

# Zhemgang added to local cultural inventory

**Thukten Zangpo**  
*from Thimphu*

In an effort to identify and understand local cultural assets, the Zhemgang Cultural Atlas booklet was launched on October 29 in Thimphu.

It adds as a third district to currently covered two districts, Bumthang and Trongsa under Bhutan Cultural Atlas (BCA) project.

The booklet documents the tangible and intangible heritage of the districts contributing to link culture and community development.

Additionally, it consists of surveying; inventorying and locating cultural resources on the map thereby optimizing the existing culture background of the districts.

Gracing the launch, Founder and President of Loden Foundation, Dr Karma Phuntsho said the Kheng region has a distinct cultural heritage

classified in seven domains namely, oral traditions, religious practices, cultural events, arts and crafts, folk knowledge and customs, games and sports, and habits and dialects.

In addition, he said the government has always focused on visible, tangible, and ceremonial high cultures with less priority on intangible cultures during national discourses and programs.

Over 90% of government spending is on construction of Dzongs (fortresses) and celebration of state festivals like Tshechus, said Dr Karma Phunthso.

“At the moment, we are failing, as tangible, ceremonial high cultures is just a tip of the iceberg while there are massive complex intangible form of cultures underneath that is yet to be documented and explored,” he added.

He said it helps in community vitality and development of a person’s

character at individual level, social cementing at the community level and national identity at national level if one appreciates these intangible cultures.

Supervisor of the project, Director of Research, CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research, France), Dr Françoise Pommaret said the BCA would help interested Bhutanese and foreigners to look into the cultural information of the districts.

Dean of Research and International Linkages, College of Language and Cultural Studies (CLCS), Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), Ngawang Jamtsho said the team faced difficulty while collecting information, as most of the information do not have written documents since it has been passed through oral transmission.

Additionally, he said senior citizens are not willing to share their culture as the community strongly

believes that rituals practiced for centuries are not to be exposed to public as it will dilute their values and essence.

Senior Architect of Department of Culture, home ministry, Yeshe Samdrup said the preservation of culture is mostly in paper work as there is no legislative tool for protection of cultural heritage.

The ministry has drafted a bill and the authorities are hopeful that it would be tabled in the next parliament spring session.

Moreover, he also said Bhutan’s cultural heritage bill has a unique provision that aligns the whole country recognizing it as a unique cultural heritage landscape.

“The legislative framework will help to streamline, recognize and designate to protect the system of registration and designation to bring a sense of ownership and

appreciation through community-based approach,” Yeshe Samdrup added.

As an initiative to preserve cultural heritage, the CLCS is going to introduce Bachelors in Cultural Heritage and Management and Conservation Studies by 2021.

The BCA aims at providing an informed database for policy makers, Department of Culture and other cultural institutions, tourism stakeholders, Civil Society Organizations, and the national and international public.

The project also looks forward for covering all 20 Dzongkhags in the country.

The project is initiated and funded by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Delhi, World Heritage Centre, and Orient Cultural Heritage Sites Protection Alliance, France.