



COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR PARLIAMENT OF BHUTAN

Foreword

With great pleasure, I present the Communication Strategy 2022 - 2025 of the Parliament. It is aimed at improving and enhancing parliamentary engagement with the citizens and encouraging their participation in parliamentary democracy. It provides an umbrella framework for communication activities and at the same time strengthening the information and communication team and infrastructure. The Strategy is also designed to reinforce collaboration within the two Houses and with stakeholders and eventually strengthen Parliament's representation and outreach activities and capacity.

This Communication Strategy has been developed through consultative approach by the National Assembly of Bhutan and the National Council of Bhutan with technical support from International IDEA.

It is my sincere hope that this Communication Strategy will enable the Parliament to create an inclusive and vibrant democracy in Bhutan.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wangchuk Namgyel', written in a cursive style.

Wangchuk Namgyel

SPEAKER

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1. Introduction

The Parliament of Bhutan consists of the Druk Gyalpo, the National Council and the National Assembly. According to the Constitution, the Parliament ensures that the Government safeguards the interests of the nation and fulfils the aspirations of the people.

The Parliament's strategic plans (2019-23) include an objective to strengthen representational and outreach capacity. The National Council of Bhutan (NCB) and the National Assembly of Bhutan (NAB) each have their own secretariats, including an Information and Communications Division in each House to promote their work. This document has been agreed by both Houses to provide an overarching communication strategy to better coordinate and reinforce individual communication activities, to educate the people on the working of Parliament and to promote the relevance of the institution of Parliament at the centre of the democratic system in the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Under this overarching communication strategy, each House will have its own communication priorities and activities set out in respective communication plans. The communication plans will be more detailed and will set out activities, responsibilities, targets, SMART objectives and evaluation metrics.

The strategy is intended to:

- Engage with citizens more effectively by promoting the relevance of Parliament as the institution at the centre of democracy in Bhutan
- Improve the public's understanding of the working of Parliament and its Committees

- Encourage the participation of the public in parliamentary democracy
- Enhance the public’s perception of Parliament
- Provide an umbrella framework for communication activities in both Houses
- Streamline communication activities
- Strengthen the Information and Communication Divisions’ teams and infrastructure
- Build a common understanding of strategic communication goals and key messages among Members and staff of both Houses

The Parliament’s Communication Strategy is tied to the timeframe of the Houses’ strategic development plans and will be refreshed before each new parliamentary five-year term. This first Communication Strategy is adopted in 2022 and will also constitute the five-year strategy from the beginning of the 2023 Parliament.

2. Communication goals

With any communication activity, there is an objective, for example to educate or inform, to raise awareness, to promote a policy or an institution and its values, to bridge gaps and build relationships, to elicit feedback and encourage participation, or to call to action. All communication activities are aligned to agreed broad communication goals, all of which are intended to raise the profile of the National Council and National Assembly and explain the role and value of Parliament as the core institution of democracy in Bhutan.

The following four communication goals are agreed, underpinned by a further goal relating to capacity in order to deliver the strategy.

Communication Goals

G1. To promote Parliament Citizens understand the role of Parliament as the core institution of democracy	G2. To connect and engage Citizens engage with Parliament and participate in decision-making
G3. To make Parliament accessible Citizens feel that Parliament is open to them and welcomes them in	G4. To build partnerships The National Council and the National Assembly build strategic relationships
G5. To build capacity Parliament has the resources, skills and capacity to deliver the communications strategy	

Some further detail on the communication objectives relating to the strategic goals follows. All communication activities in the National Council and the National Assembly will be designed with these goals in mind.

3. Communication objectives

G1. To promote Parliament

Citizens understand the role of Parliament as the core institution of democracy

Communication objectives:

Promote Parliament through -

- Education
- Raised visibility
- Public participation opportunities

- Parliamentary outreach
- Modern technology and digital engagement

Enhance public knowledge of -

- The role of Parliament, National Council and National Assembly
- MPs and what they do
- Parliamentary committees and how they work
- The law-making process

G2. To connect and engage

Citizens engage with Parliament and participate in decision-making

Communication objectives:

Demonstrate the relevance of Parliament to people's lives through -

- storytelling, case studies, success stories, personal connections, regional connections

Make Parliament more interactive –

- provide opportunities for citizen engagement, open dialogue, and participation in parliamentary business (e.g. public hearings, public petitions, input to committee inquiries, mechanism for responding to public queries)

G3. To make Parliament accessible

Citizens feel that Parliament is open to them and welcomes them in

Communication objectives:

Make information about parliamentary business easily accessible –

- Broadcasting/webcasting of plenary and committee proceedings

- Up to date, timely, and authoritative information; online and via social media; in plain language, explaining parliamentary terms
- Devise new ways to communicate (e.g. infographics, video, short animations, images)
- Publish an annual report of the Parliament's work
- Experiment with new channels and digital tech (e.g. blogs, podcasts)

Open up the parliamentary building -

- Plenary and committee sessions open to the public to attend
- Formalise a school visits programme
- Formalise a tours programme of the parliamentary building

G4. To build partnerships

The National Council and the National Assembly build strategic relationships with civil society organisations

Communication objectives:

- Extend the reach and impact of communication activities by partnering with key civil society organisations, NGOs, and government agencies
- Work in conjunction with local government and utilise established local government networks
- Develop relationships with the media and create a proactive media policy (e.g. features on TV, radio and press)
- Use influencers and trusted intermediaries to help get messages across

G5. To build capacity

Ensure Parliament has the resources, skills and capacity to deliver the communications strategy

Objectives:

- Provide skills training and ongoing professional development in parliamentary administrations to support and deliver the communication goals
- Support MPs in their communications with constituents in a resource efficient way

4. Key messages

Consistent messaging and repetition of key phrases reinforce communications and help establish the desired image encapsulated in the communication vision.

While individual communication activities, aimed at specific audiences, may have their own specific key messages, the Parliament is setting a key overarching key message under which all communication activities will sit. This message will be used internally among MPs and staff as well as externally.

Key message

Parliament is the core institution of democracy in Bhutan

Spokespersons talking to the media will use this phrase consistently, as will press notices and media briefings.

Information and educational resources will adopt this common wording. The text on the website will use this phrase.

MPs and officials will habitually refer to the Parliament in these terms. Gradually the phrase will enter common parlance and its use and understanding will become established.

To aid internal awareness and communication of the key message and the Communications Strategy, a one-page version appears as an Appendix.

5. Audiences and stakeholders

Effective communications are designed with a specific target audience in mind. The following audiences and stakeholders are identified as relevant to the Parliament:

- Whole nation
- Constituents
- Future electorate
- Young people
- School, colleges
- MPs; Women MPs
- Internal – managers, committee secretaries, comms teams
- Depends on issue
- Civil servants
- Government institutions
- Local government
- NGOs, civil society
- Rural communities
- Media
- Educated groups
- Bhutan diaspora

Audience segmentation

It is much easier for the Information and Communications Division staff to plan targeted communications and craft appropriate messages when audiences are segmented into groups. The following audience groups are agreed as the important ones for this communication strategy:

Audience segmentation

***Young people** - formal education sector and informal youth groups*

*Those **already professionally engaged** with parliament, such as civil servants, NGOs, civil society, journalists*

*Those **not currently engaged** with Parliament*

Communication channels

When planning communications, the target audience will have a major impact on the choice of communication channel, which will be appropriate for the target audience. The Information and Communication Division staff will create a guide to key communication channels for each target audience.

6. Strategic communication priorities

In line with this Communication Strategy, the Information and Communication Divisions in both Houses will design communication activities to support the strategic communication goals. To help guide this activity and ensure that limited resources are used most effectively, the leadership of the National Council and the National Assembly have agreed the following strategic priorities at this stage in the existence of the Parliament.

Young people

Children and young people are a key audience. Not only are they the future of the country but educating tomorrow's leaders about the role of Parliament in Bhutan's constitutional democracy will help inform citizens and establish the value of the National Assembly and the National Council in national life. Developing existing work with schools and teachers is therefore a priority. Teaching resources and activities will be developed in partnership with teachers. Forging links with the Ministry of Education, with teacher training institutions, and with universities will support this work. Plans will be drawn up to develop a structured school programme encompassing school visits to Parliament and visits by MPs and parliamentary outreach staff into schools.

Parliament will work with young people not only in the formal education sector but also informally, in partnership with youth groups. By "young people" we mean those up to the age of 25. The Houses will continue to look for opportunities to engage with young people in their spaces and through their communication channels, partnering with relevant youth organisations, youth media channels and shows, and trusted intermediaries and influencers.

Parliamentary outreach

Parliamentary bodies (and other organisations) are becoming more acutely aware of the need to go beyond traditional methods of communication and to improve their connection with the public. It is one of the strategic objectives of the National Council and the National Assembly to strengthen their representation and outreach capacity.

“Outreach”, in a parliamentary context, means rethinking traditional methods of communication and ensuring that parliamentary communications are not conducted simply in “broadcast mode” (one-way) from the institution out to the public. It means actively seeking out a wider range of voices: going beyond those people who already have some sort of connection or knowledge about parliament and reaching those who generally feel no connection. It means ensuring that there is two-way communication: putting yourself in the position of the audience and ensuring that ways exist for people to get their voices heard in parliament. It means really listening to the views and experiences of people, and at its most effective, finding ways for them to participate in national decision-making.

Outreach incorporates awareness raising and an element of education, and generally involves direct human contact (although it can also include digital elements). It usually involves liaising with civil society and community groups in local networks and developing strategic partnerships. Crucially, it also implies working in an informal and participative way with people in their spaces, outside the institution of parliament itself.

A key principle of parliamentary outreach is **building partnerships**. By working in collaboration with strategic partners and tapping into their existing networks and infrastructures, the reach and impact of parliament’s communication activities is increased. Partnership working is also cost effective. Key partnerships will be developed in civil society, among government agencies, and with the media (including local media). As the

people, looking for ways to work in partnership with local government will be also beneficial to demonstrating the respective roles. The Parliament will also look to develop collaboration and friendship groups with other parliaments.

By incorporating outreach elements in a communication strategy, parliaments and parliamentary committees signify their aim to listen to the people and to build strong relationships with civil society. It helps bring people closer to parliament. Not only does this help build trust, but by obtaining views and experiences from people's lives, it improves the quality of legislation and parliamentary activity.

7. Communication approaches

The following communication approaches and activities are designed to facilitate the effective delivery of this strategy and achieve the strategic communication goals. Further detail is included in the communication plans of each House.

Infographics, videos and interactive activities

More use of infographics and short educational videos will be developed. Such visual resources are appropriate for all citizens but can be particularly effective in addressing issues of accessibility around language, literacy levels and the way young people consume information.

Opportunities will be sought to involve citizens interactively in the work of Parliament, using digital and other channels.

Storytelling

Storytelling can be particularly powerful in terms of connecting with citizens. In order to connect with citizens, storytelling will be used to reveal the relevance of parliamentary work to people's lives. Illustrating the impact of a specific policy or law on an individual is much more powerful than simply explaining its purpose. People connect emotionally and relate to values more than facts or statistics. So ways to appeal to emotions and to demonstrate relevance will be sought across all communication activities.

There are many ways to tell stories, but some useful approaches are to use case studies, e.g. of how an individual or group benefit from a particular law/policy; to build stories around parliamentary or national objects, artifacts, or archival material; and to highlight personal connections and regional connections (e.g. in exhibitions).

Using appropriate images is an important element in storytelling. The Information and Communication Divisions will build up a library of appropriate images to support and frame news and stories from Parliament.

Working with and through the media

As most people still get their information through the mainstream media – TV, radio, newspapers – strengthening relations with journalists will be beneficial. The Houses' Information and Communication Divisions will build constructive professional relationships with journalist and maintain mailing lists of journalists with particular interests in different policy areas. Providing training in parliamentary procedure and terminology, press releases, and

regular briefings for journalists will help ensure that the work of Parliament and each House is accurately portrayed and that social media misinformation is addressed.

In Bhutan, local media have a key role to play in reaching citizens in all areas of the country, particularly the audience segment of those not currently engaged with Parliament. Engaging with regional and local journalists will help reach those areas of the country further from the capital. Inviting local reporters when committees are on field visits will increase coverage and show what committees do.

8. Implementation

Communication plans

This Communication Strategy is designed to provide an overall framework for both the National Council and National Assembly to present a more cohesive communications view of the Parliament of Bhutan. The strategy will span the life of a parliamentary term (five years), and be reviewed and refreshed a year before the end of the period.

Internal communications within and between the two Houses will be streamlined. The Information and Communication Divisions work closely together to present a coordinated image in their communications. A joint **communication grid/calendar** will be maintained to coordinate the timing of communications across both Houses.

The National Council and the National Assembly will each set their own communications **budget** and assign resources, depending upon their specific communication priorities. The Information and Communication Divisions
Communication Strategy for the Parliament of Bhutan

will plan their communication activities across the year in accordance with this strategy and within available budget, and produce a communications plan for each House. **The rolling communication plans will cover two to three years, being more detailed for the first year.** Communication plans will be reviewed and amended regularly and a new one agreed each year. All communication activities will relate to one (or more) of the communication goals.

The communication plans will be aligned to the Communication Strategy and will include:

- Communication activity
- Relevant strategic communication goal
- SMART objectives, target/metrics
- Target audience
- Communication channel(s)
- Who is responsible for delivery
- Timeframe
- Cost
- Any risks and mitigations
- Evaluation

Policy development and capacity building

To support the development and implementation of the Communication Strategy, associated policies will be developed as required, such as -

- parliamentary website and digital platforms
- social media
- publications

- communication channel guide
- public relations and media
- parliamentary outreach
- internal communications, intranet
- evaluation

Capacity building

To support the Information and Communication Divisions in delivering activities under this Communications Strategy – and specifically Goal 5 on capacity building – **a professional development programme will be run for ICD staff.**

Upskilling of communications staff will help to deliver the goals of the strategy. It is also recognised that some specialist skills (for example in the digital area) will be bought in for specific projects as appropriate.

Where appropriate, international support will be sought to aid the delivery of discreet projects and policy development.

International guidance

The following documents provide relevant guidance on international best practice and will inform the future development of communication activities:

IPU and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2022.
Global Parliamentary Report 2022: public engagement in the work of parliament.

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2022-03/global-parliamentary-report-2022>

IPU, 2021. **Social media guide for parliaments and parliamentarians.**

<https://www.ipu.org/file/10213/download>

IPU, 2018. **World e-Parliament Report2018.** [https://www.ipu.org/](https://www.ipu.org/file/5920/download)

[file/5920/download](https://www.ipu.org/file/5920/download)

IPU and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2012. **Global Parliamentary Report 2012: The changing nature of parliamentary representation.** [https://www.ipu.org/ file/659/download](https://www.ipu.org/file/659/download)

IPU, 2009. **Guidelines for parliamentary websites.** <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/guidelines-parliamentary-websites-new-edition>

NESTA, 2017.**Digital Democracy report** https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/digital_democracy.pdf

OECD, 2020. **Digital transformation and the futures of civic space to 2030**, OECD Development Policy Papers no. 29, June 2020. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/79b34d37-en.pdf?expires=1642591591&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=3B2462FCED69ECB38930CE612959E085>

Appendix – Strategy on a Page

The Parliament of the Kingdom of Bhutan

Druk Gyalpo -

National Assembly – National Council

Key Message

Parliament is the core institution of democracy in Bhutan

Communication Goals

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Appendix – Acknowledgments

This communication strategy has been produced through consultations with Members of Parliament from the National Assembly and the National Council of Bhutan, with the parliamentary administration, with civil society representatives and last, but not least, with the extensive input and through discussions with the Communication and Media Teams of both Houses of the Parliament of Bhutan.

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This guide was written by Aileen Walker, former Director of Public Engagement at the UK Parliament, and with over 30 years’ experience in parliamentary public engagement and strategic communications. She has a strong professional track record in the strategic development of parliamentary public engagement, education, information, outreach, and visitor services. She is an experienced change manager and programme manager, with expertise in communications, staff engagement, and research and information. She was awarded an OBE in the New Year 2017 Honours List for services to improving public engagement with Parliament and voluntary service to the community in London.

As part of the INTER PARES framework, the Parliament of Bhutan has formed a peer-to-peer partnership with the Danish Parliament, with the Hellenic Parliament and with the Hungarian National Assembly.