



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women  
Sixty-fifth session**

**Summary record of the 1437th meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 27 October 2016, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Hayashi

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(*continued*)

*Combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Bhutan*

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention** (*continued*)

*Combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Bhutan (CEDAW/C/BTN/8-9; CEDAW/C/BTN/Q/8-9 and Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Bhutan took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Mr. Singye** (Bhutan), introducing his country's combined eighth and ninth periodic reports (CEDAW/C/BTN/8-9), said that Bhutan had become a democratic constitutional monarchy in 2008 and that the current Government, which had come to power in 2013, had taken a number of steps to empower women, including strengthening the National Commission for Women and Children, enhancing the role and capacity of civil society organizations working with women and children, and promoting women's participation in public life. All public policies were screened for their contribution to gross national happiness, a Bhutanese concept that took into consideration indicators of well-being other than material development alone, and, all else being equal, policies that contributed to gender equality were considered to make a greater contribution to gross national happiness than those that did not.
3. Relevant developments during the reporting period included modest gains in women's participation in local governance, the initiation of work on a national gender equality policy, the revision of the 2010 Economic Development Policy to place additional emphasis on the creation of opportunities for rural women and women entrepreneurs, and ongoing efforts in connection with gender mainstreaming. In addition, the 2011 Child Care and Protection Act and the 2013 Domestic Violence Prevention Act had been adopted; measures for their enforcement had been taken; and a parliamentary committee had initiated consultations on amending and harmonizing contradictory legal provisions pertaining to women and children.
4. In March 2016, the length of maternity and paternity leave for public employees had been doubled, and the Government was exploring ways of ensuring that private employers provided gender-friendly workplaces. Starting in July 2016, gender equality indicators had been incorporated into the performance agreements that all government ministries and autonomous agencies signed with the Prime Minister. As a result, they were required to provide childcare facilities and develop internal frameworks to address gender matters of concern to their employees. Furthermore, the Government had undertaken a number of training initiatives to increase the employability of young people, and young women in particular, and was working with civil society organizations to boost the skills of rural women and help them to generate additional income.
5. Efforts had also been made to improve girls' access to education, combat violence against women and girls, counter trafficking in persons, and address two of the greatest obstacles to full implementation of the Convention — namely, insufficient awareness and capacity limitations. Those efforts and others, made in partnership with relevant stakeholders in Bhutan and the international community, were enabling the country, whose people valued tradition highly, to make steady if slow progress towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

*Articles 1 to 6*

6. **Ms. Haidar** said that the State party might wish to consider adopting legislation that explicitly defined and prohibited discrimination on grounds of sex, as the Constitution did not specifically address such discrimination. She would appreciate an update on any

government plans to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and, as recommended during the universal periodic review, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

7. **Ms. Pimentel** asked whether it was possible for the definition of discrimination against women contained in article 1 of the Convention to be incorporated into the State party's domestic law and, if so, whether any steps were being taken to do so. She would welcome more information about the National Commission for Women and Children, such as whether it had been given ministerial status; what its annual operating budget was; and whether the Government had any plans to provide it with additional resources. She also wished to know what efforts were being made to ensure that most policy statements, which, according to the State party's report, were gender-neutral, began to systematically incorporate a gender perspective.

8. Information on the time frame for the work of the National Law Review Task Force, which had a mandate to review procedures for drafting new legislation and to harmonize existing legislation, would be welcome, as would a comment on the expected impact of its work, in particular on discriminatory legal provisions. It would also be interesting to know whether NGOs were represented on the Task Force.

9. Referring to the section of the State party's replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/BTN/Q/8-9/Add.1) that addressed access to justice, she asked whether the Office of the Attorney General's report on the provision of legal aid mentioned in paragraph 5 had been completed and, if not, when its publication was expected; and whether the independent authority to consolidate, monitor and regulate the provision of legal aid mentioned in paragraph 6 had been established. In view of the country's rough terrain, she would also like to know what specific steps had been taken to ensure that women living in rural areas had access to justice. Lastly, she wished to know what percentage of all judicial officials the 117 women reported to be working in the justice system represented.

10. **Mr. Singye** (Bhutan) said that, as and when Bhutan overcame its capacity limitations, it would sign the international instruments mentioned by Ms. Haidar.

11. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that, since a study conducted in 2001 had highlighted the gender neutrality of many of the country's public policies, considerable progress had been made towards the systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all policies, plans and programmes. Targets had been set for the collection of data broken down by sex, and, as had been mentioned, the extent to which policies promoted equality between men and women was one of the variables considered when policies were reviewed for their contribution to gross national happiness. The gender focal points of each ministry were required to take part in the review of that particular component of the policies of their respective ministries.

12. The Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting Initiative had been undertaken to ensure that gender mainstreaming in written policies translated into action. The Initiative had been piloted in the health, education, agriculture and forestry sectors but a midterm review had found that a consolidation of efforts in those sectors, in addition to further training of finance officials, would be necessary before gender-responsive planning and budgeting could be rolled out to other sectors. The members of the newly formed Gender Expert Group were set to receive training on ensuring that gender-related statements in policies and plans led to tangible action on the ground.

13. **Mr. Tashi** (Bhutan) said it was true that there was no definition of discrimination in national law. However, since, under the Constitution, duly ratified international treaties

were automatically incorporated into domestic law, the definition contained in the Convention was applicable. As to access to justice and legal aid, the needs assessment report published by the Office of the Attorney General was to be submitted to the Government by the end of 2016 and the Cabinet would then give directives as to how to proceed. There was a budget for legal aid but as yet no applications had been made that would require the budget to be used. The National Law Review Taskforce had been convened and had begun its work. As its mandate was to review and harmonize all legislation, it would probably not complete its task within a year.

14. **Mr. Dorji** (Bhutan) said that 174 out of a total of 502 judicial officials were women. That figure broke down into 4 out of 36 judges, 3 out of 22 assistant judges, 4 out of 16 lawyers, 107 out of 256 bench clerks and 56 out of 172 support staff.

15. **Ms. Dema** (Bhutan) said that the Government was gradually working through the various international human rights treaties with a view to ratification. A high-level task force was currently studying the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities. With the help of the United Nations Development Programme, rules of procedure had been introduced in early 2016 that should help streamline the process and improve institutional capacity for ratification.

16. **Ms. Haidar** asked whether the Convention had ever been invoked in court and whether judges were aware of the definition of discrimination it contained.

17. The State party's efforts to obtain gender-disaggregated data would be of crucial importance for the presentation of its next report and to enable the Committee to provide proper advice on the implementation of specific articles of the Convention. In the meantime, if no gender-disaggregated data were available, how could the State party ensure that a given policy was the best one for the context?

18. **Ms. Pimentel** said that the report did not indicate whether the State party had created specialized courts on domestic violence and contained insufficient substantive information on women's access to justice, both in general and in respect of domestic violence in particular. She would like to know what efforts the State party was making to legislate to establish specialist courts; whether it was taking steps to implement training programmes incorporating the gender perspective for judges and other judiciary personnel; whether such training prioritized the elimination of discriminatory behaviour; what the main obstacles were to women's access to justice; and whether measures were being taken to increase and facilitate women's access to justice in all matters, and not only in respect of domestic violence.

19. **Mr. Dorji** (Bhutan) said that the definition of discrimination contained in the Convention had not been invoked in court to date. However, judges attending a training course had asked whether the Convention could be invoked and had been informed that it could. Human resource constraints had made it impossible to create specialized courts as yet. However, a women's and children's court was to be established in the capital on a pilot basis in November 2016, and possibly also in larger population centres in the near future, depending on the results, although more remote districts would have to wait longer.

20. **Ms. Lhamo** (Bhutan) said that around 70 per cent of judges, mainly at the local level, had been trained in woman- and child-friendly judicial procedures, and also in the Domestic Violence Prevention Act. Nearly 100 per cent of judges were now aware of the new legislation.

21. One of the challenges facing rural women in terms of access to justice was their limited awareness of the relevant legal provisions and the existence of social services. The first measure taken had thus been to raise rural women's awareness and understanding of what was available. The other major challenge was geographical location: various

institutional mechanisms had been put in place, such as the women and child protection units or desks, which would eventually be extended to all police stations, and community police centres, which aimed to bring policing and legal mechanisms closer to communities. In addition, there was close cooperation with civil society organizations in the community-based support system, to which women could turn for help.

22. In the absence of gender-disaggregated data, notably in the more “hard-core” sectors such as transport and infrastructure, the results yielded by the Bhutan Gender Equality Diagnostic Study for Selected Sectors were used as a basis for devising more sensitive policies in the sectors concerned.

23. **Ms. Hofmeister**, commending the State party on its efforts to strengthen the rule of law and deepen democracy, notably through its work with civil society and NGOs, said that the concept of gross national happiness, with its emphasis on physical, mental and spiritual health, cultural and ecological vitality and good living standards, was a historic development. However, as a country in transition, Bhutan appeared to be experiencing great difficulty in implementing equality. There were various possible reasons for that, including, for example, an emphasis on gender equity rather than gender equality. The network of gender focal points represented an attempt to reach less accessible areas but the number of police units was insufficient to cover all districts. In that connection, she would like to know how the special police centres worked; what the State party intended to do to reinforce the focal point network and establish police units in all districts so as to reduce reporting barriers for women; whether there were any legislative measures in the pipeline to institute gender budgeting and increase the budget of the National Commission for Women and Children; how the Government intended to strengthen its capacity for research, policy analysis and legislative review and evaluation; and what measures the State party would be taking to train police officers in the reporting of sexual and domestic violence.

24. **Ms. Zou Xiaqiao** said it was regrettable that the State party had not made any provision for implementing temporary special measures, although she recognized that the National Commission for Women and Children had taken steps to build a consensus on the drafting of legislation on quotas for women in elected office and that the midterm review of the eleventh five-year plan 2013-2018, which covered the period 2013-2018, also made reference to such quotas. In her view, there was a good basis for legislation and she wondered whether the State party had a time frame for the start of drafting. Since alternative sources reported a predominantly negative perception of the use of quotas, which were felt to go against the merit-based system, she wondered whether that was the major objection to enactment of such legislation. Were there any awareness-raising programmes to help political officials and other relevant stakeholders understand the meaning and scope of temporary special measures?

25. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that the National Commission for Women and Children had been structured to reflect its initial mandate, which was to plan, monitor and coordinate all action on women’s and children’s rights. However, since the Commission was now the competent authority for all the new legislation, a restructuring exercise was under way to ensure that it had adequate capacity. Appropriate mechanisms, such as district women’s and children’s committees on violence and other issues, were also needed. The gender focal point system was being reinforced and there were now 46 focal points working at the national and local levels. Training was being provided, but was sometimes too superficial to ensure that policies and plans were properly implemented. It was hoped that the Gender Expert Group would help to translate policy into action. There were currently 11 women and child protection units and desks operated by the police force, including a division in the capital. The goal was to have units in all 20 districts.

26. **Ms. Lhamo** (Bhutan) said that, since 2014, the National Commission for Women and Children had been working with the police to incorporate woman- and child-friendly

procedures into the police training curriculum. Ultimately all police recruits who completed their training would have a basic understanding of such procedures. As to the work of the women and child protection units and desks, she said that, in the protection units, specialist police officers dealt with women's and children's cases while, at the protection desks, cases were handled by non-commissioned officers assisted by trained officials. The Commission was finalizing standard operating procedures for the management and referral of cases involving women and children in difficult circumstances, including victims of gender-based violence. All stakeholders, including the police, would be trained in those procedures, and there would thus be a systematic referral mechanism for use by those working with women and children.

27. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that legislation on quotas for women in government was indeed one of the key performance indicators in the eleventh five-year plan. A series of consultative meetings with stakeholders had produced the National Plan of Action to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office, which was currently before the Cabinet. One part of the proposal was to create an environment conducive to women's participation; the other part proposed the setting of quotas. Quotas did not refer to allocations of seats but to required levels of representation of women in nominations. However, that concept was not generally understood and there had been a good deal of resistance, including among women, who tended to prefer the merit-based approach. It would therefore be necessary to ensure that the concept was properly understood at all levels of society.

28. Temporary special measures were also being proposed in areas of critical concern under the thematic area of gender equality in the population policy currently being drafted, and concerns about the low representation of women in politics could also lead to quotas being proposed in the context of the national gender equality policy.

29. **Ms. Zou Xiaqiao** asked what percentage quota was being proposed for the representation of women in nominations; what the current situation was with regard to the draft legislation; and whether there were any plans to use temporary special measures in other areas, such as education.

30. **Ms. Haidar** said she wished to remind the delegation that technical assistance in developing long-lasting capacity was available from intergovernmental organizations and international NGOs.

31. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that there was no draft legislation on temporary special measures or quotas as yet, only the National Plan of Action to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office. Once the national gender equality policy had been drafted, it was hoped that the next step would be legislation on quotas. No other areas had been identified as candidates for temporary special measures.

32. **Ms. Acar** said that, in spite of the gender equality and anti-discrimination legislation implemented in recent years, traditional gender stereotypes remained deeply entrenched in society. While initiatives were under way to bring about a gradual change in social and cultural attitudes, it was critical that steps also be taken to improve the immediate situation of adult women, 61 per cent of whom were, according to the gross national happiness index, unhappy. She wished to know what concrete measures were in place to raise the social status of adult women in society and, in particular, to improve their literacy levels, ensure unhindered access to public services and eliminate the double burden imposed on them by traditional gender stereotypes.

33. While the introduction of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act was to be commended, she wondered why it did not cover all forms of gender-based violence against women, and why it was focused almost entirely on prevention. It was essential to ensure that provision was made to protect victims and prosecute perpetrators. Noting that the majority of cases of domestic violence went unreported, she asked what measures had been

taken to address the cultural stereotypes that legitimized domestic violence; how much government funding had been earmarked for implementation of the Act, including for the provision of support, holistic care and shelters for victims; whether the Act had been widely disseminated and integrated into the school curricula; what capacity-building activities and training had been organized for law enforcement officials; and what proportion of judges had received specialized training on domestic violence. Lastly, she was concerned about the use of mediation in cases of domestic violence that had been categorized as minor offences. Domestic violence often escalated gradually and victims were seldom in a position to negotiate with their abusers. Mediation was therefore not advisable.

34. **Ms. Haidar** said that she wished to know whether the anti-trafficking project mentioned in the State party's opening statement corresponded to the sensitization programme organized in conjunction with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; and whether the standard operating procedures drafted as part of that initiative included identifying and supporting victims as well as investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases. Noting that girls from poor rural and mountainous areas were often sent to the city to carry out domestic work, which frequently involved forced labour, she wondered what measures were being taken to improve conditions in remote parts of the country and thus eliminate the need for families to send their children away from home to work. She would also like to know whether the definition of trafficking in persons contained in article 154 of the Penal Code was to be amended; and whether there were any plans to provide training on anti-trafficking legislation for law enforcement personnel. Statistics on the number of women in prostitution, which was illegal in Bhutan, should also be provided.

35. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that women in Bhutan often faced double, and even triple, burdens. Awareness-raising programmes were being conducted and positive female role models were being championed as part of efforts to eliminate gender stereotypes and negative social and cultural attitudes. In rural and mountainous areas, there were plans to establish childcare centres so that women were able to participate more fully in their communities.

36. It was true that happiness levels were much lower among Bhutanese women than among Bhutanese men. That disparity was attributed primarily to the obstacles that prevented Bhutanese women from achieving higher levels of education and participating in political and public life and decision-making roles. The findings of the gross national happiness survey were being analysed with a view to developing strategies for overcoming those obstacles. Some success had been achieved through non-formal education programmes focused, in particular, on improving literacy and imparting life skills. Since almost 70 per cent of participants of those programmes were women, many women had now taken part.

37. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act was not solely preventive in nature. It also contained provisions dealing with victim protection and prosecution, including the prosecution of forms of gender-based violence not already covered by the Penal Code, such as violence causing psychological or economic harm. Penalties for offences involving sexual and physical violence were already established in the Penal Code.

38. **Ms. Lhamo** (Bhutan) said that initiatives designed to raise the social status of rural women included microfinance projects and poverty-reduction programmes. The Government was preparing to conduct a study that would enable it to assess the economic value of unpaid care work and thus to better understand how much time women spent on such tasks and how some of the burdens might be alleviated. Domestic violence was the primary focus of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act simply because such violence was not covered in previously existing legal provisions, whereas other forms of violence were already addressed in various pieces of legislation. Moreover, domestic violence was the most common form of violence against women. A series of checks and balances was in

place to ensure that using mediation to settle domestic violence cases did not cause the abuse to escalate, and measures were in place to prevent perpetrators from reoffending. The police were required to keep a database of cases involving domestic violence that had been settled through mediation and to monitor the situation.

39. There was a lack of data about women in prostitution. For that reason, a study was being devised by the Government that would provide an insight into the prevalence of commercial sex work and the interventions that might be necessary.

40. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that a major review of all legislation was being undertaken by the National Assembly and a proposal to amend the definition of trafficking in persons was being considered. Research was under way to highlight the situation of women working as entertainers in clubs, as such women were one of the groups most vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of exploitation. Fortunately, the prevalence of the phenomenon mentioned by Ms. Haidar, whereby girls from rural areas were forced into domestic labour in the cities, was on the decline. It was hoped that, with continued monitoring and further awareness-raising, the phenomenon would soon cease to be an issue.

41. **Ms. Lhamo** (Bhutan) said that the standard operating procedures for combating trafficking in persons were comprehensive; they covered prevention and prosecution, as well as victim protection, reintegration and rehabilitation. A train-the-trainer programme covering all aspects of trafficking in persons, including the standard operating procedures, had already been run, and training programmes for law enforcement agencies and public prosecutors would be rolled out in the near future.

42. **Mr. Dorji** (Bhutan) said that, while no specific training on the Domestic Violence Prevention Act had been provided to judges, the issue of domestic violence was integrated into the regular professional training programme, which 70 per cent of district judges had now completed.

#### *Articles 7 to 9*

43. **Ms. Zou Xiaogiao**, commending the State party's progress to date in increasing gender equality and women's empowerment, said that women were still significantly underrepresented in political, public and decision-making spheres. She wished to know how the Government intended to eliminate the cultural, economic and social barriers that impeded women's participation in political and public life and to elevate women's standing in society; what measures were in place to ensure that women were treated on an equal footing with men in appointment processes; and whether any initiatives had been launched to prepare women for public office and leadership roles. She would be interested to know whether any comprehensive strategies had been developed to change attitudes discriminatory towards women and to combat deep-rooted gender stereotypes; whether the delegation could provide statistics on the number of women in the diplomatic service and in high-ranking roles in academia; and what measures were envisaged to guarantee that women had equal opportunities to represent their country at the international level and to participate in the work of the international organizations. Lastly, she wished to know the status of the legislation being drafted to establish gender quotas, thereby fostering greater participation of women in political life.

44. **Ms. Haidar** said that she wished to know whether women could transmit their Bhutanese nationality to their children; what steps had been taken to prevent children from being deprived of an education because they did not have a certificate of citizenship or their parents could not produce a marriage certificate; and what measures were in place to address the problems associated with the civil registration of children born to Bhutanese women of fathers whose identity was uncertain or unknown.



45. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that, as part of the tenth five-year plan, which had covered the period 2008-2013, a national plan of action for gender had also been formulated and implemented. Its priority areas had included awareness-raising and capacity-building activities to tackle deep-rooted prejudices and gender-based stereotypes. A new plan of action for gender equality was now being developed to coincide with the twelfth five-year plan. At the community and district levels, civil society organizations such as the Bhutan Network for Empowering Women also had a role in addressing women's low rate of participation in political and public life, providing them with mentoring and training to equip them for decision-making roles.

46. **Ms. Lhamo** (Bhutan) said that a study to identify the obstacles to women's greater participation in the civil service had found a lack of childcare services and the double burden of juggling work and family responsibilities to be the main reasons why women left their jobs. The Government had responded by issuing a directive requiring all government agencies to provide crèche facilities in the workplace. As a result, women's representation at executive levels had increased by two percentage points. In 2013, a senior executive leadership programme had been launched for civil service executives, including women. In addition, mentoring and training for women elected to political office was provided by the Bhutan Democracy Dialogue platform, a cross-party organization aimed at strengthening democracy in Bhutan.

47. **Mr. Singye** (Bhutan) said that, in line with article 6 (1) of the Constitution of Bhutan, both parents had to be Bhutanese citizens in order to be able to transmit their nationality to their children. If either of their parents was a foreign national, children would be granted a residency permit and, once they had lived in the country for 15 years, would be able to apply for citizenship through the naturalization process.

48. **Ms. Zou Xiaojiao** said that, while it was clear that the Government was making a concerted effort to promote women's participation in political and public life, it was necessary to establish specific targets and timescales as a means of measuring real progress.

#### *Articles 10 to 14*

49. **The Chair**, speaking in her capacity as a member of the Committee, said that she would like to know what measures and incentives, if any, had been introduced to encourage girls to remain in school; how the relationship between education and early marriage was assessed; what the impact of the Comprehensive School Health Programme had been; and how the State party had gone about recruiting more female teachers. Noting the low numbers of women in higher education, she asked how obstacles to women's enrolment were identified; what actions had been taken to increase their enrolment and support them through education; how the Government raised awareness of the importance of higher education in general; whether women were encouraged to study subjects that were traditionally the preserve of men; and whether education for girls in remote areas and the impact of the extended classroom system on girls' enrolment had been evaluated. She also invited the delegation to comment on reports that the Government planned to close several primary schools and extended classrooms in order to open more central schools.

50. She wondered why women's participation in the labour force had decreased in 2013. Noting that wages were comparatively low in the female-dominated agricultural sector — a situation that broadened the gender pay gap — and that, according to reports, fewer women were in regular wage employment than men, she said that, in order to address that problem, more women should be recruited to the civil service and women and men should enjoy equal employment opportunities in both the public and private sectors. She would appreciate information on policies that promoted equal opportunities and on the implementation of gender equality regulations in the workplace. She would also welcome information on the provision of childcare facilities in the workplace, particularly in the

agricultural sector, and on how the Government promoted shared responsibility for childcare. Lastly, she asked whether maternity and paternity leave provisions in the private sector would be brought into line with those in place in the public sector, and how sexual harassment in the workplace was combated.

51. **Ms. Chalal** said that, despite the significant progress made in the area of health, the Committee remained concerned by the high rates of pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases among young people. In that connection, she would like to know why contraception use was so low; how access to sexual and reproductive health information and care was promoted; whether the Government would be decriminalizing abortion, which was currently illegal except in cases of rape or incest or when the woman's health was in danger; whether it had any plans to improve primary health-care facilities by increasing the number of trained medical professionals; whether training for those professionals would cover gender mainstreaming; whether any health-care facilities had been adapted to accommodate persons with special needs; and what was being done to guarantee women's access to such facilities in general.

52. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that a major review of the school curriculum had been undertaken in 2004 in order to incorporate gender mainstreaming and gender sensitivity. In 2014, teaching with a gender-based approach had been introduced in secondary schools, and teachers had received training on that approach. Barriers to higher education, especially in technical and vocational fields, had been reduced by making curricula and training institutes more women-friendly and eradicating gender stereotypes. Nevertheless, entrenched attitudes meant that women and girls were often reluctant to study in male-dominated fields. The Government was looking into how girls' participation in technology and science might be improved.

53. While designed for girls and boys equally, central schools were successful in encouraging girls' enrolment in particular because they provided uniforms and teaching materials free of charge and enabled girls from remote and rural communities to access education. The initiative had been launched only recently. There had therefore been no evaluation as yet, but such an exercise was planned. The National Commission for Women and Children also planned to review the regulations and procedures in place in schools to make them more girl-friendly.

54. **Ms. Lhamo** (Bhutan) said that women's participation in the labour force had improved slightly. Nevertheless, a Government study had found that factors including childcare commitments and a lack of skills hindered their participation. Those findings had been submitted to the Cabinet and the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources to inform their efforts to increase women's participation. Other initiatives implemented had included guaranteed employment schemes. The blueprint for technical and vocational education and training would address women's enrolment, for example, through a baseline study on their participation.

55. Working mothers were assisted through programmes organized by civil society organizations and State-run early childcare and development centres. A childcare scheme was being piloted by some local governments and would be expanded if successful.

56. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that, although the private sector was not required to replicate the provisions found in the public sector, the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources was engaging with business representatives to consider how maternity and paternity leave might be extended and more crèche facilities provided in the private sector.

57. **Ms. Lhamo** (Bhutan) said that young people were encouraged to use contraception by means of awareness and advocacy programmes and youth-friendly health services that provided counselling on reproductive and sexual health. The Government also distributed free contraceptives.

58. Older adults benefited from dedicated programmes at the National Referral Hospital and were targeted by pilot programmes in local health-care centres across the country. The Ministry of Health ran a programme that examined the needs of persons with disabilities, and hospitals contained mental health units. Doctors were required to undergo mental health training and could provide basic mental health services at the local level, with patients being referred to specialist doctors in the capital if necessary. A suicide prevention action plan was being formulated that would address mental health and include interventions such as peer counselling.

59. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that indicators for childcare facilities and the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace were included in annual performance agreements concluded between the Government and private sector companies. There were no plans to decriminalize abortion at present but the possibility might be considered in future.

60. **The Chair**, speaking in her capacity as a Committee member, asked where women could lodge complaints of wage discrimination and whether the handbook on child labour issued for the use of labour inspectors had been endorsed by the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources.

61. **Ms. Haidar** asked what the leading cause of suicide was; and whether the Government envisaged cooperating more extensively with RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women), a national NGO that ran a shelter for survivors of domestic violence and provided assistance on mental health issues.

62. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that wage discrimination was not a problem thanks to the Constitution's provisions for equal pay for work of equal value. However, women could lodge complaints of wage discrimination with labour officials, who were present throughout the country.

63. **Ms. Lhamo** (Bhutan) said that the handbook on child labour had been endorsed and labour inspectors had been trained in how to use it. A study had shown that the main causes of suicide were financial problems, mental health issues and domestic violence. A suicide prevention action plan that took a multisectoral approach was in place, and a multisectoral steering committee had been established to oversee its implementation. The goal was to reduce the suicide rate by 2018.

64. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that RENEW was one of the key stakeholders involved in coordination meetings with the Government and would very likely be called upon to provide more services, including shelters.

65. **Ms. Haidar** said that, since most policymakers were men, women's organizations should be more closely involved in policy development in order to ensure the inclusion of a gender perspective.

66. **The Chair** asked whether any complaints of wage discrimination had been received from female workers and whether disaggregated data on pay levels were available.

67. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that no complaints of wage discrimination had ever been received.

*The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.*