



NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF BHUTAN

REGION
Asia

DURATION
February 2013 to
April 2013

FUNDER
Department of
Foreign Affairs and
International Trade



Parliamentary
Centre

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the PARLIAMENTARY CENTRE

Is a Canadian, not-for-profit, non-partisan organization, celebrating 45 years in 2013 as one of the leading and longest serving organizations dedicated to strengthening parliamentary democracy in Canada and around the world. Our assessments, strategic planning and training programs, combined with research products and networking channels, help legislatures and related stakeholders measure their performance, build capacity, tackle key issues and promote mutual learning.

In short—our mission is to support legislatures in their lawmaking, oversight and representatives roles to better serve the people they represent.

the BACKGROUND

In March 2008, the small Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan held its first parliamentary elections becoming one of the youngest members of the club of democratic nations. Relative to other new democracies, Bhutan's transition has been peaceful and effective. However the electorate, elected members, parliamentary staff and other institutions interacting with parliament are still very new to the system, and there is much to be learned.

While building its parliamentary democracy, Bhutan continues to guide its development by the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) that was initiated in 1972 by Bhutan's KING Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who opened Bhutan to the age of modernization. GNH is based on the idea that quality of life or social progress should be measured in more holistic terms than only economic progress. The quality of democracy and political freedoms are seen as one of the cornerstones of the GNH model.

the PROJECT

A bicameral parliament comprised of the National Council and the National Assembly, was established in 2008 with the mission to fulfill the needs and aspirations of the people. The National Council's mandate is to fulfill the needs and aspirations of the people through review of public policies, legislation and scrutiny of state affairs. It consists of twenty-five members who cannot belong to any political party, and should have the minimum qualification of a graduation from a recognized university.

In February 2013, at the invitation of the National Council, the Parliamentary Centre conducted a needs assessment of the institution. This effort was supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Canada. The assessment allowed for concrete ideas for projects supporting the NCB to be formulated.

Following the assessment, the Parliamentary Centre has proceeded with targeted assistance to the National Council. This has included feedback in the development of orientation materials for the new cohort of members who started work after the 2013 elections, as well as training for members and staff on legislative research techniques. More activities are being planned.