News from SSB
By Marianne Frei, President

Reconstruction of Chamkhar Bazar
On February 4th 2012, I had a chance to visit Chamkhar Bazar in Bumthang and take a look at the reconstruction of the town after the fire calamities 2010 / 2011.

Mr. Sonam Tshering (Dzongrap), Mr. Choki Tashi (District Engineer), Mr. Wangchuk (Account Officer) and Mr. Karma Thinley (Town Representative) showed me around the newly reconstructed area focusing especially on the sewerage system to which the Society Switzerland – Bhutan had contributed CHF 50'000.

I was convinced that our contribution was used for an important purpose, which was helpful to the community as a whole. The reconstruction is considered as “semi-permanent” because the town planning and the zonal planning is still an open issue. The City Council of Zurich has recently decided to establish cooperation between the valley of Bumthang and the city of Zurich in the fields of zonal planning, town planning, archaeology and museum conception.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bhutan is very much in favour of conducting the next meeting of the 11 Friendship Associations in Thimphu. It will be a unique and invaluable opportunity for the Societies to be briefed on recent developments in Bhutan and to share perceptions of the future role of Friendship Associations with Government Officials and Departments. Each Society will send a delegation of four key people. The SSB Board will be represented by Rosmarie Frey, Werner Külling, Julia Menk and Marianne Frei.

Events from January to May 2012
Dr. Francoise Pommaret gave an interesting lecture at the Museum Rietberg on January 11, 2012, on the topic: «One Century in Bhutan. From theocracy to constitutional democratic monarchy.» She pointed out how important it has been for the country to establish continuity and sovereignty. A large audience gathered at the lecture hall of the Museum Rietberg in Zurich. The event was organized by SSB, the Museum Rietberg, the Institute of History of the University of Zurich and the Swiss-Liechtenstein Foundation of Archaeological Research Abroad. In the afternoon, Dr. Pommaret held a seminar for University and Museum scholars and students on «Historical sources and datation. The case of Bhutan».

On two occasions, Markus Wild spoke at Songtser House Zürich about his experiences within the Participatory Photo Project in the framework of the «Leveraging and Preserving Bhutan’s Cultural Diversity» project of Helvetas Bhutan.

The photos taken by Bhutanese were exhibited from February 11 to April 21 2012 and gave us insights in Bhutan's cultural diversity in remote areas.
General Assembly, PHZ Luzern
At this year’s General Assembly, almost 50 members and guests met on Saturday, March 31, at the new building of the University of Luzern.

Marianne Frei presenting the Annual Report
Christian Rohrbach (Auditor) presenting the Audit Report
Rosmarie Frey (Treasurer) presenting Accounts and Budget

H.E. Ambassador Yeshey Dorji interacting with the audience
Prof. Dr. George van Driem giving a speech on «The Languages of Bhutan»

Visitors from Bhutan in Switzerland

Phuntshok Chhoden, Board Member of our sister organization BSS, visited Zurich very briefly on Sunday, May 6, on her way to Geneva to attend a board meeting of the Global Fund. Meeting Phuntshok gave us a chance to follow up on the «National Consultation Workshop of Elected Women Representatives» which was held for the first time in March in Paro to discuss possibilities of supporting the participation of women in politics in Bhutan. The workshop was organised by the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) and the Department of local governance (DLG) with financial support from DIPD (Danish Institute of Parties and Democracy) and UNDP Bhutan. Ms. Phuntshok was involved as a local consultant and facilitator. She continues as the interim secretary of the network named BNEW (Bhutan Network of Elected Women), which was established at the end of the workshop. From our side, we mentioned our interest to contribute to this process, because among SSB members there are a number of women politicians with a great know-how on different levels. In fact, we were in touch with Phuntshok on this earlier, but it was too rushed for making the necessary arrangements. However, we are looking forward to other opportunities to work with BNEW and to strengthen WIP in Bhutan.

Phuntshok Chhoden in Zürich with Marianne Frei and Werner Külling
Visitors from Bhutan in Switzerland

H.E. Chief Justice Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye and Judge Tshering Dorji, Registrar General of the High Court, were invited to Switzerland for the opening ceremony of the new building of the Federal Administrative Court (Bundesverwaltungsgericht) in St. Gallen. In spite of the tight schedule of the two guests, Werner Külling and Marianne Frei met with them for dinner to share news about our two countries and the longstanding partnership.

Coming Events July to December 2012

• Lecture by Dr. Francoise Pommaret July 5, 2012 in Zurich
  Once again, we are fortunate to announce a lecture by Dr. Francoise Pommaret about a fascinating and little-known part of Bhutan, Ngangla Trong on the southern edge of Bhutan (Zhemgang district), on July 5, 2012, 19:30, at Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich. The lecture will present the most striking and unique cultural features of this remote community in their environment, as well as the challenges it faces today. (www.bhutan-switzerland.org)

• Obwald Volkskulturfest July 5 – 8, 2012
  The monks of the central monastic body from Punakha Dzong will contribute their sacred music and chants at the Obwald Volkskulturfest in Giswil (www.obwald.ch)

• SSB Excursion to Gruyères September 15, 2012
  This year’s excursion will take us to the Tibet Museum in Gruyères (see below, p. 4)

• Presentation by Dr. Tashi Zangmo November 6, 2012 in Zurich
  Dr. Tashi Zangmo is the Executive Director of the Bhutan Nuns’ Foundation. She will give us first hand information about the life of nuns in Bhutan and the development in the nunneries.

New SSB Members

By Julia Menk

The Society Switzerland-Bhutan enjoys continuous increase in members, and we are very pleased to welcome the following new members:

• Alois Hauser-Tomasi, Wilen b. Wollerau
• An Lac Truong Dinh, Basel
• Ernest & Bertha König, Vouvry/VS
• Fritz Schneider, Bremgarten
• Juerg & Michael Bachmann, Zürich
• Kurt Baumgartner, Scuol
• Peter Fux, Zürich
• Susanne Lüthy, Liestal
• Ulrich Lutz, St-Aubin/FR
• Monique Bär, Zürich

This year too, there will be several interesting and enjoyable opportunities where new and long-established society members can meet, and we are looking forward to meeting all of you in the upcoming events. Tashi delek!
Excursion to the Tibet Museum in Gruyères 15.09.2012
By Rosmarie Burri and Fabienne Grossenbacher

We are happy to invite you to the SSB excursion on Saturday, September 15th 2012. We’ll visit the Tibet Museum located in the medieval and picturesque city of Gruyères.

Fascinated by Buddhist philosophy and by the beauty of Buddhist art, Alain Bordier has collected Tibetan art for 30 years. He decided to share his unique collection with the public by installing a Tibet Museum in Gruyères in 2009. The Tibet Museum is situated in the chaplaincy and chapel of the former Castel Saint Germain, which is dedicated to Saint Joseph. The collection contains Buddhist images such as sculptures, paintings and ritual objects, which have nearly all been used for worshipping. The match between the beautiful Buddhist images and the serene setting contributes to a unique experience of East meeting West.

Apéro and lunch will then be served at Restaurant «Les Remparts» Gruyères. Afterwards, time will be at disposal, and we propose to make a walk together enjoying the medieval surroundings.

Details of the excursion on Saturday, September 15, 2012
Meeting point:
11:15h Tibet Museum in Gruyères

Getting there:
Intercity train Nr 712 Zurich HB 08:32 to Fribourg (09:55); seats in 2. class will be reserved if possible.
Bus Nr 7 Fribourg 10:01 to Bulle (10:49)
Regio-train Nr 556 Bulle 10:52 to Gruyères (10:59).

Getting back:
Regio-train Nr 569 Gruyères 15:58 to Bulle (16:08).
Bus Nr 20 Bulle 16:12 to Fribourg (16:59)
Intercity train Nr 735 Fribourg 17:04 to Zurich HB (18:28).

Costs:
Guided tour / entry ticket for the Museum and apéro are offered by SSB. Lunch is to be paid on the spot.
Train tickets have to be paid individually, seat reservation will be charged on the train. Registration, please until July 15th 2012: http://www.bhutan-switzerland.org

If by misfortune you are forced to cancel your registration, please let us know before September 8th 2012. Otherwise we shall have to charge you for the costs of the booked lunch (30.– CHF) as we try to keep the expenses low for SSB.
Activities of SSB Members

Swiss Doctors back again in the Health Services of Bumthang

By Werner Külling

SHMSC ♦ Swiss Health Management Support Committee
c/o HELVETAS, Swiss Intercooperation

Motto / Vision of the project:
„Improving the District Health Services for the people in Bumthang / Bhutan with special emphasis on the Wangdichoeling Hospital, Jakar, by qualified medical care, fostering “General Medicine”, improved training, better management and organisation, decentralised local participation and good governance in public social services“

Since June 2010, SHMSC, the Swiss Health Management Support Committee offers again medical, managerial and organisational assistance to the Wangdichoeling Hospital and the District Health Services in Bumthang by providing a qualified and experienced Senior Medical Doctor, technical and financial assistance for better capacity building and training, medical equipment and the improvement of the hospital premises.

Wangdichoeling Hospital

Until now, the following Swiss Doctors working at „voluntary employment conditions“ under the umbrella of Helvetas Bhutan covered by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Health of RGoB and the SHMSC / Helvetas lasting from June 2010 – June 2013):

- Dr. med. Benedikt Holzer  
  (from June 2010 – July 2011)
- Dr. med. Jörg Nagel  
  (from July 2011 – December 2011)
- Dr. med. Alexander Walz  
  (from March 2012 – June 2013)

Due to family reasons Dr. Walz’s employment had unfortunately to be terminated prematurely at the end of May 2012. His successor as from July 2012 will be Dr. med. Regula Mettler)

The „Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development“ provided till now 200'000 CHF for the financing of the annual budgets (approx. 100’000 CHF a year). It is hoped that the financing will be continued. The SHMSC has already started new fundraising campaigns for the project, which may be extended – after an internal evaluation – in a second phase. The SHMSC first thought that the goals of the engagement could be reached within the planned phase 2010-2013, but the experiences made showed that a durable solution will take much more time, mainly the achievements in the field of self-help and „ownership“ of the services by the local population. The idea of the creation of a „Bumthang Health Association“ (BHA) as a Civil Society Organisation is still in the beginning of its realisation. Only a HMC, a Hospital Management Committee, could be established with a representation of the local beneficiaries of the hospital and health services.

Looking back to the long history of Swiss health engagements

Swiss development activities have a long history in Bhutan. Health was never a key issue. In 1970 a mobile clinic was started; a new 40-bed hospital was constructed in Bumthang by Helvetas and inaugurated in 1990. Totally 11 Swiss medical doctors worked in the Bhutanese Health Service since the seventies. The last one left 1994, and financial assistance of Helvetas expired 1997.

Afterwards only few new investments were done by the RGoB. No regular maintenance was performed, the number of beds were reduced to 20 and the operation theatre closed. The leading staff changed frequently, and therefore long-term responsibility was not taken over. Often young inexperienced doctors were transferred to Bumthang waiting only for the opportunity for further training abroad to become a specialist. The decline of the hospital
in regard to service and construction was documented in several reports. In 2008 in my previous roles as Helvetas Coordinator in Bhutan and former Secretary General of Helvetas, I was approached by officials of Bumthang District and the Ministry of Health (MoH) to initiate a new engagement. A short term mission in Bumthang of the Medical Director of the University Hospital in Zürich (USZ), Prof. Dr med. Urs Lütof, initiated the establishment of a working group in Switzerland (SHMSC, Swiss Health Management Support Committee) to formulate the outlines of the project. In October 2009, a feasibility study was made, and the SHMSC Chairman Dr. med. H. Gammeter, a former Swiss District Medical Officer in Bumthang, was discussing the issues with the MoH, representatives of Bumthang district and the hospital. According to the initial project design, the involvement in the role as a donor only should be avoided, and the partner should not be the governmental Ministry of Health, but a democratically created civil society association.

With the RGoB, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with general outlines was agreed upon and signed. The Terms of References (ToR) for the Swiss medical officer were elaborated by SHMSC. End of May 2011 the first Swiss Medical Officer Dr. Benedikt Holzer started his work in Bumthang, introduced by an experienced SHMSC member, Dr. med. Richard Frey, having also worked before in Bumthang.

Ambitious goals
The main targets of the project are generally formulated and outlined in the MoU. They encompass

- An improvement of the hospital management, especially the operational, cost and clinical efficiency
- Fostering of General Medicine in Bhutan
- Establishment of institutions as the Hospital Management Committee (HMC) and creation of the „Bumthang Health Association“ (BHA)

The HMC is responsible for the overall hospital management. The local community of Bumthang is now represented through the HMC. The initial aim of the SHMSC to create a „BHA, Bumthang Health Association“, a civil society association which would reflect the local population, getting more “ownership” of the hospital, was not mentioned anymore in the MoU, due to the lacking interest of RGoB.

The big challenge: Participation and „Ownership“ of the Bumthang people
The population of Bumthang District is not satisfied with the level of care they get in the local hospital. Mainly the frequent absence of the Chief Medical Officer and the lack of the possibility of obstetrical intervention are often criticised. But this is rather a feeling expressed by certain opinion leaders and politicians than based on a proper people based survey. There is a possibility to report individual grievances to the local authorities or even to the MoH, but there is no official channel. In connection with the present democratisation process, the SHMSC intended to promote the creation of a Civil Society institution, the BHA, Bumthang Health Association, to strengthen the direct influence on decision-making. This is a way to root the hospital better in the society of the Bumthang District.

Creating the BHA with the support of the SHMSC is a big challenge for the Bumthang people. The idea is that the Bumthang District should become a „Governance Model for rural health services in Bhutan in appropriate General Medicine and a democratically decentralized set-up. It has to be initiated by somebody who is rooted in the local society and culture. Several people have been contacted and motivated to start such an association, among them also the longstanding Health Superintendent and Administrator Dorjee Dukpa, who worked with all the Swiss Medical Doctors in Bumthang since four decades. He retired from his professional life beginning of 2011, but it is hoped that SHMSC can still count on his huge experience and participation.
The SHMSC needs the interest and help of friends of Bhutan and the SSB
The Swiss Health Management Support Committee is very much interested to provide more information, exchange and reports about the activities in Bumthang to all friends and members of the Society Switzerland-Bhutan. We are also very grateful for financial support. Thank you very much!

Activities of SSB Members

Practical training in silviculture –
an important input for sustainability in forest management!

by Erich Oberholzer
pictures Raphael Schwitter

In March 2012 we carried out a refresher training for the members of the Silvicultural Expert Group (SEG). The consultancy was requested and organized by the Participatory Forest Management Project (PFMP) of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation and SDC.

The PFMP started in 2002 with the objective to contribute to the improvement of rural livelihoods by empowering local communities and strengthening their capacity to manage forest resources on a sustainable basis. Up to 2007, around 50 Community Forest Management Groups (CFMGs) got the rights to manage government owned forest areas. By the end of the second phase of PFMP in mid 2013 far more than 400 community forests will have been handed over to CFMGs. Community forestry and the project therefore are big success stories. But there is one main bottle neck to ensure sustainable forest management in community forests: The Gewog Forestry Extension Officers (GFEOS) responsible to assist and supervise the CFMGs, are theoretically well trained but are lacking practical skills. Therefore the PFMP engaged experts to train GFEOS on silviculturally sound forest management in courses of one week conducted in the forest itself. After three such courses held in the years 2004 to 06, we proposed to switch to a training of trainer (ToT) for Bhutanese forestry staff.

In 2009, a ToT course of three weeks was held in Tsirang District. In the first two weeks the future trainers got trained in silvicultural and methodical/didactical aspects in order to get ready for training themselves groups of colleagues in the third week. At the end, the 16 new trainers, representing all sectors in forestry, launched the Silvicultural Expert Group (SEG). In the mean time they have trained more than 500 people: 60 GFEOS, 40 staff of territorial divisions, 320 members of Community Forest Management Groups, and 90 forest students.

The SEG also wants to act as a platform for further development of capacities for the sustainable management of forest resources. Therefore the members felt the need to get a refresher training in March 2012. The training was held in the three community forests with different forest types in Haa District. The participants (old and new SEG members) refined their silvicultural as well as methodical/didactical knowledge and exchanged professional experience. One main topic was to
start trials with the installation of permanent training plots to rationalize the preparation of training courses. The refresher training was also a good opportunity to discuss the further strengthening of the SEG and the improvement of its activities.

At the end of the refresher training, the SEG members carried out a two days course for territorial and district forestry staff and Community Forest Management Group members, in total 28 participants working in six groups. Each group trained the assessment of forest stands and the marking of trees to be harvested. The findings were presented to and discussed with another group. The SEG members validated the gained new skills as very helpful to conduct further courses and for their professional future. At the end of the two days training the participants confirmed that they got a lot of good ideas and confidence regarding the management of their forests. The focus on practical training and the possibility to share each other’s views in the forest was very much appreciated by all.

At the debriefing in Thimphu we underlined once more that silviculture needs more recognition. Not the writers of management plans, but the persons marking trees decide in fact on the long term condition of forests. If they are able to do a good job, the condition of forests will improve. That is why good practical training is needed.

Activities of SSB Members

Trekking to Merak and Sakteng – twin jewels of the East
by Fabienne Grossenbacher

In September 2011 a dream came true. I had been intrigued by the Brokpa living in Merak and Sakteng for a long time since I first heard of them in books. Their origin, beliefs and way of dressing are unique and awakened my curiosity. As there is no motor road accessibility, the only way to go there was to trek for seven days amidst a glorious nature. The trek was privately organized by a Bhutanese Travel Agent much to my satisfaction.

A team of guide, cook, horseman and helper will do their best to make the trek comfortable. The daily length of the hike is around 5 to 7 hours with many ups and downs, the trail is not difficult but it certainly requires training for urban visitors. By Bhutanese standards, it is an easy trek and you can meet inhabitants, old and young ones, going up and down, some carrying heavy loads on their shoulders. The campsites are to be found all along the trekking route, which allows flexibility depending on the speed of the group and the weather conditions.

Merak (3600 m) and Sakteng (3000 m) are two remote and isolated valleys situated in the district of Trashigang, bordering the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. These are two big villages with well-built and austere houses made of stones. There are several interesting lhakangs and monasteries in both valleys.

Merak means burnt fire, Sakteng means a place full of short bamboos. There is a day’s walk between the two valleys. The Nakchungla, (means the “tiring mountain”, 4300 m) lies between the two valleys and has alpine vegetation.
The nature is pristine and magnificent: green meadows, thick forests, waterfalls and giant rocks.

Merak and Sakteng are homes of the Brokpa since their displacement from Tsona in southern Tibet. The Brokpa share the same origin and history, speak their distinct language, wear their traditional dress and have unique traditions and culture. Ama Jomo is their guardian deity, who helped them to rescue from their wicked ruler in Tsona. Her abode is the mountain Jomo Kukhar above Merak. The Brokpa are semi-nomadic yak herders. They live together in the low valleys in winter and move to the higher pastures in summer.

They wear their traditional attire spun from yak hair and wool. Women wear a red and white poncho, and a jacket with long sleeves in red silk. Men wear trousers, a large vest with red wool with a hide jacket. The hat called "gama-shamo" is made out of yak hair with long twisted tufts hanging down that help keep their faces dry when it rains.

Men and women, old and young, wear now rubber boots, which are very practical to cross streams of water and protect from leeches.

Women like to dance and to perform their sacred traditional songs to honour their deity Ama Jomo.

Until recently they used to barter trade their dairy products such as fermented cheese, butter, yak meat in exchange for rice, maize from the lowland Radhi (famous for the beautiful weaving of raw silk, called “bura”), Phongmey and Chaling. They are now selling their goods, which is more lucrative.

The Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary is a national park to species of rare animals, birds, and the mythical "mirgoe aka yeti". The nature reserve also has the rare blue poppy.

Visiting Merak and Sakteng and their extremely joyful and friendly people is a wonderful experience. The best season to visit is spring, when the rhododendrons are in full bloom, or autumn. Festivals celebrating Guru Rinpoche, and tertoon Pemalingpa are held annually.

Sources:
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• Bhutanese Tales of the Yeti, Kunzang Choden, White lotus press, 1997
• Bhutan, A trekker’s guide, by Bart Jordans, Cicerone, Second édition 2008
• www.bhutan.travel
• Kuensel K2, August 13, 2011
• Bhutantoday, September 07, 2011, Tashi principal, Merak Primary School
Meeting Point

H.E. Ambassador Yeshey Dorji to return back to Bhutan

By Werner Külling

After nearly 3½ years of very intensive and fruitful activities in Geneva, Ambassador Yeshey Dorji leaves Switzerland at the end of May to return to Thimphu.

As told to representatives of the Society Switzerland-Bhutan in Zürich recently, he said it was a great honour for him to have served as Bhutan’s Ambassador in Geneva, which he greatly enjoyed. Switzerland is a special place for him and his family, having earlier served in Geneva some twenty years back, and his children having grown up here, learning French and making friends, which endure to this day.

He said he will miss the many Swiss friends and the extraordinary beauty of the country.

Of the many memorable events during his tenure, the most important was the official visit of Prime Minister Jigme Y. Thinley to Berne in October 2010, and the decision by the Swiss government not to withdraw from development cooperation in Bhutan for some time. According to him, Geneva is a very busy and challenging post, made even more busy by accredited to other countries and agencies outside of Geneva.

Ambassador Yeshey Dorji presented his credentials as Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva on 16 January 2009. He was also accredited as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bhutan to UNIDO in Vienna, FAO, IFAD & WFP in Rome and UNESCO in Paris. Bilaterally, he was accredited as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Bhutan to Switzerland, Austria and Norway.

He has held various posts at home and abroad in the course of his over 30 years career in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

His successor will be Dasho Dawo Penjo, the present Foreign Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Sonam Katharina Maurer

Student at the Swiss School of Tourism and Hospitality

By Otto Stern

The following interview presents a young Bhutanese, Sonam Katharina Maurer (23) from Bumthang, who is actually doing a professional training of hospitality in Interlaken at the Hotel Krebs, where I (OST) met her for the interview.

Sonam is attending the Swiss School of Tourism and Hospitality in Passugg (Gastgewerbliche Fachschule Graubünden), above Chur, where she is doing a higher diploma consisting of two years of study, i.e. two semesters in school and two semesters of practical training. After her stay in Interlaken she will go back to school to write her practicum report and get her Diploma. And then she wants to return home and work in her father’s Swiss Guesthouse in Bumthang.

Sonam: I came here for the Diploma only, but actually I could come back during the off-season in Bhutan, because when there is season here, there is off-season in Bhutan. I’m just thinking that during off-season in Bhutan I can come here and work, to get new ideas and experience.

OST: How did you choose the school in Passugg?

Sonam: Actually, in a way, it’s a thing of my father, he really wanted me to do a tourism school, but I also like working, do real things,
I like practical work. My dad got the name of the school in Passugg through a friend; he knew that my German was not good enough for a German speaking school; so we found this international, English speaking school in Passugg.

OST: And how did you find the hotel for the practicum?

I did three practicums; the first place, in Lenzerheide, I got it through the practicum teacher of the school, who searched for us. In Lenzerheide it was necessary to speak German also, and the teacher gave me the place because of my knowledge of German, which the teacher said is not so bad.

OST: Where did you learn your German?

Sonam: While working in the practicum places I just learned, and now it's becoming perfect, even Schwizterdutsch, but Hochdeutsch ist besser.

OST: Did your father talk to you in Swiss German when you were a child?

Sonam: No, just a few words; but always English, then in Dzongkha; but now I'm thinking, why didn't he talk to me in Swiss German! But I knew a few words; because when I was small we often came here for holidays during winter.

This time, I came here in 2009, about four months before the school started, just to get some experience of Switzerland. I stayed with friends of my family who live in Zetzwil, Aargau, and with them I studied German. My guest lady was working in an Altersheim (old age pension), and, since I had still three months before the school started, she asked me to go for work in the Altersheim too. So I went for work there, and made some pocket money! And there were so many nice people who knew English as well, and they taught me German while talking to them.

Then, my second practicum was in a hotel in Bever, Engadin. That one I found with the help of Leo Caminada. Once he came with a group of guests for dinner to the Swiss Guesthouse in Bumthang; then one man said, oh why don't you come to Switzerland for professional training of hospitality; I have a hotel in Bever, why don't you come to my place! It was the Hotel Chesa Salis, and so I got there for three months of practicum during the main winter season.

There, I was working in the kitchen manly; and when the season was closing in February, the kitchen chef was searching for me on the internet for a new place, and he found the place in the Hotel Krebs, here in Interlaken.

OST: So you said you where working in the kitchen; did you do different kinds of work during your three practica?

Sonam: Yes, when I started practicum in Lenzerheide I worked in service and bar in the gourmet restaurant, and that was very nice. Then, in Bever, in Chesa Salis, I worked in the kitchen; and here in Hotel Krebs, also in the kitchen. So, I wanted to do half and half, half service and bar, and half kitchen. Actually, my boss here wanted me to work at the reception, but what I really need is kitchen and service; I'm not doing all that is possible here in Switzerland, but I am looking for what I need in Bhutan.

OST: Back in Bhutan, you plan to work in the Swiss Guesthouse?

Sonam: Yes, exactly! There, I want to help my brother Tshering; he can be the kitchen chef, and I will just go around and do all things possible.

OST: Is there enough work for both of you?

Sonam: If I think from now to the future I see a lot of work to do; I got plenty of new ideas here! We will have to work in cooperation. You know, there are so many guest houses coming up in Bumthang, so there is a lot of competi-
tion, and you have to offer something the others don’t have. I don’t really know what by now, maybe some new dishes, I got some ideas of new menus.
And then I would like to change some of the surroundings outside; guests want to relax outside, so we could put out some Ligistüehl (deck chairs). Oh, sorry, now I always mix up with Swiss German! You know, down town to have Ligistüehl is not so nice, but we are up on the hill, in the green, and there it’s nice to relax outside, maybe somewhere near the apple orchard!
OST: But for changes in the apple orchard you have to get permission from your father!
Sonam: Oh yes, I told him already by mail I got some new ideas, and he answered, come fast, I’m waiting for you with new ideas!
OST: How do you feel here in Switzerland, strange or familiar?
Sonam: Many people I met here asked whether I felt a culture shock. But I feel homely here! Maybe because I came here several times when I was a child. Last Spring I visited London, and there I felt very strange, the busy streets, so many people rushing around; I just wanted to come back! Here I feel at home because it is like in Bumthang; I got a Swiss feeling from my dad and all the Swiss people visiting in the Guest House, and my mom, when she was alive, used to cook Swiss dishes.
But, of course, with my knowledge of Switzerland broadening, I get also different experiences; when I go to Basel to see my sister Tashi, for example, then I feel it is different, big city, industrial areas, etc. But when I come to Bern then I really feel at home! And now, here in Interlaken, I really want to learn Bärndütsch (dialect of Bern) like my father speaks it!

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 SBS, as well as the circle of readers of the Newsletter are most welcome!