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## **National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21\***

### **Bhutan**

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## **I. Introduction**

1. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) guide the nation in upholding the rule of law; protecting and promoting human rights; strengthening democracy; advancing socio-economic progress; and safeguarding peace, security and sovereignty of the country.

2. Since the presentation of the second Universal Periodic Review Report in 2014, Bhutan implemented the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (FYP) from 2013-2018; concluded the Second Parliament; and achieved the Millennium Development Goals. In October 2018, the country successfully concluded the third general elections with the *Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa* (DNT) forming the government on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

3. The objective of the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2018–2023) is the creation of a ‘just, harmonious and sustainable society through enhanced decentralisation’. The Plan has incorporated Bhutan’s pledge to implement Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The 12<sup>th</sup> FYP is also the transition plan for Bhutan’s graduation from a Least Developed Country to a Middle-Income Country in 2023.

## **II. Methodology and consultation process**

4. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs consulted various stakeholders including Civil Society Organisations to compile this Report. The Report contains initiatives undertaken to improve the situation of human rights and also highlights the challenges. The guideline contained in HRC decision 6/102 was followed. The report is submitted in accordance with UN General Assembly resolution 60/251.

## **III. Implementation of recommendations of the second cycle, 2014**

5. Bhutan accepted 103 of the 163 recommendations during the second cycle in 2014. Bhutan took note of the remaining 60. Written positions on the remaining 60 recommendations were submitted in September 2014.

6. Bhutan has accelerated the promotion of human rights through policy and legislative measures as well as implementation at the grassroots level, through targeted plans and interventions. Bhutan recognizes the important role played by its development partners in the implementation of these recommendations. Several initiatives beyond the recommendations received are also presented in the Report.

## **IV. Normative and institutional framework for protection and promotion of human rights**

### **A. Fundamental rights**

7. The Constitution of Bhutan guarantees protection of human rights for all Bhutanese and provides effective remedies when those rights are violated. Article 7 guarantees rights such as equality before the law; right to life, liberty, security and integrity of the person; right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty and the right to a fair and just trial; right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; prohibition of torture and inhuman, cruel, degrading treatment; prohibition of arbitrary arrest and detention etc. The Constitution also guarantees the right to information and freedom of press, radio, television and other forms of information including electronic. Article 9 calls for the creation of a civil society; provision of justice through fair, transparent and an expeditious process; and to provide legal aid to secure justice.

## **B. Legislative and institutional framework (Recommendations 118.2; 118.9; 118.10)**

8. In accordance with Articles 10 and 18 of the Constitution, the National Assembly Act of Bhutan, the National Council Act of Bhutan and the Rules of Procedures of the two houses, the Parliament carries out oversight functions of reviewing, monitoring, supervising public agencies including implementation of policies and legislations. The following relevant legislations were passed by the Parliament since 2014:

- (a) Information, Communications and Media Act of Bhutan 2018;
- (b) Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Substance Abuse Act of Bhutan 2015 with amendment in 2018;
- (c) Bhutan Red Cross Society Act 2016;
- (d) *Jabmi*<sup>1</sup> (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2016;
- (e) Tenancy Act of Bhutan 2015;
- (f) Office of the Attorney General Act 2015;
- (g) Bio-safety Act of Bhutan 2015;
- (h) Local Government (Amendment) Act 2014;
- (i) Tobacco Control Act of Bhutan 2014.

9. To address the issue of duplication of laws, the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) constituted a Law Review Taskforce in 2015. The Taskforce submitted its preliminary report on the review of 126 Acts (including amended Acts) to the RGoB in June 2015. The Taskforce was upgraded to a National Law Review Taskforce (NLRT). The NLRT submitted its report to the RGoB and the Parliament in June 2018 recommending the review of 65 Acts out of 98 in active force.

10. In order to streamline the treaty making process, and ratification of conventions, the Rules of Procedure for Treaty Making was adopted in 2016. It rationalises the process of assessing the impact and benefits of a treaty or agreement that Bhutan enters into with an external agency.

11. The RGoB is committed to addressing emerging concerns of different forms of inequalities through the implementation of policies and development of legal frameworks. The protocol for policy formulation requires all policies to be screened through a GNH Policy Screening Tool before implementation. It necessitates mainstreaming of gender, environment, climate change, disaster, and poverty in all proposed policies.

## **C. Access to justice (Recommendations 118.38; 118.39)**

12. The Judiciary maintains its independence and ensures equal access to justice for all in upholding the constitutional right to a fair and impartial trial.

13. In line with Bhutan's commitment towards environmental conservation, the Judiciary established the Green Bench in 2015 with special procedures in the High Court. In 2016, separate benches for criminal, family and child, civil and commercial cases were established in the Thimphu District Court. The family and child bench has a separate courtroom to hear cases involving Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) and child victims. The Bench was established to fulfil the objectives in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan (CCPA) 2011.

14. Since 2014, 11 District Courts and one sub-District Court was constructed to improve the delivery of judicial services to all, including those with disabilities.

15. The Judiciary continues to invest in enhancing its capacity through systematic training programmes. Training on Case Management System was conducted in 2016 which was instituted in accordance with the e-governance initiative of the RGoB.

16. The Judiciary also conducts regular legal awareness and training for local leaders and the general public. With a view to empowering people at the grassroots level, initiatives such as *Nangkha Nangdrik*<sup>2</sup> has been introduced to train mediators on mediation skills. Further, legal awareness programme on diverse legal topics are disseminated through the media.

#### **D. Anti-corruption measures (Recommendation 118.103)**

17. Bhutan has a comprehensive anti-corruption legislation and institutional framework implemented by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). Bhutan was ranked 26<sup>th</sup> cleanest country out of 180 countries/territories and 6<sup>th</sup> in the Asia Pacific region in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2017.

18. To strengthen internal processes and controls, ACC adopted best practice guidelines/manuals and standard operating procedures to guide its day to day operations since 2016. The ACC revised the Gift Rules and Asset Declaration Rules in 2017 and developed the Model Guideline on Managing Conflict of Interest in the Public Sector 2017 towards mainstreaming integrity measures in the governance system. A screening committee and an investigation committee were established within the ACC Secretariat.

19. In June 2014, the ACC launched the National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy. The indicators of the Strategy were integrated into the RGoB's overall Performance Management System. To promote ethical business and ensure healthy competition among business entities, the Business Integrity Initiative of Bhutan was launched in 2016 and introduced in 15 private companies.

20. Bhutan ratified the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2016 and is currently in the First Review Cycle of UNCAC implementation of Chapter III and IV.

#### **E. National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) (Recommendations 118.1; 118.3–118.6; 118.21)**

21. The NCWC is an autonomous agency mandated to promote and protect the rights of women and children.

22. NCWC continues to receive technical and financial assistance from RGoB. It was allocated Nu. 135 million budgetary support in the 10<sup>th</sup> FYP which was increased to Nu. 154 million in the 11<sup>th</sup> FYP. NCWC strengthened its human resource capacity to implement child and women protection activities. To further professionalise and enhance service delivery to women and children in difficult circumstances, CICAL Protection Service was separated from the Legal Services in 2018. The Legal Service is staffed by 3 fulltime legal personnel, and the Protection Service by 3 officers along with 2 certified counsellors. Further, the Women and Children Divisions were provided with an officer each and a Human Resource Officer was appointed in the Secretariat services.

23. The Rules and Regulations for the enforcement of the CCPA 2011, Child Adoption Act of Bhutan 2012, and the Domestic Violence Prevention Act of Bhutan (DVPA) 2013 were adopted in 2015.

24. In June 2018, the National Women and Children Welfare Committee as well as *Dzongkhag/Thromde*<sup>3</sup> Women and Children Committees were established. These Committees provide advisory support and expert services to the NCWC and undertake case management and enables timely and effective access to protection and response services. From 2018, all *Dzongkhag* legal officers were appointed as Gender and Child Focal Persons.

25. NCWC continues to provide various gender responsive and child sensitive programs and activities in collaboration with relevant stakeholders including civil society organizations. Women and children issues will receive greater impetus in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP with the inclusion of "Gender Equality Promoted and Women and Girls Empowered" as a National Key Result Area (NKRA).

## **F. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) (Recommendation 118.41)**

26. The role of CSOs in advancing a rights-based approach, improving services, and encouraging participation and accountability, is increasing in Bhutan. The RGoB partners with CSOs to implement activities targeting vulnerable groups. In addition to community-based organisations that are informal and voluntary, there are also rural groups working for the vulnerable and the needy.

27. There are 58 registered CSOs as compared to 28 in 2014. In recognition of the important role of CSOs in nation building, and their contributions especially to disadvantaged groups, His Majesty The King awarded the National Order of Merit (Gold) medal to 23 CSOs in December 2016.

## **G. Strengthening democracy and democratic culture (Recommendations 118.42–118.43)**

28. The Constitution of Bhutan guarantees all citizens the right to participate in political life. 2018 marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution and introduction of democracy. Democracy has enabled the participation of citizens in governance and particularly for women in decision-making. The five registered political parties with the support of the Election Commission of Bhutan established Bhutan Democracy Dialogue in 2014 as a forum for facilitating, nurturing and strengthening democracy. An all party conference was organised in 2017 to find ways to collaborate for a harmonious and sustainable democracy.

29. The third parliamentary elections for the National Council and the National Assembly were held in 2018. Four political parties contested for the National Assembly elections in October 2018, which witnessed a turnout of 313,473 registered voters. Of these voters, 50.8 percent were female.

30. In 2018, the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) instituted postal ballot facilitation booths to encourage voters who cannot make it to polling stations in their constituencies. For more inclusive participation, ECB also introduced mobile facilitation booth for patients in hospitals, prisoners, and the disabled.

## **V. Implementation of recommendations grouped thematically**

### **A. Right to education (Recommendations 118.26; 118.79; 118.84)**

31. Article 9 (16) of the Constitution guarantees every child the right to free basic education. To ensure universal access to free and equitable education, the draft National Education Policy and the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014–2024) were developed. These provide the guidance and strategic road map for achieving national educational goals.

32. The RGoB established schools (infrastructure facilities which support inclusive education) in all *Dzongkhags* and *Thromdes* based on need. The school curriculum and textbooks are provided free to both public and private schools.

#### **1. Access to education and school attendance (Recommendations 118.24–25; 118.30; 118.74; 118.80–84)**

33. The RGoB continues to improve access to education and school attendance so that all children of school going age attend and remain in schools. Some of the interventions include:

(a) Establishment of Central Schools to improve the quality and access to education particularly for children from rural communities. The schools are located in convenient catchment areas, integrated and resourced-based with residential facilities. They are empowered with autonomy in their operations. Students are provided free uniform, sportswear, shoes, beddings, and three meals a day. These schools also are placed with

caregivers, school guidance and counsellors, wardens and matrons to ensure the welfare of the resident students. Currently, there are 64 Central Schools benefiting around 28 percent of the total students.

(b) The RGoB continues to strengthen access to education through expansion of large boarding primary and secondary schools, where students are provided with free textbooks, stationeries, and boarding, especially in rural areas. In the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP, the RGoB intends to further improve education services in remote locations through expansion of the central school programme and initiating large boarding primary schools.

(c) The RGoB made concerted efforts to improve access to quality and inclusive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). There are currently 307 ECCD centres, including those run by private individuals, NGOs and corporations. In the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP, the RGoB plans to enrol at least 50 percent of children aged 3 to 5 years in ECCD centres, and establish at least one ECCD centre in every *Chiwog*<sup>4</sup>.

34. Education is a major component of His Majesty The King's *Kidu*<sup>5</sup> system. Economically disadvantaged students are given the opportunity to continue their education through the grant of scholarships.

## 2. Quality of education (Recommendations 118.81; 118.83; 118.89)

35. The RGoB has initiated various reforms to improve quality of education and following are some of the initiatives:

(a) The first National Curriculum Conference in 2017 was organised to review the national curriculum, the recommendations of which are under implementation.

(b) The introduction of the Central School system has enhanced attendance, learning outcomes, and overall developmental growth.

(c) The grant of greater autonomy to select secondary schools to improve educational practices and student learning outcomes. As of today, there are 104 autonomous schools including 64 central schools.

(d) The Teacher Human Resource Policy was developed in 2014 and will be reviewed to address emerging challenges. The policy specifically mandates that every teacher receive 80 hours of professional development programme in a year.

(e) The Education ICT Master Plan (2014-18) was developed to leverage ICT as an enabling tool to enhance accessibility to quality education.

## 3. Human rights education and training (Recommendations 118.11; 118.88; 118.90)

36. The values and principles of GNH have been incorporated in the school curriculum. Topics on fundamental rights are included in subjects such as civics, social studies and history. Universal values and human rights are practiced as an integral part of pedagogy in terms of giving equal opportunities to learners. All schools including UNESCO Clubs, UNESCO ASPnet Schools, as part of educating for GNH concept, promote human rights education. RGoB has started aligning Global Citizenship Education with the national curriculum as highlighted in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.

37. Sexual and reproductive health education is included in the curriculum. All schools have life skills education programmes. School health coordinators, school guidance and counsellors, and school health clubs carry out awareness programmes on sexual and reproductive health.

## 4. Illiteracy and Non-Formal Education (NFE) (Recommendations 118.82; 118.91)

38. With 98.8 percent of adjusted NER primary enrolment and 95.7 percent NER basic, all children of school going age are covered by the formal education system. Almost all adults, mostly women who missed the opportunity to pursue formal schooling are provided basic literacy and functional skills through the NFE programme. Owing to such interventions, the literacy rate in Bhutan has improved from 59.5 percent in 2005 to 71.4 in 2017.

39. To improve access and quality of the NFE programme, the following activities have been initiated:

- (a) Instituted the NFE operational guidelines and monitoring tools.
- (b) Developed Community Learning Centre Curriculum to diversify the NFE curriculum to include life skills education such as tailoring, carpentry, house wiring, etc.
- (c) Drafting Equivalency Framework for NFE Programme to strengthen and facilitate access, flexibility and equivalency of NFE to formal and vocational education.

40. In order to encourage skills development, the RGoB provides support to two privately owned vocational training centres.

## **B. Right to health (Recommendations 118.30; 118.74–118.78)**

41. Bhutanese avail free health services from primary to tertiary level health care including traditional medicine as a right guaranteed by the Constitution. The Bhutan Health Trust Fund finances all essential drugs and vaccines.

42. All health plans and programs are aligned to the National Health Policy 2011 which provides a road map for achieving national health goals. The Policy will be reviewed during the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP and a Health Bill is under consideration.

43. Bhutan has a well-integrated three tier health system with Basic Health Units and outreach clinics at the primary level, District/General Hospitals at the secondary level and regional referral hospitals and national referral hospital at the tertiary level. The health system is connected to the grassroots through voluntary village health workers. Bhutanese requiring high-end medical services that are not available in the country are referred abroad on government support.

44. The number of doctors increased from 251 in 2015 to 345 in 2017 and nurses from 1070 to 1264 respectively. A nursing program was started in the Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences and two private colleges, and similar programmes may be expanded to other *Dzongkhags* in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP.

45. Health promotion and disease prevention programs include high-level advocacy on prevention of STDs including HIV, Hepatitis and syphilis; maternal, child and adolescent health, teenage pregnancy; substance abuse; and non-communicable diseases. The Health Promotion Strategy, developed to promote behavioural change in the communities, includes the following initiatives:

- (a) To improve the quality of maternal and new-born care, Early Essential New-born care and Kangaroo care was introduced in 25 hospitals including the 3 referral hospitals. Over 450 health professionals were trained in this field.

- (b) Adolescent friendly health units in some of the hospitals were established and female health workers were deployed in the BHUs to create a more gender friendly environment.

- (c) To improve access to quality and comprehensive care key indicators for the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP include ANC coverage of at least 8 visits, PNC coverage, institutional delivery rate, contraceptive prevalence rate, maternal mortality ratio, infant mortality rate, under 5 mortality rate, new-born mortality rate, among others.

- (d) Targeted interventions are planned during the 12FYP to enhance health outcomes for mother and child including web-based mother and child tracking system to track pregnant women and child (till the child attains 5 years of age) for greater care and attention.

46. Modified delivery of health services such as medical camps and outreach clinics are used to reach remote settlements which would be further strengthened in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP.

47. To strengthen the indenting, distribution and monitoring for drugs and medical supplies, an electronic Bhutan Medical Supplies Inventory System was instituted. Health

facilities have at least 95 percent of essential medicine at any given time. Medical equipment is kept functional above 90 percent at all health facilities around the year. An emergency air ambulance service has also been introduced.

48. A *Kidu* Medical Unit, launched by His Majesty The King, takes health services to the vulnerable and unreached population.

49. The national e-Health strategy and action plan was developed to provide accessible, convenient and cost-effective health services to the people.

50. Health facilities are ranked annually based on Performance Indicators of the Bhutan Healthcare Standard for Quality Assurance, Continuous quality improvement and Infection control and waste management. To address the needs of aging population, community based elderly care programmes have been introduced in over 85 percent of the health facilities.

51. The following initiatives were introduced to adopt a comprehensive approach that include providing a healthy environment, safe water and sanitation and proper child care:

(a) Mother and children's health programme which includes implementation of Child Development Screening Tool and Child for Care and Development (C4CD) and C4CD Plus, one stop child centre and introduction of baby-friendly hospitals.

(b) The Water Safety Plan was implemented in over 300 water schemes to improve the safety of drinking water through community engagement.

52. To improve mother and child care, the 150-bedded Gyaltsuen Jetsun Pema Mother and Child care hospital is under construction.

53. Acknowledging the impacts of development on an individual's health, a health impact assessment for manufacturing industry was piloted in 2016. A similar assessment for the hydropower and related projects will be undertaken during the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP.

### C. Poverty alleviation (Recommendations 118.60–118.73)

54. Poverty reduction is the primary objective in all development plans and policies. This will continue into the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP, which has 'Poverty Eradicated and Inequality Reduced' as one of the 17 National Key Result Areas (NKRAs). Significant achievements have been made in reducing both income and multidimensional poverty. The percentage of people living below income poverty decreased from 12 percent in 2012 to 8.2 percent in 2017 while multidimensional poverty rate (MPI) decreased from 12.7 to 5.8 percent in the same period.

55. The protocol for policy formulation requires all policies to identify challenges and opportunities associated with poverty reduction. The GNH Screening Tool assesses the perceived impact of policy on 22 variables which includes living standards, material well-being, equity, health, and education amongst others.

56. The RGoB has adopted a two pronged approach to address poverty through: a) Plans and programmes in broad based programmes such as education, health, agriculture, and social infrastructure; and b) targeted poverty reduction initiatives to cover those who still remain poor due to pocketed and dispersed nature of poverty in the country.

57. Some of the notable measures/achievements towards poverty reduction in the 11<sup>th</sup> FYP are:

(a) Allocation of about 65 percent of the total budget to social sectors.

(b) Percentage of households having access to safe drinking water increased to 98.6 percent.

(c) A Resource Allocation Formula was used to determine the allocation of resources amongst the *Dzongkhags* and *Gewogs*<sup>6</sup> with poverty as one of the components.

(d) All rural households were provided 100 units of free electricity.



(e) The National Workforce Wage Rate was revised from Nu. 165 to Nu. 215.

58. Broad based programmes are complemented by various targeted poverty reduction interventions, some of which are:

(a) Given the importance of land for livelihood, His Majesty The King granted land to 123,265 beneficiaries across Bhutan.

(b) Under the *Gyalpoi Tozey*<sup>7</sup> programme, 2,675 children from the poorest families receive support to cover their entire education expenses.

(c) Monthly cash allowances to 850 senior citizens are granted by His Majesty to meet living expenses. A retirement home for elderly has been constructed.

(d) Landless and socio-economically disadvantaged people have been granted land and socio-economic support to enable them to enjoy sustainable livelihoods. A strategy for rehabilitation has been developed based on which rehabilitation projects are implemented and as of date, 245 households have benefited.

(e) Rural Economy Advancement Programme was initiated to reduce poverty by targeting the poorest villages, and has covered 75 poorest villages in the 11<sup>th</sup> FYP.

(f) Targeted Household Poverty Programme takes targeted interventions further down from village to household level. Under the programme, 3,154 of the poorest individuals/households across all *Dzongkhags* have been assessed using the MPI, which will be used to develop interventions to provide sustainable livelihoods.

#### **D. Environment, climate change and disaster management (Recommendations 118.96–118.100)**

59. Bhutan's commitment to environment is manifested, among others, in the Constitution of Bhutan that mandates 60 percent of land area to be maintained under forest cover for all times. Currently, 71 percent of the country is under forest cover including national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and biological corridors. The RGoB implemented a framework to mainstream environment, climate change, disaster, gender and poverty in the 11<sup>th</sup> FYP to address cross-cutting concerns in the plans and programmes.

60. A national water resource inventory for all *Dzongkhags* and *Gewogs* has been initiated to address water and watershed conservation and management.

61. Bhutan reiterated its commitment to remain carbon neutral in the first Nationally Determined Contribution to UNFCCC in 2015; and ratified the Paris Agreement in 2017.

62. The RGoB continues to make efforts to mitigate climate change by maintaining current levels of forest cover. While the basis of mitigation efforts rests on conserving the forests as carbon sinks, the growing issue of emissions will be addressed through priority strategies to support a low emission development pathway.

63. The Economic Development Policy 2016 provides measures to promote "green growth" for industrial development. The 12<sup>th</sup> FYP has integrated carbon neutral development as part of the NKRA to guide planning and implementation of development activities within all sectors. Presently, Bhutan offsets 4.4 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e through export of hydroelectricity.

64. Adaptation to the impacts of climate change is a priority. Bhutan has updated the project profiles under the National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) and has successfully implemented two projects. Currently, Bhutan is implementing few of the priority actions identified as immediate needs in NAPA-III project. Bhutan views the process of formulating and implementing National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) as an important means towards reducing vulnerability by integrating climate change adaptation into national development planning and implementing priority adaptation actions on the ground.

65. Bhutan is investing its resources for climate change adaptation and mitigation actions. The hydropower projects are being built at great expense to take into account the

need to withstand catastrophic Glacial Lake Outburst Floods and earthquakes. Early warning systems have been installed in 3 river basins of Punakha, Wangdue and Bumthang. The Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation provides local funding for projects to address mitigation and adaptation efforts.

66. In accordance with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the RGoB has been availing technical assistance in disaster preparedness from international partners. Bhutan has a basic seismic monitoring network in place with 14 real time and 2 offline seismic monitoring stations, 20 intensity meters across the country, and is currently setting up basic emergency communication facilities. Further, with the objective of establishing an integrated disaster response mechanism, an Incident Command System has been adopted in the country.

67. The National Earthquake Contingency Plan with Standard Operating Procedures has also been developed. The Disaster Management and Contingency Plan (DMCP) has been prepared for 4 *Dzongkhags* and the capital city, with simulation exercises carried out and trainings in basic search and rescue (SAR). A DMCP has also been developed for the education sector.

68. To enhance capacity for disaster health emergencies, disaster contingency plans have been developed for 26 hospitals.

69. Going forward, the key priorities are to establish a National Search and Rescue Centre, Emergency Operation Centres in the districts, and emergency communications for disasters. Proposal for establishing the centres and emergency communications have been developed and funding support from international partners is solicited.

70. In the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP, efforts are being made to integrate the needs of women, children, elderly and people with disabilities in disaster management strategies, plans and programmes.

#### **E. Trafficking in persons (TIP) (Recommendations 118.35; 118.102)**

71. The RGoB continues to make efforts to prevent and combat trafficking in persons. The Department of Law and Order is the lead agency for TIP.

72. A report on legal and policy review on response to TIP was prepared in 2015. A Training Manual on Human Trafficking for Law Enforcement Officials and Prosecutors was developed in 2017. A draft Standard Operating Procedures for Investigating and response to TIP Cases is under consideration.

73. Training of Trainers on TIP was conducted for law enforcement officials along with CSOs in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Additionally, orientations for law enforcement officials were conducted on preventing and responding to TIP.

74. Till date, 37 Police Officers (30 male and 7 female) have been trained to handle TIP cases. In May 2018, 2 female Police Officers were trained on the 'Training Manual on Human Trafficking for Law Enforcement Officials and Prosecutors'. The trained officers conducted sensitisation and awareness on TIP to over 224 men and 304 women seeking overseas employment. Further, 2 roll out training programs were initiated wherein 13 police officers and 30 clerks from different police stations were trained on TIP.

75. The RGoB closely cooperates and coordinates with neighbouring countries to combat cross-border trafficking in person.

#### **F. Employment (Recommendations 118.50–118.56) and Social protection (Recommendations 118.57–118.59)**

76. Measures taken by the RGoB in the 11<sup>th</sup> FYP resulted in the reduction of overall unemployment figures from 2.9 percent in 2013 to 2.4 percent in 2017. However, youth unemployment increased from 9.6 percent to 10.6 percent for the same period.

77. A Task Force on Employment Creation was formed in 2015 to propose strategic responses to promote job creation and economic growth. The National Employment Policy 2013 will be reviewed during the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP.

78. The Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014-2024) highlights that 20 percent of the higher secondary school leavers should have access to Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) by 2024. The RGoB has targeted the absorption of 20 percent of school-leavers into the TVET system in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP. The TVET Policy will also be reviewed in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP.

79. To make employment in private sector more attractive, the provisions of the Labour and Employment Act 2007 and its Regulations are being implemented in the private sector. The RGoB initiated several employments and skills development programmes which led to employment of more than 12,000 youth. The Entrepreneurship Development Program was provided to more than 3,000 youth and a Revolving Fund for New Start Ups was also created in 2016.

80. The 12<sup>th</sup> FYP also focuses on ‘Creation of Productive and Gainful Employment’ as one of the NKRA. A target of 53,000 new jobs in the various economic sectors has been set.

81. In the 11<sup>th</sup> FYP, around 8,200 jobs were created in the *Dzongkhags* mainly by establishing small and cottage industries. The RGoB is supporting 1,800 youth who have taken up farming in their communities. Through the Land Use Rights system initiated by His Majesty The King, 52 youth are currently cultivating 60 acres of land.

82. The Guaranteed Employment Program is one of the strategies adopted to ease the unemployment problem in the country. Under the initiative, youth have been trained under the Youth Employment Skills and Graduate Skills Program and placed in various enterprises under the Direct Employment Scheme. Overseas Employment Scheme is also one of the components implemented under Guaranteed Employment Program.

83. The RGoB introduced internship programs for University and High School graduates in various government and private agencies, and interns are paid an allowance of Nu. 3,750 per month.

84. The draft National Pension and provident fund policy will be submitted to the RGoB for approval. A notable feature of the policy is the introduction of the non-contributory scheme to cover those who cannot afford to contribute, and the voluntary contribution scheme to provide option for those who are in the informal sector. In accordance with the Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan 2007, a provident fund scheme for employees in the private and corporate sector was instituted. As of June 2018, there were 57,194 employees enrolled under the scheme.

## **G. Women (Recommendations 118.17 and 118.18)**

85. While Bhutanese women enjoy a high degree of independence and equal opportunities, there are still gaps that need to be addressed. The RGoB has taken several initiatives during the reporting period.

86. The Gender Equality Policy, drafted in 2015, is currently being finalised and the gender responsive budgeting was initiated since the 10<sup>th</sup> FYP. A Gender Equality Diagnostic study of selected sectors was carried out to provide updated baseline information on the situation of women and men, as well as the gender analyses of select sectors to facilitate gender mainstreaming. The RGoB is looking at generating gender disaggregated data in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP, and towards this, a review of the data ecosystem has been carried out to assess data needs and gaps, disaggregated data generation, analysis and dissemination for decision-making.

87. In July 2016, mandatory indicators on gender equality were incorporated in the Annual Performance Agreements (APA) for the year 2016–17 of all government agencies and autonomous agencies. These indicators require agencies to provide child care support to employees through provision of facilities like crèches and also develop internal

framework to address gender issues at the workplace. Further, in the 2017–2018 APA, development of internal framework to address gender issues at the workplace was included as a mandatory indicator for all *Dzongkhags*.

88. The NCWC, together with CSOs like the Tarayana Foundation and the Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs, established 20 Self-Help Farmers' Groups with 214 female members in the agriculture and livestock sector.

89. The RGoB is investing in smart agriculture approaches to address issues of time, poverty and drudgery for women farmers, and in Mainstreaming Reference Groups at the local government level, to oversee the mainstreaming of climate, gender and disaster risk reduction into local development planning and implementation. This important focus addresses the finding of the 2015 GNH survey that women farmers are the “least happy” group in Bhutan.

90. Besides the regular awareness programs, a nationwide high level advocacy program led by Her Majesty The Queen Mother Sangay Choden Wangchuck, on reproductive health, child rights issues including teenage pregnancy and services for women and children in difficult circumstances, was completed in all *Dzongkhags* in 2016 and 2017.

## 1. Gender gap in education (Recommendations 118.85–86)

91. Bhutan has made significant progress in terms of gender parity in education. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) at basic and higher education stood at 1.00 and 1.06 respectively in 2018.

92. While the GPI at the tertiary education is still in favour of boys, it has increased to 0.85 in 2018 from 0.78 in 2014 due to interventions such as provision of boarding facilities, feeding programs, life skills education and adolescent sexual reproductive health education programs in educational institutes. Moreover, trends indicate low participation of girls at tertiary level in STEM courses. The RGoB is encouraging girls to take up STEM subjects at the higher secondary level through counselling and advocacy.

93. To encourage higher attendance and retention of girls in schools, the RGoB started providing free sanitary napkins as well as separate water and sanitation facilities for girls.

94. While the number of females enrolled and graduating from vocational training institutes has increased, the TVET Blueprint 2016 provides strategies to create a gender friendly environment to encourage girls to take up vocational education.

95. The Royal University of Bhutan's annual intake capacity increased to 3,000 students in the 11<sup>th</sup> FYP from 1,500 in the 10<sup>th</sup> FYP. This has resulted in an increased number of female students from 38 percent in 2012 to 44 percent in 2015. The University has introduced 13 new programs in various tertiary institutes which provide greater access and choices for female students.

## 2. Domestic violence (Recommendations 188.19; 118.22; 118.31–34; 118.37–39)

96. The DVPA 2013 and the DVPA Rules and Regulations 2015 prescribe clear procedures to enhance access to justice for women victims of violence.

97. The Bhutan National Legal Institute (BNLI) has taken initiatives to improve access to justice by training law enforcement agencies on procedures for dealing with violence against women (VAW) cases, creating awareness on their rights, integrating women's rights into Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) trainings and training local women leaders on ADR. It also conducts regular trainings for judges on Acts that impact women and children.

98. The Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) has incorporated the DVPA 2013 in the curriculum for new recruits and cadet officers. Police personnel and their families have been sensitised on DVPA 2013. Further, the RBP is collaborating with RGoB agencies and CSO - Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW) to build the capacity of law enforcement agencies in the area of domestic violence, TIP and child protection.

99. The RBP organised 2 road shows aimed at educating communities on issues such as domestic violence and its impact on children, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and suicide.

100. More women are being recruited into the police force. They are trained in women and child friendly police procedures, and are posted to the Women and Child Protection Units (WCPUs)/WCP Desks at police stations to encourage women victims/survivors of violence to come forward and report abuse. Women constitute about 12 percent of the total police force. There are WCP Desks in 13 out of 20 districts. Efforts are being made to establish WCP Desks in all the police stations.

101. Government agencies and CSOs like RENEW and *Nazhoen Lamtoen* are involved in preventing domestic violence and helping victims become independent and productive members of society. In addition, services such as rehabilitation, counselling, temporary shelter, legal assistance, and skills development trainings are also provided to victims.

102. The first national VAW and Girls Study which is underway will provide data on the prevalence of violence, its causes and consequences, based on which policy interventions will be formulated.

103. A pilot project to address violence against women and children was launched in November 2018. The project, using the Partners for Prevention approach through participatory, community-mobilization prevention, combined with capacity development of stakeholders, and an advocacy and communication strategy, will examine the causes of gender based violence and violence against women and children to create a sustainable, community-based commitment towards building "happy, safe, and equitable families".

104. In 2016, as a health sector response to VAW, an assessment was carried out to gauge the services of the different levels of health facilities in Bhutan. Based on the findings and recommendations of the assessment, a national guideline for the management of victims of intimate partner violence and sexual violence in the healthcare settings was developed in 2017.

105. Sensitization programmes on gender-based violence and domestic violence prevention for health professionals were conducted. A module on Forensic Medicine for the Diploma course for Health Assistants was started at the Faculty of Nursing and Public Health, Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Services.

### **3. Women's participation in politics and leadership (Recommendations 118.42–49)**

106. The RGoB, recognizing the importance of encouraging women's participation in elective Offices, developed the National Plan of Action to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office (NPAPGEEO) in 2014. The NPAPGEEO was reviewed and will be developed further to address challenges and widen its scope in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP.

107. Conferences were organized on women in governance, leadership and politics in 2014, 2017 and 2018. Further, a political forum was organized by ECB in 2015 to examine the constraints and challenges for women's participation in politics and to share the best practices and lessons learned.

108. The ECB has been encouraging women's participation in the political process. Numerous election advisories were produced and disseminated during the Local Government elections in 2016 and the Parliamentary elections in 2018. Further, programmes such as seminars, political party training and research were carried out. The introduction of the Postal Ballot Facilitation Booth saw an increase in women's participation in politics as well as an increase in the voter turnout in the recent Parliamentary elections.

109. In addition, the ECB, NCWC and the CSO – Bhutan Network for Empowering Women have conducted advocacy and awareness campaigns to increase women's political representation.

110. Recognizing low female representation in leadership position, His Majesty The King, in accordance with the Constitution, appointed a woman as the Chairperson of the Anti-Corruption Commission, 2 eminent members in the National Council, 2 Commissioners in the Royal Civil Service Commission, a Commissioner in the Election

Commission of Bhutan, and a Justice in the Supreme Court. In May 2018, 2 women were elected to the National Council. One of the political parties that contested in the National Assembly elections in October 2018 was led by a woman. Furthermore, out of 19 female candidates, 7 were elected for the first time in the National Assembly. Presently, the Parliament has 15 percent women representation which is an increase from 8 percent in 2013.

111. In 2013, 52.48% of the voters in the National Council elections were female against 47.51 % male voters and 56.92% female against 53.11% male in the National Assembly elections. In 2018, female voters were still dominant with 52.4% women voters in the National Council and 50.83% in the National Assembly elections.

112. In 2016 second local government elections, out of 1439 candidates elected for various posts, 164 were female, including 2 *Gups*<sup>8</sup> and 24 *Mangmis*<sup>9</sup>.

113. Women constitute about 30 percent of the total civil service of whom 8.8 percent are in Executive Positions. Of the ten government ministers, one is a woman. In November 2018, Bhutan saw the appointment of its first female captain for its national airlines – Druk Air.

114. The ‘Internal Framework to Address Sexual Harassment and Gender Issues at the Workplace’ is being implemented to institutionalise a complaints response mechanism for sexual harassment issues and ensure a gender friendly environment at the workplace. This is further complemented by the “Go To Person” initiative launched by the Royal Civil Service Commission to take up sexual harassment and other issues within the civil service.

## H. Children

### 1. Child care and protection (Recommendations 118.6; 188.27–29; 118.36; 120.38)

115. To support mother and child care, the civil service, corporations and public enterprises have extended maternity leave from 3 to 6 months and paternity leave from 5 to 10 working days. The private sector is encouraged to extend similar benefits to their employees. The change was introduced bearing in mind the National Policy on breastfeeding which recommends breastfeeding for the first six months of the “1000 golden days”. In order to support working parents to continue with optimal care and development for their child, workplace crèches have been established. Currently, there are 12 crèche facilities in Thimphu and 1 in Paro. A Guideline for Child Care Crèches and training manual for crèche caregivers was developed in 2018. Efforts are being made to develop standards and train caregivers on basic care-giving.

116. The Communication for Development strategy was developed in 2018 to enable communities and families to uphold child rights. In addition, sensitization and media advocacy programmes have been developed on adolescent issues (Girl Talk) and television series on issues related to domestic violence.

117. To prevent children from coming in conflict with the law, the WCP Divisions, WCPUs and WCP Desks were created in police stations to create awareness on child protection in the community and initiate school-based activities and police crime prevention programmes. The WCPUs have separate detention rooms with recreational facilities for CICL. Further, CICL have access to child friendly spaces for pre-trial detention in two police stations in Phuentsholing and Thimphu. The RBP has developed three manuals on women and child friendly policing.

118. A three phased violence against children (VAC) study was conducted from 2013–2016 which included a literature review and a qualitative and quantitative study. The findings and recommendations provided key inputs to the development of the National Plan of Action for Child Wellbeing and Protection (NPACWP) 2018. The draft NPACWP provides for the promotion of children’s participation, their protection and development and will be implemented in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP.

119. Wellbeing, safety and protection of children in schools are a priority for the RGoB. Since 2016, in addition to educating for GNH initiatives, all schools are required to

promote children-friendly environment. A School Guidance and Counselling System to support children and young people's development, health and wellbeing were introduced.

120. The Child Protection Focal Person (CPFP) Network was established in 2012 with the appointment of 9 CPFPs in relevant agencies to ensure that child protection issues are mainstreamed into respective sector policies and plans. Today there are 44 CPFPs in RGoB agencies including NGOs.

121. A Child Care and Protection Office was setup under the Central Monastic Body to protect and promote the rights of child monks and nuns. The Office has designated Child Protection Officers to ensure protection of the rights of children in monastic institutions.

122. Reaffirming Bhutan's commitment to human rights, the following legal and related frameworks are in place:

(a) Rules and Regulations for the CCPA 2011, Child Adoption Act (CAA) 2012, DVPA 2013 were developed in 2015;

(b) Guidelines for Management of Shelter Homes 2016;

(c) Code of Ethics for Protection Officers and Social Workers 2016;

(d) Media Guideline for Sensitive Reporting of Cases related to Women and Children 2016;

(e) Training Manual on Human Trafficking for Law Enforcement Officials and Prosecutors 2017;

(f) Guidelines for Accreditation of Service Providers 2017;

(g) Guideline for Accreditation and Management of Shelter Homes for Women and Children in Difficult Circumstances 2017;

(h) Child Adoption Guideline 2017;

(i) Standard Operating Procedures on Case Management for Women and Children in Difficult Circumstances 2017;

(j) Alternative Care Guideline 2018.

123. Recognizing inadequate awareness and lack of capacity as two of the most pressing challenges, NCWC continues to create awareness and provide sensitization on child rights and protection issues from normative, institutional and legislative perspectives at all levels. High-level sensitization workshops for members of parliament were held in 2016 and 2017 on gender, child rights and protection issues; and on gender and child issues for the newly elected National Council members in 2018.

124. A significant achievement has been in the area of developing child protection interventions and institutionalizing capacity building on child rights. Based on the training curriculum on child rights developed by NCWC, officials from relevant agencies are regularly trained on child protection including basic case management approaches. Police officers, attorneys, private law practitioners, labour inspectors, local leaders and heads of monastic institutions were sensitized and trained on CRC, CEDAW, CCPA 2011, child friendly justice procedures and gender related challenges.

125. As per the Labour and Employment Act 2007, employment of children under 13 years is prohibited. Employment between ages 13 to 17 is prohibited in 16 categories of risky occupations. Further, under the CCPA 2011 and its regulation, child labour falls under children in difficult circumstances category and they can be provided care and protection accordingly.

## **2. Child marriage (Recommendations 118.20; 118.23)**

126. The CCPA 2011 and the Penal Code of Bhutan 2004, provides the basis for the prevention of child marriages. Any sexual act with a child below age of 18 years is classified as rape. The Judiciary adjudicate cases concerning children with promptness and austerity.

127. The Judiciary, in collaboration with BNLI sensitizes the general public in urban and rural areas, on the issues of child marriage and the laws protecting the rights of all children.

128. Bhutan, as a member of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC), is party to the Regional Action Plan to end Child Marriage in South Asia.

129. A study on prevalence of child marriage based on Bhutan Living Standard Surveys (2012 and 2017), indicated that incidence of child marriages decreased from 8.7 percent in 2012 to 5.5 percent in 2017 due to the various initiatives of the RGoB.

## **I. Persons with disabilities (Recommendations 118.80; 118.89–118.92)**

130. A National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was drafted in 2018. The draft policy is based on needs assessment survey covering persons with different types of disabilities and age groups. The action plan for the policy will be developed and implemented in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP. The draft policy is aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and follows a right- based approach. It also has provisions to improve access to health and education for persons with disabilities by removing environmental, physical, attitudinal and other barriers.

131. A first-ever Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) study on children with disabilities was launched in November 2017 to help formulate policies, plans and programmes.

132. Bhutan is implementing the Incheon Strategy to make the “right real” for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, and participated in the High-Level Intergovernmental meeting on the Mid-Point Review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disability 2013-2022 held in Beijing in 2017.

133. The RGoB ensures the inclusion of Special Education Needs (SEN) program throughout the education system by considering the needs of diverse learners through support to teaching and learning, curriculum development, assessments and physical accessibility, as well as considerations for transition into further education, training and work life.

134. Strategies to enhance access to SEN are outlined in the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014–2024). Accordingly, the Ministry of Education has established schools with SEN programs to cater to the needs of children with disabilities and special needs. During the 11<sup>th</sup> FYP, SEN programme were introduced in 8 additional schools, bringing the total to 16 in addition to 2 specialised schools for hearing and visual impairment catering to about 647 children. The programme will be expanded to 12 more schools covering all *Dzongkhags* in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP.

135. A guideline on the examinations, assessment and promotion system for students with special needs in schools with SEN programme and two special schools is currently being developed. Other initiatives include development of Bhutanese sign language.

136. A vocational programme has also been started in the Wangsel Institute for deaf and hearing impaired.

## **VI. International cooperation and assistance (Recommendation 118.101)**

137. The RGoB partners with UN agencies and other Intergovernmental bodies to enhance national capacity in fulfilling international treaty obligations and in promoting human rights. In collaboration with development partners, a National Policy for Persons with Disabilities and a Gender Equality Policy have been drafted. Further, a short-term Social Policy course has also been introduced by the Royal University of Bhutan.

138. Bhutan participated in the Voluntary National Review of the implementation of the SDGs at the High-Level Political Forum in New York in July 2018. The review enabled Bhutan to share its experiences and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.



139. Bhutan also participated in the mid-term review of the Asia and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development in November 2018 in Bangkok, and presented its report on the progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

140. In partnership with SAIVAC and the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on VAC, Bhutan hosted the High-Level Cross-Regional Round Table on the role of regional organizations in protecting children from violence and advancing progress towards the elimination of all forms of VAC in May 2018.

## **VII. Cooperation with human rights mechanisms (Recommendation 118.1)**

141. Bhutan ratified the Optional Protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the involvement of children in armed conflict to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 2009.

142. Bhutan's combined 8th and 9th Periodic Report under Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was considered by the CEDAW Committee in 2016 at its 65th session. Bhutan also presented its 3rd to 5th Combined Periodic Report on the CRC to the 75th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and its initial reports on the two Optional Protocols to the CRC - on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and on the involvement of children in armed conflict in 2017.

143. A high-level task force, chaired by the Foreign Minister was formed to study the feasibility of ratification of the CRPD in 2017. The National Interest Analysis on ratifying the Convention was accordingly submitted to the RGoB.

144. Bhutan received a visit by the UNICEF Executive Board Bureau in April 2018. The Bureau noted with satisfaction the excellent cooperation and partnership between RGoB and UNICEF in the development of norms and standards and the formulation of key policies for children. They also observed that the RGoB has committed resources to programmes and projects to achieve the objectives of the CRC.

145. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visited Bhutan in January 2019.

## **VIII. Achievements, best practices and constraints**

### **A. Achievements**

146. Under His Majesty The King, Bhutan continues to enjoy peace, unity and harmony which are central to ensuring fundamental rights to life, liberty and security as enshrined in the Constitution. Democratic institutions have been strengthened; and democratic culture and democracy have taken firm roots within a span of 10 years.

147. Bhutan's GDP has grown from Nu. 100 billion in 2013 to Nu. 180 billion in 2018, and is one of the fastest growing economies. Bhutan's GDP growth rate reached as high as 8 percent in 2016 and about 7 percent in 2017.

148. Significant progress has been made on education and health outcomes as a result of access to free health and education. School enrolment is near 100 percent with gender parity at the secondary level. Youth literacy stands at 93 percent, and life expectancy has crossed 70 years.

149. Committed to the cause of international peace and security, a key mandate of the United Nations, Bhutan joined the UN peacekeeping operations as observers in 2014. Towards broadening and deepening Bhutan's engagement and contribution to UN peacekeeping operation, the RGOB pledged a military unit of 250 troops in 2015.

## B. Best practices

150. The development philosophy of GNH has ensured a holistic development which promotes sustainable development and the rights and welfare of every citizen.

151. Basic health services have always been free in Bhutan. Bhutan Health Trust Fund established in the year 2000 as an innovative sustainable health care financing has reached to Nu. 2.3 billion. Currently, all cost of essential drugs and vaccines are financed through the Fund.

152. The RGoB provides free education to all children from pre-primary to grade 10. Access to education has been enhanced through establishment of residential central schools and large primary and secondary schools. School feeding programs have been expanded and continue to be a key incentive to encourage enrolment and retention, especially of girls in remote and difficult locations. To facilitate higher education for economically disadvantaged students, a collateral and interest free student loan scheme was initiated in 2014.

153. The *Kidu* system is a social safety net instituted by the Monarchs to address the grievances and needs of vulnerable groups. His Majesty The King has personally travelled throughout the country taking *Kidu* to the people, and has professionalized and regularized the system by appointing officials at *Dzongkhag* and *Gewog* levels to identify vulnerable individuals and their needs.

154. The NFE program introduced in the early 1990s with the objective of eradicating illiteracy continues to make significant contribution to improving literacy and access to education by women. NFE program has contributed in increasing the overall adult literacy rate to 60 percent. It is also used as vehicle for imparting important social messages to rural communities and has facilitated participation of prospective leaders in local government elections.

155. Recognizing the absence of an open air prison system for female prisoners, an agriculture based open air prison for female prisoners was initiated in December 2013. As of October 2018, the system has benefited 111 female prisoners.

156. Bhutan for Life is a unique initiative aimed at permanently conserving Bhutan's protected areas and biological corridors through providing full funding for their operations and management. This project will conserve nearly 6 million acres of forest and other natural habitat.

157. As per the Command of His Majesty The King, the De-Suung<sup>10</sup> Integrated Training Programme was instituted in 2011 with the main objective to encourage all citizens to be active in the greater role of nation building. The training programme is built upon the spirit of "volunteerism" positive ethics, values of community service, integrity and civic responsibility. Individuals, who have undergone the training programme volunteer during disaster operations, charitable activities and be of service to others throughout their lives.

158. Towards achieving efficient and effective delivery of public services, the RGoB has established a public grievances redressal system under the Cabinet Secretariat.

## C. Challenges and constraints

159. Poverty: As Bhutan strives to graduate from the LDC category, the country is confronted with 'last-mile' challenges of eradicating poverty in all its forms. The Gini coefficient has increased from 0.36 in 2012 to 0.38 in 2017, indicating rising inequality. While multidimensional poverty has reduced significantly, rural poverty is much higher than urban poverty.

160. Macroeconomic situation: While the economy recovered since 2014 with average annual GDP growth of around 7 percent, economic vulnerability on account of structural challenges, high debt to GDP ratio, spiralling trade and budget deficits are issues of concern.

161. Youth Unemployment: Although the unemployment situation has improved steadily from 4 percent in 2009 to 2.4 percent in 2017, the high incidence of youth unemployment remains one of the biggest challenges. Youth unemployment today stands at 10.6 percent, an increase from 9.6 percent in 2013. It will exacerbate in the next few years when more university graduates enter the job market.

162. Problems of access: The rugged mountains and scattered rural settlements make delivery of social services such as health, education, electricity and safe drinking water extremely difficult and expensive. This also causes rural-urban migration which has a ripple effect on other social problems like poverty, unemployment and waste management.

163. Vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters: Bhutan is highly vulnerable to natural disaster such as flood, landslides, GLOF etc. which is exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Bhutan is also located on a seismically active zone. These inherent natural factors as well as social factors like poverty, human encroachment on vulnerable slopes, and low literacy have made Bhutan one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world.

164. Migration: As a small nation that has open and porous border in one of the most populated region, Bhutan continues to face immense challenges from illegal immigration. In order to safeguard against such security threats it is necessary for Bhutan to strictly adhere to national laws and immigration rules and regulations.

165. Bhutan is also increasingly experiencing internal migration from rural to urban centres. The urban population has increased from 30.9 percent in 2005 to 37.8 percent in 2017. This trend will make urban centres unsustainable while agriculture production in the rural areas will decline.

166. Declining Population: According to Bhutan Living Standards Survey Report 2017, the total fertility rate has plunged to 1.9, which is below the replacement level of 2.1. This could lead to an ageing population and a shrinking workforce. As part of efforts to address the issue, a National Population and Development Policy has been drafted. One of the objectives of the draft policy is to ensure the total fertility rate does not fall below the replacement level at all times.

167. Ageing population: The elderly population aged 65 and above increased from 29,752 (4.7 percent) in 2005 to 43,064 (5.9 percent) in 2017. Currently, there is no specific legislation to address the needs of elderly persons. The National Pension Scheme only covers government and corporate employees. The draft National Social Protection Policy proposes a series of initiatives to provide income support to the elderly. Under His Majesty's Senior Citizens Programme, senior citizens are granted a monthly allowance to meet their basic needs. CSOs such as the Royal Society for Senior Citizens look after the welfare of senior citizens. Further, a monastic home for retired monks was established in 2016. A Geriatric Care Program to promote productivity, vitality, and happiness among elderly citizens has also been introduced by RGoB.

168. Financial resource: Although the country has launched important policies, legislations and strategies for a better future for its citizens, sufficient finances are required to implement them.

## **IX. Key national priorities, commitments and initiatives**

### **A. National priorities**

169. Towards ensuring a vibrant democratic culture and the rule of law, strengthening democracy remains a national priority. In view of the country's imminent graduation from the LDC category, strengthening the fundamentals of the economy for a sustainable graduation is imperative. The need to enhance internal revenue as well as external grant is paramount. Bhutan has to address several emerging challenges including the issue of youth unemployment. Sustaining free health and education services will remain a national priority. Reaching the unreached and to address the needs of vulnerable groups within the

framework of poverty alleviation policies will receive further attention in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP; as well as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

## **B. Commitments**

170. Under the overarching goal of narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor, the Government is committed to reducing the widening income disparity and all other forms of inequalities. The Government envisions creation of an equitable and inclusive society through targeted interventions such as provision of “one job for one household”, undertaking a comprehensive tax reform, increasing the minimum wage, building more affordable housing and enhancing maternity benefits, particularly in rural areas. The Government is also committed to initiating major reforms in health and education sector with a view to enhance access to quality services for all.

171. The RGoB is committed to creating conditions to achieve the national development philosophy of GNH. International best practices on further promoting human rights continue to be incorporated into relevant domestic policies and legislations.

172. The RGoB will continue to collaborate with national CSOs and provide them the required space to complement the work of the RGoB.

173. Renewed attention will be given to address the issues related to women and children. Further efforts are being made to address gender gap in tertiary education, politics and leadership.

174. Bhutan continues to assess possibilities to study and review human rights instruments. In accordance with its capacity and national resources, Bhutan will consider ratifying relevant international human rights instruments.

## **C. Initiatives (Recommendations 118.7; 118.8; 118.24–28; 118.17–19, 118.22; 118.31–32)**

175. To promote good governance, the RGoB introduced the Government Performance Management System (GPMS) in the 11<sup>th</sup> FYP. The system makes all public institutions accountable while working towards providing improved public services. The Annual Performance Agreements have been instrumental in achieving the 11<sup>th</sup> FYP targets and enhancing transparency and accountability.

176. The RGoB has enhanced services delivery to citizens through online delivery of services.

177. The Gender Equality Monitoring System (GEMS) formulated in 2016 monitors women’s participation in governance and decision making to address VAW; women’s competency and skills in entrepreneurship; female youth unemployment; participation of women in sustainable rural development; women’s access to education; and women’s access to health services. Further, a Gender-sensitive Indicator Handbook was also developed.

178. An online Central Management Information System (CMIS) was launched in 2017 as a central repository of disaggregated data and information on women and children in difficult circumstances and CICL. The CMIS will also lead to effective, well-coordinated and timely case management with stakeholders working together as a team.

179. A Toll Free Helpline for women and children provides counselling or legal and referral services 24/7. The Helpline and the CMIS are integrated to enable real-time recording, monitoring and evaluation of data on women and children in difficult circumstances and CICL.

180. To enhance financial inclusion, the RGoB initiated the Priority Sector Lending scheme for targeted lending to farmers and unemployed youths. Through the scheme, collateral free concessional loans for rural entrepreneurs were granted.

## X. Capacity building and technical assistance requests

181. The RGoB will require financial and technical assistance and support in capacity building to fulfil international treaty reporting obligations. Considerable resources are consumed by the existing reporting obligations at the cost of other needs. The current assistance received by the RGoB is far from adequate.

## XI. Conclusion

182. Bhutan is committed to upholding all human rights for its people as guaranteed by the Constitution. The country is also equally committed to democracy and the rule of law. Despite the challenges, the government consistently takes steps to strengthen human rights, including through aligning its laws and policies with international human rights instruments and incorporating the best practices of other countries. The government continues to study international human rights instruments with the view to acceding to them as and when circumstances improve and constraints are overcome.

183. Bhutan appreciates the support and cooperation extended by the international community in its efforts to promote and protect human rights in a comprehensive manner, including promoting social and economic rights as reflected in its development philosophy of GNH. It remains open to further engagement with the international community.

### *Notes*

- <sup>1</sup> Legal Counsel/Advocate.
- <sup>2</sup> Mediation.
- <sup>3</sup> District(s)/Municipality(ies).
- <sup>4</sup> Lowest Administrative Unit.
- <sup>5</sup> Welfare.
- <sup>6</sup> Sub District Administrative Block(s).
- <sup>7</sup> Scholarship for the disadvantaged students.
- <sup>8</sup> Elected Head of gewog.
- <sup>9</sup> Elected representative of gewog.
- <sup>10</sup> Guardians of peace.