PhD programme in Anthropology planned for 2019

Yangchen C Rinzin

The Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) has plans to introduce its first doctoral programme in Anthropology at the College of Language and Culture Studies (CLCS) from 2019.

A project team from the Institutional Development Grant (IDG) is working on the development of a PhD programme. The team comprises of president and lecturers from CLCS, international coordinator, internal coordinator, and external Bhutanese and foreign advisors.

Taryagana centre for social research and development’s senior researcher and strategic advisor, Dr Ritu Verma, who is also an international coordinator of the project, said the PhD programme would centre on the four pillars of Gross National Happiness (GNH) and their sub-fields, anthropology of the Himalayas and Bhutan, anthropology of development, environmental anthropology, and political anthropology.

Dr Ritu Verma said development of the programme would span over a period of 5 years centred on knowledge, networking, capacity strengthening, approval/validation and piloting, and informal collaboration with renowned anthropologists in the region, University of California and other universities.

"The objective is to develop a PhD programme and also to work towards becoming an institution for the study of anthropology in Bhutan and of the Himalayas," she said. "We're glad that three renowned international anthropologists are helping us."

The team conducted the first set of workshops on October 7 and 9 where members discussed different perspectives to help brainstorm and put the best PhD programme together.

Dr Ritu added there was a need for such a programme because many studies or articles on state of scholarships in Bhutan and state of anthropologists have shown the need to identify gaps and to develop anthropology capacity in the country.

"We find that most of the research done in Bhutan today has quantitative data, but lacks qualitative data, which gives answers to why there is an issue," she said, adding that with Bhutan going through many changes in different context, qualitative research would help understand the reasons. It would also help policy makers with information.

Dr Ritu Verma said that having a PhD programme in the country would be economical.

CLCS’s dean of research and industrial links, Ngawang Jampa, said the college has a dedicated department for the study of culture, language and religion, and thus, was thought to be the best place to develop and sustain a PhD in Anthropology.

He said that with strong foundation for the study of culture in place, CLCS hopes to develop a PhD programme with a long-term vision of becoming a national, regional and international institute of excellence in Anthropology.

"We are not anthropologists but most of the faculties had an opportunity to work in the field and have a sense of the subject," he said. "We’re much aware about working in the field of this work, so it is the right place to upgrade such a programme."

The project aims to take in the programme’s first cohort of about 10 in 2019 and is working on the semesters and faculties.

Construction industry raises a host of issues to govt.

Karma Cheki

About 22 issues faced by the construction industry were presented to the government yesterday at the closing of the 16th annual Construction Association of Bhutan (CAB) general meeting.

Information and communications minister DN Dhungyel attended the closing where some 200 members from the construction industry from 18 dzongkhags attended the four-day meeting in Thimphu. Issues such as mobilisation advance, defect liability period, unavailability of local materials, number of works contractors can take up, and liberalisation of labour entry were discussed at the meeting.

The eighth engineers, architects and planners’ conference held in June this year had recommended reduction of mobilisation advance (advance given to the contractors before a project begins) from 10 percent to five percent and to increase defect liability period from one to three years. Defect liability period is the time after a construction project has been completed during which a contractor has the right to return to the site to remedy defects.

Vice president of CAB, Ugyen Penjong, said that although the government wanted to decrease the mobilisation advance to international standards, the construction industry in the country is still struggling. "Mobilisation advance has no risk to the government because we put counter-guarantee from our own money."

General Secretary of CAB, Wangdi Gyelshen, said, that if there is money at the start of a project, the contractors could operate without difficulty. "Our contractors are not as advanced as international level. They have no high productivity like those at international standards."

Works and human settlement secretary Phuntsho Wangdi, said that the decrease in mobilisation advance is to create uniformity with international standards and to avoid misuse of advance fund by contractors. He added that after the procurement and bill submission of materials such as sand, timber, cement and stones, a 70 percent advance is given. "The 70 percent is given against the work done while the five percent is given before any work is done."

Ugyen Penjong said that defect liability period should be kept as it is or that if the defect liability period is increased to three years, the contractors or whoever is involved in the project should share 60-40 percent accountability. "Defect does not occur just because of quality of construction, it can also be because of design. Supervisors or whoever is concerned in the project should be equally concerned."

Ugyen Penjong said that most of the time contractors face difficulties completing a project because of not having materials, especially local materials such as sand, boulders or timbers. "We found that Natural Resource Development Corporation Limited (NRDCL) is left uneschorted. They are free. If they can, they supply. Even if they cannot, there is no risk for them. But contractor’s work is governed by time and money."

The participants said this has become a problem especially for contractors in eastern Bhutan to obtain timber. The government, they proposed should either privatise local materials or ask NRDCL to make the materials available to all dzongkhags and construction points.

Lyonpo DN Dhungyel said that the issues raised would be put up to the Cabinet.

Meanwhile, the President of CAB, Thinlay Gyamtso, said that construction productivity is not about delivering more projects but is the amount of output in relation to the amount of input used. "This is where creativity and innovation come into play. Our topic here today is mechanisation - how innovation in construction industry can play a big role in increasing construction industry’s productivity and translate them into profit."

He said that this year, CAB hosted an annual general meeting, a seminar and the Bhutan construction fair simultaneously to provide business to business interaction platform.

Wangdi Gyelshen, said, the seminar is a bridge between the fair and the annual general meeting. "It is a seminar where people can have open discussion between the buyers, exhibitors and contractors."

To modernise the construction industry, CAB is also working towards making the events more professional by conducting research on why construction projects are failing and present the findings during the Annual General Meeting. “Contractors will not deliberately fail a project. There must be various reasons behind it,” he said.