

Questionnaire

Part One

Overview of trends in achieving gender equality and women's advancement

Give a brief analytical overview (3 to 6 pages) of trends in your country in implementing the Platform for Action. This overview or broad picture should, for example, describe the country's policy with regard to achieving the goal of equality between women and men and should be linked to your national action plan or other plans or strategies.

In many respects, the status of women in Bhutan is different from that of other countries. Bhutanese society is strongly influenced by the Buddhist precepts of compassion to all sentient beings, and the practice of these has extended well into the treatment of the sexes.

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the King of Bhutan, has been the fountain-head of philosophy, concepts and policies of the national development for nearly three decades. It has always been His conviction that the ultimate purpose of government is to promote the happiness of the people. It was this belief that inspired him to state that 'Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product' whereby happiness takes precedence over economic prosperity in our national development process. Happiness forms the basis for the assessment of well being of the society.

Therefore, as reported in our report presented for the Beijing conference in May 1995 and also in the other meetings that followed, there is no discrimination between men and women in Bhutan. Bhutanese women enjoy equal rights and opportunity in every facet of life. Hence, there have been no specific project or activity undertaken in Bhutan in accordance with the Beijing Platform of Action because they were either not necessary or were already incorporated as part of the country's over-all sectoral development policies as mentioned below.

1. During the 7th Plan (1992-1997) and even during the ongoing 8th Plan (1997-2002), more than 21 % of the national budget have been allocated to the social sector. The enhancement and expansion of facilities under the social sectors i.e education, health, water and sanitation goes towards further expanding the coverage of these facilities for the Bhutanese population. Accordingly, the enrollment rates and the health status for women and the girl child are expected to be enhanced.
2. Quality of education is being enhanced by improving the education facilities (more learning resources, reviewing the curriculum) and quality of teachers with the provision of teaching allowances from July 1998, and more training facilities.

Drop-out rates for both girls and boys are expected to decline.

3. The admission formalities for female candidates in the technical institutions are relaxed to maintain a ratio of 1:4 to male trainees thereby diversifying the career opportunities for women.
4. Non-formal Education programmes still form important components of education programmes in Bhutan. 70% of the programme beneficiaries are women.
5. The 8th Plan objective to increase improved water supplies to 80 % and 100% of the rural and urban households, respectively, by establishing water supply systems with the help of the consumers will greatly benefit all sections of the population.
6. Participation of women in decision making fora such as community meetings is still over 70 %, and women representatives elected by the people to the National Assembly (Legislation Body) were 3 women 1995, increased to 9 in 1999. This clearly illustrates the fact that, both men and women have equal freedom and opportunity to participate in development at all levels in the government.
7. A Youth Guidance and Career Counselling Unit has been established in the Education Division. Female teachers and matrons will counsel girls against dropping out of schools, girls will be informed of career choices, and to be more conscious of health care, etc.
8. The introduction of group lending and saving schemes in the rural areas by the Bhutan Development Financial Corporation, the only financial institution providing rural/agricultural credit, will bring about a wider participation by the rural population, especially the women. These schemes are expected to provide the rural population with wider avenues and opportunities for income generation.
9. Government policy to reduce population growth to 2.56% by the end of 8th Plan, achieve the replacement level by year 2012 and bring the population growth rate to 1.3 % by year 2017 through such measures as awareness raising, enhancing supply/access to contraceptives, strengthening existing Mother & Child Health(MCH) care, special programme for adolescents, introduction of family planning measure, greater community participation, legal measures, etc. all go towards improving the quality of life and health status of the population in general and women in particular.
10. Abject poverty is not a problem in Bhutan since all the socio-economic development policies have been directed towards the reduction of its incidence. However, the RGOB will continue to take up activities related to income generating schemes especially benefiting the poorer section of the population.

11. The Marriage Act of 1980 was amended during the 74th session of the National Assembly in 1996:
- Compensation and separation allowances, to be paid by any spouse who is seeking a divorce or defaulters in an adultery case, is now based on the daily wage rates ranging between three to seven months as opposed to the earlier amounts ranging between just Nu. 500 (about US \$ 10) to Nu. 1500.
 - Where a married couple has been granted a divorce, custody of the child under nine years of age is given to the mother. The father has to pay child allowance according to a mutually settled agreement. In the absence of any such agreement, the father shall pay a sum in cash amounting to 20% of his net monthly income (should not exceed 40% of his income) till the child attains eighteen years of age.
 - If a suit has been filed in case of a unmarried women having been made pregnant and if the suit succeeds, the woman is entitled to receive from the person committing the offence an amount equal to ten months of his daily wages towards the cost of her medical treatment.
 - The father of a child born out of wedlock shall also pay child support according to a mutually settled agreement. In the absence of any such agreement, the father shall pay a sum in cash amounting to 20% of his net monthly income (should not exceed 40% of his income) till the child attains eighteen years of age. (Note : Exchange rates - Nu.43 = US \$1)
12. Marriageable age for women has been raised from 16 to 18 considering women's health and family planning.
13. The section for the offence of Rape under the Marriage Act has also been amended. Rape has now been categorised under - rape for married person, rape of a minor, gang rape, etc. A person guilty of the offence of rape have to pay compensations to the victims ranging from Nu.9125 to Nu.18250 (*Thrimthue* of Nu.25 for one or more years) in addition to medical expenses. The person committing the offence also have to face imprisonment ranging from a duration of one year to a lifetime depending on the type of rape and the age and the marital status of the victim.
14. While the women's issues are integrated into the sectoral programmes of the government, National Womens Association of Bhutan, a NGO supplements the government's effort to ensure further advancement of women. Some of the following programmes implemented are in accordance with the Beijing Platform

for Action.

- a. Although Bhutan does not have the problem of abject poverty, National Women Association of Bhutan(NWAB) provides income generating avenue to rural women to ease their economic burden, such as, weaving, handicrafts production and other home-based small productive enterprises.
 - b. NWAB provides skilled labour training to women in weaving, tailoring and knitting.
 - c. NWAB operates rural saving and credit scheme in the 6 eastern districts of the country which enables the women to have access to credit and help inculcate the habit of savings among women.
15. Under the Project Skills Development Programme, Ministry of Trade and Industry, funded by Helvetas, tailoring, basic hair cutting, basic plumbing, electrical wiring etc. were taken up. Out of 229 people trained about 67 % of the beneficiaries were women.

Part Two

Financial and Institution measures

2. Discuss how equality and women's advancement are addressed in the national budget. This could include an indication of the percentage of the overall budget that is allocated for women-specific policies/programmes, and any increases/decreases since 1995. What percentage of all this allocation comes from international or bilateral donors? Describe efforts to monitor budgetary allocations related to achieving gender equality and advancement of women.

As stated in question one, part one, gender discrimination is not an issue in Bhutan. There is no separate national machinery for the advancement of women. It has been the aim of the RGOB to incorporate and promote all measures relating to women in development within all sector projects and programmes in their respective ministries and departments. Therefore, there is no national budget allocated specifically for women's advancement. However, more than 21% of the national budget have been allocated to the social sector and around 18% to the Ministry of Agriculture.

- 3.a. Discuss structures and mechanisms that have been put in place to institutionalize follow-up to, and implementation of the Platform for Action. Describe whether similar mechanisms have been established for follow-up to other conference, such as the World Summit for Social Development or the Vienna World Conference on

Human Rights.

No mechanism has been established because the need for it was not felt. Further, it was felt that it would capitalise on the existing mainstream institutions and the government's role of sustainable human development.

- b. Describe the arrangements that have been made to coordinate the various follow-up efforts to global conferences.

Since no gender specific programmes were separated from the national plans and programmes the Royal Government of Bhutan's plans and programmes follow-up is automatically the effort towards all well being of the society with or without conventions.

- c. Describe the role of non-governmental organizations(NGOs) in planning the follow-up activities. Do members of NGOs participate formally in the mechanisms established to follow-up the Beijing Conference?

In keeping with the spirit of the United Nations General Assembly resolution declaring a decade (1976-1985) to the dedication of women, a women's association was formally established in April 1981 under the resolution of the 53rd Session of the "Tshogdu" the national legislature. The National Women's Association of Bhutan (NWAB) is the only non-governmental organization in Bhutan working to enhance the role of women at all levels of the development process. The objectives of the NWAB are:

- to encourage women to take part in the implementation of socio-economic development programmes and in all other nation-building activities;
- to improve the socio-economic status of women, especially rural women;
- to create awareness among women of the importance of proper maternal and child care, nutrition, clean drinking water, hygiene, sanitation etc. in order to improve the general health of the people.

The under mentioned activities carried out by the NWAB are in line with the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action.

- provide income generating avenues to rural women to ease their economic burden, such as weaving, handicrafts production and other home-based small productive enterprises.
- operates rural savings and credit scheme in the six eastern districts of the

country which enables the women to have access to credit and help inculcate the habit of savings among women.

- promoted female literacy by conducting non-formal education programmes to the girls who attend the weaving classes.
- provides skills training to women in weaving, tailoring and knitting.
- through its nationwide district level associations, NWAB ensure women's participation in the development planning process of the government.

Part Three

A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices

4. In relation to each of the twelve critical areas of concern, describe best practices and innovative actions taken by the government or other actors (NGOs), civil society, the private sectors to achieve the objectives in each critical area of concern in the Platform for Action. Your response should refer to the country's national action plan, and could include example of legal measures, reforms, media campaigns, pilot programmes or projects. Please cite, in particular, any targets which were set in the governments's national action plan or other relevant plans, and indicate how far these were met. (For example, a target may have been to appoint more women to the cabinet. To what extent was it achieved?)

The format enclosed to answer the twelve critical areas are not used as most of the women programmes are integrated in the national plans and programmes, therefore, it is difficult to segregate women's programmes from the national plans. The overall national objectives of the country is *Sustainability and Self-reliance*. However, some successful areas are mentioned below.

1. Women in economy

Under the project "Skill Development Programme" funded by Helvetas, targeted to develop skilled labour to enable them to create job opportunities for self-employment, almost 67 % of the beneficiaries were women. The programme composed of Tailoring and Designing, Basic Hair Cutting, Basic Plumbing, Basic Japanese Cuisine Training, Electrical House Wiring and Basic Japanese Cooking.

2. Education and training of women

Education is free and there is no discrimination on the basis of gender. The enrolment of girls improved remarkably due to strong effort from the government.

Besides, resource constraint the royal government increased schools and hostel facilities which enabled girls enrolment. By 1993, the enrolment in the primary level to high schools for girls had increased to 68% since 1984. As of April 1997, the percentage of primary-schools net enrolment for girls was 70% and for boys 77%. At the secondary school level, the net enrolment for girls was 37% and for boys 44%.

A review of the enrolment pattern for the technical and vocational institutions yields both interesting and encouraging results. A polytechnic offering 3 year diploma courses in civil, electrical and mechanical engineering had all male enrolment of 148 in 1984. As of April 1997, female students make up 13% of the total enrolment. Similarly, at the technical school, offering 3 ½ years certificate courses in motor and general mechanics, electrical, draughtsmen and building, females began to enter only after 1984 and as of April 1997, female enrolment was 24% of the total enrolment.

In the natural resource section, each of the disciplines in agriculture, livestock and forestry have developed their own institute to train locally. Today, at this institute where integrated programmes for all three services were provided, at least 11% of the 143 students were girls. At the Bhutan Forestry Institute, established in 1971 never had a history of recruiting female candidate as the job is considered heavy duty involving a lot of field work. In 1999 at least 12 are girls out of 32 students. Till date 39 girls graduated from this institute.

The health sector is one area where more girls are attracted to build their careers. The Royal Institute of Health Science conducts training programmes for general midwives, auxiliary nurse midwives, health assistants, basic health workers, assistant nurse and technicians. In 1997, the female students accounted for at least 53% of the institute's enrolment.

In terms of training, there is no gender preference. Training are based on needs of the organizations but not on the gender preference.

3. **Women and Health**

The Royal Government of Bhutan has accorded high priority to the programmes for maternal and child health. Today the Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning services are delivered through a network of 28 hospitals, 145 Basic Health Units, Community Health Programmes and 454 Outreach Clinics. Today, for every 100 pregnant women, 51% are attending the clinics with an average number of visits of 2.3. At the BHUs, simple curative services are also provided besides health education on nutrition and hygiene, family planning counselling and immunisation. The percentage of female health workers in the formal sector is

around 40%. The objectives of the Reproductive Health Program is to:

- increase the percentage of pregnant women availing antenatal services from 51 to 80%.
- raise the percentage of pregnant women with access to safe delivery to 40%.
- decrease the number of early marriage and teenage pregnancies.
- Reduce maternal mortality rate from 3.8 to 1.5.

Further, in addition to the health workers, the village health workers was formally established in 1993 to enhance health facilities and also improve women's awareness of issues related to basic health, nutrition and family planning. In this context the involvement of women voluntary health workers in providing health services is a priority area of intervention. At present, available statistics show that although in a few districts women health workers exceed 60% of the total, overall they only constitute around 22%.

4. **Women in power and decision-making**

The National Assembly (Legislation Body) has 150 members of whom 105 are Chhimis (representative of the people). Till date, there are 9 women members representing the people in the decision making body. Women make up 17% of the civil servant.

5. **Violence against women**

Bhutanese society in general condemns violence in any form. According to Bhutanese law, assault of any kind is illegal and the victim is protected. All assault and violence cases are usually first reported to the police then refers the victim for medical examination to evaluate the extent of injury and to receive appropriate treatment. In case of severe injury the victim can directly go to the hospital and later file the case to the police. If the cases could not settle by the police, later it is referred to the High Court. There are no separate files or records specific for violence against women.

Amendment for the offence of rape under the marriage act is mentioned in question one, part one, for the protection of women.

B. **Obstacles encountered**

5. What obstacles were encountered and what lessons were learned in implementing policies and other measures in each critical area of concern? (For example, despite new legislation to limit traditional practices harmful to the health of women and

girls, these practices continued, showing that an education campaign was also needed to bring change in behaviour, or customary law was adapted to fit modern legislation when it was learned that women were more discriminated by customary laws than men).

The major difficulties faced in implementing the plans and programmes are due to difficult terrain and low female literacy especially in the rural areas. The low female literacy is due to the lack of modern education infrastructure in the country few decades ago. The Bhutanese students were sent to neighbouring hills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong in India. The long journey, often beset with hardships and inconvenience, caused many parents to avoid sending, especially the daughters far away to another country even though the education was provided free. Within a period of three and half decades, the government has been able to create a modern education system from the primary to the tertiary level. Enrolment rate at all levels has grown at an impressive rate over the years. Today, proportion of girls among the primary level students is 44%.

C. Commitments to further action and initiatives

6. Many governments made commitments to action at the Beijing Conference. Describe steps taken by your government to fulfill any specific commitments it made at Beijing.

Refer earlier responses w.r.t. various sectors

7. List any new commitments in each of the twelve critical areas of concern which your government has made since Beijing and how these are being implemented, including any new targets which have been set and the time frame for meeting them. (For example, to increase resource allocations to primary education and to local governments to conduct an awareness campaign among parents on the importance of sending girls to school; to review the regulations governing land rights for women and men; to increase by 50 % the number of police officers trained to handle domestic violence cases and cases of rape).

Refer earlier responses.

8. List any further actions and initiatives which your government believes should or could be taken to fully implement the Platform for Action beyond the year 2000. Among these, identify which ones your government intends to take and when.
9. Briefly describe your vision for women's advancement and equality for women in the new millennium.

(Vision for women of the globe)

In the next millennium the Bhutanese women vision that

- There will be 1:1 ratio of male and female population in the world. We cannot say that the world will be a female dominant but women will be playing equal role at all levels.
- Women will no longer be at home, looking after the household work and children but share equal responsibility both at home and in the office.
- Women will be participating with equal strength in the decision making position.
- The age old customs and traditions of suppressing women prevalent in other countries will not be in practice anymore.