

Written questions to the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources

Issue 1: Follow-up on resolutions of 16th session

As per the directive of the House, the Social and Cultural Affairs Committee met with Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, Royal Civil Service Commission, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Royal University of Bhutan and representatives from the private sector amongst others during the year-long review of employment policy, programmes and strategies,. After consultation meetings, it was evident that there was a serious lack of coordination amongst the concerned stakeholders. Therefore, one of the recommendations of the National Council during the 16th session to the Royal Government was to “Ensure that every agency and sector prioritizes employment creation and promotion as a priority programme and establish a mechanism of coordination amongst them”.

The Royal Government has responded that a cabinet sub-committee comprising of Hon’ble Ministers from Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Agriculture and Forest was formed to meet regularly to address employment issues.

However, even though such a committee was formed with the Hon’ble Minister of Labour and Human Resources as the Chairperson, no responses were received on the following resolutions of the National Council. Since the recommendations pertained to employment, the National Council expected the Chairperson of the Cabinet Sub-Committee to coordinate with its members and provide responses to the following concerns. Hence, the recommendations are being sent again with copies to relevant ministries.

Answers:

Resolutions for Ministry of Education

1. *Noting* that unemployment is one of the biggest economic and social challenges facing our country but that the responsibility of addressing it has been sectoral, hereby calls upon the Royal Government to:

☞ Review Curriculum to ensure, amongst others, that:

- ④ Children’s understanding, appreciation, attitude and interest in agricultural and technical education and vocation are developed early on and steadily enhanced”,
- ④ Children are imparted with knowledge and skills in anticipation of the changing dynamics of our economy in future”.

Resolutions for Ministry of Agriculture and Forests

2. *Noting* that the huge potential of Agriculture Sector in creating employment has hardly been recognized and the trend of growth in this sector had been sluggish although a huge section of our population and the poor depend on it for livelihood calls upon the Royal Government to:

- ④ Ease land lease procedures to make them more efficient in order to encourage establishment of cooperatives, farmers groups and agriculture related enterprises by those who either own little or no land holding”.

Resolutions for Ministry of Works and Human Settlement

3. *Recognizing* that skills transfer and human resource and capacity building are essential to acquiring know-how and assuming responsibilities shouldered by expatriates, calls upon the Royal government to;

- ④ Coordinate with Project DANTAK to phase in responsibilities in areas of road constructions through national agencies so that employment in this sector is available to Bhutanese people who now have human resource, engineering and other capacities.

Resolutions for Ministry of Information and Communications

4. *Recognizing* Information and Communication Technologies as important development tool and Information Communication Technology as the most potential job generating sector in most of the countries, calls upon the Royal Government to:

- ④ Shift focus towards information and technology/ITES Industry development having put in place supporting infrastructure along with the enabling plans and policies”.

Responses to Hon’ble National Council’s Resolutions on Review of Employment Policies, Programs and Strategies

Resolutions for Ministry of Education

Ans : The MOE has already initiated the following:

School agriculture programme has been started as a part of curriculum from 2011 rolled out from class IX in 20 school on pilot. This is now administered in class from IX to XII in 39 schools.

Vocational subjects are offered as optional subjects in class IX and X, introduced in 2010 in five schools located near the Technical Training Institutes of Ministry of Labour and Human Resources. The preparatory works are in progress to introduce this subject in class XI from 2017 academic session. From 2017, National Certificate level II (NCII) curriculum will be implemented in class IX to XII in modular basis in the schools but located near the TTIs based on MOU signed between MOLHR and MOE, MOAF and MOE.

Media curriculum has been introduced in class XI in 2016, and in class XII in 2016. All curriculums are developed and updated based on the changing dynamics of our economy. However continued support in terms of financial support, and in-house capacity building is necessary. Similarly if further development and reviews are required this has to be pointed rather than indicating in a broad general directives. Further, MOLHR supports setting up of vocational and technical clubs such as beauty and hair, cobbling, tailoring, electrical, carpentry and masonry.

Resolutions for Ministry of Agriculture and Forests

Ans: Agriculture is the largest employer with about 56% of the total population engaged in it. It contributes 14% to the GDP. The sector also accounts for 4.3% of exports. Recognizing this importance, the RGOB has been making concerted efforts to move from current subsistence farming to viable commercial farming through larger farm areas as well as enhanced productivity through mechanization and improved techniques.

The targets for 11 FY Plan are to increase farmer groups to 385 from 259 and cooperatives to 50 from 39. This is expected to generate employment for about 1,370 people.

The Royal Government has allocated huge resources for agriculture sector to undertake many activities such as introduction of commercial farming and agriculture and livestock enterprises, niche and high value product including organic farming, corporatization of key mandates as agro machineries, plantations, etc.

However, there are major challenges among which are

- (i) loss of agriculture land to non-agriculture purposes including urbanization, and
- (ii) acute shortage of farm labor coupled with aging farming population

The issue of easing land lease procedures has been going on for a while. The land lease procedures in force currently have been adopted after a great deal of debate and consideration and are clear and transparent. In spite of it, the Task Force had also recommended that this issue be revisited just as it has been recommended by the Hon'ble National Council.

Land is a scarce resource. As much as there is support for easing the land lease procedures from all quarters, there are also serious concerns for possible misuse and abuse. It is also complex with impacts on local communities, forest and environment, etc. Any review will need a very careful study.

Resolution for Ministry of Works and Human Settlement

Ans: The Ministry of Works and Human Settlement encourages DANTAK to allow participation of local contractors in the construction of roads done by it. As a result, many machinery hiring and transport agencies are engaged in the construction works of DANTAK.

Resolution for Ministry of Information and Communications

Ans: The Government recognizes the potential of Information and Communication Technologies as an enabling tool for development. It has put in place various plans and policies such as Bhutan ICT Roadmap 2015, e-Government Master Plan 2014, Bhutan Telecommunications and Broadband Policy 2014, e-Government Interoperability Framework 2013 and draft ICT Industry Development Plan 2016-2020.

As rightly pointed out by the National Council, the Employment Creation Task Force Report has also recommended that the main job creation lies in IT/ITES industry and RGoB's focus should now be on IT/ITES industry development. The IT sector employment is projected to increase from about 2320 to about 11,350 15 years.

To this end, the Task Force has recommended that investments in IT/ITES industry be encouraged by reducing telecom tariff, increasing supply of qualified ICT professionals and bringing down cost of IT business operations to par with neighboring countries.

The MOIC is already following up on these recommendations.

Similarly, the MOLHR, towards increasing the supply of qualified IT professionals, has piloted Namkhaiding Solutions where 90 trainees are being trained at RIM by a Danish IT Firm on IT and Online Freelancing. The trainees are expected to earn anywhere upwards of \$ 70 a month from the fourth month. By the 8th month or so, they should be earning \$150 to \$200 a month. The good ones could be earning upwards of \$20 an hour. The trainees of the pilot project are about to enter the 4th month, which is the earning phase. If the pilot program is successful, the interest in IT industry is expected to increase by leaps and bounds as this training program will then go nationwide with trainings being conducted in every major population centre.