

VET-ting the matters of blue collared jobs

A Helvetas-Bhutan seminar on "Education for Jobs?" discussed about careers in vocational education

Thinley Zangmo

Strengthening the Vocational Education Training (VET) systems and the private sector was some of the possible solutions Bhutan could look at to address the growing problem of unemployment.

LABOUR

A seminar on 'Education for Jobs?' organized by the Helvetas yesterday, managed to bring out various issues surrounding the Bhutanese perception around blue-collared jobs and how having a well-coordinated system on VET could address these issues.

Twelve participants from Bhutan and Switzerland shared their experiences on education, training and career perspectives of VET in both countries.

Tek Bahadur, from Technical Training Institute (TTI) in Chumey, said he didn't have any other option than pursuing his career in masonry.

"After I completed my high school, I didn't have other options and that was when I heard of TTI," he said. "Al-



VTI graduates build a mud wall in Thimphu (File photo)

though misconception about the blue-collared job continues to exist, I couldn't hope for a better career."

Another participant, Pema Choden, who is studying plumbing at the TTI, said that despite the stigma and inferiority attached to their jobs, she is proud about her job.

"If we don't take up the job to fix the leaking pipes and drains, who will? I am proud to

be where I am today," she said.

Apart from these issues, members from the audience pointed out why the Bhutan-HELVETAS has taken so long to address the VET issues.

To this, the labour secretary, Pema Wangda, who was also on the panel, said that the prospect of VET addressing the rising unemployment issue was thoroughly discussed in the past.

"We even proposed a VET Act, which the government decided not to look into because there are too many Acts," Pema Wangda said.

However, the labour ministry introduced a VET policy and guidelines for Competency Based Training in 2006.

VET in Bhutan is a relatively new and an emerging system, Karma Lhazom from the labour ministry added.

"Switzerland's VET system is leading the way while Bhutan's VET is emerging and has much to achieve in terms of quality to meet the needs of the rapidly modernizing labour market," she said.

Less than 25 percent of Bhutanese students take up VET after completing class X while 70 percent of youth enter VET after compulsory schooling of nine years in Switzerland.

Country Director of HELVETAS, Hansruedi Pfeiffer, said education is not only about work but also about developing one's personality.

"For the growing number of youth, finding a decent employment is significant. Without education, there is no individual life concept, hence the theme of the seminar," Hansruedi Pfeiffer said.

The seminar was organized as part of the celebrations for 40 years of partnership between Bhutan and HELVETAS Swiss Inter-cooperation. Member of Parliament and representatives from private sector and government officials attended the seminar.

Farmers' group try onion cultivation for the third time

Yangchen C Rinzin, Samdrupcholing

It might sound like counting the chickens before the eggs hatch, but a farmers' vegetable group in Samdrupcholing dungkhag is expecting a bumper harvest this year from the onions they planted recently.

COOPERATIVES

Despite two seasons of crop failure, the group is not giving up. Capitalizing on the frequent price inflation of onion the group from Pemathang gewog decided to cultivate onion. That was two years ago when the price in the Indian market shot up almost Rs 100 a kilogram in the Indian border town and more than Nu 100 in Bhutan.

They began cultivating on

about 50-decimal land to provide Samdrupcholing people cheaper onion and generate income. The crop failed.

They could harvest only half of what they cultivated. The 10 members consumed most of it and the rest were sold in the gewog for Nu 30 per kg. Each member took home about 40 kilograms.

This time, the group planted onion seeds worth Nu 2,500 on one acre of dry land with the help from gewog's RNR officials. The first two years, they planted on wetland.

The group's chairman Sangay Wangdi, said, despite the poor returns in the past, it was evident that most consumers preferred the local onion over imported ones. "That is why we haven't given up hope," Sangay Wangdi said.



Chariman Sangay Wangdi checks the onion seeds

He said with the onion price still high, costing between Nu 80 to 120 in Indian market today, there is still an opportunity for a good profit.

"This can also help keep

our group active since vegetable productions have failed earlier," he said. The group plans to buy a power tiller from the income.

"As there is only one power tiller in the gewog, not all can

avail the service," he said. The group plans hire it out to other villagers.

For now, the members are busy taking care of their onion seeds planted about a week ago.