
Democracy Today: Youth Inclusion and Democracy

A Forum

September 15, 2011



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Background

The United Nations observes September 15th as the **International Day of Democracy** and invites all member states and organisations to commemorate the day in an appropriate manner that contributes to raising public awareness.

The International Day of Democracy is meant both to celebrate democracy and to serve as a reminder that the need to promote and protect democracy is as urgent now as ever.

The theme for this year as proposed by UNDP is titled “Youth Inclusion and Democracy” which comes from the need to reinforce the faith of all young people in democracy and human rights.

Amalgamating this year’s theme with ours to celebrate International Day of Democracy 2011, Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) and the Parliament of Bhutan, facilitated by the support from UNDP, jointly hosted a forum titled **Democracy Today: Youth Inclusion and Democracy** at the Department of Youth and Sports’ Auditorium.

The forum attempted to answer some of the questions relating to our democracy:

- Is democracy bringing real change?
- Is the democracy of today reflecting the principles of Gross National Happiness (GNH)?
- Has democracy fulfilled people’s, especially youth’s aspirations?
- What are the challenges that our democracy faces?
- While there has been much focus on expectations of parliament, what about the responsibilities of citizens? Are citizens engaging enough in the democratic change?
- What can the youth do to strengthen democracy in Bhutan?

Aims of the forum

- Promote dialogue with citizens, especially young people, and encourage their participation in political processes.
- To identify what steps we can individually take to strengthen the effectiveness of our democracy.
- Emphasise and promote awareness on the importance of democracy, what it involves, the challenges it faces and the opportunities it offers.

Impact/Results

- Deputy Speaker of Parliament reiterated the need for schools to create more avenues for youth to understand, engage, and discuss democracy. This will help prompt more action in schools to widen the space for democratic change.
- Youth found an avenue to raise their doubts/concerns on where they stand in Bhutan’s democratic system.
- Offered a platform both to the panelists as well as the participants to have a meaningful conversation on the changing roles of youth in democracy.
- The forum was broadcasted on BBS TV thus reaching a wider audience.
- Winners of BCMD’s Beyond the Ballot challenge were awarded prizes and certificates thus giving recognition to their efforts to express what it means to be a citizen.

Lessons Learned

- Need to give adequate time to participants to voice their queries.
- A longer forum should be planned in future.
- Possibility of a one hour programming for the BBS should be planned so that the forum is not rushed at the end to suit BBS' programme requirements.

Annexe I Programme

- 09:30 hrs** - Registration of Participants
- 10:00 hrs** - Welcome address
- 10:05 hrs** - Statement by UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, Mr. Bakhodir Burkhanov
- 10:15 hrs** - Address by Hon'ble Chief Guest
- 10:30 hrs** - Introduction to the Discussion Theme, Rules and Procedures by the Moderator
- 10:40 hrs** - Panel Discussion/Question & Answer Session
- 11:25 hrs** - Wrap-up of the discussion by the Moderator
- 11:30 hrs** - Hon'ble Chief Guest award prizes to winners of the challenge on the theme
'Citizenship'
- 11:40 hrs** -Vote of Thanks
- 11:50 hrs** - Serve refreshment