News from SSB

By Marianne Frei, President

To celebrate the 60th birth anniversary of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Honourable Prime Minister of Bhutan, Lyonchen Tshering Tobgay launched the “Events Calendar” Brochure. This brochure will serve as information guide to all the events happening throughout Bhutan all year round. The following link will lead to the brochure:
http://www.visitbhutanyear.com/

On this new website “Visit Bhutan 2015”, we can read: „Bhutan has declared 2015 as a Visit Bhutan Year to commemorate the 60th birth anniversary of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the beloved 4th King. A figure loved and revered by all Bhutanese, it is an occasion where the country comes together to celebrate 60 years of a life spent in the service of the nation and its people“.

On October 23, members and guests of the SSB met at the Bern Linguistics Institute for the screening of the documentary “Made in Bhutan” by Hirondelle Chatelard. Dorji Tashi, Executive Director of Loden Foundation, came all the way from London to introduce the special topic (see visitors p. 2). The documentary portrays the emergence of entrepreneurship in Bhutan. The private sector in Bhutan is still at a nascent stage, and entrepreneurship in particular is fragile. Youth unemployment is one of the major concerns in Bhutan. For quite some time, Loden Foundation is successfully promoting innovative enterprises particularly amongst the youth in the country. The documentary showed some very convincing examples.

The screening of the documentary was followed by a lively panel discussion moderated by Dr. Hugo Bigi. The panelists (from l. to r.) Franz Gähwiler, Dorji Tashi, Gyamtsho Tshering and Charles E. Huber were discussing the topic of entrepreneurship and its challenges. They all contributed with their different perspectives and backgrounds to a deeper understanding of the topic.

We felt especially honoured to have Lyonpo Yeshey Dorji, Minister of Agriculture, and his delegation kindly grace the event. Officials from the Embassy in Geneva also attended the programme. The evening concluded with an apéro offered by the Society which gave us a good chance for meeting friends and sharing news and ideas.

In September 2014, NZZ Format presented on Swiss television an excellent documentary about Bhutan “Bhutan – Königreich im Himalaya”. If you have missed the programme, you can download it here:

General Assembly 2015

2015 is coming up fast. On March 21, 2015 we will conduct our General Assembly in St.Gallen at the Swiss Federal Administrative Court (Bundesverwaltungsgericht) which has a partnership in Judiciary with Bhutan. By next spring, 6 Bhutanese will be staying in St.Gallen to achieve a master in international law (see also p. 4, and interview, p. 10). We will inform you on our website as soon as possible about the programme.

New SSB Members

By Julia Menk, Member of the Board

Since June, 13 persons joined the Society Switzerland Bhutan. We are very pleased to welcome the following new members:
• Bernhard, Stephanie & Nicolas Metzger, Lufingen
• Federica & Federico Romanelli Montarsolo Abaterusso, Randogne
• Heinz Entzeroth, Zürich
• Jan Vankrunkelsven, Dübendorf
• Mara Arizaga & Paul Faller, Genève
• Noemi & Simon Löw-Tamm, Baden
• Walo Bertschinger, Dietikon
• Yvonne Strässle, Zürich

Next year again, there will be several interesting and enjoyable opportunities to meet new and old society members. We are looking forward to see you all during one of these upcoming events. Until then we wish you a peaceful end of the year 2014 and a joyful and prosperous 2015.

Tashi delek!
Visitors from Bhutan in Switzerland

Visitors from Bhutan in Switzerland and guests of the Society Switzerland – Bhutan

By E. Werner Külling, Member of the SSB Board

Since May till November 2014, again a good number of Bhutanese citizens visited Switzerland, and were partly guests of the Society Switzerland-Bhutan, Helvetas, Swiss Intercooperation, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, Swiss Health Management Support Committee SHMSC, Bhutan Middle Management Hotel Programme BMMHP, and private individuals.

Mr. Chhimmi Dorji and wife Sangay: Programme Officer at the Helvetas Office Thimphu, in charge for agricultural and forestry projects (end of May 2014)

Dr. Man Kumar Rai and wife Uma: Former Director of Livestock Dept., Ministry of Agriculture in Thimphu and previous Member of the National Council of Bhutan (end of June 2014)

Aum Anu Chetri: wife of Dr. Saamdu Chetri, previous Dy. Coordinator Helvetas Bhutan / now GNH Executive Director, together with Mrs. Choeki, GNH Thimphu (beginning of July)

Aum Karma Choden, Admin. Officer Wangdi-choling Hospital Bumthang, and husband Mr. Pasang Thinley (Research Agric. Farm Bumthang): (12th–28th August 2014)

Hon. Tashi Dorji: Member of the National Council of Bhutan, Health Comm. – contact SHMSC (17th–19th October 2014)

Mr. Dorji Tashi: Executive Director Loden Foundation, Thimphu/London: Film presentation “Made in Bhutan” and Panel Discussion in Bern, and visits in Zürich & Geneva (22nd–25th October 2014)


Mr. Karma Dukpa and Mr. Narayana Pradhan: CEO & Technical Manager, NRDCL Natural Resources Development Corporation Ltd. Thimphu: Study tour on forestry business projects organized by Erich Oberholzer and SDC (13th – 22nd October 2014)

Mr. Sonam Tshering: Training incharge RITH, Royal Institute for Tourism and Hospitality, Thimphu visited BMMHP (14th – 15th November 2014)

We hope that all of these Bhutanese visitors enjoyed their journeys in Switzerland.
News from BSS

Bhutan-Switzerland Society elects new board and support group members

By Kinzang Tobgyal, Secretary BSS

The newly elected Board and Support Group members BSS, with Ms. Marianne Frei, President SSB

In conjunction with the celebration of the Swiss National day on August 1st, 2014, the Bhutan Switzerland Society (BSS) also conducted its annual general meeting in the conference hall of Helvetas Swiss Inter Cooperation. The annual general meeting was attended by the members. One of the highlights of the meeting was the reelection of Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji as President of BSS, as proposed by the members of the society. The Secretary of the society, Mr. Namgyel Tshering and its Treasurer Ms. Tshewang Chenzom voluntarily resigned after serving the society for many years. In their place Mr. Kinzang Tobgyal and Mr. Ram Dorji Tamang were elected as Secretary and Treasurer respectively. Similarly the previous board members also tendered their resignation after serving for many years and in place new board members were elected.

The BSS as a society has benefitted immensely from the support, guidance and wisdom from many learned individuals, who in their capacity as a senior public official have great affiliations to individuals and institutions in Switzerland. Therefore to capitalize further on their experience, wisdom and also to nurture the society, the annual general meeting requested them to serve as a support group to which they volunteered whole heartedly. The society today comprises of the following as board and support group members.

President: Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji
Secretary: Mr. Kinzang Tobgyal
Treasurer: Mr. Ram Dorji Tamang

Board Members
i. Mr. Peter Schmid
ii. Ms. Tashi Pem
iii. Mr. Kinzang Namgay
iv. Mr. Karma Tenzin
v. Mr. Sonam Tashi
vi. Mr. Tshering Wangchuk
vii. Mr. Ugyen Dorji

Support Group Members
i. Lyonpo Pema Gyamtsho
ii. Lyonpo Chenkyab Dorji
iii. Dasho Nado Rinchen
iv. Dr. M.K. Rai
v. Ms. Pema Baumgartner
vi. Mr. Namgyel Tshering
vii. Mr. Chhimi Dorji

The BSS received further impetus and encouragement when Ms. Marianne Frei, President of the Society Switzerland-Bhutan (SSB) visited Bhutan in late August 2014. The President of the BSS, Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji on behalf of the members hosted a dinner for Ms. Marianne Frei and a successive meeting was held between Ms. Marianne Frei and the new board and support. Lyonpo Kinzang thanked Ms. Marianne Frei and the members of the SSB for their goodwill, support and generous assistance, in fact numerous small scale, yet highly beneficial projects in remote schools were supported by the Society Switzerland-Bhutan. Even at personal level Ms. Marianne Frei has been a good friend of Bhutan and its people and one can recount numerous Bhutanese hosted by her and other members of the SSB while in Switzerland.

Although relatively new, the BSS board and support group members are developing project proposals and concept notes in areas of farmers exchange programme, skills development, volunteer programmes, school nutrition, tourism and school exchange programme to name few. The basic objective of these programmes is to build a mutual and beneficial relationship between the two Societies.
Lyonpo (Dr. h.c.) Sonam Tobgye, Chief Justice of Bhutan and “Father of Druk Yul’s first Constitution”, went on retirement!

By E. Werner Külling, Member of the SSB Board

He has always been a great man of Justice, a big friend of Switzerland who admired our juridical institutions. It is therefore not astonishing that he studied since years the Swiss legal systems and sought advice and cooperation in this field, be it in drafting the first Constitution of the country, the training of young lawyers and judges, the construction of District Courts and the establishment of a juridical administration adapted to Bhutan. It is with pleasure and conviction that Switzerland always granted this important support to him and the country. I know Chief Justice Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye since my time as Secretary General of Helvetas Switzerland and later as its Resident Coordinator in Bhutan. I always enjoyed the very interesting discussions with him – the philosopher – in his garden house, and the offered broad-minded hospitality in his beautiful residence above the capital of Thimphu.

Having attained the age of 65 years on November 15th, 2014, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, first Chief Justice of Supreme Court, demitted office as per the Constitution. Born in the District of Pemagatsel and originally a teacher by profession, he began his services at the Royal Court in his District and is perhaps one of the most important offices and served under various capacities. He brought many reforms in the judicature and imbibed the traditional culture, values, etiquette and discipline in the courts and among judges. Furthermore, he was the tutor of the then Crown Prince, HRH Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck (now the 5th King of Bhutan) and other Royal Family members.

Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye became the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court on February 21st, 2010. His tenure as the President of SAARC-LAW from January 2011 to May 2014 saw the revival of this institution as a pioneer organisation for cooperation between legal luminaries of the SAARC region.

For me, the most important assignment Chief Justice Sonam Tobgye has fulfilled was the Chairmanship of the first Constitution Drafting Committee of Bhutan under the wise guidance of H.M. the 4th King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. His meaningful contribution during Druk Yul’s process of democratisation can therefore not be underestimated. He received many national and international awards, medals and recognitions, including the Order of The Druk Wangyel from H.M. the Druk Gyalpo.

Thank you very much, dear Lyonpo, for all your successful achievements! And all the best for a more quiet and a peaceful future!

Activities by SSB and BSS

Pilot Bakery project in Bjoka Primary School
(Enhancing the nutritional value of the children in a remote school)

By Kinzang Tobgyal, Secretary BSS

The Bjoka Primary School is located in Zhemgang District and is perhaps one of the most remote schools in Bhutan. Established in 1966, it currently has 145 students (70 girls and 75 boys) studying from primary to class VI. The Ministry of Education approached the Society Switzerland-Bhutan (SSB) for introduction of a bakery in the school as a pilot project to supplement nutritional intake value. Considering the need and its benefits to the children of this remote school in Bjoka, the SSB fully supported the proposed request and was very lucky to find the following donors: Paul Philipp Hug (Hug Bakery, Lucerne) and Roland & Regula Stähl.

As a part of the support, the school was provided with a baking oven, a plenary mixer and other necessary equipment. In addition, the So-
ciety also supplied all the necessary ingredients to last till the school session ends. SSB through BSS also managed to depute a trainer, Ms. Sonam Lhamo (2nd from left), for a week and was able to train 6 participants. They can now confidently make bread loaf, French bread, cake roll, carrot cake and cookies.

This initiative by the Society Switzerland-Bhutan enabled the school children to enhance their food basket by supplementing the nutritional intake, and this pilot phase has been considered highly successful. The Bjoka School on their part is planning to sustain the initiative by supplying the bread beyond the walls of their school. The school management has also offered their support in imparting their skills and knowledge with other schools, if similar projects are followed through.

Yangbari Kitchen Garden irrigation project
By Jamyang Choeda, Dungpa, Weringla

Background
Yangbari is a tiny hamlet, lying at the right bank of Kuri-Gongri river in Mongar District. The village stands at an altitude of 289m above sea level with potential for vegetable farming, if water is available.

The farmers of Yangbari are suffering from nutritional deficiency with low living standards. Therefore these 45 households requested irrigation and support in areas of vegetable cultivation not only for their own consumption but also to supplement their income.

The Project was generously funded by Annegret Reinhardt and PrimeSteps Foundation and implemented by Bhutan-Switzerland Society. It consisted of construction of a 39,200 litre reservoir tank and fitting of 5720 m High Density Polythene (HDP) water pipes and sprinklers in forty five gardens, costing about Nu.936,738.93 (CHF 16'000 approximately). With the installation of this tank, the farmers have been able to cultivate vegetables on an area of 13.74 acres (5.5 ha).

A brief survey was carried out to find about the production of vegetables from 45 households, interviewing them by going around from house to house. The total amount of production and sale of vegetables by 45 households for 2013 is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particular</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total area of vegetable gardens</td>
<td>4.67 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Vegetable produced from the gardens</td>
<td>3,393 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of vegetable bought from the market</td>
<td>601 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash earned by selling vegetables</td>
<td>Nu. 12,400.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Formation of Community Committee to manage the facility

The scheme was handed over to the community and a five member community committee was formed to manage the facility. The functions are: to coordinate among the users, frame rules and regulations, operate accounts of maintenance fund, and lead maintenance work to ensure sustainability of the project.
And last, but not least:

**10 Years of Bio Bhutan!**

By Patrick Vogel, Member of the SSB Board

The Board of SSB congratulates the Management Team of Bio Bhutan for its 10th anniversary! What started in 2003 upon an initiative of members of the SSB has become an enterprise successfully established in the market of Bio products. Many ideas of the Feasibility Study have been realised – some are still waiting. But thanks to the entrepreneurial spirit and commitment of the founder team, Karma Yangzom and Dr. Irmela Harz, and thanks to a generous financial incentive by Helvetas, Bio Bhutan stands on a solid base by today. Following the maxim “think global, act local” it has gained even global radiance and is open to the world market.

Please, Dr. Irmela Harz and Karma Yangzom, continue with your entrepreneurial spirit and let your company be an important part of Bhutan's growing organic industry. So we can continue to buy and enjoy this incredibly intensive and breath-taking lemon grass air spray!

---

**Books**

**Parlons Dzongkha**

Georges van Driem & Karma Tshering of Gaselô, Introduction by Françoise Pommaret,

*Ed. l’Harmattan (2014)*  

by Silvia Hansel

Twenty-two years after its first publication, George van Driem's seminal work on Dzongkha has been published again, this time in French. The first chapter on the various languages of Bhutan has been replaced by a very compact portrait of the country by Françoise Pommaret; the rest of the book follows the contents of van Driem's 1992 'The Grammar of Dzongkha' and of the 1998 'Dzongkha', including exercises.

The user will miss Karma Tshering's audio files, which accompany the 1998 edition and are of great help to the student.

It remains a work designed for linguists, and the casual reader will find it hard to put the knowledge to practical uses. However, the extensive explanatory passages make it possible to derive an impression of the language's structure, e.g. its syntactic composition. It's a pity, though, that the new edition did not avail itself of the chance of consolidating the vocabulary into one single section – you still have to go through each chapter's individual list when looking for a word.

**New Book:**

*The History of Bhutan*

Karma Phuntsho,  
*publ. Random House, 2013*

The first comprehensive and accurate account of Bhutan and its enigmatic past.

http://www.historyofbhutan.com

“A must-read” (Kunzang Choden)
Meeting of European Associations of Friends of Bhutan
in Middelburg, Zeeland, The Netherlands
By E. Werner Külling, Member of the SSB Board

More than 70 representatives from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Holland, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and of course of the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan participated in the bi-annual Meeting of European Associations of Friends of Bhutan which took place in the first week of October in the beautiful City of Middelburg.

It was well organised by the “Friends of Bhutan in the Netherlands” and offered an excellent information and exchange programme, including also an interesting touristic part in the area of Zeeland. The numerous Swiss delegation of the SSB was composed by Marianne Frei, Claudio Zingg, Rosmarie and Richard Frey, Otto Stern, Katharina Washington, Sabine Liebherr and Werner Külling.

The first day was dedicated to the theme “Gross National Happiness, a challenging concept from Himalayan Bhutan”. GNH measures the quality of a country in a more holistic way (than GNP = Gross National Product) and believes that the beneficial development of a human society takes place when material and spiritual development occurs side by side to complement each other. The 4th King of Bhutan, H.M. Jigme Singye Wangchuck (reigning from 1972–2006) declared GNH to be more important than GNP and therefore the country oriented its national policy and development plans towards GNH.

The former and first democratically elected Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley, as keynote speaker said at the beginning of the conference: “We have now clearly distinguished the ‘happiness’ in GNH, from the fleeting pleasurable ‘feel good’ moods so often associated with that term. We know that true abiding happiness cannot exist while others suffer, and comes only from serving others, living in harmony with nature, and realizing our innate wisdom and the true and brilliant nature of our minds”.

The other speakers, Prof. Benjamin Radcliff at Notre Dame University and Prof. Jos van Loon from the University in Gent gave their views on creating happiness from their more specific field of interest. Dorji Wangchuk, MBA Cambridge, and presently working in the financial sector in London, elaborated in the way the present Bhutanese Government is operating with the concept of GNH. The meeting was chaired by Frank Majoor, former Netherlands Ambassador to the UN and NATO, and former Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A panel discussion including the participants was followed by a reception at the University College Roosevelt and a dinner in the City of Middelburg.

“Water: A common threat and opportunity for Bhutan and The Netherlands” was the interesting subject and topic of the second conference day after an exchange of questions of common interests among the European FoB Societes.

Water has been for The Netherlands, and for the Province of Zee-
land in particular an external threat, a risk for the survival. For Bhutan water entails a natural hazard through floods and droughts, while it offers simultaneously immense opportunities for economic development through hydropower and agriculture.

Prof. Matthijs Schouten, he is often described as a nature philosopher and is also a Buddhist meditation teacher, gave an excellent exposé on “Water, Nature and Buddhism”, while the former Bhutanese Civil Engineer Dorji Wangchuk elaborated on “Hydropower: economic benefits and social impact”. He pointed out how important water power is for the development of Bhutan, but it also increases the already high economic and political dependency from the big neighbour India, and causes long term environmental damages at some project sites.

Dr. Hans van Noord, a Physical Geographer and Landscape Ecologist, looked at what hazards form a real threat in Bhutan, how they express themselves and their characteristics. He focused on a very practical danger in Bhutan: glacial lake outburst floods or GLOF, an extreme form of floods with serious impacts downstream along the river system. The efforts to mitigate this hazard are unique in the world, and an example for the whole Himalayan region.

The presentation of the film “Water in Bhutan” demonstrated with what kind of challenges Bhutan is confronted in cases of such hazards in mountainous areas.

Sjef Ernes from ‘Aqua for All’ spoke on ‘Save drinking Water and Sanitation’ and how important it is for the health of human beings, and which investments are needed to reach a safe situation in this respect. Dr. Jody de Brouwer informed about the ‘Innovative Water Management in Zeeland’ and that safeguarding the population in this Province against the hazards of water is an essential task for the Dutch Government.

In the evening, the official Representatives of the Province of Zeeland offered and served a Buffet Dinner in the Abbey where several speeches were given.

The third conference day was reserved for an excursion which included a bus trip to guided visits of projects and infrastructure in “Contemporary Water Management in Zeeland” to prevent water disasters as happened in the past, to the charming harbour city of Veere and a sailing-boat trip to an island in the Veerse Lake with a typical Dutch mussel lunch.

Our sincerest thanks go to the “the Friends of Bhutan in the Netherlands” for having so well organised the bi-annual Meeting of European Association of Friends of Bhutan. The next conference will take place in two years in Greece.

Activities of SSB Members

Rice and Religion as a road to happiness

By Sabrina Behrschmidt

I have spent 6 months in Bhutan for the completion of my Bachelor’s Thesis on the poultry sector – especially on the egg production – within the degree of International Agriculture at the University of Applied Sciences, HAFL in Zollikofen. It was my first journey to an Asian country, so I was excited and sad at the same time. Sad, because I had to leave behind my beloved ones for half an year in Switzerland, and excited, because I expected to discover many new things.
When I arrived in Bhutan in April 2014, I was overwhelmed by the impressive nature, an architectural style that was completely unknown to me and the friendly, but unfamiliar behaviour of the Bhutanese people. After a one-week stay in Thimphu, which served to get acquainted with the Helvetas-Team, I relocated to the ‘Rural Development Training Center’ (RDTC) in Zhemgang, where the main part of my Thesis was to be carried out. The mere drive to Zhemgang was spectacular. Past waterfalls and deep canyons, over bumpy roads and steep mountain passes, I was able to admire a breath-taking fauna and flora.

Once arrived at the RDTC, I found good company quickly. During the same six months, 40 ‘Horticulture’ students have been accommodated at the school. Among the students were four girls who warmly welcomed me. I was able to experience a very interesting and memorable time with the students and learned what it actually means to live in Bhutan. It was interesting to learn about the everyday questions and problems the Bhutanese youth has to deal with. It appeared to me that everyone at the age from 19 to 26 shares worries and fears concerning their future. Some try to take it all in stride, others drown their problems in gallons of beer and ara, sometimes leading to disagreements that ended in fights.

In my view, the youth is in conflict with the traditional Bhutanese culture and the modern world. On the one hand, they are diligent workers when it comes to cultivating paddy rice fields, on the other hand, they are easily distracted by sports, media, doma and ara. Despite this irresponsible behaviour, there is one thing that is taken unconditionally serious: Religion. On public holidays, the young men and women would be up and ready by five o’clock in the morning, dressed in their gho or kira, willing to take on a 3-hours walk to a temple for praying. Also festivals, featuring traditional dancing and singing are to the students’ liking.

Speaking of taste: the unbalanced diet consisting of rice and potatoes three times a day, brought me, as a lover of Swiss bread, to my own limits. Whenever I would substitute a meal with cornflakes or noodles, the students were worried that I did not eat properly, and would even bring a bowl of rice to my room. In their opinion, a meal without rice is no real meal!

As part of my Bachelor’s Thesis, the surveys have allowed me to see large parts of Bhutan. I have travelled to remote corners of Bully, Gelephu and Sarpang, always on the lookout for interviews with poultry farmers, since the emphasis of my Thesis lies on the poultry sector, specifically on the egg production in the two districts of Zhemgang and Sarpang. I was able to gain insights into the lifestyle of the rural population, their daily difficulties and the circumstances, under which they carry out their farming activities. With each survey I have become more and more aware of how little Bhutanese people have to get by, and yet they seem to be happy.

However, some concerns remained. Modern development is progressing quickly, so that the building, enlarging and strengthening of infrastructure can be experienced at any corner. The population is devoted to increase their production in order to make more money, however, it seems that they are not always willing to work for it. I sometimes felt that many men and women were overwhelmed by the modernisation and the rapid development. Industrial products from India clearly gain control in the local stores. Toddlers and young children are already used to drinking Coca Cola and are kept quiet with a package of potato chips. The package, I may note in passing, is then simply disposed in the closest water moat. Bhutan, with its breathtaking nature, the huge biodiversity and climatic diversity should be treated with care. In my opinion, development – yes, but the direction of this development has to be rethought.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to my University of Applied Sciences, HAFL in Zollikofen, the Helvetas-Team in Thimphu, as well as the teachers and the staff of the RDTC in Zhemgang: to friendship and unforgettable six months!
Meeting Point

Interview
By Otto Stern (OSt)

This interview – given on November 29, 2014 – presents

Karma Tshering (29) and Thongjay (29)
Masters of Arts in International Law (MIL), University of St. Gallen (HSG)

Karma: Grüezi. I was born and brought up in Chaskhar, district of Mongar. Until 2005, I never went out of Mongar. I grew up in a joint family. I am second youngest with three elder sisters, two elder brothers and one younger brother. All of them, by and large, are into farm works. I am married with no children as of now.

I did my primary schooling in my village, Junior Secondary School in another village called Drametse – a one day walk from my village, crossing over a huge river and a tall mountain – and Higher Secondary school in Mongar. I qualified for a scholarship to pursue a 5-years Baccalaureate of Law (BA., LLB (Hons)) at NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, India (2005-2010). In 2011, I did a one year Post Graduate Diploma in National Law (PGDNL) in Bhutan. Since 2012, I have been working in the Judiciary of Bhutan. Presently, I am pursuing a Master's in International Law (MIL) at the University of St. Gallen, under joint funding of the Judiciary of Bhutan and Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC).

Thongjay: I come from Phongmey, the eastern most Gewog of Trashigang. I am third of five children, three sisters and one brother. I am the first in my family to graduate and join the civil service. My two elder sisters are farmers, and the younger one a nun. My brother, who is the youngest among us, is pursuing Post Graduate Diploma in Education with specialization in Mathematics. I am married and have one son. I am coming from a farming background, but in 2004, I was lucky to get a government scholarship to pursue Law in India at Jigme Sherubling Higher Secondary School, Khaing. I received my B.A., LL.B (Hons) in 2010 from NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, India. From thereon I got through both Civil Service Examination and Post Graduate Diploma in National Law, and since 2012 I have been working as a Court Registrar with the Judiciary of Bhutan. Currently I am a Master's student in International Law at the University of St. Gallen (HSG), studying under a program jointly funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the Judiciary of Bhutan.

OSt: How come in your family the two boys got such a good education, although your village is so far away from the urban areas?

Thongjay: Phongmey Primary School was established in the 1980s and it is located within half an hour walking distance from my home. If it wasn’t established during those years, in retrospect, I would have rather been a farmer helping my parents.

Karma: Thanks to His Majesty the King and the Royal Government of Bhutan, me too was able to go to a school which was located just a twenty minutes walk from our house. Thanks to a Bhutan-Swiss program, presently, I am able to pursue my Master’s. I would not have been able to achieve this level of education without free public schooling and such generous support.

OSt: Both of you worked for almost three years as a Court Registrar; where exactly did you work, and what is the type of work you were doing there?

Karma & Thongjay: On our initial appointment, we were placed with the Thimphu District Court. Currently, we work for the Supreme Court of Bhutan located in Thimphu. As a civil servant, our responsibilities are laid down by the Royal Civil Service Commission. Accordingly, as Court Registrars, we are involved, inter alia, in: "verifying the petitions are duly filed before the Court; studying the admissibility of the case; assisting the Judge, under his order, with the task of issuing remand order, seizure order, arrest warrant, search warrant, bail/release order of the prisoners; ensuring the attendance of litigants as per hearing calendar", just to name a few. We are also involved in drafting judgments, and enforcement of judgments of the Court.

OSt: How do you enforce a judgment?
Karma & Thongjay: In normal course, the courts not only have to decide cases but also have to enforce its decisions. But evidently as a single judge cannot handle all the responsibilities, we are assigned to do it. Enforcement of judgment starts when, for example in monetary cases, person A comes to the court with the complaint that person B did not comply with the judgment. Upon receiving the complaint, we summon the defaulting party before the court, and jointly work out the best possible way to enforce the judgment. If the defaulting party either fails to appear before the court or continues to default, we take help of other law enforcement agencies.

OST: Once you finish your Master’s here, will you go back to the same position at the Supreme Court?

Karma & Thongjay: Presently, we are on study leave. On completion of our studies, it is our responsibility to return and continue from where we left.

OST: Tell us more about your studies here in St.Gallen!

Karma & Thongjay: As already mentioned we are pursuing a Master’s of International law. The duration of the course is three semesters (full-time). Presently, we are in the second semester.

The Curriculum of the MIL program includes three mandatory courses, core electives, legal electives, independent electives and Master’s Thesis. Mandatory courses comprise (1) legal method and theory of international business law, (2) international negotiation and (3) international legal order. Under core electives, we can opt to study courses to understand specific international law topics such as International and European Business Law, Dispute Resolution, and International Organizations and Politics. We can also opt to study courses on cultural awareness, critical thinking and leadership skills. Under legal electives, we can opt to study courses that will enhance our legal expertise. Under independent electives, we can choose among a wide range of options. Lastly, for our Master’s Thesis, we can work on a research question in a specialized subject area of our interest and choice. (More information: http://www.mastersportal.eu/studies/38438/international-law.html)

OST: Does the Master’s Thesis require empirical work, or is it a theoretical study?

Karma: It depends on the topic you choose. As an international law student, I have chosen to do an in-depth research on a question closely related to the role of international law in Bhutan’s expression of her sovereignty in the international arena. I cannot tell more than this because the nature of my approach being expository, explanatory and exploratory, the real outcome can be expressed in concrete terms only upon its completion. Therefore, my thesis will not require any empirical work as such.

Thongjay: At HSG, my particular interest is the comparative public law. As Master’s Thesis, I am working on a legal framework of resolving disputes in the bicameral system of Bhutan. Based on recent examples of disagreement between the two Houses, a comparative theoretical study will be done with the United States and Australia as an example of representative democracy, and Switzerland as an example of direct democracy. I am exploring best democratic cultures and values of matured democracies and see what Bhutan can learn from them.

OST: Are you also getting practical experience at the Administrative Court here in St.Gallen?

Thongjay and Karma: Presently, we are doing an internship at the Federal Administrative Court. We go to FAC every Friday. Mr. Lukas Rast, Assistant to the President of the Court Dr.iur. Markus Metz, has been kind enough to program it. Our internship with the Court will help us to understand how Courts carry out their mandates in Switzerland in particular, and in Civil Law countries in general. We will also work as facilitators on works involving collaboration of the Court and the Judiciary of Bhutan.

OST: And how do you finance your stay here?

Thongjay and Karma: We are studying here under the joint funding of the Judiciary of Bhutan and Swiss Development Cooperation. We get a monthly stipend of one thousand plus Swiss Francs. We manage everything within this available range of budget. However, tuition fees and other such expenses are directly paid to the University by the SDC Office in Bern.

OST: By now you are here for about ten months: how is life for you in Switzerland?

Thongjay: Switzerland is a very beautiful country with a high standard of living. I am greatly fascinated by magnificent mountain ranges, breath-taking scenery, the world’s most famous pocket knives, and Swiss watches. It is also curious to see how four different languages can live perfectly together: Italian, German, French, and Romansh. In the midst of trying hard to be Swiss, occasionally, I forget where I come from. Two things I love most...
are the beautiful landscapes with countless charming villages, and the reliable public transport services.

**Karma:** As an obvious fact, life in Switzerland is expensive and fast. I really admire the sense of timeliness and punctuality here. Geographically, the landscapes are sehr schön. With certain elements of similarity, I must admit, I find Switzerland quite homely. People are nice, friendly and helping. The public services are very effective. Except for the language barrier and being far away from my family, there isn’t anything I do not like in Switzerland.

**OST:** Did you have a chance to get to the mountains?

**Karma:** Oh yes, we went for excursions with Judge Dr. Christoph Bandli and his family into the mountains in Andeer. The President of the court Dr. Markus Metz and the Vice-President Dr. Jean-Luc Baechler have also been so kind to take us around. We have seen many beautiful lakes, dams, rivers, mountains, valleys, animals, villages, and cities.

**OST:** I see, the Bhutanese are trekking in Switzerland, but never in Bhutan!

**Karma:** Well, you could say that. Having experienced the beauty of trekking, I feel we (Bhutanese) should take advantage of our mountains. We really have great mountains, but largely trekked by tourists only. Personally, going into the mountains was so refreshing and reenergizing. Surely, I will start to trek.

**OST:** How about language?

**Thongjay:** As an International Master’s student without any German language knowledge, one has to provide proof of German at Level A1. We have provided this language level by attending the German Beginners course during the Spring Semester 2014. Hence, we can understand and talk basic German. Of course, the MIL courses are taught in English.

**Karma:** When we first came here, Mr. Killian Meyr, a Court staff, took us downtown to do shopping. That day was easy, refreshing and comfortable. We started to really face the language problem only from the day we went for shopping on our own. It was completely a different experience – living in the Deutsch speaking part of Switzerland with no clue of Deutsch. Everything was labeled either in Deutsch, Italienisch, or Französisch. Later, we explored the town and came across some Asian stores. This did not ease much. But having undergone the Deutsch Level A1 Course, and having stayed here for months, we are now very much comfortable with the lifestyle here.

**OST:** What is your favourite meal you are cooking here?

**Karma:** Initially we tried to cook some Swiss food, like Rösti and Spaghetti. We also bought readymade meals, pizza, breads and creams, etc. We tried to live a Swiss life. But now we are back to a more Bhutanese tradition.

**Thongjay:** Food, ingredients and the way to prepare it do not vary much between Bhutan and Switzerland. Except, as Bhutanese we don’t use chillies as a spice, we eat them like vegetables. A meal is not complete without enough chillies in it. I always thought that we have to endure with bread and butter, but I have to say that rice and red chillies can also be found in St. Gallen.

**OST:** Thank you for this very interesting interview!

**Karma and Thongjay:** Bitte schön. Auf Wiedersehen!

---

**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!