



Situation  
Assessment  
of Journalists  
in Bhutan



JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION OF BHUTAN



## Situation Assessment of Journalists in Bhutan



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
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**Swiss Agency for Development  
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# Acronyms

<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>BBSC</b>	Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation
<b>BICMA</b>	Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority
<b>BIMIS</b>	Bhutan Information and Media Impact Study
<b>BMF</b>	Bhutan Media Foundation
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussions
<b>GSLI</b>	Group Savings and Life Insurance
<b>HRD</b>	Human Resource Development
<b>JAB</b>	Journalists Association of Bhutan
<b>MBS</b>	Media Baseline Survey
<b>MDA</b>	Media Development Assessment
<b>PF</b>	Provident Fund
<b>RTI</b>	Right to Information
<b>SWS</b>	Staff Welfare Scheme

# FOREWORD

It is common knowledge that news media industry in Bhutan is facing challenges like never before. The economics of market sustainability has tested it to the core. The hope of revival is grim and gloom. The ripples of the poor economic health of the media have not spared journalists who are key actors and stakeholders. Many a journalists hope against hope that there could be a light at the end of the tunnel. Those who thought the future of the media industry has crossed the threshold of no return have already called it quits. And some of those clinging on for the love of profession are going through difficult phase of their journalistic career. A good number of journalists, especially those working in the private media organizations, continue to do their job without timely remuneration and enough facilities the profession requires.

The “Situation Assessment of Journalists” by the Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB) is expected to serve as a basis for policy interventions and strategic direction from the agencies and authorities concerned to enable the media to play its role and contribute to the growth of our democratic society. The study is the first of its kind and its findings could be used as point of departure to work toward building a strong, healthy, responsible and responsive press in the country.

Notwithstanding the not-so-good situation of journalists in the country, they exude a huge potential as the average age of Bhutanese journalists stands at 27 years. If the spirit, energy and the steel determination of journalists are channeled properly, we as society have everything to benefit as vibrant journalism promotes good governance.

Journalism largely consists in saying “Lord Jones is dead” to people who never knew Lord Jones was alive”, said G.K Chesterton. News media, where journalists work, is the chief purveyor of information and viewpoints on public affairs. It is a space every citizen has a stake. Therefore, the role of our journalists is fundamental to creating a citizenry that is informed and educated.

The report cannot be summed up in one sentence. Nor in a paragraph. We leave to the reader!

Many thanks,

Passang Dorji  
President  
Journalists Association of Bhutan

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB) carried out the 'Situational Assessment of Journalists in Bhutan' with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in Bhutan. The survey covered 90 journalists working in 16 media organizations and 29 former journalists. The primary objective of the study was to identify constraints and challenges facing journalists in discharging their responsibilities and assess prevailing media policies and freedom to practice journalism (access to information and challenges).

Most working journalists (69%) reported of being provided with adequate facilities/equipment against 31% saying the facilities provided are inadequate to do their job. Some journalists mentioned they share workstation and equipment like laptops, cameras, and recorders. 39% of working journalists are paid a monthly salary of less than Nu 10,000, while 18% are paid above Nu 21,000. The rest earn between Nu 11,000 to 20,000.

The journalists working in private media organizations earn far less than those in state-owned ones. 40% of journalists working in private media organizations reported of not receiving their salaries on time (at the end of the month). They have not been paid between one to four months in a row. Some of them reportedly borrowed money from friends and relatives to support themselves while others moved in with their parents and friends.

18% of journalists mentioned that their management/owners feed them news ideas all the time against 16% saying they never do. Management interference in news affairs is not so much about feeding news ideas alone. Interference is prevalent in varying degrees. 9% of working journalists 'strongly agree' that editorial contents are influenced by the management/owner/board while 28% 'strongly disagree'. However, 21% of the respondents 'agree' that editorial contents are influenced by the management/owner/board while 42% 'disagree'.

The majority (71%) of working journalists feels that journalism has become unattractive and lost its attractions. The low salary packages, professional hazards, and the lack of public recognition of the profession are cited as the main reasons. Most former journalists left journalism because they wanted to change their profession. However, a good number of them said low salary and better opportunities propelled them to leave, while others mentioned professional hazards including censorship, threats and long working hours as reasons for their exit.

Almost all working journalists are aware the freedom of press is guaranteed in the



Constitution of the country. However, 50% of them disagree that it is in practice. In a similar vein, 45% of former journalists either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree' that there is freedom of press. About 66% of working journalists feel it is 'difficult' to access public information. In fact, 11% of them mentioned it is 'very difficult'. However, 23% of them say it is easy to access public information.

About 58% of working and 62% of former journalists felt 'unsafe' to cover critical stories. A good number of journalists say they feel/felt 'unsafe' to cover critical stories fearing reprisal and because of practicing journalism in a small close-knit society, lack of adequate skills and objections from their management. At least 47% of working journalists say they have been threatened for covering critical stories against 53% saying they did not encounter any threat.

The current media situation is extremely bad, according to most journalists. They say the lack of government support (policy interventions and provision of incentives for quality journalism), unsustainable economics of the media industry, absence of quality journalism and censorship are the main causes. 58% of working journalists mentioned the existing media legislations and policies failed to ensure media development in the country.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

As recent as 2006, Kuensel Corporation Ltd. and Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation (BBSC) were synonymous with the Bhutanese mainstream news media. The entry of two private newspapers in 2006 – Bhutan Times Ltd. and Bhutan Observer Private Ltd. – marked the beginning of the industry’s radical growth. Within a short span of five years, the number of newspapers grew to 12 (eight in English and four in Dzongkha). The number of radio stations increased to five. A couple of news magazines were also launched during the intervening period. The liberalization of media market, necessitated by the democratization process, was a major impetus that encouraged the proliferation of news organizations in Bhutan.

Apart from playing the role of the fourth estate in a new democracy, the media industry created a lot of employment openings for journalists. Some newspapers, for example Bhutan Times Ltd. and Bhutan Observer Pvt. Ltd. had over a hundred employees at one point of time (2008-2009). Of the total employees in different media organizations, at least a third of them were journalists.

Journalism in terms of quality and coverage was starting to carve its own identity. However, the growth trajectory was short-lived. The heavy dependence of media outlets on government advertising for sustainability and stiff competition caused the industry to plunge into financial trouble. Beginning 2012, the government faced budgetary deficits leading to a cutback in public expenditures, including advertisements. In the absence of a strong private sector and lack of market carrying capacity for more than a dozen media agencies, the struggle for sustainability became more real. Today, most media houses are at the brink of bankruptcy and closure.

The sustainability crisis faced by media houses has had a direct bearing on the quality of journalism. Many senior journalists and editors have left the media industry, leaving the newsrooms (especially the privately owned) to a crop of young reporters without much experience and journalistic skills. The exodus of experienced journalists and impending closure of media houses will negatively impact the quality and pluralism of journalism. And those continuing to practice the profession are reportedly going through difficult phase in their career. Many a time, journalists have been working without salaries and other benefits for months in a row. Some journalists do not have access to basic equipment such as laptops, cameras, and recorders.

Therefore, in this wake, the situational assessment of journalists was launched to understand the state of journalists in Bhutan and the environment they work in. The study will also help in identifying critical areas and gaps that affect the quality of journalism and recommend measures to address them.

## 1.1 Objective

**The purpose of the study is to conduct a situational assessment of journalists working in Bhutan to:**

- a. Identify constraints and challenges faced by journalists in discharging their responsibilities.
- b. Assess prevailing media policies and freedom to practice journalism (access to information and challenges thereof).
- c. Provide policy and program recommendations to improve the constraints identified.

## 1.2 Methodology

The study employed a multi-research technique that included both qualitative and quantitative methods such as individual survey, desk review, and focus group discussions.

### **Qualitative approach**

The qualitative aspects attempted to corroborate the findings and results of the quantitative method drawing on the study objective and the expected deliverables of the study. Three focus group discussions were held with a group of working journalists, former journalists and the media owners/managers. The findings are reported in Section 4.

### **Field Survey & Sampling**

Two sets of structured individual questionnaires were administered on (a) working journalists, and, (b) former journalists who left the mainstream news media industry since 2006. The survey questionnaire employed both open and close-ended questions and contained five sections (Annex). In both categories of respondents, census survey on all journalists working in print, television, radio and magazines were carried out to ensure good response rate.

## 2. STUDY LIMITATIONS

- The study could not gather responses from some journalists away from their workstations. They were either in the field on duty or out of the country on studies and trainings.
- Bureau correspondents could not be captured because of distance and technical difficulties.
- Some former journalists could not be traced for the survey.
- General findings on economic challenges are skewed to some extent by the responses of journalists working with the two big media organizations (Kuensel and BBS).

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Stephen Quinn in his book 'Asia's Media Innovators' (2008) mentions that "News is a business [and] with exception to public-broadcasters such as [British Broadcasting Center] (BBC), most media organizations must make money to survive" (p. 9). Rapid technological advancement fuelled by the emergence of the digital platform has changed the media landscape in its distribution and consumption. However, owing to the unique market conditions, Bhutanese mainstream news media have failed to embrace fundamental transformations to keep pace with the changing needs to remain afloat. Media owners and managers are battling sustainability challenges even as they increasingly try to grasp opportunities that rapidly evolving digital platform offers. Although they are looking for alternative business models, they are yet to be able to strike what Quinn (2008, p.13) advises "go where the audience is and reach the 'eyeballs'".

All Bhutanese media outlets depend on a single revenue stream i.e. government advertising. The small private sector in Bhutan does not have the capacity to spend on marketing and advertising. Media's heavy reliance on the single advertisement source coupled with small readership base intensifies the competition, ultimately affecting professionalism and sustainability with lateral decline in trustworthiness and credibility (BIMIS 2013: 89). The proliferation of newspapers resulted in "sensationalism and exaggeration in the process of beating the competition to sell well" (ibid).

According to Quinn (2008:19), another key role of journalism in the knowledge age “is to turn information into knowledge - to synthesize it for their busy audience which takes education and training of human capital”. However, Bhutan Media Foundation’s (BMF) Human Resource Development Master Plan for Media (2012-2016) notes the lack of coordinated national approach in addressing human capital development needs of the information and media sector. A high staff turnover rate, especially trained senior journalists and entry of young university graduates into the media industry, has created a professional vacuum in the industry with less competent and trained journalists (BMF HRD Master Plan for Media, 2012-2016). And veritably, the media industry has become a ‘launch pad’ (Dema 2014) for fresh out-of-college graduates.

The BMF HRD Master Plan for Media, 2012-2016 further quoted a comment of one of the discussants that “media houses risked training staff that ended up working for their competition” (p.88). Such trend triggers a headhunting of trained and senior journalists with each entity offering attractive financial perks even if the organization has to pay through their nose. Such exodus leads to horizontal movement among different entities caused by unmatched demand, souring the relation in the industry (MBS 2012:28).

Some of most common obstacles facing the journalists according to Media Development Assessment [MDA 2010) are unwillingness of the public officials to talk to media, retain public information at the highest bureaucratic level (p. 8) and largely ineffective and untrained media focal persons (BMIS 2013: 92).

The Constitution guarantees freedom of press and right to information. However, there is no right to information Act. Though the National Assembly recently endorsed the Right to Information Bill, it requires the concurrence of the National Council (Upper House) to be enacted into a law. The National Council has deferred the deliberation of the Bill.

It is comforting to note that unlike in other countries, threat to life of journalists is not a major concern at the moment in Bhutan (MDA 2010). However, the report mentions that Bhutanese journalists undergo mental stress while reporting on sensitive issues from the pressures unique to a small society. MDA (2010) states that censorship of online content is minimal in Bhutan and both the National Security Act of 1992 and BICMA Act 2006 do not mention anything about censorship.

# 4. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGD)

Three focus group discussions with working journalists, former/freelance journalists and media owners/managers were held as part of the qualitative approach of the study. Each group comprised a minimum of eight participants. A loosely structured questionnaire was designed to guide the discussions.

## 4.1 Discussions

The FGD explored several broad themes relevant to Bhutanese media and journalists. These themes included the current state of journalism, challenges faced by journalists, reasons for senior and trained journalists leaving the profession and its inevitable impact on quality of journalism, and sustainability issues confronting the private media organizations.

An overwhelming majority of participants from all the three groups highlighted the poor state of media and journalism in Bhutan. They pointed out the urgency to create conducive policies and favorable environment to revive the 'dying' media industry. A few participants referred to Bhutan's private media as a 'sinking ship', which, many journalists were now abandoning. A participant remarked, "There are more senior and trained journalists outside the media industry than in the media" which has adversely affected the quality of media content.

Many participants agreed that this was a natural outcome of the poor financial state of the media houses. "Although journalism is highly regarded as a calling with a huge social mandate, at the end it must pay our bills. And when you don't get paid on time and when you have to meet household expenditure, repay loans, feed your family, it becomes difficult to work without salaries," said a former journalist.

Eventually, this led to an exodus of trained journalists from the media industry. Many former journalists now work in the private sector, run their own businesses, or have opted for better job opportunities. Participants were of the view that the poor financial position of news media also directly affected the quality of news content. To cut cost, media houses closed bureau offices, which has had huge implications on the coverage of news stories from rural areas, deepening the urban bias of news reports.

The situation of working journalists hasn't improved either. Many of them from the private media still continue to work under difficult circumstances, without getting paid on time. Some of the working journalists shared that if the situation does not improve, they will be forced to leave journalism and look for other job

opportunities. "It is really difficult having to work without salaries," said a working journalist. "I am hanging on because of my love for journalism. I am wishing the situation would improve, sooner than later."

The FGD with media owners/managers revealed that sustainability issue is by far their biggest concern. Many of them have given up hope on government interventions to revive the media. "Any intervention is now too little, too late," said a participant. "Unless there is a dramatic and miraculous change in market conditions, I don't see the media getting back on its feet."

Almost all media owners/managers present at the FGD said they are sailing through financially very turbulent times. Majority of the owners expressed that they have to keep media business alive, because they have made huge investments, taken out loans mortgaging their property and Overdraft facility from banks. Media owners said they have exhausted the Overdraft and are battling lot of odds to keep the business afloat.

"We have even risked our personal properties to take out loans to sustain the media. We have never thought of making profit but at least the returns should be able to meet the cost of operation," said a participant.

A few media owners also shared that they are on the verge of closing down. "If we continue, it will only add to our liabilities. If the situation doesn't improve, shutting down is the only option," said a media owner.

Media owners also felt that while government and a few donor agencies are investing in media development, the benefits are not trickling down to the media. They expressed the need for the government to correct the market conditions through right policies. Some of them expressed that if nothing much is done and effectively, it's only a matter of time when private media will start to close, which could have grave repercussions on media pluralism.

Majority of former journalists felt that there is a need to encourage and create opportunities for former and senior journalists to contribute to the media. And one way to do that was through accreditation of freelance journalists. Some of them said it was difficult to operate as a freelance journalist since government organizations and agencies often denied information or access to events unless one were officially reporting for a media house.

Former journalists also expressed concerns regarding censorship from outside and within the newsroom and political tagging of journalists and media houses, particularly during elections.

## 4.2 Recommendations

The various groups were also encouraged to suggest possible measures to revive the media and improve the quality of news content. Some these recommendations are listed as below:

- Government need to come up with a strong, coherent policy that will address the existing problems faced by private media and institute mechanisms to ensure their sustainability
- Important to retain senior journalists in the media and encourage former journalists to contribute to the media by writing columns, news pieces, and opinions and by mentoring young group of reporters
- Need to recognize freelance journalists and allow them access to information like any working journalists
- Trainings (both long and short-term) are important to upgrade the skills of journalists but at the same time, there is a need to evaluate the impacts of trainings provided to journalists
- Need to encourage competition in the broadcast media by licensing of private television, which will encourage former journalists to join the media

# 5. FIELD SURVEY RESULTS

This section reports the study findings covering general information and challenges confronting journalists that concern internal management, economic and external. It also presents the results of the survey on the prevailing media policies/access to information and where relevant the highlights of the responses of former journalists as reference point.

## 5.1 General Information

Respondents by gender, their educational qualification, in-country trainings, current position, years of work experience as journalists, and reasons to become a journalist are presented in this section.

The study covered 119 (90 working and 29 former) journalists<sup>1</sup> working and had worked in 16 different print and broadcast media organizations in the country (Table 1). At the moment, even the Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB) has not been able to determine the exact number of journalists. It is, however, estimated that Bhutan has about 150 journalists working in the mainstream news media industry.



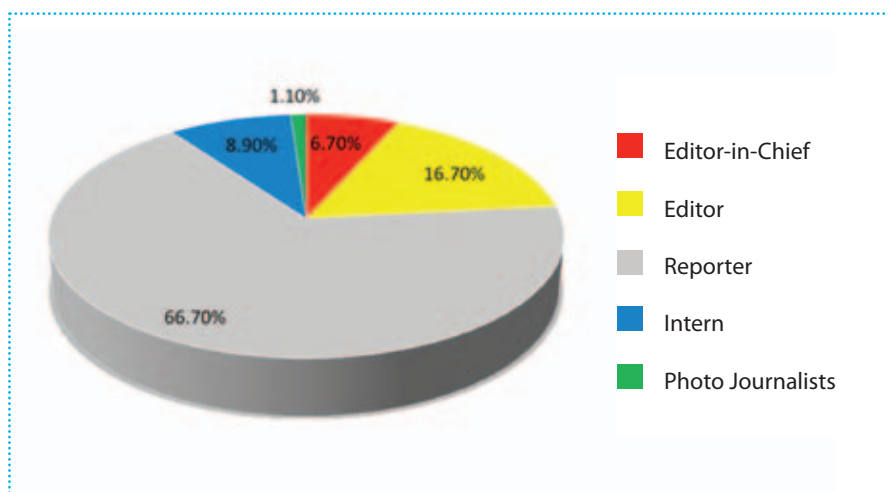
**Table 1: Respondents by type of media and gender**

Respondents		Gender		
Media houses	Type of media	Female	Male	Total
Business Bhutan	Print	4	2	6
Bhutan Broadcasting Services	Broadcast/Radio	3	4	7
Bhutan Observer	Print	-	2	2
Bhutan Times	Print	2	2	4
Bhutan Today	Print	3	3	6
Druk Melong	Print (Dzongkha)	1	5	6
Druk Neytshuel	Print (Dzongkha)	2	3	5
Druk Yoedzer	Print (Dzongkha)	2	3	5
Gyelchi Sarshog	Print (Dzongkha)	1	2	3
Kuensel	Print	11	8	19
Kuzoo FM	Radio	3	4	7
Radio Valley	Radio	2	2	4
Radio Yiga	Radio	3	2	5
The Bhutanese	Print	-	1	1
The Journalists	Print	4	2	6
Yeewong Magazine	Magazine	4	-	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>90</b>

Among the working journalists, the survey covered equal number of respondents by gender. However, a few more male freelance journalists were interviewed compared to that of female freelancers. Most of the working journalists (60) are reporters followed by 15 editors and six editors-in-chief. The rest are eight interns and one photojournalist (Figure 1).

<sup>1</sup> Former journalists are those who left the news media since 2006 and currently working as freelance journalists.

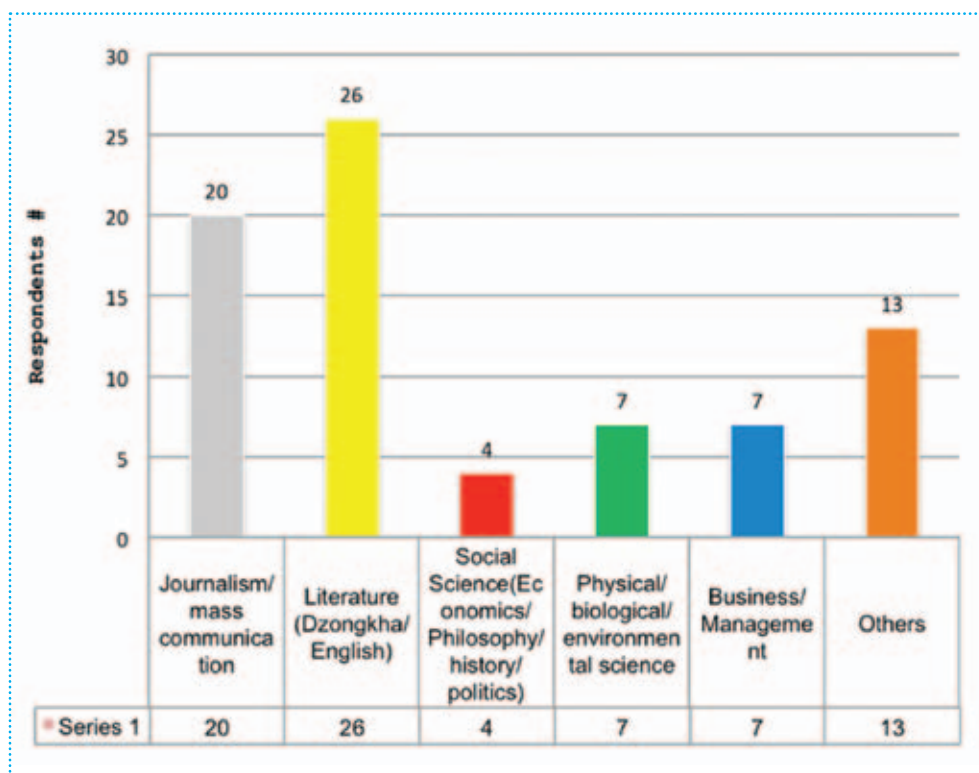
**Figure 1: Current position of the respondents**



Among former journalists the survey covered, 15 worked as reporters while 12 were editors. This means, in the last seven years since 2006, the Bhutanese mainstream news media industry lost a good pool of seasoned and experienced journalists.

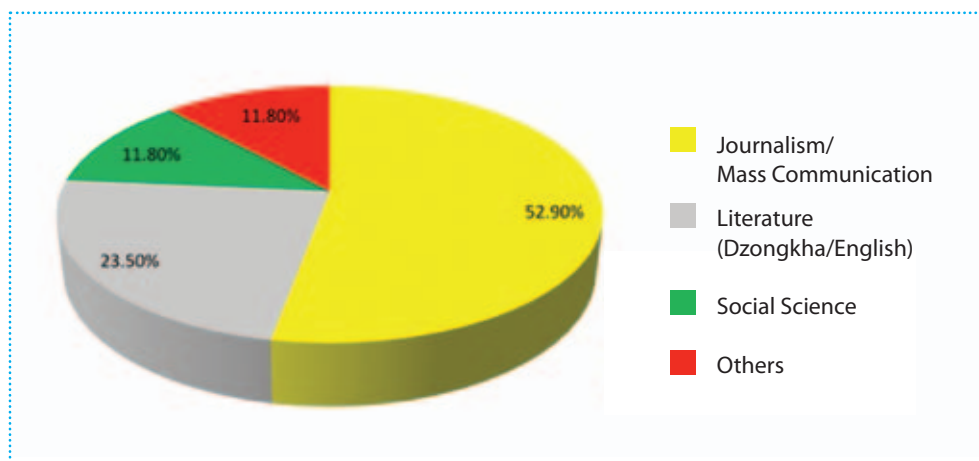
With regards to educational qualification, the majority (68%) of the working journalists possess Bachelor's Degree followed by reporters with higher secondary level education (14%). A little more than 13% of the journalists hold Masters Degree in different disciplines. Only a mere 22% of the respondents studied journalism or mass communications. A few journalists have postgraduate diploma. The field of study by respondents at undergraduate level is shown below (Figure 2):

**Figure 2: Undergraduate degree of working journalists (#)**



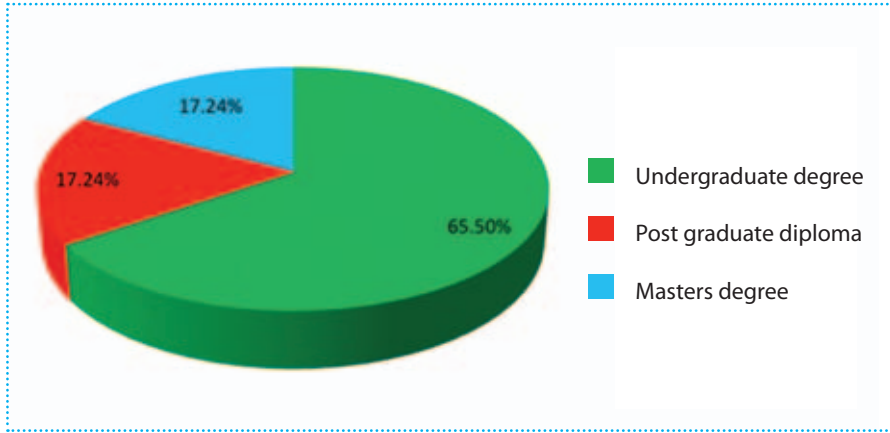
Of the 17 respondents who acquired postgraduate diploma or master’s degree, majority of them (53%) specialized in journalism/mass communication as shown in the figure below:

**Figure 3: Subject specialization of respondents**



Similarly, majority of former journalists have undergraduate degree, while more than 34% of them have completed their masters and postgraduate studies.

**Figure 4: Qualification of former journalists**



Reporters have obtained most of the in-country trainings.

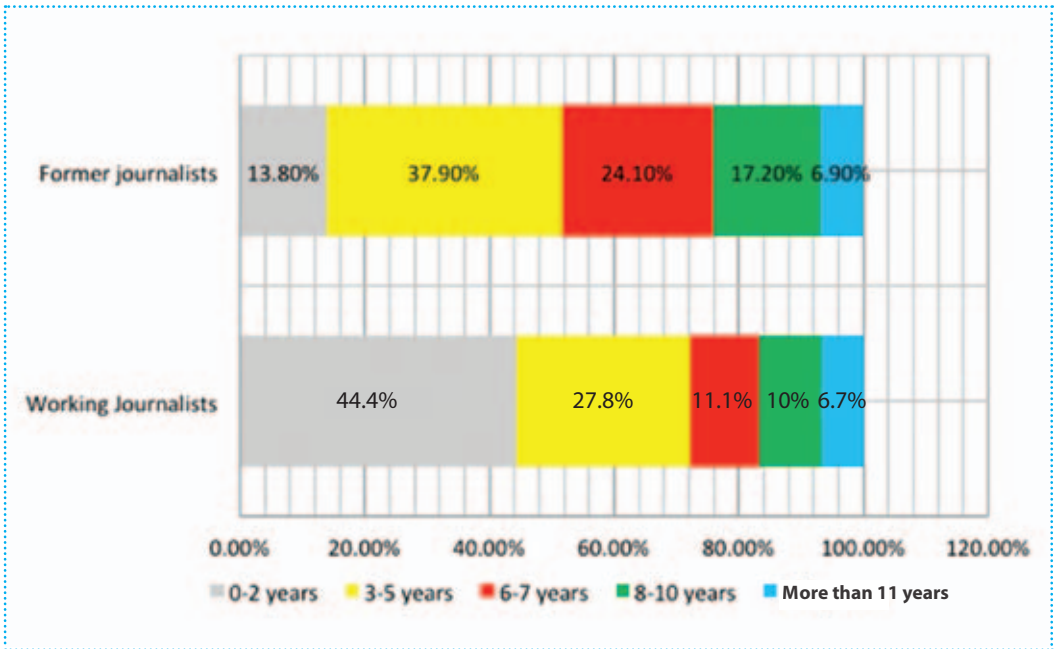
**Table 2: Educational qualification & type of in-country trainings obtained**

Qualification	Election reporting	Disaster reporting	Basic journalism	Radio jockey/ journalism	Photo journalism	Business reporting	Multi-media	Advanced Editing	Others
HSS	3	-	6	3	1	2	2	2	1
Bachelors	19	6	36	12	11	6	15	9	4
PG Diploma	2	1	2	1	-	-	-	-	-
Masters	5	-	7	1	-	-	1	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>

Almost 18% of the respondents mentioned that they are journalists by training against 82% who said they learnt the job hands-on. More than half of the respondents reported it was their ambition to become a journalist while a little more than one third said they took up journalism because of job openings. A few journalists landed in journalism because of peer influence and for unspecified reasons.

In terms of work experience, almost half (44%) of the working journalists have been in the profession for less than two years only. And 38% of former journalists had been in journalism between three to five years (see figure 5). The figure explains the exodus of experienced journalists from the news media industry.

**Figure 5: Years of work experience as journalists**



## 5.2 Internal Management Challenges

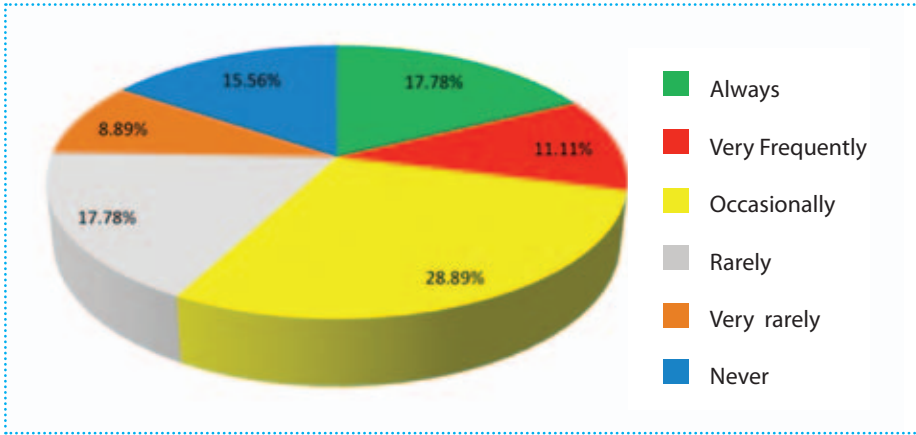
This section covers issues that concern the ownership status of media organizations, frequency of news ideas journalists receive from the heads of management and owners, level of management/owners/board directors interference and influence in editorial affairs and content.

Most journalists (48%) the survey covered work for news organizations that are owned by sole proprietors followed by 21% who work for (Kuensel) jointly owned by the state and private shareholders. The rest work for media organizations that are owned by partners, the state, and shareholders.

69% of the respondents agreed that their managing directors play the role of the editor-in-chief against 31% disagreeing. However, only 16% of the journalists surveyed mentioned they never receive news ideas from their organization's management/owners against 18% saying they do 'always'. This shows, to varying extents, journalists are fed news ideas by their management/owner (see figure 6).

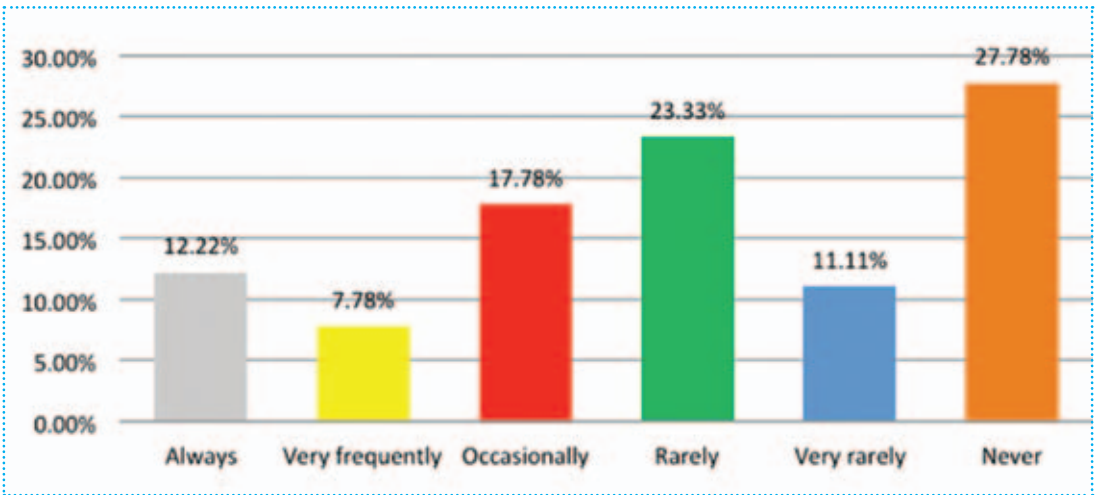
Similarly, majority of former journalists have undergraduate degree, while more than 34% of them have completed their masters and postgraduate studies.

**Figure 6: News ideas received from head of Management/owners**



23.3% of the respondents reported that they 'rarely' experience interference in new affairs from their management/owners while 28% of them mentioned 'never'. However, the management/owner interference in news affairs is prevalent in varying degrees (Figure 7).

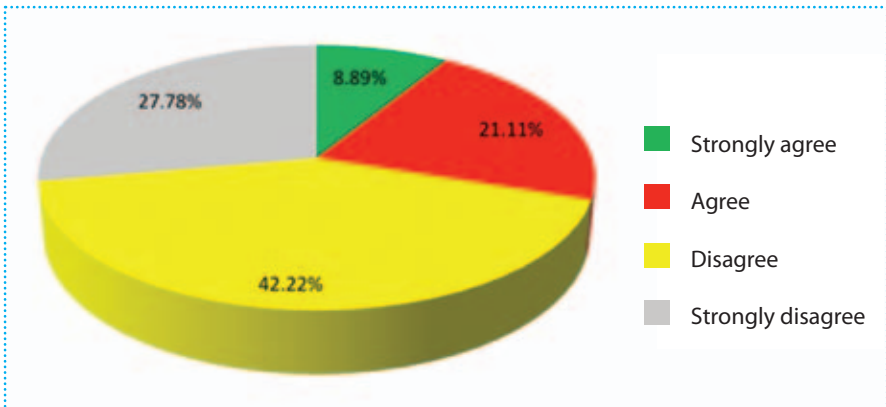
**Figure 7: Interference in news affairs**



9% of the journalists surveyed 'strongly agree' that editorial contents are influenced by the management/owner/board while 28% 'strongly disagree'. However, 21% of

the respondents 'agree' that editorial contents are influenced by the management/owner/board while 42% 'disagree' (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Influences of news content by owners/board**



### 5.3 Economic Challenges

Under this section, economic challenges facing the working journalists are covered. They include the provision of facilities required to discharge their responsibilities and remuneration.

The majority of journalists (69%) reported of being provided with adequate facilities/equipment (desktop/laptop/chair/table/telephone and internet connectivity), 31% mentioned they are not given adequate facilities to do their work. Some journalists mentioned that they are sharing work station and equipment like laptops, cameras, and recorders.

**Table 3: Equipment/facilities provided while in the office**

Equipment/Facilities while in office	No. of respondents
Desktop	39
Laptop	65
Chair & Table	46
Telephone lines	28
Notepad	8
Internet connections	36
All of the above	37

*(Due to multiple choice of response, the answer will not reflect the exact number of survey participants)*

The responses were sought if the journalists are provided with equipment/facilities while they are out in the field for news gathering such as laptop, recorder, camera and notepad and office car. The study found that majority of them were provided with office car (63) while on duty followed by 42 respondents who are provided a laptop, recorder, camera and notepad. However, two respondents said they are not provided with either of the equipment while out in the field for duty.

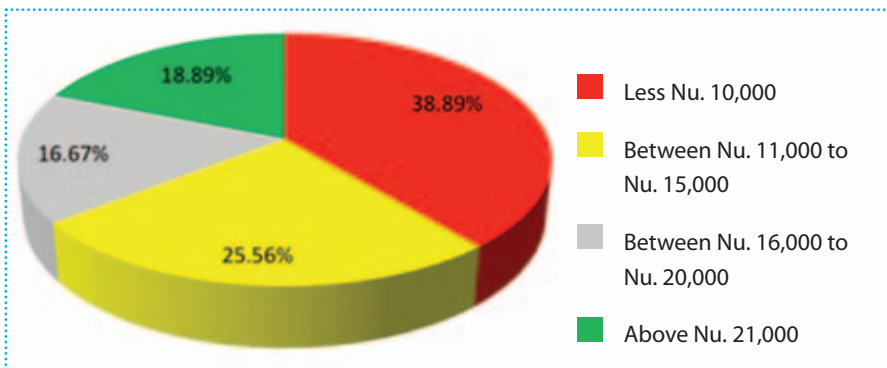
**Table 4: Equipment/facilities while on duty in the field**

Equipment/Facilities for news gathering	No. of respondents
Laptop	42
Camera	40
Recorder	41
Notepad	32
Office car	63
None of the above	2

*(Due to multiple choice of response, the answer will not reflect the exact number of survey participants)*

On the remuneration front, 39% of the journalists surveyed reported that their monthly salary is below Nu 10,000 while 18% are paid above Nu 21,000 a month. The rest earn between Nu 11,000 to 20,000. On the other hand, all former journalists used to earn more than Nu 15,000 a month.

**Figure 9: Salary range of respondents**



The journalists working in private news organizations earn far less than their fellow journalists working for the state-owned media companies (Kuensel & BBS). 55% of the reporters working in the private media organizations the survey covered are paid less than Nu 10,000 a month (Table 5).

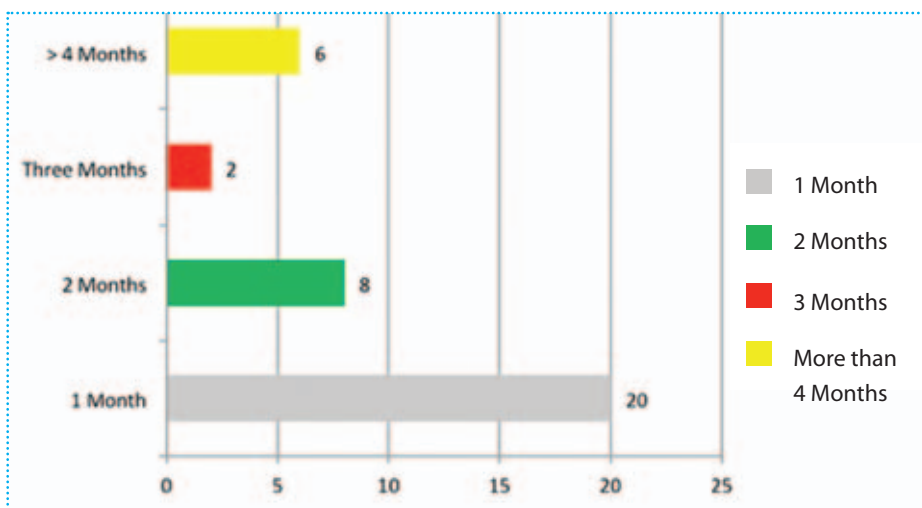


**Table 5: Salary range of respondents in private media**

Salary Range	No. of respondents
Below Nu. 10, 000	35 (55%)
Between Nu. 11, 000-Nu. 15, 000	20 (31%)
Between Nu. 16, 000-Nu. 20, 000	2 (3%)
Above Nu. 21, 000	7 (11%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>64 (100%)</b>

40% of journalists working in private media organizations reported of not receiving their salaries on time (at the end of the month). They have not been paid between one to four months in a row when the survey took place. Some of them borrowed money from friends and relatives to support themselves while others moved to their parents' and friends' place.

**Figure 10: Timeliness of salary (No. of months)**



Due to non-payment of salary on time, eight respondents said they couldn't be journalists 'anymore' while 16 can survive on their savings for at least 1-2 months and 12 want to continue as journalists for more than three months (even without salaries).

Despite problems in getting paid on time, 20 journalists want to continue to be journalists against 16 stating otherwise. However, out of 54 respondents who receive their salaries on time, 49 want to continue as journalists while five are either looking for better opportunities or want to change their profession.

Due to non-payment of salary on time, eight respondents said they couldn't be journalists 'anymore' while 16 can survive on their savings for at least 1-2 months and 12 want to continue as journalists for more than three months (even without salaries).

Despite problems in getting paid on time, 20 journalists want to continue to be journalists against 16 stating otherwise. However, out of 54 respondents who receive their salaries on time, 49 want to continue as journalists while five are either looking for better opportunities or want to change their profession.

**Table 7: Salary & willingness to continue as journalists**

Salary Timeliness	Continue as journalists?		Total
	Yes	No	
Salary on time	49	5	54 (60%)
No salary on time	20	16	36 (40%)
	<b>69 (76.67%)</b>	<b>21 (23.3%)</b>	<b>90 (100%)</b>

Most of the former journalists reported that wanting to change their profession was a major reason for leaving the media industry. A good number of them said low salary and better opportunities influenced them to leave journalism while others mentioned professional hazards including censorship, threats and long working hours as reasons for their exit (Table 8).

**Table 8: Reasons why former journalists left the profession**

Reasons	No. of Respondents
Low salary	9
Long working hours	5
Constant management interference	2
Professional hazard (censorship/threat/pressure)	6
Got better opportunities	8
Wanted to change the profession	15

The majority of journalists reported that they have access to various allowances while on duty, especially when they are out of their workstations on reporting (Table 9). However, depicting a grim picture of financial security, 40% of the working journalists do not have access to financial facilities like provident fund, office loan/advances, group saving and life insurance schemes (table 10).

**Table 9: Type of allowances journalists receive**

Allowances	No. of respondents
Daily Allowances (DA)	50
Travel Allowances (TA)	41
Communication Allowances	17
Entertainment allowances	3
Other allowances	10

*(Due to multiple choice of response, the answer will not reflect the exact number of survey participants)*

**Table 10: Type of benefits received by respondents**

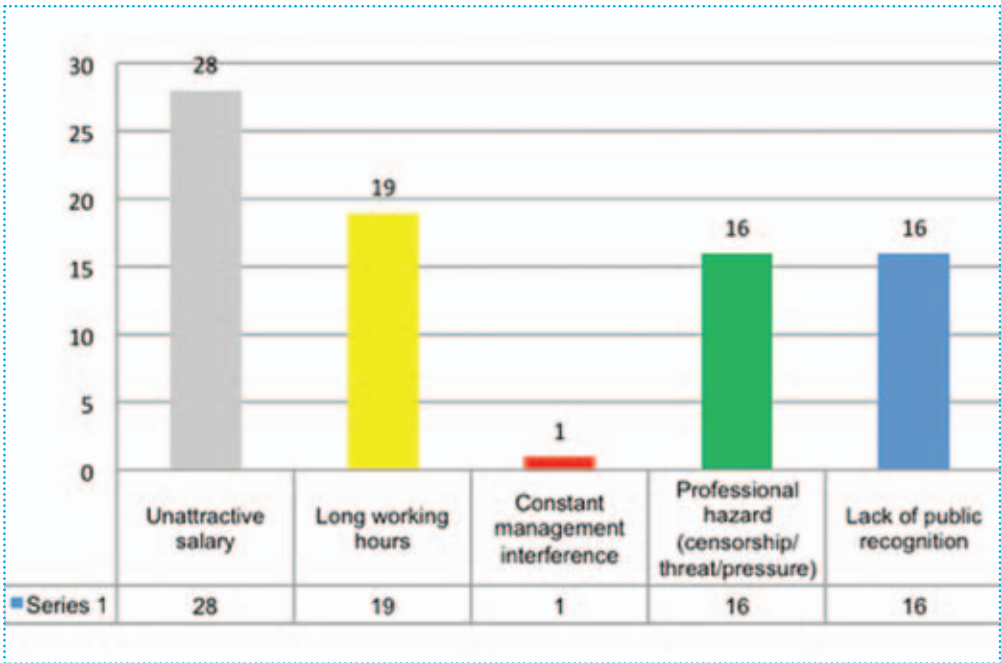
Benefits	No. of respondents
Group Savings and Life Insurance	7
Provident Fund	27
Staff Welfare Scheme	32
Office loan/salary advances	32
None of the above	36

*(Due to multiple choice of response, the answer will not reflect the exact number of survey participants)*

## 5.4 External Challenges

A whopping 71% of working journalists feel that journalism has become unattractive and has lost its glamour. The low salary packages, professional hazards and the lack of public recognition of the profession are cited as the main reasons (Figure 11).

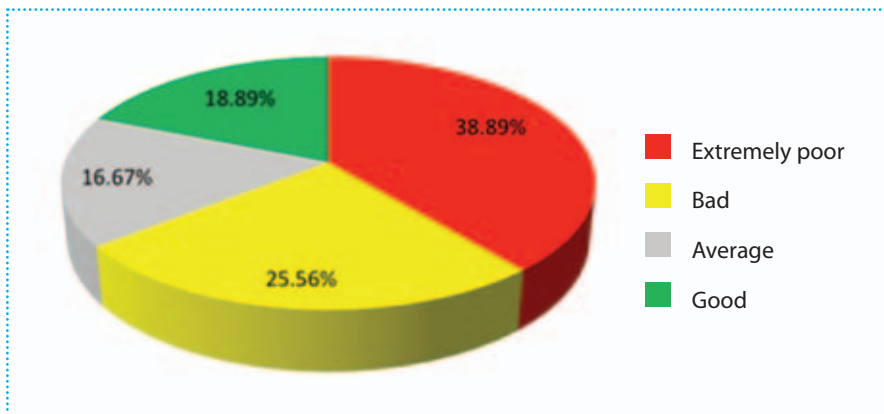
**Figure 11: Reasons why Journalism is unattractive (No.)**



More than 73% of the journalists reported that their newsrooms have their own independent editorial policy. However, at least eight respondents said the media organizations they work for do not have editorial policy. And 16 journalists do not know if their editorial team has an editorial policy to follow.

Most journalists, both working and former, feel the current state of media is 'extremely poor' and 'bad'. A few of them are of the view that the existing media situation is average and a negligible of them say the situation is good.

**Figure 12: Current Media Situation**



Most journalists mentioned the lack of government support (policy interventions and provision of incentives for quality journalism), unsustainable economics of the media industry, absence of quality journalism and censorship as causes of the current situation of the media in Bhutan.

**Table 11: Causes of current media situation**

Reasons	Former journalists	Working journalists	Total
Unsustainable media industry	24	40	64
Lack of quality journalism	20	28	48
High level of censorship	11	23	34
Lack of government support	19	59	78
All of the above	1	5	6

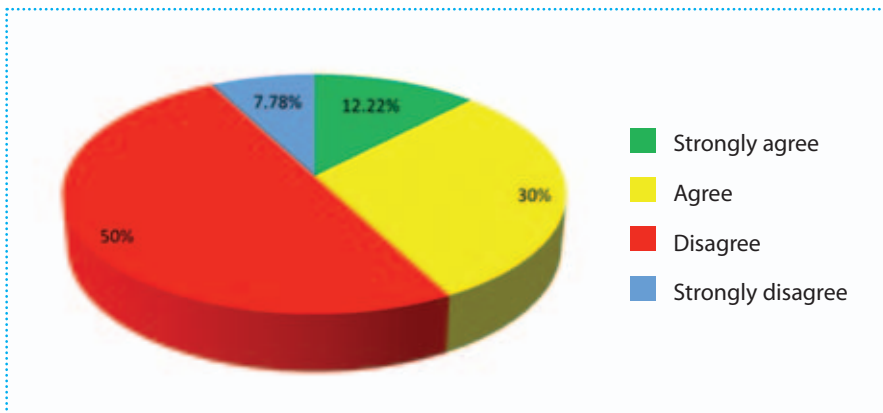
*(Due to multiple choice of response, the answer will not reflect the exact number of survey participants)*

## 5.5 Access to information & Prevailing media policies

All democratic societies are built on a foundation of freedom, individual rights and responsibilities. Constitutional and legal guarantees are essential to ensure that these tenets of democracy are guaranteed and in practice. A free, independent and vibrant media is important to all democracies as a mechanism to ascertain that these rights are protected and respected in practice.

The majority (75) of working journalists are aware that the freedom of press is guaranteed in the Constitution of the country. However, 50% of the respondents disagree that there is freedom of press in practice (Figure 13). On the other hand, 12% of the journalists interviewed 'strongly agree' that there is freedom of press.

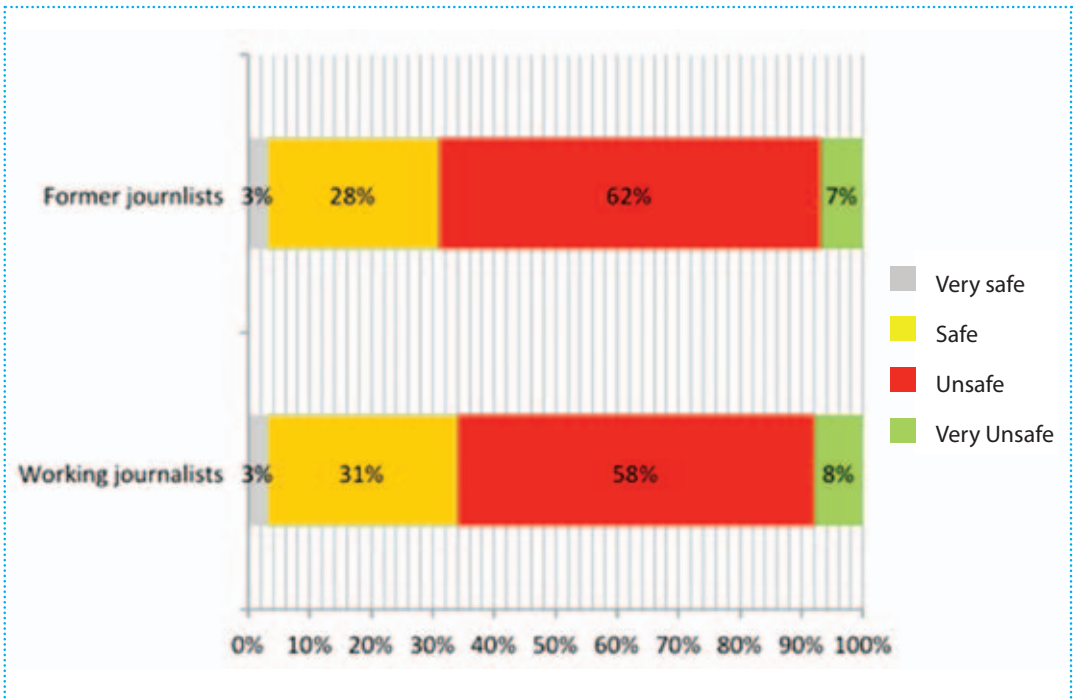
**Figure 13: Freedom of press according to working journalists**



In the similar vein, former journalists felt the freedom of press guaranteed in the Constitution has not necessarily translated into practice. 45% of them either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree' that there is freedom of press.

Similar to the majority of journalists disagreeing there is freedom of press; almost 66% of the working journalists also feel it is 'difficult' to access public information. In fact, 11% of them mentioned it is 'very difficult'. However, 15.6% and 7.8% of the journalists respectively reported that it is 'easy' or 'very easy' to access public information.

**Figure 14: Safety to cover critical stories**



About 58% of the working journalists and 62% of the former journalists felt 'unsafe' to cover critical stories. A good number of journalists say they feel 'unsafe' to cover critical stories fearing reprisal, because of a small close-knit society, lack of adequate skills and objections from their management.

At least 47% of the working journalists say they have been threatened for covering critical stories against 53% saying they did not encounter any threats. The nature and degree of threats include physical abuse/harassment, threatening to withdraw advertisements, denial of information in future and using reporters' employers to terminate from their jobs.

About 62% of former journalists also mentioned that they had been threatened while discharging their responsibilities. The natures of the threats were the same that working journalists claim. The journalists who had been threatened reported that maximum threats come from bureaucrats (13) followed by newsmakers, politicians, business people and armed forces (3).

A majority of 58% of the working journalists surveyed reported the existing media legislations and polices fail to promote journalism and ensure media development in the country.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study clearly indicate that journalists in Bhutan are not going through the best of time. Some of those working in the private media houses have not been paid for months in a row forcing them to move in with their parents and friends, while others share workstations and equipment to discharge their responsibilities. Most working journalists pointed out that journalism in Bhutan as a profession has lost its charm and glamour for varied reasons like lack of public recognition, low salary, censorship and threats. A good number of both working and former journalists feel there is no press freedom and it is difficult to access public information. The media situation is bad and the current legislations have not been able to develop media in the country. However, what is inspiring is some journalists are willing to continue as journalists despite difficulties they face.

## 7. REFERENCES

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# 8. ANNEXURE

**Annex-1: Survey Approval**  
**Annex-2: Survey questions (working journalists)**  
**Situational Assessment of**  
**Working Journalists in Bhutan**

Survey Code: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Status of the questionnaire:**

1. Completed with initially selected individual     2. Not completed, due to refusal   
3. Not completed, individual not found     4. Incomplete

I certify that the information gathered in this questionnaire was obtained/reviewed by me personally and in accordance with instructions.

Interviewer's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Recorder's name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Data Entry Person's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

---

## INTRODUCTION

Hello! My name is..... This survey is an initiative of the Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB) with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation (SDC), Bhutan. The purpose of this survey is to collect information on the situation of Bhutanese journalists working in the Bhutanese news media industry. The information you provide will help to analyze the ground realities and challenges facing the journalists in the light of mainstream media industry being challenged by sustainability issues. The information will help recommend appropriate interventions by the authorities and stakeholders concerned.

Yes     No

---

## ANONYMITY

The use of your responses will be restricted to the mentioned study. Your identity will be kept confidential and will not appear in any public document, including in this report.

Checked by: \_\_\_\_\_

---

## 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

### 1.1 Gender:

- a. Female  b. Male

### 1.2 Current position:

- a. Editor-in-Chief  b. Editor   
c. Reporter (news producer/correspondents)  d. Interns   
e. Photo journalists

### 1.3 What is your highest qualification?

- a. Higher Secondary school (up to 12th grade)   
b. Bachelors degree   
c. Postgraduate diploma   
d. Masters degree

### 1.4 What is your main undergrad major? (Tick appropriate)

- a. Journalism/Mass communication   
b. Literature (English/Dzo)   
c. Social Science (Economics/politics/sociology/philosophy)   
c. Physical/biological/Environmental science   
d. Business & management (BBA, BBM, B.com)   
e. Others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### 1.5 If you have postgraduate degree/diploma, in which field?

- a. Journalism/Mass communication   
b. Literature (English/Dzongkha language)   
c. Social Science (Economics/politics/sociology/philosophy)   
d. Physical/biological/Environmental science   
e. Business & management (MBA, MBM, M.Com)   
f. Others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### 1.6 Have you attended any of the following short term in-country trainings?

- a. Election reporting   
b. Disaster reporting   
c. Basic Journalism Course   
d. Radio journalism/jockey course   
e. Photo journalism/   
f. Business journalism   
g. Multi-media   
h. Advanced editing course   
i. Others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**1.7 How long have you been working as a journalist?**

- a. 0-2 years
- b. 3-5 years
- c. 6-7 years
- d. 8-10 years
- e. More than 11 years

**1.8 Are you a journalist by training or became one on-the-job?**

- a. Journalist by training
- b. Journalist through on-the-job training

**1.9 Is journalism your first job/profession?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**1.10 How long have you been working with the present company?**

- a. 0-2 years
- b. 3-5 years
- c. 6-7 years
- d. 8-10 years
- e. More than 11 years

**1.11 Why did you decide to become a journalist?**

- a. Ambition
- b. There was a job opening
- c. Parent ('s') decision
- d. Peer influence
- e. Others (specify).....

---

**2.INTERNAL MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES**

**2.1 What is the legal status of the ownership of your organization?**

- a. Sole proprietorship
- b. Owned by partners (private limited company)
- c. Owned by shareholders (public limited company)
- d. State owned (no shareholders)
- e. Owned by state & private shareholders

**2.2 Is MD also the Editor-in-Chief?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**2.3 How often do you receive news ideas from your head of management or owners?**

- a. Always
- b. Very frequently
- c. Occasionally
- d. Rarely
- e. Very rarely
- f. Never

**2.4 How often does the head of your organization interfere in news affairs?**

- |                 |                          |                    |                          |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Always       | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. Very frequently | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Occasionally | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. Rarely          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Very rarely  | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. Never           | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**2.5 Do you agree that 'owners/management/board members of your organization influence news content'?**

- |                   |                          |                      |                          |
|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Strongly agree | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Disagree       | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. strongly disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |

---

**3.ECONOMIC CHALLENGES**

**3.1 What equipment/facilities are you provided with while in the office?**

- |                     |                          |                         |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Desktop only     | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. Laptop only          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Chair and table  | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. Telephone line       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Notepad          | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. Internet connections | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. All of the above | <input type="checkbox"/> |                         |                          |

**3.2 Are you provided with the following equipment while you are out of office for news gathering?**

- |               |                          |            |                          |
|---------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| a. Laptop     | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. Camera  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Recorder   | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. Notepad | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Office car | <input type="checkbox"/> |            |                          |

**3.3 Are the equipment provided adequate to discharge your duties?**

- |        |                          |       |                          |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| a. Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|

**3.4 If No, how do you manage?**

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| a. Borrow from friends/families                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Use personal equipment                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Buy ourselves and recover the cost from office | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Others (specify).....                          |                          |

**3.5 What is your monthly salary?**

- |                                  |                          |                                   |                          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Less than Nu.10,000           | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. Between Nu. 11,000 - Nu.15,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Between Nu. 16,000-Nu. 20,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. Above Nu. 21, 000              | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**3.6 Are you paid on time?**

- |        |                          |       |                          |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| a. Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|

**3.7 If No, how many months in a row?**

- a. One month
- b. Two months
- c. Three months
- d. More than four months

**3.8 If you are not paid on time, how do you manage?**

- a. Borrow from friends
- b. Ask support from family members/relatives
- c. Moved to family's place
- d. Moved to friend's place
- e. Others (Specify)\_\_\_\_\_

**3.9 How long do you think you can continue to be a journalist without salary on time?**

- a. Not any more
- b. 1-2 months
- c. More than 3 months

**3.10 Do you want to continue to be a journalist?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**3.11 If No, why?**

- a. No salary on time
- b. Looking for better opportunities
- c. Want to change the profession
- d. Other (Specify).....

**3.12 Are you provided with the following facilities while you are away on duty?**

**(Tick appropriate)**

- a. Daily Allowances (DA)
- b. Travel Allowances (TA)
- c. Communication Allowances
- d. Entertainment Allowances
- e. Others (Specify).....

**3.13 Apart from salary, are you entitled to other benefits?**

**(tick appropriate)**

- a. General Life Insurance
- b. Pension Fund
- c. Staff welfare schemes
- d. Office loan/Salary advance
- e. None of the above

---

## 4. EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

### 4.1 Do you think journalism as a profession is attractive?

- a. Yes  b. No

### 4.2 If no, why?

- a. Salary package is not attractive   
b. Long working hours   
c. Constant management interference   
d. Professional hazard (censorship/threats/pressure)   
e. Lack of public recognition

### 4.3 The current media situation is:

- a. Extremely poor  b. Bad   
c. Average  d. Good   
e. Excellent

### 4.4 What, according to you, are the causes of current situation?

- a. Unsustainable news media industry   
b. Lack of quality journalism   
c. High level of censorship   
d. Lack of government support (policy/incentives)   
e. None of the above

### 4.5 Does your company have an independent editorial policy?

- a. Yes  b. No   
b. Don't know

---

## 5. PREVAILING MEDIA POLICIES/ACCESS TO INFORMATION

### 5.1 How easy is it to access public information?

- a. Very easy  b. Easy   
c. Difficult  d. Very difficult

### 5.2 'There is freedom of the press', do you agree?

- a. Strongly agree  b. Agree   
c. Disagree  d. Strongly disagree

**5.3 Are you aware of freedom of press guaranteed in the Constitution?**

- a. Yes  b. No

**5.4 Do you think the existing legislations and policies promote media development?**

- a. Yes  b. No

**5.5 If No, which laws/policies you recommend to amend?**

- a. BICMA Act, 2006   
b. Advertisement Policy/Guideline, 2012   
c. Information and Media Policy, 2012   
d. Others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**5.6 Have you been threatened (in any form) while discharging your journalistic responsibilities?**

- a. Yes  b. No

**5.7 If yes, how?**

- a. Threatened not to share any information thereafter   
b. Threatened to withdraw advertisement in future   
c. Threatened to use management to terminate from job   
d. Threatened to physically abuse/harassment   
e. Others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**5.8 Who threaten you the most?**

- a. Politician(s)   
b. Bureaucrat(s)   
c. Armed forces   
d. Business person(s)   
e. News makers

**5.9 How safe do you feel to cover critical stories?**

- a. Very safe  b. Safe   
c. Unsafe  d. Very unsafe

**5.10 What prevents you from reporting critical issues?**

- a. Management   
b. Small and close knit society   
c. Lack of adequate skills   
d. Fear of reprisal

**Thank you for participating in the survey!**  
**Annex-3: Survey questions (Former journalists)**  
**Situational Assessment of Former/freelance Journalists in Bhutan**

Survey Code: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Status of the questionnaire:**

2. Completed with initially selected individual  2. Not completed, due to refusal   
4. Not completed, individual not found  4. Incomplete

I certify that the information gathered in this questionnaire was obtained/reviewed by me personally and in accordance with instructions.

Interviewer's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Recorder's name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Data Entry Person's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

---

**INTRODUCTION**

Hello! My name is..... This survey is an initiative of the Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB) with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation (SDC), Bhutan. The purpose of this survey is to collect information on the situation of working journalists and former/freelance journalists. The information you provide will help to analyze the ground realities and challenges facing the journalists in the light of mainstream media industry being challenged by sustainability issues. The information will help recommend appropriate interventions by the authorities and stakeholders concerned

Yes  No

---

**ANONYMITY**

The use of your responses will be restricted to the mentioned study. Your identity will be kept confidential and will not appear in any public document, including in this report.

Checked by: \_\_\_\_\_

**5.1 Gender:**

a. Female  b. Male

**5.12 Past position:**

- a. Editor-in-Chief   
b. Editor   
c. Reporter (news producer/correspondents)



- d. Interns
- e. Photo journalists

**5.13 What is your highest qualification?**

- a. Higher Secondary school (up to 12th grade)
- b. Bachelors degree
- c. Postgraduate diploma
- d. Master degree

**5.14 If you have postgraduate degree/diploma, in which field?**

- a. Journalism/Mass communication
- b. Literature (English/Dzongkha language)
- c. Social Science (Economics/politics/sociology/philosophy)
- d. Physical/biological/Environmental science
- e. Business & management (MBA, MBM, M.com, MM)
- f. Others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**5.15 How long did you work as a full time journalist?**

- a. 0-2 years
- b. 3-5 years
- c. 6-7 years
- d. 8-10 years
- e. More than 11 years

**5.16 What was your monthly salary?**

- a. Less than Nu.10,000
- b. Between Nu. 11,000- Nu.15,000
- c. Between Nu. 16, 000-Nu. 20,000
- d. Above Nu. 21, 000

**5.17 Why did you decide to leave journalism?**

- a. Low salary
- b. Long working hours
- c. Constant management interference
- d. Professional hazard (censorship/threats/pressure)
- e. Got better opportunities
- f. Wanted to change the profession

**5.18 Apart from freelancing, what is your main profession?**

- a. Own Business
- b. Social work (Local NGOs)

- c. International agencies
- d. Corporations
- e. Civil Service

**5.19 The current media situation is:**

- a. Extremely poor
- b. Bad
- c. Average
- d. Good
- e. Excellent

**5.20 What, according to you, are the causes of current situation?**

- a. Unsustainable news media industry
- b. Lack of quality journalism
- c. High level of censorship
- d. Lack of government support (policy/incentives)
- e. All of the above

**5.21 'There is freedom of the press in Bhutan', do you agree?**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**5.22 Were you threatened (in any form) while discharging your journalistic responsibilities?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**5.23 If yes, how?**

- a. Threatened not to share any information thereafter
- b. Threatened to withdraw advertisement in future
- c. Threatened to use management to terminate from job
- d. Threatened to physically abuse/harassment
- e. Others (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**5.24 Who threatened you the most?**

- a. Politician(s)
- b. Bureaucrat(s)
- c. Armed forces
- d. Business person(s)
- e. Person whose news was reported

**5.25 How safe did you feel while covering critical stories?**

- a. Very safe
- b. Safe
- c. Unsafe
- d. Very unsafe

---

**Thank you for participating in the survey!**

#### Annex-4: FGD participants (Working journalists)

Name	Gender	Organization	Designation
Pema Lhaden	Female	BBSC	Reporter
Sonam Lhamo	Female	BBSC	Reporter
Sarawati Sundas	Female	Business Bhutan	Reporter
Alka Katwal	Female	Business Bhutan	Reporter
Dechen Dolkar	Female	The Journalists	Reporter
Phuntsho Choden	Female	Bhutan Today	Reporter
Dawa Norbu	Male	The Journalists	Reporter
Biku	Male	Bhutan Times Ltd	Reporter

#### Annex-5: FGD participants (Former journalists)

Name	Gender	Former Organization	Current Employee
Kesang Dema	Female	Kuensel Corporation	Own Business
Tandin Pem	Female	Bhutan Observer	Bhutan Foundation
Kunzang Choden	Female	Bhutan Times Ltd	RSEBL
Mitra Raj Dhittal	Male	Bhutan Times Ltd	Own Business
Sonam Pelvar	Male	Bhutan Times Ltd	Freelance Journalists
Tashi Dorji	Male	Business Bhutan	Own Business
Sonam Pelden	Female	Business Bhutan	Own Business
Kunga T. Dorji	Male	Kuensel Corporation	Freelance Journalists

### **Annex-8: FGD participants (Media owners/managers/editors)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Designation</b>
Tenzin Dorji	Male	Bhutan Today	CEO
Bharat Yongyang	Male	Bhutan Today	Advert. Manager
Phuntsho Wangmo	Female	Bhutan Observer	CEO
N.B. Ghalley	Male	Bhutan Times Ltd	CEO
Namkhai Norbu	Male	The Journalists	Editor
Choling	Male	Centennial Radio	Station Manager
Tenzin Lamsang	Male	The Bhutanese	Editor
Yamuna Rai	Female	Yiga Radio	Editor/Manager



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