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BHUTAN CENTRE
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

unicef 

Youth Initiative- Summer Training and Summer sitting

Training: Friday 4th July- Tuesday 8th July 2014

Venue: WWF Conference Hall.

Summer Sitting: Thursday 19th July

Venue: Royal Institute of Management (RIM) MP Hall

Supported by UNICEF Bhutan in collaboration with BCMD



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Background

After two weeks of intensive residential training in January 2014, which focused on research, deliberative communication and democratic problem-solving skills, the 19 youth representatives had unanimously selected three different issues that they wanted to carry out for the rest of the year. The three committees of the YI deliberated on the following issues during their first sitting in January:

- **Community Welfare:** Bhutan should reduce the imports of junk food in order to promote local industry and lower non-biodegradable waste production.
- **Social Justice:** The public and private sectors need to take collaborative measures to improve the employment opportunities for differently-abled persons.
- **Education:** The National Teaching Council of Bhutan should be formed to improve the quality of education in Bhutan.

Since then the committees have taken up these three issues to continue researching and advocating for the issues through advocacy films, podcasts, newspaper, social media (Facebook) and advocacy campaigns in their respective schools and colleges. While much was being done to debate, deliberate and advocate for the issues, the youth representatives felt there was a need in their association to lead a more result-based initiative at the local level.

Therefore, after a thorough consultation among the youth representatives and recommendations by the steering committee, the youth initiative (YI) took a different approach to do things. While the youth representatives will continue to research, debate and deliberate on some of the issues, they will now carry out three different local actions that are in line with their individual committee issues. The local action were planned and discussed during the summer training and were to proposed during the summer sitting.

Aims & Objectives of the summer training:

- To develop participants ability to present a well informed argument in public
- To learn the difference between engaging in a discussion (with an aim to understand an issue better) and to debate (competitive).
- For participants to understand how policies are made, what action citizens can take to create change

Impact & Lesson learned:

- The most important challenge of the YI remained the time management of the youth representatives since they have schools, colleges and to go to work. Because of this, some youth representative could not attend the training as well as the summer session. However, they have learned to work together as a team and to substitute one another when and where needed. The ones who were available came together at BCMD office, prior to the training, to help plan the workshop, make calls to invite participants and



resource persons, to take care of the logistics during the training and other tasks. However the biggest challenge of the YI remains its ownership among the members.

“Absenteeism is solely to do with the commitment instead of inconvenience. Whenever, we have training or meeting, we ensure that everyone is informed of. We have worked together as a team for last 8 months or so. Going by this duration, all should be in the same page where all should be in the position to represent whoever absent. However, we are way behind. If one person is absent, say Committee Leader, then other members in most cases are not able to represent him. In addition, some representatives consider their engagement to YI as fun. While it is one of way of being part of YI, we lack seriousness.”
–Dechen Rabgyal

- The shift in the approach of moving towards local action has had a positive impact on the youth representative. It creates an opportunity for the youths to practice what they have been advocating for during their time in YI. And it gives them hands-on experience on making a difference.

“The shift in our approach from very broad and ambitious issues to a simple local action is a great movement because I feel we are doing something for the country instead of asking what the country can do for us. And I personally feel that by carrying out these local actions I will be able to learn the process of change and how the system works. For example, going around offices to get approvals teaches us that change is not easy and that we should not give up” – Sangay Thinley

- The training this time allowed the youths to go beyond just debating. It allowed the youths to learn that while it is important to debate, it is much more important to have a consensus through dialogue.

“In a society with different opinions and voices all colliding to make some sense, I believe finding mutual consensus is very important. And even more so as members of a team aimed at making democracy work, it is a very important skill. Well debating skills were covered in the first training, and since we all have good skills to express our opinions, a chance to put ourselves in someone else's shoe and see the other side of the argument was indeed a good move.” – Ngawang Gyeltshen

- The public session that the YI leads twice a year allows the youths to interact with people from different walks of life and get to hear different opinions while they are stating their points forward. It is important to hold such sittings because it helps in the personal development of the youth and also for others to understand that youth are capable of change.

“Personally, the sittings were really of great help to me in terms of building the exposure of delivering in the public and gaining the confidence to talk in front of huge number of people. I am sure that the audience also learned about the issues by observing our public sittings. We have also received really good feedback from the audience which we hope to consider as much as we can” – Ziwang Gurung



Summer training

The 4 day training was attended by 15 youth representatives including two new members at the WWF Conference Hall, Thimphu. The training was largely facilitated and presented by BCMD; however, there were few resource people and a speaker session.

Unlike the winter training, where youths learned mostly about debating skills, the summer training allowed the youths to learn about the importance of going beyond just debating. That is to engage in discussing an issue, debating on the issue and then engaging in a dialogue which allows everyone to come to a consensus.

The youths engaged in discussion, debate and dialogue on the following topics:

- What policy is and how we should review and discuss policies at different level and the difference between public policy and private policy.
- Whether the number of children should a person have is a public or a private policy and whether abortion was a public or a private policy.
- Youth unemployment
- What is a community and why is it decreasing in urban areas?

The other sessions of the training included:

- Interviewing and research skills led by Bunty Avieson who is teaching Journalism at Sydney University in Australia. The session concluded with youths going out to field to test their interview skills with audio recorders.
- The participants interacted with policy makers, Dasho Lekey Dorji from the National Assembly (NA) and Dasho Tashi Wangmo (NC) from the National Council, on what is a policy, how laws are deliberated and made and how can a young person contact his/her representative in the parliament.
- The public speaking session aimed to strengthen public speaking skills of the participants. It was facilitated by Michael Rutland, Honorary Consul of the United Kingdom to Bhutan. Michael gave tips on how to talk in front of huge crowd by making their points short, simple and to the point.
- Towards the end of the training and perhaps the most important part of their training was to develop three local action projects. While the YI debates and deliberates on issues, it was important that they practice what they learn. The youth representative learned how to develop simple and practical local actions using BCMD's guideline. The youth representatives continued their research and prepared for the summer sitting to propose their local actions.

Summer sitting

After 4 days of training and 2 days of researching and developing 3 local action plans, the youth representatives held the second sitting on 10th July at the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) hall. During the sitting they proposed their local action to an audience of 80, representing from different civil society organisations (CSO), schools and colleges, political parties, international



non-governmental organisations (INGO), media houses, National Assembly, National Council and private individuals.

The main objective of the public session remained similar to that of the first session that is to show that youth are capable of engaging in civil conversations about national issues and that they can come up with creative solutions. More importantly to highlight the importance of putting words into action, that YI would carry out 3 local actions to show that debating and deliberating is one thing where as implementing is quite another issue.

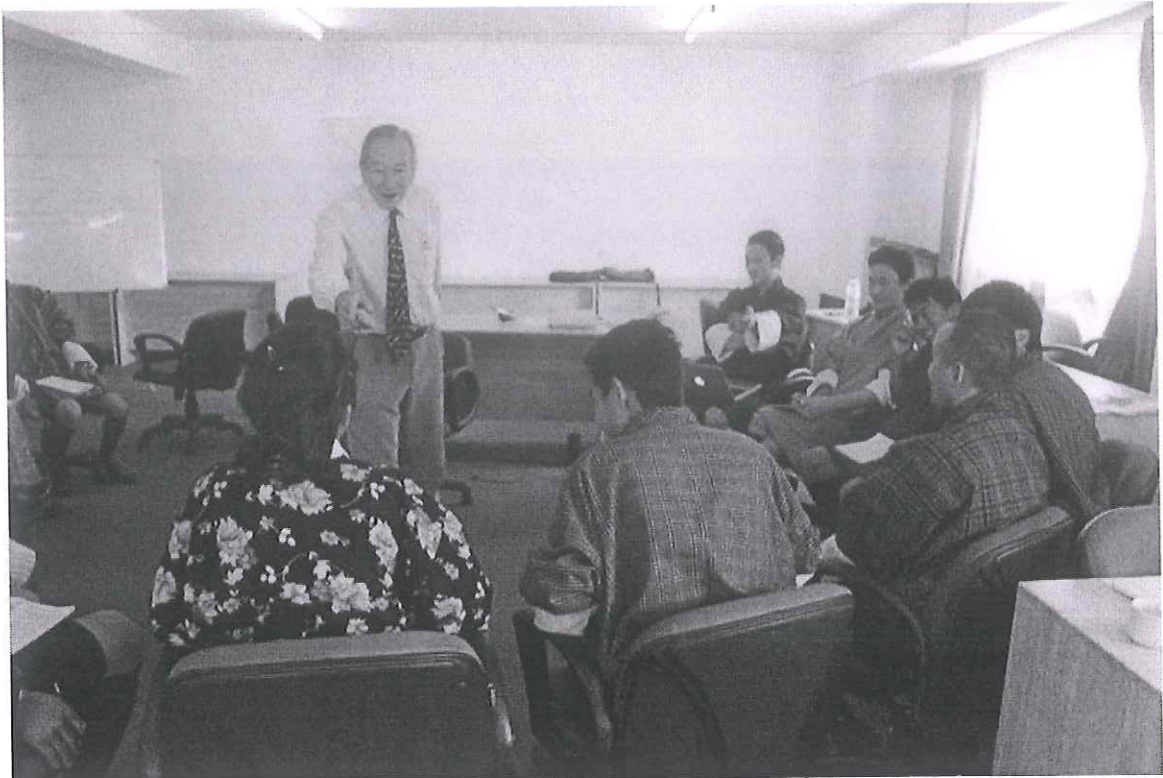
14 youth representative and the co-founder of YI, Phub Dorji, were present to explain their research findings and propose their local action. The proposals were based on evidence and facts through research and consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The summer sitting's programme is as follows:

- Dechen Rabgyal, the president of the YI, began the session by introducing YI and the change in the approach of the YI to bring change in the communities by taking local action.
- Phuntsho Namgay, BCMD programme officer, presented the preliminary findings of the YI from a study conducted by an external evaluator Riikka Suhonen, a UN volunteer in Bhutan. The findings revealed significant improvement of the individual development of the youth representatives. A more in-depth report will be compiled at the end of the year.
- The **Social Justice Committee** proposed a local action to create a safe path for differently-abled and the patients of the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH) in Thimphu. They propose developing sign boards, ramps and more zebra crossings from the JDWNRH till the memorial chorten in Thimphu. They also proposed gathering volunteers to help co-ordinate and bring people on wheel chair from the hospital to the memorial chorten.
- The **Community Welfare Committee** proposed their local action to promote locally produced potato chips in school canteens in Thimphu. The group proposed encouraging schools, students and school canteen owners to sell and buy local products.
- The **Education Committee** proposed to promote a reading culture as their local action. The committee aims to encourage children to expand their knowledges and skills through reading. They will organise a reading campaign among selected schools in Thimphu within this year.

A Q&A session followed each presentation. The three evaluators were Sonam Wangchuk, Youth and Adolescent Development Officer, UNICEF Thimphu, Tashi Choden, BCMD board member and Thinley Namgay, Registrar at RIM.

As a follow up on the summer training and the public session, the next step that the YI will take on is to consider the feedbacks form the session, integrate that into their local action proposals, and submits their local action proposals to BCMD for allocation of funds. The proposed local actions are subject to change depending on the feedbacks received from the audience during the sitting. The youth representatives will finalise their proposals by end of August 2014.



Learning how to speak in front of people

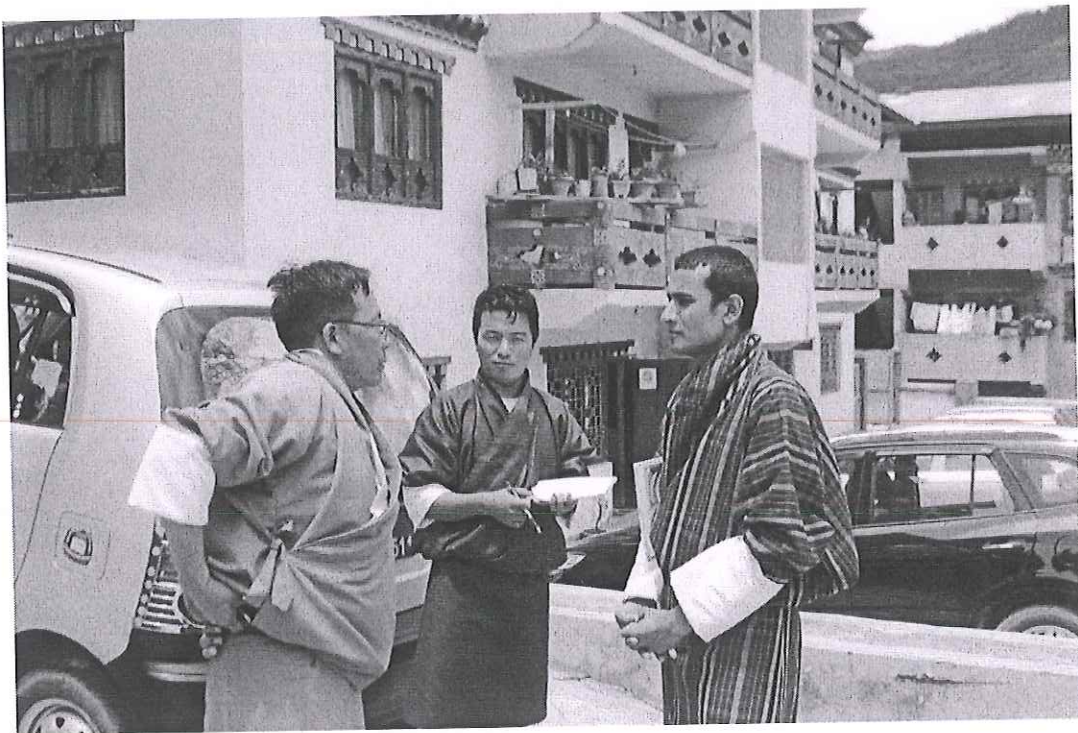




Lunch time

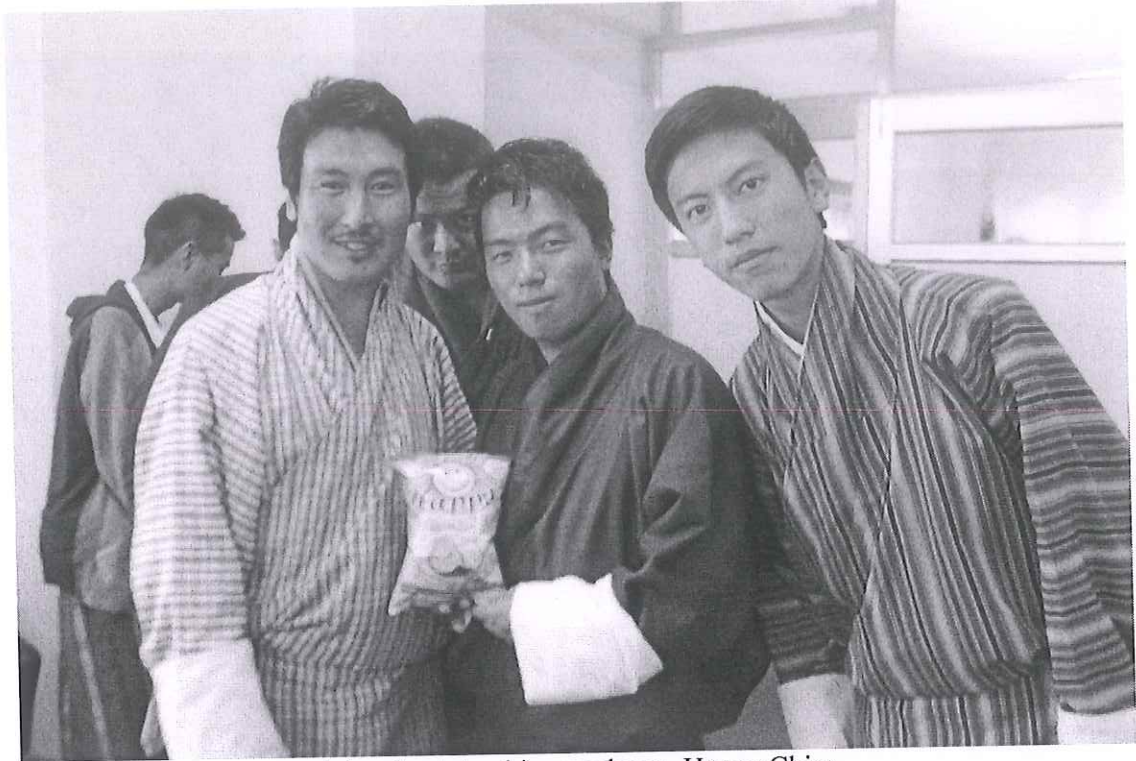


Discussing whether the number of children a person should have is a public policy or a private policy.

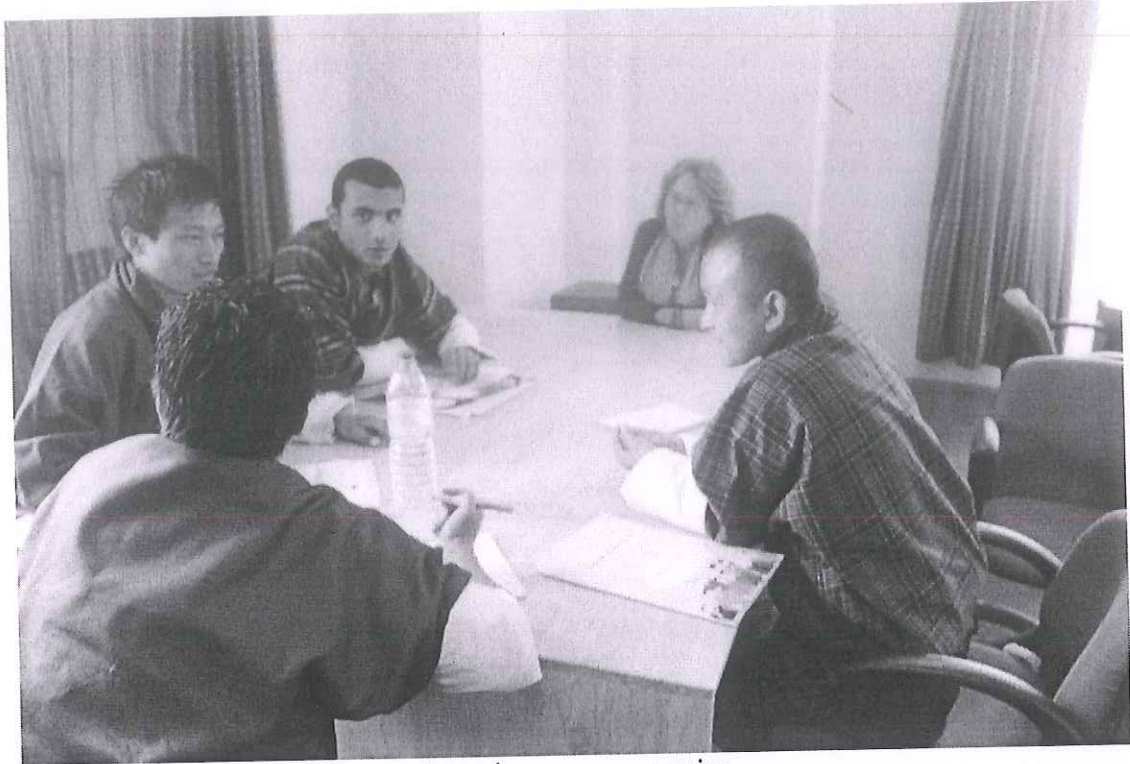




Interview field work after learning how to interview people



A local potato chips producer- Happy Chips



Interview group exercise



Education committee visit to public library in Thimphu.

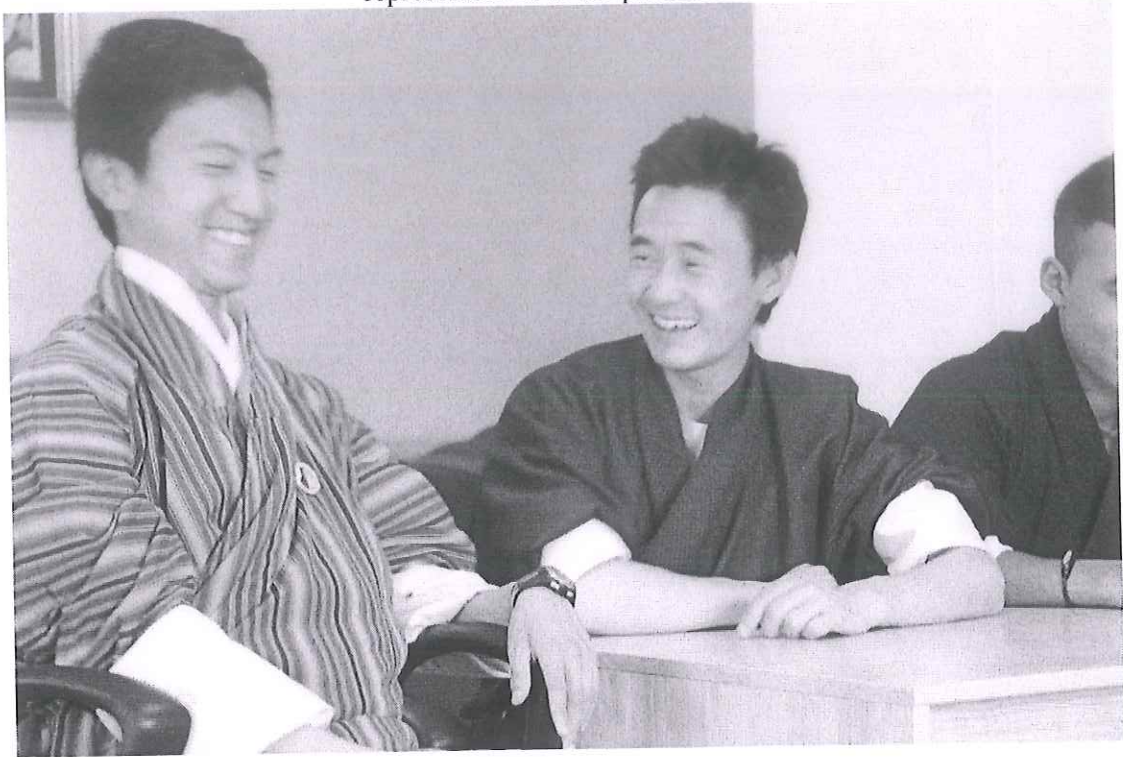


Dasho Lekey Dorji says if we want democracy to work, it has to be through each and every citizens taking part in the policy making.





Dasho Tashi Wangmo, National Council, talks about how can a young person contact their representatives in the parliament



An Engaged Society. A Vibrant Democracy.