Happy news from Bhutan

During the address to the Nation on November 11, on the auspicious 60th birthday anniversary of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty the King announced that their Majesties are expecting a son in February.

Kurzfilmtage Winterthur

From 3-8 November, 2015, the 19th Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur, Switzerland’s most important short film festival, took place. In the Country in Focus section, films from Bhutan and Nepal were presented. The Winterthur Filmfestival offered three times two free tickets for SSB members. Congratulations to the three happy winners: Verena Röhm Günther, Weggis; Erich Oberholzer, Thalheim; and Tobias Blessing, Wabern (see also Meeting Point, p. 12).

Among others, the following short films from Bhutan were screened:

- The Red Door
  Tashi Gyeltshen (2014)
  (see Newsletter June 2014)
- Lo Sum Choe Sum/3 Year 3 Months Retreat
  Dechen Roder (2015)

Departure of H.E. Ambassador Daw Penjo

At the SSB event in Bern on September 12 (see p. 5), H.E. Ambassador Daw Penjo came to take leave from the members of SSB, as His Excellency’s three and a half year tenure came to an end by the end of November 2015. Ambassador Daw Penjo had presented his credentials in Geneva on July 2012. Over the past years we have had so many good opportunities for meeting, sharing and strengthening the ties between Bhutan and Switzerland with him. We would like to thank H.E. Ambassador Daw Penjo very much for the time and the attention he was giving to the Society Switzerland Bhutan. For the next phase in his life we would like to wish him all the very best and tashi delek!

Save the date: SSB General Assembly 2016

On March 12, 2016 we will conduct our General Assembly at ETH Zurich. After the formal meeting in the morning, Dr. György Hetényi will give a presentation on “Mountains and earthquakes – fieldwork and results of two geophysics projects in Bhutan”. This will be followed by a presentation by Prof. Dr. Simon Löw on “Landscape Evolution and Landslide Hazards in the High Himalaya of Bhutan: A new ETH research project”.

We are looking forward to this interesting and relevant topic! We will inform you on our website as soon as possible about the programme.

Measurement point between Trongsa and Zhemgang

For additional information see "The GANSSER Project", Newsletter June 2013, p. 11-13.
New SSB Members
By Julia Menk, Member of the Board
Nine new members joined the Society Switzerland Bhutan during the last 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 all. In the name of SSB we would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new members:

- Andreas Stalder (- Müller), Malters
- Benedikt Holzer, Bern
- Fritz Wolf, Zollikon
- Gunter Fischer, Genève
- Jeannette Dindo, Zürich
- Lotti Gerber, St. Gallen
- Pascal Gerber, Bern
- Selin Grollmann, Bern
- Tobias Blessing, Wabern

In Memoriam Annegret Reinhardt–Schuler (1944 – 2015)
by E. Werner Külling, Member of the Board and former Secretary General of Helvetas

Annegret Reinhardt passed away on September 12th, 2015, in Weesen/SG, after having suffered ten years under a terrible, incurable nervous disease, which forced her to give up her many-sided professional activities in 2004. She always carried them out with full enthusiasm and a strong dedication for social activities in favour of people who do not live „on the sunny side in this unjust world“. But she was not at all a „classical charity woman“. Her humanitarian engagement was based on the respect of all human beings, whatever cultural background they came from, as well as their visible willingness to help themselves, as good as it laid in their own possibilities. She applied the same principles also for herself. Her strong character enabled her – with the help and understanding of her husband – to make the best out of the difficult years of her illness and to overcome paralysing situation of depression and resignation.

Annegret was brought up in a big family as the second of eight children in the village of Rothen-turm/SZ. Her father – in collaboration with the mother – ran a saw-mill with attached woodwork industries, and the local Guesthouse “Ochsen“. Language courses in the French speaking part of Switzerland, in Rome, Madrid and London – followed by studies as a travel agent – opened her mind for the “Third World“ and the culture of countries in Africa and Asia, which she visited many times, partly also during long trips with her husband through the Sahara desert. Travelling became a passion and a learning field for her. She became confronted with development projects and with the deplorable situation of refugees, which initiated further studies as a Social Assistant in Lucerne. After that she worked during years in the international social context of refugee relief and development cooperation, partly together with her husband. To be mentioned is her work for the integration of refugees from Laos and Cambodia in Switzerland and the assignment in the Swiss Corps for Humanitarian Aid in refugee camps of Somalia as a Logistic Officer, where her husband was the Mission-Head and the UNHCR Coordinator.

In the year 1983, HELVETAS engaged Ernst Reinhardt – together with his wife Annegret – as the first Resident Coordinator of the Technical Cooperation Projects and of SDC in Bhutan. From the very beginning Annegret played a very important and active role in the management of the challenging Swiss development program. With her dynamism, her practical approach in the daily work, her big hospitality, her sense of humour and her heart-warming laughing, she was highly appreciated and loved by the then numerous Bhutanese and Swiss collaborators.

She was an excellent networker and always a very reliable organiser and supporter. Ernst Reinhardt confessed – at the end of the four years of the Bhutan assignment in 1987 – that he would never have been able to successfully achieve the sometimes difficult and challenging tasks of the Resident Coordinator without her assistance. The Reinhardts made many personal Bhutanese and Swiss collaborators.

Back in Switzerland, the active life of Annegret Reinhardt continued: She was engaged in local politics in Weesen/SG, in social, health and environmental matters. She was later the Head of a Health Assistant Association, also the Manager of an Old Age Home, and other similar jobs.
She was also an active member of the Society Switzerland Bhutan SSB, of which her husband Ernst Reinhardt was the first President from 2000 onwards. We all owe Annegret sincerest thanks for what she did for Bhutan, for Helvetas, for the Society Switzerland Bhutan, for disadvantaged people, and for a better world. Her contribution and participation is unforgettable. May she rest in peace!

**News from BSS**

**Highlights of the 6th Annual General Meeting of the BSS**

By Kinzang Tobgyal, Secretary BSS

The 6th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Bhutan Switzerland Society (BSS) was held on 1st August at SDC office premises, coinciding the Swiss National Day. Unlike in the past, this year’s AGM was graced with the presence of Mr. Mario Fehr, Minister for Security, Government of the Canton of Zurich, and Mr. Werner Kuelling, who has a long association with Bhutan and its people. His immense goodwill and contribution to Bhutan has come a long way in nurturing the friendly relations between our two countries and today, whenever senior civil servants meet Swiss people, there is always a reference to Werner.

Mr. Kuelling & Lyonpo Kinzang addressing the AGM

The AGM was attended by the board and the members, and presided over by the President of BSS, Lyonpo (Dr) Kinzang Dorji. Lyonpo extended warm welcome to the Swiss guests and other members. On behalf of the BSS, Lyonpo conveyed his sincere greetings and felicitations to the government and people of Switzerland on the occasion of its 724th national day. Lyonpo thanked the government and people of Switzerland for its unwavering support to Bhutan. Lyonpo also thanked the President of SSB, Ms. Marianne Frei and the members for their continuous support during the last 15 years.

Mr. Kuelling thanked the BSS for the invitation and stated that it was a great pleasure to attend the 6th AGM of the BSS. He conveyed the best wishes and greetings from SSB. Mr. Kuelling stated that SSB is a growing organization in Switzerland and continues to play a very active role in promoting Bhutan. In conclusion he congratulated the BSS board and members for their contribution and wished for a continued cooperation and close partnership.

Apart from the progress updates and information sharing, the highlight of the 6th AGM was the discussion on registration of BSS under Civil Society Authority Act, and the BSS Strategic Plan 2016-18.

**Registration of BSS under the CSO Authority**

Series of meetings were initiated by Lyonpo Kinzang with the CSO Authority and other stakeholders on the registration of BSS. He stated that there is a possibility of registering BSS as a mutual benefit organization, which was construed as impossible by some of the members earlier. Lyonpo stated that once registered, it would have an institutional standing and it would also be easy to raise funds for the society. Members expressed that it is an important and timely initiative which will provide a strong foundation and also enable smooth functioning of the BSS. After extensive discussions, the AGM endorsed the proposal for registration of BSS under the CSO Authority.

Members of BSS come together to discuss plans and programs
BSS Strategic Plan 2016-2018
Lyonpo briefed the members on the proposed activities under the BSS Strategic plan. The members submitted that the BSS strategic plan must translate into a business plan, which can become part of the document for the registration under the Civil Society CSO Authority. All members supported the proposal and urged for fast tracking the registration process.

The following proposals were also discussed during the AGM, which will be pursued by BSS in collaboration with SSB.

i. Skills development programme
This will be taken up as priority activity by the BSS focusing on plumbing. Similar initiatives are undertaken by Helvetas Swiss Intercoporation (HSI), and BSS will ensure that it does not duplicate the initiatives of HSI.

ii. Swiss volunteers programme
The meeting was informed that there are already two volunteer teachers working at the Early Learning Center. Through this initiative efforts are being made to streamline and institutionalize the procedures.

iii. Support to remote schools
The meeting was apprised of the support provided to five remote schools in Zhemgang and Mongar Dzongkhags, which has been possible with the generous funding support from SSB. The support mainly consists of school uniform sets, shoes and slippers.

The balance funds shall be used for providing other necessary items such as water filters, kitchen utensils, printer toners, vegetable seeds and toiletry items.

New uniforms for Yaragla Primary School

Yaragla Community Primary School with the new uniforms and shoes. The students are accompanied by their parents.

iv. Farmers exchange programme
Lyonpo reported that a concept note has been prepared for the farmer’s exchange programme, and this would also be one of the priority activities of the BSS in 2016. (see also below, p. 6)

v. Improving of hiking trails
Discussions are currently being held with the Tourism Council of Bhutan, and indications are positive which will be followed through by BSS.

Following the AGM, all the members joined together to celebrate the Swiss National Day. Apart from the members of the BSS, senior government officials, representatives from bilateral and multilateral agencies, CSO representatives and friends of Bhutan and Switzerland attended the celebration. A quiz on Switzerland and a lucky draw was also held to mark the occasion.
Activities by SSB and BSS

Study tour in Switzerland of Lyonpo Dr Kinzang Dorji, President BSS, Thimphu:

Strengthening the relations, cooperation and strategies between the Friendship Associations BSS and SSB

By E. Werner Külling, Member of the SSB Board

On invitation of the SSB, Lyonpo Dr Kinzang Dorji, former Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture, and now President of our sister organisation BSS, Bhutan Switzerland Society, made an intensive study-tour in Switzerland from September 9th – 19th, 2015. He was received by SSB President, Marianne Frei, who had prepared an interesting visitors program which brought him in contact with many old Swiss friends in the Canton of Berne, Zürich, Lucerne, Graubünden and Thurgau, he had worked with when he was a member of the Royal Government of Bhutan. Two important meetings took place with the SSB Board to discuss on-going common education projects in rural areas, new fields of cooperation and strategies to be followed by activities of both societies in Bhutan and Switzerland. In a small workshop, Lyonpo Kinzang was thoroughly informed of the Swiss system of direct democracy and the very important roles the thousands of civil society organisations (CSO, Vereine, voluntary activities) are playing in the social life of the Swiss Confederation (CH). Practical samples were showed to him during his study tour in different places, which could also be applied and copied in Bhutan.

Lyonpo Kinzang was highly impressed and in the report and assessment of his visit he wrote: „You know that I have always been a great admirer of the Swiss system of democracy and governance, and my admiration has been further enhanced during this trip. This was my fifth time to Switzerland during the last 19 years, but I did not get to learn so much as I did this time. What impressed me most is your grassroots level democracy known as ‘Vereine’ which is so pervasive and so deep rooted. You name any trade, any profession, even activity, you have associations, cooperatives or clubs for it. So, I have come across ‘Vereine’ for hiking trails, wine growers, singing, rope-ways, cow-right holders or alpine pastureland owners, just to name a few unheard of ones elsewhere besides of course the common ones in various fields including various sports. I came to learn that every Swiss would belong to at least one if not more such ‘Vereine’ as a result Switzerland has over 100’000 such associations.

I also learnt that they are more of self-help groups besides of course promoting their common interests, as against what is understood in this part of the world, mainly as pressure groups or voice of certain sections of society, thereby giving a rather negative connotation. Some have even told me that ‘Vereine’ have been one of the main factors to Swiss economic success and prosperity besides the governance system. The process required to be followed in forming such associations / CSOs and the management system are worth emulating in Bhutan.”

Tribute to the Forth Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuk

In a public conference organised by the SSB on September 12th in Berne, Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji gave an excellent and emotional speech about the reign of the 4th King of Bhutan, H.M. Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who celebrates his 60th birthday on November 11, 2015. He praised the farsighted engagement of the former Druk Gyalpo and his dedication to the people of Bhutan. He felt deeply impressed and grateful that he had the honour and chance to serve under such a great King for many years in different roles in the Government, be it as a departmental Director, a ministerial Secretary, as well as a Minister and even Prime Minister before the first parliamentary elections in 2008. Thank you for your visit, Lyonpo. We also learnt a lot from you!

ref. Newsletter June 2015, H.M.Jigme Singye Wangchuck, p.6 and 7
Discussing Farmers Exchange Programme

Another discussion topic of the visit of Lyonpo Kinzang, was the planned Farmers Exchange Programme. *(see point IV, p. 4)*

Here, discussing with Roland Stähli at Berne University of Applied Sciences, School of Agriculture, Forest and Food Sciences HAFL.

Also focusing the Farmers Exchange Programme with Fritz Schneider, Consultant and SSB member.

Two Swiss teachers teaching in Bhutan

By Christoph Schwitter, Early Learning Centre, Thimphu
*(cont. from Newsletter June 2015, p. 8)*

After nine months of teaching in Bhutan I’m finally more relaxed in the mornings. Guess why!

No, it’s not that the students would have been that naughty and I was afraid to face them every morning. But along with the time, and with hours of practice, I reached a level where it takes me only 5 instead of 15 to 20 minutes, to put on my Gho, my everyday working uniform!

Yes, by now we – Barbara Mühlemann and myself – have adapted very well to life at the Early Learning Centre (ELC) in Thimphu. These days I feel there is a good flow in my classes and the students are quite productive. But in both cases, Barbara’s and mine, it was not like that from the beginning. We had to get used to the Bhutanese students and they had to get used to our Swiss way of teaching. Individual project work, critical thinking skills, group work, presenting projects and independent problem solving was not part of their daily schedule. But they were very open and improved a lot, even though they are still happy when they can simply copy a larger text from the blackboard and don’t need to think a lot.

Both of us, we use a lot of Swiss teaching aids and supplementary worksheets in the classes. The teachers are very open to any type of advice and are inspired by the variety we brought into the sports lessons and cooking club. Also we were partially successful in setting up a proper collaboration with parents, which we hope will be continued and finally implemented in 2016. All those positive experiences make us feel very happy and satisfied.

As I said, work is going on very well. But as soon as there are some days off in a row, we try to escape Thimphu City and visit the countryside. Barbara, it seemed, fell really in love with the countryside and its amazing citizens. When we reached there, we went for hikes, we visited good friends in Bumthang, we ate tons of tasty local food, were pushed to have a cup of Ara or two (or three), and I even got a chance to play archery.

Of course the archery practice took place before the Ara happening; I wouldn’t have wanted to appear on Kuensel’s front page in relation to a deadly cow accident next to Wangduecholing Archery Playground.

However, we managed to invite our parents and that was simply great! They fully enjoyed their stay with their daughter or son as personal tour guides.

Of course we would have showed them around for free, but they insisted and paid us in kind. We got lots of Swiss chocolate, Raclette and Fondue Cheese, dried meat from my district Graubünden and I even got a bottle of wine from my favourite winemaker in my village. These products turn into genuine treasures so far from home!

Our school is co-facilitating a students’ camp in Tsirang in December. We have the chance to conduct some teacher professional training during this time, and we are really looking forward to that.

Kadrinche La, to all the people who made it possible for us to stay here in Thimphu! It’s an amazing experience which has allowed us to grow and widen our minds. Tashi Delek!
Donation to Tang Central School
On September 23, a statue of the deity of wisdom and knowledge (Jampelyang/Manjushri) was offered to the Tang Central School. The donation was possible thanks to contributions from late Karma Tobden's friends and colleagues in Switzerland. It will be placed in the memory of Karma Tobden on a balcony overlooking the assembly ground of the school.

Activities of SSB Members

Happy Faces all over - 19 young Bhutanese Hoteliers graduated with a Swiss Diploma
By Kaye E. Anthon
With the completion of the last of four two month courses in August 2015 19 young Bhutanese hoteliers, eleven males and eight females, graduated with a Diploma of advanced Studies (DAS) in Hospitality Management issued by HWZ University of applied Sciences Zurich/ZFH. A convocation ceremony was held at RITH, the Royal Institute of Tourism and Hospitality on October 24, 2014.

His Excellency Norbu Wangchuk, Minister of Economic Affairs, some hoteliers, Nidup Dorji Vice Chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan together with the Swiss Board of the program including Marianne Frei and Werner Külling were also present to congratulate the 19 young Bhutanese hoteliers.
(See also: https://www.flickr.com/photos/fhwz/22123742254/in/album-72157660739503962)

Urs Dürsteler, Chairman of the Swiss Board, pointed out that all program objectives were reached, namely all graduates are employed in the sector they were trained for and they were happy with the knowledge and competence they developed during the program. Norbu Wangchuk pointed out in his speech the importance of managerial skills for Bhutanese in the hotel sector and distributed the diploma to an excited batch of young hoteliers. The three toppers are offered a three month internship at the Hotel Belvedere in Scuol GR, a reputable four star hotel in the lower Engiadina Valley, starting in December 2015. Mrs. Kuenzang Wangmo, Mr. Sangay Tenzing and Mrs. Bhim Maya Tamang were the best performing graduates of this batch and had a special smile on their faces while receiving this award.

Three best Graduates for Scuol GR
Finally Urs Dürsteler emphasized on three thoughts to the young hoteliers to be taken along while starting their career. He underlined the importance that the graduates are role models and ambassadors of the program in the hotels in Bhutan and amongst friends. Furthermore, the freshly graduated hoteliers need to train their peers whatever skills and competencies were acquired during the program, and lastly the importance of being innovative in the work place. He summed up to the 19 graduates that “it does not only further your career, but is also benefitting the hotels and the overall reputation of tourism in Bhutan all around the world”.

Thinley Namgyel (Gup in Tang, son of Karma Tobden) and Christoph Schwitter (teacher in Thimphu and friend of the family) were present.
High-tech jobs made in Bhutan
By Dr. Günter Fischer

About 120'000 job seekers will enter Bhutan’s labour market during the current 11th Five-Year-Plan (2013-2018). This figure seems to be modest. However, for a small economy like Bhutan’s, this is a herculean challenge. In particular youth unemployment is an increasingly growing concern in the country. While the overall unemployment rate is around 3%, the rate of unemployment among the youth is considerably higher, rising to 20 – 30% in urban areas. Therefore, the creation of decent and gainful employment, which also reflects the aspirations and the interest of youth in the 21st century, has become a key priority for Bhutan’s Government.

It is with such considerations in mind that the Government aims to increase computer literacy across schools by mainstreaming information technology (IT) related elements into secondary and tertiary curricula, as well as by training teachers and setting up computer labs in schools.

Parallel to the promotion of a strong local talent base, the Government is developing physical IT infrastructure. The Thimphu TechPark which is located in Babesa at the outskirts of Thimphu is the flagship of these efforts. (for those who would like to see it on Google maps: N27°25'40.0" E89°39'03.3")

The Park provides essential infrastructure – from office, work and conference space to high-speed telecommunication lines and workstations, to data backup facilities – which can be leased by local and foreign IT companies for a wide range of activities, including outsourcing of data centres, software development, business process outsourcing, transaction processing, content development, design and animation, geographic information system services, etc. Moreover, the Thimphu TechPark also houses the Bhutan Innovation and Technology Centre (BITC) which offers a Business Incubator, a Shared Technology Centre and a Data Centre, which cater particularly to the needs of IT start-ups.

There is also a Swiss company among the tenants of the Thimphu TechPark. However, the IT Park’s most successful enterprise is ScanCafé Inc., the global leader in analog-to-digital conversion of imagery and video. The company converts conventional paper photos, slides, negatives to a high quality digital format. While photos are scanned in Bangalore, India, those requiring restoration are sent to ScanCafé’s operation at Thimphu TechPark where they are edited by Bhutanese staff. The same operation also undertakes desktop publishing to produce photo books of customers’ photos, which are then printed abroad.

Starting with a staff of 20 in 2012, ScanCafé now employs about 400 Bhutanese and it may even expand further its operation in Bhutan. It also sets an example for other investors to set foot in the country and to tap the growing local labour market.

Dr. G. Fischer was in charge of a United Nations-funded project which aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Royal Government of Bhutan to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) for the diversification of the national economy in line with the concept of Gross National Happiness.
Visitors from Bhutan in Switzerland
Bhutanese Judges and Lawyers visit Switzerland
By Lukas Rast,
Assistant to the President at the Federal Administrative Court of Switzerland (FAC),
and responsible for the coordination of the Legal Sector Project (LSP) at the FAC.

From Sept. 29 to Oct. 5, a Bhutanese delegation, consisting of the Judges Dasho Sonam Gyeltshen from Paro District Court, Dasho Phurba Dorji from Mongar District Court, Dasho Norbu from Trongsa District Court, Mr. Dorji Sangay, Registrar at the Supreme Court, and Ms. Tshering Pem, Legal Officer at the Bhutan National Legal Institute, made their first visit to Switzerland to learn about the Swiss legal system and find inspiration for their own work back home.

The delegates arrived early on Tuesday morning on the LX flight from Delhi, and we went straight on to discovering the city of St. Gallen and its historic Stiftsbezirk. On the next day, the delegation was officially received by Jean-Luc Baechler, the President of the Federal Administrative Court (FAC). We introduced them to the functioning of the FAC, different divisions of the court as well as the court administration, before visiting the Cantonal Court of St. Gallen, the Circuit Court of St. Gallen, as well as the District Court of Arbon, which lies at the most beautiful lake in the world (according to Ms. Tshering Pem). Unfortunately, at this point it was already too cold to suggest to take a swim. I had only recently found out that our Bhutanese friends at the University of St. Gallen, though not necessarily professional swimmers by nature, really enjoyed going for a dip in the summer time.

All in all, it was a tightly scheduled workweek. In order to move on to the next item on our program, I always had to interrupt highly interesting discussions between delegates and Swiss jurists or other professionals at the courts, be it about the vocational education system with FAC HR, protection of the courts against threats from litigating parties at the Circuit Court of St.Gallen, or about the impact of coloured walls in the office space on the creativity of the people working there, as happened in the newly designed district court in Arbon.

For the weekend, we planned a trip to Zürich, Bern, Fribourg and Gruyeres. Being a bit lost in Zürich, Marianne Frei and her husband Claudio Zingg were so kind to receive us and show the delegation around. They also introduced the delegation to the concept of Apéro – thanks to the SSB at this point! – followed by a dinner at Bluetige Duume and a stroll through beautiful Friday night Niederdorf.

On the next day, we visited Berne, including the Federal Palace and the Maison de Watteville, before joining Jean-Luc Baechler for a trip in his natural habitat, the Freiburgerland: In Fribourg, we took an extended walk through the basseville and its many fountains and monasteries and halted at the scenic Belvedere café, before treating ourselves to a true Vacherin fondue. On the next day, we first visited a chocolate factory treating ourselves to a truffle Vacherin fondue. On the next day, we first visited a chocolate factory and halted at the scenic Belvedere café, before treating ourselves to a true Vacherin fondue. On the next day, we first visited a chocolate factory and halted at the scenic Belvedere café, before treating ourselves to a true Vacherin fondue. On the next day, we first visited a chocolate factory and halted at the scenic Belvedere café, before treating ourselves to a true Vacherin fondue. On the next day, we first visited a chocolate factory and halted at the scenic Belvedere café, before treating ourselves to a true Vacherin fondue. On the next day, we first visited a chocolate factory and halted at the scenic Belvedere café, before treating ourselves to a true Vacherin fondue. On the next day, we first visited a chocolate factory and halted at the scenic Belvedere café, before treating ourselves to a true Vacherin fondue. On the next day, we first visited a chocolate factory and halted at the scenic Belvedere café, before treating ourselves to a true Vacherin fondue.

The next study visit in Switzerland will probably take place sometimes in February 2016. If you got interested in our itinerary and have inputs about something that we missed on our way, please don’t hesitate to fill up my e-mail box: lukas.rast@bvger.admin.ch.

Learn more about the Legal Sector Project (LSP) in the last SSB Newsletter June 2015, under “Project Judiciary of Bhutan – Federal Administrative Court of Switzerland (FAC)”. 
The Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC) on a study visit to Switzerland
By Namgyel Wangchuk, Program Officer BOC

The Bhutan Olympic Committee has received project support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Thimphu, for promotion and development of sports in the country. One of the activities under the project is to develop a Trainers Manual to address shortages of grassroots coaches and capacity building of members of Dzongkhag Sports Associations (DSAs).

The BOC – upon the advice of SDC – has decided to facilitate an exchange visit to Switzerland with the following objectives:

1. Review the environment for youth engagement in sports at the national and local level.
2. Introduction to the National sports structures in Switzerland.
3. Understand the support systems for sports association and clubs (financial, infrastructure, regulatory).
4. Review the competency development for sports functionaries and coaches.
5. Review materials for grassroots sports education (manuals etc.).
6. Explore opportunities for future partnerships between Swiss and Bhutanese sports bodies.

The delegation, led by the SDC Director Matthias Meier, travelled to Switzerland on 26th September, 2015, for a 10 days study tour. In the first evening in Zurich a welcome dinner was hosted by SDC at the King’s Cave in the Central Plaza Hotel. The dinner was also attended by the President of the Society Switzerland Bhutan, Ms Marianne Frei, accompanied by her husband, Prof. Claudio Zingg, also a member of the SSB.

The BOC would like to thank the SDC Thimphu for their generous support for promotion and development of sports in the country.

Artists from the Choki Traditional Art School in Thimphu at the Ethnographic Museum of Zurich University
by Dr. Martina Wemsdörfer, Ethnographic Museum, Curator South-, Central- and East Asia

From August 30 until September 6, 2015, the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich hosted five guests from the Choki Traditional Art School in Thimphu:

From left: Kelzang, Jamyang, Taktru, Sonam Choki, Thinley Pem

Sonam Choki, head of the school, was accompanied by Taktru, administrative coordinator and teacher for Thangka painting, and the three students Thinley Pem (embroidery), Jamyang Pelzang (Thangka painting), and Kelzang Menlam (woodcarving).

The one-week event started with a public speech by Sonam Choki about the school’s history, teaching program, aim and prospect.

In the following three days, the four artists practised their handicraft skills in the museum’s entrance area for two to three hours each day. Handmade products from the school were sold in the Museum’s shop.
The highlight of the week was the artists’ participation in the Zurich Museum Night on Saturday, September 5. In addition to continuously performing embroidery, Thangka painting and woodcarving, three painting workshops for children and adults were offered in which the participants could learn how to draw and paint typical Bhutanese flowers with natural colours in a traditional style of painting. The workshops lasted until 2am and were a full success for everybody.

Looking back, the whole week provided a unique opportunity to encounter traditional Bhutanese handicraft and the opportunity to enter in dialogue with the artists – watching, asking questions, exchanging experiences and practising. Many people of all age and gender took this opportunity.

Our thank goes to Sonam Choki and the four artists who shared their skills with us, and to the Fontana Foundation who supported the event with financial aid.

In Bhutan for Bhutan

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Bhutan commemorated 40 years of development partnership

By Tenzin Losinger/Hansruedi Pfeiffer

2015 marks four decades of development partnership between Helvetas and Bhutan. In times of a hastening pace of Bhutan’s modern life, Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation has remained a steady partner in the country’s development journey. This year’s 40th anniversary provided the opportunity not only to look back, but to realize an anniversary program “in Bhutan, for Bhutan”. With this idea in mind began the planning of an architecture exhibition that showcased six institutions of national significance Switzerland has actively supported to build and develop. There are, of course, several other highlights in the portfolio of the 40 years development partnership, such as the achievements in the forestry and education sectors. But this year’s anniversary events were not only about achievements of the past, but about present day challenges as well. Education and jobs and the cityscape, and architectural expression of the sprawling capital city of Thimphu are two such challenges.

On Friday the 23rd October 2015, an auspicious day in Bhutan, the exhibition “Tradition and Innovation in Architecture” was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Bhutan, Mr. Tshering Tobgay, and the President of Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, Mr. Elmar Ledergeber.

Around 200 guests, among them representatives of the Royal Government of Bhutan, development partners, the international community and old and new friends had come together to join the staff of Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation on this joyous occasion.

The premises of the Royal University of Bhutan provided the ideal setting for the exhibition. It was one of the six institutions showcased in the eight-day expo.

Visitors going through the Exhibition

Walking through Thimphu, the IT Library and Auditorium Hall clearly stand out with their timber-heavy construction and minimalistic design. Important parts of the 40 years commemoration activities were a panel discussion that deepened the topic of the expo with experienced panellists from Bhutan and Switzerland. An in-
interested and critical audience listened attentive-
ly to the issues discussed on stage and the dif-
ferent perspectives on architectural develop-
ment in Bhutan.

Another highlight was an evening on vocational
education and training, where young Swiss
workmen from the WALO construction company
(Walo Bertschinger AG, Zürich, http://www.walo.ch)
and Bhutanese trainees shared views on their
education, training, job experiences, and their
fears, hopes and plans for the future.

For more information see also our website:
https://www.bhutan.helvetas.org/en/news/?1633/40-
years-ended

Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation looks with in-
terest and continued engagement at the cha-
lenging future of Bhutan and would like to thank
everyone who was involved and continues to be
engaged in this development partnership.

### Meeting Point

**Interview**

By Otto Stern (OST)

This interview – given on October 20, 2015 – presents

**Tobias Blessing (27), Internship at the Technical Training Institute (TTI) in Chumey for the Bachelor’s in Wood Engineering, University of Applied Sciences in Bern/Biel**

In 2013 I did a six weeks travelling in Malaysia,
Thailand and India where I went to Ranikhet to
visit my cousin’s family who were living and
working there for one and a half year. It is near
the Nepal border – within sight of the western
peaks of the Himalayas! My cousin’s husband
Andreas Meister was born in Bhutan, where his
parents worked for Helvetas in the seventies.
Today he is also a wood engineer, and he did
once an internship in Bhutan. This inspired me
for my own practical internship which was part
of my studies and included the writing of my
Bachelor’s Thesis. Long time ago I already had
thought of doing my internship in a developing
country where I could learn and help at the
same time. Andreas got me in contact with Hel-
etas in Bhutan, and so it came that I did my 10
months internship from March to December
2014 in Bhutan, supported by Helvetas.

**OST:** Where did you stay in Bhutan, and what
did you do?

**Tobias:** My work was mainly based at the
Technical Training Institute (TTI) in Chumey,
Bumthang, and a little also in the TTI Dekiling
(near Sarpang/Gelephu). In TTI Chumey I was
attached to the carpentry section. (For the organisation of TTI Chumey see http://ttichumey.bt)

**OST:** What was your impression when you first arrived in Bhutan?
Tobias: This great view of magnificent mountains immediately at the landing approach, and then all the impressive signs of a foreign culture, the houses and especially the national dress of the people; all this gave me the impression of a mysterious new world hidden behind the mountains.

And also, for the first time in my life, the impression of being a stranger, especially in Chumey where I was the only Westerner most of the time, the “Chilip”, as the children in the village used to shout.

OST: How was your life there?

Tobias: I lived in a comfortable furnished apartment, although sometimes quite cold with around 4°C Celsius! But I even had internet access (most of the time), and I could do my own cooking – what I like to do also at home in Switzerland! In Chumey I could only get some basic food, a big sack of rice, some chilli, onions, garlic, potatoes and vegetables depending on the season. More food diversity was to be found in the Jakar market, but almost one hour away.

Also, on my way from the workshop to home very often I got invited spontaneously, and I could enjoy spicy Bhutanese food – and also some Ara, of course! I like spicy dishes, and as a vegetarian I could avoid the often quite greasy pork meat!

I had a mountain bike and made nice and sometimes quite distant excursions on weekends. I also participated in the bike race “Tour of the Dragon” from Jakar to Thimphu, over four passes, but 10 km below Dochu La I was over the time limit and had to give up!

With my cousin who visited me in June on his trip through Asia, I once did a short trekking from Paro to Thimphu. At the end of September my girlfriend came to see me for three weeks of holidays and we had a wonderful time travelling around.

OST: What was your work in TTI Chumey?

Tobias: The main focus was to work on improvement of the performance of the practical training of the trainees; layout and maintenance work in the carpentry workshop turned out as one of my major working fields. In the beginning I thought we could do all within the first month, for example quickly rearrange the machines in the workshop to make more efficient use of them, or manage and structure the material and tool store in a clear way. But then it turned out that all this was a lasting open process, and I had to learn that in Bhutan new things and changes take their time!

Trainees working for the first time with the Spindle Shaper to molde round profiles for a Chudom.

Tapping the full potential of the existing infrastructure and making use of modern technologies was essential to bring the carpentry training a step forward. While maintaining the beautiful Bhutanese construction style, it is important to modernise the working processes by applying modern technologies and using machines where this is possible. On construction sites Bhutanese carpenters traditionally work manually with the “patang”, a short-handled axe or hatchet with a straight single-edged blade.

Carpentry trainee Karma working on a door frame with the Patang.

In the TTI workshop there were many different European and Indian machines, and the trainees should learn to use them, in order to get the same result but with better quality and more precision. The aim for the trainees is to learn how to use these machines, thus getting more chances to get a job in modern Bhutanese construction enterprises.

OST: Is processing of wood in Bhutan increasing, instead of just exporting un-processed wood to India?

Tobias: There are a few bigger wood-processing enterprises, but mostly you find small carpenter’s workshops of the size of a one-car garage; mostly carpentry is done directly on the construction site; but the process of modernising has already started.

OST: What other projects did you carry out in TTI?

Tobias: A project to produce Chudom Furniture with the trainees was suggested by the principal. Chudoms are small benches, open on the back side like a bookshelf, upon which tea or food is served, often nicely decorated with carvings or paintings. The aim of the project was to teach the trainees the production process step
by step from designing a Chudom to the decorated end product. On purpose of demonstration I made one myself!

Another interesting project was the production of the thermally improved windows for the new guest rooms in Ogyen Choeling in Tang. Planning and producing of these windows was a part of my Bachelor’s Thesis were I made suggestions to improve the energy efficiency of the traditional Bhutanese building envelope. (see http://oling.bt/index.html).

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!

**Ost:** Overall, what is a lasting impression of your stay and work in Bhutan?

**Tobias:** In this unknown environment, patience was one of the most important skills, and sometimes it was challenging for me to adjust myself to the given work conditions. Working and living in Bhutan for ten months was an extraordinary experience which will have a lasting impact on my professional and personal development in future. I consider it as an honour that I had the chance to do my internship, as a part of my studies, in Bhutan and I’m grateful for this wonderful experience.

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