

Investigative Stories from Bhutan

Investigative Reporting Grant 2019



Funded by UNESCO, New Delhi Office

Summary



BMF team with mentors and grantees of Investigative Reporting Grant

Bhutan Media Foundation successfully executed the Investigative Reporting (IR) Grant with financial assistance from UNESCO New Delhi Office under the project titled 'Promoting SDG 16.10: Strengthening Investigative Journalism to Ensure Public Access to Information'. The objective of the project is to increase professional coverage of corruption and transparency in the Bhutanese media and build awareness for the necessity of transparent government.

The 10 grantees (reporters) from the Bhutanese media received the IR grant. Three mentors (senior journalists) were assigned to the grantees. The mentors helped the grantees from shaping story ideas to information gathering to structuring the stories. Within the time period of five months, the grantees were able to produce 16 stories, which included 15 print stories and one broadcast story.

BMF is grateful to the following mentors who worked with the grantees since the programme began on 18 June 2019:

- Gopilal Acharya, Author, Freelance Journalist and Consultant
- Namgay Zam, Executive Director of Journalists' Association of Bhutan
- Kinely Wangmo, Freelance Journalist and Consultant

Stringent law needed to curb digital pornography

Chencho Dema, Business Bhutan

In September 2014, a 21-year-old woman reported to Bumthang police that her boyfriend had made a sex video of her and circulated via WeChat. The video was made in June 2012 without consent. The suspect was convicted.

In another incident, a 20-year-old woman lodged a complaint with Pasakha police in Phuentsholing stating that her boyfriend had distributed their sex clip in WeChat. Her cousin sister informed her that a pornographic clip of hers had gone viral. The suspect was arrested. He later confessed to the crime saying he distributed the clip to his friends under the influence of alcohol. The 24-year-old man was convicted by the Phuentsholing dungkhag court. Several locally made amateur pornographic clips were circulated in 2014 causing an outrage among the general public. Voices were raised on social media and authorities called to attention.

A few arrests were made. An online petition signed by over 2,000 people demanding strict laws on such sexual materials was submitted to former Prime Minister Dasho Tshering Tobgay. Nothing, however, came out of submission and the hullabaloo soon settled down.

Most of the victims are women. They are targeted with revenge porn or leaked pornographic clips, made with or without consent or using hidden cameras. Cellular devices and Internet has made producing and circulation of such pornographic clips, with or without consent, easy.

The Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) registered 17 cases of computer pornography from 2007 to May 2019. Computer pornography is a distribution of an obscene photograph or picture on the computer or over the Internet, according to the Penal Code of Bhutan.

Pornography clips cases registered with Royal Bhutan Police



These clips, about one to five minutes long, mostly reveal the faces of women. Some seem to be made with consensus of both partners, while some seem to be shot using hidden cameras.

“I usually watch to see if I know the girl in the video and I am a member of a WeChat group created solely to share such clips”

The figures, police official said, can be more than the reported cases. From the reported cases, 13 were convicted while two have been forwarded to Office of Attorney General (OAG) and one was withdrawn. The clips are circulated using the popular social media app, WeChat.

According to sources WeChat groups like Local Ema Datshi and PokPok Chek have about 270 men and women sharing and receiving Bhutanese pornographic clips. The groups also share international clips. Sources also said that about a dozen Bhutanese amateur porn clips were shared in at least two international porn websites. One clip had over 2,200 views.

A 40-year-old private firm employee said he was shocked to learn about and see Bhutanese amateur pornographic clips on the international porn sites. “I usually watch to see if I know the girl in the video and am a member of a WeChat group created solely to share such clips,” he said, “My wife receives clips from her friends as well.”

Sources said pornographic clips continue to be generated and shared, mostly in closed groups in WeChat. Making and sharing of pornography is illegal

in Bhutan.

Section 476 of the penal code states that if a person publishes and distributes an obscene photograph or picture on the computer or over the Internet, a crime of computer pornography has been committed. It is a misdemeanor nature and the defendant is liable for a sentence of one to three years in prison. The offence is compoundable. A thrimthue (compensation) can be paid in lieu of imprisonment term. Colonel Tshewang Rinzin with Royal Bhutan Police's Crime Branch said there is law. "People have to be aware of it and refrain from doing and getting involved in such acts," he said.

The complainants (usually the victim), he said, were usually informed by friends or relatives who came across or heard about the clips. Colonel Tshewang Rinzin said suspects are often given counseling. "Most time people are ignorant of the law," he said.

Pema Choki, a social worker and core volunteer with Respect Educate Nurture Empower Women (RENEW), said law does not protect the women. "Women are considered sex objects and usually the one making the video turns out to be a man," she said. "Owing to the non-severity of the penance, the crime continues." The issue of amateur pornography, she said, would be easier to curb with stricter laws and severe punishment.

Jigme Wangdi, Director of Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA), said the authority is not aware of such contents being shared in Wechat. "The communication is private in nature, unless you are in the group," he said. "It is impossible to check what is shared privately between individuals or in a closed group." However, he said, sharing pornographic content is punishable by law and the law enforcement agencies have been acting on it. "The Rules on Content prohibits dissemination of such content and is punishable by law," he said.

Jigme Wangdi said there was a lack of advocacy or awareness about the law. "We have all the required laws but we could work further to create awareness among ICT users," he said.

"BICMA as a regulatory body for ICT and media could look into experiences from other countries to resolve the issue." He also said advocacy has been carried out

before but they can collaborate with other agencies to be more effective.

Member of Parliament Tshewang Lhamo, who is also the chairperson for Legislative Committee, said stringent laws could have bigger impact. "However, if people are not responsible, they will continue to commit the same act," she said. She also said that perpetrators also needed help. "Pornography is something they are addicted to, like getting addicted to drugs," she said. "In reality perpetrators also need counseling besides being convicted." She also said that more efforts had to be put in creating awareness and advocating against creating and circulating pornographic clips.

Member of Parliament Ugyen Dorji of Dewathang Gomdar constituency said there are two ways to tackle the issue. "Legal embargo would cure the symptoms but not the root cause," he said, adding education and advocacy were imperative to tackle the root cause. "We need to educate our society that it's both illegal and unethical." Besides, Dr Chencho Dorji, a psychiatrist, said pornography is detrimental to one's mental, emotional and sexual health and can be a major threat to marriage, family life, children, individual happiness and social stability. "Among couples affected by one spouse's addiction, two-thirds experience a loss of interest in sexual intercourse and maintaining good family relations," he said. Meanwhile, RENEW has not received any case pertaining to pornography till date.

It has however has been sensitizing and advocating on sexual offences such as sexual harassment and incest, including child sexual offences. "While the context is criminal in nature, we would make referral to the competent authority and RENEW provides psychosocial counseling to victims to overcome the trauma," said Dechen Choki, legal officer with RENEW.

A study by United Nations Children's Fund Bhutan and National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) revealed that 20% of children aged 13-17 were exposed to pornography. The report also stated that 41.7% of boys and 28.7% of girls are exposed to digital pornography of other people.

24 out of 2,050 overseas employees sent back by Middle-East host countries in 5 years on medical grounds

— Damchoe Pem, *The Bhutanese*

In a span of five years (2014 to 2019), 24 candidates who went overseas for employment were sent back by the host countries on medical ground. Of the 24, maximum candidates were sent back with an impression of scar in their lungs, while the rest with hepatitis, blood infection and mental disorder cases. The collected data are from Bhutan International School of Hospitality and Tourism (BISHT), iED jobs, Employ Bhutan Overseas Employment Agent (EBOEA not to be confused with the suspended BEO) and RUMI.

In five years time, they had sent 2,050 candidates for employment overseas, mainly to Qatar, Kuwait, Dubai, Oman and Bahrain. Although the candidates were issued with approved Medical Certificate (MC) from JDWNRH, however, they were diagnosed with the medical conditions during medical screening for a residential work permit in the host countries. To make sure that the report is accurate, they were rescreened up to three times, agents shared.

In one case of hepatitis, after returning, the candidate did the screening twice in JDWNRH and the report was normal. However, since the candidate was again refused by the host country, on request, the sample of the candidate was sent to Delhi, whereby the report showed it to be positive.

In other returning cases, there were a few candidates who suffered from Tuberculosis (TB) in the past, but they got through the medical screening from the hospital.

A 22-year-old woman from Bumthang said that she cleared the medical screening (X-ray and blood) from Bhutan and went to Kuwait with the approved MC. But she did not clear the medical screening in Kuwait as she had a scar in her lung.

"In my first test, only my urine and blood test was

done which was normal. Before I could even finish my probation period which was for 3 months I did my 2nd round of test, whereby I was detected with a scar in my lung," she added.

“

I want to try for another job but I will have to pay the fees again. Therefore, I didn't try for second time. It was a loss for me and family

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The moment she was detected with the scar she was asked to return to Bhutan and no concrete documents were provided to her by the company there, she added.

After returning she has undergone medical screening but the report was normal, to her surprise. She said, "The agent was helpless as well, and until now, I did not get to see the medical report from Kuwait despite request to the agent." The expenditure of her return home was borne by the company.

Likewise, a 22-year-old woman from Paro shared that she was sent back as a spot was detected in her lungs as well. "I did not get a Qatar ID even after a month when rest of my friends got. Back there, the company didn't tell me about the scar, but the agent here had informed my parents about it," she added. She requested for a second screening but they didn't allow it and she was instead asked to leave Qatar.

"Once I reached here, I did a thorough screening twice, but the reports say I am physically fit and with no scar in my lungs," she added.

She was made to pay 50 percent of the airfare and did not get her refund from the company (Nu 33, 000). "I want to try for another job but I will have to pay the fees again. Therefore, I didn't try for second time. It was a loss for me and family," she said. Both of them wanted to go back but the companies have refused to take them back. They went there in 2018.

Meanwhile, a 25-year-old man was sent back in 2018 from Dubai after he was detected with left pleural reaction and no focal pulmonary lesion. When he went from here, his MC was normal. After coming back he did a medical screening in hospital but report states that everything was normal.

There were other cases where the candidates were sent back for indulging in burglary and drinking. In addition, there are also reports of a few cases of skin diseases; however they are under treatment for now in the host countries.

The Labour and Human Resources Minister, Lyonpo Ugyen Dorji, said that medical screening is important but it is not certain how strictly the hospital conducts the screening and if a person is vulnerable to certain diseases after the test.

He said, "It is something challenging and it would be difficult to eliminate the issue completely. However, what is possible has to be done and as a part of process we can only question, inform hospital to be stricter, if at all, they have been a little negligent."

"We will ensure that things will be monitored at the places where it is required, at least when it comes to overseas employment, and we will always keep in mind when we implement," Lyonpo added. "The honesty is upon the candidate and their parents. This is moral responsibility that each of us must shoulder," he added.

An official from Department of Medical Services (DMS), Ministry of Health (MoH) said that they do not have a stand on the need for MC as the requirement really depends upon the host countries. If the requirement is an extensive test, the hospital would try to do all. However, he said that it is must to understand that this is burden on the hospital as it is taking the resources away.

He also said, "Issuing MC is very different from treating a sick person, and for that matter, the accusation that is made against the health workers of

not being concerned over the issue is unfounded". In addition, he said that they are not aware about the host countries conducting medical screenings once candidates reach the said countries. He said, "If a person is subjected to further medical screenings upon reaching, then we won't be asked to provide the MC from here."

"I do not know the circumstances for people who have returned home, and therefore, I won't be able to talk on that. In terms of monitoring, the doctor who certifies the MC is responsible for it because everything has to be checked and balanced before issuing the MC," he said.

He said that they are not aware of any future plan to make medical screening mandatory, however, they would provide health advisories before travelling, especially on disease prevention, vaccination requirements, etc.

Ugyen Tshomo, proprietor of EBOEA said that the medical screening is done by the hospital to know if a person is physically fit to work. Candidates go there to work but they do not get to work (not even a month) as they are sent back due to certain medical issues.

She said, "After their return, they undergo screening here in hospital and they come to us requesting to go back, however, the companies do not want to take them back."

Therefore, she said that these things cause expenses to the company and loss to the candidates. Some companies are generous enough to bear the cost to send the candidates back home while there are some who ask for cost sharing.

"No one is at fault and before sending the candidates abroad to work, they are briefed on such matter. It is our responsibility to bring them back home safe but we cannot refund their amount as we charge them only with a month salary," she added. In addition, she also said that to those who have come back, they suggest them to refrain from travelling to any other countries as the procedure is going to be the same everywhere.

"We have raised this issue to the ministry, and later we were informed that the validity of the medical certificate has been brought down to three months from six months. If the validity of the MC is above 3 months then the Kuwait embassy will not (issue a)

stamp," she added. Medical issue is something challenging to handle when one is far from home, also it can pose threat on someone's life, she further said.

Similarly, Kalpana Sunwar, principal of BISHT shared that they have encountered a few return cases though their MC were approved from here, and companies in host countries are particular about health issues. Since it is not a fault of the agent or the candidates, they bear 50 percent of the flight tickets for them, she said.

She said, "When such issue pops up, it doesn't look good on candidate, government and the agents here. We have raised this issue to the ministry. Number may be few right now, but it may grow in future if the relevant agencies do not take the required measures." Finance Director of IED jobs, Tshewang Dorji, said that the ministry and hospital has to do thorough and compulsory check up of the candidates regardless of which country they are going to, and when such checks are not done, this becomes double work for the agent as well for the candidates.

He said, "This issue is sometime an indirect harassment to the candidate who went to work with an approved MC, and a loss to the country in some ways. If these things are not taken care at the earliest, there is every chance of serious issues in future." In addition, he also said that at the end of the day, agencies are being blamed for being irresponsible. "I feel that it is mandate to create awareness program including hospitals, MoH, agencies, MoHCA, etc., because it can curb down such issues in the future," he said.

Dr Tshewang Tobgay, JDWNRH, said that they conduct the medical screening strictly and as per the requirement set by the host countries. He said, "If they find anything in X-Ray they refer to the chest e

specialist and to pulmonologist, and until we get the approval from them we do not sign the MC." In terms of TB patients, if they have no active infection then usually the host country will accept the person and also they approve the MC, he added.

He said that the duration of MC for overseas is 3 months, and there is a window period to every disease. If a candidate has a clean report today, they may get any diseases tomorrow and this is why it is quite challenging. With regard to the psychological and mental issues, he said, "There is no particular screening for that. However, if a person has a history of bipolar, depression and anxiety disorder then we mention in the paper. But if a person looks normal, we do not do the mental screening separately."

A scar in the lungs does not only mean a person has or had TB, it can also mean a candidate is having calcification, viral infection, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary diseases (COPD), previous infection which is healing, etc.

"As far as I know, we did not come across any person who has come to us requesting for proper medical screening after their return due to medical failure. If they have then we would have done a screening to cross check," he added.

There is no delay in services because the screenings are conducted the same day when they come for MC and they have a lab technician working the same hour (4pm to 7 pm). The report has to be collected the next day and visit doctor the same evening, he said. In a day, each doctor is supposed to attend to 60 people for the issuance of MC. However, when number exceeds 100, they then call for additional doctors. One doctor a day is assigned for the said purpose and on a rotation wise basis.

Though Bhutan Overseas Jinzai is still operating, the agent did not want to comment on the issue.



Long work hours, instant noodles diet, no sleep and cramped conditions led to 30 TB cases in Japan LEP Program

— Damchoe Pem, *The Bhutanese*

Long working hours, coupled with improper diet and living conditions are the main causes of students contracting Tuberculosis (TB), according to students who are in Japan under the Learn and Earn Programme (LEP).

In an earlier interview (13 April 2019), *The Bhutanese* reported 30 cases of TB among the students in Japan. It is suspected that of the 30 students who got TB, 60 percent of them got infected through one Bhutanese in the same school due to cramped living conditions and other factors. The students said they were sharing rooms which were already congested, were not getting enough sleep and depending mostly on instant noodles for sustenance.

In order to cover their expenses, including loans and school tuition fees, they had to sacrifice their weekends and their vacations. They also shared that few of their friends were deported back as they were caught working two jobs at a time.

"But it is difficult to get the required amount with one job," one student said, adding that students were aware they had to work hard, but did not realize it would be this challenging. No matter how hard they work, they could hardly pay their tuition fees, forget about paying loans and sending money home. The medical record of Sonam Tamang, 27 years, who is in coma for past one year show she is diagnosed with Tuberculosis meningitis (multi-drug resistance). She was admitted in a Japanese hospital in September 2018.

As per her mother Dhan Maya, Sonam Tamang did not have any illness before leaving for Japan. "If I knew that my daughter has any disease while in Bhutan, I would not have let her go. She did not complain of any illness," she added. According to Sonam Tamang's friends in Japan, she

was hardworking and would skip meals to earn extra money. This way, Sonam Tamang was able to pay her monthly loan without fail and was also sending money home to her family. "Maybe that is why she got TB, since she couldn't take better care of her health," said a friend.

Another 30-year-old TB patient who is a student in Japan under LEP said he slept only few hours. "It is difficult to attend classes and work," he said. "I worked in a factory and I woke up at 4 AM as my work starts at 5 AM."

He attended classes after work and usually skipped lunch which was the one hour break to work on assignments. He has completed his language studies, however, and is waiting for his working visa.

The 30-year-old said that during their summer vacations they had to work from early morning till night to cover up their tuition fees, phone bill, electric bill, rent, water bill, food, health insurance and loan. "If we skip a single day then we fail to pay those bills. I worked hard sacrificing most of my meals and sleep. I lost weight drastically and may be that is why I got TB. However, I have completed my medication and I am hoping that I could do better if I get my working visa," he added.

Another 27-year-old, Dorji said that he contracted TB when he was in Japan and he has now completed the medication course in Japan. He said he shared a single room with three others. The apartment had one toilet and a kitchen.

Another student, a 28-year-old, contracted TB from her friend. "Some of us, including some Japanese students and teachers got TB from him," she said, adding that she had completed her six-month medication course after which was supposed to screen for TB again. She has not done her screening and is back in the

country. Yet another student who got TB said patients were given the choice to undergo the six-month TB medication course or stop it before the course is completed. "I stopped medication after few months," she said. "I stopped thinking that complications would arise in future, since I am anemic."

Students said that no proper medical screenings were carried out in Bhutan. They were issued a pink Medical Certificate (MC) which was meant for employment purpose in Bhutan and not Japan. One of the students said that doctor on duty asked him the purpose for MC whereby he said it is for Japan LEP program.

"The doctor asked me to get different form for MC (for Japan) from the counter but I told him the same thing which was shared to me by the agent. The agent (BEO) had said that it is okay to have the normal pink MC for the program. The doctor then issued me the MC without further enquiry," he added.

He said that the Bhutan Employment Overseas (BEO) agent in the beginning told them that the agent will carry out a throughout medical screening of the students whereby they will be disqualified if found with any diseases.

In addition, he said, "They asked us to remove any tattoos on our body and thereby some of them did. The agent also said that they will do drugs test. However, at the end nothing was done and we went to Japan with the pink MC."

Students have shared that after reaching Japan they were made to undergo compulsory medical screening and if diagnosed with any diseases, the students had to undergo the treatment. The Medical Superintendent (MS) of JDWNRH, Doctor Gosar Pemba said the requirement for Japan is blood, urine and X-ray test which is to detect TB and HIV among others.

"We usually get blamed saying we did not check the person well before issuing the MC," he said. "TB

can be negative while he or she undergoes the screening and it can get activated after reaching the destination countries due to various factors," he said. "Not only in Japan, but there are people who got TB in Australia due to various reasons," he added.

He said that in Bhutan most of people already have TB in their body whereby it may become active when one's body get very weak. He said a person can catch TB due to harsh working conditions, no proper diet, weight loss, depression and more. "Of all, it depends upon the person's immune system and they cannot guarantee 100 percent that a person won't get TB in a lifetime," he said. "If a person with low immune system sits next to the TB positive person, the TB will then get transferred."

"Hospital alone cannot take the responsibility," he said adding that people should be honest. He said, "Students who went to Japan must have gone to see the doctor with the pink form which is why they must have approved the MC thinking that it is for employment for in-country purpose. Otherwise they would have done the screening as per the requirements by the Japanese." The students, however, says that they did inform about them going to Japan.

The experience of the Bhutanese students is not a unique case as the LEP program students from other countries like Vietnam, Nepal, Philippines and others show similar examples of students falling sick, dying and even killing themselves in some cases. The very program was found to be fundamentally flawed but what made it worse was unethical practices by agents and language schools.

Of around 700 students in the LEP program in Japan two died (one was a suicide), one was a coma cases, two were paralysis cases, 30 were TB cases, two were mental breakdown cases and there were other trauma cases too.

Cost of Public Infrastructure

Dechen Dolkar, *Business Bhutan*

The construction of public office buildings during the 10th and 11th Five Year Plan (FYP) involved huge investment. The offices are Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB), Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Office of Attorney General (OAG), Supreme Court and Center for Bhutan Studies (CBS) which are located in the capital. Most of the office constructions were funded by Government of India (GoI).

Office of the Attorney General (OAG)

With an investment of more than Nu 98mn, the four-storied OAG building has eight rooms on each floor. Documentation with the OAG states that the construction work began back in May 2011 and was completed in 2014. The construction was carried out as part of the OAG strengthening program under GoI project tied assistance in the 10th FYP with an allocated budget of Nu 88mn.

However, in the process of construction, the budget requirement escalated to Nu 98mn with an additional Nu 10mn approved by a high level tender committee as mandatorily necessary for completion of work. The total staff strength at the OAG office is 76 and the maximum electricity bill the office has paid so far is around Nu 42,983.

OAG is one of the first buildings to be built under the green building concept. The green building concept primarily aims to achieve energy efficiency through natural light. It minimizes environmental impact by preserving the existing vegetation in its natural state.

However, officials from OAG said that the green building concept never really materialized. "It is only the roof that is green," said the official, adding that when it rains, the water gets in from the windows. The official also said the floorings have become loose and space has appeared between the planks. They have to use carpets to hide the flooring. A toilet ceiling has also caved in on the first floor at OAG.

According to the green building concept, OAG should have had LED lighting along with movement sensors, backup solar, and double glazed windows.

Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB):

The five-storied Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) was constructed at a cost of around Nu 128mn. Construction began in 2014 and was completed in 2015. The five-storied Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) was constructed at a cost of around Nu 128mn. Construction began in 2014 and was completed in 2015.

ECB is also one of the green buildings. The building has modern architecture and toughened glass walls. The glass covers three sides of the building on three floors. The building has high ceilings and large corridor space. The corridors and walls are used for exhibitions and educating voters during the election period. All the rooms are fully occupied. The rooms remain warm even without heaters, officials from ECB said. The highest electricity bill paid so far is around Nu 100,000. The ECB headquarters has 68 staff. It also houses the office of the chairman of Bhutan Children Parliament.

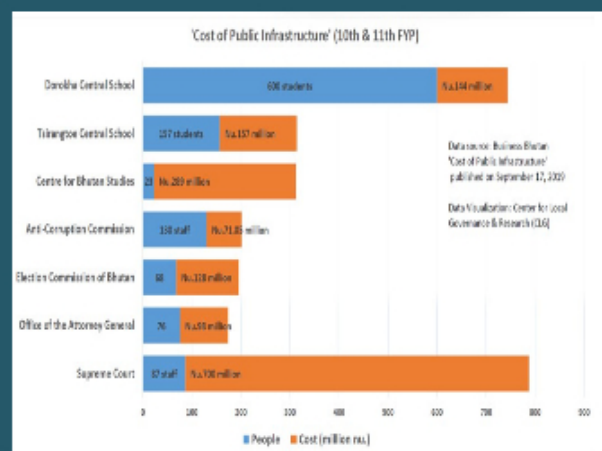
Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC):

With funding from the GoI, the office of ACC was constructed at a cost of about Nu 71.05mn. Including the basement, it is a six-storied building with every floor having 18 working stations and a documentation room. ACC's highest electricity bill paid is around Nu 92,000. As of August 7, the total staff at ACC is 130 including ESP, GSP, and drivers. The construction work began in November 2009 and was completed in 2012.

Supreme Court:

The Supreme Court was constructed at a cost of about Nu 700mn and was also funded by GoI. The foundation stone was laid in October 2005. The construction of the Supreme Court began only towards the end of 2008. There are 87 staff at the Supreme Court. The electricity bill comes up to more than Nu 100,000 in winter.

The Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, inaugurated the Supreme Court in 2014, during his first visit to Bhutan.



“There are no proper guidelines followed for the construction of public offices. So the ministry is now coming up with guidelines for the construction of public offices.”

Center for Bhutan Studies (CBS):

The initial cost involved in the project contract for CBS in November 2016 was Nu 243mn plus Nu 46mn for the heating system. However, the construction is ongoing.

According to the Project Manager of CBS, it is a public infrastructure. Any organization can conduct seminars and meetings at the CBS conference hall free of charge. The structure of CBS is being built according to the landscape, and the building is divided into three blocks. Block A and B are four-storied and block C is six-storied. Block A has 10 rooms. Block B and C have one atrium each. Talking

to Business Bhutan, the project manager of CBS said that the rooms are used as guest rooms.

“International resource persons and guest lecturers who come for seminars can stay in the guest rooms. Block B is being used for events like art exhibitions.” Most floors are open space. The project manager said that the space may be used as a conference hall depending on the number of participants.

The project manager said that CBS has installed a central heating system under the flooring. The office also uses a solar power system that generates 100 kilowatts peak (kWp). The room temperature can be adjusted on every floor and room.

“With centralized heating system, the electricity bill will be one fourth less than the normal electricity bill,” he said. Of the six floors, the first floor will be devoted to the body and its improvements for wellbeing, and the second floor will house the library of sound and activities centered on both sound and its absence, that is, silence. CBS has 23 employees including support staff.

MoWHS:

The Director of Department of Engineering Services with the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement (MoWHS), Karma Dupchuk, said that most of the agencies hired a consultant for their construction but theirs is a design approved by themselves.

He said that agencies have to get approval from Thromde who scrutinizes and incorporates traditional Bhutanese architecture, safety aspect, permissible height of the buildings and coverage of the building. “There are no proper guidelines followed for the construction of public offices.” So the ministry is now coming up with guidelines for the construction of public offices.

Earlier during the scrutiny of construction, the overall space occupied was overlooked. He said that there was inequity in space utilization; like in some agencies, the office of director was bigger than the office of minister.

The guideline will promote equity among the agencies' utilization of office space. The objective of the guideline is to allocate the right space to the right employee.

The guidelines will also ensure offices will be constructed as per the requirement of the office space. The current trend is to design and build offices as per the budget allocation.

Space will now be utilized optimally reducing cost. “In the process, we would have built an infrastructure that would accommodate the required capacity,” said Karma Dupchuk.

The guidelines will also be helpful for the Department of National Property. DNP will have a basis to refer to guidelines while renting out space. Private apartments are being rented as government agencies using the rate per square feet. Now with this guideline, the authorities can determine the rental value for office space. The guideline will be initiated after the ministry has completed an office inventory exercise.

However, the government halted new office construction in the 12th Plan in order to carry out an assessment of the space required. There are more than 25 office constructions proposed in Thimphu and other dzongkhags.

During a Meet the Press, the Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tshering, said that there are more than 30 units

of office space constructions required including two major office constructions of the education and foreign ministries in the 12th Plan.

While the funds spent on public infrastructure is huge, in comparison central schools that have huge implications in terms of human resources and wellbeing have less investment.

At the moment, there are at least 63 central schools in the country. The highest amount allocated for the construction of a central school was for Tsirangtoe Central School. The amount was about Nu 157mn. The new constructions include two intergraded academic blocks, which house 18 classrooms, and two staff quarters of eight units, two 180-bedded hostels and a multi-purpose hall. The school has 751 students and classes from PP to 10. The construction began in 2016 and finished in 2018.

Similarly, Dorokha Central School was constructed at a cost of around Nu 144mn. The school has a 120-bed hostel each for girls and boys. The integrated academic block has 18 classrooms, three laboratories, a staff room, a multi-purpose hall, staff quarters, and offices for the principal and vice-principal. There are more than 600 students enrolled in classes IX to XI.



Nu.850mn proposed for construction of three Ministries' offices

— Dechen Dolkar, *Business Bhutan*

The new MoWHS guidelines will be implemented for the construction of new public offices.

The government has approved the construction of the offices of three ministries: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the 12th Five Year Plan. The government has formed a task force team to study the proposals for construction of new office space in the 12th plan and it has completed a study on existing office space and rationalizing of new office space. The minister for work and human settlement, Dorji Tshering said that the outcome of the task force team was readjustment of existing office space and office space guidelines.

Lyonpo said that readjustment of office space is analyzing of office space according to suitability of the requirements.

"However it is very subjective because they may say that they have plans in the future. The readjustment of office space will continue," said the Lyonpo. Lyonpo said that the second out on office space guideline is very much in line and suitable for Bhutanese context. The ministry has already approved the guideline. Lyonpo said that the immediate plan for construction of office space during the 12th plan is three ministries' office space. "There are more than 25 offices' constructions proposed from Thimphu and other regions too."

"We will try our best to decongest Thimphu by taking the ministries' office construction to the outskirts of Thimphu town. We will try to locate the offices in the periphery of Thimphu," said the Lyonpo. However, Lyonpo mentioned that the budget for construction of these office buildings is not yet finalized.

The senior architect under Department of Engineering Service, Tshering Norbu also said that the cost will be calculated upon the office space required for particular agencies. He said that the cost may go up or down from the proposed budget from individual agencies. Business Bhutan learnt that the ministry of

education and ministry of agriculture and forest has proposed budget of Nu 300mn each and ministry of foreign affairs has proposed Nu 250mn for the office building constructions.

Lyonpo said that these three ministries required immediate new office construction because the education ministry office building is old and the life span of office is over which is very risky.

Ministry of agriculture and forest office needs to demolish their present building and ministry of foreign affairs office space is being shared with the parliament house, Lyonpo added. Lyonpo mentioned that with the guidelines the cost of office construction would be minimized.

The guidelines state that its aim and objective is to promote equity among agencies in the utilization of space, allocate right space to right employee, cut down cost through effective utilization of space and to set as a reference point in approving the space for all government office buildings.

The guidelines state it will be applicable for construction of new office buildings and renting private buildings for office use. Additionally, the types and size of the workspace depend on the types of personnel or employee. Different personnel or occupants performing different activities require different workspace to execute their task. Based on the nature of office functions, the workspace can be categorized.

For instance, for ministers, secretaries, chairpersons or equivalent office allocation required enclosed workstation, conference, pantry, attached toilet, personal assistant, personal secretary and waiting lounge workspace of 29.25m², 315ft² will be allocated.

For dzongda, director general, director, commissioner or equivalent required enclosed workstation attached toilet and personal assistant the space required is 22.18m², 238ft² and for Dungpa, dzongrab and cheif required enclosed workstation and attached toilet

space required is 13.86m²,150ft². For division heads, specialist or equivalent required enclosed workstation and for mid-level professional, junior-level professionals, secretarial, administration, clerical, seasonal part-time and intern required open workstation is required.

For deputy, executive, mid-level the space requirement is 9.3m², 100ft², for inspectors, technicians, assistants officer space requirement is 7.4m², 80ft² and for secretarial (administration) group space requirement is 6.5m²,

70ft². In the 12th plan the construction of embassies are also approved.

The budget allocated for construction of Bangkok embassy is Nu 344mn, for Bangladesh embassy renovation and construction Nu 122mn and for construction of consulate office at Kolkata budget allocated is Nu 40mn.

Even as the government is being drained of huge money for construction of offices, basic amenities like roads receive a major part of the budget too. But authorities say it is not enough.



The sand thieves of Sha region

Younten Tshedup, Kuensel



Almost 65 percent of the total sand transaction in the country happens in the Sha region

Rinchengang, Wangdue—A full sail dredging is underway at the quarry. This happens six days a week from 7am to 7pm.

The narrow stretch along the Punatsangchhu is crowded with trucks zooming in and out, and this dizzying state of affair never seems to stop. Sand from this quarry is ferried mostly to Thimphu and Paro. It takes less than five minutes to fill an 8m³ (cubic metre) truck with a help of a pay-loader.

Loaded trucks start their journey towards Thimphu, making way for the others waiting for their turn. However, the journey from the quarry to the final destination, in either Paro or Thimphu, takes a curious turn with numerous clandestine transactions in between.

Why illegal supply and black market

Over the years, the growing demand due to the construction boom, especially in Thimphu and Paro, has unleashed an illegal market in the sand supply. And, because of the illegal nature of business, the real game happens under the cover of darkness. Records with the Natural Resources Development Corporation Ltd (NRDCL) show that Thimphu alone

has more than 2,500 new on-going construction activities registered this year. Based on approvals, the NRDCL supplies the sand.

With the capital gripped by a construction frenzy, demand for sand is soaring. The increasing demand is confronted with the supply limit NRDCL has set. As per the corporation's regulation, an individual building a house is eligible for only a truckload of sand a week.

This, according to builders, hinders construction work. "One truckload of sand is not enough for whole week's work," said Karma Tsewang, who is constructing a three-storey building in Changangkha, Thimphu. "The quota, with judicious use, is enough for only about two days' work."

He said that once the sand was used up, labourers had no work. "This adds up to the construction cost. Works are resumed only when we receive the next quota of sand a week later," he said.

On an average, construction of a three-storey building (20mx10m) with 3BHK of two units on each floor would require around 30 truckloads (8m³) of sand.

Since November 2007, among other natural resources, sand was nationalised. Operation and marketing of sand was put under the purview of the NRDCL.

However, many builders have found a solution of a sort. There are others who are involved in supplying sand besides the NRDCL. These suppliers are mainly truckers who engage some middlemen to connect the builders with them.

Under the cover of darkness

Like in most illegal businesses, the activities happen at night. The loaded trucks enroute to Thimphu from the quarry in Rinchengang starts moving at night. The trucks are seen parked alongside the highway until late evening. Hiding in secret pockets along the Dochula-Lampari highway are other empty trucks waiting.

At least seven to eight trucks laden with sand start moving together. When they reach the secret pockets, mostly near Chasheygang area, they start sharing the load. Sand shared from eight trucks can fill up another two trucks. This additional sand is sold in the black market where the cost is more than double the regulated price.

When the trucks arrive at the check post in Hongtsho, those with valid documents take the lead, while others without documents wait. The wait is long.

"Before the additional trucks start to move, we make sure that the guards are either sleeping or busy in some other works," said a trucker who requested anonymity. "We also see if there are vehicles to chase us if in case they see us."

Once the drivers hiding a few metres away from the checkpoint receives the green signal from the friends, they slowly start to move without starting the engine. This usually happens after 2am.

"They take advantage of the person who is on duty," said a forester at the Hongtsho check post. "If it's a female on duty, the drivers pass using force. Most of the time, they cross the check post while the duties are asleep or while eating."

The forester shared that once when a 10-wheeler truck forcefully crossed the check post they followed the vehicle. "We were in my car and the truck nearly threw us off the road when we tried to overtake and

stop it," he said.

In another event, some of the truckers had quietly latched the door of the duty-room with foresters inside. "Even the tyre of the vehicles of a duty personnel was flattened so that we could not follow them," said an officer.

Except for a CCTV camera that was recently installed near the check post, there is no barrier gate or other fortifications in Hongtsho. "Speed bumps and a barrier gate can help monitor the vehicles better," said the forester. "This is the only check post between the source and Thimphu. Once you pass from here, you cannot monitor the vehicles."

Besides illegally transshipping the sand from one truck to another, NRDCL officials in Rinchengang said that there are truckers who extract sand from along the banks of Punatsangchhu. Sand collected for rural consumption and from private land are also illegally sold, according to NRDCL officials.

The forest and nature conservation rules and regulation 2017 of the Department of Forest and Park Services (DoFPS) allows private registered landowners to commercially trade sand extracted from their land after obtaining environment clearance from the department.

This regulation, NRDCL officials said has loopholes that are exploited by individuals. The chief forestry officer (CFO) has the authority to allow people to collect sand from certain pockets where the NRDCL does not operate.

"People collect more than what the CFO permits," said an official. The additional sand is sold illegally. It was learnt that some of the people intentionally dump the legally lifted sand in open spaces and claim it to be illegal. This is a trick adopted by suppliers to convert illegal sand into legal sand.

Forest officials impose fine on illegal sand. However, the sand is not seized. Once the fine is imposed, the sand becomes legal.

"If we have about 20 truckloads of sand, we just claim five truckloads to be illegal," said one trucker. "Once we pay fine for the five truckloads, we take the remaining 15 truckloads together claiming that we paid the fine for all."

The illegal auction yard

The truck parking in Thimphu is a bustling hub.

Covered in blue tarpaulin are trucks loaded with sand. And there are people busy on their phones negotiating rates.

"We cannot keep the load for long. There is pressure on the vehicle tyre," said a trucker. "The frequency of checking from forest has increased lately."

According to sources, many more loaded trucks stay hiding elsewhere and avoid coming to the truck parking. "Most of the deals are made in advance so immediately as the trucks reach Thimphu, the load is delivered to the concerned buyers," said a source. He said that during peak season when constructions are in full swing, the demand for illegal supply of sand increases. "People don't mind paying double the price as long as the consignment is delivered on time. There is a risk involved but the reward is worth it." The cost of dredged sand at the Rinchengang quarry is set at Nu 273.77 per cubic metre. The cost for stock and quarry sand is different.

As per NRDCL rate, an eight cubic metre tipper truck ferrying dredged sand from the quarry till Olakha, Simtokha and Changbangdu areas cost Nu 9,168.72 (Nu 6,978.56 as transportation rate). For every additional kilometre from Simtokha area, the transportation rate increases by about Nu.100.

According to the source, illegal sand is sold at about Nu 18,000 (for the same amount) in areas near Simtokha. The cost differs with the carrying capacity of vehicles. A 16m3 AMW truck sells sand for some Nu 28,000 in Simtokha area.

Collusion?

Recently, the NRDCL sacked four staffs involved in illegal transaction of sand. Two of them were at managerial level.

NRDCL's officiating chief executive officer, Sonam Chopel, said that the management does not tolerate any illegal activity among the staffs. "There is no big or small corruption. They had misused their authority which is why they were terminated."

An internal investigation was undertaken to curb the practice after the office received complaints from the public. Sonam Chopel said that with a new system in place things have improved. "It might not be a perfect system, but it's a good one and people have come to us expressing their gratitude." Under the new system, customers with their own vehicles can

collect sand on their own once all the documentation of the construction approval and the sand requirement is worked out.

For those without vehicles, NRDCL mobilises vehicles from their common pool. Currently, there are more than 400 registered trucks in the pool.

No system is full proof, said Sonam Chopel. "A strong collusion among the agencies involved could work through any system." However, he said that there are also advantages of involving several counterparts.

The fine imposed on the illegal sand intercepted at the check post and along the highway is minimal. The sand is not seized after the fines are imposed. The fine imposed for 8m3 tipper truck was about Nu 3,000. Chief forestry officer with the Thimphu division, Gyeltshen, said that the department is now planning to seize illegal sand. However, a large area to dump the seized sand has to be identified, he added.

He said that having another check post while entering Thimphu could help curb the issue, however, it would be additional harassment for the public. "Constructing a gate at the Hontsho check post could help control the illegal movements."

Sonam Chopel said that with increasing demand of sand, the pressure is on the natural reserve. However, he said that NRDCL has managed to narrow the demand-supply gap over the years.

"Initially we had targeted to supply about 50-60 trucks in a day but due to high demand we are supplying about 120-130 trucks everyday," he said. "During winter the supply goes up to 200-230 trucks a day." He added that with almost 65 percent of the total sand transaction in the country happening in Wangdue, opportunities are abundant to do illegal business.

"We are yet to find a solution to this problem. But the overall system has improved and we believe almost 95 percent of the illegal business is stopped," he said. "However, a few incidents are bound to happen."

Meanwhile, recently, in a cat and mouse chase, officials intercepted a truck laden with sand at char-kilo near Chuzom checkpoint.

It was learnt that the truck was illegally ferrying sand and was enroute to Paro after escaping officials at the Hongtsho checkpoint.

Illegal sand business continues

Despites efforts from forest department and NRDCL to curb the issue

— Younten Tshedup, Kuensel



The Sha region in Wangdue supplies sand to about 16 Dzongkhags

In 2012, the Department of Forest and Park Services (DoFPS) recorded the first case of illegal sand transportation. The number soared to 29 in 2013.

In 2015 the department detected only two such cases. However, number of cases started to grow in the following years, from 11 cases in 2016 to 24 last year. Latest records show that 14 cases were detected so far this year. This however, is only those apprehended and registered by forest officials. Several such cases go uncaught. Recently officials from the Natural Resources Development Corporation Ltd (NRDCL) in Thimphu caught three trucks illegally ferrying sand from Punakha. Forest officials in Thimphu also apprehended a trucker transporting the construction material without any documents two days ago.

Officials said that the illegal sand business continues to grow despite several measures put in place by both the department and NRDCL. The limited natural resources such as sand and timber are confronted with large demand from the ever-growing construction sector in the country today.

Efforts to curb the illegal market

NRDCL's general manager with the mineral resources division, Deo Kumar Biswa, said that the corporation has strengthened their monitoring

system and have also started to deploy teams to visit construction sites. "We have started to send our people to check on the volume of sand people are receiving and also to inspect the source," he said.

Deo Kumar Biswa said that they have also started to educate their clients to refrain from buying sand illegally. "We don't mind supplying an additional truckload or two if the requirement is genuine." An online system that keeps record of all the customers and sand supplied has also been developed.

A client can avail only a truckload of sand a week as per the corporation's regulation. However, it was learnt that many people claimed that they did not receive their quota of sand for months and try to hoard the mineral.

"The online system helps us keep track of our supply system and also help in equal distribution of sand," said Deo Kumar Biswa.

He added that illegal transaction of sand from areas that are under NRDCL has been reduced by almost 99 percent.

"However, we cannot completely stop this practice, as there are several other areas from where sand is being sold illegally and these areas do not fall under NRDCL's jurisdiction."

NRDCL's chief executive officer, Sonam Wangchuk, said that the Sha region has to supply sand to some 16 dzongkhags and the biggest market is in Thimphu. He said that there are only limited sites with the corporation in Wangdue from where sand is being extracted.

With demands exceeding the production capacity in the Sha region, many resort to extracting sand from other places thereby promoting the black market. Sonam Wangchuk said that there are potential sites in places like Gelephu and Lhamoidzingkha to address the growing sand demands in Thimphu.

"However, people are reluctant to buy from these places as they do not want to pay for the additional transportation cost that would be incurred."

Uncoordinated approach

On an average, the Sha region dredges about 70 truckloads of fresh sand daily from the Punatsangchhu basin.

Construction of a three-storey building (20mx10m) with 3BHK of two units on each floor requires around 30 truckloads (8m³) of sand. Currently, there are more than 2,500 new constructions ongoing in Thimphu. While it is the thromde that approves construction plans, NRDCL is responsible to provide raw materials

such as sand and timber. It appears that there is a lack of coordination between the two agencies, which has led to an illegal business of the natural resources.

Sonam Wangchuk said that a tentative projection of how many new constructions would be annually approved by the Thimphu Thromde could help NRDCL plan its production accordingly. It was learnt that the corporation had proposed for a system for coordinated approach in construction a few years ago. However, the plan didn't come through.



Why Thimphu still has water shortage even after completion of the NU 400 Mn Dodena project and promises of 24/7 drinking water

— Pema Seldon, *The Bhutanese*

As a part of Central Water Supply Scheme (CWSS), Thimphu Thromde, with financial assistance from World Bank, started Nu 400 million project of 10 MLD water treatment plant at Taba, to improve urban infrastructure service in Northern Thimphu where no formal services are available, and also to augment the existing water supply system.

After missing several deadlines, Thromde started supplying water from Dodena from May 2019 and the residents of Thimphu Throm were supposed to receive 24 hours water supply, but it is only Changjiji, Yangchenphu and Langjophakha that receive adequate water. Thromde planned to improve the water system in Norzin Lam and Changzamtog areas but even after the completion of the project, the areas still face severe water shortage.

World Bank

The project started on September 2017 and was expected to complete by February 2018 but due to the delay in getting clearance on land, the contractors could complete the project only on February 2019. After the completion of the project, there was a delay in testing and commissioning of the plant because water didn't reach to the plant on time due to several breakages of pipelines. The testing was done in March 2019.

Again, they couldn't supply the water immediately to the reservoirs tanks because there were similar breakages of pipeline while supplying water to four reservoir tanks located in Taba, Pamtsho,

Langjophakha and Samteling. People received water only from May.

Project Manager of World Bank, Pekar Rabgay, said that the project has been completed and is successful as water was supplied to places it was supposed to reach. He said, "It was initially decided that World Bank will bring water from Dodena to 10 MLD

water treatment plant at Taba, and from there we will distribute water to four reservoirs tanks. From Langjophakha, we have supplied water to Yangchenphu and Changjiji which was not there in the plan. Initially, it was decided that we will supply water to four reservoirs tanks which we have done. Core area was never meant to be covered by Dodena."

Pekar said that since there is a severe water problem in core as well as in Changzamtog areas, Thromde was trying to mobilize and bring the Dodena water to three tanks near the Swimming Pool.

Once they are able to bring the water to swimming pool, the whole water problem in Thimphu will be resolved, he said. He also said it needs to be done immediately because during APA signing with the Prime Minister, the Thimphu Thrompon has agreed to supply 24-hour water in Thimphu City.

He said, "When we tested the pipelines initially, the joints gave away because of the pressure in the pipe. There are different types of joints, and the joints we used were push in joints where we have to connect two joints which perfectly fit together. These joints are easy to fix because there is a rubber gasket which is quite flexible. So when there is too much pressure and if these joints are not buried underneath or exposed, it came out but we have resolved the issue by providing concrete."

He pointed out that such problems are expected to occur in a big project. "Although we have rectified the problem, the problem might occur in the future because we are talking about 33 kms of pipelines in total, but if anything happens, the contractor is responsible because even if they have handed over to Thromde, they still have one year as defect liability where they have to monitor the system. So if anything happens till June 2020, they will have to look after

this," Project Manager of World Bank, Pekar Rabgay, said.

East West Construction

Proprietor of East West Construction said that it is responsible for the construction of the water treatment plant in Taba which involves a few tanks. The project was started on 1 September 2018 and was expected to complete by 1 December 2018, which was the initial project period. He said,

"As we couldn't start the work at the time when we are supposed to start because of delay in the construction of road at the treatment plant and delay in getting the clearance, on 27 August 2018, we wrote a letter to the Thromde stating that as there was delay in works from the beginning, we would not be able to complete the work on time. Thromde extended the time to February 2019."

He also said, "Though the project was completed in February, we could run the test only on March as we didn't receive water at the plant. As there was no water from Dodena, we had to test the plant by bringing water from nearby source which took a long time as the pipelines were small."

He said that even after receiving the water, there was the problem of water leakage and bursting of pipelines. He said, "This happens when there is excess pressure in the pipelines. People had to constantly monitor it and once the leak at one point was rectified, there were leakage from other joints and this problem went on. We handed the project officially on May and people started receiving water from May."

Nima Construction

Nima Construction is responsible for construction of intake, transmission main line from Dodena to Taba with further trunk line.

Engineer Yogesh said that the main work of the company was to lay down the pipelines, construct sedimentation tank and four reservoir tanks. The work was delayed due to the delay in securing clearance.

He said, "We even started providing water by February but there was some issue, where certain pipes gave away but I think we were able to provide water by April." The engineer said the pipes required to be tested under 12 to 13 kg pressure for

24 hours.

"If the water has to run for more than a day, the pressure has been already checked. And when it gives away after a month, it is because of external factors like rain. When it rains, it washes away the soil which leads to movement of joints and joints go off. It's not because of any workmanship because if it was because of the workmanship or the material, it would go away in the very first day because we have to keep 24 hours for test."

Now it has been more than two months there hasn't been any breakage, he said.

He further said, "We construct thrust block at a point where there is weak joints and wherever it is necessary, and we don't construct thrust block ourselves, but we are told by the consultants to construct the thrust block. In December also, we were told by the consultant to construct additional 40 thrust blocks. We had already constructed thrust block but we were told that there was need for additional thrust block and we constructed around 40 blocks after the first charging of water."

He said, "Sometimes what happens is that if there is a turn and there is a joint that joints gives away faster and we found out that in many joints, it was because of the short pipes. In smaller joints that gives away." From the total of 30 kms of pipeline, only 10 joints gave away which is quite reasonable. 5,500 pipelines of 5.5 meters were laid. There are 5,500 joints in between, he said.

He said that the pressure was more at the Pangrizampa area because of the gradient and most joints gave away in those areas. This is because the terrain is very difficult in the area as there are more turns. If the joints are buried underground then the joints wouldn't give away but there is no way that we could bury the joints underground in these areas and there was the risk. Most of the pipes are buried underground till Pangrizampa, he added.

Thromde

Thimphu Thromde announced that with the completion of the project, Thimphu City would get 24 hours of water supply, but on the contrary, even after the completion of the project, the residents in Thimphu are still struggling with water shortage.

Thimphu Thromde was not able to provide water as it planned in Norzin Lam and Changzamtog areas. The situation in Changjiji, Yangchenphu and Langjophakha has improved after Thromde started supplying water from Dodena.

Initially when the project was started, Thromde planned to provide water in places where it was required and also to improve the existing system in the Thromde.

In the past, Changjiji was supplied its water from Motithang. Yangchenphu and Langjophakha was supplied water from Jungzhina. Now, as Dodena covers all the three areas, Thimphu Thromde then decided to supply water from Jungzhina to three tanks in Changangkha that will address the water shortage in Norzin Lam and Changzamtog.

Thrompon Kinlay Dorjee said that the Thromde also planned to take one pipeline to the three tanks in Changangkha by February or March this year. It was expected that the water reaching the three tanks in Changangkha, will reach Changzamtog areas and core town areas too.

Thrompon said, "All these works should have been completed by now, but the engineers have not done their work which is laying of pipeline, which has resulted in the delay."

Yangchenphu receives water from Swimming Pool Tank, and Thromde planned to supply water from Yangchenphu to Swimming Pool as well, but the water was not able to reach the tank as the pipelines were too small. This has also affected supply of water to Norzin Lam, the Thrompon said.

However, he assured that after they complete laying the pipelines, they will be able to provide water to Norzin Lam and Changzamtog.

Thrompon also said that Thromde has to also look into distribution network in Norzin Lam as the network was done in late 1970s and 80s which was never upgraded. The network in Norzin Lam is so pathetic, he said.

Senior engineer, Nakphel Drukpa from Water Supply Division said that if Thromde supplies 135 liters of water per person per day, it would mean that Thromde has supplied water for 24 hours in a day. In 2018 to 2019 APA, Thromde worked out the total number of consumers and the total amount of water

Water supply in Thimphu Thromde (in Cubic Metres)



Source NSB

supplied by Thimphu Thromde, and after studying the details it was learnt that Thromde was supplying water beyond the benchmark. It is also learnt that by Indian standard, if it is for high altitude countries, 135 liters per person should be enough but it also depends on the size of the population.

Nakphel said, "We monitor the complaint statistics, and I feel that the situation in Norzin Lam is improving every day. If we get more complaints from a particular area, it would mean we will have to focus on that area and see why it's happening. Is it because the network is poor or is it because people are not careful in using the water or is it because there was disruption like breaking of pipes due to construction or if the thromde has failed to regulate the water supply in a way it is supposed to do?"

He said, "We look at the past to draw lessons, and we have to move forward and our focus is now shifted to the distribution network, and we have to work more on distribution network. We are going all out to resolve this issue."

He further said, "We have a pilot project in South Thimphu assisted by Asian Development Bank Korea Water, which is globally accepted as a specialist in water technology. Korea Water experts are studying it. In the core and extended areas, we have to put in new treatment plants, we have to do new distribution, rehabilitation and augmentation, extension and replacement of pipelines."

He said that Thromde is putting in smart devices, like water meters that can be read automatically. It is often noticed that due to high water pressure there have been constant breakage of pipe, therefore, Thromde plans to install pressure-reducing valves that will work through automatic sensors.

When Thromde was looking to extend the network in Norzin Lam, problems came up. "The reason why there is problem in core area is because during those day around 1980s, there was only one reliable source in Motithang and it was quite convenient during that time because there were only few houses. But with time the number of houses increased which eventually led to increase in the number of connection in the area. That's why we have wrong house connections which will be eventually lifted in the coming years," he said.

Pema Thekchog, Thromde engineer said that in the past Motithang Treatment Plant supplied water to Yangchenphug and Changjiji received water from Jungzhina treatment plant via swimming pool tank in addition to three boreholes that supplies water to Changjiji. Water from Jungzhina is pumped and supplied to Langjophakha. Motithang treatment plant supplied water to Motithang, Changzamtog, Saabji Baazar, Yangchenphug, and Kalabazar, Norzin Lam, Changangkha and Kawajangsa

Jungzhina supplied water to BCCI from where the water is supplied to Norzin Lam areas. It also supplies to the swimming pool plant, which in turn supplies to the hospital and Changjiji and the water that reaches dzong tank supplies to Kawajangsa. Chamgang supplies water to Babesa, Olakha, Lungtenphu and Changbangdu and Dechencholing plant supplies to Dechencholing.

After the completion of the project, Changjiji is fully covered by Dodena. In the past the water from Jungzhina treatment plant was supplied to swimming pool tank which then supplies to Changjiji. With Dodena, Thromde does not have to supply water to Changjiji and has disconnected all the line, and water from BCCI tank is supplied to Norzin Lam.

Dodena supplies water to Yangchenphug which was earlier supplied from Motithang. Langjophakha received water from Jungzhina treatment plant and in line with this Jungzhina also received water from Dodena.

Through BCCI the water also reached few places in Norzin Lam. In lower Taba, Thromde is in the process of installing water meters. There are few areas in Taba that receive water from Dodena. Pema said that the water pipelines are old in the

Norzin Lam, and since the line or the distribution is old, the water that is supplied from BCCI doesn't reach as it goes to different households because of old distribution. He said, "If the same amount of water that is supplied reaches the tank, we can store the water in the tank and can supply it when it is needed on time but because of this some houses in Norzin have excess water while other face severe water shortages."

"From Jungshina treatment plant there is a line to Samtenling, and from there we will supply water to three tanks at Changangkha which will solve the water problem in Norzin Lam, Hongkong market, hospital areas and Changzamtog. The tank is 320,000 liters and there are 3 tanks of same capacity. The water from Dodena is supplied to Dzong tank which will then supply to Hejo area and Kawajangsa by pumping it from Dzong tank. It will also come partially to Norzin Lam and Saabji Baazar areas."

According to Hotel Jomolhari, many hotels have been facing water problems for 5 to 10 years. Without adequate water, the hotels can't run maximum number of rooms, bathrooms and toilets. Hotel areas require more water than the residential areas. Thromde water is also drying up as there are so many constructions, pointed out the hotel owner.

The owner of the hotel said that many complaints were put up to the Thromde but only to be told that the problems will be resolved with the completion of the Dodena project by 2018. It is now nearing 2020, and the hoteliers are still facing water shortage problems.

He said, "I also feel that even with the completion of the project, the water crisis in Norzin Lam will not be settled because I heard that the Dodena project will cover only certain areas like Changjiji, Langjophakha and Yangchenphu."

Another hotel, Namgay Heritage, said it faces water problems frequently, especially during its busy season when most of the rooms are occupied. "We have to buy water, paying around Nu 5,000 to 6,000 in a day. The water that Thromde supplies is not sufficient but we are not saying that there are water problem all the time but it occurs most of the time. And this happens, especially during summer and monsoon," the general manager said.

The hotel says it does not face water shortage in the winters. However, the water problem is severe in June to August.

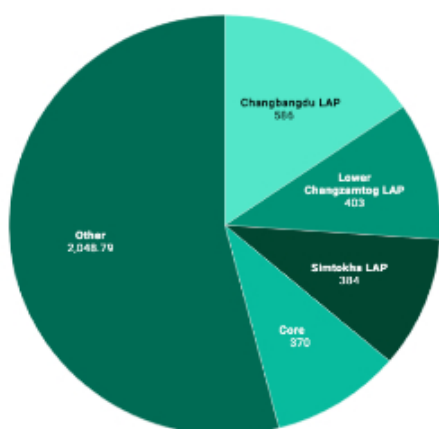
"We have requested the Thromde to install more water meters and we are paying extra money for meters but there is still water shortage most of the time. After paying extra money, we have three lines, one line that is for normal households which is from time to time, and we have two commercial lines meant for 24 hours supply, but there is still water shortage because when the water goes off, it goes at same time even though we have three lines. Last time, we did not have water from more than one week so we had to buy water from private," he said.

Private house owners in Changzamtog said that Thromde provides water from time to time, which is for only 2 hours in the morning and evening. "We have a group of private house owners and we have a private connection. Even if we have private connection we have water problem," said a house owner.

Number of households in Thimphu Thromde by LAP who reported that their main source of drinking water is not reliable

Reliable means availability of water at least during the critical time (For eg: Between 5AM – 8AM, 11AM – 2PM, and 5 PM – 9 PM) for washing and cooking.

Changbangdu LAP Lower Changzamtog LAP Simtokha LAP Core Other

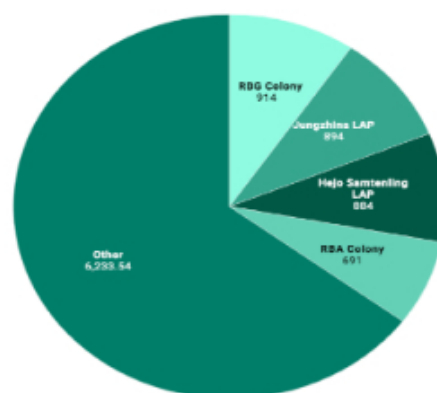


Source NSB

Number of households in Thimphu Thromde by LAP who reported that their main source of drinking water is reliable

Reliable means availability of water at least during the critical time (For eg: Between 5AM – 8AM, 11AM – 2PM, and 5 PM – 9 PM) for washing and cooking.

RBG Colony Jungkhina LAP Hejo Samtenling LAP RBA Colony Other



Source NSB

House owners say that even with the combination of Thromde and private connection, it is hard to provide 24 hours of water supply, as water from the same source is not enough. This has also resulted into fights among house owners.

A house owners said, "We have complained several times to Thromde, but Thromde said they will provide water but they haven't. Thromde said that Dodena project will solve the water issue and after the commissioning of Dodena project, Thromde will provide water from Motithang."

We have to keep a plumber on constant duty as there are people who cut the pipes and steal the water. It maybe between plumber as they protect their water and steal other's water, owners stated.

"Thromde considers private water connection as illegal, and even we don't want private connection as it is not tested or treated water, but we don't have any other option as Thromde water is not sufficient," the desperate house owners added.

Educating the nation for 50 years without a policy

Where is the draft NEP 2018?

Yangchen Choden Rinzin, Kuensel



There are 512 schools in the country today

Modern education in Bhutan began in the mid-1950s just as the country was gearing towards planned development. Until then monastic education was the main form of education but it was not accessible to the general population.

The change in the education system was supposed to usher in the giant leap forward for the country. It was seen as the most important aspect of Bhutan's development aspirations. Therefore, education received the highest priority.

Today, after 50 years, Bhutan has made tangible achievements, both in creating a literate society as well as using education as a springboard to achieve other national goals. Bhutan is expected to graduate to middle income country in 2023. However, critical gaps remain.

Despite huge achievements in the education sector today with more than 300 ECCD centres, 512 schools, 19 tertiary institutes, six technical training institutes, and two Zorig Chusum institutes, young literate Bhutanese remain disillusioned and unemployed.

The syllabus has become irrelevant with the generic education system. There is no system or vision that pushes for an enduring sense of direction the education system should take. Could things have been different, if there was an all-encompassing National Education Policy (NEP)? Yes, say observers. They say they are surprised that when policies are being enacted for far less consequential sectors, the

policy for the education sector continues to elude the government.

The first NEP was drafted in 1976 by the then department of education, as commanded by The Fourth Druk Gyaplo. An expanded version of the policy was approved by the Cabinet in 1985 after the revised policy focused more on the school curriculum. A new Curriculum and Textbook Division (CTDD) was also established and launched the "New Approach to Primary Education" (NAPE) from Pre-primary to class VI.

But many bypassed the NEP. The fact is there has never been a real education policy in decades that provided a vision to respond to changing needs.

Is NEP necessary?

Some educationists shared that education policy is a fundamental part of the foundations of any country, as it would clarify the roles of different actors in educating the children. For all its limitations, a progressive, definitive policy is critical especially for an all-embracing sector like education, because it engages the largest and the most precious segment of the society- children and youth.

However, there are no right answers when it comes to creating an education policy, say observers. A senior educationist said that everybody thinks they know about education because they once went to school. Everybody, he observed, has a view or opinion on what education policy should be.

It is 2019 and there is still no solid and real NEP. Education system is still struggling to have the draft NEP 2018 as a tailored policy that would guide the future. The policy, which was drawn based on the constitutional commitment and policy documents of 1976 and 1982, is still a draft.

Article 9, Section 15 and 16 of the Constitution clearly mandates the state to provide free basic education from PP to Class X. However, there are many informal and formal policies or guidelines in different documents with some inconsistencies and therefore,

creating confusion.

The Education Blueprint 2014-2024 also calls for a consolidated education policy directive into one legal framework for the growth and development of education in the country. Bhutan is yet to see one. In 1984, the World University of Canada sent its volunteers and more than 40 Canadian teachers have worked in Bhutan. More than 20 Bhutanese teachers studied at the University of New Brunswick. Besides Canada, Bhutan had sought support and cooperation to reform and develop education in Bhutan from countries like Ireland, United Kingdom, Denmark, and India.

Today, these countries especially Canada and Ireland are applauded for successful education system, and are among the top performing education systems in international rankings and tests, run by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

While in Bhutan, the test run by the OECD report this year recommended a major overhaul in the curricula of the country's education system. So what could have been the reason for such pitfall in education when Bhutan's education system has clearly chosen these countries for cooperation? Schools, Royal Education Council (REC) and Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment (BCSEA) should prioritise on the depth instead of the breadth of learning to avoid superficial learning and incomplete understanding of core concept, the OECD report stated. Many educationists believe such pitfall may not have been encountered if a strong policy with vision was in place.

The attempt has been there to have a bold and futuristic education policy. However, it has never gone beyond the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) who reviews the policies and later submits to the Cabinet for approval.

Draft NEP 2018

Today the education ministry still holds a draft NEP since 2018 but the question is, is it for real this time? This is because NEP is yet to receive any attention. The draft was submitted to the GNHC, however, it was

learnt that the draft is again back with the ministry for further review. It (draft) claims to make education more relevant for changing needs and expectations. There is nothing new in its entirety- in the new draft education policy. What it doesn't talk about is teachers leaving the job. It will inform and guide all forms and levels of education in Bhutan, public and private, to support the aspirations of the government. It includes early childhood, monastic, tertiary, training, non-formal, and continuing education.

The policy states that under the school education, among many policy statements, the ministry, dzongkhags and schools should maintain a class size of maximum of 24 for primary and 30 for secondary levels. However, although it is reported that schools have the right ratio, most teachers disagree. What the policy needs is an effort to hold profound and in-depth review of the system that would lead to fundamental changes aligning with the 21st century changes.

Policy politicised?

The education policy has become a political battleground over the years. It is politicised, which means it does not necessarily reflect what teachers think is best, so politicians think they should be kept in charge of these decisions. With 15 years of democracy and three different elected governments not serious with a policy, the average student may have been affected by three different education ministers.

The problem in the existing policy is that it places too much emphasis on knowledge rather than understanding, and importance on academic skills instead of also including practical skills. "Why is the importance for STEM again making noise? The emphasis has existed for decades but nothing much was done because we lacked a mother policy that took care of the country's vision," said a retired teacher.

Observers said that the lack of policy lead to ad-hoc decisions often to fulfill campaign pledges and elected government can do anything they want in the

absence of a national policy. Is the policy still not being put in place because government cannot make decisions on education? The education policy has been changed piecemeal, changes to the various subject curricula at the whim of individual policy makers.

For instance, despite hiccups, central schools were established, Shakespeare was removed from the curricula. Then despite questioning its constitutionality, the cut-off point for Class X, which has existed for years, was removed. The admission age of a student in the Pre-Primary is six years old and this has also remained debatable without a solid policy to prove.

An educationist said that policy makers change every few years, so there is a lack of continuity. Another said there are around 178,000 children in schools and what was suitable for a few hundred pupils half a century ago is no longer suitable for 178,000 in the 21st century. Yet the education system overall has changed little. Some questioned the various education guidelines to run the education system without having a policy to derive the guidelines from.

What former ministers say?

Former education minister Thakur Singh Powdyel said the ministry had drafted a National School Education Policy and submitted to the Cabinet that received endorsement in 2011. He said the final draft incorporated all the changes that were suggested and was submitted to the GNHC for review.

"The final version did not come till the government's term ended in April 2013," he said. "I learnt later that when the ministry submitted the draft to the next Cabinet, it was not endorsed for several reasons including the fact that I had used the expression *gyalyong gakid pelzom* in my foreword." Agreeing with the importance of such policy, the

former minister said that there is a need for a sound NEP instead of reckless and maverick approach to education, which would cost the nation dearly. He said there is a need for a clear sense of direction, continuity and focus, rather than a frequent tinkering with the system.

"A willingness to engage the relevant stakeholders would lead to refine and evolve a robust NEP. Education is too important to be politicised and the bottom-line is that if education succeeds, no nation can fail."

Former education minister Norbu Wangchuk said the draft NEP was ready towards the end of his term, however, he advised the ministry to let the new government do the due diligence before approving it.

"As a major government policy, it was important that the new government needed to endorse and own the policy," he said. With several reforms planned by the new government, it was only right that these initiatives are reflected in the policy."

He said Bhutan should now be ready for an education policy that would inform stakeholders on all major education matters. However, he added that Bhutan has not reached a situation where education would halt for a want of a policy document.

"If it is taking a longer time in approving, it must be for a good reason. There is no need to rush to put an education policy in place if further review needs to be undertaken to get it right."

However, the education ministry that is supposed to bring in the policy has blissfully remained quiet on this matter.

Kuensel could not contact top ministry officials for response and information on the current status of the draft policy despite trying for more than a month. Meanwhile, all that can be done, with the silence, is ponder upon why we still do not have an education policy and what is happening with the draft NEP.

MoE aims for “futuristic and comprehensive” education policy

— *Yangchen Choden Rinzin, Kuensel*

Education ministry is working on the draft national education policy (NEP) again after the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) returned the draft to the ministry seeking further clarification. GNHC has also suggested reviewing other relevant policies that were being developed to maintain linkages and consistency.

Although the draft NEP 2018 was submitted to Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) for the review earlier this year, the policy after failing to meet certain screening criteria was sent back to the ministry.

As per the policy protocol, after the GNHC reviews the policy, it is then submitted to the Cabinet for approval. This is the second time the draft NEP failed to meet the criteria and was sent back to the ministry for revision during the former government. An official from the GNHC said that it was sent back because the ministry had also proposed for the blueprint then but the sector never returned the revised policy.

The first draft of the current version was initiated sometime in 2008. It was revised and submitted to GNHC in 2014 for further review and approval. Education secretary Karma Yeshey said that both the draft policies were put on hold in light of many education reform processes at hand then. He added that the ministry started working on this current draft from 2017 following the policy protocols and presented the final draft to the ministry on August 16 this year.

Secretary said that the draft NEP with comments from GNHC has since been reviewed following due processes and have put through another round of stakeholder consultation. He said the final is ready for submission to GNHC and would be submitting soon. Education Minister JB Rai said the ministry is aiming for a bold, futuristic, comprehensive, strategic and meaningful NEP, which is why it is taking time. Education system is still struggling to have the draft NEP 2018 as a tailored policy that would guide the future. The policy, which was drawn based on the

constitutional commitment and policy documents of 1976 and 1982, is still a draft.

Lyonpo said that there are so many components and chapters that need to be included in the policy, which is currently missing in the draft NEP, so the ministry is concerned on formulation of the policy instead of hurrying to get it endorsed.

As a minister, JB Rai said that he will have to present the policy to Cabinet for approval, but after going through the policy, decided to rework on the policy since it was not satisfactory.

“I wanted to have a passion or confident about the policy to present to Cabinet for approval and it sounded more like rules and regulations,” Lyonpo said. “The policy is inadequate in many other areas especially a vision that is achievable. Lyonpo said this is why the ministry would like to take adequate time to revise and prepare.

However, secretary said that the delay in the education policy so far was because policy development and formulation requires a lot of stakeholder consultation to understand and capture the policy vision, scope and intent of the policy. “The education having one of the largest and complex structures of stakeholders, it required a thoughtful process and consultations to come up with a policy that is broad, long-term, and forward looking,” the secretary said. “Policy formulation often has to be taken along with other important education reforms, thus considering the human resources, skills and time constraints, this policy has been kept on hold.”

Lyonpo said that although it would take some more time, the ministry would ensure that the policy comes through this time and also ensure such policy is consulted through stakeholders to scale up the efforts. “In light of its scope, impact and the role it can play, I will certainly push for this policy to be approved within my term.”

Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering said he is aware that the draft policy is still being reviewed. He has yet to go through the draft document.

"There are many things that we need to look into, closely and in detail when it comes to relevance of education," Lyonchhen said. "I've told GNHC to ensure that components that would upgrade education system should be incorporated in the policy."

The draft policy claims to make education more relevant for changing needs and expectations. According to the draft policy, it will inform and guide all forms and levels of education in Bhutan, public and private, to support the aspirations of the government.

it includes early childhood, monastic, tertiary, training, non-formal, and continuing education.

The policy states that the curriculum will be designed to develop a sound foundation in literacy, numeracy and language.

The first NEP was drafted in 1976 by the then department of education, as commanded by The Fourth Druk Gyalpo. The Cabinet in 1985 approved an expanded version of the policy which was more focused on the school curriculum.



Were there hands in glove?

A deeper look into the Health Ministry's procurement system

— Dechen Tshomo, Kuensel

In April this year, a number of staff at the national referral hospital in Thimphu found something wrong with the medical gloves. The latex gloves were not easy to wear and tore easily.

This meant risk. Then came similar complaints from health centres outside Thimphu.

In fact, the Haa District Hospital lodged a written complaint to the health ministry's Department of Medical Supplies and Health Infrastructure (DoMSHI). The staff complained that some gloves contained foreign materials like hair, while others were not sealed properly.

A few had blood-like stains on them even. Eventually, the supplier was asked to replace a huge consignment of medical gloves, some two hundred thousand pairs.

What was wrong with the gloves?

A health official at the national referral hospital said medical gloves should be a little thick, easy to wear, and should contain a modicum of powder inside. However, the gloves did not appear sterile and tore a tad too easily. Health officials soon raised questions about how the supply passed the quality check.

A surgeon at the national referral hospital said the gloves could not be used in surgery since they tore easily. He said simple medical devices like latex gloves play an important role in controlling infection. Without sterile gloves, there could be illnesses and deaths from cross-contamination.

The gloves were supplied between 2018 and 2019, and about 726,332 pairs of three types of gloves worth Nu 4.7 million were distributed to various health centres. The supplier replaced about 200,000 pairs of gloves in May and June this year.

The director general of DoMSHI, Sonam Dawa, said the problem was noticed after the gloves were distributed to the health centres. Based on the various complaints, DoMSHI officials verified the samples and found that some gloves were indeed of inferior quality. Quizzically, however, the tests showed that the gloves

were sterile and did not have bloodstains.

“The gloves were supplied between 2018 and 2019, and about 726,332 pairs of three types of gloves worth Nu 4.7 million were distributed to various health centres. The supplier replaced about 200,000 pairs of gloves in May and June this year.”

A procurement officer with DoMSHI, Dorji Phuntsho, said the department immediately informed the health centres to refrain from using the gloves if they were not properly sealed, contained foreign materials or had any other defect. They were instructed to set aside such gloves for replacement at the end of the year.

DoMSHI's chief procurement officer, Rudra Mani Dhimal, said the department had a tolerance level for defective products, both in terms of quantity and the kind of defect.

“In the case of the gloves, about 27 percent had some kind of defect, so we asked the supplier for replacement,” he said.

Rudra Mani said the gloves were not recalled immediately since doing so could have affected the service at health centres.

The department, however, makes immediate recall if it involves medicines or drugs. The glove supplier is now barred from participating in tenders for the supply of the same, and the manufacturer has been told that Bhutan would not purchase any of its products henceforth.

Suppliers' side of the story

Gloves are supplied in huge quantity, in truckloads. Since it is impossible to monitor each pair, random

checks are carried out. The department officials said the random check did not reveal any defect. Generally, local suppliers first order samples from the manufacturers, and most times samples are good. But then when the products arrive in bulk there are always cases of inferior quality goods included in the supply.

The supplier, UTL Pharmaceuticals and Medical Supplies claimed that his company had a good record until the glove incident. He said the medical equipment he had supplied earlier from Japan, UK, and the USA were good. "Gloves were a huge loss to me," he said. "My counterpart in India supplied the poor quality gloves."

Suppliers say they are at the mercy of their counterparts abroad since each and every item has to be imported. Despite this, most imports do meet the ministry's quality check. Health officials say it is the consumables with short life span that are mostly prone to manufacturing defects or breakage. Poor or wrong packaging also leads to wastage. A poorly packaged consumable fails to sterilize even it doesn't have any real defect.

DoMSHI's Sonam Dawa said there were incidences of poor quality products in the past that they had to reject right at the entry point in Phuentsholing. In case of the neonates' death in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at the national referral hospital because of bacterial infection outbreak last year, Royal Centre for Disease Control's investigation found that the hypochlorite solution used in the hospital had only five percent of active chlorine against the required 30 percent.

The chlorine solution used for cleaning, or disinfecting, the hospital was recalled. Health officials say there is no way the end user can gauge the quality of consumables like the disinfection solution. Technical assistance and lab tests are required.

Who are the suppliers?

The country currently has 153 registered medical suppliers. However, all the registered suppliers do not automatically participate in tenders. The suppliers must renew their certificate every three years and those who do not renew are automatically deregistered.

This means the number of suppliers changes every year. Those suppliers who do not participate in annual tenders for three consecutive years are not re-registered.

Some suppliers Kuensel talked to say there are many challenges in medical procurement. The biggest threat is the system's vulnerability to corruption since medical procurement involves huge amount of money.

Bhutan doesn't produce anything. This means every single item, from the tiny syringe to the huge MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) machine, has to be procured from abroad. This not only adds cost but also leaves room for malpractices in the supply chain. Sometimes foreign suppliers send inferior quality products that are rejected by the Medical Supplies Distribution Division (MSDD) in Phuentsholing. Their local counterparts have to transport it back to the point of origin, and this often results in huge loss of time and resources for all the parties involved.

Prone to corrupt practices

Health procurement is technically complex and involves many individuals with different expertise. Bhutan's health sector gets its medical supplies through Bhutanese suppliers since the finance ministry's procurement rules and regulations does not allow direct procurement from the manufacturer. Rudra Mani said there was inherent vulnerability in the supply chain since the country is totally dependent on suppliers from abroad. Except for traditional medicines, the country doesn't produce any drug.

The supply chain is multi-layered, and this means each actor factors in his or her margin. This adds to the cost and things become expensive. As a result, the health ministry ends up paying substantially more for the same good that could have been way cheaper in India.

On the top, there is no way to monitor the quality of the product at the point of manufacture. Most quality check is done after the goods are delivered at the MSDD in Phuentsholing.

For example, when an MRI machine at the JDWNRH had to be upgraded recently, technicians came from

the US. This means loss of time and discontinuation of the service. The other big challenge is the lack of technical capacity of local medical suppliers. Many are new to the business and do not have adequate knowledge of the system or the process. An observer said a lot of them are in just for the fat commission. Sonam Dawa said Bhutanese suppliers did not engage seasoned medical equipment technicians in the process and a majority of them were not able to provide after-sales service when the equipment breaks down.

"If something breaks down, experts have to be brought in from the manufacturers outside," he said, adding that availing spare parts was altogether a different challenge. Such vulnerabilities have led to incidences of corruption in the past.

One such incident surfaced in 2009 when an equipment supplier sponsored a trip to Germany and China for the members of the tender committee. The company had allegedly bribed the officials.

In the Germany's case, some officials involved were acquitted by the high court. Others were suspended after investigations revealed they had disproportionate assets. Some were accused of conflict of interest in awarding the contract and some were booked for lapses on quality inspection. There are also systematic lapses, health officials say. For example, medical supply involves a closed list and there is no competition. The bigger caveat is allowing only Bhutanese suppliers (who have no technical capacity and knowledge) to participate in tenders.

"Bhutanese suppliers are basically middlemen," said the official. "They just keep their cut and supply whatever their counterparts send." Most suppliers do not travel to verify or see the supplies for themselves even if the manufacturers are based next door in India.

"We are not in the most ideal situation when it comes to medical procurement," said the official. "It's challenges versus the necessity."

When rules defeat the purpose

The government's procurement rules do not allow the ministry to go for direct procurement from manufacturers. Procurement officials are not allowed to

negotiate directly. And there are other challenges in direct procurement.

Further, manufacturing companies also do not encourage suppliers to come directly to them because of the small quantity. The companies instead encourage middlemen for their own convenience. "When we contact them directly, they ask us to contact their agent in Bhutan," an official said. "And we are trying to avoid the agent system here."

Procurement of sophisticated health equipment is highly technical. This means people involved in the procurement process must have decent knowledge about functionality, safety, and laboratory analysis. The purpose of the procurement rules and regulations is to get the best value for money. However, whether this objective is being met remains a question with the very many underlying challenges. It's a no-win situation simply because of lack of competition in the market, because of monopoly, because of the scale involved, and because of the absence of local manufacturers.

Procurement is a suspicious sector.

There is a common belief that procurement almost always involves bribery, and people openly express their lack of trust in procurement officials. This means direct purchases negotiated by procurement officials could come under the public scanner.

After the investigation in 2009, the post of the chief procurement officer under Drugs, Vaccine and Equipment Division remained vacant for about two years. There were no applicants despite the announcement of the vacancy a number of times.

"There is a dichotomy here," said a health official. "On one hand, you want to ensure transparency and follow the rules, and on the other, you want to reduce corruption by not directly involving procurement officials in the supply chain."

Officials say there are inherent challenges in health procurement, and this perhaps requires looking beyond mere rules and regulations. They say other areas of the sector should also be improved and streamlined. For example, willful or careless wastage could be monitored more stringently. The idea of fixing accountability could be strengthened.

An allied health professional, during the recent high-level committee meeting at the health ministry, said maintenance of medical equipment is a major concern as the sector lacks skilled technical people.

“Do we really want to go for the lowest price or go for specific brands that have proven quality and lifespan?” he asked. “This would help cut down lots of recurring cost.

Otherwise, we keep on procuring the same equipment every year.”

The best starting point, officials point out, would be to encourage Bhutanese to manufacture simple medical devices like the kidney dash, dressing trays, and forceps.

This, they say, could be the beginning of the much-needed reform in the country’s health sector.



Team formed to revamp procurement system

— Dechen Tshomo, Kuensel

In a bid to add value to the procurement system, the government has started working on revamping the procurement system.

A team, led by the director-general of Department of National Properties, has been formed to work on this, the Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering said. Lyonchhen said specialised institutions and hospitals should have specialised procurement system.

He said that institutions like works and human settlement ministry and health ministry that have special system needs to have a specialised procurement system and the rest will fit into the miscellaneous group. "One size doesn't fit all." Lyonchhen said the health ministry should have a different procurement system. Even within the health sector, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWRH) and referral hospitals should have specialised procurement system as their requirements differ.

"BHU's requirement and the hospitals' requirement is different."

The Prime Minister said that all relevant officers were asked to give recommendations and the focal persons have also been identified which includes the director-general of the Department of National Properties, chief procurement officers and experts. "If possible, we will have Royal Audit Authority representative in the team."

"This will be the core team that will be working on revamping the system," Lyonchhen said. "We have

sent suggestions to them and they are working on it." Officials from various agencies will be consulted during the process.

Revamping the procurement system also requires amending the rules and regulations.

"Ultimately, the body will change and value add to the existing system and make it more intelligent. Then, we will have about three to four procurement rules and regulations," Lyonchhen said.

Currently, the finance ministry's procurement rules and regulations 2009 is applied for all government procurement. The health ministry is also exploring to reform the medical procurement system.

Its procurement is technically complex and involves many individuals with different expertise. It is vulnerable to corrupt practices and there were issues in the health procurement because of the inherent challenges like being totally dependent on the suppliers abroad.

Health Minister Dechen Wangmo, during the health ministry's first high-level committee meeting after reconstituting the committee members earlier last month, asked the Department of Medical Supplies and Health Infrastructure (DoMSHI) to take lead, do a thorough study on the new model of procurement. Lyonpo said there are some fundamental issues of procurement and the ministry is trying to solve it. "I want to have a good system that is effective, efficient and helps the ministry to maximize the utilization and expenditure."

Going Organic, A Far Cry From The 2020 Vision

Thukten Zangpo, *Business Bhutan*



Bhutan aspires to become organic in its agriculture practices, however, the import of agro-chemicals has been increasing.

Statistics show the increasing amounts of agrochemicals imported in the country every year to enrich the soil, boost production, and keep diseases and pests at bay.

About 37% of Bhutanese farmers use agrochemicals in 19% of the cultivated land implying 162,000 acres of cropped area were chemical free in 2012, according to the agriculture ministry.

The implementing agency, National Plant Protection Center (NPPC) and National Seed Center are responsible for the procurement, distribution, and supply of agrochemicals and chemical fertilizers respectively in the country.

From July 2017 to June 2018, the NPPC and the agriculture ministry supplied 508.58 metric tons (MT) of plant protection products (PP).

Herbicides (490MT) saw the highest increase in quantity compared to the previous year followed by horticultural mineral oil (8MT), insecticides (5MT), fungicides (5MT) and rodenticides (14 Kg).

For July 2016 to June 2017, the amount of herbicides supplied was 393.66MT, followed by insecticides with 6.1MT, and 5MT fungicides. While, in 2011-12, 3.8MT herbicides was supplied followed by 3.6MT insecticides and 2.9MT fungicides.

The consumption of PP products is high in dzongkhags that grow paddy, apple, potatoes, or vegetables. Paro Dzongkhag ranks first mainly due to mass use of herbicides in paddy cultivation.

The use of chemical fertilizers increased drastically from 1,983.4MT in 2013 to 5,033.5MT in 2015 and then declined in 2017 at 1,213MT in 2017, according to Bhutan RNR statistics, 2017.

While, the country's vision was to go organic by 2020, only limited number of crops have been certified.

The country has currently certified 10 products as organic namely, potato, garlic and carrot from Gasa, turmeric from Zhemgang, sea buckthorn, chamomile, mint from Bumthang, camellia sinensis from Trongsa, by Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA) and Rhododendron anthopogon from Thimphu and lemongrass from Mongar by International Certification Body.

A study conducted by the Institute of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences, International Agricultural Trade and Development found out that the banning of chemical fertilisers and crop protection agents would still affect one in three farmers. Additionally, reducing the usage of agrochemicals would stunt agricultural production by about 15%.

Replacing fertilizers with natural or organic farm input like compost, vermin-compost, farmyard manure, green manure is a problem however, it is easier to tackle compared to pests and diseases, said Program Director of Agriculture Research and Development Centre, Yusipang and National Organic Program's Coordinator, Kesang Tshomo. In the long term, the demand for synthetic pesticides is expected to either decrease or completely stop once organic substitutes are in place, Program Director, NPPC, Yeshey Dema added.

"Crop loss to pests and diseases is very high and without the use of pesticides, it is difficult to control some of the pests and diseases," she said. There is an alarming trend of herbicide use to control weeds in Bhutan due to shortage of labor for manual weeding, as the organic alternative to synthetic weedicides is not available worldwide, said Yeshey Dema.

Emphasizing on integrated pest management (IPM), she said the NPPC plans to use minimal amount of pesticides with focus on the promotion and usage of organic inputs such as lures, pheromone traps, stickers, and neem oil for controlling most of the pest and diseases.

Chairperson of Sanam Yargay Nyamlay Tshogdey (farmers cooperative), Bjabcho geog in Chukhha Dzongkhag that emphasizes on vegetable production and marketing, Tshagay said that pests mostly infest vegetables during heavy rainfall and the output is

poor. The group also uses pesticides and chemical fertilizers because of inadequate organic manure.

Tashicholling Ginger Cooperative, Tashicholling geog in Samtse, Chairperson, Dhan Bdr.Chettri said they have discontinued growing ginger after being affected by disease last year, and they grow turmeric and usually use cow dung as manure.

Sonam Chithuen Rangzhin Detshen, Chokhor geog in Bumthang grows organic buckwheat. Chairperson, Sonam Tobjai said growing buckwheat is labor intensive with a total income of Nu 130,000 in a year and about Nu 52, 000 is spend on paying workers and profit received is only Nu 5,000 to Nu 6,000.

However, the profit is minimal and group does not use agro-chemicals, Sonam Tobjai said. Additionally, he said their field was attacked by armyworm and there was no option to apply pesticides as manually picking was not possible in eight acres field.

Chairperson of Kachin Zhungsa Larchae Detshen, Tendruk geog from Samtse, focuses on cultivation of cardamom, Ganesh Bdr Gurung said for growing cardamom, there is scarcity of water as it requires lots of water.

Given the only budgetary support from the government in the 11th FYP unlike the 9th FYP and 10thFYP, the United Nations Development Programme, SNV Netherlands Development Organization, and European Union-Agricultural Sector Strategic Plan projects supported the organic program, going fully organic by 2020, which has been declared not achievable.

For example, the organic program budget was slashed to Nu 2.42mn in the fiscal year 2016-17 (FY) from Nu 16.06mn in FY 2012-13.

"Although National Framework for Organic Farming was developed, matching support from the donors was not available, while we continued the work," said Kesang Tshomo.

Additionally, she said the budget was only enough to educate and train agriculture extension agents and interested farmers as there were no subsidy or interest from the government to promote organic. "If possibly, all the supporting information, materials, infrastructures, capacity building, market

development and production planning could have happened as planned, then we could have been organic by 2020," said Kesang Tshomo.

While Bhutan's journey towards going organic continues with adoption of the National Organic Flagship Program (NOFP) themed 'Sustainable Socio-Economic Development through the Commercialization of Organic Farming' in the 12th FYP with budget allocation of Nu 1bn.

Under the flagship, 12 products have been identified with their production target set by the end of 2023, according to NOFP blue print. "Bhutan should go organic at some stage but we cannot fix the date,

the aspirations still should be to go organic for the whole country but it is not easy," said Kesang Tshomo.

Additionally, she said it would also depend upon the farmers whether they are interested or not. "One cannot force people to grow organic," she added. According to the Labor Force Survey report, 2016, 57.2% of Bhutanese livelihoods depend on agriculture.

Currently, there are around 5,560 acres of land under organic agriculture benefiting 2,680 households. According to Population and Housing Census of Bhutan, 2017, 93.8% of the total population is food sufficient with food during 12 months.



Agriculture ministry confident about Bhutan's organic dream

— Thukten Zangpo, *Business Bhutan*

Recognizing that going organic is a challenge, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MoAF) has come up with the National Organic Flagship Program (NOFP) that identifies 12 agriculture and livestock products with specific target production by 2023. The flagship is themed "Sustainable Socio-Economic Development through the Commercialization of Organic Farming" in the 12th Five-Year-Plan with budget allocation of Nu 1bn, of which Nu 189.9mn was earmarked for the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

Of the 12 products identified, six crops are targeted for export markets - Buckwheat production to 1,500 Metric Tons (MT), Quinoa (25MT), Ginger (5,000MT), Cardamom (5,000MT), Mushroom (20MT), and Turmeric (500MT), one livestock product, Trout (7MT) and one Non-Wood Forest Product (NWFP), and Lemongrass oil (10MT).

The Program Director of Agriculture Research and Development Centre (ARDC), Yusipang and the National Organic Program's Coordinator, Kesang Tshomo said going organic requires lots of research and capacity building for the agricultural staffs, farmers, private sector, and entrepreneurs.

"With the flagship, the ministry is confident to go organic. However, it would depend on the market and the interest of the farmers to grow organic, as one can't force," she added.

The estimated volume of export is to generate 12,062MT of agriculture products, 7MT of livestock products and 10MT of NWFP to generate a total of Nu 3,383.76mn within four years.

For domestic markets, four crops are selected namely Asparagus with producing capacity of 80MT, Beans (1,369MT), Chili (4,445MT), and Cauliflower (1,061MT). The domestic production is estimated at 6,955 MT and would generate revenue of Nu 617mn annually.

The flagship would cover 43,728 acres of land and generate 1,587 employment opportunities. To help in going organic by 2023, the agriculture

ministry has also initiated School and Hospital Feeding Program on July 30 this year with a budget of Nu 3.198mn to provide nutritious and healthy food, sourced locally from farmers and cooperatives. According to government's annual magazine,

'The Executive', the feeding program expects to supply perishable agriculture produces to institutions to fully consist of domestically produced food by 2022. Under the feeding program, 12,835 students in 115 schools across the country receive the benefit.

The feeding program empowers farmers, Farm Machinery Cooperation Limited and Bhutan Livestock Development Cooperation Limited to negotiate and supply farm products to the parties without having to participate in open procurement bidding.

Meanwhile, the ARDC in Yusipang will spearhead the organic program and will do the process certification of local organic products through the Local Organic Assurance System.

For the third-party certification, the produces to be exported, Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA) is in the process of setting up an accredited certification system that needs to be expedited with required testing facilities.

The implementing agencies- National Plant Protection Centre (NPPC) and National Soil Service Centre (NSSC) are responsible for the procurement, distribution, and supply of bio-pesticides and bio-fertilizers respectively in the country.

The National Post Harvest Center (NPHC) will look after post-harvesting, processing and value addition of the produces, the Department of Agriculture and Marketing Cooperatives (DAMC) into market information and marketing, and extension agents will look into field implementation.

NPPC's Program Director Yeshey Dema said there is no overnight solution to organic inputs and it would take some time for both the agencies and the consumers alike to gain confidence in organic agriculture.

"With the NOFP in place, there is room to explore for alternatives to synthetic pesticides and promotion of these substitutes would hopefully help reduce demand and use of the current conventional synthetic pesticides," she added. NOFP's Program Coordinator Kesang Tshomo also pointed out the farmers can use imported bio-fertilizers, bio-pesticides, and bio-fungicides, while farmers would also be trained to make their own with local materials in short term.

The flagship recognizes eco-friendly pest and disease management practices for crop loss due to pests and diseases with use of botanical pesticides (eco-chemicals) isolated from parts of the plants such as leaves, roots, barks, fruits, seeds or seed kernels.

"The people should be educated and advocated in differentiating between the local produces and organic as all local produces are not organic. It is not expensive to grow organic produces but farmers would have little difficulty as they cannot use any herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, and fertilizers," Kesang Tshomo said.

She added that organic produce in Bhutan do not

get premium price because people are not willing to pay because people assume that all local produces are organic.

As the existing markets do not have designated organic outlets, information and organized value chain, according to Kesang Tshomo, the NOFP has to support farmers in finding and linking them to potential market, both for domestic and export. "We have to start building market, market research, doing research and development on processing, value-adding and packaging as well as putting the whole system through the process of certification," she added.

Kesang Tshomo urge encouraging the private sector, entrepreneurs, and foreign direct investment to come forward and manufacture bio-manure, bio-fertilizers, bio-pesticides, and organic feeds. Currently, there are around 25,667 acres of land under organic management of crops, livestock and wild collection, of which 19,366.9 acres comprise forestland for wild collection of various NWFP, according to the NOFP blueprint.



Sexual harassment among least reported sexual offences

— Namgay Zam and Kelden Lhamo Gurung



A man flashing his penis to women is dismissed as someone being mad and that the women should avoid being in his path.

A man in an *atsara*'s mask during *Tshechus*, groping women and forcing them to kiss him and sleep with him in gory detail, is excused as being someone in character. The women are expected to indulge him. There are men sneaking in kissing emojis in professional texts to women. The women are accused of overreacting if they were not okay with such texts. There are men and boys pulling bra straps and pinching the bottoms of women and girls, especially in schools. This is normal because it has happened before.

The Penal Code of Bhutan defines a person to be guilty of sexual harassment under Section 205 "if the defendant makes unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal abuse of sexual nature." By this definition, all the cases described above are sexual harassment.

But sexual harassment cases are rarely reported. In the last decade, of the 745 sexual offences reported to the RBP, only 89 were cases of sexual harassment. Although Section 206 in the Penal Code also states

that, "The offence of sexual harassment shall be a petty misdemeanor," many cases are withdrawn due to social stigma and intimidation by perpetrators or unreported because many Bhutanese do not even know what constitutes sexual harassment.

In a case reported to the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) and the RBP, last year: Two elderly non-nationals had molested two female hotel receptionists. The incident had taken place when the receptionists were collecting their bills. The receptionists cried and yelled for help forcing the men to leave the hotel premises. All of this was captured on the hotel's CCTV and submitted to the RBP.

The perpetrators were apprehended the next morning. However, both receptionists withdrew the case out of sympathy towards the wives of the men who had begged them to drop the case. Yeshey Lham, Chief Programme Officer at NCWC, attributes under-reporting of sexual offences to social and cultural stigma. She adds that victims often do not report sexual offences because of the lengthy legal process. They first need to go to the police, then to court, and

many feel humiliated by the experience.

"I think we women endure it as if it is culturally accepted - the eve-teasing and the unwelcome behavior. If one or two women stand up for themselves and realize they do not have to tolerate such behavior then it will be enough to reduce if not eliminate sexual harassment against women and give other women the courage to do the same," says Lham.

14 molestation cases and four sexual harassment cases have been reported to NCWC from 2018 till November 2019.

Despite sexual harassment being a daily occurrence at homes, schools, and at workplaces, RENEW has not seen many cases of sexual harassment, shares Rinchen, a senior counselor. They have dealt with one sexual harassment complaint from a man, and a number of child molestation cases. Stories of women and girls blackmailing men with sexual harassment/ rape are rife on social media, but only four such cases have been reported to the RBP's Women and Child Protection Desk, shares Major Karma Rigzin. All cases (three in Thimphu and one in Paro) were dropped as the men involved were married.

There have been increasing reports in the media on molestation and rape as well. Many have called for stricter laws and even capital punishment in the wake of horrifying rape and molestation stories. There are counselors like Rinchen who advocate for the rehabilitation of sex offenders. According to the American Psychological Association, sex offender therapy coupled with tough laws can prevent recidivism.

Section 25 in the Penal Code states "If a defendant is found to be clinically insane or suffering from a mental abnormality or chronic condition that significantly impairs the defendant's capacity to make sagacious judgments, a Court shall, in lieu of imprisonment, order the civil commitment of the defendant to a hospital or other institution for psychiatric or other rehabilitative treatment."

Neither RENEW nor the psychiatric ward at the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH) have seen perpetrators mandated by court for therapy so far.

A JDWNRH psychiatrist explains that sex offenders

are like drug addicts. The pleasure they derive from their sexual acts whether consensual or not activate a pleasure pathway in the brain, which they get addicted to.

“ 14 molestation cases and four sexual harassment cases have been reported to NCWC from 2018 till November 2019. ”

Many sex offenders are unfortunately released back into society with their sexual tendencies intact. The vice-principal who molested multiple female students did not have a criminal record despite having faced a civil suit that included sexual violence.

Family and child bench Drangpon Pasang Wangmo supports the existence of a Sex Offender Registry. "There is no legal tool at the moment for a sex offender registry. It is very important to have a sex offender registry, especially to protect our young students. A registry will ensure sex offenders are not employed in schools."

The Royal Civil Service Commission opened a "well-being division" in June 2018 for civil servants who encounter sexual/ workplace harassment.

"There are four people in the well being division who provide counseling and look after the well-being of civil servants dealing with depression, alcoholism, suicidal thoughts, and workplace harassment," shares Roshmi, a member of the well-being division. The division has not had any cases of sexual harassment reported till date.

Major Rigzin says social media is playing an important role in increasing awareness on sexual offences. She believes social media could encourage more people to report sexual crimes especially sexual harassment.

"Victims do not need to be scared of the perpetrator and not report the offence because they have support not only from the Police, NCWC, and RENEW, but also from the Penal Code of Bhutan," says Major Rigzin.

Call NCWC's 24/7 tollfree helpline 1098 to report sexual violence or to seek help.

Rethinking reproductive health of women in Bhutan (Synopsis of the video)

— Sangay Chezom, Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS)

The usage of Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECP) among Bhutanese women for unplanned pregnancy has been increasing over the years.

There are, on average, 10 people from a total population of 48,000 in Paro Dzongkhag who have been buying the contraceptive pills daily. In Thimphu and Phuntsholing, an average of 15 Bhutanese women buy Emergency contraceptive pills every day.

The Drug Regulatory Authority has authorised the import of more than 44 thousand pills from January 2018 to April 2019.

Dr Sangay Tshering, a gynaecologist of Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital, said, "We also have women who take i-pill very frequently and then it's not good for health in the long run." He said the very common side effects of the pills are nausea and vomiting as it contains a high dose of hormones. The frequent usage of ECP further causes menstrual disturbances and irregular bleeding as complained by the women.

The Drug Regulatory Authority once banned the sale of i-pill over the counter. Since then, the country experienced a lot of abortion. Therefore, to curb unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions across the border, the DRA, in consultation with the Ministry of Health, allowed the over-the-counter sale of emergency contraceptive pills in 2012. The sale of ECP was permitted only after retailers were trained to counsel clients while selling the product.

In 2018, the clinics in the neighbouring Indian town of Jaigaon received around 10 inquiries from Bhutanese women every month. Girls and women are offered a variety of pills to flush out the foetus from their womb and it costs them between Nu 600 and Nu 2,000 per dose depending on the maturity of the fetus. The women who undergo surgery in Jaigaon, Alipurduar and Siliguri in West Bengal pay around Nu 12,000 to 15,000 for a single operation.

The Health Ministry's Annual Health Bulletin 2018 shows that the number of abortions in the country

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Girls and women are offered a variety of pills to flush out the fetus from their womb and it costs them between Nu 600 and Nu 2,000 per dose depending on the maturity of the fetus. The women who undergo surgery in Jaigaon, Alipurduar and Siliguri in West Bengal pay around Nu 12,000 to 15,000 for a single operation.

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decreased since the commercial sale of the ECP began.

The penal code of Bhutan 2004 states that a defendant is guilty of the offence of illegal abortion if the defendant unlawfully aborts or prevents a child from being born alive. However, the act is legal if it is done to save the mother or when the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest or when the mother is of unsound mental conditions.

Lhaki Dolma, Member of Parliament, said, "Because we are a Buddhist country, even thinking of abortion is wrong or sinful. Fetus in a womb has life and even killing an animal is sinful."

She added that, since abortion is illegal in the country, women are found going across the border visiting unhealthy clinics and undergoing unsafe abortions.

The Ministry of Health should now intervene and carry out thorough research to see if the Penal Code 2004 applies to the current situation.

According to the ministry, Bhutan has 65% coverage of contraceptive methods. Apart from condoms and

emergency contraceptive pills, the hospitals and BHUs in Bhutan provide other forms of contraception.

According to Sangay Tshering, a gynaecologist at JDWNRH, there are two types of contraceptive methods, a permanent method and a temporary or reversal method. But due to lack of awareness and female health workers, accessibility and poor service,

“ *When we talk about reproductive right, it is about choosing when to have a kid. And we have that all forms of contraceptives available in the BHUs. We are also not dictating which form of contraceptive they should have. It is the choice of women. We give them the information to make the right choice and then we facilitate that* **”**

young girls and women in remote villages either opt for emergency contraceptive pills or have unsafe sex resulting in unwanted/early pregnancies.

“When we talk about reproductive right, it is about choosing when to have a kid. And we have that all forms of contraceptives available in the BHUs. We are also not dictating which form of contraceptive they should have. It is the choice of women. We give them the information to make the right choice and then we facilitate that,” Lyonpo Dechen Wangmo, the Minister for Health, said.

According to Wangchuk Dema, an advocate for the sexual and reproductive health of right, reproductive health of the population will improve if the sexual and reproductive rights are clearly understood by the people. Royal Education Council works on changing the entire curriculum. The Ministry of Education (MoE) plans to include 10 core values in seven subjects which will cover sexuality education.

Before 2019, the MoE had one values education class a month in schools, focusing on sexuality education. Beginning this year, the ministry has made it mandatory to have two classes a month for values education.



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