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Corruption: Sharing the responsibility

BY KINLEY DORJI

Government leaders know what to do but are not doing it. Rules exist but are not implemented. The bureaucracy has shown poor leadership and suffers from poor organizational culture. There is no record keeping in the system and, therefore, no trails to decisions. There is a lack of accountability throughout the system. There is no attempt to improve service quality. The media is not playing its role. Neither is the judiciary. There is no one responsible for the morality of the civil service.

Meanwhile there are big and small fish to be reprimanded for

corrupt practices.

These are just some of the weaknesses in the Bhutanese system that has led to the growth of corruption, identified by the Anti-Corruption Commission. "But the war is not lost," says Neten Zangmo, chairperson of the ACC. "Bhutan can be the first country to achieve the millennium development goals.

The ACC is not going after individuals. It is going to build a system. Quoting leaders as far back as Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who condemned corruption, the ACC, which has investigated 16 cases out of 600 complaints it has received, will take a slow approach that focuses on awareness.

The UNDP, the Korean

Independent Commission Against Corruption (KICAC), and the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) are ACC's latest partners in developing anti-corruption strategies.

These partners organized a two-day workshop in Thimphu on August 20 and 21, attended by Bhutanese officials and private sector representatives. It was a workshop that agreed there was much to be done to translate the somewhat clichéd concepts into practical activities.

Some practical ideas that the ACC picked up, according to Neten Zangmo, were concepts like citizen

CONTINUED PAGE 13

Corruption: Sharing the responsibility

FROM PAGE 1

inspectors, integrity surveys, monitoring of the code of conduct, effective audio units, and verification of assets declared by public officials.

Among the issues that were stressed: the Bhutanese media needs to be more professional and deal with issues including ownership and control by business interests, politicians, and by government. Meanwhile Bhutanese citizens are urgently in need of information and awareness and government needs to be more transparent.

There were many other questions. Who is responsible for curbing political corruption? Who is responsible for ethics and the code of conduct of public servants? Will Bhutanese society benefit from a "naming and shaming" approach

to corruption or is Bhutanese society too fragile to deal with that?

The caretaker prime minister, Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji, opened the workshop with the message that the ACC has been conveying, for 20 months, that fighting corruption is the responsibility for all citizens. The people, he said, must take responsibility for their destiny.

Bhutan's international partners were far more positive in their assessment.

UNDP's Resident Coordinator in Bhutan, Mr. Nicholas Rosellini, reminded the participants that, unlike many countries, Bhutan had clear and firm commitment from the top; from His Majesty the King. UNDP expert, Mr. Omar Noman, pointed out that Bhutan stood fifth in Asia in Transparency International's "corruption perception index", and first

in South Asia.

KCIC's Director General, Mr. Hyun-Sun Hong, was struck by the frankness and sincerity of the discussions, unlike workshops he has attended elsewhere. He hoped it would lead to specific plans by ACC. Mr. Patrick Keuleers from UNDP-Bangkok said he believed that Bhutan, being one of the few countries with strong values depicted by its GNH policy, had a good chance to find the balance between its traditional values and modern mechanisms to fight corruption.

The ACC would like to share the expectations of its partners. "Even if one or two more people become more aware of the perils of corruption and try to make a change in their organizations, such efforts would be worthwhile," says Neten Zangmo, with a meaningful sigh.