Re-calibrating Possibilities in Bhutan
Talk by Dorji Wangchuk, London

On November 14, Dorji Wangchuk gave a talk to the members of our Society on Re-calibrating Possibilities in Bhutan. Drawing on narratives and observations from the recently concluded Bhutan’s second parliamentary elections, he discussed the changing expectations of the Bhutanese people and the lessons learnt in the last five years. He highlighted the milestones and achievements during the last decade on the democratic and development path. The speaker analysed the biggest institutional, economic and social challenges ahead for Bhutan and its people. He closed with “There are challenges, but they are not insurmountable”. Dorji Wangchuk’s very interesting, critical and nevertheless optimistic presentation was followed by a discussion. You can find the summary of the talk and the presentation on the SSB website (http://www.bhutan-switzerland.org/pages/downloads.htm)

Dorji Wangchuk has been working in London for three years as a manager in Financial Services Advisory. He is a consultant and advises businesses on strategy and on regulatory reform. He studied engineering in India and worked for 4 years with the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement for the Standards and Quality Control Authority. His responsibility was to develop standards for the construction industry and monitor the quality of construction. Dorji Wangchuk has an MBA from the University of Cambridge.

On November 29th, the Hon. Speaker Jigme Zangpo hosted a dinner for Marianne Frei at the Folk Heritage Museum Restaurant in Thimphu.

On Dezember 5th, the Foreign Secretary Yeshey Dorji met with Marianne Frei, Dr Françoise Pommaret, President of Les Amis du Bhoutan, France, and Michael Rutland OBE, Chairman of the UK Bhutan Society, to discuss matters pertaining to the European Friendship Associations and their link to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Upcoming events 2013
The General Assembly of the Society Switzerland-Bhutan will be held on March 15, 2014, in Zurich. Please make a note of the date in your diary! The invitation including venue, agenda and social programme will be sent out in February.

Bhutan Panel: Bhutan: migrations, transformations and transitions at the 23rd European Conference on South Asian Studies University of Zurich (Switzerland) 23 to 26 July 2014 http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easas/ecsas2014/panels.php?PanelID=2471

Lecture by Dr Francoise Pommaret
Tuesday, February 18, 2014
The Bern Linguistics Institute and the Society Switzerland-Bhutan will host a lecture by Dr Françoise Pommaret on the topic “Lama or monk? Religious semantic categories of Buddhism in Bhutan”. The event will take place on February 18, 2014 at Unitobler in Berne. For details please go to the SSB website.

SSB Activities
Excursion to the Tibetan Monastic Institute in Rikon
by Silvia Hansel
On August 30, a sunny Saturday morning, some thirty members of the Society met at Rikon station, arriving by car and by train for the SSB’s annual excursion. A short drive through the woods and the grounds of the Kuhn-Rikon AG took us to the Tibetan Monastic Institute, located above the town at the edge of a small valley.

We were welcomed by the managing director and curator of the Institute, Mr Philip Hepp, who proceeded to give us not only an interesting talk about the institute itself, but also a concise and lucid description of Buddhism.

The Institute was founded in 1961 to answer to the necessities of a growing number of Tibetan refugees in Switzerland. With the financial support of the owners of Kuhn-Rikon AG, and under the patronage of H.H. the Dalai Lama, architect Ueli Flück from Baden designed and erected a building which complied both with the constraints of a Buddhist monastery and the requirements of the Swiss authorities.

The complex includes a temple, several monks’ cells, and an apartment reserved for H.H. the Dalai Lama, whose last visit took place in April 2013. Today, the monastery houses 7 monks and an Abbot, who provides religious services to Switzerland’s Tibetan Buddhist community, and is in charge of the library housed in a small annex added in 1993 above the main building.

With over 12'000 titles on Tibetology, the library is one of the most important of this kind. It is affiliated to the IDS Information Network of the University of Zürich. We did not visit it, instead walked through the fields below the Institute to the stupa built at the edge of the woods.

Here, Mr. Hepp continued his lecture on Buddhist religion and its symbolism. After a short break, the last part of his talk was then delivered in the monastery’s temple, which houses a shrine to the historical Buddha
Shakayamuni and the traditional throne reserved for H.H. the Dalai Lama.

The rev. Abbot Geshe Thypten Legmen followed Mr Hepp and, after giving us a short lecture on the main types of meditation and their importance for Buddhist practice, led a two-minute meditation. Several members purchased publications, which is another of the Institute’s activities. This concluded our visit to the Institute.

We then drove to the Gasthof Gyrenbad in Turbental. The Gyrenbad, a listed building, goes back a long time; the location is already mentioned in the 14th century. Although it does not have a hot spring of its own, thermal bathing with water heated locally began in the 17th century and carried on over the station's heyday around 1900. Placed very attractively on top of a sloped clearing and surrounded by woods, it is now a restaurant-hotel renowned for its interesting, well-kept interiors and regional food cooked with much dedication by the third-generation owners.

There we reassembled on the sunny patio and enjoyed an apéro, courtesy of the SSB. After the formal welcome spoken by Marianne Frei and Rosemarie Frey, Werner Külling reported on his recent trip to Bhutan, in particular about the results of the elections held at the end of July. A leisurely lunch was held in one of the private rooms of the restaurant.

Gyrenbad is a starting point for many attractive walking tours, and those guests who did not have to leave right after lunch took part in a tour to Schauenberg and back, thus rounding off a perfectly pleasant day.

(more pictures on our homepage http://www.bhutan-switzerland.org/pages/m_excursion-13.htm)

---

**Switzerland-Bhutan Society’s transit into the social network.**

by Dragyel Tenzin Dorjee

In July, visiting the SSB website, with the upcoming events that I saw, I found it effective to have a society group on Facebook, where members could start sharing events and happenings. And here is how the society grasped at the chance to go on Facebook!

It all happened after the fruitful meeting of society members gathered at the Zurich University of Teacher Education (PH Zurich) on a warm evening on the 8th of July.

Discussions ran from the society’s plans, to projects and to social networks in full energy from the members. All excited and brainstorming of how to make the society go active on the internet, the members kept on throwing critics and advantages. After much discussion, the meeting unanimously decided on having a Facebook account.

After the meeting we were invited to a wonderful dinner in Zurich, and with the voluntary keynote that I had addressed to the meeting for starting a society Facebook account, I sat down in the train heading home to Baar-Zug from Zurich. And that is when the Facebook account started to take shape. Amidst the blessings of technology, at the press of my thumb, I started to create the Facebook
account on my mobile: “sometimes technology can be fascinating!” Before I got home, which takes me around 25 minutes, I was already done creating the account. Waiting for an occasion to launch the Facebook account, on the 1st of August coinciding with the national day of Switzerland and the Annual General Meeting of BSS in Thimphu, I activated the SSB Facebook account, flooding it with pictures and short clips of the celebration. With many temptations, the account started to get friends requests.

https://www.facebook.com/groups/societyswissbhutan/

Activity by SSB and BSS
Fund Raising Campaign „School Children Programme“
Status Report
By Patrick Vogel, Member of the Board
Photos by Namgyel Tshering, BSS

First of all, thank you very much for the donations you have provided! Since the beginning of our fund raising campaign in September 2013, we could accumulate more than 16000 CHF to support the School Children Programme. That makes us feel confident to reach the goal of 18000 CHF by the end of the year 2013, as pronounced at the General Assembly in March 2013.

With all the funds dedicated to this programme, a total of 520 students directly benefited from this support in 2013. It is therefore the intention of both societies to continue the programme in the near future and access additional sources for funding, outside the SSB (e.g. foundations, other private organisations, communities in Switzerland etc.)

Welcome address by Principal Tashibi Primary School, Mr. Tshering

Our commitment to further develop this initiative is well expressed in the words of the principal Mr. Tshering from the Tashibi Primary School «We will make sure that the children get maximum satisfaction from your generous contribution. Transparency and accountability is our top priority for this project».

### Schools supported, Time period, CHF, Financial support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools supported</th>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>CHF</th>
<th>Financial support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tradijong (Zhemgang)</td>
<td>2011-2013</td>
<td>10’000</td>
<td>Secured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barpong (Zhemgang)</td>
<td>2012-2014</td>
<td>7’000</td>
<td>Secured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tashibi (Zhemgang)</td>
<td>2013-2015</td>
<td>10’000</td>
<td>Secured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kagtong (Zhemgang)</td>
<td>2013-2015</td>
<td>10’000</td>
<td>Partly secured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaragla (Mongar)</td>
<td>2013-2015</td>
<td>8’000</td>
<td>Secured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurme (Mongar)</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>6’500</td>
<td>Secured</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the allocated funds we are able to assist the schools in Yaragla (3 years support), Jurme (1 year support) and Kagtong (1st year). All of them are in very remote areas and – by Bhutanese definition – in some of the poorest regions of the country.
New SSB Members

By Julia Menk, Member of the Board

Twelve new members joined the Society Switzerland Bhutan during the last couple of months. We are very happy to see our Society grow and become more and more cross-linked and tightened to Bhutan related topics thanks to you all. So in the name of SSB we would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new members:

- Anna & Bendicht Schluep, Pieterlen
- Hansruedi Pfeiffer, Thimphu
- Regula Hanimann, Horgen
- Silvia & Jürg Zollikofer, Ossingen
- Helene & Hubert Menk Lombard, Stein am Rhein
- Françoise Uldry, Hergiswil
- Federico & Federica Romanelli Montarosolo Abaterusso, Randogne
- Urs Egger, Zürich

We are looking forward to meeting you all at the General Assembly on March 15 to toast to an interesting, long lasting mutual friendship. Tashi delek!

Obituary to a big friend of Bhutan

The SSB-member Peter E. Maurer, Brig, died at the age of 74

by Werner Külling

It was already planned that he would again travel to Bhutan in November 2013, together with the former Mechanical Workshop Manager of Bumthang, Fritz Loppacher. Both of them were invited by the former planning Minister, Lyonpo Chenkyab Dorji and other Government representatives of Bhutan, to do a first draft for a planning study for an eventual railway project from Phuntsholing to Thimphu. The study tour was already scheduled one year before when Peter Maurer had to be hospitalized for a cancer operation, from which he recovered successfully. But then, all of a sudden, on July 26th, 2013, a heart-attack brought to an end the interesting and challenging life of the friendly, open-minded, retired, but still energetic and active former Railway- and Transport Engineer from the Furka-Oberland-Bahn (FO), residing since many years in Brig / VS.

The Bernese Peter Maurer studied Mechanical Engineering and worked first for the Nestlé Company in Vevey. In 1967 he was engaged by the Furka-Oberland-Bahn where he ran through a very multifarious professional career promoting him to the demanding job of the Technical Director of the railway company, merging in January 2003 with the Matterhorn-Gotthard-Bahn in the frame of the BVZ Holding.

The defunct Peter Maurer visited the Himalayan Kingdom Bhutan six times for different consulting missions in the transport and traffic sector. During his first assignment in 1971, engaged by the famous ‘Switzerland-Bhutan development promoter’ Fritz von Schulthess (Foundation pro Bhutan) – a close friend of the 3rd Druk Gyalpo, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck – he worked there for four months during a granted leave from his employer FO. It goes without saying that his technical knowledge was a big asset for the first steps the country undertook for a sustainable development in the transport and traffic sector. He was also an important Consulting Engineer for the technical back services here in Switzerland and gave advise for the purchase of technical equipment and preparation support for new Swiss collaborators and many of their Bhutanese counterparts who visited our country for further training and relevant professional contacts.

With his unexpected death the country and the people of Bhutan have lost a big friend and supporter in the first decades of opening from the splendid isolation and on the way to modern and sustainable development. The Society Switzerland-Bhutan thanks him for his long-standing fidelity and faithfulness and the solidarity he has always proven for Druk Yul, the country of the peaceful thunder dragon. May he rest in peace.
Parliamentarian Delegation from Bhutan visiting Switzerland

By Werner Külling, Member of the Board

The main reason of the trip to Switzerland of the Bhutanese Parliamentarian Delegation was to attend the General Assembly of the International Parliamentarian Union (IPU) in Geneva, which took place from October 5th – 9th, 2013. The Delegation was composed of the newly elected National Assembly and National Council members of Parliament (MP)

- Dasho Jigme Zangpo, Hon. Speaker of the National Assembly
- Tshewang Jurmi, Chairman Foreign Affairs Committee, National Assembly
- Tshering Dorji, Dy Chairman of the National Council
- Ms Tashi Wangmo, Chairperson, Good Governance, National Council
- Ms Karma Damcho Nidup, Member Public Accounts Committee, National Council
- Kinzang Wangdi, Secretary General, National Assembly / Parliament of Bhutan

Since a few of them were already in contact with development projects of HELVETAS / SDC in Bhutan or even collaborators in the fields of Education or RNR (Renewable Natural Resources), an additional contact program was arranged for them by HELVETAS, SDC and the Society Switzerland-Bhutan SSB.

The group arrived from Geneva in Zürich on October 10th and visited first the Cantonal Parliament of Zürich, followed by contacts and discussions with the Bureau of the Parliament of the Canton Zurich (Kantonsrat) to learn about the Swiss federalist cantonal governance system. They were also received by the Minister of the Security Department of the Canton of Zürich, Mario Fehr, a longstanding friend of Bhutan, for an information about security measures which could be implemented in their country. On October 11th, a presentation was given at the HELVETAS head office about the development strategy of the organisation and ongoing projects in Bhutan.

Then, the delegation transferred by train to Berne, where it was received by the former Federal Chancellor Annemarie Huber-Hotz and collaborators of SDC for a visit of the Federal Palace and the two chambers of the Swiss Federal Parliament. Members of the Council of States (Ständerat) and the National Council (Nationalrat) were involved in an information-round about the functioning of the Swiss parliamentarian system. It followed a visit at the Swiss Red Cross (SRC) Headquarters in Berne with an interesting presentation of the activities of the NGO. The possibility of creation of a Bhutanese Red Cross Society was discussed which could get assistance from SRC and international Red Cross Associations.

On October 12th a sight seeing tour was organised in the City of Zürich and a boat ride on the lake of Zürich. In the evening, the group was invited by the Society Switzerland-Bhutan SSB for a visit and a dinner in the historic small town Kyburg near Winterthur, where the Parliamentarians could meet a
News from Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Bhutan
by Hansruedi Pfeiffer, Country Director, Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Bhutan

After 30 years of work with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), mostly related to South Asian countries (Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), I joined Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation for the position of a country director of Bhutan in August 2013.

I find it extremely interesting to work for an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) such as Helvetas. Our team benefits a lot from a long-standing and cordial relationship of Helvetas with Bhutanese partners and personalities up to the highest echelons of governmental and non-governmental institutions. The reputation and appreciation of Switzerland’s contribution (much of Helvetas’ work has been funded by SDC, and Helvetas represented SDC) to Bhutan’s development has been outstandingly high. The recent opening of an SDC office in Thimphu, however, is not without dysfunctions for the Swiss aid to Bhutan, and from my personal perspective and experience with both SDC and Helvetas I would have wished that a wider vision and perspective of a Swiss presence in Bhutan would have found a way to continue the unique and cost-effective model of an INGO representing the Swiss development cooperation in Bhutan.

The main objective of the work of my team is to continue to make an effective contribution to Bhutan’s development. Our project portfolio includes partnerships in the fields of general and vocational education, rural economic development (including the promotion of community forestry and agricultural value chains) and decentralisation and local governance, that is strengthening the autonomy and competencies of districts, “communes” and civil society organisations. We have also been facilitating the work of a growing number of personal initiatives of friends of Bhutan in quite a wide field of themes, such as health, archaeology, to mention only two.

Our main challenge is to maintain and strengthen a focused programme in the three fields of our core competencies mentioned: education, rural economic development and decentralisation and strengthening civil society organisations. Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation needs to do this in a cost effective manner, demonstrating that it does add value with its contributions and presence. Only if we continue to succeed in this a continued presence and today’s operational infrastructure will be justified for some more years beyond 2017.
News from Bhutan-Switzerland Society (BSS)

by Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji, President

4th Annual General Meeting of BSS

The 4th Annual General Meeting of BSS took place on August 1st, 2013, at the SDC Office premises in Thimphu. After the Society’s official agenda of the day, the President was invited to deliver a speech on the occasion of the 722nd Swiss National day. The many levels of cooperation between the two countries were highlighted. A deep gratitude to the people and government of Switzerland was expressed for all that Bhutan has / continues to benefit from this relationship.

(the whole text of the address on our homepage: http://www.bhutan-switzerland.org/pages/druk.htm under the rubric bhutan-switzerland society (bss)

Generous Donation by SSB to Trust Fund of Mongar Alumni Association (AMA) by Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji, President BSS

The generous contribution of CHF 5,000.00 by the Society Switzerland-Bhutan to the Association of Mongar Alumni (AMA), an association of former students of Mongar Higher Secondary School, has been received with much appreciation and relief. The Executive Committee of AMA met on 15 October 2013 to discuss and decide on its utilization on a sustainable basis through proper investment by creating a trust fund. The meeting decided to preserve the capital amount and use its annual investment income to finance its annual activities particularly the recognition certificates and incentives to students and teachers for their outstanding performances, prizes for annual debate competition in English and Dzongkha, and reasonable amount of financial support to poor students.

AMA was founded in 2009, the golden jubilee year of the school, by mostly the first group of students who enrolled in 1959 when the school was established by the 3rd King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. During the golden jubilee celebrations on 21 May 2009, AMA had made commitments to support the annual activities of the school to enhance quality of education, and to support children of poor parents through annual financial support for purchase of uniform and stationeries since Mongar is one of the least developed Dzongkhas with many Gewogs being remote and inaccessible by road. However, AMA was faced with a funding crunch and, as a result, it could not continue its annual commitments to the school.

The Executive Committee of AMA acknowledged that SSB had come to the rescue of AMA which was in a deathbed, and given it not only a second life but a very long life. AMA strongly believes in the importance of education not only for the future of the children of the poor farmers but also for the bright future of the people of Bhutan. So, SSB’s generous contribution will not go in vain. It is, in fact, a long term investment for a very good cause.

AMA is going to hold its Annual General Meeting on 17 December 2013 at the NRDCL conference hall when the generous contribution from SSB/BSS shall also be acknowledged.
During the last one and a half years an Urban Planning Team (Amt für Städtebau) of the City of Zurich supported a team of urban planners in Thimphu with the drawing up of a Master Plan for Bumthang Valley. The aim of the plan is to facilitate moderate, structured growth and, at the same time, to protect the invaluable cultural assets and natural resources of the valley.

To mark the successful project end, a delegation from Zurich including Mayor Corine Mauch and City Councilor André Odermatt travelled to Bhutan in October this year, in order to officially hand over the Master Plan to the Minister of Works and Human Settlement.

This exceptional collaboration started with the contacts established alongside the exhibition shown in the Rietberg Museum in 2010, called “Bhutan – Sacred Art from the Himalayas”, from which a regular, intercultural exchange arose. In 2011, the then Minister of Agriculture and Forests in Bhutan, Dr. Pema Gyamtsho, requested support from Switzerland for the preservation of cultural assets in his country. In June 2012 a delegation from the City of Zurich encompassing Patrick Gmür, Birgit Kurz (both Amt für Städtebau) and Albert Lutz (Museum Rietberg) travelled to Bhutan to explore the needs and possibilities of such collaboration. In ensuing discussions with politicians, planners and local representatives, the necessity for a spatial development plan for the Bumthang Valley emerged.

The Plan was started as a joint project between the Bumthang Dzongkhag Administration and the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement who provided technical expertise and support. A planning team with Birgit Kurz and Christoph Durban from the Structural Engineering Department of the City of Zurich has then supported Bhutan with the preparation of the Master Plan. They travelled to Bhutan to collect data and impressions of the location, but also organized several workshops with technical experts in Switzerland who have contributed much knowledge and valuable input. In depth analyses were executed of the topography, hazard zones, spiritual and cultural landscape, archeology and land use, as well as records of the traffic and road system, settlement structure and housing typologies. Two student classes from the University of Applied Sciences and Arts (FHNW), Basel, also visited Bumthang Valley, and their analyses of traditional housing forms were integrated in the plan. Ugyen M. Tenzing, the Senior Planner who led the project in Thimphu, visited Zurich twice in order to participate

Handover of the Master Plan: from left to right Mr. Kinzang Norbu (Director of Department of Human Settlement), Lyonpo Dorji Choden (Minister for Works and Human Settlement), André Odermatt (City Councillor), Ms Corine Mauch (Mayor of Zurich) and Patrick Gmür (Director of the Structural Engineering Department)

The goal of the Master Plan is to stop uncontrolled settlement and accommodate and facilitate the anticipated future population growth. A new planning approach was adopted in Bumthang on a pilot basis wherein the entire valley was included in the planning boundary, thus serving to promote integrated planning.

Pictures after the handover ceremony in Bumthang with Dzongkhag Officials and the Swiss Delegation

Group picture after the handover ceremony in Bumthang with Dzongkhag Officials and the Swiss Delegation
Once upon a time ...

Vor 47 Jahren als Tierarzt in Bhutan auf Bandwurmjagd
Jürg Eberle


47 years ago as a veterinarian in Bhutan on tapeworm hunting
by Jürg Eberle / Translation by Erik Allgoewer

One day in 1966, during my last semester as a student of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Zurich, in the section of the local pathological institute with Professor Stünzi holding class, unexpectedly the then King of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, appeared accompanied by his personal physician, Dr Tobgyel. They brought with them a skull of a deceased Yak calf. The king was highly concerned about the fact that lately many young yaks in Bhutan had been suffering from a painful movement disorder dying with signs of great suffering. The aim of his visit to the veterinary hospital was to find a diagnosis of this condition. On the other hand, the King asked for help to fight this costly disease. The examination of the brain immediately allowed for a clear diagnosis: The cause was...


(Inv. med. vet. Jürg Eberle, CH-3257 Grossaffoltern, juerg.eberle@bluewin.ch)

For the investigation of yak herds, I always followed the same routine: interrogation of the shepherds about losses, examination of sick animals, eventually emergency slaughtering in order to examine the brains. The Zurich-diagnosis was confirmed in all herds. The interrogation of the shepherds showed that usually they gave the brains of the dead animals to their dogs. Therefore the vicious, infectious cycle continued. After a while word got out that there was a man in the country asking the shepherds about their attitude with dead young yaks. All of a sudden, supposedly nobody had given the yak brains to their dogs! However, intensive interrogation turned up the truth.

In order to prove the vicious cycle, I dewormed several of the shepherds’ dogs. They had to stay tethered nearby until they emptied their bowels. And indeed, a large amount of worms were expelled, including the sought for multiceps multiceps. Now proof of the whole disease cycle was provided. Thereafter I developed a containment strategy by informing the shepherds about this tapeworm cycle, and in the following months, all their dogs had to be dewormed several times. I drew up a picture of the cycle, and we tried to distribute this document widely. My companion Dorji Tenzing wrote the explanatory text in the national language. He was then charged with planning and monitoring the deworming campaigns. Back in Switzerland, I helped to purchase the correct deworming medicine. Some time after my work in Bhutan, I learned that some shepherds were surprised about the fact that the dogs rather than the yaks were treated, despite the fact that the yaks were sick!

And don’t forget!

Under the heading “Once upon a time …” the SSB Newsletter invites readers to look back on past experiences in the Bhutanese context. Contributions to this rubric from members of SSB and BSS, as well as the wider circle of readers of the Newsletter are most welcome! The articles may be written in any of the three Swiss languages or in English; the publication will be bilingual or English only.
Meeting Point
Interview
By Otto Stern (OST)
This interview presents Thinley Lhamo, Civil Engineer

Thinley Lhamo (27), from Thimphu, is actually studying in a Masters’ graduate program on Tunnelling at the EPFL Lausanne and ETH Zurich. The interview took place on Nov. 4, 2013.

Thinley: I’ve been born and brought up in Thimphu; my parents are from eastern Bhutan, Tashigang. I have five brothers and sisters, I’m the second youngest and third daughter. I’ve done my bachelor of Civil Engineering at the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Hamirpur in Himachal Pradesh, India. Civil Engineering covers everything from transportation infrastructures to buildings, we even studied irrigation, and I had a basic course on geology and some Structural Engineering as well (Structural Engineering is dealing with the analysis and design of structures that support or resist loads).

After my bachelor I’ve been selected and I’m still working for Druk Green Power Corp. in Thimphu, it’s a Bhutanese Hydropower company; I’ve been working there since October 2008, right after my graduation. I am married, and my husband is also an engineer; he is working in the same company, but far away from me; he is in a project in Dagana, in the south.

Initially, for six months, I was working in the Hydropower plant, where I was given responsibility to oversee the civil works; but after six months I’ve been transferred to the Corporate Office in the capital; there I’ve been mainly working on how to go from conception to construction, and was mainly responsible for the geotechnical and the geological aspects of the projects. Then, my company was very generous, and I’ve been awarded a scholarship to do my Master’s in Tunnelling.

Now, I’ve been here in Switzerland since January 2013, so it’s almost eleven months; first I was at the EPFL in Lausanne, Laboratory for Rock Mechanics. My course was divided into modules; I finished three modules in Lausanne, and now I’m at the ETH in Zurich, Institute for Geotechnic, in my fourth module for which I’m working on a thesis.

OST: How did you get to Switzerland?
Thinley: Since I’ve been awarded the scholarship from my company, I was looking around for a university giving courses in tunnelling; I looked all over the world, I checked in Canada, the US, New Zealand, Australia, Europe; finally I came down to three universities, one in U.K., one in New Zealand, and one in Australia, but I was not aware of Switzerland, because when I was browsing the internet I did not get much out of Switzerland. Luckily I met somebody who recommended me about Switzerland, so when I checked the course I felt it was better than the other three; that’s how I got here.

OST: And why specifically Tunnelling?
Thinley: Actually in Bhutan we have very little in-house capacity of geotechnical experts, so the company opened a slot for this particular subject and offered a scholarship in Tunnelling. It fit exactly my particular interest, because I was already working for the geotechnical and geological aspects which are very much related to tunnelling, and so I got it.

OST: Once you had decided to come to Switzerland how did you proceed?
Thinley: First I got in contact with EPFL and they gave me the coordinates of the department and the person responsible for that. They asked me to send my CV and my certificates and everything, so they could check whether I met the necessary criteria; and finally I got the letter of acceptance for a master of advanced studies; that is how I came here.

OST: What are the modules you have chosen about?
Thinley: The first module gave us an introduction on the basics of soil and rock mechanics, so that when we moved to the second module we were not lost. In the second module we were given in-depth studies in rock mechanics, the geological aspects, how the tunnelling is done, and what kind of investigations are carried out; it’s everything from conception to operation and maintenance. In the third module we were given a project, a group work; my group did a project on a railway tunnel, and from there we got hands on how all this works in reality, we had to apply what we had studied in class. We did quite a few number of site visits, like the Hagerbach Test Mine in Flums/Sargans, then the Ceneri Base Tunnel, where they even showed us on the spot how the
blasting is done; a very interesting and great experience. It was all very relevant to the type of work I was doing at the company.

**OST:** And what kind of module are you doing here at the ETH in Zurich?

**Thinley:** It is my last module, and I have to write a report on what I’m studying; I’m doing a study on the optimization of pillar spacing and the stability of the rock support; pillar spacing means how much rock support is needed between two tunnels; that is how much space is needed for that; if it is too close we have to provide more support, and the question is whether this is economically feasible; if they are more apart, the rock support increases, but again there is more space needed for the bypass and the tunnel will become longer, which means again economically a problem; so we have to optimize both the cost and the construction technic.

For this module we had to choose our topics, and I have chosen a Numerical Analysis. For a tunnelling project you have to analyse the stability of the rock of a mountain; whether it is feasible or not to carve inside a particular rock; there are certain methods by which we can calculate that, and the numeric analysis is one of these methods; for this method there is a certain kind of software; right now we are using a two-dimensional software called “Phase two”; I input all the geological and geometrical data of the project, and based on the results I’m going to analyse whether it is feasible or not.

There are companies offering their supervision for a topic that meets their field. Two of us got a supervisor in a company here in Zurich, specialised in underground constructions; the company is Amberg Engineering; the Amberg Group consists of three companies: Amberg Engineering, Amberg Technologies and the Hagerbach Test Gallery (www.amberg.ch). They are also involved in the Gotthard base tunnel, the world’s deepest railway tunnel constructed to date (cf. www.alptransit.ch ).

**OST:** How many people are working together in a group?

**Thinley:** Four of us are working together, all with different backgrounds. The whole class of 16 in total is composed of people from eleven different countries, and I’m the only woman! In my group there is one Swiss, one from Pakistan, and one from China.

**OST:** It’s still not very common that women are studying in this field; how come you got interested in tunnelling?

**Thinley:** I think it was some kind of a fate. As I already mentioned, I was working for six months in the Hydropower Plant, then I was transferred to the Corporate Office where I got to interact with experts from Norway. I was nominated to work with them as a counterpart for a feasibility study and project recommendations. So, when I saw how they were studying the rocks, analysing everything, and saying what is feasible and what not, I was quite taken aback and I got very much interested. That’s how my interest in geology developed. And because in my office they support the build-up of individual capacity, I told my boss that I’m interested in geotechnic, and that’s how I’ve been settled as geotechnical engineer in my company.

**OST:** But even the profession of civil engineering is not common among women in Bhutan; how about that choice in the first place?

**Thinley:** (laughs) actually my first interest was in psychology! After class twelve I was selected for a scholarship, but there was only one slot for psychology, and my marks were a few per cent behind the one who got it, so it was quite unfortunate for me; but my second choice was civil engineering. I got interested in it mainly because of all the buildings coming up in Thimphu, and especially when I watched the movies where you can see all these very nice buildings and very nice designs; that’s how I became interested.

**OST:** And how do you get along in Switzerland, and where are you living here in Zurich?

**Thinley:** I’m living in Dielsdorf with a Bhutanese family; in Lausanne I rented a room with a Swiss family, it was near the lake and a beautiful summer there; unfortunately I don’t know how to swim, but it was very nice to walk around. I like everything here; it’s quite easy to get along; apart from the language I don’t find anything difficult here; life is very easy, especially travelling; I’ve been quite active visiting around; I’m quite a hiker, so I went around hiking; in the mountains scenes are very breathtaking; I’ve been to Zermatt and I saw the Matterhorn; I’ve also been to the Aletsch glacier, the largest in the Alps and the longest in Europe.

**OST:** And what are your plans for the future?

**Thinley:** I will return to Bhutan and continue my work in the company and what I was doing before; I’m planning to work on the construction sites to gain more experience; this will be good for shaping my future carrier.

**OST:** After finishing your Master’s, will you immediately return to your company?
**Thinley:** Not immediately, because, again, I got an extension for six months! I got an internship offer from a German company starting from January till the end of June. The company is Herrenknecht AG located in a place called Schwanau, near Freiburg, one of the top companies world wide in mechanized tunnelling technology (www.herrenknecht.com), such as tunnel boring machines; they offered me to work for three months in their manufacturing plant in Schwanau, and then three months in Singapore at a construction site. I’m very interested in this because it’s a mechanized method. In Bhutan we only use the drilling – blast method; it’s important for me to get familiar with this new kind of method, because we have plans to also use mechanized tunnelling in future. Mechanized tunnelling means we use mainly machines, and not explosives; these big drilling-machines just rotate and with their “teeth” they cut the rock. In the drilling – blast method, as it says, you first drill holes, then fill the wholes with explosives and then blast the rock. Herrenknecht in Schwanau is manufacturing these huge drilling machines for mechanized tunnelling. With them I will manly deal with the geotechnical aspects of how mechanized tunnelling is done. They already have given a presentation of this method to my company in Bhutan; they are interested to come to Bhutan. – So, I’ll be going to Germany soon!

**Ost:** Thank you very much for the interview!

---

**And don’t forget!**

Under the heading **“Meeting Point”** the SSB Newsletter regularly features interviews with Bhutanese and Swiss people working, studying and visiting in the respective host country. It will give insight in the experiences and activities of Bhutanese and Swiss people in contact.

Contributions to this rubric from members of SSB and BSS, as well as the circle of readers of the Newsletter are most welcome!