

Guidelines for Introduction of Democracy Clubs in Schools and Educational Institutions in Bhutan, 2012

1. Introduction

The Section 35 (a) of the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008 states that:

“It shall be the responsibility of the Election Commission to promote public awareness on electoral matters by conducting education and information dissemination programmes or by any other means.”

Accordingly, the Election Commission of Bhutan has the responsibility to create and promulgate an active civic learning and engagement system to ensure that the Bhutanese democracy sustains.

The process of democracy must engage all citizens of a country and begin early on in their lives so that they become responsible for their own governance, are able to make informed choices, and meaningfully participate in the democratic life of the country.

It is for these reasons that some of the successful democracies have active civic learning and engagement programmes where all sections of society are adequately exposed to democratic processes to build strong and vibrant democratic values and culture.

Bhutan has become a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy in 2008 with the conduct of the first-ever parliamentary elections. Continuous

and concerted effort is required to be dedicated so that Bhutanese democracy maintains the vibrancy that is characteristic of a mature and ideal democracy.

While the responsibility to inculcate civic learning and undertake civic engagement may be the responsibility of citizens in general, the Election Commission of Bhutan, as an institution that is responsible for conduct of free and fair election and referendums, believes that it also has the duty to prepare the future electorates through proper and relevant civic and electoral education.

2. Background Information

Civic Education includes electoral education which is a continual and long-term process and is usually embedded in education curriculum and other programmes. Civic education often referred to as civic and citizenship education deals with broader concepts underpinning a democratic society such as the respective roles and responsibilities of citizens, government, political and special interests, the mass media, and the business and non-profit sectors, as well as the significance of periodic and competitive elections. It emphasizes not only citizen awareness but citizen participation in all aspects of democratic society.

Civic and citizenship education typically comprise three main elements the teaching of/towards: civic knowledge, civic disposition (values) and civic skills – i.e. to enable them to acquire the knowledge and skills essential for informed, effective citizenship. Civic education is a

continual process, not tied to the electoral cycle. Voter information and electoral education, however, may be part of larger civic education endeavour. Civic education may be carried out through the school and university system, through civil society organizations, and perhaps by some state agencies, although not necessarily the election authority. (*BRIDGE -Civic Education Module*)

Civic education in Bhutan has evolved with the transition of the system of governance. Civics has been taught as a subject in the school curriculum for a number of years with focus on learning about the different institutions of governance, the powers and roles of the state authorities, and the roles and responsibilities of individual citizens. However, civic education could now encompass active learning and engagement in the future Bhutanese citizenry who would take part in the democratic governance of the country.

The Election Commission of Bhutan, as mandated by the Electoral Laws, undertakes electoral education and dissemination of voter information programmes in relation to preparation and conduct of elections in Bhutan without engaging in broader and all-encompassing civic education. Activities carried out since 2006 have focused on inculcating civic learning and engagement amongst the Bhutanese citizenry. From the experience, it is evident that civic learning and engagement programme for future electorates at an early stage in life would be essential to become part of the core of its functions.

Given this backdrop, the Election Commission of Bhutan, in

collaboration with the principal stakeholders including the development partners of Bhutan, proposes to engage in undertaking full-fledged civic education programme to help build and promote the idea in schools and other educational and training institutes throughout Bhutan so that the students and youth are better able to understand their current and future roles and responsibilities as citizens through a “Democracy Club”. It will also complement their learning of civics as a subject in the school curriculum and prepare them for active participation in democratic Bhutan.

3. Objectives

3.1. The objectives of installation of a Democracy Club in schools and educational institutions are to:

3.1.1. *Educate* and *inform* on the electoral process;

3.1.2. *Develop* and *prepare* future citizens in the world of a democratic system and values such as political tolerance that would guide appropriate choices and determine behavior and attitude; and

3.1.3. *Sustain* the positive trends to support democracy.

4. Democracy Club

4.1. A Democracy Club shall strive to engage in active civic learning and skills development to prepare young minds for their roles and responsibilities as citizens of

democratic Bhutan.

- 4.2. Each school and educational institution shall install a Democracy Club that will initiate, coordinate, and implement activities that promote civic learning and engagement of students and youth in good democratic values and decision-making in the running of the institutions and activities.
- 4.3. A Democracy Club shall encourage students and youth to gain the following knowledge and skills essential for informed, effective citizenship and participation in democratic Bhutan in:
 - 4.3.1. Civic knowledge;
 - 4.3.2. Civic disposition (values); and
 - 4.3.3. Civic skills.
- 4.4. A Democracy Club shall function as a mini-Election Commission to conduct elections and organize events and activities that promote understanding of the Bhutanese electoral system and processes, democratic governance and institutions, and encourage student participation in school or educational institution's decision-making processes.

5. Composition of Democracy Club

- 5.1. A Democracy Club in a school or an educational institution shall comprise of:
 - 5.1.1. A teacher/lecturer/instructor as the Club Coordinator who will be responsible to guide, monitor and report;
 - 5.1.2. Not less than 30 students/trainees as active members of the Club; and
 - 5.1.3. An elected student/trainee as Person In-charge responsible for implementation of the activities.

6. Activities of Democracy Club

- 6.1. A Democracy Club shall be responsible to, *inter-alia*:
 - 6.1.1. Undertake activities that promote development of democratic values and understanding of civic culture amongst students;
 - 6.1.2. Undertake activities to promote or encourage student and people in respective school and community to enroll as voters and vote in elections;
 - 6.1.3. Undertake community-based activities that will promote understanding of electoral democracy and participation other than by voting;
 - 6.1.4. Constitute student parliament to debate on certain

- important issues that affect student and youth;
- 6.1.5. Observe the International Democracy Day on 15th of September;
 - 6.1.6. Organize literary activities on democracy and elections in Bhutan and globally;
 - 6.1.7. Coordinate the conduct of school or educational institution elections (of student management) using Electronic Voting Machines and form student committees of elected student representatives;
 - 6.1.8. Organize mock elections on conduct of Parliamentary Elections to help understand the process;
 - 6.1.9. Coordinate and support to purchase resources and encourage writing of democracy literature to promote school democracy literary club; and
 - 6.1.10. Undertake activities that will help generate funds to support the Democracy Club.
- 6.2. The Coordinator and In-charge shall ensure that all activities carried out under the Guidelines conform to the electoral laws and the laws governing the operation of the two Houses of Parliament.

7. Seed Fund

- 7.1. The Election Commission of Bhutan will provide a Seed Fund to every Democracy Club to support the implementation of the Democracy Club activities of the participating schools and educational institutions.
- 7.2. The Seed Fund is a one-time measure to help the schools and institutions coordinate and provide support to set up a Democracy Club.
- 7.3. The Club Coordinator will be required to conduct activities to generate income out of the Seed Fund in order for the club to fund its future activities.

8. Management of the Fund

- 8.1. The head of the institution shall submit an application for fund as in the Form for Application of Seed Fund No.1.
- 8.2. The Fund shall be released to a separate bank account operated in the name of the Democracy Club of a School or institution.
- 8.3. The Club Coordinator will be required to maintain proper accounts of the Seed Fund.
- 8.4. The accounts will be subjected to audit by the Royal Audit Authority.

9. Responsibility of School/Educational Institution Authority

- 9.1. The Principal or Director of a school or an educational institution shall be responsible for providing the necessary support and guidance.
- 9.2. He/she shall designate a teacher to serve as the Club Coordinator responsible for implementation of the activities.
- 9.3. He/she shall serve as the focal point with the Election Commission of Bhutan or the respective Dzongkhag Election Office.

10. Election Commission of Bhutan's Responsibility

- 10.1. The Electoral Education and Training Division of the Election Commission of Bhutan shall take overall responsibility of coordination, monitoring and implementation of Democracy Clubs.
- 10.2. The Dzongkhag Election Offices shall provide all the necessary coordination and assistance to the implementation of Democracy Clubs in their respective Dzongkhags and, from time to time, support the Democracy Clubs in implementing their activities.

11. Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation

- 11.1. The Club Coordinator will be required to submit a

Comprehensive Report on the activities carried out and its impact on the Club members and students in general.

11.2. The Dzongkhag Election Offices will be required to monitor the implementation of activities of the Democracy Clubs under their Dzongkhags.

11.3. The Electoral Education and Training Division shall conduct an annual monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the Democracy Club through Questionnaire Surveys and other means.

Done under the seal of the Election Commission of Bhutan on this
.....Year in the Bhutanese Calendar.

Election Commissioner

Election Commissioner

Chief Election Commissioner