Bhutan

Political parties in a democratic culture and some options for DIPD engagement

A Scoping Mission Report
Bjørn Førde, November 2011
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bhutan for offering unconditional support during the mission, including helping set up meetings with key stakeholders – with a particular appreciation extended to Ms Tashi Peldon, Section Head, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The mission also would not have been possible without the extensive support of the Representation Office of Denmark, in particular the Head of ROD, Mr. Henrik A. Nielsen, and the Senior Programme Officer Mr. Tek B. Chhetri.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BMF</td>
<td>Bhutan Media Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DLG</td>
<td>Department of Local Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPT</td>
<td>Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (ruling party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECB</td>
<td>Election Commission of Bhutan</td>
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<td>FPTP</td>
<td>First Past the Post (electoral system)</td>
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<td>GNHC</td>
<td>Gross National Happiness Commission</td>
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<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>NWAB</td>
<td>National Women’s Association of Bhutan</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>People’s Democratic Party (opposition party)</td>
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<td>RGoB</td>
<td>Royal Government of Bhutan</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROD</td>
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1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Bhutan may be a small country in area and population, but it has nevertheless managed to make a mark for itself in the global discourse on democratic governance as well as in the debate on how we should measure the progress of a society in a meaningful way. Today you often find references to the concept of *Gross National Happiness* as it has been promoted and pursued by Bhutan for several decades. And the peaceful and planned *transition to constitutional democracy* initiated by the King in 2008 – after 100 years of monarchy – is in sharp contrast to the many violent and chaotic transitions seen elsewhere, and a testimony to the importance of strong leadership rooted in clear values.

The 2009 Regional Conference on Deepening and Sustaining Democracy in Asia, organized by the Government of Bhutan in cooperation with UNDP, is one example of the commitment and willingness to contribute to the continuing debate on how to deepen democracy in the context of the wishes and particularities of each country. In his keynote address, the Prime Minister of Bhutan, HE Jigmi Y. Thinley, made the following important remarks:

*In the ultimate analysis, it is the people themselves who must dwell within the house of democracy or let it collapse. In truth, it is less a question of choice and more a question of capacity of the people to choose their representatives wisely and to hold them responsible and accountable.*

Democracies fail not because of inherent flaws but because they fall into the wrong hands and the people are too feeble to exercise their power with firmness and unity. People in many developing economies neither understand the power and value of the vote nor are able to assume responsibilities that come with it.

Democracies go wrong not for want of good laws and systems but because of the lack of democratic culture and polity, which must sustain them. Promoting the development and nurturing of democratic culture where it does not exist is, I believe, the moral obligation of governments and leaders.

This report pays tribute to the important accomplishments made by the Bhutanese, as well as to the close and trusted cooperation which has developed between Bhutan and Denmark over many decades. While it provides some background information on recent developments in the area of democratic governance, it should not be seen as a thorough analysis of these developments. The focus is on the role of political parties and the multi-party system, the local gov-

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1 “Beyond the Ballot Box. Report from the Deepening and Sustaining Democracy in Asia Conference, 11-14 October 2009.” Organized in cooperation with UNDP. Published by the Centre for Bhutan Studies. 2010. Quote from p. 10-11.
ernance system and the democratic culture as it relates to these parts of the system, building on the information offered during the meetings with a number of stakeholders.

One caveat needs to be highlighted from the outset: The agreed “Framework for continued Danish-Bhutanese partnership” from September 2011 mentions that “The Parties welcome the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy’s decision to explore opportunities for piloting and supporting initiatives with the purpose of strengthening the capacity of democratic institutions in Bhutan”. However, whatever opportunities may be identified, these will of course have to be implemented within the provisions provided by the Constitution, the Electoral Act and other types of legislation that may be relevant. This is particularly important in the case of activities focusing on political parties and the multi-party system, because Article 15 of the Constitution states the following with regard to the registration of a party by the Election Commission, and Article 23 states almost exactly the same with regard to candidates running for elected office:

Article 15, 4 (d): It does not receive money or any assistance from foreign sources, be it governmental, non-governmental, private organisations or from private parties or individuals.

This issue has been raised during meetings with the political parties, with the Election Commission and with the Chief Justice. While there seems to be a genuine appreciation of the offer of DIPD to engage in the strengthening of democracy in Bhutan, and also an understanding that the type of capacity development in a multi-party approach that DIPD would like to offer is different from the external “money and assistance” which seems to have been the concern of the fathers of the Constitution, a formal response will have to await the development of specific proposals for activities.

Seen from a distance it is not necessarily immediately logical that a small constitutional monarchy like Bhutan should decide to go down the often difficult and treacherous road of multi-party democracy. Democracy was not introduced because of strong and organised demands coming from citizens, who felt that parties could be their most effective channel of representation and voice. Rather, democracy was ‘handed back’ to the people, from a highly respected King who together with his father has shown foresight and leadership in taking the country through a guided tour de force towards democracy, step by step, in tune with the well thought out development process Bhutan has experienced over several decades, based on the broad consensus around the unique concept (if not development model) of Gross National Happiness.

Elections to the two houses of the new Parliament took place in 2008, with elections of the directly elected 20 members to the National Council in December-January, and on 24 March elections of the 47 members of the National Assembly. Elections were peaceful, well organised by the Election Commission, and generally seen as being free and fair. They also mobilised a healthy 79% of the registered voters, which in a sense means that the initial fears of many that the Bhutanese might reject the new form of democracy involving political parties was proven wrong. The results of the election for the National Assembly is presented in the table on page 6:
### Mission Report: Bhutan

#### Total no. | % of No. | Seats | % of Seats
---|---|---|---
Registered voters | 318,465 | 100.0 | - | -
Votes cast | 253,012 | 79.4 | - | -
DTP | 169,490 | 67.0 | 45 | 95.7
PDP | 83,522 | 33.0 | 2 | 4.3

Thanks to the First Past the Pole electoral system chosen, the 67% of the votes cast for the DTP translated into 45 seats, leaving only 2 seats for the opposition party PDP receiving 33% of the popular vote. The leader of DPT was appointed on 9 April as the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Bhutan, and the cabinet made up of 11 ministers was approved by the King a few days later.

During the mission I have had the opportunity to meet with a broad spectrum of people, representing political parties, the National Council, committees of the National Assembly, independent constitutional bodies, local government civil servants and elected representatives, as well as people from think tanks and civil society organizations. (See list of meetings in Annex 1.) Without exception they have been extremely helpful, open and frank, offering extremely useful reflections from their individual perspectives.

The “challenges” now confronting Bhutan, three years after the first elections involving political parties and less than two years before the next election are not surprisingly numerous. They are in many ways not particular to Bhutan, but very much logical and unavoidable in a country moving from one governance system to another. In fact, during meetings it was repeatedly stated that the citizens of Bhutan needed to familiarize themselves with the new democratic dispensation, and it could not be expected that everything would work perfectly from the beginning. From my perspective I have highlighted the following 9 challenges, that are presented in more detail in chapter 7:

1. **Weakness of party structures:** Today, neither of the two parties competing in the 2008 election have well functioning structures. This is partly because of lack of resources to maintain a minimum structure. Basically there is a need to look at the minimum requirements to run and manage political party structures.

2. **Funding of parties and the party system:** Existing provisions of the Constitution make it possible for the parties to engage during election campaigning. But there is a need to ensure funding for the operations of the parties as well, unless this will be dominated by individuals.

3. **Establishing new political parties:** The system does not make it easy for a healthy multiparty system to survive. All parties can run in the primary round, but only the two getting most votes can compete in the general election.

4. **Political parties at the local level:** Effectively Bhutan has a party system which is divorced by law from daily life of the people. Parties cannot run for local government positions, only for the Assembly seats at national level.

5. **Citizen acceptance of the new system:** Participation of the electorate in the 2008 election was more than 70%, which could be an indication of citizens embracing democracy. But most people indicate that this would be to overstate the facts, and that the reality still is that people are uncertain about the new situation - and still feel uncomfortable about moving away
from the monarchy they knew so well. The 2013 elections may be the real test case.

6. **Media as educators and monitors:** While media has developed both in quality and diversity over the last decade, it is still not clear exactly how the media sector and the political parties as well as other parts of the political system can support each other in developing a ‘democratic culture’, and how media will be able to manage its important role of holding the political stakeholders accountable and making them transparent.

7. **GNH and the manifestos of the parties:** There is no doubt that the GNH thinking is at the core of the policy thinking of all political parties and other stakeholders, to the extent that it becomes difficult to flag an independent ‘ideology’. For this reason the defining nature of political parties easily becomes the personality of the leader/leadership, which may not be healthy in the longer term.

8. **Role of women locally and in parties:** Empowerment of women is an area where Denmark, UNDP and other development partners have contributed a lot over the years, but where more still needs to be done. Not least in the area of political parties and elections for local government offices. It is also an area where local organisations could play a contributing role.

9. **Parties and the electoral system:** There is no doubt that the system of First Past the Pole contributed to the landslide 2008 victory being more pronounced that it was when looking at the distribution of votes.

With the limited resources of DIPD, it is necessary to focus on a few areas where different forms of capacity development and Danish expertise and support can make a difference. As presented in chapter 8, I am suggesting four possible areas:

**A. Strengthening women in politics at local level:**

Danida, UNDP and a few other development partners have offered a variety of forms of support for the empowerment of women in Bhutan, as well as programmes emphasizing gender equality. This has been the case both at national level (gender mainstreaming of development plans is one example), as well as at local level (support for women candidates running in the June 2011 local government elections is an example).

But it would be possible for DIPD to make an additional contribution by focusing on the development of a “platform for empowerment of elected women candidates at local level”. This is presently a small group, but it will grow in the years to come. A demand-driven platform that can offer women in rural areas in particular different forms of training over a longer period of time, gradually building capacity, would be beneficial according to all those consulted.

*This could be started more or less immediately, and it could be implemented in close cooperation with the ROD.*

**B. Needs assessment support for parties:**

The two to four parties expected to compete in the 2013 parliamentary elections need to undertake a very basic assessment, as a basis for a longer-term strategic plan for organizational development - a necessity if Bhutan wants to become a genuine multi-party democracy, embedded in a democratic culture which also includes the way the parties operate on a daily basis.
Such an assessment needs to involve both party officials, elected MPs, the leadership - as well as the membership. This is also an exercise Danish party officials could be involved in, as facilitators and trainers - and at a later point this could be a useful entry point to a training programme taking place in Denmark, being hosted by the Danish parties.

*It will have to be discussed when this should take place considering the election timetable. But it would not be impossible to undertake the baseline assessment early 2012.*

C. Capacity input to Parliament:

With the political parties being in a sense ‘confined’ to the arena of the National Assembly, both the National Assembly and the National Council are important institutions for multi-party democracy. This is also an area where Danida has been active, both regarding the physical establishment of the building, as well as in support to different parts of the Secretariat of the National Assembly and Council.

The multi-party dialogue taking place in the committees is important, and although there has been cooperation with Folketinget, this could be developed further as a longer-term plan. Some support for specific research by the secretariat and committees (like state funding for political parties) could also be a possibility. It is likely that at least part of this should wait until after the 2013 elections, when new MPs could benefit from the training.

D. Media contributing to a democratic culture:

Great strides have been taken in strengthening the media sector, and there is much greater pluralism and independence of media today than just a decade ago. More recently Bhutan has also seen the establishment of the Bhutan Media Foundation (BMF), with a mandate to encourage professionalism of media operators and support the media sector to develop strategies for further development.

It should not be the role of DIPD to engage on the broad media agenda, but rather in specific areas where the capacity of media to cover the ‘political’ aspects could be strengthened. This could be through support for specific media productions like films and radio programmes focusing on women elected for local and national office. It could also be supporting BMF in strategic planning for this part of the media agenda - possibly using some of the Danish media organizations as co-implementors.

*This could also be an area of engagement that could be started immediately, and even with an impact on the upcoming elections.*
2. **BACKGROUND AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

In the meeting in April 2011 of the Board of DIPD, the possibility of contributing to the process of democratization in Bhutan, with a particular focus on the strengthening of political parties in a democratic culture, was discussed – based on initial contacts with the Representation Office of Denmark (ROD) in Bhutan. The response of the Board was positive across the board, and the Director/Secretariat was mandated to investigate the possible options further.

In a meeting in Copenhagen in early August with the Head of the ROD, it was agreed that a scoping mission could be undertaken by the DIPD Director in the second week of September. At this point in time the High Level Meeting between Bhutan and Denmark had taken place, meaning that plans for the phasing out had been discussed, including the possible role of DIPD. However, the mission had to be postponed for early November due to the Danish parliamentary elections on 15 September.

The general purpose of the scoping mission was to meet with key stakeholders and officials from the political system of Bhutan, to assess and discuss a possible substantive framework for future cooperation, as well as to investigate some key administrative issues related to the operationalisation of a future programme.

Bhutan has embarked on a process of democratization, based on a strong desire to maintain its own culture and traditions, combined with an equally strong eagerness to learn from others. The more ‘traditional’ aspects of democratic governance – like the constitution, parliament, elections, justice, local governance, media – have been addressed by various development partners over the years, including Denmark. In the case of Denmark there has also been cooperation between the National Assembly of Bhutan and the Danish Parliament, Folketinget, involving both the levels of the secretariats and politicians.

In discussions on future cooperation between Denmark and Bhutan, following the phasing out of development cooperation as such in 2014/15, the possibility of DIPD playing a role in the areas of political parties and democratic culture has been mentioned. The two parties represented in parliament are both young, and they are therefore in need of support for capacity development in a number of areas. DIPD is also new and in the process of establishing the first projects in a limited number of countries.

Because this is the first direct contact between DIPD and the Bhutanese political parties and other political authorities and institutions, the focus of this scoping mission is different from the comprehensive scoping mission undertaken on Nepal\(^2\) in the sense that it will be used to understand the very new political party landscape in Bhutan; it will be used to establish relationships with potential future partners; and it will ask very basic questions that can indicate what a future programme might look like, but will not present a specific and detailed programme.

Some of the issues to be clarified are:

- While new parties in theory could benefit from capacity development support in all of the traditional areas of party support, it would be useful

\(^2\) The Nepal scoping mission was undertaken after several years of discussions among donors and with a large number of political parties; the mission was led by recruited consultants - one international and one local; and it had a duration of several weeks.
to get a sense of what the parties themselves consider to be most important and/or urgent priorities?

- It would also be useful to understand the sequencing of the themes, also in the perspective of elections coming up in 2013: are there certain issues that should definitely be prioritized before the elections, and other issues that could be addressed after?

- Equally important as understanding what should definitely be addressed would be to get a clear sense of issues/themes that the stakeholders in Bhutan would consider to be no-go areas, for whatever reason.

- While a major focus will most likely be the internal political party capacity development arena, including their local anchorage and organization, it will be important to get a sense of the broader landscape in which the parties operate and to what extent some of these could/should/must be part of a programme – to mention just a few areas: the role of media in communicating the policy of the parties and holding parties accountable; relationships between political parties and civil society; how political parties manage their parliamentary responsibilities.

- One interesting feature of democracy in Bhutan is the role of political parties in the National Assembly, versus the role of individuals in elections for the National Council and at the local level. How does this impact on a programme focusing on political parties? Should this in any way be part of a programme? And if this is the case, how could it be done in a meaningful manner?

- It will be important to discuss how a project should be organized with regard to management issues: Should an existing institution (governmental or non-governmental) be the key partner? Should a secretariat of the political parties be established? Would it be useful to have an independent third party to manage the project? What role should the Danish Representation Office have, also considering the phasing out process that has been agreed between Bhutan and Denmark?

- Although few development partners are present in Bhutan, it will be useful and in line with the DIPD strategy to understand how other development partners are engaging on the political party democracy/governance agenda. One of those – and most likely the only one – would be UNDP.

Based on the meetings held, a report will be written, to be shared with the partners visited as well as the Board of DIPD. This will indicate the broad scope and framework of a possible DIPD engagement in Bhutan, but will not be a detailed programme regarding specific activities and the operational aspects. A comprehensive needs assessment of the political parties or other democratic institutions for that matter have not been undertaken at this point in time, although some of the most obvious needs have been identified through the discussions with representatives of the political parties.\(^3\) However, it seems to make sense to focus on issues like:

- **Legal/constitutional framework:** Understand the framework given for the development of the political parties individually and the political party system as a whole.

\(^3\) Annex 2 presents an assessment approach which is useful to keep in mind when discussing with representatives of political parties.
- **Capacity of the political parties**: Understand what the most pressing needs of the political parties are, in the context of the upcoming 2013 elections.

- **Political parties and civil society**: Understand what is happening around the parties that will impact on their capacity to deliver in the future.

- **Priorities and sequencing**: Consider what DIPD will be able to offer, what should be given priority, and what comes first?

In accordance with the principles of DIPD, as reflected in the 2011-13 strategy, activities have to be demand-driven and owned by the partners involved. Therefore, while the report will indicate what could be the major focus of a program from a DIPD point of view, this obviously need to reflect needs as they have been expressed through the discussions with stakeholders in Bhutan and this will need to be further discussed and agreed at a later stage.
3. BRIEF SOCIAL-ECONOMIC OVERVIEW OF BHUTAN

Bhutan – also referred to as the “Land of the Dragon” - is a country in the eastern part of the Himalaya mountains, smaller in area than Denmark, and with a population which is smaller than the city of Copenhagen. For those fortunate enough to be able to pay the rather costly prize of travelling, it is a place to visit because of the beautiful landscapes, the intriguing Buddhist influence, the spectacular architecture, as well as the strong commitment of people to maintain the traditional culture, including the way of dressing.

But Bhutan has also made global headlines for at least two other reasons. One reason being the innovative concept of Gross National Happiness, which has been discussed as something to emulate in many international conferences on how to measure progress of societies. The other reason being the enlightened leadership of the Kings that have ruled the country from the beginning of the last century, leading in 2008 to the first full-fledged democratic elections and the adoption of a new constitution which dramatically reduces the role of the Monarchy. For these reasons Bhutan has played a much larger role in the global context that the size of the country would indicate.

Basic facts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Thimphu</th>
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<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>38,394 square km</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forest area/coverage</td>
<td>72.5 % of total land area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural area</td>
<td>7.8 % of total land area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>683,000 (registered citizens in 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth</td>
<td>1.3% (average 2006-2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Dzongkha (official language) and at least 10 local languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Buddhism (state religion), Hinduism, few Christians</td>
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Gross National Happiness (GNH)

Although the GNH is not of direct importance for the work on political parties and other aspects of the democratic process, it is useful to start with a brief presentation of the concept, simply because it impacts directly and indirectly on many social, economic and political issues.4

“...The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) structures, formalizes, and combines the substance of policy goals as aspired to by the Druk Gyalpos (the Kings). First introduced in the 1980s by Jigme Singye Wangchuck, it basically combines modernization and conservatory policies. Its essence is that economic development in particular and modernization in general have to take into consideration the well-being of the people not only in material terms but also in spiritual and social terms. It thus resembles the constant commitment of the monarchy to be responsive to the well-being of the people, while at the same time

guiding Bhutan on a path of development in order to adapt to the challenges of a changing world.

“The current interpretation of GNH identifies four main aspects of that policy: 1. economic development, 2. environmental preservation, 3. cultural promotion, and 4. good governance.

“The concept of GNH has “provided a coherent political basis to the regime” on which policy decisions can be based. It resembles further a modern adaptation of Buddhist tradition, as it is “inspired by traditional principles of conciliation, pragmatism, and compassion”. By and large, GNH is one main cornerstone in an effort to create a coherent national identity. With its reference to environmental protection and good governance combined with the preservation of tradition and socio-economic development GNH provides an interesting modernization concept that can address the problems of changing societies in a globalized world far more adequately than prevailing concepts. For Bhutan, GNH is the formulation of the monarchy’s commitment and efforts to gradually change the society, economy, and polity, without risking disruptive effects on the inner peace and stability of its people.”

Economic profile

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BNI pr. Indbygger</td>
<td>1900 USD (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
<td>132 out of 172 countries (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vækst i BNP pr. Indbygger</td>
<td>7 % (2006-2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gældssituation (år)</td>
<td>Lavt forgældet, langfristet offentlig udlandsgæld: 60 pct. af BNP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udenlandsk bistand pr. Indb.</td>
<td>201 USD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuta</td>
<td>Ngultrum, BTN - Valutakurs 12,3 (1DKK= ca. 8,1 BTN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturressourcer</td>
<td>Dolomite, limestone, coal, talc, marble, zinc, lead, copper, tungsten, quartzite, iron ore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandkraft</td>
<td>An estimated potential of 30,000 MW with mean annual energy production capability close to 120,000 GWh</td>
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5 The following sections have been taken without any changes from the website of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including most of the basic facts mentioned. Apologies for not having translated this section due to time constraints.
4. Danish Engagement in Bhutan

Denmark has provided development assistance to Bhutan for more than 30 years, first through multilateral agencies from 1978 while bilateral development cooperation dates back to 1985. In 1989, Bhutan was selected as one of Denmark’s programme countries, and from 1992 the development cooperation has been concentrated within three areas: health, environmental and natural resource management, and urban development. In addition, democratisation, good governance and decentralisation have been supported.

The total Danish assistance through 1989-2009 amounts to almost DKK 1.4 billion in current prices. As Bhutan’s population is small, about 700,000 people, the assistance per capita, around DKK 2,000 has been the highest Danish assistance per capita to any of the 15 partner countries. In Bhutan, Denmark has through many years been the second largest bilateral provider of assistance (after India).

The 1st Country Strategy was made for 1998-2002, while the 2nd Country Strategy for 2003-2007 added education as a priority sector. The 3rd Country Partnership Strategy for the period July 2008–June 2013 was endorsed in May 2008, based on Bhutan’s development priorities and Denmark’s development policies. It fully aligns to Bhutan’s 10th Five Year Plan that is also Bhutan’s Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The strategy stipulates that Bhutan will continue to be a programme country for Danish development assistance. However, based on the positive macroeconomic trend, it was decided in 2008 that the Danish assistance will be gradually phased out after 2013.

In the approved strategy for 2008-13, the following goals have been agreed, within the framework of the 10th Five Year Plan:

1. Support to the constitutional process to ensure free and fair elections.
2. An independent and accessible judiciary, including a legal representation system.
3. A well functioning and fair land policy and administration.
4. Civil society organisations based on the approved Bhutan Civil Society Organisations Act established.
5. Local governments established with at least 24% of government resources administered at decentralised levels.

Bhutan’s social, economic and political development over the last decades has been impressive. This was confirmed by the 2nd Joint Evaluation of the Danish-Bhutanese Country Programme 2000-09 (September 2010), which provided key lessons learned and recommendations for the future. Amongst these is a call for a differentiated phasing-out strategy with special attention to governance and environment; capacity development of local governments; further support to monitoring and evaluation capacity, improved tackling of poverty and regional inequalities, and strengthening of the dynamics of the small private businesses.
At the High-level Consultations in March 2009, it was agreed to work on a joint framework to continue the bilateral relations post-2013 between Bhutan and Denmark even after the development assistance is phased out. The joint framework was presented at the High Level Consultations in 2011.  

The following sections of the Transition Support Programme are relevant because they will impact directly or indirectly on possible DIPD focus areas.

**Good Local Governance**

In Bhutan, there has been a positive move towards further decentralisation and with the transition to constitutional democracy in 2008, the Constitution as well as the Local Governments Act of Bhutan 2007 provides for further power and authority to be given to decentralised bodies and elected representatives at local level. Local governments' elections, delayed because of the process of amalgamating the rural and urban legal framework into a revised Local Government Act (2009), are taking place up to June 2011 with the completion of the election of councils in the four major towns by 21st January.

However, the speed of change in Bhutan means that there are some human resource constraints. One major challenge relates to effective building of capacity in the dzongkhags and gewogs. There has been major progress in posting professionals to these levels, who still require further skill development, and there is in particular need for training of the newly elected members to enable them to better carry out their responsibilities of local governance, planning and implementation. A joint Local Governance Capacity Development Strategy and a long-term action plan have already been drafted by the Department of Local Governance, now responsible for the local governments. A key issue is how to sustain the institutional capacity of the local governments, not only of the firstly elected governments. As part of this, the establishment of a Local Governments Association has been proposed.

The decentralisation process is supported by a number of development partners since 2008 through the Local Governance Support Programme (UNDP, UNCDF, Helvetas, Austria, JICA, and Denmark as lead) and, with an emphasis on the environment and climate change aspects, through the Danida-funded Sustainable Environment Support Programme, of which the Joint Support Programme (UNDP/UNEP and Denmark) is focusing on environment capacity development.

**Civil Society development**

Bhutan’s Vision 2020 envisions that management of development should be undertaken in partnership with the Government to share the responsibilities for the nation’s future development. This partnership in also stressed in the current 10th Five-year Plan, and in the Constitution (Art. 7.12, and 9.3). However, although Bhutan’s Civil Society Act was enacted in 2007, civil initiatives have mostly been a common traditional force that addressed spiritual, social and economic needs of the Bhutanese communities. For centuries, traditional self help groups have been a vibrant means of addressing communities’ needs in the country. These informal associations functioning on vital civil society values of sacrifice, community empathy, volunteerism, participation and self help are still popular mechanisms that address communities’ needs ranging from water sharing to community resource management to sharing of labour or supporting the bereaved family who have lost a loved one. But they have not been formalised.

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7 It was on this occasion that the possible contribution from DIPD was mentioned.
In the recent decade, Bhutan witnessed the emergence of more formal Civil Society Organisations that established themselves as non-state actors, mainly as trust funds. The Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) and the National Women’s Association of Bhutan (NWAB) are two of the oldest civil societies with more formal structures. Several other non-governmental initiatives were organized in the more recent years in diverse areas such as poverty alleviations in marginalized communities, women and children, youth, animal care, etc.

The passing of the CSO Act in 2007 was a significant landmark in the evolution of civil societies in Bhutan, creating a modern legal status, and introducing access to external funding for the registered organisations. The CSO Authority was set up in 2009 as the custodian of the CSO Act, responsible for implementation of the CSO Act through the creation of an administrative and regulatory framework for the conduct of the CSOs. As of now, 13 CSOs have obtained the legal status of registered CSOs, and several are in the pipeline.

Denmark has provided the main support to the establishment of the CSO Authority, its Secretariat, and to a joint CSO Funds Facility to promote the civil society and its organisations. The first funds applications were approved in February 2011 by the Fund’s Board, representing the Ministry of Home & Culture Affairs, Denmark, Helvetas and the Dutch NGO SNV. The fund is providing support to capacity development and specific activities as a kick-off start to enable the CSOs themselves to sourcing and sustaining their own (external) funding. In addition, the guidelines now also allow support to voluntary non-registered community groups in the rural areas. The Funds Facility is a temporary instrument, however, it is assessed that a final support during the transition period is required to enable more CSOs to become sustainable.

**Component 1: Good Governance**

Denmark has supported the democratic institutions, decentralization and the civil society through the Good Governance Support Programme (GGSP) since July 2008. The support to the democratic institutions, i.e. Royal Court of Justice and the National Land Commission will be completed by the end of the programme by 2013.

As the decentralisation reform is only gaining speed now with the election of the first local governments in 2011, and the experiences of the annual capital grants to the local governments are still being made, there is a need to continue the support to the reform process beyond the completion of the current joint Local Governance Support Programme (LGSP). The government is providing most of the funding (more than 80%) for the annual capital grants. For capacity development of the elected members and the staff, a long-term joint local governance capacity development strategy is in the process of being agreed upon.

While sufficient funding for the capital grant mechanism and the capacity development activities will be available up to the end of the programme period in 2013, it is critical that additional support is forthcoming, in particular during the years 2013-15 until the government will be able to fully sustain the devolution. Most of the capital intensive infrastructure works (roads, electricity, water supply, gewog offices, etc.) are planned to be completed by the end of the 10th Five-year Plan. Thus, the need for annual capital grants will probably diminish, while the demand for annual current support will increase. However, the Government is fully funding the current expenditures, and with increasing revenues should be able to do so in the future.

The Danish support to the civil society development has been instrumental in promoting the legalisation and facilitating the upcoming civil society organis-
tions. With the establishment of the Civil Society Organisations Authority and the support from the Civil Society Organisations Funds Facility, substantial progress has been made. However, the development is still fragile, and to make more civil society organisations sustainable (in particular, by being legalised and able to generate their own revenue, including access to external sources), and also reach out to the informal voluntary non-registered community groups in the rural areas, a final support through the established mechanisms is required.

As recommended by the Joint Evaluation of Danish Bhutanese Country Programme 2010, continued assistance is required as a way of achieving more sustainable improvement in the capacity of local government and the CSOs. Denmark will continue supporting this TSP component to consolidate and enhance the sustainability of the outcomes achieved during the previous programmes.

- **Development objective**: The development objective for the Component 1 is ‘realisation of good governance principles in Bhutan’. It includes two immediate objectives, each forming the framework for programme sub-components:

  - **Immediate objectives**: There are two immediate objectives outlined below:

  - **Immediate objective One**: ‘To enhance democratic governance at local levels and deliver services effectively and efficiently as mechanism to reduce poverty and contribute to achieving the MDGs’. The support is targeted to the Gewog Annual Capital Grant and the capacity development of the Local Government elected members and staff.

  - **Immediate objective two**: ‘An enabling framework for Civil Society Organization created to strengthen the democratic process and hereby supporting poverty reduction’. Denmark will continue support to the Non-State Actors (the CSOs) to strengthen the civil society, promote social welfare and improve the conditions and quality of life for the people of Bhutan.

**Sub-Component 1.2: Support to Capacity Development of Local Government Elected Members and Staff**

The existing Dzongkhag and Gewog development committees, nominated since 2003, are now being phased-out. Instead, the first local governments’ elections in the first half of 2011 will institute full-fledged local governments as stipulated in the Constitution and the revised Local Governments Act (2009). However, the elected members and the supporting staff members will have a huge demand for capacity development, and introduction to the new situation, and the decentralisation reform process should also further develop. Thus, a Local Governance Capacity Development Strategy (2011-2018) has been initiated by the GNHC, and further developed by the Department of Local Governance, now in charge of local governments and the LGSP.

The draft strategy contains an analysis of the capacity building situation and contains detailed capacity development plan. It is expected to provide a wider approach to capacity development that connects to Gross National Happiness requiring a more holistic and area based planning method. Furthermore, the draft strategy is expected to provide an impetus for an improved curriculum for local governance training, a demand-driven capacity building approach, and promote a greater public awareness of the decentralized system. The strategy implementation is planned to be supported from the on-going programmes, including the LGSP and the Joint Support Programme for Mainstreaming Environment and Climate Change.
While support for local governance capacity development is estimated to be available from the on-going support programmes up to mid-2013, there is need for continued support in the transition period, in particular if the joint LGSP is not extended. The TSP subcomponent will provide funding from TSP from 2013 to mid-2015 to cover the essential needs for capacity development assisting the implementation of the joint strategy during the critical years until the Government will be able to fully fund and continue its implementation. It is an assumption that the strategy in its final version will be endorsed by the relevant RGoB authorities, and that allocation priority will be given to capacity development of the elected members.

**Output 1.2:** Effective and sustainable capacity building mechanism/plan for local government personnel and elected members in operation

**Activity 1:** Human Resource Development and Management: Implementation of the Capacity Development Strategy Activity Plan outlined under CD Strategy; Pilot ear-marked capacity development grants to LGs; Update Integrated Capacity Development Plan Training Curriculum for Locally Elected Members and Government Officials in line with the Capacity Strategy of the LG, 2011; Supporting Curriculum Development in Education Institutes; Study Tour for LGs

**Activity 2:** Policy, regulatory reforms: Development of innovative practice for piloting and upscaling; Establishment of Local Governance Reform Committee; Conduct Studies or strategies; Piloting innovative decentralised block grant system and out-of-plan budget allocation; Develop Helpline/Help Desk for Local Government Staff

**Activity 3:** Local Government Association: Support to the establishment of an Association of Gewog and Thromde Tshogde, as an institution of articulating the interests of all the local governments.

**Sub-Component 1.3: Support to Non-State Actors (CSOs/NGOs)**

Civil Society Organisations currently receive support as part of the Good Governance Support Programme, which runs from 2008-2013. Support to the CSOs is very much in its embryonic stage, and a longer time frame for support is needed to ensure sustainability. The first disbursements to CSOs were made by the beginning of 2011. It is critical to ensure that the registration process of CSOs is being undertaken in an efficient manner, and some concerns in this regards was raised previously by different stakeholders. This is a new initiative that will take time to become established, known and utilised. It is assessed that support will be required beyond 2013 in order to promote sustainability of the CSOs in Bhutan. There should also be a potential for attracting international interest and support. The sustainability of the Fund itself is not necessarily an objective, but through its support to capacity development and registration, the CSOs will be allowed and able to attract external international funding as per the CSO Act.

The CSO Funds Facility, which provides grants on a competitive basis, can provide financial and technical assistance relating to legal, organisational and managerial issues and other types of capacity development as required. The administration of the CSO FF is outsourced to a Bhutanese consultancy company.

A Steering Committee is established composed of representatives from the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, Member Secretariat to the CSO Authority, two CSO representatives (currently from RSPN and Royal Textile Academy), SNV, Helvetas and Representation Office of Denmark. The Steering Committee de-
cides on which requests to support and monitor the work of the CSO FF. The following criteria are of priority for selection of projects and activities: Environment, Good Governance, Socio-Economic Development (including support to women) and Culture. These areas are reflecting the RGoB’s priorities in the 10th FYP. The endorsed guidelines of the Fund Facility now also include support to voluntary non-registered community groups in the rural areas.

- **Output 1.3: Sustainable Civil Society Organisations**: A substantial number of CSOs supported to register according to the requirements of the CSO Act and capable of providing services to the benefit of vulnerable social groups and their members.

- **Activity 1**: Support to registered formalized CSOs: The Fund will provide support to (i) emerging and less-resourceful existing CSO to meet the requirements of the CSO Act; and (ii) existing, registered CSO, to strengthen their capacity to cater for the interests of their constituency. The requirements are spelt out in the eligibility guidelines.

- **Activity 2**: Support to Informal Non-registered Voluntary Groups in the rural areas: CSO FF shall support with funds to small projects of informal non-registered voluntary groups in the rural areas or the traditional customary-based non-registered CSOs.
5. THE COMING OF DEMOCRACY IN BHUTAN

The story of how Bhutan entered the present democratic phase in 2008 is both fascinating and very different from what we experience elsewhere in the world these days. Rather than summarizing this myself, I am taking the liberty to reproduce parts of an article written by Mark Turner, Sonam Chuki and Jit Tshering.⁸

The small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is one of the most recent recruits to the world’s democratic nations after more than a century of rule by the Wangchuck dynasty. The first national democratic elections were held in 2007 and 2008 and mark the formal transition from authoritarian rule, albeit of an enlightened nature, to democracy.

But most conventional explanations of democratic transition are unconvincing when applied to the Bhutanese experience. The two causal factors which do seem to explain the democratic transition are the strong state and transformational leadership. This is an unusual combination which not only challenges orthodoxy but also extends our understanding of the ways in which democratization can occur, a paradoxical way where, without any elite or popular pressure, monarchical powers are directed towards enabling democratization.

A strong state and the leadership of the King

There is a multiplicity of paths to democratization, but Bhutan’s path to democracy confounds most of the conventional explanations of transitions from authoritarianism. There were no elite pacts, no traces of regime disunity, no economic crisis, no international pressure and no popular mobilization for democratic rights. The elements that normally contribute to the decline and fall of authoritarian rulers were absent in Bhutan. In fact, the conditions seemed more appropriate for maintaining the status quo. The state was strong, society compliant and the legitimacy of the monarchical regime was undisputed.

However, the king’s own analysis of the situation led him to opt for change, believing that Bhutan’s security in the world, its national integrity and enhanced GNH must rest on the foundations of democratic government.

Somewhat paradoxically, it was this legitimacy and the strong state which were such important factors in promoting and implementing democratization. The dynastic legitimacy was employed by the king to force through democratizing reforms on an often reluctant population; and to assist in the implementation of those reforms he had an efficient, effective and obedient state apparatus. But simply having a strong state capable of implementing reforms is not a sufficient explanation for Bhutan’s successful democratization. There needs to be a democratizing impetus, which in the case of Bhutan came from unusual quarters, the apex of the political hierarchy, the king. It is rare if not unknown for authoritarian rulers to be the autonomous instigators of democratization. They are generally pushed or jostled into democratizing by elites or other social forces. But in the case of Bhutan the king experienced no pushing or jostling. He conceived the idea that Bhutan needed to become a democracy and then spent considerable time and effort convincing the population of the wisdom of this transfor-

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⁸ This is taken from the article *Democratization by decree: the case of Bhutan* by Mark Turner, Sonam Chuki and Jit Tshering, in *Democratization*, Vol. 18, No. 1, February 2011, 184-210.
information. To accomplish this he demonstrated the various behaviours associated with transformational leadership.

**A long journey towards democracy**

But it could be argued that while the king’s announcement of democratization was a surprise it may not have been a total surprise. Following the successful centralization and consolidation of the state by the first and second kings, the third and fourth kings pursued a long-term democratization project of a leisurely incremental character. A succession of changes to the political system were made at the national and local level over a period of almost 50 years, and each increment saw a diminution in the authority and power of the monarchy. The decision to write a constitution and hold national elections may have represented a larger increment than usual but it can still be seen as a step, perhaps a giant-stride, in a long-running project: Bhutan’s own original gradualist approach to democratization.

**1998: the King steps down**

10th July 1998 will probably remain a milestone date in modern Bhutanese history. By kasho, a royal edict, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck devolved his executive powers, stepping down as head of government, and reintroduced the principle of his own responsibility vis-à-vis parliament, which he had abolished back in 1972. The Council of Ministers had to step down, as new regulations foresaw the direct election of ministers by the representatives of the National Assembly. Also the triennial vote of confidence in the king was reintroduced in order to legitimize the king’s rule and the National Assembly could initiate a vote of no-confidence in the king at any time by a one-third majority, upon which he would have had to step down in favor of the crown prince or the next in the line of succession.

It seems that the Druk Gyalpo had planned these rather radical changes for a long time. After setting up an efficient system of administration in combination with grass-root democracy by decentralization, after creating a coherent national ideology and political concept, and after securing and fostering a national identity, he surprised the nation and especially the political and bureaucratic elites. Although he was explicitly asked not to give up to his executive powers, he rejected these proposals, showing once again his commitment to genuine reform and political modernization.

The reforms that followed the royal move in 1998 were all aimed at bringing the administration and bureaucracy in accordance with democratic norms, providing for liberalization, and finally leading to the drafting of the first written constitution in Bhutanese history. In 1999 television and the Internet were introduced, modern sources of information that were previously prohibited. Together with the Bhutan Information Communications and Media Act of 2006, the possibilities for the public to receive independent information had considerably improved. After passing the Act in the National Assembly, two new independent broadcasting corporations and two new newspapers were established, challenging the preeminence of Kuensel, the state-run daily newspaper.

**2002: First national elections**

In 2002 the first elections under universal suffrage were conducted on sub-national level. Although the turnout was not very high, it was a first test to make the public familiar with universal adult franchise and the procedures linked with democratic elections. Two important acts were aimed at promoting democratic norms within the administrative system. The Anti-Corruption Act established an
independent Anti-Corruption Commission in order to persuade cases of corruption and to build confidence in the public administration. With regard to a truly independent judiciary, the Judicial Service Act provided for the establishment of the Judicial Service Council, which is now responsible for the allocation of positions and promotions within the judicial branch.

**2005: draft of a new constitution presented**

In March 2005 the first draft of the new constitution was officially presented, after three years of work. The king commanded the drafting of the country’s first constitution in 2001 and for this purpose a group of experts was set up. The group consisted of the Chief Justice of Bhutan, senior civil servants of important government agencies, members of the National Assembly, the elected members of the Royal Advisory Council, lawyers, elected members from all the 20 districts of Bhutan, and two eminent persons from the Central Monastic Body.

In the three years of its work, the commission examined and analyzed dozens of constitutions from all over the world, as well as traditional sources of law from Bhutan and the region. This process was unique in several ways: first, besides the fundamental laws which were enacted in 1959, no previous document of such significance existed so that the constitution, to a large extent, could be drawn up from scratch. Unlike many other countries where judicial legacies in the form of prior constitutions exist and have to be taken into consideration, for practical or other reasons, in the Bhutanese case the drafting committee had an enormous amount of freedom in designing the new constitution.

A second important aspect was the fact that the drafting process was completely free from politico-strategic considerations and the usual bargaining of the involved political actors. As the constitution was drafted before a noteworthy politicization of the population and the elites took place, the considerations of the commission could be limited to purely technical aspects within the broad framework that the king had set for the content of the shape of the constitution.

Finally, the drafting of the constitution was not the result of demands from the people for reform. It did not have to consider balancing necessary structural-constitutional reform versus „national agitation“.

**2006: abdication of the King and announcing 2008 elections**

After the first draft was finished and presented to the public, members of the Royal Family and the king himself extensively toured the country, explaining the constitution to the people, and discussing their concerns. As a result, suggestions and concerns were taken into consideration during the final drafting. In December the same year, the king announced that the first democratic elections on national level would be held in 2008 and, surprising and shocking his people, that he would then abdicate in favor of his son, the Crown Prince.

From that moment on he was bound to his word and history as well as the world would judge him with respect to his ability to abide to his plans. In 2006 the Electoral Commission of Bhutan was inaugurated and it started to prepare for the general elections in 2008 through voter education, the promotion of political awareness and organizing the conduct of the elections. It also held two mock-elections in order to give the population a chance to familiarize itself with the procedures and the electronic voting machines. India supported the efforts of the Election Commission with knowhow and technical assistance all throughout the process.

On 14 December 2006, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the fourth Druk Gyalpo, surprisingly announced his immediate abdication. “It was the first time in world
history that a monarch, who was initially vested with absolute powers, voluntarily reduced the scope of these powers and eventually abdicated with no other reason than his own dedication to political reforms”. His son Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, who holds a MA degree in political science from Oxford University, took over the official functions, but postponed his coronation until after the elections and the passing of the new constitution. This can also be seen as the first achievement of the new monarch. Even though this gesture is more of a symbolic character, it nevertheless shows the changing self-perception of the Bhutanese monarchy. It also demonstrated that the new king had the same commitment to democracy as his father had.

The last formal step on Bhutan’s transition path was the passing and signing of the country’s first written constitution on 18 July 2008. One year after the monarchy’s centennial birthday, Bhutan had been transformed into a constitutional monarchy providing for democratic standards de jure and constantly pursuing these standards de facto. On 6 November 2008 Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck received the Raven Crown from the hands of his father and officially became the fifth Druk Gyalpo of Bhutan.
6. Political parties and the 2008 elections

Seen from a distance it is not necessarily immediately logical that a small constitutional monarchy like Bhutan should decide to go down the often difficult and treacherous road of multi-party democracy. As argued in previous sections, democracy was not introduced because of strong and organized demands coming from citizens, who felt that parties could be their most effective channel of representation and voice (as it has been the norm during the third wave of democracy that started in Portugal in 1974).

Rather, democracy was ‘handed back’ to the people, from a highly respected King who together with his father has shown foresight and leadership in taking the country through a guided tour de force towards democracy, step by step, in tune with the well thought out development process Bhutan has experienced over several decades, based on the broad consensus around the unique concept (if not development model) of Gross National Happiness.

In his address to the nation on National Day in 2005, the Fourth King directly alluded to the uncertainty among citizens about what the future of a democratic Bhutan would bring:

“During my consultations on the Constitution in the different Dzongkhags, the main concern of our people is that it is too early to introduce parliamentary democracy in Bhutan... During the next two years in 2006 and 2007, the Election Commission will educate our people in the process of parliamentary democracy and electoral practice sessions will be conducted in all the 20 Dzongkhags. After 26 years of the process of decentralization and devolution of powers to the people, I have every confidence that our people will be able to choose the best political party what can provide good governance and serve the interest of the nation. I would like our people to know that the first national election to elect a government under a system of parliamentary democracy will take place in 2008.”

How this is understood and explained from a political party point of view is well reflected in the Foreword to the DPT Manifesto In Pursuit of Gross National Happiness, written by the President and now Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley:

“It was exactly a hundred years ago that the Bhutanese people placed the destiny of our troubled country in the hands of Gongsar Ugen Wangchuck with complete faith and confidence. Surpassing all expectations of the people, He and his Dynasty have given to our country and people a golden era of unprecedented peace, security and progress. At a time when our allegiance to our beloved Monarchy is at the highest and, indeed, is in ascendence, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo and His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck have
chosen to return the sacred responsibility directly to the people in the form of Parliamentary Democracy. This supreme gift is a manifestation of the highest degree of trust and belief of our Kings in the collective wisdom of the Bhutanese people and our loyalty to the three fundamental elements (Tsawasum) of Druk Yuel.

“No Bhutanese was eager to accept this awesome burden. But even as we now embrace the vision of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo with great trepidation, we take comfort in the presence of His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and know that he will always be blessed with His enlightened guidance and inspiration. Unlike any other people or country, the Bhutanese have had the unique opportunity of being personally prepared by His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo for democracy. He has prepared us for this eventuality through the process of decentralization, election of local government leaderships and by putting in place all the necessary institutional arrangements. The road ahead is, nevertheless, daunting and fraught with challenges. Our duty and privilege is to establish a true and vibrant democracy through which we will not only build on the amazing legacy of our Kings but prove ourselves worthy of their immeasurable trust.”

So while elections was not a new phenomenon, elections involving candidates representing different political parties with different programmes and different symbols, rather than individuals representing themselves was not only new, but also confusing. To some extent this still seems to be the case, which should not come as a surprise. Bhutan is after all still a very young democracy, where institutions, procedures and processes are still being tested and tried.

Key elements of the governance framework

Political parties only make up one part of the governance system. Understanding the state of affairs of the party system, the challenges it faces and what needs to be done to make the parties a key part of the ‘democratic culture’ requires an understanding of how the parties fit into the larger whole. The table on page 22 provides a quick overview.10

Compared to the institutional set-up of the Danish governance system you could argue that the system of Bhutan is complicated. In particular because it combines governance structures where political parties are not allowed to play a role (local government institutions and the Council) with structures like the Assembly, where parties dominate. In addition there are strict limitations to the possibilities for representatives of the political parties to engage directly with citi-

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9 Much of the information in this and the following sections of the report draws primarily on the excellent presentation in “Drukyul Decides. In the minds of Bhutan’s first voters. The story of Bhutan’s first democratic election” by Gyalmo Sithey and Dr. Tandi Dorji. Centre for Research Initiative, 2009.

10 I refer to chapter 5 for a more detailed overview of the main elements in the process towards democracy and the first elections in 2008.
zens at the local level (districts and gewogs) outside the official electoral campaign periods.

| Constitution | Adopted 18 July 2008. Process of writing a new constitution was started in 2001, and a draft was presented for consultation with the people in 2005. It establishes Bhutan as a democratic constitutional monarchy. |
| Head of State | King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck (2006). The Constitution states that the King will retire at the age of 65. The legislature can force his abdication with a three quarters majority vote. |
| Legislature | Comprises two chambers: The National Council and the National Assembly, meeting twice a year. The Council (effectively the Upper House) consists of 25 apolitical members, with 20 elected in the 20 districts and 5 eminent persons nominated by the King. All elected for 5 years. The role is one of overview and review. The Assembly (Lower House) consists of 47 members elected from the two political parties contesting in the general elections. The Assembly is responsible for bills and other legislation, including national development plans. |
| Executive | The cabinet is formed by the majority party in the Assembly and is responsible to the King and the Assembly. In the 2008 elections DTP gained a landslide majority, and the Prime Minister is the President of DTP, Jigme Y. Thinley. |
| Local Government | Local government comprises of District Councils (20) as well as smaller units. The lowest level of administration is the 205 Gewogs (counties), each headed by a Gup (head). All those elected for local government offices must be apolitical, i.e. cannot represent or be a member of a political party. |
| Election Commission | The Election Commission of Bhutan was established by royal decree in 2006. It is independent, led by the Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners. ECB functions in accordance with the Election Act. One of the first tasks of the ECB was to encourage and call for the formation of political parties. |

Another important feature is the rather strict requirements for candidates to be approved by the Election Commission. Candidates running for the Assembly and the Council have to have a BA as a minimum, and they are not allowed to have another job. Candidates running for office in local government need to pass a ‘Functional Literacy and Skills’ test showing that they can read and write. They also have to document that they are not a member of a political party.

There is no doubt that the fathers of the Constitution and the Election Act (having also studied practices and experiences in many other countries in the region as well as elsewhere) have designed the democratic system the way they have because they believed that this would ensure a peaceful transition from 100 years of monarchy to parliamentary democracy. While introducing multi-party...

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11 See annex 3 for a more detailed presentation of the local government elections in 2011.
democracy as the backbone of the Bhutanese democracy (with the Assembly being responsible for the formation of the government and key legislation), they have maintained the election of trusted non-party-political individuals both below (local government) and above (the National Council).

To what extent this also means that barriers or difficulties for the development of strong and sustainable political parties have been built into the system will be addressed in the next chapter of the report.

Formation of political parties

In June 2007 the ban on political parties was lifted to allow for their formation in the face of the upcoming elections. According to the Constitution, the following requirements have to be fulfilled to be registered:

- The members shall be Bhutanese citizens
- Membership must not be based on region, sex, language, religion or social origin
- Is broad-based with cross-national membership and committed to national cohesion and stability
- Does not accept money or assistance other than contributions made by registered members and in amounts according to Election Commission
- Does not receive money or assistance from foreign sources

Only three parties registered, of which one was rejected with regard to the restrictions mentioned. This meant that contrary to what is stated in Articles 15, sections 5, 6 and 7 of the Constitution, there was no primary round of election among the field of parties to identify the two that should then contest in the general election.

It is not the purpose of this report to go into details with the formation, vision, structure, etc. of the two parties. But seen from the outside it is difficult to see what the important programmatic differences between the two parties are. Both recognize that they are established to continue the process of development Bhutan has embarked upon during the leadership of the Monarchy, and both refer to the Gross National Happiness as the vision for the country. Probably the major differences are related to the leadership and personalities chosen to present the parties to the citizens during the first electoral campaign.

The following brief overview might be useful as an introduction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People’s Democratic Party (PDP)</th>
<th>Symbol: A galloping white horse (signifying dynamism, advancement and purity of the party) against a clear sky (signifying peace and prosperity of the country).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formally registered 1st September 2007</td>
<td><strong>Vision:</strong> A peaceful Kingdom of Bhutan that is politically united, culturally harmonious, socially just, economically prosperous, environmentally rich, and secure in its sovereignty enabling all Bhutanese to pursue and enjoy happiness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT)</th>
<th>Symbol: Three black-necked cranes soaring in the sky, to reflect the commitment to balance material development with enrichment of inner peace and happiness, which is a basic premise of GNH.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formally registered on 2nd October 2007</td>
<td><strong>Vision:</strong> Growth with equity and justice. And to realize the vision of His Majesty for a truly vibrant and progressive democracy; to ensure fundamental rights and freedom; to strengthen conditions for happiness of the people; to ensure stability.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Result of the 2008 general election**

Elections to the two houses of the new Parliament took place in 2008, with elections of the directly elected 20 members to the *Council* in December-January, and on 24 March elections of the 47 members of the *Assembly*. Elections were peaceful, well organised by the Election Commission, and generally seen as being free and fair. They also mobilised a healthy 79% of the registered voters, which in a sense means that the initial fears of many that the Bhutanese might reject the new form of democracy involving political parties was proven wrong. The table below provides a quick overview of the results of the election for the *Assembly*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total no.</th>
<th>% of No.</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>% of Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered voters</td>
<td>318,465</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votes cast</td>
<td>253,012</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPT</td>
<td>169,490</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>83,522</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thanks to the *First Past the Post* electoral system chosen, the 67% of the votes cast for the DTP translated into 45 seats, leaving only 2 seats for the opposition party PDP receiving 33% of the popular vote. The leader of DTP was appointed on 9 April as the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Bhutan, and the cabinet made up of 11 ministers was approved by the King a few days later.
7. CHALLENGES TO POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY

During the mission I have had the opportunity to meet with a broad spectrum of people, representing political parties, the National Council, committees of the Assembly, independent constitutional bodies, local government civil servants and elected representatives, as well as people from think tanks and civil society organizations. (See list of meetings in Annex 1.) Without exception they have been extremely helpful, open and frank, offering extremely useful reflections from their individual perspectives.

What is summarized as “challenges” on the following pages is my personal consolidation of the inputs I have received, supplemented with what I have read in articles and books. They are presented in no order of importance, and they cover both the political parties as such as well as other parts of the democratic system (and democratic culture). At this point in time my focus has been on trying to indicate the nature/character of the challenge, and not to analyze the challenge in depth to come up with solutions. This must be the focus of a later stage.

I would also like to emphasize from the outset that the challenges mentioned are not particular to Bhutan, but very much logical and unavoidable in a country moving from one governance system to another. In fact, during meetings it was repeatedly stated that the citizens of Bhutan needed to familiarize themselves with the new democratic dispensation, and it could not be expected that everything would work perfectly from the beginning.

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1 Weakness of party structures

Parties were introduced in Bhutan in 2007, and those interested in participating in the first elections in 2008 scrambled frantically to put an embryonic framework of a party together – recruiting members, defining a platform (a manifesto), establishing offices in the districts to ensure proper outreach during the campaign, creating symbols and slogans, and of course deciding on a leadership (trustworthy and well known personalities) that had the potential to win the election for the party and thereafter form the first democratically elected government. Considering the limited time involved and the newness of the party concept in Bhutan, it is actually impressive that two parties could deliver what was needed to have a free and fair election. What contributed to this was also the campaign funding offered to the parties from the state.

But a little more than three years down the road, the reality is that neither the ruling nor the opposition party has a party structure in place which is able to perform the most basic functions of a traditional political party (the ruling party may be in better shape than the opposition party, but admittedly not in good shape). This is most obviously reflected in the membership, which has plummeted dramatically – maybe a few thousand are left in DPT and a few hundred in PDP. This can probably be explained by a number of reasons that is not only caused by the weak or non-existing structure (party infrastructure), but the inability to perform even the most basic functions and offer the most basic party services obviously do not help.

A well functioning multi-party democracy requires at least a minimum party infrastructure to be able to offer citizens a reasonable level of continuity, and for parties to be able to perform their duties with regard to representation and voice. If this is not achieved, the party system risks being reduced to an electoral campaign phenomenon. While this requires financial resources, it also requires all parties to undertake a very honest and detailed needs assessment, which can
be used as the basis for a realistic strategic planning process – and as a basis for a capacity development planning process which includes training of staff and much more.

During meetings I referred to the types of questions and issues mentioned in the baseline assessment approach outlined in Annex 2, and this was much appreciated.

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### Funding of parties and the party system

Article 16 of the Constitution establishes the framework for a Public Election Fund, to be managed through the Election Commission. This makes it possible for the parties campaigning for the Assembly as well as the individual candidates campaigning for the Assembly to actually present their case to the people. To what extent the funding offered is adequate has not been possible to establish, and it has not really been a key point in the discussions simply because this is territory which is presently being discussed in Parliament.

The provisions of the Constitution are important in the sense that they are intended to implement electoral campaigns that are not ‘infected’ by non-transparent financial transactions, which is a major issue and problem in many countries. However, the campaign funding is not intended to cover the needs of the parties between elections, and it seems that the limitations established by the Constitution regarding how parties get an income to cover the running of a party structure make it very difficult to achieve what has been indicated as basic in Challenge 1.

At the time of writing the Good Governance Committee of the Parliament is looking into the issue of state funding, and not surprisingly there seems to be some divergent views between the Assembly and the Council. It is understood that part of the work of the Secretariat of the Assembly involves looking into experiences from other countries. This is not an area where DIPD has special expertise, but it is certainly an area where institutions like International IDEA and UNDP have done some ground breaking work that Bhutan can also benefit from.

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### Establishing new political parties

Listening to different stakeholders there seems to be a shared understanding that the type of democracy envisioned for Bhutan requires a strong multi-party system, and not just a two-party system. This is in line with what the Constitution indicates by operating with a primary electoral round between a number of parties to identify the two parties that will face each other in the final general election. Unfortunately it was not possible to establish this tradition in the first election because the third party seeking registration was not approved by the Election Commission.

Assuming that the two parties presently represented in the Assembly will be able to deal with their financial constraints by June 2012 as required by the Election Commission, right now there seems to be the possibility of maybe four parties facing off in the primary round in 2013 – talk of the town and the media point to two parties being in the making. Should this turn out to be the case it will be an important injection into the democratic system and should be welcomed.

But with the rules and regulations established by the Constitution as well as the Election Act it is also clear that setting up a new party is very demanding and requires a lot of courage from those taking the initiative. Running as a candidate, you have to be willing to sacrifice e.g. your civil service job, without any
guarantee that you will be successful. It also seems to have to be prepared in an atmosphere of secrecy, which is not necessarily conducive for the dialogue in society and flow of information to citizens that is a necessary part of a democratic culture.

In addition, it remains to be seen how the result of the primary round in 2013 will impact on the long-term sustainability of the new parties. If both new parties get a serious beating and the old parties come through, it should not be a surprise if the new parties will have a difficult time surviving. This could (in the most pessimistic scenario) create an unfortunate tradition of new parties being established before each election – or an institutionalization of two parties only.

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**Political parties at the local level**

In many old democracies the political parties form the backbone of the democratic system both at the district, provincial and national level. Parties get a lot of their ‘oxygen’ from being active in local elections, where parties deal with issues that are very close to what citizens/voters care about – access to health clinics, water and sewage, the quality of the schools they send their children to, etc. This is also where young party members and activists get their first training and may test their qualities in their first attempt to seek office. This is where the party gets a lot of the programmatic input that will at some point feed into the national manifesto. To mention a few examples of the importance of local level presence, although this should of course not be overstated or romanticized.

The Constitution makes it impossible for Bhutan to emulate this ‘model’. Local government elections is a race among individuals, and candidates are not allowed to be a member of a political party. The same is the case for candidates running for the Council seats. The intention of the fathers of the Constitution – and the King – seems to have been to create the necessary checks and balances at different levels of the system, and to secure a clear and understandable division between implementation of development activities (local) and decision of legislation (national). A noble intention, and maybe even a decision that has made it possible for a reluctant population to accept the introduction of political parties.

Such a system does not deny the political parties access to the local level and the choices and decisions that must be made at local level. Bhutan is a country (and a culture) where all citizens seem to have a close relationship with the locality where they were born and grew up and have been registered, and the democratic system does not change that. But when the parties are prevented from actively engaging on those issues people are most concerned about between the elections, it means that they are denied access to the ‘oxygen’ that can make party manifestos concrete, attract loyal members, groom new candidates, etc. It could therefore reinforce the understanding among some/many that parties are strange constructions and don’t belong in the hearts and minds of ordinary people.

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**Citizen acceptance of the new system**

Bhutan is a small country with a 100 year history of enlightened Monarchy, which has managed to lead the country safely into the 21st century. Knowing the conservative nature of people living in a still predominantly rural society, and knowing the devotion of citizens towards the King, the decision to take the big step into what is termed a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy was not only brave, but indeed an example of great leadership. As mentioned elsewhere in the report, the King was fully aware of the position of his people, and the same
was the case with the political leaders now taking up the challenge of implementing the vision laid out in the Constitution.

The strong participation in the 2008 elections could of course be taken as evidence of citizens already getting used to the new dispensation. But during meetings with stakeholders representing a diversity of positions it was clear that this is not necessarily the case. “People still don’t understand the reasons for the new system.” “People don’t understand the role of political parties.” “Even members of the parties still do not understand what membership means.” These are just a few examples of what was said during meetings.

All transitional experiences indicate that there are no shortcuts when responding to this challenge, and no single activity which is the key. It is rather a combination of long-term investments in what we could term the democratic culture, involving at least the following three areas.

One area is what you could call the interface between citizens and their government. This needs to be understood as much more than the electoral campaign period, in fact it must be the interface in between elections that should be given priority. Examples of this would be public consultations and hearings (organized by parliament), communication through various forms of media, etc. – backed up by clear evidence that those elected are actually delivering on their promises, or at least clear explanations if this is not the case. The development and practice of intra-party democracy can also offer a powerful contribution.

Another area is the importance of civil society. There are numerous organizations in Bhutan already, both in traditional local areas of service delivery and increasingly also at the national level in areas of development, gender and environment. But there are still few in the area of democratic governance, where new ideas can be generated, where there is capacity and willingness to hold those elected to office or appointed to manage accountable (part of what some call the “monitoring democracy”). This should be encouraged, and there should be agreement about the importance of respecting and supporting the independence of the organizations – keeping them out of the hands of the political forces. Also the media has a role to play in ensuring this ‘independence’, which is not to say that civil society organizations will be ‘neutral’ on specific issues and actions of those elected.

A final dimension contributing to the ‘democratic culture’ is the quality of the relationship between the political parties. FPTP systems tend to generate a culture of sharp competitiveness between the parties, in some countries it is said that a “winner takes it all” mentality creeps into the system, even when the substantive differences between parties may not be large. In Bhutan it could be argued that traditional culture and religious values provide an effective protection against this, and it also seems that the way the Speaker of the Assembly manages his role contributes. But it is nevertheless important to keep in mind, and Bhutan might at some point consider how voluntary ‘codes of conduct’ between the parties could contribute.

This should be seen as a natural challenge when a society transitions from one system to another. No one magic bullet exists, but it can be useful to keep in mind that institutions and formal rules alone will not provide for an effective ‘immune system’.

Media as educators and monitors

There is no doubt that the King did a fantastic job in introducing and familiarizing the people in every corner of the country with the new democracy now being introduced. It is also true that the newly established Election Commission did a
great job in the run-up to the elections in 2008 of educating the voters in the technicalities of voting, as well as introducing a number of substantive issues, like the role of women in local government.

But as already mentioned in Challenge 5, there is a need for a ‘democratic culture’ to underpin the democratic institutions and procedures. Article 7 of the Constitution covers the fundamental rights of citizens, and this includes the right to information and the freedom of the press. So the importance of a vibrant media community with the capacity to reach citizens in all parts of the country and with very different backgrounds and capacities is critically important.

The role of media can be defined in many ways, but one is to emphasize the role as ‘educator’ as well as ‘monitor’, and to understand the link between the two. Citizens need to know what their elected representatives do, and this information can come both from the elected themselves and from the media. Without the information it is not possible for citizens to hold their representatives accountable – in the end with the purpose of deciding if they have delivered on their promises and if they deserve to be re-elected.

Considering the size of the country and the limited availability of resources, this is not an easy challenge to meet. Of course the state financed media have an obligation to deliver information on a non-partisan basis, but other media need the necessary strength to report, based on the capacity to investigate and analyse.

7  
**GNH and the manifestos of the parties**

Looking at the manifestos of the two parties now represented in Parliament, it is very difficult to come to a very clear conclusion on what exactly make them different. To push the argument: There is no decisive programmatic difference at all! Both parties emphasize that they will work for the realization of the visions of His Majesty; they will secure the sovereignty and stability of the nation; they will protect the rights of people in a democracy; and they will pursue the thinking enshrined in the development concept of Gross National Happiness, which has put Bhutan on the global map regarding how we should measure the progress of a society.

One consequence of this is that the defining feature of the parties end up being their leadership, the individual(s) leading the party. There is nothing wrong with that in itself. Parties all over the world search for charismatic leaders with the ability to connect and communicate, and this has become increasingly important in this time and age of the internet, social media, infotainment, 24 hour a day exposure on television, etc.

This focus on the personalities can however become dangerous if it overshadows the substance of what the party represents. Every political party in Bhutan therefore needs to reflect more on what it is that makes it different from the other parties – when all of them pay tribute to the GNH as the guiding principle for the development of Bhutan. Maybe there needs to be a stronger focus on the GNH as an overarching vision for the country, and the different ways of achieving the vision in practice. Maybe there needs to be an understanding that it is fully legitimate to disagree on how to reach the targets of GNH.

8  
**Role of women locally and in parties**

Gender equality and the importance of empowering women to play a stronger role in decision making are principles and values being embraced by all in positions of importance, be it in civil society, in local government positions, in the
National Assembly and Council, and in government. So this is not the challenge. Doing something about it and changing age-old traditions of course is, and Bhutan is no different from most other societies in this respect.

Already much has been done, and many of the partners working in Bhutan (the UN system, the Danish government, the few international NGOs) have given this area high priority. This was also the case with regard to the first election in 2008 with the initiatives of the Election Commission to inform about the importance of women seeking election for posts in local government as well as in elections for the Parliament.

With the democratic system and a new culture finding its form in the years to come, there is a golden opportunity to ensure that the political arena is given a ‘female face and voice’ from the start. Approaching this from a gender mainstreaming perspective is probably not enough, it will take the ‘role model’ approach of strong women, and it will require involvement and support of men in the party organizations - as well as formal or informal rules and regulations within the political parties and in the local government structures. It will also be an area where civil society organizations working on gender equality issues and empowerment of women could find ways of engaging with the political parties.

Parties and the electoral system

Like many other countries, Bhutan has opted for the First Past The Post system (FPTP). In many countries this system has undoubtedly contributed to creating a functioning system with the ability to legislate through clear majority decisions – unlike what can often be the case in countries where many parties are represented and coalitions are necessary but often fragile.

But it has also been seen in many countries that the FPTP electoral system has an inherent tendency to create a political climate of conflict, in particular when the gap between the popular vote and the number of seats is huge, which is the case when landslide electoral victories have taken place – like in Bhutan in 2008 (67% for the ruling party results in 45 seats and 33% for the opposition party results in only 2 seats).

It is of course still far too early to conclude on how the choice of electoral system will impact on the type of multi-party system Bhutan will end up having. Many of the people consulted expressed an honest wish for a more ‘balanced’ system - with a stronger opposition than is the case after the 2008 elections. Right now it is simply not possible for only a few MP’s - despite the opposition being given lots of room for interventions by the Speaker in the National Assembly - to cover the entire territory of legislation.

But even if the 2013 elections will result in a better balance, there are examples from other FPTP systems around the world that Bhutan can learn from. During meetings I used the example of Botswana, which ever since independence in 1966 has seen the Botswana Democratic Party win a handsome majority of parliamentary seats - despite often winning with only very narrow margins in the popular vote.

While this is fair and democratic (and elections in Botswana have generally been considered free and fair), it may result in a ‘democratic culture’ which is not entirely healthy. One reason being that it results (whether intended or not) in a symbiotic relationship between the political system and the state - the ruling party slowly ‘takes over’ the state apparatus, in a sense comes to see the state as an extension of the party. This can easily result in many government officials feeling, also at the highest levels of Permanent Secretaries of ministries, that in order to be able to survive in this ‘democratic culture’ you need to be (too) close-
ly associated with the ruling party, or as a minimum not do anything that could alert the ruling party to you being what a civil servant must be: independent, professional, and of course loyal.

This type of development can in the worst case scenario result in what I would term an institutional democracy without a real and deep rooted democratic culture. A democracy that risks losing the active support and participation of citizens (both members of parties and non-members), because why should they vote if the state in reality is a department of the ruling party? Why maintain the illusion about a multi-party democracy if effectively the system has turned into a one-party system? And how to deal with the argument of the ruling party about “The opposition not being mature enough to run the country because they have never before been in power?” – a circular argument which is not healthy if being repeated decade after decade.

Bhutan is in a much better position to do something about these risks than others, partly because they have a history of listening and learning from others while maintaining their own principles and values; and partly because they are still at the early stage of a long democratic journey.
8. OPTIONS FOR DIPD ENGAGEMENT

The following very sketchy proposals or options are being suggested based on the discussions that have taken place during the week of the mission. The ideas have been floated in an informal way in various meetings, and they have all been seen as interesting and relevant at the very general level they have been discussed. This is of course not an expression of a demand-driven process, and it should not be seen as a substitute for such a process, but rather as a first attempt to try and limit the focus.

Strengthening women in politics at local level

Why? Because equality of women is an important part of a democratic society; because this is an issue which is also receiving strategic attention in many other programme activities supported by Denmark; because this was also a focus in the efforts supported and managed by the Election Commission after the national elections in 2008; because it is important to support the group of women that have now decided to run for office in local government. When the idea was ‘tested’ in one locality with an elected woman, it was fully embraced.

What? Around 75 women have been elected for office at the level of districts and below, out of more than 1100 seats available. A few more will be added when the final round of elections for the seats that could not be filled first time around take place, but it will most likely not exceed more than 100 hundred – less than 10% - in all. One idea could be to support the establishment of a formalized forum or network, which would allow the women to meet and share lessons learned, best practices, barriers to their work, etc. Training sessions could include women in politics from the region (Nepal) as well as from Denmark at some point.

Who? It is likely that an appropriate set-up would have to involve several stakeholders - including national stakeholders like the National Commission for Women and Children, the Department of Local Governance, an international organization like UNDP, as well as an independent consultant and/or civil society organization. It should also involve representatives from local government structures in Denmark, selected from the political parties working with DIPD.

How? A first step could be to ask a reputed local consultant (possibly supported by an international or Danish consultant) develop a first proposal, to be shared with all relevant and interested stakeholders – including selected women at local level of course. This could form the basis for a workshop, where ideas are tested and further developed.

When? Such an activity would be building on activities that Denmark is already engaging on or has been involved with in the past. It would therefore not necessarily require as lengthy a preparatory process as some of the other proposals would require. The possibility of the activity being kick started with funds from the Representation Office of Denmark could be considered.

Needs assessment support for parties

Why? Because this seems to be the most basic and urgently required aspect of a capacity development input to the political parties; because both parties represented in the Assembly, at all levels of the parties, agree that they need such an input; because people considering setting up new parties mention that this
would be useful; and finally because this seems to be an activity where it would be possible to bring the parties together in a meaningful way to learn and share from each other.

**What?** A programme in this area would cover a number of elements: [1] workshop for representatives of all party secretariats where the methodology and content of a needs assessment is presented and discussed; [2] needs assessments undertaken with the support of a consultant for each party individually; [3] workshop for all parties together to share results of the individual needs assessments and learn from each other; [4] development of strategic plans with targets set, resources allocated, etc. A programme could also at some point include representatives from some of the Danish political parties, as well as ‘internships’ with some of the secretariats of the Danish parties.

**Who?** This activity could very well involve staff from Danish political parties as facilitators of the process, and at a later stage also as hosts and on the job trainers in the strategic follow-up to the assessment. In the political parties in Bhutan the key persons to be involved in the baseline assessment should come from the secretariats as well as MPs and members. Training programmes following the assessments would have to involve a smaller and strategic core group of people – which could also be the core team benefitting from training in Denmark.

**How?** The first step would be to agree on the scope of a baseline exercise, and when it should take place, considering the timetable for the 2013 election. At the same time TORs for local and Danish facilitators could be developed, and the generic type of training and strategic planning following an assessment could be developed.

**When?** There are presently two parties up and running, but at least two more are in the making. Ideally they should all be offered assessment and training support – which would indicate that it should wait until after the 2013 election when it is clearer if both old and new parties will survive the test before the electorate.

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**Capacity input to Parliament**

**Why?** Denmark has provided substantial support for Parliament over a number of years, including support for the construction of the assembly hall, the secretariat of Parliament, study tours to the Danish parliament, so there is a lot to build on – and of course a need to ensure that it is not just more of the same. Parliament could also be a useful entry point for working with the political parties, contributing to building a strong multi-party dialogue. And of course a well functioning Parliament is an important precondition for the development of a strong democratic culture.

**What?** Both secretariats of the Council and the Assembly have indicated their wish for support from DIPD. With the limited resources available, focus should be on the software rather than the hardware. This could include training of MPs in working in the committees (including study tours to the Danish Parliament); research support for certain issues of particular importance to the democratic system (like state financing of political parties).

**Who?** The key partner in Bhutan would be the secretariats of both the National Assembly and the National Council, and they have experience in working with Danish institutions, including Folketinget. On the Danish side, it would be relevant to engage with the secretariat of Folketinget as an institutional partner. With regard to specific research assignments (like examples of state funding mecha-
nisms) we could engage with the academic community – Jørgen Elklit is one person who is already familiar with Bhutan.

**How?** A first step could be to ask the secretariats of the Assembly and Council together to come up with a more detailed needs assessment related to work in the committees and research for the committees.

**When?** With regard to committees, the indication was that this should wait until after the 2013 elections, when it is likely that a fair share of the MPs will be new. With regard to areas of research that could be relevant for DIPD to support, this could be more flexible.

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### Media contributing to a democratic culture

**Why?** The role of a vibrant, independent and qualified media sector in developing and maintaining a strong democratic culture cannot be overestimated. With weak political party structures it is even more important that the media can offer avenues for people to both learn and voice. This is not only important during a general election, but even more so between elections.

**What?** DIPD should not engage in general media support, because this is not our mandate, nor do the resources allow such an approach. But it could be relevant to support projects that focus on specific issues – like the role of women in politics, the role of political parties in a democracy, the role of media in holding elected officials accountable.

**Who?** DIPD has received a proposal for a documentary film and a series of radio programmes from KCD Productions, which is a well recognized media company in Bhutan with experience in quality productions – focusing on women running for election to local government and National Assembly and Council. It would also be possible to engage with the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, which seems to have the capacity to engage in this area. At the strategic level it could be considered to engage with the new Bhutan Media Foundation. In many of the media areas it would be possible to involve Danish institutions as consultants, partners and contributors.

**How?** First step could be to engage on the proposal presented to DIPD, not only because it is already there, but also because it links very well with the focus on women presented under A. It might also be possible to involve other stakeholders in Bhutan around this project.

**When?** For the documentary and radio programmes to be able to play a role in the 2013 elections, it will be important to move rather quickly – part of the documentary would be done in Denmark in the early part of 2012.
Annex 1:

MEETINGS HELD DURING MISSION

Meetings were undertaken with the following individuals and institutions, in the order they are mentioned below:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Director Thinley Penjor, Chief Tenzin Wangchuk and Ms Tashi Peldon

UN Resident Coordinator, Ms. Claire van der Vaeren

Chhukha Dzongda Tshewan Rinzin, Chhukha Dzong

DT Chairman, Dorji Penjore (Chapchap Gup)

Bjalchhog Gewog, Mangmi, Off. Gup, Ms. Choden

Sonam Tshering, DPT Local Office, Paro

Dr. Tandin Dorji, initiator of a new party, former PDP candidate, Centre for Research Initiative

DPT party office, Secretary General Thinley Jamtsho (TBC)

PDP party office, Vice President Yeshey Dorji

The Centre for Bhutan Studies, Mr. Dorji Penjore, Senior Researcher

Bhutan Centre for Media & Democracy, Director Ms. Pek

Mr. Sonam Kinga, Member of Parliament, Deputy Chairperson

Chief Election Commissioner, Dasho Kunzang Wangdi & Election Commission of Bhutan

Hon’ble Minister for Works & Human Settlement Yeshey Zimba, Vice-Chairman of DPT

Hon. Opposition Leader, Chairman of PDP Tshering Tobgay

Secretary, National Assembly, Mr. Nima Tshering

Chairman of National Assembly Legislative Committee Ugyen Wangdi

RENEW Director Pema Gyaltshen

Secretary-General National Council, Mr. Tswang Norbu

Hon’ble Chief Justice Lyonpo sonam Tobgay

Speaker National Assembly, Hon. Jigme Tshultim

Gender consultant Ms. Phuntshok Chhoden
Annex 2:

**BASELINE NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

A baseline assessment helps provide a programmatic starting point by identifying the needs of parties. It is very much like a stocktaking exercise where a snapshot of the party is taken outlining its current structure. When conducted in a collaborative manner, the assessment gives an opportunity to build constructive relationships with individuals—including leaders—in the parties concerned. Baseline assessments are an essential tool in continuously evaluating programs. Referring to baseline assessment reports can help provide a reality check on what is working and what is not. Baseline assessments also provide benchmarks by which the parties can measure program developments.

To achieve a mutual understanding with a political party on its development, it is not possible to rely solely on an assessment questionnaire. Instead, an assessment needs to be conducted in a participatory manner that involves party leaders, party staff and members from different levels of the party organization.

Ideally, the process becomes that of a self-assessment by the party, where leaders and activists reflect on their situation and needs and discuss them openly and frankly with the assessment team. The assessment process may include a series of one-on-one meetings and focus group discussions over a period of time. When done systematically and purposefully, the result can be an honest appraisal of a party’s situation and needs.

The questions mentioned on the following pages are not meant to be followed in a rigid manner, they only provide guidelines. All of the questions will not be relevant in every situation.

An assessment team could consist of a DIPD staff member and/or an international political party expert, possibly together with a local independent expert or resource person. It is important to ensure that everyone is fully briefed on the country’s political background in advance. While an international expert may be very comfortable with the operation of a political party, they will not, in most cases, be familiar with the local political environment or culture.

While it is often useful to discuss these issues with the parties in order to assess their impact, the team should have a good understanding of these in advance and be in a position to discuss them knowledgeably with the parties. A team member who is not familiar with the electoral system or who raises an issue such as candidate profile where a party list system operates will create a poor impression with the party concerned.

The following is an example of areas that could be addressed, with generic questions mentioned for each area. Obviously these will have to be scrutinized in the context of the type of democracy and political party system the country is pursuing.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGULATORY ASPECTS</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Party History</th>
<th>Guiding Principles</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Are political parties mentioned in the country’s constitution?</td>
<td>1. How does the party define its purpose (i.e., why does it exist)?</td>
<td>1. When and why was the party founded?</td>
<td>1. What is the broad ideological position of the party?</td>
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<td>2. Is there a separate party law?</td>
<td>2. What role does the party want to play in politics?</td>
<td>2. Was the party the result of merger or a split in previously existing parties?</td>
<td>2. What are the main policy positions of the party?</td>
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<td>3. Are there pre-existing registration criteria (i.e., what makes a party “legal”)?</td>
<td>3. Where does the party want to be in five years?</td>
<td>3. Who are the original leaders/organizers of the party?</td>
<td>3. What policy tendencies or diversity exists in the party?</td>
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<td>4. What legal, political or practical restrictions are put on political parties?</td>
<td>4. What are the key political issues for the party (current and future)?</td>
<td>4. What is the background of the leadership?</td>
<td>4. How was the ideological position developed?</td>
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<td>5. Is there public funding of political parties?</td>
<td>5. Does the party support the country’s current development vision?</td>
<td>5. What is the professional/political/personal history of key leaders?</td>
<td>5. How often is the position being revised/redefined?</td>
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<td>6. Are there restrictions on private funding or funding from abroad?</td>
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<td>6. What is the party’s electoral history in terms of vote percentage?</td>
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<td>7. Is free speech and assembly restricted?</td>
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<td>7. Has the party ever held power?</td>
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<td>8. Is there equitable access to media?</td>
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<tr>
<th>PARTY HISTORY</th>
<th>GUIDING PRINCIPLES</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When and why was the party founded?</td>
<td>1. What is the broad ideological position of the party?</td>
<td>1. Does the party have a written constitution and/or code of conduct?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Was the party the result of merger or a split in previously existing parties?</td>
<td>2. What are the main policy positions of the party?</td>
<td>2. Is the party organized at national and local levels?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Who are the original leaders/organizers of the party?</td>
<td>3. What policy tendencies or diversity exists in the party?</td>
<td>3. Who runs the day-to-day operations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What is the background of the leadership?</td>
<td>4. How was the ideological position developed?</td>
<td>4. Research, policymaking and administrative units?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is the professional/political/personal history of key leaders?</td>
<td>5. How often is the position being revised/redefined?</td>
<td>5. How many people work in each unit at national, regional and local levels?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What is the party’s electoral history in terms of vote percentage?</td>
<td></td>
<td>6. How many are full-time salaried staffers, paid part-time staff and volunteers?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Infrastructure
1. National, regional and local offices?
2. Does the party have access to computers, fax machines, copiers, etc.?
3. Is there access to the Internet?
4. Does the party have a web page?
5. Party newspaper (formal or informal)?

### Internal Party Processes
1. Is there a formal structure(s) used for policy development?
2. Is this structure institutionalized or ad hoc?
3. Does the ordinary party member have access to these structures?
4. How are policies determined?
5. Are policy documents broadly distributed and reviewed by members?
6. How are leaders elected?
7. Are party members subject to any disciplinary mechanisms?
8. Requirements (and restrictions) for being elected to leadership positions?
9. How are candidates selected and do members at local level have a say?

### Strategy
1. Does the party have a strategic plan or the ability or intention to create one?
2. What are the party’s organizational priorities?
3. What does the party do between elections?
4. Does the party have a strategy for expanding its political base?
5. Does the party have a strategy for consolidating its political base?

### Party’s Leadership Profile
1. What is the composition of the leadership (including gender)?
2. Is this composition evolving or stable?
3. Are there any ideological tendencies that members of the leadership fit into?
4. How much influence does each group have on party policies and programs?
5. Are all of the party leaders committed to the party’s principles and policies?
6. Is there any single person or group that personifies the party?
7. Are there ethical guidelines for leadership?
8. How are parliamentary representatives held accountable to party principles?

### Membership/Supporters Profile
1. How many members does the party have?
2. What is the regional, gender and age composition of the party?
3. Is the membership of the party growing or shrinking or is it stable?
4. What is the ratio of members to supporters?
5. Is there a formal membership process?
**DIIPD Mission Report: Bhutan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>LEGISLATIVE PROFILE</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How many seats does the party have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How does the party fulfill its role as a majority party or official opposition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Is it fulfilling this role adequately or not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What is needed in order to make it possible for it to fulfill this role?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Is there a party caucus and does it function adequately and meet regularly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How well does internal party communication operate?</td>
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<td>7. Are parliamentary representatives “disciplined”?</td>
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<td>8. Does a party whip apply?</td>
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<td>9. What kinds of relationships do party structures have with their MP’s?</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>EVENTS</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does the party hold any annual or regular conferences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are these organized nationally, regionally or locally?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Are these activities open to the public, members only, or party leaders only?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How are delegates to party events chosen?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Is the party engaging with parties outside the country?</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What training facilities and opportunities are available to party members?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What facilities are available for leaders, staff members and MP’s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How does the party pay for training programs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are there non-party institutions that can offer training in a credible manner?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. What other relationships or options for assistance does the party have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Could support from outside the country be an option?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Could multi-party training be a possibility?</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>FUNDING</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the level of funding?</td>
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<td>2. What is the level of private funding?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Is the party financially sustainable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How does the party raise funds?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## COMMUNICATION

1. Does the party have a communication structure?
2. Does the party produce any publications, like a newspaper?
3. Does the party have a press office?
4. Does the party have access to media outlets such as television and radio?
5. How does the party communicate its views to citizens?

## ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

1. How are the candidates recruited and selected?
2. How is the campaign managed?
3. How are candidates and activists trained?
4. How are voters contacted?
5. Does the party monitor polling places?
6. How is the campaign organized – centrally/regionally/locally?
Annex 3:

**THE 2013 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS**

Following the enactment of the Local Governments Act on 11th September 2009 by the joint sitting of the National Council and the National Assembly, the issue of the delimitation of the three types of thromde (municipal) council, A, B or C (yenlag) was resolved by the decision of the ECB on 25th November 2010 to carry out the first-ever local governments election in Bhutan before the end of June 2011 by a special one-time measure with conduct of elections in the four A-thromdes (Gelephu, Thimphu, Phuentsholing and Samdrup Jongkhar on 21st January, and subsequent conduct of elections in the 205 gewogs (rural local governments), while elections of the remaining 16 B-thromdes and the class C-(yenlag) thromdes are postponed until after the second National Parliamentary elections in 2013. Accordingly, the A-thromde elections took place on 21st January 2011, also observed by the Representation Office of Denmark, and a separate observation report of this has been submitted to the ECB.

The notification of 6th April 2011 stipulated the local governments’ election to take place in all the Gewogs and Thromdes (Municipalities) of Bhutan on 24th May 2011. However, due to the submission of complaints from various institutions and a substantial number of candidates disqualified in particular for not adhering to the procedures of verifying their non-party political status, His Majesty the King granted a Royal Kasho to the ECB on 4th May, following which the Election Commission on 10th May deferred the local governments’ election to the 27th June 2011, on which date the elections were subsequently implemented nation-wide.

**Registration of voters**

According to the ECB, all Bhutanese citizens above the age of 18 years on the date of elections and registered in the respective local constituency by 1st January 2011 were eligible for registration as voters on the Electoral Roll, based on the civil registry database of the new Citizenship Identity Cards of the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs. Thus, the voter registration was supposed to be automatic which meant everyone eligible was registered, except the members of the Royal Family and religious personalities, who were not issued Voter Photo Identity Cards (VPIC). The draft Electoral Roll was issued by 10th March for public inspection, and changes could be made up to thirty days before the date of the poll.

As noted from the observations of the thromde (municipal) elections in January, the actual resident population in Bhutan does not correspond to the local census population, as many people prefer and are allowed to maintain their local registration in the rural area, even if they have been residing in the urban area for years. Consequently, more voters are registered in the gewogs than actually live there. To exercise their voting rights, they will have to travel to their old village, if they are not permitted to vote by postal ballot, as the case for civil servants, people working in the tourist industry, students, etc.

The final total number of voters registered was 347,938. For the voters for the gewogs, the total was 346,646 of which 170,600 (49.2 pct.) were male, and 176,046 (50.8 pct.) were female registered voters. With a national population

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13 The presentation in this section is a shortened version of “Bhutan Local Government Election. Final Observation Report of the 2nd Stage: Gewog Elections 27th June 2011” by the Representation Office of Denmark, written by Henrik A. Nielsen and Janus Munk.
gender ratio of male/female as 52.5 pct./47.5 pct. (Population Census 2005), the higher registration and participation by the female voters is interesting.

Nomination of candidates

The identification and nomination of candidates for the 205 positions as Gup (Head of County or Chairperson of the County Committee), the 205 positions as Mangmi (Deputy Gup) and the minimum five to eight seats for Tshogpas (ordinary member) in each of the 205 Gewog Tshogde (GT, gewog council), was not easy. A major constraint was that many of the interested candidates had already been involved in the national political activities, and the early strict application of the rule of at least one year since resignation from any political party resulted in the mentioned disqualification of 259 former members of political parties. This challenge was only resolved after appeal to His Majesty, and the subsequent decision by the ECB to postpone the elections providing more time to scrutiny case-by-case, increasing the number of candidates by 232.

For the Tshogpa positions, however, it was still difficult. While the Gup’s monthly salary of Nu. 14,355 and that of the Mangmi of Nu. 10,765 (plus some allowance for mobile telephone, etc.) may seem reasonable for a fulltime job with a large responsibility, many has expressed that Nu. 2,000 monthly for the GT ordinary members is not compatible with the voters’ expectations of delivery of services, in particular, if no other (public) employment is permitted. In addition, the qualifications required for all passing a functional literacy and skills test (FLT), which most (80 pct.) of those registered for the test actually did, but it could still be perceived as a psychological test constraining some potential candidates.

In the end only 51 (25 pct.) of the GTs fulfilled the constitutional requirement of minimum seven members of the GT. For not less than 358 Tshogpa seats (25 pct.) out of total 1,439 seats, there were no candidates. And while there was no contest for only 13 (6 pct.) out of the 202 elected Gups, and no contest for 13 (6 pct.) of the 204 elected Mangmis, there were no less than 468 (68 pct.) of the 684 elected Tshogpas, which were uncontested, as there was only one candidate. In these cases, the voters were obliged to vote ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the only candidate – which they actually did with negative consequences for 32 candidates. Obviously, the lack of sufficient number of Tshogpa candidates is a serious issue to be addressed.

Conduct of election campaign

In general, it is the observation that the election campaign was conducted in a fair and acceptable manner. The ECB had posters and advertisements for general voter education and information, including promotion of more female candidates, and all candidates were presented in joint meetings in the Gewogs. The contesting candidates were not given any state funding to run their campaigns unlike in the national elections in 2008. Each candidate, however, was allowed to spend up to Nu. 50,000 from his or her own sources, to be properly accounted for subsequently to the ECB, to produce e.g. posters and other election material. All written materials were required by the ECB to be in Dzongkha and English in order to ensure level playing field. Obviously, this could make it difficult for citizens who do not have Dzongkha as their mother tongue, and it could be regarded as an unnecessary limitation. The official election notice boards were only utilised to a limited degree. The most important part of the election campaigns were, as explained by the candidates, their personal house-to-house canvassing, but even that was probably also limited, as many candidates were already known in the local communities.
Freedom of peaceful political activity

The election campaign and process was conducted in a peaceful and efficient manner, and although a few minor incidents of friction between followers of candidates were reported, the general impression is of a well-guided election campaign and a dignified election process. In particular, the polling process on the election day and the serious conduct of the voters was impressive. The voters also seemed to have recalled their experiences of the national elections, so both they and the returning officials performed smoothly. Obviously, the Bhutanese society is getting to know, how to conduct democratic elections in a peaceful and dignified manner.

Without fear or undue influence

It was a clear observation from all visited polling stations that voters were able to cast their votes freely and without fear or undue influence. Obviously, there has been a lot of discussion in the local community, within the families and between individuals of which candidate to prefer. This is a very legitimate part of the democratic process. A special feature of the local governments’ election is that they are apolitical, i.e. the candidates are elected on their own individual qualities, and are not to be affiliated with any political party, thus having not been a member of a party at least for a year. Moreover, the two political parties, members of Parliament, and others affiliated with the parties, are not allowed to visit the local governments during the election period. How this is to be interpreted, since in the local communities party affiliation of supporters and previous party preference is probably well known among the voters, is still a learning process. However, no observations of undue party interference were made by the Observer team.

The ECB promoted specifically enhancement of more female candidates prior to the notification of the elections. Up to now, only few women were actively taking part in elected local committees as members of the GYT’s (Gewog Development Committees). Traditionally, the public sphere outside the households or villages does not provide an obvious platform for women in the rural areas, and it takes courage for women to move outside their village, contesting an election publicly, including moving around in the Gewog. The larger turn-out of female voters (more than men), and although the number of female candidates, about 165 (8%) out of the total number of 2,185 candidates, is less than expected, it does indicate that changes are under way.

Determination and transmission of results

Overall, as announced the day after the elections by the ECB, 1,102 candidates were elected, including 202 Gups, 204 Mangmis, 684 Gewog Thsogpas, 8 Dzongkhag Thuemis and four Thromde Tshogpas. The ECB declared after the election that the 205 gewogs in Bhutan now has an elected Gewog Tshogde. This is, however, debatable since there are still three Gup vacancies (i.e. due to a tie in one Gewog), one Mangmi vacancy and not less than 360 Gewog Tshogpa vacancies. As the vacancies are unevenly distributed, a majority of the Gewog Tshogdes (75 pct.) do not comply with the Constitutional requirement of minimum seven GT members.

Of the 205 gewogs, only 25 pct. (51 gewogs) have full membership, i.e. the minimum Constitutional requirement (Article 22, 10) of seven elected members, after the 27th June elections, and by-elections are urgently required. The Constitution states (Article 22, 14) that “When an office of a member of the Local Government becomes vacant for any reason other than the expiration of term, an election of a member to fill the vacancy shall be held within thirty days from the
date of the vacancy.” It may thus be required to hold by-elections as soon as possible, and not wait until 2012, to fill the 358 Tshogpa vacancies, one Gup vacancy and two Mangmi vacancies.

Gender-wise, precise details of the results have not yet been released. Preliminary figures indicate 1 female Gup (Dagana, Tashiding Gewog), 12 Mangmis, and 61 women elected as Tshogpas, in total 74 (7 pct.) women elected at gewog-level out of 1,090 elected. This is no big difference from the previous GYT-system, where (by 2010) there were 1 Gup, four Mangmis and 76 Tshogpas nominated. The major difference being that this was the first democratic local governments’ election, where candidates of both sexes contested openly against each other on a level-playing field.