

# Training Local Government Functionaries

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## Introduction

With democratisation and decentralisation of Bhutan's governance system, the role of gups and other members of the local government has evolved significantly. Local government comprises thrompons (mayor), gups (heads of county), mangmi (gup's assistant) and tshogpas (elected representatives), elected every five years, with their khadar (ceremonial scarf) bestowed by His Majesty the King.

Local governments receive annual grants from the central government and are responsible for the socio-economic development of their communities. Planning, budgeting, execution and monitoring of development activities are their main responsibilities.

The Department of Local Government (DLG), in the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, is responsible for training local government functionaries, to provide better services to the citizens. Capacity development, however, has a narrow approach. Training is specified as capacity assessment, strategy and plans, leadership and management, minutes drafting, dzongkhag and gewog conferences, to name a few. Training is not holistic; it is limited by a funding shortage, and to one skill set at a time.

The DLG initiated a training needs assessment in collaboration with the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) to better understand the challenges facing LG members and to design a training programme to meet their needs. The team interviewed gups, mangmis, gewog administrative officers, geydrungs, extension officials, citizens and dzongkhag officials directly involved with LG functionaries.

## Results

The issues that emerged from the study were:

- Administrative challenges faced by LG members
- Understanding roles of LG leaders

- Planning, budgeting and prioritisation
- Leadership qualities desired by the people
- Difficulty in expectation management of citizens
- Education qualification versus functional literacy of LG leaders.

### **Administrative Challenges faced by LG Members**

After elections, new gups take up office with neither office management experience nor training, with little or no idea of planning processes, and many other roles. They feel lost and are unable to fully carry out their duties. Civil servants support newly appointed LG leaders, but the quality of their support depends on the capability of these officials. New Gups depend heavily on the GAO (gewog administration officer), so the effectiveness of their training depends on the GAO's capability and experience.

Another challenge is that newly elected gups find themselves dropped in the middle of development activities planned by the previous leader. They have their own pledges to the community and they are in the middle of five-year plans with not much scope to insert their own ideas.

Those new to the role and who are just functionally literate, find their job challenging, and they perform through trial-and-error, based on little or no experience. In such situations, they depend heavily on the GAO, but this works only if the GAO is experienced. In the words of one gup, "We lose two to three years of our tenure trying to understand and figure things out, and by the time we are experienced, it is already time to plan for the next five years."

Not being oriented into the system and not having enough skills at hand are major challenges faced by local leaders, who are then not able to serve the citizens.

Human resource management is another issue. There is a perceived lack of clarity over the line of reporting in terms of extension staff. The ambiguity is compounded by the nature of the work. LG elected leaders complain that extension staff are always out of office, on training, workshops, and outcalls, while extension staff complain that LG leaders exclude them from development activities. When a gewog is supposed to function as one entity in the service of a citizen, there is a lack of coordination between extension staff and the LG leader.

LG officials require skills in leadership, conflict resolution, team building, general and office management, adaptation to change, flexibility, awareness of policies, rules and regulations and interpersonal relationships.

### **Understanding Roles of LG leaders**

Although their roles and responsibility are specified in the LG Act 2009, we tried to understand what is required of them practically on the ground.

Planning and Budgeting of development activities is a major role for LG leaders. With decentralisation, the Five Year Plan (FYP) for the gewog is collected and planned in consultation with the citizens. So planning, implementation and monitoring of development activities are mandates of the LG.

Public service delivery is another function. For G2C services, the gewog forwards letters and signs documents, and is expected to solve issues of services like census, land transaction, dispute settlement and other problems that citizens raise. Protocol duties also keep LG members engaged.

Day-to-day gewog administration, official correspondence, submission of reports to dzongkhags and central agencies, are roles of gups. The gewog administration includes not only elected members but also other LG functionaries like GAO, and livestock and agriculture extension workers. Effective human resource management falls on the gup, as the leader.

LG leaders are a bridge between citizens and central government agencies. They relay information from various sectors (both government and non-government agencies) to the citizens. They also have to collect data from citizens to submit to various agencies, and facilitate implementation of sector-specific projects like livestock, agriculture and national projects.

### **Planning, Budgeting, and Prioritisation**

The gewog Five-Year Plan is based on the LG Key Result Area (LGKRA) and a budget is released as annual grants. The gewog conducts meetings with citizens to collect their opinions about the Plan, involving gups, mamgmis, tshogpas, GAO and other members of the LG functionaries. Annual activities are compiled by the respective tshogpa through chiwog

meetings and the prioritisation of activities happens during the Gewog Tshogdue (County Committee or GT).

Planning and Budgeting development activities is a major challenge that local government leaders face. Often, the development activity is not necessarily based on data or needs assessment. Evidence-based planning is lacking.

People feel that their needs and opinions are not taken into consideration when development activities are planned and decisions made. With citizens' views not sought, they feel their voices are not heard. People also fail to understand the prioritisation process that gewogs have to go through because of fixed/limited budgets. Prioritisation is based on budget, urgency and need, but people fail to understand that and expect an equal share of the budget.

People cannot see the common interests of the gewog as a whole, and look only at their own chiwog. People's support in the planning and implementation of development activities is important, but the gewog is faced with the challenge of not getting enough adult representation from households for important meetings and live activity planning meetings. Some send their children and grandparents, who does not participate actively in the meetings.

After plans are finalised and implementation starts, objections and dissatisfaction are often raised. Citizens, on the other hand, feel they are burdened with too many meetings. They have no choice but to send their children or older members of the family who are not able to work on the farms.

Strategic prioritisation of activities is a major challenge, as prioritisation is being driven by expectations of the people at the cost of quality. The local leader feels the pressure to please every chiwog. Hence, most of the time, they end up distributing resources equally. Dividing the budget may please people but no notable impact is created.

Resources are used but social value is not maximised. However, this differs from leader to leader. Gups who are decisive and concerned about the

greater benefit of the community do not resort to equal distribution, but they risk making other chiwog (unit of a county) people unhappy.

Another source of frustration for LG leaders and citizens is influential people who interfere in gewog development activities and affect the prioritisation process.

Delay in the implementation of plans is another major challenge for LGs. Delays are caused by various factors, like not getting clearance on time, contractors being late, natural obstacles, no professional support from the dzongkhag on time, and many more. Delays lead to budget lapses and other related issues. It is a very frustrating situation. Monitoring of development activities is another challenge, as the gups lack technical skills.

Planning and budgeting being major activities in the gewog where development activities are decided, it is important to put aside personal agendas for holistic and impact-based planning. The ability to influence people, communicate the importance of common goals of the gewog, facilitation skills, stress management, adaptability to change, decision-making, prioritisation skills, systems thinking (whole of government approach) are some of the competencies required for LG members.

### **Leadership Qualities Desired by the People**

Citizens and officials alike, when asked about the type of leaders they want, all identify “*sampa-semkay*” which loosely translates as a person with a good heart. A leader without it is viewed with mistrust; they say that a person of good heart will do everything with good intentions. Most citizens feel that a leader should be like that, and be an approachable person.

People feel a leader should also have good communication and speaking skills because these are needed to communicate with central agencies and influence people.

### **Difficulty in Expectation Management of Citizens**

Gups have to manage the varied expectations of people, both personal and professional, but they find it difficult, as they have to stay within the purview of the policies, acts, rules and regulations. People, for example, expect their

needs to be met through development activities even if these do not align with national policies, rules and regulations. People are dissatisfied when their activities are not approved.

A person with high emotional intelligence, who is approachable, with good communication skills, is the type of leader the people desire. So, gaining people's trust, ability to communicate rules and regulations to the citizens, to convince people, to make people feel they are heard and understood, are qualities a LG leader would require.

### **Does Educational Background of LG Members Matter?**

With automation of most services, having to adhere to policies, acts and guidelines, and with the increase in responsibilities, the current qualifying threshold of functional literacy may not be enough. It is felt that having a formal education is critical in discharging responsibilities of LG members. However, educational background does not guarantee leadership skills and the ability to earn the trust of the people.

Most people feel that not having an educational background limits leaders in discharging their responsibilities, especially when they have to deal with paperwork, and comprehending policies and guidelines they are required to adhere to can be challenging. Education may not be the only factor, but most people feel that taking a holistic view of developmental activities, using needs-based, futuristic and strategic planning, is missing when the leader is not educated and lacks knowledge and skills.

Most official communication is conducted either through email, letters or other technological medium, so gups themselves agree that educational background is critical. Without education, even conducting workshops and training for local government functionaries would be a challenge.

However, it is observed that having an educational background does not always guarantee success and readiness to run an office. They may not understand the concerns and challenges that citizens face. Although even citizens feel an educational background is necessary, it is not known if they would choose the educated over the uneducated, as there are many other factors affecting voting.

## Training Programme Design: An Outcome of Training Needs Assessment

This study interviewed and looked at all the LG functionaries and elected members of the local government, but the training and competency design is mainly targeted at gups, because of time and budget constraints.

The team identified the following competencies required to satisfy the need of the LG members:

Table 1: Competencies Identified for LG Leaders

Sl no.	Competencies	Attributes
1	Leadership skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be confident and assertive</li> <li>• Decision-making skills</li> <li>• Interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Conflict resolution</li> <li>• Team building</li> <li>• Reliable and dependable</li> <li>• Approachable</li> <li>• Systems thinking</li> <li>• Strategic management skills</li> </ul>
2	Emotional Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress management</li> <li>• Adaptation to change/ being flexible</li> <li>• Attitude of service</li> <li>• Understanding the people’s need and existing rules and regulations</li> <li>• Empathise with people and understand their needs.</li> <li>• Listening skills</li> </ul>
3	Planning Budgeting and Prioritisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand planning process</li> <li>• Able to plan for the gewog taking into consideration the overall goal of the gewog against individual person and chiwog.</li> <li>• Know budgeting process and policies.</li> <li>• Able to prioritise based on the factors set in the LG Act and able to make use of data (evident based) for prioritisation</li> </ul>
4	Communication Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to Articulate and convince people and make things clear with integrity</li> <li>• Being able to communicate clearly</li> </ul>
5	Digital Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to use digital technology to communicate information, collect and store data.</li> </ul>

6	Office Management Skills/ Administrative skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning daily activity</li> <li>• Prioritisation skills</li> <li>• Time management</li> <li>• Monitoring and appraisal</li> <li>• Work process engineering</li> </ul>
7	Facilitation skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gup needs to enable the people to see the importance of the common goal of the gewog instead of just individual interests.</li> <li>• Setting agenda</li> <li>• Facilitating discussions in meeting</li> <li>• Conduct meetings</li> <li>• Resolutions and follow-ups</li> </ul>
8	Analysis Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct comparative analysis</li> <li>• Analysing alternative options</li> </ul>
9	Cultural Intelligence (Here used as sense of knowledge of your culture and ability to uphold culture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to understand once culture and tradition (community and nation)</li> </ul>
10	Policies, rules and regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being aware of various rules and regulations for better service delivery</li> </ul>

Competencies were defined based on the insights and needs of the gups. To develop those competencies, the training topics were designed by content development. While developing training topics, competencies, roles and challenges they face were taken into consideration. Knowledge, skills and attitude (KSA) framework was used to design the training module.

The training programme specification includes objectives, learning outcomes, teaching and learning approach and mode of delivery and assessment. For the effective implementation of the training programme, a participant handbook was developed, which included the learning outcomes of each module, learning activities, and assessment tools used.

### Learning Outcomes

At the end of the programme, the gups and mangmis should be able to:

1. Manage expectations of the citizens to serve them better.
2. Facilitate and inspire staff and citizens to work effectively towards a common goal.
3. Identify and analyse problems and opportunities and explore options before making decisions.
4. Plan, budget, implement, monitor and evaluate developmental activities.
5. Manage conflicts in workplace and gewog.



6. Lead strategic development of the gewog in line with national priorities and importance.
7. Lead and manage the office so that people trust the institution and citizens are served effectively.
8. Communicate clearly and collaborate with individuals, and within teams, in professional and community settings.

## **Conclusion**

As roles and responsibilities evolve and new systems for service delivery are developed to keep up with the changing government system, the dynamic world, and people's expectation, the capacity development for today's local government leader is critical. A structured approach to capacity development is more important than an opportunity-based programme which may not be directly channelled to the requirement and need of the concerned participants.

For better service delivery and better management of local government, it is recommended that capacity development is provided at the start of their tenure. From the needs assessment, it is understood that there is a major challenge in terms of planning and budgeting, firstly not being equipped to deal with the planning process and, secondly, a lack of citizens' participation. The team has designed a holistic capacity development training that covers all the knowledge, skills and attitude that is required to better serve the people in their community.