



**National Review Report to the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)**

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**Women and Children Division**

**Secretariat to National Commission for Women and Children**

**Royal Government of Bhutan**

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AFHS	Adolescent-friendly Health Services
AMCH	Accelerated Mother and Child Health
BAOWE	Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs
BCCI	Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry
BCDST	Bhutan Child Development Screening Tool
BCMD	Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy
BCSR	Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulations
BMF	Bhutan Media Foundation
BNLI	Bhutan National Legal Institute
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
BRCS	Bhutan Red Cross Society
BWPC	Bhutan Women Parliamentary Caucus
C4D	Communication for Development
CARLEP	Commercial Agriculture Resilient and Livelihood Enhancement Program
CBSS	Community Based Support System
CCPA	Child Care and Protection Act 2011
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CICL	Children in Conflict with Law
COP	Child Online Protection
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSI	Cottage and Small Industry
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DHI	Druk Holding and Investments
DVPA	Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013
ECB	Election Commission of Bhutan
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EVAC	Ending Violence Against Children
FYP	Five-Year Plan
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GCFP	Gender and Child Focal Point
GFP	Gender Focal Person
GovTech	Government Technology Agency
ICMA	Information, Communication, and Media Act
ICT	Information Communication, and Technology
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence

JDWNRH	Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital
LEA	Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan 2007
MCH	Mother and Child Hospital
MoESD	Ministry of Education and Skills Development
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoICE	Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment
MRG	Mainstreaming Reference Group
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NCSIDBL	National CSI Development Bank
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NPAGE	National Plan of Action on Gender Equality
NGEP	National Gender Equality Policy
NPAPGEEEO	National Plan of Action to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Offices
NPPF	National Pension and Provident Fund
OAG	Office of the Attorney General
PCB	Penal Code of Bhutan 2004
PFM	Public Finance Management
QVoB	Queer Voices of Bhutan
RBP	Royal Bhutan Police
RCSC	Royal Civil Service Commission
RENEW	Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women
RGoB	Royal Government of Bhutan
RNR	Renewal Natural Resources
SEN	Special Education Needs
SoP	Standard Operating Procedure
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WHO	World Health Organizations

## **Section I: Highlights**

### **Introduction**

1. The National Review was undertaken in line with Resolution E/RES/2022/5 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council titled the ‘Thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women’. The resolution calls upon states to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

### **National review process**

2. The national review outlines the progress and the challenges faced during the implementation. The National Review is aligned and builds synergies with the work of the 2030 Agenda, further strengthening gender-responsive mechanisms and interventions.
3. The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), as the national machinery for women and children, led the comprehensive review in consultation with all the relevant government ministries and agencies, parliament, and civil society organisations (CSOs), including women’s organisations, the UN (United Nations) system, the private sector, media, and academia. Access to the most recent and disaggregated data, where relevant information was also provided by the stakeholders. Further, several rounds of cluster meetings and bilateral meetings were conducted in preparing this report.

### **Progress in gender equality**

4. The Penal Code (Amendment) Act of Bhutan was passed in 2021, decriminalising same-sex relations. Section 213 of the Penal Code of Bhutan (PCB) was amended to exclude homosexuality between adults as an unnatural sex. The National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) was approved in 2020 and reviewed from an LGBT+ perspective in 2023 to expand its scope by including all genders and sexual orientations to create a society where substantive equality is realised, providing equal opportunities to women, men, boys, and girls, and gender-diverse people. This ensures that all people benefit equitably from the social, economic, health, education and political development of the country.
5. The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (NPPD) 2019 and the National Policy for Senior Citizens 2023 address intersectionality by focusing on those facing compounded disadvantages from age and disability. These policies promote inclusivity, equal opportunities, and rights protection, aligning with BPfA's goals of gender equality and women's empowerment.
6. Under the guidance of Her Majesty the Queen, The PEMA was instituted in June 2022 as a nodal agency for mental health to cater services and programmes through a life-course approach for women, children, and vulnerable groups. As of May 2024, the case management services have

addressed issues such as gender-based violence (GBV) and child protection issues assisting 592 individuals (370 females and 222 males). The Woman and Child Helpline received 601 calls (408 females and 193 males), offering immediate assistance and guidance. Additionally, The PEMA's Counselling Services supported 143 individuals (96 females and 47 males), with over 50% of sessions conducted online. These efforts emphasise the significant challenges faced by women and girls and the crucial role of The PEMA in offering timely and effective support.

7. The 150-bed state-of-the-art Queen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck Mother and Child Hospital (MCH) became operational in 2024. It caters to various needs of mothers and children, including paediatrics, gynaecology and obstetrics, anesthesiology, operation theatre, neonatal intensive care, and paediatric intensive care.
8. With support from the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) and international development partners, the Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women (RENEW)<sup>1</sup> established 10 Community Service Centres in 10 *Dzongkhag*<sup>2</sup>. These centres provide case management, psychosocial support, safe spaces, and training in livelihood skills. As a result, 33,938 individuals received assistance through these services, including 22,445 females, 17,392 males, and 41 others, who were provided with referrals and support for their well-being and economic empowerment.

## Good practices

9. Some of the highlights, good practices, and noteworthy initiatives that Bhutan implemented in promoting gender equality are: i) *Gakey Lamtoen*: the Bhutan Pilot Project, ii) *Dekyid Thuendrel*, iii) integration of age-appropriate *comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)* in the national school curriculum, and iv) *Sustainable Development Services intervention* in the private sector.
10. *Gakey Lamtoen*, loosely translated as '*path to happiness*' was launched in 2018 but implemented in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pilot project focused on promoting gender equality attitudes, reducing violence against women and girls (VAWG), and creating a safer community for women, girls, and children. The project was piloted in three schools between 2018 and 2022 and focused on class VII boys and girls. The sessions were conducted as part of the school's Career Guidance Counselling class through two 50-minute sessions per week. The intervention for the caregivers, composed of parents or other primary caregivers of the adolescent participants, was also conducted simultaneously. The caregiver groups met once or twice a month for 2–3 hour sessions facilitated by trained teachers. The evaluation of the pilot found that most students enjoyed the sessions and found them useful. In addition, the adolescents found the concepts, topics, and skills easy to understand. The overall change in their attitude was estimated at around 11%, which is a significant achievement given that social change is a slow process. Given the

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<sup>1</sup> RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the empowerment of women and children in Bhutan and promoting Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), with specific attention to the survivors of domestic violence (DV) and Sexual & Gender Based Violence (SGBV).

<sup>2</sup> There are 20 Dzongkhag (Districts) in all of Bhutan, each headed by a Dzongdag appointed by the King as the chief executive, supported by civil servants.

impact of *Gakey Lamtoen*, the various sessions of the pilot are integrated into scouting programmes, counselling classes, and parent-teacher meetings.

11. In 2022, the NCWC launched a comprehensive three-year project to Empower Communities to Address Violence Against Children. The project aims to promote a multi-sectoral collaboration between key government agencies, CSOs and the general public in promoting positive parenting at home, school and communities, transforming harmful and discriminatory gender and power dynamics and improving relationships and communication within the families. As part of this initiative, the pilot programme titled "*Dekyid Thuendrel - Positive Parenting*" was piloted in 15 schools in Thimphu *Thromde*<sup>3</sup>, 12 schools in Dagana, and 7 schools in Zhemgang, along with three core areas within Thimphu *Thromde*, 10 *Gewog*<sup>4</sup> in Dagana, and four *Gewog* in Zhemgang. Currently, the programme is being rolled out in 6 schools under Thimphu *Dzongkhag*. The programme aims to educate the children, parents and caregivers on the knowledge, attitude and skills of positive parenting, build resilience and confidence in boys and girls to express themselves safely and prevent violence at homes, schools, and communities by improving access to community -based child protection mechanisms and services. As part of the program, a community-based child protection committee was formed in all the pilot *Gewog* and a school-based child protection committee in all the pilot schools. To encourage children to seek support and share their concerns and suggestions, a feedback box was implemented in all the project schools. Initial assessments of the intervention show its effectiveness in reducing violence and improving relationships between caregivers and children. This impact has been particularly beneficial for girls, who are more likely to experience violence at home, including sexual violence. The project also includes orientation sessions for *Dzongkhag* officials, local leaders, and civil society organisations on relevant laws, policies, and mechanisms in place. This multi-faceted approach creates a supportive environment for children, promoting their safety and well-being through education and community engagement.
12. Recognising the importance of CSE as a critical part of young people's education in equipping them with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions related to their health and well-being, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, the MoESD institutionalised CSE in schools by integrating CSE concepts in the national school curriculum across all grades from pre-primary till class XII in seven subjects (English, Dzongkha, Science, Biology, Social studies, Value, Health & Physical Education). To ensure CSE was delivered according to international standards, nationwide CSE training for teachers was initiated in 2023, reaching nearly one-third (200) of schools in Bhutan. Many of the core qualities of CSE, such as a gender equality and human rights-based approach, contribute to the prevention of GBV and the promotion of a gender-equal society. Further, to de-stigmatise menstruation and address challenges related to menstruation faced by girls and women, the Red Dot Bhutan Campaign was launched in 2022 and carried out across schools and nunneries. The Customs Duty (Amendment) Act of 2021 waived

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<sup>3</sup> Thromde is a term used to refer to a municipality or an urban area.

<sup>4</sup> A *Gewog* means county in Bhutan, governing a cluster of villages and overseen by a council led by a local government leader.

off 30% customs duty on sanitary products and 5% sales to zero to make them affordable for all women and girls.

13. The Gender, Inclusion, and Diversity Assessment in Sustainable Development Services (SDS) was piloted in four sectors by NCWC in collaboration with the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI). While the companies in the pilot sectors demonstrated equal gender representation and provided preferential employment to persons with disabilities, they lacked inclusive infrastructure, policies, and adequate maternity leave for women and persons with disabilities. Therefore, based on the recommendations of the assessment, the companies developed gender-sensitive policies, mandatory training on gender sensitisation and sexual harassment for managers and executives, established committees to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, and extended maternity leave for childcare. These initiatives aim to create a more inclusive and supportive work environment and will continue to enhance gender equality in the workplace in Bhutan's private sector.

### **Setbacks and challenges**

14. While significant progress has been made, Bhutan has yet to achieve gender parity in many domains. The proportion of parliamentary seats held by women decreased from 15.3% in 2018 to 6.9% in 2024, despite numerous awareness campaigns on women's leadership and the training and support provided to female aspiring candidates.
15. A gender assessment in taxation was conducted to analyse how existing tax policies in Bhutan affect gender equality. The study shows that while there are no explicit gender biases in tax policies, implicit biases do exist. Women, who are predominantly in lower-income categories or the informal sector, often do not benefit from tax incentives. This situation limits their economic opportunities and reinforces gender inequalities. The study recommended developing capacity among tax policymakers and administrators to understand the intersectionality of gender, collection of sex-disaggregated data, targeted subsidies for low-income women and female students in remote areas and improve public communication strategies to educate women about tax policies and incentives in the short run. In the long term, the assessment recommended developing a framework for mainstreaming gender in tax policy design, integrating gender-responsive budgeting throughout public finance management, providing tax incentives to businesses that promote female employment and supporting women in the workforce through measures such as tax holidays for women entrepreneurs, and formalise unpaid care work.
16. Challenges related to data, particularly the availability of sex-disaggregated data in some of the sectors still remain. The lack of access to reliable and timely data has hindered gender analysis in policy development and programme implementation in some sectors. Also, the administrative data maintained by different organisations and periodic surveys need to be harmonised.
17. Bhutan continues to encounter challenges in implementing Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting. In 2011, Bhutan adopted Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting by piloting it in



four ministries. While efforts have been made to enhance the capabilities of mainstreaming gender into the planning and budgeting phase, the initiative could not be scaled up to other ministries due to the lack of technical capacities and appropriate frameworks.

18. In 2021, the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability Assessment of Gender Responsive Public Financial Management (PFM) 2022/23 highlights a lack of gender analysis in revenue policy and legislative reforms, despite significant laws like the Tax Act 2021 and Customs Duty Act 2021 being enacted. While the National Budget Report includes qualitative assessments of past and projected revenue, it fails to consider gender impacts. To enhance gender-responsive PFM, it is recommended to integrate gender analysis in future policies, build capacity in gender-responsive budgeting, engage gender advocacy groups, and implement mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the gender impacts of fiscal policies.
19. The COVID-19 Impact on Women and Children Study (Bhutan) 2021 reported a significant increase in gender-based violence (GBV) against women compared to men during the pandemic. Among adults, 64.8% observed increased physical violence, 47.1% noted sexual violence, 34.6% experienced emotional abuse, and 30.7% faced economic violence. Regarding economic and livelihood impacts, although working hours for paid work remained stable, about 18.9% of households reported a loss of income from jobs or businesses. The pandemic increased unpaid care and domestic work for both genders, with more women and girls reporting this rise. Most adults and children could access health and basic services without much difficulty. However, 72% of respondents, particularly in rural areas (76%), faced challenges due to school closures. All these findings emphasise the need for improved country preparedness to address such issues during emergencies.

### **Areas of support**

20. A nationwide survey of the Prevalence of VAWG was conducted in 2017 to determine the prevalence and type of violence, perpetrators, reporting behaviour, impact, and the likely triggers and causes. The survey findings informed the development of NGEF where prevention has been highlighted, development of standards and guidelines, and implementation of programmes and projects to change attitudes and prevent violence. The next survey of VAWG is scheduled in 2026 and 2027 and will collect data in similar thematic areas. Bhutan will require both technical assistance and financial support to conduct the survey. The survey is crucial to understanding the impact of policy and programmatic interventions thus far and setting priority areas.
21. A gender-responsive PFM system that incorporates gender needs at all levels of planning and the budgetary process is crucial for understanding resource allocation, gaps, and resource requirements to promote gender equality. The NCWC will collaborate with MoF in the implementation of the PFM Reform Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2028 to adopt and implement gender-responsive PFM. This will involve developing systems and enhancing the capacities of all stakeholders involved in the planning and budgetary process which will require significant resources.

22. Despite being a carbon-negative country, Bhutan faces environmental disasters and climate-induced challenges with significantly higher risk to agricultural and hydropower sectors. As women make up a significant part of the agricultural workforce, they are vulnerable to such disasters. To address these impacts, Bhutan has initiated climate-resilient agricultural practices, including water management, crop diversification, and introducing resilient crop varieties. Enhancing market linkages has helped women farmers sell surplus produce, increasing their income and economic stability. This approach includes ensuring women-friendly equipment, sustainable farming training, and establishing institutions and standards to promote market linkages. This has helped in economic stability and ability to absorb climate shocks or disasters, ensuring women-friendly equipment, training on sustainable farming, and establishing institutions and standards to promote market linkages.
23. Bhutan is committed to promoting women in politics, which requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to overcome gender biases and barriers. The National Plan of Action to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Offices (NPAPGEEEO) will be strengthened to achieve legal, societal, institutional, and individual changes.

## **Section II: Priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks**

### **Analysis of Achievements, Challenges, and Setbacks**

#### **Ratification of UN Conventions**

24. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan enshrines equal fundamental rights for men and women, intolerance of violence against women, and aims to eliminate discrimination against women and children. The Constitution also recognises international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which Bhutan ratified in 1981 without reservations as the deemed law of the Kingdom, showcasing the government's commitment to women's rights. Bhutan presented its 10th periodic report to the Committee on the CEDAW in 2023 and the combined 6th-7th report to the Committee on the rights of the child. In response to the 10th CEDAW and CRC Concluding Observation, Bhutan is currently developing an agency-wise mapping and action plan.
25. Bhutan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2023 to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons living with disabilities.
26. Bhutan also ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and its associated protocols in 2023. The ratification of Bhutan reaffirms its commitment to implementing measures to strengthen its legal and institutional frameworks to tackle transnational organised crime effectively to ensure a safer and more secure environment, particularly for vulnerable groups including women and girls.

#### **Legislative reforms and policy development**

27. Bhutan made a landmark change in recognising and protecting the rights of LGBT+ individuals by passing the Penal Code (Amendment) Act 2021, which decriminalised same-sex relations. This amendment marks crucial progress towards protecting and safeguarding LGBT+ rights by ensuring equality within the legal framework and promoting greater acceptance in society.
28. In 2020, Bhutan approved the NGEP marking a significant effort and step towards promoting gender equality across all sectors. This policy was reviewed in 2023 to include provisions for LGBT+ individuals which reflect Bhutan's commitment to addressing the needs and rights of all individuals of diverse sexual orientation, gender identities and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). A National Plan of Action on Gender Equality was also developed to implement the provisions of the policy.
29. Bhutan approved the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities in 2019. The policy aims to enhance stakeholder coordination to foster equality and inclusivity. According to the 2017 Population and Housing Census, 15,567 individuals in Bhutan live with disabilities, with 8,111

being female and 7,456 male. The government has allocated Nu 2 billion in the 13th Five-Year Plan to implement a new social protection system for vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities. This plan also includes developing 10 cluster hospitals with disability-friendly features by 2029 and expanding the number of inclusive schools for persons with disabilities from over 40 to 120 across the country.

30. In 2023, the National Policy for Senior Citizens was approved to focus on the welfare and rights of the older population to ensure that they receive the care, respect, and opportunities they deserve. The policy intends to benefit older women who are more vulnerable to poverty, risk of poorer health outcomes, and exclusion from society. Further, other policies integrate gender to mainstream it. One such initiative was the formulation of a gender-responsive Climate Change Policy 2020 where gender is mainstreamed across adaptation and mitigation actions, response, and disaster management activities.

### **Promotion of women and girls in STEM and TVET**

31. Recognising the importance of women's participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for economic growth and empowerment, Bhutan adopted the National TVET Gender Strategy 2024–2028 in 2023. While the Gender Parity Index (GPI) increased from 0.42 in 2020 to 0.51 in 2023, women remain underrepresented. Therefore, the strategy aims to create a globally recognised and inclusive TVET system that respects, inspires, and empowers individuals to pursue quality and holistic technical education and training. The strategy targets to achieve 50% gender enrolment in TVET and ensures that at least 70% of female graduates are employed within 12 months of graduation. This strategic approach ensures a balanced workforce where women have equal opportunities to contribute to and benefit from the nation's economic development.
32. Bhutan conducts programmatic initiatives periodically to encourage women's involvement in STEM and TVET. These initiatives include the STEM festival, an annual event designed to generate interest in STEM subjects among girls and women involving 2000 people, including girls, boys, and adults; and a STEM camp where 200 girls aged 12 to 17 years are involved. 50 girls aged 17 to 25 attended digital literacy training workshops to improve women's digital skills and prepare them for the demands of the modern workforce. A girls' mentoring programme was also carried out for 40 girls by 10 mentors. As of 2023, Women in STEM Bhutan has engaged 2765 participants in various activities since its inception in 2022. Other initiatives such as hackathons for girls and Girls in Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) were initiated to provide a platform for girls to develop and showcase their IT, coding, and problem-solving skills.

### **Prevention and response to sexual harassment in the workplace**

33. Recognising sexual violence against women and girls as a significant impediment to gender equality, several policies and guidelines were adopted, The PEMA drafted a policy for prevention

and response to sexual violence to prevent and address sexual violence in all settings by outlining measures to protect individuals from sexual violence and provide support to survivors.

34. The NCWC developed a Standard Internal Framework to Address Gender-Related Issues at Workplace, which is mandated to be adopted by all government agencies, *Dzongkhag* administrations and local governments. This framework specifically provides strategies and procedures to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, ensuring a standardised approach across the public sector.
35. The standard operating procedure for the (SoP) "Go-to-Person"<sup>5</sup>, established in 2018 continues to address sexual harassment and ensure psychological safety within the civil service workplace.
36. In 2022, Bhutan's Judiciary, independent of the executive branch, adopted the Guideline for Prevention and Protection of Judicial Service Personnel from Sexual Harassment at the Workplace. This guideline aims to protect judicial personnel from sexual harassment and ensure a safe and respectful working environment within the judicial system. Similarly, for companies owned by Druk Holding and Investments (DHI), the Group Policy Framework on Gender Equality at the Workplace 2021 was developed to provide a strategic framework, policies, and procedures to promote gender equality by addressing sexual violence at the workplace.
37. Further, all CSOs collaborating with development partners are required to develop policies and guidelines for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) to address SEA risks in the workplace and among beneficiaries.

### **Established institutions to promote gender equality**

38. Recognising the importance of addressing mental health issues in Bhutan, The PEMA was established as reported in Para 6. It focuses on providing comprehensive treatment, rehabilitation, and aftercare services for substance users to ensure access to quality care. It also provides protection services to survivors of violence, who are mostly women. The PEMA Centre, a 60-bed hospital, will be established by 2026 to offer specialised mental health care with a dedicated ward for children and families. The Ministry of Health (MoH) has introduced a Child and Family Ward, catering specifically to the mental health needs of children and adolescents in early 2024.
39. The Queen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck Mother and Child Hospital, which became operational in 2024, as reported in para 7, offers a wide range of specialised services, including paediatrics, gynaecology, and obstetrics, as well as anesthesiology, and is also equipped with an operating theatre to deal with complex issues. Moreover, the neonatal intensive care unit and paediatric intensive care unit are equipped with advanced medical technology and staffed by skilled professionals, providing critical care to newborns and children with serious health conditions.

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<sup>5</sup> The "Go-to-Person" programme was introduced in 2018 to respond to sexual harassment and provide psychological safety in the workplace.

40. The Legal Aid Centre was established in October 2022 to provide legal assistance and representation to individuals who cannot afford legal services. The Centre offers services for both civil and criminal cases. It specifically targets indigent persons, ensuring they receive fair legal representation and advice, which is crucial for upholding the rule of law and protecting human rights. The Centre has already made a significant impact by providing legal aid to 52 individuals, including 21 men, 31 women, and 5 persons with disabilities. The Centre's services include legal advice, assistance in filling judicial forms, and representation in court, particularly for serious criminal offences and vulnerable individuals like children in conflict with the law and those with disabilities.

### **Programmes to prevent gender-based violence**

41. Bhutan has made significant progress in addressing GBV through a series of comprehensive initiatives. In the health sector, efforts were also made to ensure at least one female nurse in all healthcare centres cater to female patients and training healthcare workers on responding to GBV.

42. The policy support unit, in collaboration with the MoH, will ensure compliance with the Environmental and Social Management Framework 2022, focusing on environmental and social risks. Key measures will address GBV and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse/Sexual Harassment through gender-sensitive policies, training, preventive committees, and ensuring safe, equitable working conditions, especially during sickness and quarantine.

43. In the education sector, numerous initiatives were piloted such as *Gakey Lamtoen* and *Dekyid Thuendrel* as reported in Para 10 & 11 to promote positive gender attitudes and improve caregiver and children relationships. Further, the curriculum was reviewed to ensure that the language and illustrations in the textbooks avoid gender stereotypes and reinforce child rights and gender equality. An age-appropriate curriculum framework and instruction guidelines on CSE were also developed and implemented in all schools of Bhutan.

44. The NCWC, in collaboration with stakeholders, has implemented the SoP for GBV Prevention and Response, which provides clear guidance on handling GBV cases across the country and trained service providers in case management.

45. RENEW has enhanced its Community Based Support System (CBSS)<sup>6</sup>, including a dedicated helpline number and crisis centres, to offer immediate assistance and counselling to survivors. The MoH's efforts, including the establishment of specialised care units in hospitals, have significantly contributed to addressing the physical and psychological needs of survivors.

### **Setback and challenges**

46. Challenges of female representation in parliament, limited gender-responsive public, financial

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<sup>6</sup> The Community Based Support System (CBSS) is a mechanism to ensure the safety and security of survivors of domestic violence through partnerships with community members.

management, inadequate sex-disaggregated data and COVID-19 are reported in Para 14-19.

## **Priorities in the last five years for accelerating progress for women and girls**

### **Equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice**

47. Bhutan's legal framework, enshrined in the Constitution, guarantees fundamental human rights to all citizens, including women and girls. Provisions such as equality before the law and the right to life, liberty, security, and integrity of the person ensure equality and non-discrimination regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, and other identities.
48. To enhance access to justice for vulnerable populations, including women, the first Legal Aid Centre as reported in Para 40. In 2022, the Bhutan National Legal Institute (BNLI) also conducted virtual sensitisation programmes on legal aid for various groups, involving the participation of the general public, judges, judicial officers, bench clerks, LG Leaders, and paralegals. In 2023, BNLI continued its efforts by organising workshops, including sessions for 50 private lawyers on Legal Aid Rules and Pro Bono Guidelines, Local Government Leaders of Trongsa, CSOs, and a Child-Friendly Legal Aid training for 25 private lawyers and staff of the BNLI and the Legal Aid Centre.
49. Bhutan has also made progressive improvements in physical infrastructure to enhance access to justice. Courts in all 20 *Dzongkhag* and 15 *Dungkhag*<sup>7</sup> are universally accessible and equipped with modern amenities. New courts, except the *Dzongkhag* Courts in Thimphu and Chhukha, and Lingzi *Dungkhag*, feature child-friendly rooms and disability-friendly equipment.
50. The Family and Child Bench, established in 2017, has been providing women and children-friendly services. Staffed mostly by women, the bench ensures that its services are sensitive to the needs of women and children. It also determines the specific needs of women and children in difficult circumstances and makes direct referrals to other service providers, including The PEMA, hospitals, and other support services. In 2022 and 2023, the bench decided 446 and 556 cases, respectively. In Paro and Wangdiphodrang Courts with two benches, one bench is dedicated to Family and Child matters. The judiciary is cognizant of the importance of family, women, and children and therefore, to enhance access to justice, Thimphu *Dzongkhag* Court will have new infrastructure in the 13th Five-Year Plan. Six courts will be built in the first phase (2025-2026), and six more courts will be built in the second phase (2027-2028). The new structure will have a women, child, and disability-friendly environment.
51. Further, to enhance access to justice, especially for disadvantaged women and people in remote areas, a pilot e-Litigation platform was introduced in all courts in 2021. This platform enables electronic case registration, document filing, payments, and remote hearings, streamlining the legal process for women and girls. E-Litigation equipment was distributed to thirteen courts, increasing access to justice for litigants across the country. Specific procedures for e-Litigation

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<sup>7</sup> Drungkhag is a sub-district administrative division in Bhutan, responsible for local governance and development activities within a Dzongkhag (district).

have been developed, outlining steps, principles, and the roles of service providers in facilitating access to justice through electronic channels. More than 559 people availed of these services and 13.5% of the total court hearings were conducted virtually in 2021. Furthermore, the judiciary encourages the use of virtual hearings through the use of social media platforms.

52. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) stands as a crucial avenue for women and girls to seek legal remedies, with trained local leaders facilitating free assistance and guidance on laws and procedures related to women and children. This approach efficiently resolves conflicts outside formal court settings, making justice more accessible for vulnerable groups. In support of this, 193 female local leaders have been trained in mediation and negotiation techniques. In 2022, 3,454 disputes were resolved through ADR, with only 23 cases appealed to the high court in 2023 indicating the effectiveness of ADR in dispute resolution in the communities.
53. Court-annexed mediation in Bhutan has become an integral part of the judicial system, providing an alternative and efficient method of resolving disputes. This approach helps to reduce the backlog of cases in the courts and offers a less adversarial and more amicable resolution process, which is particularly beneficial for family and community-related disputes. Since its establishment in 2019, 1,924 cases have been resolved through the Court-Annexed Mediation.

## **Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls**

54. An SoP for GBV Prevention and Response was developed to enhance institutional mechanisms and streamline procedures for addressing GBV through a coordinated multi-sectoral framework. This SoP outlines the roles of key stakeholders to ensure uniform, efficient and comprehensive GBV service provision and interventions. In 2019 and 2020, training sessions on the SoP were provided to more than 200 case managers. As part of the SOP, a service mapping exercise was carried out to create a comprehensive referral pathway for GBV survivors.
55. A guideline for GBV case management was developed to make case management a central aspect of GBV services. A total of 101 women and 61 men, including protection officers, counsellors from government organisations, and volunteers from CSOs such as RENEW and Nazhoen Lamtoen<sup>8</sup>, received training on guideline and case management. These trained individuals now serve as case managers in various *Dzongkhag*, ensuring adequate services for GBV survivors. Continued capacity-building efforts are underway, including the development and distribution of pocket guides for frontline workers. In 2024, 32 police officers were trained by UN-certified trainers on GBV, including sexual violence.
56. In 2020, a guideline for managing survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence in primary healthcare centres was developed to strengthen the health sector's response to GBV. All forensic focal persons from all hospitals and primary healthcare centres underwent training following this

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<sup>8</sup> Nazhoen Lamtoen is a Bhutanese CSO that supports children and youth in conflict with the law and in difficult circumstances.



guideline. Prevention and response to GBV were also integrated into the curriculum of the *Desuung* Training Program<sup>9</sup> as most of the *Desuups*<sup>10</sup> serve as frontline workers.

57. The NCWC conducted training programmes using the RESPECT implementation package with a diverse group of participants from various fields and organisations. RESPECT is a comprehensive framework that includes seven strategies to guide policymakers and implementers in creating, executing, monitoring, and evaluating interventions to prevent and respond to violence against women. A total of 72 participants from different sectors, such as Gender and Child Focal Points (GCFPs), *Dzongkhag Tshogdu*<sup>11</sup> Chairperson, Police Officers, Case Managers, Protection Officers, and officials from organisations like RENEW and Nazhoen Lamtoen, participated. This diverse representation ensures that multiple perspectives are considered, resulting in more effective strategies and solutions for addressing violence against women.
58. The Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) has integrated women and child-friendly procedures into their training curriculum and conducted targeted capacity building for police personnel. Over 200 police officers received training in 2020 and 2021 on GBV, early identification, and safe referral, including specialised training for GBV service providers. Women and Child Desks/Units have been established in all major police stations, with personnel trained in women and child-friendly services. The desk managed 268 and 565 cases in 2021 and 2022 respectively offering gender and child responsive services. To ensure that women and children across Bhutan have easy access to gender and child-friendly services, all *Dzongkhag* police stations will have women and child desks/units by 2024.
59. Further, 10 Community Service Centres were established in 10 *Dzongkhag* by RENEW as reported in Para 8 to provide women and girls with services such as case management, emotional support, referrals, and livelihood skills training.
60. In 2019, a Communication for Development (C4D) strategy for child protection and wellbeing was developed to help raise awareness of harmful social and cultural practices that increase children's vulnerabilities to violence, exploitation, and neglect. Subsequently, an initiative for a nationwide Ending Violence Against Children (EVAC) campaign was organised to prevent emerging child protection issues. More than 220,000 women and girls were reached through this program. Furthermore, awareness programmes for the public on GBV, reporting procedures, and available services were conducted by CBSS volunteers and GCFPs in all 20 *Dzongkhag*. Every year, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the 16 Days of Activism receive significant attention. Her Majesty the Gyalum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, United Nations Population Fund Goodwill Ambassador, and other high-level dignitaries actively

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<sup>9</sup> The *Desuung* Training Programme in Bhutan prepares volunteers for disaster management, community service, and national security roles through comprehensive training covering topics like disaster response, first aid, and community service.

<sup>10</sup> Individuals trained in *Desuung* Training Program.

<sup>11</sup> District-level assembly in Bhutan for local governance and decision-making by elected representatives from *Gewog* and *Thromde*.

engage in these events, demonstrating their commitment to ending violence against women.

### **Unpaid care and domestic work**

61. Bhutan recognises that the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women will restrict women's participation in the labour force, education and training, and personal care. A study was conducted in 2019 to estimate the economic value of unpaid care work and propose measures to alleviate the burden. The study estimated the value of women's unpaid care work using different methodologies ranging between 10-16% of the GDP. The findings were widely disseminated to policymakers, officials, and the public. Key findings and recommendations from the study were integrated into the NGEF and National Plan of Action for Gender Equality (NPAGE). Furthermore, efforts are underway to explore the potential integration of these recommendations into other national surveys.
62. In 2016, the maternity leave for civil servants was extended to six months and it was also counted as part of active service for all civil servants including promotion, training, and retirement benefits. Subsequently, many corporate sectors adopted similar measures by extending maternity to six months, and more than 166 private companies also adopted increasing maternity leave from two to three months. Further, nursing mothers in the civil service and private sectors are entitled to flexitime until the child is up to 24 months old.
63. The RGoB also prioritises the establishment of workplace crèches and early childhood care and development (ECCD) centres to ease the burden on working parents, particularly working mothers. Currently, there are 495 ECCD centres across the country including community centres, private and operated by CSOs with 8,026 students, managed by 947 facilitators. Bhutan aims to achieve 100% ECCD enrolment. This has enabled working parents to participate in the workforce and promote gender equality. MoESD is further working towards expanding the ECCD facilities and equipping them with professional teachers and facilitators.
64. The State of the Nation 2023 Report highlighted the training of 24 gender and child focal persons across 20 *Dzongkhag* and four *Thromde*, ensuring timely services for women and children in need of care and protection. The establishment of three new workplace facilities expanded crèche services to 28, facilitating working parents. Further, the Supreme Court of Bhutan opened a crèche in 2021 for the three offices: the Supreme Court, the High Court, and the BNLI, to empower women to perform better.
65. A notable initiative, the 'I support my friends-peer helpers' program, was introduced to assist students facing academic, personal, and social challenges post-distress. This program, benefiting 4,022 students nationwide, the mentor-mentee program, now standardised across all schools, provides a platform for children to seek guidance in smaller groups

## **Changing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes**

66. Bhutan has taken a multi-pronged approach to combat discriminatory behaviour, attitudes, and stereotypes involving legislative and policy review, development of standards, advocacy, and awareness programmes. Gender Norms on Sexual and GBV among Men in Bhutan: a qualitative assessment confirmed the existence of deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and practices and stereotypes regarding gender division of roles. Assessments have shown that while there is no overt discrimination in Bhutan, women are constrained by a few gender stereotypes and societal expectations regarding their roles in the family and community.
67. Numerous awareness and advocacy campaigns were conducted to address social and cultural norms perpetuating discrimination and VAWG that led to significant transformation in attitudes and approaches related to reproductive health, GBV, and women and girls' empowerment. For instance, the United Nations Population Fund Goodwill Ambassador led high-level advocacy programmes, reaching out to more than 4800 teachers, health workers, LG officials, volunteers, persons with disabilities and frontline workers across the country. Social media campaigns such as the television talk show "*Moghi Mikhar*" (translated as "*from her perspective*") and the #GirlTALK<sup>12</sup> campaign on social media platforms provide forums for discussing gender, relationships, feminism, and combating harmful practices like GBV and child sexual abuse. A training workshop on gender-sensitive reporting was also conducted for 20 media professionals and journalists, including individual bloggers, in April 2021.
68. The revised education curriculum adopts a gender-sensitive approach to eradicate stereotypes by removing illustrative materials that reinforce such biases. Similarly, gender equality and inclusion have been integrated into educational programmes such as scouting. Promoting gender equality attitudes, reducing VAWG, and creating a safer community for women, girls, and children, details on a project titled *Gakey Lamtoen* loosely translated as '*path to happiness*', are reported in Para 10.

## **Action taken to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of vulnerable women and girls**

### **Women and girls with disabilities**

69. In addition to legal and policy frameworks, as reported in Para 25 & 29, initiatives such as the *Gyalpoi Tozey*<sup>13</sup> scheme provided economic and educational support to vulnerable girls and women.
70. Introduction of Special Education Needs (SEN) programmes in schools provides specialised training to management and teachers in schools. As of 2023, 39 schools provided SEN programmes to 1,025 students with special needs of which 60% were girls. The launch of the first

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<sup>12</sup> Girltalk Bhutan is a series dedicated to our girls, their caregivers, teachers, parents and boys.

<sup>13</sup> The "Gyalpoi Tozey" scheme provides support to underprivileged students, ensuring they have access to education on par with their peers.

model-inclusive ECCD Centre is tailored to accommodate girl children with disabilities and those from urban poor backgrounds and serves as a platform for early intervention services.

71. In 2019, the Bhutan Child Development Screening Tool (BCDST), a mechanism for early identification and diagnosis of disabilities in children was developed and implemented. It was further incorporated in the MCH Handbook to help identify major red flags in the development of children aged 0-5 years, allowing for early and prompt intervention. 379 Health workers from 20 *Dzongkhag* have been trained on BCDST to assess learning difficulties in schools, including private and monastic institutions, Rapid Functional Assessment and use of Brigance.
72. Recent investment in the development of Technical Training Institutes and disability-inclusive programmes have promoted the participation of children with disabilities in TVET. In 2021, more than 75 persons with disabilities were trained in various programmes such as bakery, massage, and tailoring. With the support of development partners, RGoB in collaboration with CSOs continues to support specialised institutes such as Wangsel Institute for the Deaf and Muenselling Institute (for the visually impaired) in providing education and training to children with disabilities. The two specialised schools currently provide education to 132 children with disabilities (76 boys and 56 girls).
73. To mainstream disability in disaster risk reduction, regular training sessions are conducted for local government officials, urban planners, and relevant stakeholders. *Thromde* conducted an in-depth self-analysis to enhance disability inclusion using the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Resilience Scorecard for Cities and its Ten Essentials for Making Cities Resilient. In 2023, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction conducted training on Urban Resilience and Disability Inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction in four *Thromde*. As part of the targeted employment programmes, Nu. 8.4 million was allocated to support livelihood initiatives for vulnerable groups including women and girls with disabilities.
74. To ensure access to justice for persons with disabilities, services such as e-Litigation and legal aid are provided as reported in Para 51. The Legal Aid Centre also facilitates e-Litigation services through online facilities established as a part of legal aid service. Further, the Human Dignity Clinic at Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law developed an advocacy toolkit and guidelines on access to justice for persons with disabilities, providing simplified information, especially for children with disabilities.

### **People with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, or sex characteristics**

75. In 2021, Bhutan took a significant stride towards inclusivity and equality by amending its Penal Code to decriminalise homosexuality, marking a pivotal moment in its legal landscape as reported in Para 4.
76. Pride Bhutan is one of the CSOs advocating LGBT+ in Bhutan. Its members conduct engaging sessions focused on SOGIESC, exploring different perspectives and deepening their

understanding of these crucial topics. Pride Bhutan also initiated #BTSelfCare, a dedicated advocacy programme to equip individuals with essential knowledge and resources to enhance their sexual health and overall well-being. Such initiatives have a significant impact on LGBT+ individuals, resulting in increased registered membership of Pride Bhutan to 354 in 2023 compared to around 150 in 2021.

77. Grassroots movements such as the inception of Queer Voices of Bhutan<sup>14</sup> in 2018 and the initiation of the #BetterTogether<sup>15</sup> Media campaigns in 2020 have played crucial roles in elevating the voices and narratives of vulnerable groups. Furthermore, organisations like The PEMA, NL, RENEW, and Pride Bhutan have established helpline services which provide essential support networks for LGBT+ individuals, addressing mental health concerns, and offering protection from violence.
78. The observance of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia since 2016 shows a national commitment to inclusivity. The theme for International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia 2023, "Together always: united in diversity," symbolises a collective effort to combat discrimination and promote equality. Awareness programmes and media coverage have also helped bring LGBT+ issues into the public sphere, encouraging open discussions and paving the way for societal acceptance. For instance, the Queer Talk series hosted by Queer Voices of Bhutan sensitises LGBT+ issues and advocates for integration into the society.
79. Until 2015, sexual minorities lacked specific terms in *Dzongkha*<sup>16</sup>. This changed after the National AIDS Control Programme requested the introduction of corresponding terms. Consequently, terms for LGBT+ individuals were incorporated into *Dzongkha*. As a result, LGBT+ communities are becoming more visible and experiencing increasing acceptance in society.

## **Women and girls living with HIV/AIDS**

80. The RGoB adheres to the Political Declaration on Fast-Tracking the AIDS Response of 2016, adopted by the UN General Assembly, UNAIDS strategic guidance on Fast Tracking to Zero and Ending AIDS, and the World Health Organisation's (WHO) new treatment guidelines. Since the detection of the first cases of HIV infection in Bhutan in 1993, the collective number of cases as of June 2023 was 900 (433 females and 467 males), mostly (93.8%) acquired HIV through the heterosexual route. The National HIV/AIDS, and sexually transmitted infections strategic plan 2017-2023 guides the provision of health services for people living with HIV/AIDS in Bhutan.
81. The first mother-to-child transmission was reported in 2002. Prevention of mother-to-child transmission guidelines were developed and implemented starting in 2009, whereby expecting

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<sup>14</sup> The first queer advocacy platform in Bhutan.

<sup>15</sup> #BetterTogether is a campaign initiated to raise awareness about unpaid care work and the importance of family unity and support.

<sup>16</sup> National Language of Bhutan.

parents undergo two-time testing during pregnancy check-ups to ensure the triple elimination of mother-to-child transmission, congenital syphilis, and hepatitis B. Parents who are currently living with HIV and planning to have children should adhere to HIV treatment and other care services to avoid any transmission to the child.

82. As a part of the national HIV and AIDS response, the RGoB continues to strive to bridge the current case detection gap to achieve sustainable development goals by ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. Four key strategies are implemented to enhance the case diagnosis such as phase-wise scaling up of the HIV, self-testing and counselling services across the country, implementing the targeted index testing (contact tracing) and partner notification services as a core intervention to efficiently and effectively identify HIV-positive individuals. HIV counselling and testing services are streamlined and strengthened across health facilities.
83. In terms of care and treatment, the MoH has decentralised the provision of antiretroviral therapy drugs for people living with HIV from the *Dzongkhag* hospital to the primary health centres and other community testing centres for enhanced accessibility. The MoH also decentralised the viral load testing services from the national referral hospital to eight more *Dzongkhag* hospitals. CSOs like Lhak-Sam receive financial support from Save the Children and Amplify Project to provide psycho-social services to people living with HIV/AIDS and their families, including children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.
84. The National AIDS Control Programme in Bhutan has been the primary agency working with men who have sex with men and transgender communities to reduce the risk of HIV. One of the main challenges has been identifying and reaching these populations due to their hidden nature. Nonetheless, initiatives like networking, counselling, capacity building, and advocacy for legal reforms are making progress towards establishing support networks for LGBT+ communities. Between 2012 and 2022, 33 HIV Treatment Literacy trainings were conducted, reaching 601 HIV-positive people (283 female, 318 male), 43 drug users, and 163 HIV-negative individuals.
85. The *Lhak-Sam* Livelihood Centre initiated a support hub for People Living with HIV/AIDS. Community-based home care equips individuals with valuable skills, mitigating isolation, fear, and self-stigma. From 2019 to 2024, the Centre has benefited a total of 33 people, including 9 men, 8 women, and 16 children. As of 2024, there are currently 17 beneficiaries: 3 men, 7 women, and 7 children.
86. Among the fourteen individuals supported by the centre, eight women living with HIV/AIDS actively participate as advocates. They use their experiences to raise awareness, challenge misconceptions, and promote the rights and well-being of people living with HIV/AIDS, thereby fostering greater understanding and acceptance within the broader community.

## Crises that affected the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and measures taken to prevent their negative impact on progress for women and girls

### COVID-19 Pandemic

87. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the prevalence of GBV and exacerbated existing inequalities, as reported in para 19, Bhutan implemented a coordinated national response that included strict containment and inclusive measures. The country sealed its borders, restricted travel, closed schools, and imposed several lockdowns, while making special efforts to repatriate Bhutanese citizens stranded abroad.
88. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government, led by the NCWC, developed and implemented the Gender and Child Protection Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan to address the increased vulnerabilities of women and children during emergencies. It focused on preventing and responding to GBV and violence against children, with interventions including the enforcement of existing SoP, clear protocols for responding to family separation and other protection issues and raising awareness about stigma and social exclusion. These measures were implemented collectively by all relevant government agencies and CSOs, ensuring a coordinated and effective response to safeguard the well-being of women and children amidst the crisis.
89. To protect the vulnerable sections of society, measures were put in place that included the rollout of an education-in-emergency and adapted curriculum to mitigate long-term impacts on social outcomes. A National Resilience Fund was established, along with several monetary and fiscal measures. The Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu<sup>17</sup> provided support to those whose livelihoods were most affected, while an Economic Contingency Plan prioritised support for the tourism, construction, and agriculture sectors. The Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu provided income support Kidu to 54,783 individuals from April 2020 to March 2022. Monthly child support Kidu to around 7,000 children of the applicants were also provided. During the first lockdown, ration support consisting of essential items was given to 14,565 people. As of February 2022, Nu. 4,163.33 million has been disbursed to the affected population.
90. Under the guidance of Her Majesty The Queen, emergency shelter homes have been established in all *Dzongkhag*. About 30 women along with their children sought emergency shelter in the *Dzongkhag* by early January 2021.
91. Efforts have been made to ensure uninterrupted access to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services, including providing SRH services to women and girls schools, nuns and shelter homes. Sanitary pads, along with menstrual hygiene management information and COVID-19 prevention messages, were distributed to quarantine facilities and schools nationwide, benefiting thousands. Front-line workers in bordering areas received convenience kits containing sanitary pads.

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<sup>17</sup> The Druk Gyalpo Relief Kidu is a humanitarian assistance programme established to provide relief and support to Bhutanese citizens facing hardship or crisis situations.

Additionally, the Bhutan Nuns Foundation conducted awareness programmes on menstrual hygiene management and GBV, reaching 1,500 nuns from 32 nunneries. Sanitary pads were distributed to all nunneries to ensure continued access to menstrual hygiene.

92. Community volunteer focal points in 20 *Dzongkhag* under RENEW received mobile phones to provide online psychosocial support to survivors of GBV and children in difficult circumstances.

## **Climate change**

93. The Climate Change Policy 2020 has integrated gender considerations into all climate actions as reported in Para 30, to ensure that climate change strategies account for gender-specific opportunities and challenges. Women in sectors like agriculture are likely to face impacts due to limited resources, hindering adaptation.
94. To understand the issues impacting women, the NCWC, in collaboration with the erstwhile NEC conducted a study on Gender and Climate Change in Bhutan with a Focus on Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) Priority Areas in 2020. The study aimed to understand climate change and its impacts on gender dynamics and women's empowerment in the selected NDC sectors and identify mitigation and adaptation in the context of gender dynamics and women's empowerment including access and, or control over resources, participation and decision-making, benefit-sharing, and livelihood security. Following the gender assessment, the NCWC issued a toolkit for Gender Mainstreaming in selected Nationally Determined Contribution Sectors in Bhutan: Agriculture, Waste and Energy in 2022.
95. The launch of the National Adaptation Plan and the implementation of two NDC programmes provided a strategic framework for countries to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of climate change.
96. In 2023, the Advancing Climate Resilience of the Water Sector in Bhutan project was launched with a total investment of Nu. 747.5 million, benefitting over 37,000 individuals residing in the climate-vulnerable *Dzongkhag* of Gasa, Punakha, and Tsiriang. It ensured assured access to irrigation and domestic water for 19,391 individuals, Restoration or climate-proofing of 41,910 hectares of land and the protection of 38,518 hectares of watersheds.
97. At the 2017 Vancouver UNPK Defense Ministerial, Bhutan pledged to reduce its peacekeeping carbon footprint and environmental impact. This commitment, praised by the UN Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support, was reaffirmed at the 2021 Seoul and 2023 Accra UN Peacekeeping Ministerial.
98. Bhutan's peacekeeping contingent in the Central African Republic uses solar energy and practises environmental conservation. Troops receive training on sustainable practices from UNITAR's course, which is then shared within the contingent.



## **Priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in the next five years**

### **Quality education, training, and lifelong learning**

99. Bhutan has made significant progress in education with the expansion of school infrastructure to 1,121 schools and other educational institutes as of 2023. The adjusted GPI for primary (pp to class VI) and basic education (pp – class X) was 0.97 and 0.92 respectively in 2023 which indicates a significant improvement in girls' education. However, the lower adjusted GPI at the secondary and tertiary levels indicates that girls lag in secondary and tertiary education. A higher unemployment rate among girls/women calls for improving education for girls and expanding opportunities for life-long learning.
100. Improving girls' education involves addressing various social, economic, and infrastructural challenges. Efforts will be made to strengthen policies with clear, measurable objectives and specific targets to increase female enrolment and retention at all levels of education, especially at tertiary level and STEM fields. For instance, gender will be mainstreamed, and girls' education will be highlighted in key policies such as the national child and youth policy. This will set priority for girls' education and provide a mechanism for coordination and resource mobilisation.
101. The current school design guidelines specify girl-friendly infrastructure and facilities such as toilets and hostel space standards for girls. The school design guidelines will be reviewed and updated and infrastructure and facilities will be improved considering the specific needs and safety of girls in all facilities. This will include design, lighting, and other amenities such as changing rooms, and facilities at sports complexes.
102. Girls' education can be significantly enhanced by training teachers to adopt gender-sensitive teaching practices and creating inclusive learning environments. Teacher training programmes that focus on gender equality can help educators recognise and address the unique challenges faced by boys and girls in the classroom. NCWC will strengthen its collaboration with teacher training colleges to ensure a gender-sensitive teacher training curriculum. Training will also include strategies for promoting girls' participation in STEM subjects. Investment in comprehensive teacher training will ensure that the education system supports the advancement of gender equality and empowers girls to achieve their full potential.
103. To promote women and girls in TVET, the National TVET Gender Strategy (2024-2028) was developed as reported in Para 31. Despite these efforts, enrolment rates for women in TVET programmes remain lower compared to their male counterparts. To address these challenges, targeted interventions outlined in the strategy will be implemented. This includes providing TVET education in schools, career workshops and orientation, gender-sensitive training for TVET instructors, and awareness campaigns to promote the benefits of TVET for women. Furthermore, the TVET institutes will be encouraged to collaborate with industries to create internships and job placements specifically targeting female graduates to enhance their

employability.

### **Eliminating violence against women and girls**

104. Existing legal and policy frameworks are strengthened to ensure smooth enforcement for effective response, protection and support for survivors as reported in Para 27-30. Plans and programmes to end violence against women and girls will be further strengthened. The capacity of law enforcement agencies to handle cases of violence will be enhanced for greater efficiency, as reported in Para 54-58.
105. Providing comprehensive support services for survivors of violence is essential to prevent re-victimization and empower women. NCWC will collaborate with service providers in enhancing and maintaining shelters, safe spaces, counselling centres, and helplines that offer immediate and long-term support to survivors. Support services for survivors will include legal aid, medical care, psychological counselling, and economic empowerment programmes to help rebuild their lives. NCWC will facilitate mobilising resources to ensure that these services are adequately funded and staffed by trained professionals.
106. Education and awareness will be critical in changing societal attitudes and norms that perpetuate violence against women. Campaigns that target all segments of society, including men and boys, to promote gender equality and respect for women's rights will be conducted. Efforts will be made to integrate gender and human rights education into their curricula to inculcate values of equality and non-violence from an early age. By raising awareness, these campaigns can challenge and change the cultural norms that condone or ignore violence against women.
107. Engaging communities in the prevention of violence is vital for sustainable change. Grassroots initiatives that involve local communities in identifying and addressing the root causes of violence can be highly effective. Community-based organisations and civil society groups will be encouraged to work closely with the government to implement localised programmes that address specific issues faced by women in different regions. For instance, community watch groups, led by both men and women, can monitor and report instances of violence to ensure timely intervention. Survivors will also be engaged in such initiatives to provide insights and foster a supportive environment where women are empowered to speak out.
108. Establishing a multisectoral approach ensures that all aspects of prevention and response are covered comprehensively. The NCWC will lead the coordination among different government agencies, CSOs, and international partners to streamline efforts and resources. International partnerships will be strengthened to expand access to expertise, resources, and best practices. Moreover, research on VAWG is crucial in understanding the scope and impact of various methods to inform effective policies and plans. In order to identify social, economic and political factors that increase the risk of women and girls experiencing violence, understanding the extent and nature of violence, studies and research are indispensable.

## **Political participation and representation**

109. Women's participation and engagement in national and local politics are essential for ensuring diverse representation, fostering inclusive policy and decision-making, and advancing gender equality in society. Bhutan will focus on Promoting women's political participation by strengthening the implementation of NPAPGEEO and other strategies as reported in Para 23 which focuses on social, individual, institutional, and legal changes.
110. Gender assessment of the existing electoral legal and policy framework including the Election Act, the Political Parties Act as well as regulations and by-laws will be conducted. Based on the assessment, new laws or provisions will be recommended, or discriminatory provisions of existing laws and policies will be amended.
111. Institutional changes will also be made to make the institutions gender-responsive. It will focus on enhancing the gender sensitivity of the ECB, political parties, parliament, and the local government. This will include gender assessment of these institutions using standard tools, conducting gender sensitisation workshops for the key personnel, and orientation programmes for newly elected women.
112. As the school curriculum shapes the values and attitudes of students, the curriculum will be reviewed to ensure that the teaching materials are gender responsive and free of gender biases. Further, NCWC will collaborate with MoESD to include the benefits of gender representation in all sectors highlighting the importance of political participation.
113. NCWC will coordinate with stakeholders to organise advocacy programmes, seminars, and workshops on women's leadership and capabilities at various societal levels. Successful women leaders will be highlighted through media and events where elected women representatives can interact with other aspiring candidates and younger women. This is expected to bring about change in the perception of the population towards gender roles and create acceptance of women in leadership positions.
114. Initiatives to bring individual change will be implemented focusing on developing the capacity of aspiring candidates and networking opportunities. Capacity development will focus on leadership and public speaking to build confidence, political literacy to make politics more accessible, and campaign management covering strategic planning, voter outreach, and media management. Networking among elected women leaders and aspiring candidates will be promoted to share experiences and build relationships. This will create a sense of community and collective strength to help overcome isolation and build confidence.

## **Women-led- and owned-enterprise**

115. Despite concerted efforts, women remain underrepresented in the business sector, particularly in medium and large enterprises. The current NGEF emphasises women's participation in the

economic sector and NCWC will coordinate with all stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of the provisions of the policy. To promote women's entrepreneurship and women-owned enterprises, Bhutan will focus on skills development and training, expanding access to finance, networking, and mentorship.

116. To equip women with the necessary skills and knowledge, various training and capacity-building programmes are conducted by organisations like the BCCI, RENEW, and the Loden Foundation. In colleges and TVET institutes, entrepreneurship is taught as a module. Entrepreneurship has also been introduced as a subject in schools for class XI and XII for those pursuing Commerce. Coordination between these institutions offering entrepreneurship training needs to be strengthened to complement each other's efforts.
117. To expand access to finance for women, microfinance institutions and banks have introduced women-friendly financial products. Few banks and microfinance institutions provide micro-loans and other financial services tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs. However, the amount of loan is limited. To expand access to finance, NCWC will collaborate with the Royal Monetary Authority of Bhutan in implementing financial inclusion to ensure gender-responsive implementation. The strategy is expected to encourage the development of new financial products, develop infrastructure, and build financial capabilities.
118. Networking and mentorship programmes play a crucial role in supporting women entrepreneurs. Initiatives by BAOWE, Tarayana, RENEW, and Loden Foundation offer platforms for women to connect, share experiences, and learn from each other. These networks provide valuable mentorship opportunities, helping women navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship and build successful businesses. Building on the success, business associations and groups will be encouraged to develop platforms for networking, particularly for women entrepreneurs. For instance, the BCCI, Hotels Association of Bhutan, Association of Bhutan Travel Operators, and other associations will be encouraged to develop platforms for networking.
119. MoESD in partnership with development partners have expanded the UPSHIFT<sup>18</sup> programme to ensure its sustainability and integration. This expansion entails incorporating UPSHIFT modules into various academic subjects such as Business and Entrepreneurship, STEM, and Innovation. UPSHIFT has been integrated into school scouting programmes and the Scout proficiency badge system to enhance skill development among Scouts. The initiative has expanded to include an additional 64 schools and 7 colleges, covering 22% of schools and benefiting 16,000 young people (8188 female), including those in 10 youth centres in 2023. NCWC will continue to work with the partners to expand the programme.

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<sup>18</sup> UPSHIFT is a social innovator accelerator for young people aged 10-24 years that rapidly unlocks their generational potential to create real and tangible change in their lives and their communities.

### **Section III: Implementation progress across 12 critical areas of concern of the BPfA**

#### **Dimension 1: Inclusive Development, Shared Prosperity, and Decent Work**

##### **Actions taken to advance gender equality in the world of work**

##### **Prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace**

120. Sexual harassment constitutes a petty misdemeanour of a criminal nature as per the Penal Code of Bhutan and the Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan (LEA) 2007 further provides a comprehensive definition of sexual harassment and prohibits it at the workplace. Chapter 14, Section 276 of the Regulations on Work Conditions mandates employers to develop a Policy on the Prevention of Sexual Harassment. The policy should outline penalties for such conduct and provide procedures for lodging complaints against harassers.
121. The Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulations 2023 (BCSR) which govern all working conditions in the civil service prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace. The Go-to-Person programme, initiated by the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) in 2018, provides a designated individual for employees to confidentially report concerns, seek guidance, and receive support, thereby promoting a workplace free from sexual harassment.
122. The Guideline for Prevention and Protection of Judicial Service Personnel from Sexual Harassment at the Workplace as reported in Para 36 establishes clear protocols to protect judicial personnel from sexual harassment and ensure a safe and respectful working environment within the judicial system.
123. In 2023, The PEMA Secretariat spearheaded the drafting of the National Policy on Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence, aimed at preventing sexual violence in homes, educational institutions, workplaces, and communities. The objective is to promote safe and conducive environments while instituting uniform and supportive response mechanisms as reported in Para 33.
124. The DHI companies developed the Group Policy Framework on Gender Equality at the Workplace in 2021 as reported in Para 36. Further, awareness programmes on gender equality, sexual harassment, and gender-based discrimination were conducted for DHI employees, with ongoing efforts to develop internal mechanisms to address gender issues.
125. The NCWC, in partnership with the Institute of Management Studies and the BCCI, conducted training programmes to combat sexual harassment in the workplace, targeting executives, HR managers, and employees from both the public and private sectors. A two-day training on the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace was held in 2021, with 30 officials participating (20 females and 10 males). In 2023, BCCI organised a training programme in Gelephu, attended by CEOs, senior HR managers, and proprietors from various industries. Further, over 600 employees have been oriented by NCWC in collaboration with the private

sector, covering legal provisions, reporting procedures, and prevention strategies. These initiatives contributed to fostering a gender-friendly working environment in the private sector.

126. The legislative framework, policy and guidelines, and initiatives adopted by different sectors provide a strong foundation to prevent and respond to sexual harassment not only in the workplace but in all settings as reported in Para 34-36.

### **Financial inclusion and access to credit**

127. Recognising financial inclusion as crucial for sustainable and inclusive socio-economic growth, the NGEF 2020 stresses empowering women by enhancing their access to finance, market opportunities, and skills development. It particularly focuses on self-employed women in rural and disadvantaged areas, aiming to improve financial inclusion and access to credit. The policy implements targeted interventions to increase access to credit and financial services, ultimately enabling women to strengthen their businesses and livelihoods for sustainable growth and development.
128. The National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2018-2023 highlights the importance of including women and addressing gender disparities in account ownership, particularly in non-life insurance and credit. Similarly, the Financial Inclusion National Action Plan 2019-2023 focuses on enhancing access to formal financial services through digital technology and access points, increasing Small and Medium Enterprises credit portfolios owned by women, and strengthening financial literacy programmes for rural communities. Additionally, the Action Plan mandates that all financial literacy interventions have at least 40% female participants.
129. The Royal Monetary Authority licensed 5 microfinance institutions to serve the financial needs of the rural population, particularly women. Bhutan Care Credit's Women Business Loan aims to support socially and economically underprivileged women, especially divorcees in urban areas, who shoulder significant financial responsibilities for their families. The RENEW Microfinance Private Limited operates in 11 *Dzongkhag* and 103 *Gewog*, providing 435 access points for savings, loans, and financial literacy programmes to vulnerable and low-income women and their families. It now caters to more than 28,482 clients. Yeshey Dawa Premium Savings offered by RENEW Microfinance is designed to empower women through fostering a culture of savings and encouraging them to build a long-term source of capital. BAOWE-Pelzhing Microfinance Institution offers affordable financial services and savings accounts, complementing the government's efforts towards financial inclusion for women entrepreneurs including those in rural areas.
130. The Community Development Loan from Bhutan Development Bank Limited and the Rural Financial Development Programme which is implemented through the bank provide dedicated financial access to people in rural communities.

## **Women's equal participation in economic decision-making bodies**

131. The BCSR 2023, Chapter 2: Civil Service Structure states that the Human Resource Committee (HRC) shall aim for a balanced gender representation whenever feasible.
132. The Corporate Governance and Corporate Social Responsibility Code of Bhutan 2022 mandates consideration of an equal representation of men and women when filling managerial positions in the company. It mandates the executive management to consider diversity and, in particular, aim for an appropriate consideration of women. In 2024, women comprised 33% of the total Board of Directors of the Royal Monetary Authority (Central Bank).
133. The Gender, Inclusion, and Diversity Assessment in Sustainable Development Services piloted by NCWC and BCCI in four sectors encouraged the development of gender-sensitive policies, training on gender sensitisation, and extended maternity leave, fostering women's equal participation in economic decision-making bodies in Bhutan's private sector as reported in Para 13.

## **Actions to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, promote work-life and family balance**

### **Maternity leave**

134. Chapter 8 of the BCSR 2023 grants six months of paid leave to all women civil servants after childbirth as reported in Para 62. There are provisions for miscarriage, allowing up to one month of leave with a medical certificate. Maternity leave is considered part of active service for all HR actions, including promotion, training, and retirement benefits. These provisions ensure that civil servants receive appropriate compensation and benefits during maternity leave while addressing any disparities in allowances across different professions. Additionally, through the welfare scheme, the RCSC provides allowances of Nu. 10,000 per childbirth to civil servants, starting from November 2022.
135. The LEA 2007 emphasized creating favourable working conditions for pregnant and nursing mothers, as well as ensuring equal pay for work of equal value. These principles are reinforced in the National Employment Policy (2013), which aims to create a gender-friendly working environment. The policy advocates for establishing day care centres and crèches at or near workplaces, as reported in Para 63, to encourage greater workforce participation of women with children.
136. The NCWC spearheaded the establishment of crèches at the workplace to create an enabling environment for working parents and ensure proper care and development of children. These facilities are provided for employees with preschool-aged children, aiming to improve the work-life balance for working parents with young children. As of 2023, a total of 28 crèche services have been established.

137. To ensure the distribution of unpaid care work, chapter 13 of BCSR 2023 allows spouses to be transferred to the same location to promote care and support. This provision ensures that women are supported in their unpaid care work and receive support from their spouses.

### **Expanded childcare services**

138. The RGoB aims to achieve full enrolment by 2030. The ECCD programme operates through community-based ECCD centres, centres operated by private entities, CSOs, and corporations as reported in Para 63. Further, the ECCD Evaluation Report 2020 by UNICEF Bhutan found that children who attended ECCD programmes were more ready for school compared to those who did not. Therefore, the 13th Five-Year Plan (FYP) will continue to invest in early childhood development to ensure equitable access to quality ECCD services, establish more centres, and professionalise facilitators.

139. In 2021, MoESD in collaboration with development partners piloted the Caring for Caregiver training package in Trashigang, Tsirang, and Punakha Dzongkhag to equip ECCD facilitators with skills in caregiver support, particularly focusing on health and emotional support. The pilot phase, which began in Trashigang, trained 75 ECCD facilitators and Dzongkhag education officers across the three Dzongkhag. Bhutan became the first country in Asia to roll out the program, reaffirming its commitment towards the promotion of health and well-being among caregivers.

140. With support from development partners, Bhutan developed a Caring for the Caregiver (CFC) package, a foundational training module designed to complement existing packages related to caregiving and parenting. The CFC focuses on a strengths-based counselling approach to build caregiver confidence, support stress management, self-care, conflict resolution skills, family engagement, and social support.

### **Expanded support for elderly people**

141. Bhutan launched the National Policy for Senior Citizens on 13 October 2023. As reported in Para 30, this policy aims to enhance the livelihoods of senior citizens and alleviate the burden of care and support on the younger generation.

142. The “*Lotedh*” Scheme, initiated by the National Pension and Provident Fund (NPPF) in 2015 continues to provide benefits to the family members in the event of the pensioner's demise.

143. His Majesty's Kidu Mobile Medical Unit plays a crucial role in delivering essential medical services to patients and the elderly. This included attending to patients and their attendants at the *Kidu*<sup>19</sup> Patient Guest House, individuals in temporary shelters, and elderly residents at *Goensho*

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<sup>19</sup> “Kidu” refers to social welfare or assistance provided to those in need in Bhutan, often involving financial aid or relief support.



*Tshamkhang*.<sup>20</sup>

144. In 2020, extensive health assessments were conducted by MoH, which included screening for conditions such as mobility impairment and depression symptoms, and identifying individuals who require personalised care plans. These assessments have highlighted the necessity for assistance in daily activities among elderly individuals. The programme has implemented robust monitoring and follow-up mechanisms to ensure ongoing support and progress tracking. Notably, older persons have been actively engaged in community-based exercise programmes and social activities to promote physical and mental well-being.
145. The Royal Society for Senior Citizens observed the International Day of Older Persons on 2nd October 2023 under the theme "Fulfilling the Promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Older Persons: Across Generations." A mass health check-up for senior citizens was launched alongside the observance of the day.

### **Time- and labour-saving infrastructure**

146. Recognising that unpaid care work is often linked with poor utility infrastructure which can result in severe health consequences for women and their families, Bhutan prioritises and continues to invest in the development of infrastructure such as construction, agriculture, piped drinking water, electricity, transport, and sewerage systems. As per the Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2023 Report, 99.71% of households were connected to electricity, 99.80% were connected with improved drinking water, and 96.91% to improved sanitation facilities. Improved access to utilities and drudgery-reducing facilities will allow women to participate in education and training, politics, and the labour force.

### **Conducted campaigns or awareness-raising activities to encourage the participation of men and boys in unpaid care and domestic work**

147. To recognise women's contribution to unpaid care and propose measures to alleviate the burden by reducing it, a study on "Accounting for Unpaid Care Work in Bhutan," was conducted in 2019 to estimate the economic value of unpaid care work. The study estimated the value of women's unpaid care work as 10-16% of the GDP. Two workshops were convened at both regional and national levels to disseminate the study's findings to members of the Parliament, government officials, media, educational institutions, private sectors and the general public. Key findings and recommendations from the study were integrated into the NGEF and NPAGE. Also, efforts are underway to explore the potential integration of these recommendations into other national surveys.
148. To challenge stereotypes and biases surrounding the gendered division of roles and redistribute domestic responsibilities, NCWC launched the #BetterTogether media campaign in 2020 as

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<sup>20</sup> "Goensho Tshamkhang" is a project initiated by His Majesty to provide homes for elderly individuals in Bhutan who lack family support or care.

reported in Para 77. This initiative featured men from diverse backgrounds sharing their experiences of household duties and emphasising the importance of shared responsibilities within the home environment.

149. RENEW developed and disseminated a documentary titled “Engaging Men and Boys” in 2021 to address unpaid care and domestic work. The documentary aimed to raise awareness of the triple burden faced by women and its implications for their access to opportunities beyond the domestic sphere.

## **Action taken to reduce the gender digital divide**

### **Mainstreamed gender perspectives in national digital policies**

150. The NCWC provided gender mainstreaming training for 36 participants in 2022 for *Dzongkhag* Mainstream Reference Groups (MRGs) and central-level representatives. These groups are responsible for integrating cross-cutting issues, including gender, into plans and policies. Additionally, the MoESD conducted capacity development for out-of-school youth in 2023, aiming to empower them to utilise digital opportunities effectively.
151. Information Communications Technology (ICT) has been prioritised in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP, allocating Nu. 180.3 million to enhance the quality and equity of education and skills. The Education ICT Master Plans, iSherig-1 (2014-2018) and iSherig-2 (2019-2023) have been instrumental in leveraging ICT to improve teaching and learning processes. These initiatives align with the Asia Pacific Regional Strategy on Using ICT to Facilitate the Achievement of Education 2030, focusing on expanding relevant skills in secondary education, TVET, and higher education, improving teaching quality and practices, promoting inclusion and equality in education, and supporting data-driven monitoring and evaluation. This initiative has strengthened gender perspectives in national digital policies, ensuring that gender considerations are embedded in the development and implementation of digital initiatives. By fostering greater inclusivity and equality in the digital realm, Bhutan aims to address the digital divide and empower women and girls to participate fully in the digital economy.
152. The NCWC conducts regular training programmes for Gender and Children Focal Persons (GCFPs) to enhance their gender mainstreaming skills and knowledge. In parallel, schools and youth centres are implementing projects to enhance digital literacy among adolescents and young people, utilising online programmes like UNISOLVE<sup>21</sup> reaching out to more than 16,000 participants.
153. In 2023, the Bhutan Filming Regulation (Amended) highlighted gender perspectives to ensure a sensitive portrayal of gender-related matters, prevent discrimination, and promote inclusivity and equality in filming. Both the examining panel and the National Film Review Board were

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<sup>21</sup> UNISOLVE is a digital platform designed to facilitate UPSHIFT delivery through a school-based, teacher-facilitated blended learning model.

mandated to maintain gender balance in their composition. These rules aim to ensure that films produced in Bhutan are sensitive to the social and cultural values of both genders.

154. The Child Online Protection Guidelines 2023, emphasise Bhutan's commitment to gender equality by ensuring equal access to the internet and modern technologies for both males and females. Aligning with the Gross National Happiness philosophy, the government focuses on well-being and social inclusion, implementing initiatives to bridge the digital gender gap through internet access and technology training. When developing products or services for children, an inclusive design approach should be adopted, considering gender, cultural, and geographic diversity.

### **Introduced or strengthened programmes to provide universal meaningful connectivity for women and girls, especially for underserved areas**

155. The National Broadband Master Plan Implementation Project has played a crucial role in providing universal meaningful connectivity for women and girls, particularly in remote areas of Bhutan. Through this initiative, all 20 *Dzongkhag* have been connected, along with 201 out of 205 *Gewog*. This extensive network, spanning approximately 3,300 km, is owned by the Government and is leased to telecommunication operators and Internet Service Providers free of charge.
156. Bhutan has made significant strides in enhancing ICT infrastructure and connectivity, particularly in schools, to promote gender equality in the workforce. In line with its 12<sup>th</sup> FYP goals, the MoESD has worked to achieve a computer-student ratio of 1:10 for secondary schools and 1:30 for primary schools, establishing 120 new ICT labs and supplying 11,000 computers between 2020 and 2022. As of 2023, 44 public and 27 private schools have computers. This initiative aims to integrate ICT education from pre-primary to higher secondary levels, focusing on building digital skills and applying them in various projects, including Non-formal Education and SEN. Recognising the risks associated with internet use, the RGoB and CSOs have conducted digital literacy training for 2878 people (2019-2021) to ensure safe and responsible online behaviour among officials, community members, and students.
157. According to the State of the Nation 2023 Report, all 526 schools in Bhutan are now equipped with computer labs connected to the internet. 511 of these labs have been connected to the internet under the Digital Drukyul Flagship Programme<sup>22</sup>, which started in 2019, bringing the total number of connected labs to 651.
158. The "Digital Drukyul Flagship Programme" and the Rural Connectivity Programme are key components of Bhutan's efforts to ensure reliable connectivity for all. Through these programmes, Bhutan is establishing a Third International Internet Gateway, investing in satellite

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<sup>22</sup> The "Digital Drukyul Flagship Programme" aims to advance Bhutan's digitisation efforts, fostering innovation and connectivity across the nation.

technology, and connecting previously unconnected households in remote areas.

159. Bhutan's Digital Druknyul Flagship Programme encompasses nine components aimed at enhancing connectivity, digital services, and fostering gender equality in the workforce. Initiatives include establishing a national digital identity platform, improving government network reliability, integrating citizen services online, and enhancing ICT capacity. Additionally, the programme streamlines business licensing, trade facilitation, and education management through digital platforms. It also centralises healthcare records and tax systems for efficient services. These efforts promote universal meaningful connectivity, ensuring women and girls have equal access to digital opportunities.

### **Introduced or strengthened programmes to increase the digital literacy and skills of women and girls**

160. The ICT Curriculum Framework 2021, developed by the MoESD, aims to enhance students' proficiency in using ICT appropriately and responsibly. It includes a Safety and Ethics strand to promote responsible digital citizenship. The implementation of 'Coding' from primary classes is currently in progress, and a new ICT curriculum has been introduced as a compulsory subject from class PP to XII. This initiative aims to provide girls with access to quality digital education, empowering them to navigate the digital world safely and ethically.
161. Digital citizenship education has been integrated into the ICT education master plan (2019-2023), empowering students to engage responsibly in the digital world. The MoESD and CSOs provide digital literacy training to non-formal education learners and community members, fostering safe and ethical online behaviour among all citizens. Further, Global Citizenship Education is now part of the curriculum in all schools, addressing critical topics such as domestic violence, cyberbullying, child trafficking, abortion, and suicide, ensuring a comprehensive education on these vital issues.
162. To advance gender equality in the workforce, Bhutan has introduced various initiatives focused on increasing the digital literacy and skills of women and girls. In 2021, the Bhutan National Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, along with relevant government agencies, organised a winter camp providing robotics, coding, and scientific skills to 48 girls, aiming to eliminate traditional stereotypes around gender occupational segregation. Special attention was given to differently-abled children to ensure their full potential is realised.
163. The digital literacy training of trainers for adolescent girls, coordinated by the MoESD and facilitated by Women in STEM, aimed to educate 50 girls between ages 17-25 years on digital skills and cyber security for their safety in the digital world. Following the training in 2023, participants rolled out the programme in remote communities in Bhutan.
164. Bhutan's first national hackathon for adolescent girls was conducted on September 2023,

engaging 28 girls from seven *Dzongkhag*. The event narrows the gender gap in STEM education, considering that 67.8% of Bhutanese youth between 15-24 years lack digital skills according to the World Skills Clock. Organised by the MoESD, Government Technology Agency (GovTech), and UNICEF, the hackathon featured sessions on various tech topics. It was in partnership with the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia and Women in Tech Maldives, aiming to support girls and young women in South Asia for success in a digital world.

165. RENEW, with support from Friends of Bhutan Austria, conducted a three-day "Basic Financial Literacy and Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) Tutorial" from November 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The training, attended by 30 participants (28 female and 2 male), focused on money management, saving, accounting, and basic ICT skills. Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, RENEW has been actively empowering vulnerable women and girls, through vocational training programmes.

### **Measures taken to promote gender-responsive STEM education**

166. The Bhutan Foundation, along with Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and DHI, established the "Super Fab Lab," equipped with advanced technology like 3D printers and woodworking machinery to foster innovation. Since 2020, the Bhutan Foundation has forged new partnerships with the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and MIT to expand Bhutan's scientific community.
167. A three-day STEM Education Seminar and Training was held at Paro College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan. The event aimed to promote STEM education among school teachers, educators, and administrators. With over 200 participants from various agencies, institutes, and schools in Haa, Paro, and Thimphu *Dzongkhag*, the seminar featured both local and international experts. Alongside this, the college is enhancing human resource capacity in Bhutan's education colleges through curriculum reform and innovative teaching methods. After the seminar, Paro College of Education plans to establish local and international partnerships to further develop STEM education programs across the country.
168. Since June 2020, NASA DEVELOP<sup>23</sup> has included Bhutanese interns based in the United States to work on practical applications of Earth sciences and satellite technology. This initiative researches, analyses, and creates solutions for real-world problems. In 2021, a collaboration between the Royal University of Bhutan and scientists from Switzerland's European Organisation for Nuclear Research was supported to train approximately 100 Bhutanese science and mathematics educators in the latest effective pedagogies. This multi-faceted educator workshop enhances STEM education across Bhutan. Nine Bhutanese scholars, including five women, participated in a capacity-building programme with NASA in 2020 as part of a multi-

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<sup>23</sup> NASA DEVELOP is a capacity-building program that provides hands-on research experiences to students and recent graduates.

year Interagency Agreement to strengthen the foundations of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in Bhutan. The programme and their experiences were disseminated through the media to encourage more girls and young women to take up these fields of study.

169. An increasing number of girls in Bhutan are showing interest in STEM subjects, as evidenced by the overwhelming response to the fifth Girls STEM Camp held in Phuentsholing in January 2024, which received 400 applications. This surge in interest reflects a growing trend of young women pursuing STEM. Further, initiatives like the Women in STEM Bhutan show provide a platform to celebrate women's achievements and contributions, recognising their strengths and inspiring future generations.
170. Women in STEM Bhutan launched the Girls Mentorship Programme in April 2023 to encourage young girls to engage in STEM-related activities. As a pilot program, 10 registered mentors guided around 40 girls from schools across the country for six months as reported in Para 32. This initiative seeks to inspire and support girls in pursuing interests and careers in STEM. Further, they organised a STEM Forum with 465 participants, including 450 attendees and 15 speakers.
171. As a member of the South Asia Women in Power Sector Professional Network (WePOWER), all the major power companies in the country are implementing interventions across four pillars - promoting STEM education among girls; recruiting women employees; offering professional development opportunities to women employees; and adopting policy and institutional changes to increase women's participation in the power sector.
172. Several STEM competitions, particularly in Mathematics, have been introduced to foster interest and excellence in these subjects. The "His Royal Highness Gyalsey Annual Mathematics Award" initiated two years ago, involves students from grades IX to XII competing in rigorous mathematics tests. Winners receive cash prizes and the opportunity to participate in the International Mathematics Olympiad. Similarly, coding competitions are held, with successful participants representing Bhutan in international robotics competitions such as the World Robotics Competition organised by First Global.

## **Dimension 2: Poverty Eradication, Social Protection and Social Services**

### **Actions taken to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls**

#### **Broadened access to land, housing, finance, technology, and agricultural extension services**

173. The Land Act of Bhutan 2007 and Inheritance Act of Bhutan 1980 guarantee equal rights and access to land ownership to true members of a family regardless of gender. The 12<sup>th</sup> FYP is premised on the principles of inclusivity to ensure fairness and justice for all. One of the key initiatives under this plan was the Local Government (LG) programme which focused on poverty reduction, income generation, and employment creation.
174. In October 2020, the RGoB launched the National Credit Guarantee Scheme to expand access to finance by providing collateral-free loans. The fund aimed to stimulate the economy, create jobs, and enhance productivity. Aligning with this, the Cottage, Small and Medium Industry Development Strategy (2012-2020) outlines clear strategies to promote women entrepreneurs and facilitate their access to finance. This initiative, supported by other enabling conditions, has led to the registration of five microfinance institutions, including the National CSI Development Bank, Tarayana Foundation, Bhutan Care Credit Limited, RENEW, and BAOWE, with a specific focus on improving access to finance among rural women.
175. Interventions in the agriculture sector have prioritised women's involvement in decision-making processes. For instance, the NCWC, in collaboration with CSOs like the Tarayana Foundation and BAOWE, established 20 Self-Help Farmers' Groups with 214 female members in the agriculture and livestock sector.
176. The Royal Government of Bhutan emphasises its dedication to agricultural transformation, transitioning towards a sustainable, market-oriented sector, and delineating a long-term vision for the industry as the country graduated from the Least Developed Countries category in December 2023.
177. Projects like the Food Security and Agricultural Productivity Project (FSAPP), Commercial Agriculture Resilient and Livelihood Enhancement Programme (CARLEP), and the Resilient Mountain Solution project aim to increase women's livelihood and economic opportunities in rural areas. These projects target at least 30% of women beneficiaries and include provisions for capacity building in income-generating activities and the supply of women-friendly farm machinery.
178. Climate-resilient and transformational change in agriculture project prioritises enhancing women's access to resources and knowledge on climate-resilient water resource management designs and technology. These projects incorporate specific gender targets for women's participation in water and agricultural resource management and decision-making. The National Accredited Entities of Green Climate Fund (GCF), Bhutan for Life and Bhutan Trust Fund, have

developed a gender action plan focusing on environmental and climate change issues.

179. Continuous capacity building and marketing support provided by Renewable Natural Resources (RNR) and agriculture extension offices have further enhanced gender-inclusive agricultural practices. For instance, between July 2019 and June 2021, 952 female and 603 male farmers benefited from various aspects of organic farming, vegetable and fruit tree cultivation and land management, underscoring the commitment to empowering women in agriculture.

### **Introduced/strengthened low-cost legal services for women living in poverty**

180. The Constitution of Bhutan guarantees the protection of human rights and provides effective remedies when those rights are violated. The Justice Sector Strategic Plan (JSSP) 2018-2023 seeks to provide improved access to justice services for vulnerable groups including women. Legal Aid, one of the key strategic priorities of the plan, was established in 2022 to provide legal assistance and representation to vulnerable individuals who cannot afford legal services as reported in Para 40.
181. The Human Dignity Clinic at Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law (JSW Law) drafted the Legal Aid Guideline in 2021. The guideline offers clear instructions on providing Legal Aid to vulnerable women. In addition, CSOs also provide legal aid services. For instance, in 2021, RENEW partnered with Bhutanese Legal Solutions, a private law firm based in Thimphu, to provide legal aid to vulnerable women including representation.
182. HRH Princess Sonam Dechan Wangchuck inaugurated the Court Annexed Mediation (CAM) Unit at the High Court in July 2020. The mediation unit has proven highly effective, especially for financially constrained and vulnerable women litigants. As reported in Para 53, the Judiciary mediated 1,924 cases successfully, while the local government resolved 4,003 cases through mediation in 2023.
183. The introduction of the DrukLaws App in 2020 provides easy and convenient access to legal information and services, featuring approximately 199 laws of Bhutan and providing access to 71 judicial forms for users' convenience.
184. The e-Litigation platform was launched in April 2021, as reported in Para 51, to facilitate equitable access to justice, particularly for women residing in remote communities. Further, an SMS alert system has been implemented to provide real-time updates regarding the relevant Bench, the designated Bench Clerk, and the presiding Judge overseeing their case. Virtual hearings are conducted via social media platforms such as WeChat, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Zoom which are commonly used by the rural population. The judiciary also ensures that their services are provided in languages and dialects understandable by litigants, fostering a localised platform where litigants can communicate comfortably in their preferred dialects.



**The social protection response to the pandemic spurred gender-responsive innovations, but measures were mainly short-term.**

185. To contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bhutan closed its international borders which significantly impacted the tourism and allied sectors. Bhutan launched the Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu to provide economic relief to affected people. The Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu provided income support through Kidu as reported in para 89.
186. Recognising the financial strain on individuals and businesses, the RGoB deferred loan repayments and reduced interest rates, providing significant relief to those struggling to meet financial obligations. As of March 2021, total interest payment support amounted to Nu. 11.06 billion, with Nu. 9.18 billion granted by Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu and Nu. 1.88 billion borne by the financial institutions, benefiting 139,096 loan account holders.
187. Free healthcare and COVID-19 testing were made available to all citizens to guarantee access to medical care regardless of financial situation. Efforts to boost mental health support services to help individuals cope with pandemic-induced stress and anxiety are reported in Para 88.
188. The NCWC, alongside other government and non-governmental partners, also launched online case management, counselling, and emergency services to ensure uninterrupted support for GBV survivors amidst the pandemic. This initiative provided critical assistance to survivors in need, with a particular focus on addressing the surge in cases during the crisis. Moreover, in November 2020, a comprehensive guideline for responding to GBV in emergencies was developed, drawing insights from the initial national lockdown in August 2020.
189. Bhutan initiated skills development training and employment support programmes to employ those affected by the pandemic. More than 7,081 *Desuups* received training in diverse vocational education and training fields. Besides providing economic relief to individuals and households, the initiatives also enhanced the employability of individuals through skills development.
190. In Bhutan, only 14% of the population, approximately 91,000 people, are currently covered by pension, provident, and insurance schemes (NPPF: 9%, RICB and BIL: 5%). As of June 30, 2022, the NPPF had 68,221 active members from the civil service, state-owned enterprises, the Armed Forces, the Build Bhutan Project, and the private sector. The number of beneficiaries receiving pensions and related benefits, such as orphan, dependent parent, disability, and surviving spouse benefits, increased to 8,821 from 8,294 the previous year, marking a growth of 6.35%.
191. In the country's major urban areas, there are 29,447 housing units, out of which 1,069 are National Housing Development Corporation Limited (NHDCL) units. Only 20% of these units are owned, with the majority (79.8%) being rented.

## **Actions taken to improve access to social protection for women and girls**

### **Promoted women's access to health services through the expansion of universal health coverage or public health services**

192. Article 9 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan ensures free access to basic public health services in both modern and traditional medicines. It also ensures security in cases of sickness, disability, or lack of adequate means of livelihood. The Constitutional provisions are a testament to Bhutan's commitment to human development through the provision of free basic health and education.
193. Despite challenges posed by the landscape and topography, Bhutan has established at least a Primary Healthcare Unit (PHC) in the *Gewog*, and Outreach Clinics to serve the health needs of the rural population. The health needs of the population are now served by 54 hospitals, 186 PHC and 51 sub-posts which is an increase compared to 2020 where the health needs were served by 49 hospitals, 186 PHC and 53. Further, the hospital facilities are also upgraded.
194. Bhutan has implemented a comprehensive mobile medical service to enhance healthcare accessibility for those in remote areas. This initiative includes mobile medical units that provide a wide range of health services to most isolated populations. The mobile medical units are equipped with diagnostic equipment and provide a wide range of treatments by trained healthcare professionals. This has ensured access to women living in remote areas, older women and women with disabilities.
195. To ensure continuous access to maternal health services, particularly for pregnant women in remote and challenging areas, the mobile cardiotocography service was introduced in November 2020. The initiative leverages Internet of Things technology<sup>24</sup> to remotely monitor fetal heart rates and uterine contractions, allowing for early detection of high-risk pregnancies and timely referrals. The iCTG devices<sup>25</sup> were distributed to 55 health facilities, mostly in remote and underserved regions, to enhance the quality and accessibility of maternal healthcare. By August 2023, this service had benefited 9,615 pregnant women across the country.
196. As part of comprehensive health initiatives, Bhutan has made significant progress in cancer screening, particularly for cervical and breast cancer. The National Cervical Cancer Screening Programme reached 128,285 women, covering 90.81% of the target population. Additionally, breast cancer screening reached 93% of the intended 78,004 women. Early detection of cancer and identification of high-risk individuals significantly improve women's health outcomes.

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<sup>24</sup> Internet of Things (IoT) technology refers to the interconnection of devices, sensors, and systems through the internet, enabling them to collect, exchange, and analyse data.

<sup>25</sup> The term "iCTG devices" refers to "Internet Cardiotocography" devices, which are used for monitoring fetal heart rate and uterine contractions during pregnancy and labour.

## **Actions taken to improve health outcomes for women and girls**

### **Expanded specific health services for women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health services, maternal health, and HIV services**

197. The Accelerated Mother and Child Health (AMCH) Policy was approved in January 2020 to provide comprehensive support from conception until the child reaches two years of age. The policy and programmes focus on interventions like antenatal care, institutional delivery, postnatal visits, and micronutrient supplementation to improve health outcomes and address declining fertility rates.
198. The comprehensive maternal and nutrition health initiative was launched in 2023. It integrates conditional cash transfers and the 1,000 golden days initiative, aligning with the AMCH policy. It enhances the effective coverage of essential health and nutrition services for both children and women. As part of the comprehensive maternal and nutrition health package, Multiple Micronutrient Supplements were introduced for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, expected to combat maternal anaemia, prematurity, low birth weight, and intergenerational stunting.
199. The RGoB and Development partners continued collaborating to support the early detection, management, and referral of children with delays in developmental milestones. 152 health workers from 13 *Dzongkhag* were trained on applying the BCDST for early detection and referral for health care management.
200. In adherence to Bhutan's policy of universal basic health, all persons, including women sex workers, are entitled to equitable access to medical services. Targeted medical services and awareness campaigns are conducted for individuals living with HIV/AIDS and LGBT+ individuals.
201. In March 2024, the 150-bedded Queen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck Mother and Child Hospital was operationalised to provide high-end facilities for paediatrics, gynaecology, neonatal intensive care, paediatric intensive care, and other services to women and children, as reported in Para 7.

### **Taken measures to support women's mental health, including access to specialised services and counselling**

202. Bhutan has adopted a holistic approach to preventing mental health issues and providing comprehensive care. Bhutan's mental health strategy is guided by the Bhutan Mental Health Strategy and Suicide Prevention Action Plan (2018-2023). The plan integrates mental health services into primary healthcare and promotes community-based care to make mental health support more accessible and holistic. The plan focuses on early intervention, regular mental health screenings, and public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking behaviours.

203. Bhutan, along with other Southeast Asian countries, committed to the Paro Declaration during the 75th Regional Committee Meeting of the WHO Southeast Asia Region in 2022. This declaration promotes people-centred mental health care and community engagement.
204. A high-level event titled "Mental Health for All: Leaving No One Behind" was hosted by Bhutan at the sidelines of the 78th United Nations General Assembly on 19 September 2023. The event, held at UNICEF House in New York, was led by Her Majesty the Queen of Bhutan and Her Majesty Queen Mathilde of the Kingdom of Belgium, in collaboration with the WHO, UNICEF, and United for Global Mental Health. Its purpose was to reaffirm the highest level of political commitment and action to ensure universal access to mental health care and support.
205. In 2022, The PEMA was established under the patronage of Her Majesty the Queen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck to serve as a nodal agency for addressing mental health issues in Bhutan. The PEMA has provided support through various services as reported in Para 6.
206. NCWC and MoESD launched two online campaigns to promote mental health awareness among children and youth: "Project Gawa"<sup>26</sup> in 2020 and #OnMyMind<sup>27</sup> in 2021. These campaigns led to an increase in the number of cases received by the MoESD and NCWC helplines with 552 children and 278 female youth seeking counselling services after the campaign. The MoESD also adopted the Zoala App to provide mental health and well-being support via an online platform. The Zoala App was piloted within four central schools during winter youth resilience and leadership development programmes to 320 students and 44 counsellors in 2024.
207. Bhutan prioritises school-based counselling programmes to support the mental health issues of boys and girls. Counsellors have been appointed in over 149 schools, and the capacity of school guidance counsellors has been strengthened through regular training in family intervention and psychosocial support. Between 2020 and 2021, 177 counsellors (84 female) were trained to provide Mental Health and Psychosocial Support. This is further supported by school-based child protection committees and school-based clubs such as peer helpers, scouts, and Y-PEER<sup>28</sup> which advocate and encourage openness about mental health.
208. A dedicated child clinic at the psychiatric department was established in 2023 and provided training to the first psychiatrist specialising in child and adolescent psychiatry. In the same year, an e-counselling service was launched to enhance accessibility. Over 248 children (124 female, 129 male, and 2 who identified as 'others') availed the services.
209. To support the above initiatives through a trained and sustainable workforce, Khesar Gyalpo

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<sup>26</sup> Project Gawa is a platform created to let children and young people know that they are not alone to feel this way. It is a space for you to express, to ask questions, to share your concerns and to help you understand your emotions.

<sup>27</sup> The campaign focuses on enabling children and young people to understand and open up that it's okay to talk about mental health and seek help.

<sup>28</sup> Y-PEER Bhutan is a youth-led organisation working to advocate and create awareness on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for young people of Bhutan since 2012.

University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan launched the Bachelor of Science in Clinical Counselling as reported in Para 209. This programme aims to develop a responsive mental health care system and reduce the country's suicide rates. 16 clinical counsellors graduated and have been deployed nationwide including at Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH).

210. A dedicated Mental Health and Psychosocial Response Team has been established during the pandemic to provide mental health and psychosocial support. More than 20,000 health workers, counsellors, and volunteers were trained in Psychological First Aid (PFA) and suicide prevention. Maternal mental health screening has been integrated into the new Mother and Child Health Handbook, ensuring that every mother is assessed for common mental health issues during antenatal and postnatal care visits.
211. In 2021, RENEW launched a special programme on the art of well-being involving school health coordinators, RENEW counsellors, CBSS volunteers, and staff. A total of 40 participants attended the programme including 13 school health coordinators from 13 schools in Thimphu. The participants were introduced to the traditional art of yoga, meditation, and dance movement to promote physical and mental health.

#### **Undertaken gender-specific public awareness/health promotion campaigns**

212. The NCWC launched the #LoveBeginsAtHome media campaign in April 2020 which advocates healthy and violence-free families during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent GBV and violence against children through both mainstream and social media channels. The NCWC also launched the #BetterTogether media campaign as reported in Para 77 & 149 to challenge gender stereotypes. These initiatives collectively aimed to address and prevent GBV while promoting healthy family dynamics amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic.
213. In 2020, CBSS volunteers conducted awareness programmes on GBV, reporting procedures, and available services for survivors in 17 *Dzongkhag* and two *Thromde*, reaching approximately 3,000 community leaders and the general public. Basic procedures for responding to GBV were incorporated into the curriculum of the *De-suung* Training Program, resulting in the training of 3,000 *Desuups* (650 females and 2,350 males). Between April 2020 and March 2021, 3,800 frontline workers, including health workers, law enforcement personnel, LG leaders, and members from CSOs like the Taxi Association, were trained on responding to GBV.
214. The Red Dot Bhutan Campaign was launched to destigmatise menstruation and address related challenges for girls and women. As part of this effort, a four-day sensitisation and awareness session was conducted in 2021 for various groups, including nine women taxi drivers, 15 *Desuup Gojays*, 20 taxi drivers registered under the Bhutan Red Cross Society, and 20 street hawkers at

Gawailing Happy Home<sup>29</sup>.

215. In 2021, RENEW, in collaboration with development partners conducted workshops to raise awareness of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), GBV, and related laws. The workshop sessions covered the legislative framework such as the Marriage Act, the Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA), the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) and violence. Similar training was provided to 18 taxi drivers, 10 Thimphu Bikers, and 22 bus conductors over three days. In the same year, RENEW also initiated a national consultation meeting with organisations representing LGBT+, Red Purse, Lhak-Sam, *drayangs*, and street vendors. This two-day meeting identified challenges faced by these groups concerning GBV and SRHR issues and resulted in a plan of action to address them.
216. In addition, RENEW introduced Druk Adolescent's Initiative on Sexual Awareness Network (DAISAN) sessions in 20 schools which engaged 7,125 students in 2021 to strengthen their understanding of SRHR.

### **Provided gender-responsiveness training for health service providers**

217. The MoH has established numerous health service standards to guide health workers and facilities in delivering quality care. Many of these standards were set in 2007 and continue to serve as benchmarks for healthcare delivery. These standards are regularly updated to ensure they reflect the latest best practices and advancements in healthcare. The MoH conducts training programmes to equip health workers with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet these standards effectively, ultimately aiming to improve health services across Bhutan.
218. In 2021, 300 health workers received training on reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (RMNCH) guidelines during COVID-19 with standardised manuals made available online for easy access. Additionally, 550 participants were trained on the MCH handbook and BCDST via Zoom, and 63 health workers received infant and young child feeding counselling training through the same platform. The MoH conducted training for healthcare workers in child and youth-friendly health services, focusing on reproductive health and environmental risks.

### **Strengthened comprehensive sexuality education in schools or through community programmes**

219. The National Strategic Framework on CSE was adopted in 2021. This framework outlines strategies and approaches to institutionalise CSE at national, *Dzongkhag*, *Thromde*, and school levels to promote the health, well-being, and dignity of young people through the application of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values. Currently, CSE is integrated into seven subjects from class PP to XII, with a separate subject dedicated to CSE taught in all schools as reported in Para 12. A Dzongkha version was also made available and is being taught in monasteries and

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<sup>29</sup> RENEW's Gawailing Happy Home provides an environment of physical and psychological safety for individuals and families.

nunneries.

220. Modules on gender and SRH are integrated into the scout's handbook, and scout leaders are trained on the revised handbook. As of 2023, there were 119, 976 students actively engaged as scouts nationwide. This provided students with opportunities to explore sexuality education through outdoor learning and teamwork activities.
221. Following the launch of the curriculum, school management and staff of 20 priority schools from 16 *Dzongkhag* received training in 'CSE Facilitation'. To ensure continuity, colleges of education created a 60-hour non-credited module manual for CSE facilitators. All trainees at these colleges undergo CSE training.
222. The Customs Duty (Amendment) Act of 2021 waived off 30% customs duty on sanitary products and 5% on sales to zero per cent to make them affordable for all women and girls as reported in Para 12.

#### **Taken actions to expand access to health services for vulnerable groups of women and girls**

223. In 2023, the AMCH Programme was launched offering comprehensive care and cash transfers for at-risk women, and Bhutan achieving high vaccination rates and introduction of ICT-based healthcare services are reported in para 77 & 79.
224. Adolescent-friendly health services (AFHS) clinics were established in 54 hospitals, including referral hospitals across 20 *Dzongkhag*, to provide comprehensive adolescent-friendly SRH information and services. Moreover, an AFHS training manual was developed to institutionalise capacity building of health workers. The manual is expected to enhance the knowledge, abilities, and skills for providing quality, rights-based, and client-focused family planning services across the country.
225. The One Stop Crisis Centre at JDWNRH in Thimphu continues to be a pivotal resource for fostering awareness and understanding of GBV throughout the community. Besides providing direct support, the One Stop Crisis Centre undertakes training programmes for healthcare workers, conducts GBV awareness campaigns, collaborates with Village Health Workers and Outreach Clinics to extend its reach, and ensures clear signage for survivor access. The One Stop Crisis Centre has reported 1371 cases of domestic violence and 441 cases of sexual violence from 2020 to May 2024. Perhaps this is due to increased reporting systems but it also may be due to the increased awareness of what constitutes violence against women. Further, to enhance services, Bhutan established its first-ever forensic laboratory in November 2023. This is expected to aid and expedite investigative processes, including crimes related to women and children.
226. Early Essential Newborn Care (EENC) and Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) initiatives improve neonatal health through skin-to-skin contact and early breastfeeding, reducing preventable

neonatal deaths. The Bhutan Newborn Action Plan (BENAP) is a five-year strategy focused on reducing newborn deaths and enhancing neonatal health. Point of Care Quality Improvement (POCQI) aims to improve care quality for mothers and newborns in health facilities. Low Dose High Frequency (LDHF) programme trains nurses and doctors to handle postpartum haemorrhage and birth asphyxia, enhancing healthcare outcomes. The MCH Tracking System ensures continuous care by tracking pregnant women and their babies until the age of five. Preconception Care provides guidance and support to individuals and couples planning pregnancies to optimise health before conception.

227. As a result, significant strides have been made in improving health outcomes in recent years. Institutional delivery rates have risen from 93.4% in 2017 to 97.5% in 2022. In the same period, maternal Mortality Rate has decreased from 89 deaths per 100,000 live births to 60. Infant Mortality Rate has reduced from 25.5 to 19.016, and Under Five Mortality Rate has declined from 34.1 to 24.

### **Action taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls, including in sectors where they are underrepresented**

#### **Increased access to skills and training in new and emerging fields, especially STEM and digital fluency and literacy**

238. In 2020, during the 113th National Day, His Majesty the King issued a Royal Decree to initiate a transformative reconceptualisation of the education system. The Royal Command emphasised creating an education system that is rooted in Bhutanese culture and values, and progressive in its pursuit of science, technology and innovation. Accordingly, Bhutan implemented several reforms including revision of the school curriculum, teaching and learning approaches, and assessment practices to enhance educational standards and learning attainments.
239. The Digital School initiative was launched under the Digital Drukyul Flagship Programme which is part of the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP. This initiative aims to enhance digital learning in schools by implementing a Learning Management System to facilitate online education. The programme addresses the digital divide by providing internet connectivity to schools, developing digital literacy, and equipping educational institutions with the necessary infrastructure and digital tools.
240. Several initiatives to promote STEM were also launched such as open educational resources, STEM camps for girls, girls in ICT, and participation in national and international STEM competitions to promote STEM in schools, particularly among girls. Similarly, the MoESD, in collaboration with the Druk Gyalpo Institute, launched the HRH Gyalsey Annual Mathematics Award in 2022, as reported in Para 172. This annual award aims to emphasise the importance of mathematics and generate and nurture interest in STEM. The national-level test for Middle Secondary (classes 9 & 10) and Higher Secondary School students (classes 11 & 12) saw 1927 and 1066 participants, respectively, in 2023. The six winners included three from each school



level, with two being female.

241. The Women in STEM group, a voluntary group established in 2022 endeavours to advance girls and women in STEM disciplines. Among the group's primary initiatives are the annual STEM festival, Girls STEM Camps, Monthly STEM Quizzes, and STEM Forums as reported in Para 32, 169 & 170.
242. Bhutan Hydro Power and utility companies are members of WePOWER and implement interventions across four pillars - promoting STEM education among girls; recruiting women employees; offering professional development opportunities to women employees; and adopting policy and institutional changes to increase women's participation in the power sector, as reported in Para 171.
243. The 13th FYP will continue to support women and girls in STEM education. The plan emphasises enhancing the participation and performance of female students in STEM fields with the broader goals of promoting gender equality and empowering women through education. Specific initiatives include targeted scholarships, mentorship programmes, and improved access to STEM resources and training to ensure that more women and girls can pursue and excel in these critical areas.

#### **Ensured access to safe water and sanitation services and facilitated menstrual hygiene management, especially in schools and other education/training settings**

244. The National Sanitation and Hygiene Policy of Bhutan 2020 guides the implementation of activities aimed at improving sanitation and hygiene. It focuses on providing equitable and sustainable sanitation facilities, promoting hygiene practices, and reducing environmental pollution. The policy outlines strategies for infrastructure development, community engagement, and capacity building, and emphasises the importance of clean water and sanitation for public health and well-being. The policy also aligns with SDG 6 which aims for clean water and sanitation for all.
245. The Water Flagship Programme was launched in 2020 to support the implementation of the policy. The programme focuses on ensuring access to safe, reliable, and sustainable drinking water and irrigation services across the country. A total budget of Nu. 3 billion was allocated to the programme. The RGoB partnered with *DeSuung* to enhance water security and management through the Water Flagship Programme. The collaboration executed 42 drinking and irrigation water projects which benefited 3,931 households with 24-hour access to drinking water.
246. In 2020, MoESD, MoH and development partners launched a knowledge book on menstrual health and hygiene, based on a formative study and a Knowledge, Attitude and Practices survey. Further, Bhutan observed Menstrual Hygiene Day with a red *dopchu*<sup>30</sup> in 2020 as a simple and

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<sup>30</sup> "Dopchu" is the term used in Bhutanese culture to refer to a bracelet.

powerful global symbol for menstruation. Each red bead in the bracelet represents empowerment, hope, love, care and solidarity. In collaboration with the MoH, MoESD and UNICEF, organised annual School Health Coordinator training on the seven key hygiene behaviours.

247. Sewing machines were distributed to nunneries for making reusable sanitary cloth pads from environment-friendly local materials. Commercial pads, tampons, and menstrual cups are increasingly available, though imported sanitary products incur sales tax and import duty. Local entrepreneurs are producing both disposable and reusable pads. The Health Minister launched an electric incinerator, donated by Clean Bhutan and Bhutan National Bank, to facilitate safe and hygienic disposal of sanitary pads at nunneries. As of 2022, improved sanitation coverage stands at 97% in schools, 89% in monastic institutions, and 99% in healthcare facilities.
248. In response to advocacy efforts for Menstrual Hygiene Management, Red Dot Bhutan is now urging increased action and investment. To sustain progress and promote learning without stress or barriers, as reported in Para 234, the MoESD and partners distributed 2,000 menstrual cups, 17,000 reusable sanitary pads, 500 sanitary tampons, and 5,500 disposable sanitary pads to 139 schools, benefiting 2,700 adolescent girls in 2022. Further, the MoESD, in partnership with RENEW and UNICEF, distributed 1,000 reusable dignity kits to students in five schools in 2024.
249. In 2023, seven out of thirty-seven SEN schools in Bhutan were equipped with inclusive toilets funded, each costing approximately Nu 2.5 million. During the same year, Red Dot Bhutan distributed menstrual hygiene kits to students with disabilities and designated Khuruthang Middle Secondary School's inclusive toilet as the country's first menstrual hygiene-friendly toilet.

### **Strengthened measures to prevent adolescent pregnancies and to enable adolescent girls to continue their education in the case of pregnancy and/or motherhood**

250. The National Adolescent Health Strategic Plan offers a comprehensive framework for providing coordinated adolescent health services in the country. It includes health care packages, such as sexual and reproductive health, accessible to all boys and girls through AFHS clinics and designated focal persons in various hospitals. A dedicated unit at the MoH oversees the implementation of these programmes, with 125 AFHS focal persons available in all district hospitals to facilitate access to SRH services and referrals. An AFHS training manual was created to standardise capacity building for health workers, and the revised national family planning manual now includes adolescent-specific components.
251. The institutionalisation of CSE has empowered adolescents with knowledge and skills in SRHR. The National Strategic Framework on Comprehensive Sexuality Education, adopted in 2021, aims to enhance the provision of SRH services and education. To de-stigmatize menstruation, the Red Dot Bhutan Campaign was launched in 2022, as reported in Para 12 & 214, targeting schools and nunneries to address related challenges faced by girls and women.

252. The National Standards and Implementation Guide for Youth Friendly Health Services established in 2008 continues to enhance measures aimed at preventing adolescent pregnancies. The guide ensures that health services specifically tailored to the needs of young people are readily available and accessible, providing them with the necessary support, guidance, and resources to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. Further, the National Family Planning Standards 2018 emphasise the importance of addressing adolescent sexual behaviour and teenage pregnancy. The revision of the national midwifery guideline in 2018 ensures improved care and support for teenage mothers and their children.
253. The MoESD's support for adolescent mothers, including opportunities to continue their education and access psychosocial support during and after the pregnancy ensures that young mothers can continue their studies. All secondary schools across the country have certified school guidance counsellors available to provide necessary psychosocial support. Further, NCWC supports the enrolment of young mothers in school based on their convenience. NCWC also assesses the family situation to determine if grandparents can provide proper care to determine the custody of the child and ensure that the young mother is not burdened with childcare while pursuing education.
254. Teacher training programmes include extensive modules on CSE and the educators possess the ability to address adolescent SRHR effectively as reported in Para 224. Regular conferences, seminars and trainings were conducted on adolescent SRH to further enrich the knowledge base of educators and stakeholders.

**Economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic closes gender gaps in poverty, employment, social protection, education, and/or health**

255. The NCWC initiated the development of a national response plan targeting especially violence against women and children. The plan aims to prevent and respond to gender-related and child protection issues given the heightened risk during the pandemic.
256. The RGoB in collaboration with development partners supported CSOs, and women's organisations to address GBV and ensure services for those affected. Ensuring basic essential services are provided for survivors of GBV, including interim shelters, health services, counselling, and psychosocial support.
257. By early 2021, the government had provided financial support to 34,384 beneficiaries and over 25,000 children through the Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu under the National Resilience Fund as reported in Para 89. Various fiscal and monetary measures were implemented, including the deferment of loans until 2022 and the provision of working capital to ensure the uninterrupted supply of essential commodities. Bhutan also launched the National Credit Guarantee Scheme in 2020, as reported in Para 174, to enhance access to finance for start-ups and businesses, with a focus on supporting women entrepreneurs.

258. Efforts have also been made to address gender disparities in education and health. Bhutan ensured continued access to education for girls and women, particularly in remote and vulnerable communities, where educational opportunities may be limited. Initiatives to enhance women's access to healthcare services and promote gender-sensitive health policies have also been prioritised to address the unique health needs of women during the crisis.
259. The government's response to the pandemic has shown positive results in reducing gender disparities in various sectors. By March 27, 2021, 60% of the adult population had received the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, with a higher turnout during the second drive in July. Children aged 12-17 also received vaccines, with 32,600 children vaccinated by late July. As of August, more than 97% of the population were vaccinated. Financial support and access to social protection schemes have helped mitigate the impact of the crisis on women's economic well-being.

### **Dimension 3: Freedom from Violence, Stigma and Stereotypes**

#### **Forms of gender-based violence and context and settings prioritised**

##### **Intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence**

260. The DVPA focuses on addressing violence within intimate or domestic relationships. The legislation introduces the concept of "intimate partner relationship" and recognises all forms of violence. It also criminalises economic violence which was previously considered a civil matter.
261. In the health sector, a national guideline for managing IPV and sexual violence at PHC was developed in 2020. Healthcare professionals were trained to provide comprehensive, gender-sensitive healthcare services to survivors of GBV. Further, the Forensic Department adheres to the SoP outlined in the Management of Intimate Partners and Sexual Violence 2017. Training has been conducted for law enforcement and healthcare professionals on identifying and responding to IPV. For instance, in January 2022, health workers from Bumthang, Trongsa, and Zhemgang *Dzongkhag* were trained on managing survivors of IPV.

##### **Violence against women and girls facilitated by technology (e.g. online sexual harassment, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images)**

262. Information, Communication and Media Act (ICMA) 2018 ensures the protection of the general public and vulnerable sections of the population such as children and young persons from undesirable influences and online violence. Children are further protected by CCPA which ensures safeguarding of personal information, particularly that of children, women and girls. To enhance enforcement, the RBP has established a dedicated Cybercrime Unit. This unit is tasked with investigating and taking action against cybercrimes, including those targeting individuals, businesses, and critical infrastructure.
263. Bhutan conducts regular advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about cybersecurity, privacy, and online safety. The GovTech has developed and disseminated numerous awareness materials covering various topics related to online security. These materials are distributed through national television, print media, and social media platforms. Bhutan also actively participates in global initiatives such as "Safer Internet Day" to raise public awareness. CSOs complement the efforts of the government by organising sensitisation workshops to spread awareness. CSOs such as Bhutan Media Foundation (BMF), RENEW and Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) conduct regular training for youth and the public.
264. Through comprehensive sexuality education, in-school and out-of-school youths are sensitised about technology-facilitated GBV. Further, Y-PEER, a youth network actively advocates for prevention and response to Technology-facilitated GBV in colleges and institutions.

## **Child, early and forced marriages**

265. The Penal Code classifies any sexual act with a child below the age of 18 as rape and the CCPA categorizes engagement in marriage or sexual activity with a child as statutory rape. Further, the Marriage Act of Bhutan explicitly prohibits child marriage. To ensure a uniform approach in the administration of child justice, the Child Justice Training Manual 2022 was developed and the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) conducted training for key stakeholders across the country.
266. The draft National Child Policy will support the implementation of various legislation prohibiting early and forced marriages. The draft policy provides for appropriate child support measures to assist parents in ensuring the conditions necessary for their child's development. The policy will also safeguard their health and development, promote healthy behaviours, and ensure access to health services that are sensitive to their rights and specific needs.
267. As part of this regional initiative, Bhutan collaborates with other South Asian countries to address the root causes and consequences of child marriage through the implementation of the Regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage.
268. The NCWC spearheads coordination and implementation efforts and conducts awareness-raising campaigns on the harmful impacts of child and forced marriages. One such initiative is the C4D strategy which was developed in 2019 to educate both the public and young people about the negative consequences of child marriage, exploitation, and neglect. Further, it seeks to create an awareness campaign on social and behavioural change to end violence against children through community engagement. By 2022, this initiative reached out to over 520,000 individuals, including through social media platforms.

## **Trafficking in persons of women and girls**

269. Section 154 which defines Trafficking in Persons (TIP) of PCB was amended in 2021 to align with the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. Bhutan ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime in 2023 as reported in Para 4 & 26. The amendment of law coupled with ratification of the convention strengthened that legal foundation to protect women and girls from trafficking.
270. The National Prevention and Response Strategy was launched in 2022 to enhance bilateral, regional and multilateral coordination for effective prevention, protection and repatriation of TIP survivors. The strategy is also accompanied by an action plan with interventions to be implemented by relevant agencies over the next three years.
271. The SoP on Multi-sectoral Response to Address TIP was approved in 2019 for implementation. The SoP is a significant step towards instituting a systematic mechanism to address TIP. It outlines specific procedures for the identification and referral of survivors. A special task team

with representatives from relevant agencies, including NCWC and RENEW, was formed to support the implementation of the SoP and improve coordination among agencies. The task team is also responsible for the development and review of plans and interventions on TIP.

272. More than 466 individuals, including LG leaders, RENEW volunteers, Judges, SPs, OCs, Judicial officials, and bench clerks, underwent training on the SoP for Multi-sector Response to Address TIP in Bhutan. Various agencies, including CSOs, conducted additional training sessions for over 2500 participants. Specific training sessions were conducted for 171 Police, Immigration, and labour officials.

### **Actions taken address Gender-Based Violence in past five years**

#### **Introduced or strengthened violence against women laws, and their enforcement and implementation**

273. The DVPA 2013, and its rules and regulations, delineate clear procedures to improve access to justice for survivors and victims of violence. The Marriage Act of Bhutan and the PCB establish legal prohibitions against violence, while the CCPA 2011 addresses broader issues related to child protection and welfare.
274. To operationalise these legal provisions and enhance the capacity of stakeholders including law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, targeted initiatives and programmes have been implemented. In 2023, the BNLI conducted multiple training programmes involving 314 participants from various legal and judicial roles. Notable sessions included the Paralegals Consultative Workshop, Mangmis Training, Bench Clerks Training, a Scholar Forum, Interpretation of Statutes and Judgment Drafting, *Thromde* Thuemis Training, Legal Service Providers Training, and Prosecutors & Clerks Training. Additionally, an Online Refresher Course for Local Government Leaders covered 83 *Gewog*.
275. The NCWC conducted training on the RESPECT framework for GCFPs, *Dzongkhag Tshogdu* Chairpersons, case managers, and officials from CSOs engaged in prevention and response to violence against women. The training was attended by 72 participants as reported in Para 57.
276. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, led by NCWC, developed and implemented a Gender and Child Protection Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan as reported in Para 88.
277. CBSS volunteers conduct awareness programmes to educate community leaders and the general public on reporting procedures and available services for survivors. Frontline workers, including health workers, law enforcement personnel, and local government leaders, receive training on responding to GBV and violence against children, ensuring a coordinated and effective response at the grassroots level.
278. Efforts to strengthen coordination between government agencies and CSOs have led to the establishment of the National Action and Coordinating Group (NACG). Comprising CSOs and

UNICEF, the NACG accelerates the implementation of regional initiatives to end violence against children while providing networking opportunities and capacity-building support.

### **Introduced or strengthened measures to increase women's access to justice**

279. Bhutan has undertaken several initiatives to enhance access to justice, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and children as reported in Para 48-53. Further, the specialised bench, equipped with a dedicated courtroom, focuses on cases involving matrimonial matters where women are mostly victims, children in conflict with the law (CICL), children in difficult circumstances (CIDC), and child victims of abuse.
280. An SoP for prosecution and response to sexual offences, including rape, is currently being developed. The unit actively participates in consultative meetings with relevant agencies.
281. The Consensus Building Programme initiated by RENEW in collaboration with NCWC, RBP, and JSW Law offers training to CBSS volunteers to assist GBV survivors and women facing difficult circumstances as reported in Para 213.
282. In 2021, the NCWC collaborated with key justice sector agencies to develop legal aid guidelines for vulnerable women and children, providing clarity and minimum standards for agencies and individuals responsible for delivering legal aid services. Moreover, the OAG developed child-friendly prosecution guidelines, diversion guidelines, sentencing guidelines, and SoP for dealing with CICL, all guided by the best interests of the child and promoting fair treatment without discrimination.
283. The NCWC, Bar Council, and RENEW collaborated to provide legal counselling and information to women in difficult circumstances and GBV survivors, equipping them with essential knowledge about their rights under relevant laws, legal remedies, and available support avenues. In cases involving the prosecution of sexual offences against women and children, the OAG also engages The PEMA in assessing the case and supporting its victim.

### **Introduced or strengthened services for survivors of violence**

284. The RGoB has put in place SoP for GBV Prevention and Response, a multi-sectoral response mechanism and the roles of key actors, ensuring a coordinated approach to addressing GBV incidents. GBV and child protection case management SOP and guidelines were developed to institutionalise case management as a critical service for GBV and children survivors.
285. Public hospitals and health centres across Bhutan provide immediate medical care to survivors of violence. These facilities offer treatment for injuries, sexual assault examinations, and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for HIV. JDWNRH is equipped to conduct forensic examinations, which are crucial for legal proceedings and evidence collection in cases of sexual violence.
286. The *Gawailing Happy Home Shelter* in Thimphu continued to provide shelter to survivors of



GBV. Since its inception, this shelter has benefited over 900 survivors, including women and children who need care and support. To support survivors in remote *Dzongkhag*, RENEW established 10 Community Service Centres in 10 *Dzongkhag* as reported in Para 8.

287. To ensure survival-friendly services in accessing justice, RBP personnel are trained through integrating women and child-friendly police procedures in the police training curriculum and targeted capacity building on specific issues. Over 158 police personnel were trained in 2020 and 2021 on GBV, procedures, and early identification and safe referral.
288. Women and Child Protection Desks have been expanded and by the end of 2024, all 20 *Dzongkhag* will have one desk each in the Police Stations. These units and desks are managed by trained police personnel, including at least one female member. This expansion of Women and Child Protection Desks has been vital in addressing cases of domestic violence, as shown by the rise in convictions under the DVPA 2013, from 268 in 2021 to 565 in 2022, offering accessible support and legal assistance to survivors.
289. Similarly, 24 gender and child-focal persons nationwide underwent training to provide prompt assistance to women and children in need of care and protection. Over 191 principals, 110 counsellors, and 358 focal teachers were trained to improve counselling services in schools, including prevention and response to violence.

### **Introduced or strengthened strategies and interventions to prevent violence against women and girls**

290. Besides legal and policy interventions as reported in Para 47, NCWC initiated many programmes to prevent violence such as the EVAC campaign, *Gakey Lamtoen* and integration of CSE in schools curricula as reported in Para 10. Other initiatives include the development of the "Ending Violence Against Children" reference handbook, developed in 2022, which provides a comprehensive guide for community-driven efforts to combat violence against children in Bhutan. It outlines strategies including awareness and education campaigns, capacity building for community leaders, creating safe spaces for children, and establishing community watch and reporting systems.
291. Several campaigns were conducted across social media pages to raise awareness of GBV. For example, the NCWC launched the #LoveBeginsAtHome media campaign advocating for violence-free families during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent GBV and violence against children as reported in Para 221. RENEW also initiated the documentary "Engaging Men and Boys," highlighting the importance of everyone's role in ending violence, with the participation of Thimphu Badgers, Bhutan Taxi Association, and Film Association of Bhutan in 2021 as reported in Para 149. Moreover, the "Orange the World TikTok Challenge," a social media campaign was conducted in 2023 to raise awareness about GBV and promote gender equality.

## **Measures for improving the understanding of the extent, cause and consequence of violence against women and girls, including through collection and use of data from different sources**

292. The NCWC offers capacity building, sensitisation, and guidance to help sectors integrate gender into their plans, policies, and activities. In 2021, a gender mainstreaming guideline and toolkit for selected sectors were developed. This toolkit will complement the Gender, Environment, Climate Change, Disaster, and Poverty (GECDP) framework developed by the MRG.
293. *Dewa*<sup>31</sup>, an integrated dashboard to track and monitor the Gross National Happiness Indicator, SDGs and development plans was launched in 2022. It is an important monitoring tool to track progress on gender equality targets of the SDGs and 12<sup>th</sup> FYP. The NCWC and relevant agencies, update progress against indicators on VAWG and legal and policy framework to prevent gender discriminatory practices periodically.
294. Since 2017, there hasn't been a study on VAWG, and there's a pressing need for more recent data to inform planning and programme development. While this study has been a priority, resource limitations have prompted the government to incorporate essential data and indicators and other areas into alternative surveys. We anticipate that reports from the National Health Survey and other surveys will provide valuable data to address current gaps in information.
295. The NCWC and its partners are actively educating the public and young people about the harmful impacts of child and forced marriages, highlighting penal provisions against such practices. As reported in Para 60, they developed a C4D strategy in 2019 to raise awareness about harmful social and cultural practices affecting children's safety and well-being. This strategy also aims to promote positive parenting and fill knowledge gaps. Further, a nationwide EVAC campaign is being launched to address and prevent GBV and child protection issues.

## **Strategies taken to prevent GBV**

### **Promoting non-violent family relationships and positive parenting practices**

296. A C4D strategy for child protection and well-being aimed to help raise awareness of harmful social and cultural practices that increase children's risk of violence, exploitation, and neglect, as reported in Para 60. The strategy seeks to address these norms contributing to violence against boys and girls and address knowledge gaps on positive parenting. The *Gakey Lamtoen* pilot project also played an important role in promoting a non-violent family relationship as reported in Para 10.
297. The Bhutan Scouts Association collaborated with the NCWC and Save the Children Bhutan to organize a workshop on "Parenting without Violence" for scout members and their parents. This initiative aimed to empower parents with practical tools to raise responsible children and foster stronger family bonds. Participants were also introduced to tools that can be easily integrated

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<sup>31</sup> "Dewa" is a Bhutanese term that translates to "happiness" and "well-being" in English.

into their daily lives.

### **Promoting positive gender-equitable attitudes, beliefs, values and norms, especially among men and boys**

298. The #HeForShe campaign was adopted in Bhutan to promote gender equality by creating positive gender-equitable attitudes, beliefs, values and norms among men and boys. #HeForShe mobilised both men and women to advocate for gender equality and women's rights. The campaign emphasises the importance of male allies in the fight against gender discrimination and GBV. Various government officials, educators, and community leaders in Bhutan have pledged their support for #HeForShe, participating in awareness programmes, workshops, and public declarations to promote gender equality. These efforts are aimed at breaking down traditional gender roles and fostering a society where men and women can work together towards mutual respect and equality.
299. Alongside #HeForShe, Bhutan has embraced other campaigns aimed at promoting gender equality and combating GBV such as the White Ribbon Campaign and the MenEngage Alliance. Bhutan is a member of the MenEngage Alliance which focuses on education, advocacy, and community involvement, aiming to transform societal attitudes and behaviours regarding gender roles.

### **Raising public awareness to change attitudes and behaviours**

300. Grassroots organisations such as the GCFPs, CBSS, and the Multi-sectoral Task Force play a crucial role in public awareness of gender equality and creating awareness to change attitudes and behaviours. These institutions facilitate community awareness on various social issues including gender equality, GBV, and LGBT+. For instance, through such grassroots initiatives, approximately 3,000 community leaders were sensitised on available services for survivors of violence.
301. Bhutan also makes use of social media platforms to raise public awareness effectively. For instance, Aum Yeshey Dawa, an animated series developed by NCWC was launched in October 2020. The animated series is a blend of statutory provisions, real-life cases, illustrations and findings from various studies on social issues including gender equality. Social media campaigns and challenges are also created on social media to create virality and raise awareness.

### **Actions taken to prevent and respond to technology facilitated GBV**

#### **Data on technology-facilitated violence, drivers and consequences**

302. To understand the extent of and the magnitude of technology-facilitate violence, a social media landscape in Bhutan was conducted by the BMF. In addition to use and social media engagement, the study also covered the extent of violence, types of violence perpetrated and its consequences. Since social media is mostly used by youth, the study exclusively focuses on the youth.

## **Awareness-raising initiatives to sensitise young people, caregivers and educators to ethical and responsible online behaviour**

303. The MoESD has integrated digital citizenship into the school curriculum, as reported in Para 161. This initiative educates students about online safety, digital footprints, and the ethical use of digital resources. By starting this education early, Bhutan aims to cultivate a generation of informed and responsible digital citizens. Further, the initiative of the government is complemented by the activities of CSOs. In-person and online digital citizenship education and trainings are provided by Youth Centres, and CSOs like the BMF and BCMD. This training focuses on digital literacy, online safety, ethical use of digital resources and digital footprint awareness, among many others.
304. The Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA) has been actively involved in digital literacy campaigns aimed at educating the public about responsible online behaviour. These campaigns focus on teaching users about privacy settings, the importance of secure passwords, and how to identify and avoid online scams and phishing attempts. In addition, workshops and training sessions for teachers, parents, and community leaders are regularly conducted to empower them with the knowledge and tools to guide young people in their digital interactions.
305. Bhutan adopted the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)'s Child Online Protection (COP) guidelines to implement comprehensive strategies aimed at safeguarding children in the digital environment. The COP provides a framework for developing national policies, educational programmes, and awareness campaigns designed to protect children from online risks such as cyberbullying, exploitation, and exposure to inappropriate content. Bhutan adopted the guidelines for children, educators, parents, and the industry. Further, ITU's resources for advocacy were adapted to Bhutanese settings and widely distributed to schools. This is expected to increase awareness among educators, parents, children and the industry.

## **Worked with technology providers to introduce or strengthen human rights-based design, development and deployment approaches to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence**

306. Bhutan celebrates Safer Internet Day annually with the active involvement of CSOs, telcos, MoESD, NCWC and development partners. The celebration aims to promote a safer and more positive online experience for all, particularly children and young people by raising awareness, promoting education and empowering users.

## **Measures taken to resource women's organisations to work to prevent and respond to GBV**

307. The NCWC is tasked as the national machinery to promote and protect the rights of women through gender-responsive interventions as reported in Para. 340 & 341. The RGoB maintains its collaboration and support for CSOs that work to prevent and respond to GBV. In the fiscal year 2022-2023, the RGoB allocated approximately USD. 9.5 million in subsidies and transfers to CSOs operating shelters for women and children survivors of violence and those involved in

legal conflicts. The NCWC ensures that CSOs receive annual resource allocation to align with government initiatives. The RGoB facilitates platforms for CSOs to network, enhance capacities, disseminate knowledge, and strengthen monitoring and reporting.

308. After the formation of the NACG, consisting of eight CSOs and UNICEF, the group further enhanced coordination and cooperation among its members and expedited the implementation of the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children, along with other national and regional initiatives.

**Action taken to address the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender biases in media, including social media**

**Enacted, strengthened, and enforced legal reforms to combat discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, including social media**

309. Chapter 17 of ICMA of Bhutan 2018 serves as a cornerstone for safeguarding online and offline privacy, with a particular emphasis on protecting the privacy of personal information. Bhutan has taken proactive measures to regulate the content disseminated by its ICT and media service providers by adopting Rules and Regulations on Content in 2019. These regulations explicitly prohibit child sexual exploitation and abuse, sharing of obscene materials, discrimination and violence to ensure a safer and more inclusive media environment for women and children. The regulations provide a framework to monitor violations and report them. The NCWC actively collaborates with BICMA in monitoring and assessing the reported online abuse.

**Provided training to media professionals to encourage the creation and use of non-stereotypical, balanced and diverse images of women and girls in the media, including social media**

310. The NCWC collaborated with BMF to provide specialised training on Media Guidelines for Reporting on Women and Children in 2021. The training focused on ethical reporting practices, particularly concerning child protection and rights, and gender stereotypes. Journalists and reporters from print, radio, television and bloggers attended the training.

**Complaints about media content or gender-based discrimination/bias in the media and reporting**

311. An individual or entity can report online discrimination and other forms of online abuse including biases in media reporting through several channels. Violations can be reported to BICMA who is responsible for regulating and overseeing digital communications in Bhutan. Reports can also be filed to the Women and Children Tollfree number - 1098 which not only acts as a helpline for women and children in difficult circumstances but also accepts complaints against media content including advertisements.

**Prevent violence against disadvantaged and vulnerable women and girls**

**LGBT+, women living with HIV/AIDS and women with disabilities**

312. Bhutan ratified two conventions in 2023 to promote equality and ensure that disadvantaged groups enjoy full rights and protect them from violence. In addition, Bhutan has also ratified several regional instruments such as the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution and the SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. Bhutan also amended the Penal Code to decriminalise homosexuality in 2021.
313. Many policies were revised or adopted to protect the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, particularly women who experience double discrimination. The NGEF was revised and submitted for approval to include LGBT+ individuals, the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was endorsed in 2019 and the PSC was endorsed in 2023. Bhutan's ratification of international and regional conventions, strong laws and targeted policies for disadvantaged groups create a robust legal and policy framework that protects vulnerable populations. This framework is particularly important for women who often face compounded vulnerabilities due to the intersection of various disadvantages and vulnerabilities.
314. The NCWC's standard operating procedures focus on providing prompt and comprehensive survivor-centric services. The case managers, frontline workers and law enforcement officers are trained in dealing with GBV including vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. This ensures that the needs of the vulnerable groups are considered while providing services.
315. To expand and enhance access to justice, initiatives such as e-Litigation, legal aid, ADR, and CAM were launched as reported in Para 40, 51-53. This directly benefits vulnerable women such as women in remote areas and women with disabilities as they have mobility constraints. Other services such as health and psychosocial support are also provided by the government and CSOs.
316. Recognising the link between economic dependency and vulnerability to violence, Bhutan has also prioritised initiatives aimed at strengthening the financial independence of women. Bhutan strengthened SEN schools and frameworks for inclusive education in higher education and pre-vocational curriculum for students with disabilities were developed as reported in Para 70. An ICT curriculum for children with vision impairment was also designed to support effective learning through technology.
317. In 2020, RENEW launched livelihood projects to support programmes aimed at economically empowering vulnerable and affected women, including survivors of GBV, *Drayang* workers displaced by the coronavirus pandemic, the LGBT+ community, and People Living with HIV. The initiative supported small business ventures and women entrepreneurship through micro-credit loans. Specific training for persons with disabilities was initiated as reported in Para 72.
318. The *Lhak-Sam* Livelihood Centre provides refuge and support for People Living with HIV/AIDS. Through community-based home care, it equips individuals with valuable skills, helping to reduce isolation, fear, and self-stigma as reported in Para 84 & 85.

319. The NCWC Mobile App was developed in 2021 to enhance service efficiency for women and children in need of care and protection. It provides easy access and a convenient mode of communication for the survivors of violence to report the case and seek immediate interventions.

### **Prevent violence against girls, adolescents, and younger women**

320. In 2023, The PEMA Secretariat led the development of the National Policy on Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence as reported in Para 123. The DVPA 2013 contributes to preventing violence against girls, adolescents, and younger women by specifically targeting sexual abuse within intimate or domestic relationships as reported in Para 260 & 261.

321. The strengthening of the Woman and Child Helpline (1098) by The PEMA is integral to preventing violence against girls, adolescents, and younger women. By providing psychosocial first aid services, legal advice, and case referrals during lockdowns, as well as tele-consultation and mental health support services, the helpline offers vital support to those at risk of or experiencing violence as reported in Para 77 & 206.

322. In 2022, the NCWC launched a GBV primary prevention pilot project, *Gakey Lamtoen* in 2018 as reported in Para 10. The project, through its engagement with caregivers and adolescents, addresses the harmful social and cultural norms and practices, and the root causes of GBV against women and girls. Moreover, the NCWC in partnership with MoESD, carried out a larger-scale pilot of the project in three schools and communities in 2022. This initiative aims to gather further evidence for the nationwide implementation of primary prevention measures targeted at addressing violence against girls, adolescents, and younger women.

323. RENEW conducted several initiatives. For example, RENEW organised a workshop on 'CSE Facilitation' for 20 priority school counsellors from 16 *Dzongkhag* in 2021 as reported in Para 221. This equipped young people with the knowledge and skills to protect themselves from violence and exploitation, thereby aiding in violence prevention. Moreover, RENEW's CBSS actively works to prevent violence against girls, adolescents, and younger women by forging partnerships with community members as reported in Para 60, 213 & 277.

324. RENEW, in collaboration with the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) and BMF, organised the television talk show "*Moghi Mikhar*," as reported in Para 67. This show featured speakers discussing topics such as gender, relationships, feminism, parenting, and harmful practices like GBV and child sexual abuse, thus directly addressing issues related to violence against girls, adolescents, and younger women.

#### **Dimension 4: Participation, Accountability and Gender-responsive Institutions**

##### **Actions and measures taken to promote women's participation in public life and decision making**

##### **Opportunities for capacity building and skills development**

325. Bhutan ensures equal opportunities for capacity building and skills development for women and girls, and other disadvantaged girls. For instance, TVET institute recognises the needs of women and girls and provides gender-friendly infrastructure and services. In addition to regular training, TVET institutes also provide need-based specialised training. For instance, the Skills Development Programme was launched in October 2021 to support the skills development of the youth and others affected by the pandemic. An environment and social assessment was also carried out to ensure that the programme is responsive to the needs of all genders and that the environment is conducive for female job seekers. 185 men and 103 women have completed the programme as of the first year of the project.
326. The Build Bhutan Project (BBP) was initiated in July 2020 as part of the economic contingency plan in response to the pandemic. It focused on reskilling youth to work in the construction industry. It has trained 535 young women and 1587 men, engaged 309 women and 741 men in construction and 93 women and 587 men in the hydropower sector. As a result of the initiative, 54 specialised firms have also been established.
327. The Village Skills Development Programme (VSDP) under the BBP focuses on creating sustainable economic opportunities through skill development, particularly targeting women and youth in rural areas. The programme aims to accelerate economic activities, create seasonal off-farm job opportunities, empower women through engagement and boost gender equality through skills training programmes.
328. In 2022, the MoESD in collaboration with iBEST institute provided a well-structured training to 25 NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) adolescents and youths, providing young people with a complete set of skills that would help them either get employment or start their businesses in the field of multimedia and digital marketing.
329. The Food Security and Agricultural Productivity Project and the CARLEP, implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MoAL), are targeting at least 30% of women beneficiaries as reported in Para 17 to increase women's livelihood and economic opportunities in rural areas. More than 10,000 female farmers were trained through the CARLEP project implemented in six eastern *Dzongkhag*. In addition, regular capacity building and marketing support is provided by the RNR research centres and agriculture extension offices in the respective *Dzongkhag* and *Gewog*. 952 female and 603 male farmers were trained in organic farming, vegetable and fruit tree cultivation, and land management between July 2019 and June 2021. Likewise, the Resilient Mountain Solution project is expected to increase women's resilience to socio-economic and environmental changes as reported in Para 177.



330. RENEW Livelihoods Project provided various vocational skills, including weaving, tailoring and food production, to cushion the impact on vulnerable women with weaker social safety nets and dependent on informal sectors. This training is offered at the shelter home and the community centres, or in partnership with government and other training providers.
331. The RCSC organised a ‘women in executive leadership development workshop for achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world’ in collaboration with Queensland University of Technology, Australia in 2021. 11 women and two men participated in the workshop. In addition, the commission identified and trained 36 potential women leaders through its ‘Building a Support Foundation for Women Leaders’ programme in 2021 and 2022.

### **Encouraged the equal political participation of all women**

332. The revised NPAPGEEO 2019 adopts an inclusive approach to address the challenges faced by women in politics. It serves as the foundation for various capacity-building, skills development, sensitisation, and mentorship programmes tailored to empower women from diverse backgrounds to participate actively in political processes. For example, working towards the 3rd LG Elections of 2021, Bhutan Network for Empowering Women (BNEW) mobilised and sensitised over 2387 potential and aspiring women candidates, and trained more than 380 women in leadership and interpersonal skills. Potential candidates were also oriented on the situation of women and men in the country, emerging gender issues, new policy and programmatic development, and key skills necessary for participation in elections.
333. The NCWC and BNEW collaborated to launch the Bhutan Women Parliamentary Caucus (BWPC) in 2019 to address gender disparity in politics. BWPC provides a platform for women parliamentarians to collaborate, advocate for gender-sensitive policies, and promote women's rights and interests within the legislative framework. The Caucus works on various issues such as GBV, health, education, and economic empowerment. BWPC aims to foster a more inclusive and equitable political environment, encouraging greater female participation in politics and leadership roles. The Caucus also engages in capacity-building activities and public awareness campaigns to challenge traditional gender norms and support aspiring women leaders.
334. The ECB conducts regular awareness about the significance of women's participation in its civic and voter education program. Advocacy materials were created and distributed extensively through both mainstream and social media platforms.

### **Prevention of violence against women in politics**

335. The Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008 mandates that every political party, candidate, and their representatives must refrain from making defamatory or derogatory attacks on rival parties or individuals through any form of communication. It prohibits the use of inflammatory language, provocative actions, images, or manifestations that incite violence, hatred, or intimidation against another party, candidate, or any person or group of persons.

336. As per the ECB Social Media Rules and Regulations 2018 of the Kingdom of Bhutan, individuals must avoid unlawful or inappropriate online behaviour, including derogatory remarks, bullying, harassment, or posting offensive content. This is crucial for preventing violence against women in politics and fostering a respectful online environment.

337. The National Assembly Secretariat has established an internal framework to address gender-related issues in the workplace. This framework aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination, including sexual harassment, and applies to Members of Parliament as well.

### **Collected and analysed data on women's political participation, including in appointed and elected positions**

338. The ECB and other relevant government and non-government agencies maintain administrative data on women's involvement and representation in politics, including details about women voters. The data is publicly available on the website ECB.

### **Government entity dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.**

339. The NCWC is the national mechanism for coordinating, monitoring, promoting, and protecting the rights of women and children. The Commission consists of eight members, including one parliamentarian, government secretaries from the Prime Minister's Office, MoFA & ET, and MoESD, as well as representatives from law enforcement, the judiciary, and CSOs. It is mandated to oversee the implementation of laws and policies related to women and children, monitor and evaluate various government and non-government agencies, and ensure compliance with treaty obligations under the (CEDAW, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and its optional protocols. Additionally, the NCWC is responsible for developing standards, guidelines, and procedures for implementing gender-responsive interventions.

340. In 2019, the Women and Child Welfare Committee (WCWC) was established at the national and *Dzongkhag* levels, with dedicated Gender Focal Points appointed across ministries, CSOs, *Dzongkhag*, and *Thromde* to ensure gender-responsive interventions are incorporated in plans and programmes. The government provides support to the NCWC and its secretariat through infrastructure, human resources, and financial resources, with additional assistance from development partners and agencies. In the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP, the Government allocated more than USD 0.94 million and USD 1.23 Million for the 13th FYP.

### **Mainstreaming gender equality across sectors through GFPs and consultations**

341. The NCWC has appointed Gender Focal Points (GFPs) in all 20 *Dzongkhag* and 4 *Thromde* to serve as the committee secretary to the *Dzongkhag/Thromde* Women and Child Committee. Their role is to integrate gender considerations into planning and implementation, enhance services for women and children in need of care and protection, and enforce relevant legislation at the local level. Additionally, NCWC has GFPs in central agencies, including the judiciary,

legislative bodies, CSOs, the private sector, and other relevant agencies, to ensure gender mainstreaming in sector plans and policies.

342. With support from the Gender Expert Group, the NCWC has developed a Gender Training Manual, standards and guidelines to address capacity gaps among GFPs and other relevant officials sustainably. It is the first of its kind in the country and aims to institutionalise capacity-building programmes on gender and mainstreaming. It has enabled GFPs and other relevant agencies to conduct capacity-building activities, including awareness and sensitization programmes, within their respective sectors or areas of jurisdiction. Annual GFP meetings are held to enhance coordination and consultation, advancing the gender agenda.

## **Dimension 5 - Peaceful and Inclusive Societies**

### **Actions taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda**

#### **Measures taken to mainstream women, peace, and security**

343. As a UN member, Bhutan supports international peace and security by contributing trained men and women officers to UN peacekeeping missions. Since 2014, Bhutan has been an active participant in the UN's peacekeeping endeavours. As of 2023, Bhutan has engaged 270 men and women in UN peacekeeping missions from the Royal Bhutan Army and RBP effectively serving as UN peacekeepers.
344. Notable contributions include the deployment of its first full contingent of 180 peacekeepers, including two women peacekeepers to support the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission for the Central African Republic in November 2022. In 2023, all 180 personnel received the UN Peace Medal in recognition of their steadfast service and significant contributions to peace and stabilisation efforts in the country.
345. In alignment with the UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), Bhutan has focused on increasing women's engagement in peacekeeping missions around the world. Women's representation in the peacekeeping mission is above the UN target of 17%.
346. As part of the United Nations System, Bhutan upholds a zero-tolerance stance against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Bhutanese volunteers, including women contributing to peace and security efforts, undergo mandatory pre-deployment e-learning courses on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, aligning with UN policies and procedures to ensure a safe and respectful environment for all.
347. In 2021, the Royal Bhutan Army recruited its first cohort of 150 women and provided them with a yearlong training. By 2023, the RBA had expanded to include 436 women, with 138 serving as officers and 298 in other ranks. Their contributions are indispensable in safeguarding national security and fostering stability.
348. To prevent gender-based discrimination in the recruitment, selection and transfer of police personnel and to promote a gender-friendly environment, the RBP has appointed a permanent senior female police officer in the HRC. Representation of female police officers is also ensured in the Police Service Board. Special considerations are also made for capacity-building opportunities with preference given to female police personnel. The number of female police personnel (commissioned, cadets and non-commissioned) increased from 435 in 2016 to 656 in 2021.

## **Actions taken to promote women's participation in humanitarian and crisis response activities**

349. The Bhutan Red Cross Society (BRCS), established under the Bhutan Red Cross Society Act 2016, aims to create a safer and more resilient society, help people during disasters, and improve the lives of vulnerable populations through voluntary humanitarian aid auxiliary to public authorities. Her Majesty the Queen is the President of the BRCS. Women constitute at least 50% of the branch coordinators and youth coordinators of the society.
350. BRCS has conducted various training programmes since its inception to improve volunteer services and empower them with the necessary skills to deliver sustainable assistance during crises. The core volunteers, comprising members of His Majesty's Retired Armed Forces Services, are complemented by a network of community volunteers, including a significant number of women.
351. A total of 45,444 *Desuups* had been trained, with 19,015 being females and 26,429 males, by March 2024. More than 4,000 women *Desuups* have contributed to various initiatives such as disaster relief operations, health and medical support, community services, logistical support, and infrastructure restoration.
352. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, women *Desuups* played a crucial role by working alongside the RBP, RBA, and other volunteers. They sensitised the public about COVID-19 while patrolling borders and town areas. There were a total of 285 women *Desuups*: 120 in Samtse, 26 in Samdrupjongkhar, 74 in Sarpang, and 65 in Phuentsholing.

## **Actions taken to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, including adolescent girls**

### **Human rights of women and girls in the situation of armed and other conflicts**

353. The RGoB ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and the Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict in 2000. The country adhered to these requirements, ensuring that most national legislation was already aligned with the Optional Protocol at the time of ratification.
354. A key measure ensuring compliance with the Optional Protocol in the recruitment process of the armed forces. The Royal Bhutan Police Act 2009 (RBPA), Royal Bhutan Police Rules and Regulations (RBPR&R), and LEA 2007 collectively ensure that no individual under 18 years of age is recruited into the armed forces. These laws are enforced through rigorous recruitment practices.

### **Implemented policies and programmes to eradicate child labour**

355. Section 9 of the LEA of 2007 mandates the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment to address child labour and the worst forms of child labour including prohibiting forced or

compulsory labour. The LEA ensures that individuals, including children, are not subjected to work against their will, protecting their rights and well-being.

356. A child labour handbook outlining an SoP to address child labour issues was developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders. This handbook provides procedures and mechanisms for receiving and responding to complaints of child labour, ensuring a structured and effective approach to tackling this issue.
357. The RBP is responsible for investigating and enforcing criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labour by dedicated Women and Child Protection Divisions and 17 Women and Child Protection Desks, which are tasked with enforcing laws protecting women and children. The Child Justice Court adjudicates criminal and civil cases involving child labour, ensuring legal accountability and protection for children in such situations.
358. In a significant event in February 2024, Bhutan organised the Regional Children's Consultation on Ending Violence Against Children, with a special focus on eradicating child labour in South Asia, in collaboration with the South Asia Initiative to Ending Violence Against Children. The adoption of the Thimphu Children and Youth Declaration on ending violence against children marked a pivotal moment, establishing a Regional Children and Youth network. This network aims to amplify the impact of the consultation by forming broader children and youth groups across the region, fostering a united front in combating violence against children and empowering young voices in the pursuit of a safer and more inclusive society.

## **Dimension 6: Environmental Conservation, Protection and Rehabilitation**

### **Actions taken to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation and land degradation**

#### **Supported women's participation and leadership in environmental, climate and natural resource management**

359. In 2020, the National Environment Strategy and Climate Change Policy integrated gender into environmental actions through comprehensive analyses. Initiatives like the Sectoral Adaptation Plan of Action aim to protect water resources, recognising women's roles in water management. The NCWC's project on gender-responsive NDCs strengthened institutional capacities and developed gender mainstreaming toolkits for the 13th Five-Year Plan and the 2nd NDC. By 2021, 220 men and 173 women participated in training programmes.
360. National Accredited Entities of GCF, such as Bhutan For Life and Bhutan Trust Fund, have developed gender action plans integrating women's perspectives into environmental policies. These efforts ensure women's participation and leadership in environmental and natural resource management, shaping a more inclusive and sustainable future for Bhutan.
361. The NCWC, in collaboration with the National Environment Commission, is currently implementing a project on gender-responsive NDC to strengthen the institutional capacities of the selected NDC sectors. Through the project, a gender mainstreaming toolkit and guidelines were also developed to support the sectors in preparation for the 13th FYP and the 2nd NDC.
362. The NCWC carried out a gender assessment in selected NDC sectors - Agriculture, Waste and Energy - to gather evidence on gender issues, challenges and opportunities, and to inform policy and programmatic interventions. Based on the recommendations from the assessment, discussions on the inclusion of the NCWC in the Climate Change Coordination Committee (C4), a technical body for the coordination of climate change-related matters in the country, are underway. Furthermore, the formulation of Bhutan's 2nd NDC and low-emission development strategies for industries, food security, transport and human settlement is guided by the findings from the assessment.
363. In addition to the efforts of NCWC, the Department of Climate Change and Environment and selected NDCs towards mainstreaming gender in climate change and disaster risk reduction, the MRG serves as an important institutional mechanism to formulate and implement gender-responsive climate change and disaster risk reduction actions.
364. Moreover, initiatives such as the climate-resilient and transformational change in agriculture project, supported by the GCF, prioritise enhancing women's access to resources and knowledge on climate-resilient water resource management designs and technology. These projects incorporate specific gender targets for women's participation in water and agricultural resource

management decisions. The National Accredited Entities of GCF, including Bhutan For Life and Bhutan Trust Fund, have developed a gender action plan focusing on environmental and climate change issues.

365. Given the important role that women play in water resource management as well as the disproportionate impact of water shortage on women and girls, the Sectoral Adaptation Plan of Action for the RNR sector seeks to protect watersheds and water sources through integrated watershed management practices.
366. In the agricultural sector, Bhutan targets at least 30% of women beneficiaries in programmes like the Food Security and Agricultural Productivity Project and the CARLEP. These initiatives aim to increase economic opportunities for women in rural areas, recognizing their essential role in agricultural productivity and decision-making.

### **Enhanced women's access to climate-resilient agricultural technology and infrastructure**

367. Recognising the potential impacts of climate change on the RNR sector, identified Climate Smart Agriculture as one of the key strategies for adaptation to climate change. Bhutan's Economic Development Policy 2016 focuses on low carbon development, thus prioritises organic farming, biotechnology, agro-processing and promotion of green and climate-smart agriculture practices. For example, between July 2019 and June 2021, 952 female and 603 male farmers were trained in various aspects of organic farming, vegetable and fruit tree cultivation, and land management, underscoring the commitment to empowering women in agriculture.
368. Similarly, more than 37,000 people in three *Dzongkhag* were supported through Advancing Climate Resilience of the Water Sector as reported in Para 96.
369. The initiative, "Supporting Climate Resilience and Transformational Change in the Agriculture Sector in Bhutan," facilitates the shift towards 'climate-informed planning agriculture' across eight *Dzongkhag*. The project equips farmers including the women farmers with the necessary skills to build resilience to climate change, both individually and collectively. These capacity-building efforts are locally executed with the assistance of the government's agricultural extension services and relevant sectors. As a part of this initiative, the 13.5-kilometre irrigation scheme utilised new and climate-resilient technology, also known as climate-proofing, to better withstand extreme climate conditions. This ensured uninterrupted access to water for farmers in 12 villages, including women farmers.
370. Tarayana Foundation, with support from the Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation (BTFEC), has initiated the development of climate-resilient communities through mitigation and adaptation measures. Electric fences are installed in 15 remote villages across five *Dzongkhag* to mitigate the continuing problem of human-wildlife conflict faced by the farmers.
371. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock oversees climate response, actions, and research in



the agriculture sector. Their outreach, especially in climate-smart agriculture, is strengthened at the local level through agriculture sector representatives at the *Dzongkhag* level, and the RNR extension services at the *Gewog* level. GFPs have been established across sectors, with ongoing efforts to mainstream gender.

372. At the *Dzongkhag* level, climate change actions are coordinated by *Dzongkhag* Planning Officers, *Dzongkhag* Environment Officers, and relevant sectors. The MRG is responsible for mainstreaming issues including gender, environment, climate, disaster, and poverty. In mainstreaming gender-responsive climate actions, a gender-responsive Climate Change Action Plan has been developed in line with the Climate Change Policy (2020). This plan outlines specific actions and responsibilities.
373. The Bhutan Foundation signed Project Mikhung 2.0 in partnership with BCMD in January 2024. Titled “Capacitating the Local Government and Citizens to Strengthen People-Centred Planning,” this project focuses on hands-on learning experiences, enabling people-centred planning and community development. This capacity development initiative fosters greater inclusivity and participatory processes at the local government level.
374. A dedicated National Result Areas, “Gender Equality Promoted, Women and Girls Empowered” has been included as one of the Local Government Key Results Areas in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP. It provides a window of opportunity for the LGs to mainstream gender in their respective development plans. The AKRA is mapped into their annual work plans to ensure the allocation of adequate resources to implement gender interventions. The majority of the local governments included gender awareness and capacity building in their annual plans amongst others.

### **Taken steps to ensure that women benefit equally from decent jobs in the green economy**

375. During the fiscal year 2021-2022, a total of 62 groups were registered, comprising 4 cooperatives and 58 farmers' groups. Among these, 24 groups focused on livestock while 38 were dedicated to agriculture. The registered groups boasted a total membership of 1111 individuals, with 537 females and 574 males, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution within the registered groups.
376. Since 2020, there has been a noticeable increase in the establishment of new vegetable markets in Thimphu. A novel concept known as "*Kaja Throme*" has emerged in Thimphu, Paro, Punakha, and Phuentsholing. These markets primarily feature women vendors, contributing significantly to their economic empowerment. The introduction of *Kaja Throme* has garnered considerable attention, attracting both residents and tourists from various parts of the country.
377. The Handicrafts Association of Bhutan plays a critical role in the Bhutanese handicraft industry, with a network of 7,500 micro and small enterprises across the country. This network includes businesses led by both women (5,250) and men (2,250), highlighting the significant participation of women in the industry. In 2024, there has been a remarkable increase of over 25% in the

number of female tourist guides compared to previous years. This surge reflects a positive trend towards greater gender diversity in the tourism industry, providing more opportunities for women to participate in and contribute to the sector.

## **Actions taken to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience**

### **Supported women's participation in disaster risk reduction policies, programmes and projects**

378. The Disaster Management Act of Bhutan 2013 provides the legal basis for ensuring women's representation in Disaster Management Committees at both national and local levels. Section 134 of the Act mandates special care for vulnerable groups, including women, during rescue, response, and relief interventions.
379. In 2021, gender mainstreaming guidelines and a toolkit were developed to guide sectors in integrating gender into their plans and policies, complementing the GECDP framework.
380. Tools like the Bhutan Disaster Assessment Tools were developed in collaboration with women and girls, addressing their specific needs during and after disasters, including sexual and reproductive health services.
381. In the environmental sector, the National Environment Strategy 2020 emphasises gender-responsive development, recognising women's key role in natural resources management. Similarly, the Climate Change Policy of Bhutan 2020 integrates gender into all climate actions through a comprehensive gender gap analysis.
382. Projects supported by the GCF include gender targets to ensure women's participation in decision-making regarding water and agricultural resource management. Moreover, the MRG ensures sustained efforts in integrating gender perspectives into policies and programmes.

### **Strengthened the evidence base and raised awareness about the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to the impact of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters**

383. Under the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP, an emphasis on carbon neutrality led to the development of an SoP for disaster management that is gender and children responsive. The NGEF addresses discrimination faced by women and girls, including those affected by climate change and disasters.
384. The NGEF seeks to address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women and girls, including those living with HIV/AIDS and affected by climate change and disasters. Additionally, “gender, climate change and disaster risk reduction” is also included as one of the key critical areas in the NPAGE.
385. The Bhutan Red Cross Society's Strategy 2030 guarantees that every one of the 205 *Gewog* across the country has a Red Cross volunteer skilled in emergency disaster preparedness.

Currently, the country has a volunteer force exceeding 8,000 members.

386. The Bhutan Red Cross Society training sessions were conducted for 45 branch coordinators in 2024, focusing on disaster response readiness at the community level. The coordinators received training in non-medical first aid, financial literacy, and digital skills. The Red Cross Youth Volunteer Base, established in 2023, provided basic training in Non-Medical First Aid, Safety & Security, financial literacy, and communication to the youth volunteers.
387. Projects like the climate resilient agriculture project, supported by the GCF, specifically target enhancing women's access to resources and knowledge, with gender action plans implemented by National Accredited Entities like Bhutan For Life and Bhutan Trust Fund.

**Promoted access of women in situations of disaster to services such as relief payments, disaster insurance and compensation**

388. Compensation is provided to individuals or private entities whose property is used, lost, or damaged during relief, response, and recovery operations, in accordance with Chapter 11 of the Disaster Management Act of 2013.
389. Single mothers received relief support during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 1,733 single mothers benefitting from relief payments since April 2020. These initiatives, along with the collaboration of institutions like the NCWC and National Environment Commission ensure the promotion of access for women in disaster situations to services such as relief payments, disaster insurance, and compensation, contributing to gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience.
390. Cash compensations were provided for the loss of crops and livestock due to disasters and wildlife depredation. However, challenges have emerged with this compensation scheme, including the availability and sustainability of funds, difficulties in verifying claims, and concerns about creating unhealthy precedents. To address these challenges, the MoAL in collaboration with the Royal Insurance Corporation of Bhutan Limited has initiated a study to explore the feasibility of implementing crop insurance schemes and other sustainable risk transfer option.

## Section IV: National Institutions and Processes

### Bhutan's Comprehensive Strategy for Gender Equality: Policies, Priorities, and Alignment with SDG 5

391. The NGEF is the key document for promoting gender equality in Bhutan. The policy envisions a society where substantive equality allows women and men to reach their full potential. It provides a framework to ensure equal rights, opportunities, and benefits for all genders in various spheres of life.
392. The policy aligns with SDG 5 aiming to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The NGEF addresses key areas outlined in SDG 5. For instance, the NGEF's focus on ending discrimination and VAWG is aligned to SDG 5.1 and 5.2; ensuring participation in leadership and decision-making is aligned to SDG 5.5; and valuing unpaid care and shared domestic responsibilities with SDG 5.4.
393. In the social domain, the NGEF aims to combat GBV and improve access to health services for women and girls. The policy seeks to create a culture of zero tolerance towards GBV and strengthen the implementation of the DVPA 2013. It also focuses on providing comprehensive support services for survivors, including those with disabilities, and enhancing the capacity of relevant agencies to prevent and respond effectively to GBV. Health services, particularly maternal, adolescent, sexual, and reproductive health, will be expanded and improved to address the specific needs of women and girls, particularly those in rural areas.
394. In the economic domain, the NGEF aims to address gender disparities in education, employment, and economic participation. The policy promotes gender-friendly school environments and infrastructure to increase and retain girls' participation in education at all levels. It also emphasises integrating gender-related issues into the education curriculum to challenge stereotypical gender norms. To support women's economic participation, the policy seeks to improve access to finance and market opportunities, provide capacity and skills development, and implement measures to reduce the burden of care and domestic responsibilities. These efforts aim to create a conducive environment for women's engagement in formal employment while acknowledging the importance of their contributions to the informal economy.
395. The NGEF outlines the development of a NPAGE, integrating gender into national planning, collecting disaggregated data, and ensuring adequate financial and human resources. It emphasises gender-responsive planning and budgeting, legal provisions for gender equality, and fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships for effective implementation.
396. Some of the other key documents for promoting gender equality are National Plan of Action for Gender Equality which covers 2018 - 2023, the National Plan of Action to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office, and the National Gender TVET Strategy 2024 - 2028.

## **National process and institutional mechanism to implement and monitor the critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)**

397. Bhutan's development is guided by the philosophy of GNH, which encompasses all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The FYPs align with GNH and resonate with the SDGs. Bhutan is committed to realising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The FYP formulation guidelines mandate all sectors to incorporate cross-cutting issues like gender into their plans to ensure BPfA critical areas are included. The progress of the National Result Areas which is aligned with SDGs and GNH is tracked and monitored every year. This provides an effective way of ensuring the implementation of critical areas of BPfA.
398. Government Performance Management System (GPMS) provides an annual framework for monitoring and reporting on national plans, including the SDGs and other critical areas of concern. Through GPMS, performance agreements are signed between government agencies and the Prime Minister. This trickles down to individual civil servants through their work plans. This system ensures annual monitoring and provides a "scorecard" on how well SDGs are being implemented.
399. The NCWC as the national women's machinery in the country coordinates and monitors the implementation of the critical areas of the BPfA. It is also responsible for the dissemination of the strategic objectives and actions to relevant agencies for inclusion in their plans, policies and programmes. The critical areas are also considered during the formulation of national development plans and are mainstreamed in the plans of respective sectors. The GCFPs are one such important institutional mechanism through which the critical areas are implemented at the sectoral level. In addition, they also carry out awareness and sensitisation programmes in their sectors and facilitate the collection of sex-disaggregated data.
400. The Women and Child Welfare Committees (WCWC) and *Dzongkhag/Thromde* Women and Child Committees (D/TWCC) implement specific BPfA critical areas at national and local levels. WCWC advises the NCWC on issues of violence against women and children, while D/TWCC ensures the protection of women's and children's rights at the local level.
401. The CSOs play a vital role in the implementation of the critical areas of the BPfA. In addition to their work in empowering women and girls in rural areas, they also advocate for the integration of gender issues under various critical areas into national plans, policies, legislation and programmes. They serve as a checks and balances mechanism to ensure effective implementation of the committees on BPfA.

## **Formal mechanisms for different stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the BPfA and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

402. As Bhutan has ratified three of the core Human Rights Convention, it is required to make periodic reports to the UN committees. In addition, Bhutan also submitted the Voluntary

National Review (VNR) to present the progress towards achieving SDGs. The national review process involves all stakeholders which provides an opportunity for different stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of BPfA and SDG.

403. The periodic commission meeting of NCWC also provides opportunities for officials from different sectors to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the progress in the implementation of BPfA. The Hon'ble Members of the commission consist of officials from the government, law enforcement and justice sector, service providers and CSOs. The NCWC is an important platform for stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of progress, and provide sector input to accelerate the development.
404. The annual GCFP meeting hosted by NCWC also provides opportunities for representatives of different stakeholders to participate in the development process. The meetings note progress, identify setbacks and challenges, and develop strategies for promoting gender equality, and promoting and protecting the rights of the child.

#### **Stakeholders contributed to the preparation of the present national report**

405. The National Review was undertaken in line with Resolution E/RES/2022/5 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council titled the 'Thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women'. The resolution calls upon states to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.
406. The NCWC led the comprehensive review in consultation with all the relevant government ministries and agencies, parliament, and CSOs, including women's organisations, the UN system, the private sector, media, and academia. Access to most recent and disaggregated data, where relevant, was provided by the stakeholders. Further, several rounds of cluster meetings and bilateral meetings were conducted in preparing this report. A validation workshop for the stakeholders was conducted to provide input and validate the progress. The stakeholders were also invited to make comments on the draft report before its submission.

#### **Action plan and timeline for implementation of the recommendations of the CEDAW**

407. Bhutan expresses gratitude to the CEDAW for the constructive dialogue and the recommendations from the dialogue. Following the receipt of these recommendations, the NCWC undertook a comprehensive dissemination effort. Recommendations were shared with stakeholders through presentations and consultative bilateral meetings.
408. To ensure effective implementation, the NCWC carried out a detailed mapping exercise to align the recommendations with the appropriate stakeholders responsible for addressing the committee's observations. NCWC will organise a consultative meeting in May 2024 involving

all stakeholders. The purpose of this meeting will be to collaboratively draft an action plan which will include specific targets, timelines, and clearly defined responsibilities for each stakeholder. The action plan will be finalised by 2024.

## **Section V: Data and statistics**

### **Gender-sensitive data in the formulation of policy and implementation of programmes and projects**

409. The NGEF emphasises the importance of using gender-sensitive data to inform policy decisions. The policy mandates collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data to identify gender gaps and ensure that both men's and women's needs are addressed. The policy highlights the necessity of integrating gender perspectives into national development plans and sectoral programmes to promote equitable growth and development. Both survey data and administrative data are used in developing policies, strategies and programme implementation.
410. To highlight a few examples, the education sector collects and maintains comprehensive data on students, teachers, infrastructure and performance. The MoESD publishes an annual report providing key gender indicators such as GER, NER, completion rates, and repetition rates by education level. Also, the report publishes data on teachers-student ratio, teacher distribution and qualification. The government uses the data to make key decisions such as infrastructure development, teacher training and recruitment, and budget allocation, among others. The data is also used by other institutions such as the university and TVET institutions in developing their plans.
411. Similarly, the MoH maintains data on patients by each of its health facilities and is aggregated at the national level. The Ministry publishes an annual health bulletin with key health indicators including healthcare spending. Bhutan has developed the Electronic Patient Information System (ePIS) to manage patient information electronically. It enables comprehensive patient records, ensuring continuity of care and better management of chronic conditions through monitoring and tracking health outcomes. The aggregated data can be used for healthcare policy and programme development. MoH also conducted health surveys for informed decision-making. The national health survey conducted in 2024 collected data on health including sexual activities and violence against women. Similar data are maintained in labour force participation and economic activities.

### **Country's priorities for strengthening national gender statistics in next five years**

412. Comprehensive and reliable gender data is essential for formulating effective policies and programmes that promote gender equality. Currently, data collection efforts on gender issues are limited to few sectors and not harmonised across different agencies. An inter-agency committee on gender statistics and data will be prioritised to harmonise data collection and establish common standards and methodologies for collecting gender data. The committee will assess existing data sets and identify areas where critical information on gender issues is lacking. This will help prioritise future data collection efforts.
413. The NCWC will collaborate with the National Statistical Bureau of Bhutan in establishing the committee. Membership will include representatives from key government agencies dealing



with critical areas like health, education, law enforcement and labour. In addition, the committee will also include expertise from CSOs working on gender issues, statistical experts from academia, and data user groups such as researchers. The committee will play a crucial role in promoting the use of gender data for evidence-based policymaking across government and programme development. The establishment of an inter-agency committee presents a significant opportunity to strengthen the national data ecosystem on gender issues.

414. A harmonised data collection between different sectors can be consolidated into a national gender dashboard on various thematic areas such as health, education, political and labour force participation. The dashboard will also provide the opportunity to develop interactive visualisations (charts, graphs, maps) to present key gender statistics. Also, the ability to filter and drill down into data by specific criteria will provide greater insights into gender equality in different domains.
415. A long-term strategy for maintaining and updating the database will be crucial. As data collection efforts evolve, the platform will be made adaptable to incorporate new data sets. Micro or raw data will be made available to interested organisations and individuals for further analysis. By making data accessible and user-friendly, this platform can empower evidence-based decision-making, programme development, and advocacy efforts towards achieving a more inclusive society.

## **Section VI: Conclusion**

While considerable progress has been made over the last five years in implementing the actions outlined across the twelve critical areas of the BPfA, the RGoB acknowledges the need to put in further efforts towards achieving all the strategic goals highlighted under the BPfA. Therefore, the government is committed to consistently working towards the realisation of the commitments made under the BPfA. The RGoB is equally committed to upholding the rights of women and girls as enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan. The government continues its effort to work together with its non-government partners to implement other international instruments like CEDAW and SDGs particularly Goal 5, “Gender Equality” to promote gender equality and empower women and girls.

Bhutan appreciates the support and cooperation extended by the international community in its efforts to promote gender equality and empower women and girls in our pursuit to achieve, “a happy and inclusive society where children, women & men live in harmony with equality and respect in all spheres of life”.