

GENDER ANALYSIS (SUMMARY)¹

A. Key Issues

1. **Good progress.** Development approaches in Bhutan have resulted in major progress in areas critical to gender equality and the well-being of women. As a result of considerable investment in increasing access to education, fewer than 2% of children aged 6–16 were out of school in 2012, and participation by girls was virtually equal to that of boys from pre-primary levels to grade 10. Another major goal of the government has been electricity for all, and 95% of households were connected by August 2013. The clean energy thus supplied helps reduce the extra work burden of fuel wood collection and household tasks placed on women. A government focus on extending farm and rural roads has reduced the isolation of rural communities and increased access to schools, health care, extension services, and markets. Better services and easier access to them are among the factors that have contributed to a reduction in the maternal mortality rate from an estimated 430 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 180 in 2010. The Gender Inequality Index for 2012 shows that Bhutan compares well with countries in the region. It ranks as more equal than Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan (although less equal than Myanmar or Sri Lanka).

2. **Areas of concern.** Nonetheless, several areas of concern remain. They involve unequal benefits for women from socioeconomic and political changes and emerging or deepening gender gaps. Based on information available from mainstream data sources, some of these issues are summarized in paras. 3-9. A better understanding of these and other questions about women's equality in Bhutan will require more rigorous questioning of assumptions about gender relations. These assumptions include the widespread view that the gender equality situation is relatively favorable, that no overt discrimination exists, that inheritance patterns favor women, and that household welfare is shared equally by all members. More detailed analyses, aided by improved data that would allow insights into relations within households, may reveal other layers of discrimination not visible through mainstream data.

3. **Education gaps.** Gender gaps are evident in educational outcomes. While Bhutan has made remarkable progress in increasing access to education, the poor performance of girls in the last 2 years of basic education, particularly in math and science, reduces their chances of qualifying for publicly funded higher secondary schools (grades 11 and 12). Of the students continuing to higher secondary schools, 66% of boys but only 60% of girls are able to pass qualifying exams to enter public funded schools. As fewer private than public schools offer sciences, and less girls are able to enter public schools, this narrows the higher education and technical education options for girls. Participation by girls in education drops again at the tertiary level.

4. **Fewer jobs for women.** Higher unemployment rates for women—including women graduates—are of concern. Unemployment rates have been higher among women than men since 2009. The discrepancy is marked in urban areas, where the female unemployment rate has been more than double the male rate since 2009. Labor force survey data from 2012 show that unemployment rates are higher for women than men at all levels of education. They are highest for women with tertiary education—i.e., with some undergraduate study, a bachelor's or master's degree, or some form of certificate or diploma—and this is also where women fall the farthest behind men with similar education in employment rates.

¹ This summarizes the more detailed analysis presented in ADB. 2014. *Bhutan: Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors*. Manila, <http://www.adb.org/publications/bhutan-gender-equality-diagnostic-selected-sectors>, which provides full source citations for all the data referred to here, with dates for data as of May 2013.

5. **Locked into agriculture.** The much slower movement of women out of agriculture reflects constraints on opportunities. In rural areas, labor force participation rates are higher for women than men, and women outnumber men among the employed, particularly in agriculture. In 2012, agriculture and farming enterprises accounted for 86% of employed rural women but only 66% of employed men, because men had a larger share than women of rural employment in private business and government. Agriculture is a sector in which productivity and earnings remain low.

6. **Multiple work burdens.** Women's workloads are heavier than those of men, because family and community responsibilities are added to their economic activities. The time-use data collected in 2010 for Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index showed that women worked almost 1 hour more per day than men; women were therefore considered by the study to be overworked and time-deprived. Access to electricity has eased some of the household work generally done by women. Despite the progress in household access to electricity, firewood is still used by most rural households for cooking and heating. Studies have shown firewood collection, most of it done by women, adds up to as much as 1 person-month of work per year. Women carry an extra burden in terms of community labor and seem to do a disproportionate share of the unpaid, so-called voluntary work required for routine maintenance of farm roads.

7. **Adult female illiteracy.** Low literacy among adult women limits their participation in a modernizing society. Since few people in previous generations had the opportunities available in recent years to gain an education, adult illiteracy remains high, particularly among women. The gender gap is large. The 2005 census found that only 29% of rural women over the age of 15 are literate, compared with 58% of men; in urban areas, the literacy rate for women is 60%, compared with 80% for men. Those who remain illiterate have only a limited chance to participate in and benefit from a modernizing society. The lack of basic skills narrows their economic options and disqualifies them from becoming candidates in local and national elections.

8. **Domestic violence.** The high incidence and tolerance of domestic violence against women suggests that it is not sufficiently challenged. A 2010 national survey found that 24% of women aged 15–49 had experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives. An even more disturbing finding was the extent to which domestic violence was condoned by women, including younger women, educated women, and women in all regions. Among women aged 15–49, 68% believed that a man is justified in beating his wife or partner for any one of these reasons: neglect of children, going out without telling him, arguing with him, refusing sex, and/or burning food. This level of tolerance of domestic violence suggests a lack of exposure to contrary views from men, educational institutions, and/or political authorities.

9. **Few female public officials or civil servants.** Women are poorly represented among elected officials or in the civil service. In 2013 elections, women gained 3 of the 47 seats in the national assembly (down from 4 in 2008) and none of the 20 elected seats in the national council (down from 3 in 2008). The local elections in 2011 also resulted in a low number of women running for office and succeeding as candidates. Women are not well-represented in the civil service, particularly in the upper echelons that wield the most influence on policy. Women accounted for 36% of all civil servants but only 6% of those in the executive category in 2012. Neither are women well-represented in field postings to manage regulatory affairs, advise local governments, deliver extension services, or teach in schools. All these data suggest that the public has limited exposure to women in modern leadership roles.

B. Government Commitments

10. The major documents of state policy in Bhutan promote attention to equality of citizenship rights and enjoyment of life by all citizens, be they women or men. Bhutan's constitution makes a strong statement on the equal rights of all citizens, regardless of sex, and the Principles of State Policy commit the state to taking measures to eliminate discrimination against and exploitation of women. Bhutan 2020, the country's vision statement and long-term strategy document, outlines a vision of development based on the GNH concept, which emphasizes the ability of all to realize their potential; equitable sharing of the benefits of development; and opportunities for all to share in decisions that affect their lives, livelihoods and families.² The strategy document implies that this vision cannot be attained without ensuring that women have equitable access to self-realization, development benefits, and participation in decision making.

11. The government's Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) has played an important role in stimulating and coordinating action by sector ministries in support of gender equality. It has also issued a protocol for policy formulation that directs all policy proponents to mainstream gender issues in policy preparation. Compliance is monitored through a GNH policy screening tool, which includes gender impacts as one of the variables to be scored under the governance theme, and a policy protocol report, which sets out four points to be addressed in the gender analysis of policy alternatives and/or implications. The 11th five-year plan for 2013–2018 strongly directs all ministries and agencies that are developing sector plans to address gender gaps and to do this on the basis of gender analysis and evidence. In addition, a strategy to implement a gender-responsive planning and budgeting approach is being explored as a means of strengthening policy and program development.

12. The GNHC and the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), in consultation with gender focal points in government and other stakeholders, prepared the National Plan of Action for Gender (NPAG) in 2008.³ The NPAG provides analysis and sets out an action plan in seven critical areas, including good governance, economic development and employment, education and training, and prejudices and stereotypes. The NPAG was intended to complement the 10th five-year plan and had the same term, 2008–2013. By the end of this period, actions identified in several of the areas had not yet been implemented. However, rather than updating the NPAG as a parallel document to the 11th five-year plan, the NCWC has collaborated with the gender focal point network to select and prioritize the remaining NPAG-identified actions for inclusion in the NCWC strategic plan. Attention to a focused set of issues by the NCWC will complement the emphasis to be put on mainstreaming throughout other sectors, which is the approach mandated by the GNHC in the 11th plan.

C. ADB Experience in Addressing Gender Equality in Bhutan

13. The country partnership strategy (CPS) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for 2006–2010 aimed to expand livelihood opportunities through support for policy development and institutional capacity. It also sought to support NCWC initiatives and NPAG implementation through policy dialogue and advocacy. The CPS committed ADB to ensuring attention to women's views and needs in the design of its public sector loans. It cited a Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR)-funded technical assistance (TA) grant⁴ for the resulting benefits to

² Government of Bhutan. 1999. *Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness*. Thimphu.

³ Government of Bhutan. 2008. *National Plan of Action for Gender 2008–2013*. Thimphu.

⁴ ADB. 2005. JFPR Grant: *Improving the Well-Being of Road Workers*. Manila.

women in the form of improved school attendance and health outcomes, and increased income for rural women. Another JFPR-funded TA grant focused on enhancing women's economic empowerment.⁵ Finally, the CPS noted several areas of proposed activities in which outcomes would benefit women—transport systems, rural electrification, private sector development, and microfinance. The interim CPS, 2012–2013 called for continued support to the NCWC to facilitate gender mainstreaming across sectors. This was to be pursued through a JFPR grant.

14. ADB's program in Bhutan includes a large proportion of TA and grant-funded activities and relatively few loans. The only loan approved after 2006 with a gender action plan was the Urban Infrastructure Project.⁶ ADB contributions to addressing gender issues during the previous CPS period have been made mainly through the two JFPR-funded projects—one for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment, the other to improve the well-being of road workers (para. 13)—and through the Bhutan component of a regional JFPR-funded TA grant concerned with access to clean and renewable energy.⁷

15. Opportunities to support gender equality also arise in TA initiatives for policy and capacity development, such as in the support provided for policy development for the micro, small, medium-sized enterprise sector,⁸ and capacity development for the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (footnote 5). This also applies to ADB support for the production of knowledge products and services. An example was ADB assistance to conduct the Bhutan Living Standards Survey 2012 and develop the Bhutan Transport 2040 Strategic Vision. This is an area where the scope for improvement in the quality of analysis and support is great.

D. ADB's Gender Strategy for Bhutan

16. Under the CPS, 2014–2018, ADB will pursue the following strategies to enhance women's empowerment and gender equality:

- (i) It will continue providing support to the NCWC to strengthen its capacity. This will include helping build the capacity of the gender focal point network to implement the 11th five-year plan's gender mainstreaming initiatives and targets.
- (ii) It will use the Bhutan Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors (footnote 1) as the primary tool in creating awareness, advocacy, and enhancing visibility of the NCWC and addressing gender issues at all levels of the government and in the private sector.
- (iii) ADB will make strategic use of JFPR grants to develop understanding of gender equality issues and potential approaches in key sectors.
- (iv) It will require that all TA projects for capacity development, policy and/or regulatory development, and the development of knowledge products and services identify relevant gender equality issues at the proposal stage and allocate resources to ensure they are addressed.
- (v) It will ensure that the ADB team preparing loans includes a qualified gender equality expert and provides a credible gender analysis and a feasible gender action plan.
- (vi) ADB will monitor implementation of all of these strategies and analyze the results of this monitoring and the implications of the results. It will look at what changed for women and in the state of gender equality as a result of the intervention, what factors contributed to achievements or a lack thereof, and what conclusions or recommendations could be made to government and/or ADB on the basis of this experience and these findings.

⁵ ADB. 2011. JFPR Grant: *Advancing Economic Opportunities of Women and Girls*. Manila.

⁶ ADB. 2011. *Urban Infrastructure Project*. Manila.

⁷ ADB. 2011. JFPR Grant: *Improving Gender-Inclusive Access to Clean and Renewable Energy in Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka*. Manila.

⁸ ADB. 2007. *Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprise Sector Development Program*. Manila.