



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

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

### Information received from Bhutan on follow-up to the concluding observations on its tenth periodic report\*

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\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



## List of abbreviations

ABS	Ability Bhutan Society
BCMD	Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy
BNLI	Bhutan National Legal Institute
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSOA	Civil Society Organization Authority
CSC	Community Service Centre
DPOB	Disabled People's Organization of Bhutan
DLGDM	Department of Local Government and Disaster Management
ECB	Election Commission of Bhutan
GAO	Block Administrative Officer
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GCFP	Gender and Child Focal Person
GEMS	Gender Equality Monitoring System
GEWOG	Administrative block within the district administration administered by GUP
GUP	Head of the Administrative block at local level
LG	Local Government
MoESD	Ministry of Education and Skills Development
NAB	National Assembly of Bhutan
NCB	National Council of Bhutan
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UPR	Universal Periodic Report

## Introduction

1. The Royal Government of Bhutan submits this Interim Progress Report following the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations (CO) on the tenth periodic report of Bhutan to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) periodic report, and pursuant to the Committee's request to the Government to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations pertaining to paragraph 15 (National Machinery), 23 b (Non-governmental organization) and 35 (a) and (b) (participation in political and public life).
2. This report outlines measures taken by the Royal Government of Bhutan since October 2023 till date, to implement the recommendations contained under para 15 (strengthening national women's machinery), para 23 (b) (support to non-governmental organizations), and para 35 (a) and 35 (b) (participation in political and public life) of the Concluding Observations on Bhutan's tenth periodic report.

## Methodology and Consultation Process

3. The preparation of the report was led by the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) in consultation with all relevant stakeholders including Parliamentarians, Local Government Leaders, Government Agencies, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Academia, and Private sector.

## Stakeholder engaged in the consultation process

4. **Parliament:** National Assembly of Bhutan and National Council of Bhutan.
5. **Government:** The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), The PEMA Secretariat, Office of Cabinet Affairs and Strategic Coordination (OCASC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade (MoFAET), Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD), Royal Bhutan Police (RBP), Office of the Attorney General (OAG), Royal Court of Justice, Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB), Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC), Department of Local Government and Disaster Management (DLGDM), Civil Society Organization Authority (CSOA), Local Government Officials.
6. **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Private Sector:** Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW), Nazhoen Lamtoen, Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD), Tarayana Foundation, Disabled People's Organization of Bhutan (DPOB), Draktsho, Royal Society for Senior Citizens (RSSC), Ability Bhutan Society (ABS), Phensem Parent Support Group, Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI).

## Follow-up information on the concluding observations (CEDAW/C/BTN/CO/10)

### Implementation progress relating to paragraph 15 of the concluding observations

7. The Government notes the Committee's concern regarding the Commission's mandates and functions following the 2022 civil service reform. Structural transformation and strategic alignment were undertaken to strengthen the Commission

and allow it to focus more effectively on its core mandates, namely, policy development, strategic oversight, monitoring & evaluation, and reporting on the status of gender equality. The Commission continues to retain its independence and authority as the apex decision making body related to protection and promotion of rights of women and children.

8. Further, the restructuring has strengthened the Commission's autonomy by focusing on its regulatory, monitoring and advisory functions and has also enabled the Commission to report independently on progress and gaps in gender equality and women's rights.

9. The government has strengthened its institutional response to Gender Based Violence through the establishment of the PEMA Secretariat, which is responsible for providing integrated services and support to survivors, working closely with the NCWC, the PEMA Secretariat ensures that services are effectively delivered and aligned with national gender equality objectives. To enhance outreach and timely service delivery, more than 25 Protection Officers, including Counsellor's and Mental Health Outreach Workers, have been appointed. The government allocates over Nu. 6.5 million annually to support GBV case management, reintegration, and rehabilitation services. An additional Nu.10 million was spent to establish an interim shelter (Pema Home) in the 2024–2025 fiscal year.

10. Planning Officers within sectoral agencies and local governments have now been appointed as GCFPs. This change is intended to strengthen the GCFPs' role in gender mainstreaming, policy advisory, and monitoring of gender equality interventions within their respective agencies. GCFPs will report directly to the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), reinforcing their independence and strategic alignment with national gender equality objectives.

11. The National Strategy and Framework of Action on the Elimination of Gender Based Violence, launched in 2025 by NCWC, aims to strengthen coordination among stakeholders for GBV prevention and response. The plan provides directions to foster strategic partnership and enhance resource mobilization capabilities of the NCWC, The PEMA Secretariat and other relevant agencies. This will strengthen GBV prevention and response interventions at the national and community level.

12. To further improve NCWC's regulatory and reporting functions, the Gender Equality Monitoring System is being revamped and strengthened. The upgraded system will allow the Commission to enhance monitoring of the implementation of gender equality results at the national level.

## **Implementation progress relating to paragraph 24 (b) of the concluding observations**

13. The Government recognizes the vital role of CSOs, particularly in the provision of essential services, and in advancing the rights and well-being of women and girls. As such, the 13th Five-Year Plan (FYP) 2024–2029, also commits to enhance the effectiveness, reach, and efficiency of programme implementation, especially at the community level.

14. To operationalize the 13th FYP objective on strengthening government and CSO collaboration, a guideline has been developed to establish a clear, transparent, and trust-based framework for partnership. The guideline will provide expanded space for CSOs to function more effectively and implement projects that complement government efforts. Further, this will allow the CSOs to engage in formal partnership with government, contribute to policy deliberations, access resources and capacity

building opportunities, and bridge gaps at the community level, particularly targeting vulnerable groups.

15. To address challenges faced by CSOs due to limited resources, the government is supporting CSOs to mobilize resources and institutional capacity building with a focus on CSOs working for women's empowerment and intersectionality issues. Some of the measures taken are:

(a) The Government has provided Nu. 300 million to CSOs to support initiatives targeting improved health and wellbeing, quality education, and an inclusive and comprehensive social protection system;

(b) The Government has provided USD 2.6 million for CSOs to empower persons with disabilities, senior citizens and the LGBT+ community. The Piloting Inclusive Services for Vulnerable Groups project supports establishing an integrated business centre for persons with disabilities and the LGBT+ community, and a club house for senior citizens. The project is also expected to enhance the capacity of Tarayana Foundation, Disabled People's Organization of Bhutan, Pride Bhutan, and the Royal Society for Senior Citizens to provide disability inclusive and gender responsive care, livelihood and recreational services;

(c) Through the Youth Engagement and Livelihood Programme (YELP), additional human resource support was provided to the Phensem Support Group<sup>1</sup> to recruit 17 youths in 2024;

(d) The Government continues to support the operation of shelter homes for women and children managed by the CSOs. Since fiscal year 2023/24, support to CSOs has increased to Nu. 3 million from Nu. 1 million;

(e) The Government through its "Strengthening Inclusive Access to Justice" Project supported institutional capacity development of CSOs to enhance resource mobilization, strategic partnership and sustainability based on a comprehensive capacity assessment. Additionally, capacities of relevant CSOs were also built on UN human rights mechanisms, including UPR and relevant human rights treaties;

(f) Since the last reporting, the RENEW has established an additional three Community Service Centres (CSC) in partnership with the government, extending the outreach of CSCs to 13 districts. The establishment of CSCs was facilitated by the Government through provision of land, structure and facilities. Support to CSCs also include capacity building and technical assistance;

(g) The government continues to build technical capacity of the relevant CSOs on GBV case management and specialized GBV services to enable timely and appropriate services in line with the established service standards.

16. Further, the Government has accepted the proposal by CSOs to raise the required endowment fund over a period of time.

17. Bhutan's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2023 marks a transformative step in Bhutan's commitment to inclusive development. The ratification of UNCRPD provides an enhanced legal basis for the CSOs to advocate for and implement a rights-based approach that addresses the needs of persons with disabilities. Additionally, the ratification enables CSOs to expand their work in intersectional programming, ensuring that the voices and needs of vulnerable women, including women with disabilities, are mainstreamed into national development processes.

<sup>1</sup> Phensem support group is a CSO focused on supporting parents, caregivers, and families of children with disabilities and special needs.

## **Implementation progress relating to paragraph 35 of the concluding observations**

18. The Government acknowledges the Committee's concern regarding the decline in women's representation in the National Assembly and the limited representation in the National Council, as well as the prevailing attitudes among voters that hinder women's political participation.

19. Recognizing women's limited leadership capacity and exposure as key impediments to their participation in elections, the Government, in partnership with CSOs, continues to focus on identification and capacity building of aspiring women candidates. Targeted leadership capacity building, coaching and mentoring for elected and aspiring women candidates are being carried out.

20. To strengthen and increase visibility of the Bhutan Women Parliamentary Caucus (BWPC), the Government continues to explore opportunities for networking with similar forums at the regional and international level. Towards this end, Bhutan hosted the Asian Women Parliamentarians' Caucus (AWPC), which brought together parliamentarians from 12 Asian countries. The forum served as a platform for sharing best practices, experiences, and challenges of women candidates, fostering regional collaboration and strengthening collective efforts to advance women's leadership across the region. The conference resulted in partnership between the AWPC and NCWC to build long-term capacity building of aspiring women candidates. Similarly, the Government hosted the South Asian Women's Conference 2025, which focused on increasing women's economic empowerment and decision making in rural South Asia. Opportunities such as the Konrad Adenauer School for Young Politicians (KASYP) program provide platforms for aspiring young women leaders to strengthen their political knowledge and leadership skills, fostering a new generation of responsive and accountable political actors in Asia. Similarly, regional forums like the Asian Women Parliamentarian Caucus (AWPC) create vital spaces for women politicians to network, share experiences, and advance women's political empowerment and leadership across the region.

21. To identify additional capacity needs and barriers to women's political participation, consultations among local government members, members of Parliament, government officials, and CSOs were held at the local government level in three districts. In addition, the Bhutan Democracy Dialogue saw 60 Local Government leaders, young people, members of Parliament, and government officials coming together to discuss challenges and opportunities for inclusive governance and women's leadership.

22. Following this, various capacity building initiatives were carried out at various levels focusing on building confidence, improving public speaking and media literacy skills, and building gender awareness such as:

(a) Gender capacity building for all elected female leaders was carried out to enhance their understanding on gender, gender responsive planning and budgeting, and women's leadership;

(b) Capacity building for more than 80 per cent of Parliament members on gender issues, women's political representation, understanding and addressing gender stereotypes, gender responsive legislature, and budget scrutiny;

(c) Gender capacity building for sector heads, local government leaders and community members of eight districts to create awareness on the importance of gender mainstreaming and women's leadership at the local level;

(d) More than 110 officials including Mayors, Chairperson of the District Council, Planning, Finance, and Block Administrative Officers were sensitized on planning, budgeting and implementing gender-responsive and socially inclusive development initiatives. The session facilitators<sup>2</sup> also reviewed the Local Government plans to mainstream women and child focused programmes.

23. The Inclusive Community Engagement Programme of the Department of Local Governance and Disaster Management (DLGDM) provides a platform for women at community level to build leadership capabilities. This is expected to increase the pool of aspiring women candidates for elections.

24. To change public perceptions of women's leadership, the Government, in collaboration with CSOs, continues to create awareness and carry out advocacy programmes. This includes capacity building for media professionals on gender sensitive reporting, advocacy campaigns promoting women's leadership and gender equality, and regular dialogues among the government, CSOs, and Parliamentarians. Events such as International Women's Day and SDG Week are used as additional platforms to highlight and celebrate women's contributions to decision making and leadership. Since 2023, these continuous awareness and advocacy efforts have reached more than 5,700 participants.

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<sup>2</sup> NCWC, MoF, OCASC, GEG, DLGDM.