



THE GLOBAL GOALS

# United Nations Country Results Report 2023

# BHUTAN



UNITED NATIONS  
BHUTAN

●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●  
Leaving No One Behind

# UN Country Team

## IN BHUTAN

On 21 September 1971, the Kingdom of Bhutan became the 128th member to the United Nations, and the Office of the United Nations in Bhutan was established in early 1974. Since then, the country has hosted many UN agencies, funds, and programmes, that together support the Royal Government in delivering services regarding national development needs and improvements to the socio-economic conditions of the people of Bhutan. UN Bhutan currently comprises of seven resident agencies and 24 non-resident agencies.

The 24 United Nations non-resident agencies are foundational to the work of the UN in Bhutan. Working through the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, the NRAs support the UNCT by contributing technical expertise to the initiatives under the United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework.

The UNCT is committed to the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework (UNSDPF) 2019 – 2023, in partnership with the Royal Government of Bhutan, with the overall goal to support a just, harmonious, and sustainable society where no one is left behind.

## Resident Agencies



World Health Organization

## Non-Resident Agencies



UNITED NATIONS  
TECHNOLOGY BANK  
FOR LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES



United Nations  
Human Rights  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



INTERNATIONAL  
ORGANIZATION  
FOR MIGRATION  
IOM-OIM  
THE UNITED NATIONS MIGRATION AGENCY

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# FOREWORD

## BY THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR



*Kuzu Zangpo La.*

On behalf of the United Nations in Bhutan, I am proud to present the Annual Results Report of the United Nations in Bhutan for 2023. In this report, we reflect on our collective efforts for people, planet and prosperity.

Over the past year, the United Nations has worked closely with the Royal Government of Bhutan and other key stakeholders to support the country's journey towards achieving its 2030 aspirations, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Bhutan's national development plans. In a context marked by dynamic shifts and emerging challenges, our collaboration has been guided by a shared commitment to 'leave no one behind' and build a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable future for all Bhutanese.

Our support has been anchored in aligning our initiatives with the national priorities and development frameworks of Bhutan, including the 12th Five-Year Plan and the United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework (UNSDPF).

Through strategic partnerships and innovative approaches, we have worked across multiple sectors from education and health to climate resilience and economic empowerment to address the complex and interconnected challenges facing Bhutan.

I am pleased to acknowledge the unwavering commitment and collaboration of the Royal Government, whose leadership and partnership have been instrumental in driving progress and achieving substantial results. Together, we have leveraged each other's strengths, expertise, and resources to implement initiatives that have positively impacted the lives of Bhutanese people across the country.

Furthermore, I extend my sincere appreciation to our diverse range of partners, including civil society organizations, the private sector, development partners, and the people of Bhutan whose engagement and contributions have enriched our collective efforts and enhanced the effectiveness and sustainability of our work in Bhutan.

As we reflect on the achievements highlighted in this report, the United Nations remains committed to deepening our partnership with the Royal Government and all stakeholders to build on our achievements, address remaining challenges, and accelerate progress towards the shared vision of a prosperous, equitable, and sustainable Bhutan.

Together, we will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that no one is left behind and that the Bhutanese development journey leaves a legacy for future generations to come.

Thank you and *Tashi Delek.*

**Karla Robin Hershey**  
*Resident Coordinator*  
*United Nations Bhutan*





# CHAPTER 1

## Key developments in the country and regional context

In 2023, Bhutan faced several challenges and opportunities, deeply connected with its development trajectory and regional dynamics. Drawing from updates of the UN Common Country Analysis (CCA), several key dimensions have shaped the country's development context, shedding light on critical trends and emerging issues.

For Bhutan, the journey towards economic prosperity has been marked by both resilience and vulnerability. Despite past successes, the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a significant blow to its economy, exacerbating existing challenges such as high economic vulnerability and a narrow economic base. Efforts to diversify and strengthen the private sector face hurdles, compounded by issues like youth unemployment and migration. The tourism sector, a vital contributor to the economy of Bhutan, continues to grapple with uncertainties, necessitating adaptive strategies amidst changing legislative landscapes.

While strides have been made in social services, persistent challenges linger regarding the quality and inclusivity of essential services, particularly in rural areas. Issues like malnutrition, low learning outcomes, and gender inequality persist, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

Vulnerable groups, including women, children, marginalized and persons with disabilities, face multifaceted challenges exacerbated by fragmented policy implementation and insufficient data. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed critical gaps in protection systems, underscoring the imperative for robust social safety nets and inclusive approaches.

The rich biodiversity of Bhutan and its commitment to conservation face mounting pressures from impact of climate change and disasters. As global temperatures rise, Bhutan grapples with the implications for its hydropower-dependent economy and fragile ecosystems. Balancing conservation with development imperatives poses a formidable challenge, compounded by rapid urbanization and energy security concerns. Addressing these challenges requires holistic approaches that prioritize resilience-building and sustainable resource management.

Enhancing the country's resilience hinges on addressing key areas such as disaster risk reduction and governance capacity. Vulnerability to climate-induced disasters necessitates comprehensive strategies, including improved risk assessment and early warning systems. Strengthening governance institutions and promoting citizen engagement are vital for sustaining democratic progress and delivering essential services. Additionally, mobilizing financing for sustainable development remains a pressing concern, requiring innovative approaches and partnerships to realize the Bhutanese vision for inclusive and green growth.

In conclusion, the developmental journey of Bhutan embodies a quest for balance—between economic progress and environmental stewardship, between social inclusion and resilience, and between tradition and innovation. As the country navigates the complexities of a rapidly changing world, collaborative efforts, guided by the principles of Gross National Happiness and the SDGs, will be paramount in shaping a sustainable and equitable future for all Bhutanese.



**Vulnerable groups, including women, children, marginalized and persons with disabilities, face multifaceted challenges**



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## CHAPTER 2

# UN development system support to national development priorities through the Cooperation Framework

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# 2.1. Overview of Cooperation Framework Results



In 2023, United Nations support to Bhutan aimed at boosting data management and governance for inclusive development, notably through the creation of the Bhutan Statistical Database System (BSDS), a unified platform facilitating evidence-based decision-making by providing easy access to sector data. A key achievement includes the integration of a 72-hour rapid assessment system improved disaster preparedness for the Royal Government, facilitating swift impact assessment and response. UN collaboration with frontline agencies strengthened emergency coordination, telecommunications, and preparedness, bolstering the nation's readiness for future disasters. The United Nations reinforced field-based preparedness by boosting the Royal Government's capacity, particularly at the food security desk, to improve the humanitarian supply chain for essential resources like food and water, as well as setting up emergency shelters.

The United Nations also supported in developing thematic reports on youth dynamics and sustainable population development, offering vital insights for policy-making and strengthening data governance. Yet, challenges persist in implementing recommendations, addressing disparities, and ensuring representation of marginalized groups in policy formulation.

The United Nations support also focused ensuring equitable access to quality social services for vulnerable populations in Bhutan, addressing child protection, education, health, nutrition, and hygiene. Despite progress, achieving equitable access, especially in remote areas, remains challenging. These interventions align with Bhutan's national development priorities, fostering inclusive development and laying the groundwork for sustainable progress. Leveraging existing achievements and partnerships can further propel Bhutan towards its development goals, ensuring no one is left behind.

Alongside key partners, the United Nations supported the Royal Government in enhancing entrepreneurship and digital inclusion in Bhutan. This involved workshops for 402 youth entrepreneurs, digital skills training for 166 MSMEs, and intensive online entrepreneurship training for 36 young entrepreneurs through the Springboard Plus 2023 Programme.

The United Nations also supported a comprehensive gender equality assessment in Bhutan's public sector, collaborating to develop a Gender Action Plan addressing identified gaps. These initiatives aimed to reduce gender disparities and promote inclusive governance. Additionally, parliamentarians received training on social policy, enhancing skills in policy formulation, enactment, and implementation, contributing to a child-friendly governance framework.

In 2023, the United Nations supported Bhutan in advancing a sustainable, resilient, and carbon-neutral development path, focusing on climate actions and disaster risk reduction. Achievements included establishing climate-informed biological corridors, empowering over 6,500 farmers, especially women, in sustainable forest management, and climate-proofing irrigation channels and roads. Additionally, initiatives promoting sustainable resource management and climate-resilient practices directly benefited over 700 individuals, alongside equipping rural development centers with farming technology. This reflects the UN's holistic approach to sustainable development, encompassing climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, inclusive growth, and addressing pandemics like COVID-19.



# Outcome 1: Data and Policy

By 2023, there is enhanced access to and use of reliable and timely data for inclusive and evidence-based policy and decision-making.

In 2023, the United Nations provided support to Bhutan, bolstering its data management capacity and governance frameworks to foster inclusive development. A pivotal undertaking in this endeavor was the establishment of the Bhutan Statistical Database System (BSDS), aimed at facilitating data sharing, compilation, integration, and maintenance nationwide.

The BSDS serves the dual purpose of streamlining administrative data collection, validation, and dissemination from local (gewog) to national levels while ensuring easy access to high-quality data through a unified platform. Currently, it functions as a collaborative hub for government agencies and other data users comprising of five sectors—gewog profile, agriculture, livestock, forestry, and education. Other sectors outlined in the draft 13th Five-Year Plan (FYP) will be incorporated into the system.




The United Nations also supported the development of a 72-hour rapid assessment approach supplementing the Disaster Management Information System (DMIS) to enhance disaster preparedness and response capabilities.


Additionally, the development of thematic reports, such as those focusing on young people's dynamics and sustainable population development, provided critical insights to inform policies and decision-making processes. The support provided has enabled the National Statistical Bureau (NSB) with enhanced capacity to collect, analyze, and disseminate data.




## 1 Establishment of BSDS



Streamlining data collection from local to national levels.




Serving as a collaborative hub for data users.




Incorporating various sectors according to the 13th FYP.

## 2 Integration of a 72-hour Assessment in DMIS



72 - hours Assessment




Enhancing disaster preparedness and management

## 3 Development of Thematic Reports




Informing policies with insights on youth dynamics and sustainable population development.

## 4 Enhanced NSB Capacity



Collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data.

## 5 Statistical Bill Endorsement



Streamlining the national statistical system.

## 6 Challenges and Efforts



Translating recommendations into policies.



Addressing disparities and ensuring representation of marginalized groups.

A key outcome of UN support to data and policy was the endorsement of the proposal to develop a statistical bill by the NSB, marking a commitment to streamline the national statistical system. Efforts to resubmit the bill in 2023 reflect ongoing initiatives to enhance data governance and management in the country. However, efforts should focus on moving beyond national averages to capture disparities and inequalities within the population, particularly among vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities. Further emphasis on disaggregated data collection and analysis is necessary to ensure that marginalized groups are adequately represented in policy formulation and implementation processes.

While several reports were developed to inform policies, challenges may arise in translating recommendations into actionable policies and programs on the ground. Delays in the endorsement of the statistical bill by relevant authorities may hinder efforts to strengthen the national statistical system and improve data governance.

While challenges persist, and concerted efforts are required to address disparities, strengthen institutional capacities, and ensure building on existing achievements and fostering partnerships with stakeholders.

**The training fits into a broader effort by the United Nations and the Royal Government to build the country’s capacity in using drones for emergency preparedness and response.**



## DRONES: A Game-changer for Emergency & Response

It’s 8:26 am in Paro, west of Bhutan’s capital Thimphu. A group of men and women attending a workshop are enjoying a light moment over morning tea and breakfast when their phones buzz and beep together.

“ALERT ALERT ALERT,” reads the message, which includes an aerial photo of a community delineated in red. “An earthquake has hit this area marked in red, with reports of survivors, damaged buildings, and critical infrastructure throughout. There is a village outlined, we need it to be mapped and analyzed.”

The message provides further information on an emergency operations meeting, drone use clearance from the authorities, and instructions to always fly the drone within the visual line of sight.

By the time the areas have been scanned and mapped by drones, damage assessed, and victims rescued, it’s close to 4 pm.

For the 18 frontline and emergency responders, the simulation exercise, a surprise organized by their trainers from United Nations Drones and Bhutan Flying Labs, ended a five-day training of Bhutan government officials, coming from agencies ranging from the police and army to hydrology and mining.





“Having a bird’s-eye view can help humanitarians get a better grasp of the whole picture. Drones can provide rapid post-disaster assessments and map out large areas accurately, saving both time and improving emergency response efficiency,” says Elizabeth Bourke, a drone expert.

Bhutan counts among 80 countries worldwide where the United Nations offer a raft of different drone-oriented activities — from prepositioning equipment in high disaster-risk countries and strengthening local emergency preparedness efforts through training and workshops, to supporting emergency responses when disaster hits.

In Bhutan, the United Nations drone training supports government efforts increase drone use in monitoring glacial lakes, mapping forest fires, and conducting search-and-rescue and disaster-impact analysis. Among other areas, the training focuses on areas like thematic applications of drones, manual flights, mission planning and data processing — all using disaster simulation exercises involving drones.

Participants receive hours of drone flying time each day to build their manual skills and learn to analyze drone images to speed up emergency response. This knowledge helps responders to react better in the aftermath of a disaster, where access to information is critical to allocate resources and reach people in need.

For Major Tshering Namgyal from the Royal Bhutan Police, leveraging drone technology is important for Bhutan since it costs little to operate and builds capacity in dealing with difficult weather conditions and emergency search-and-rescue missions.

“We also learnt about the evolution of drones, data acquisition, analysis and use, and regulations within the country and outside,” he adds.

“Hopefully this shared experience will allow the stakeholders, who are participants of the workshop, to stay in touch and work towards a safe, locally led, enabling future,” says Bourke.

# Outcome 2: Essential Social Services

**By 2023, vulnerable and unreached people access and receive quality health, nutrition, protection, education, water, sanitation, and hygiene services.**

The United Nations continued its support to Bhutan to enhance equitable access to quality social services for vulnerable and unreached populations in 2023. Through various interventions, the United Nations aimed to address key issues related to child protection, education, health, nutrition, and hygiene.

In 2023, the Royal Government established the Pema Center Secretariat, under Royal Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen- a coordinated multisectoral approach to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS). The United Nations was one of the key partners in the establishment of the organization.

United Nations support resulted in the provision of mental, physical, and psychosocial health services to over 54,506 children, along with essential support to parents and caregivers. Around 616 children directly benefited



616 children directly benefited from child protective services, while efforts to combat intimate partner violence and sexual violence were strengthened through services available in primary health centers, additionally high-level sensitization workshops engaged parliamentarians and agencies representatives on child rights issues.

The United Nations played a significant role in expanding inclusive, quality, and gender-responsive learning opportunities. Efforts included establishing two additional community-based Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centers, reaching 44 children, alongside alternative models. Furthermore, an inclusive ECCD center was established as a



## Social services provided :



**Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)**



**Education**



**Child Well-being and Protection**



**Health and Nutrition**



**Empowerment and Advocacy**




**WASH Services**


**Establishment of the Pema Center Secretariat and Protection**



**Services provided to over**



**54,506 children**



**616 children**  
benefiting from child protective services

model and resource center, with home-based interventions extending to 123 children in remote areas. The United Nations also supported initiatives for children with disabilities, such as identifying transition schools and providing teacher training in inclusive education. Challenges remain, as revealed by an Exploratory Study on the Readiness of Colleges under the Royal University of Bhutan to accept students with disabilities.

Additionally, around 1,500 young people, including 700 females, were empowered with marketable skills, reflecting the UN commitment to youth empowerment and economic opportunities. In 2023, the United Nations supported strengthening policy for children's well-being in monastic institutions by reviewing and developing the Dratshang Child Protection Strategy 2023-2027. The support also extended to the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) in preparing State Party Replies to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Additionally, efforts focused on improving the justice system for children, establishing Child Justice Technical Working Groups, and implementing diversion programs. Collaboration with the Royal Bhutan Police led to the establishment of women and child protection desks in most districts. A multi-sectoral campaign addressed violence against children, reaching over

120,000 people, while UN engagement with youth through various programs empowered thousands, fostering personal and professional growth. Significant progress in WASH services was achieved in 2023: with United Nations support, Bhutan achieved 100 per cent Open Defecation Free status, benefiting schools and monastic institutions. Handwashing stations and safe water facilities were installed in health centers, benefiting hundreds daily. Special focus on menstrual health included children and monastic institutions through the 'Red Dot' campaign and high-level advocacy on Menstrual Health and Hygiene with the theme 'Men Take Lead' observed on Global Menstrual Hygiene Day. Environmentally friendly systems were installed, and inclusive toilets constructed, improving access for children, including those with disabilities through building of two inclusive toilets each for schools and monastic schools are benefitting 2,003 children including 92 children with disabilities and 100 monks.

In partnership with Civil Society Organizations (CSO), the United Nations sensitized 21 local government authorities and 45 young people on Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) and adolescent participation in local governance, engaging 5,000 youth volunteers through civic engagement programs, including 3,000 women, facilitated the design of solutions to address community issues.

Additionally, the United Nations supported health systems based on primary health care and universal health coverage, ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health information and services for adolescents and youth. Timely procurement and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPEs) ensured the safety of healthcare providers, while the expansion of cold chain capacity continues to be strengthened post COVID-19. Efforts to improve sanitation coverage, promote handwashing practices, and address malnutrition through food fortification and school meal programs were also notable achievements.

The United Nations supported Bhutan in strengthening its response to Gender Based Violence (GBV). Through the United Nations support, a total of 158 healthcare providers across half of all districts can deliver survivor-centered services and issue injury reports for GBV cases, utilizing online, secure platforms for consultations. Concurrently, the United Nations also supported drafting the National Policy on Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence 2023 which was submitted to the Royal Government for approval. Once finalized and approved, it will provide a comprehensive approach to combatting sexual violence nationwide.

Joint UN collaboration supported the creation of an integrated National RMNCAH Strategy, ensuring equitable access to quality services for vulnerable populations. These efforts extend to maternal health services, where five district hospitals are pioneering the reporting of maternal near misses- an indicator for maternal health and care, and implementing quality improvement measures, setting a benchmark for maternal healthcare nationwide.

Additionally, advancements in cervical cancer prevention and diagnosis, international collaboration through the inaugural International Cervical Cancer Symposium aimed to unite global efforts to end cervical cancer by 2030. It also fostered interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers, practitioners and policymakers to design and implement public health interventions. Specialized training for healthcare professionals were provided to underscore this multifaceted approach towards a healthier, safer, and more equitable future for all Bhutanese, in partnership with the Royal Government and other stakeholders.

In 2023, the United Nations showcased remarkable progress in various areas aimed at improving public health, social issues, and the empowerment of women and girls. Spearheaded by Her Majesty the Queen Mother Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, high-level advocacy efforts reached over 400 individuals across 12 gewogs of Tsirang, emphasizing the importance of sexual and and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE).

Additionally, local government leaders from 10 districts demonstrated their commitment to advancing the International Conference on Population and Development Program of Action (ICPD POA), allocating resources and mainstreaming interventions related to SRHR and gender-based violence (GBV) in local plans. UN support for health system strengthening included supporting the development of a Health Technology Assessment Framework to enhance healthcare decision-making. Additionally, 60 per cent of healthcare centers across 15 districts have received and installed autoclaves for managing infectious health waste. Additionally, 321 waste handlers at all health centers have been trained in safe healthcare waste treatment. This not only protects public health through safe treatment of healthcare wastes but also promotes environmental sustainability.

Moreover, significant progress was made in capacity building and strategic partnerships to combat violence against women and promote SRHR. A total of 72 participants from diverse sectors of policymakers and implementers on programmes and policies to prevent violence against women were trained on the RESPECT framework through joint United Nations activities. This training equipped them with the skills to implement evidence-based strategies and programs to prevent violence against women.

Furthermore, collaborations with the central monastic body and religious organizations resulted in the implementation of standardized messaging on social media on GBV prevention and SRHR, incorporating such messages into mask dances during festivals across all 20 districts. These efforts, along with initiatives to integrate comprehensive sexuality education into school curricula and provide virtual learning platforms, have contributed to a more informed and empowered



population in Bhutan.

In 2023, the UN supported a series of initiatives in Bhutan to bolster public health and healthcare resilience. An independent review coordinated by UN confirmed the interruption of endemic rubella transmission for over 36 months, marking a significant milestone in public health. The United Nations ensured the installation of two Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) oxygen plants at key healthcare facilities, guaranteeing a continuous and reliable oxygen supply for routine healthcare and emergencies, while also providing specialized training for medical gas technicians to strengthen primary healthcare resilience.

The United Nations supported the Royal Government in developing a pandemic preparedness proposal and successfully secured approximately US\$ 4.9 million to strengthen Bhutan's healthcare system's preparedness for future health crises. The United Nations also played a pivotal role in supporting Bhutan's

National Health Survey 2023, integrating data from 14 surveys to generate high-quality health data, setting a global benchmark for evidence-based decision-making methodologies.

Additionally, the United Nations provided technical assistance to strengthen Bhutan's health system for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, resulting in a comprehensive roadmap aligned with Dhaka's call to action to manage hypertension.

With a total investment of US\$ 1.86 million, the United Nations also supported to procure and install two Computed Tomography (CT) scanners at Dewathang and Samtse Hospitals, enhancing diagnostic capabilities, improving patient care with high-quality imaging services. This significantly contributed to improve healthcare services and patient outcomes in Eastern and Southern regions of Bhutan.



**The journey of an inspiring young woman who rises above stigma to live a productive, dignified life with the support of the United Nations and partners.**



## Destigmatising disability and menstruation

Tshering Lham is strong. She is a young woman who has faced many challenges in life. She transcends these challenges time and again.

Living with a disability, Tshering Lham uses her feet as her hands. She has been a student of the Draktsho vocational training center in Thimphu for the last four years. The training centre is a civil society organization that supports children and youth with disabilities to live dignified, healthy lives. Tshering has learned how to use her feet to sketch, paint and do household chores as well as change her sanitary napkins.

Tshering lived with her parents in Trashigang where she also attended school until grade seven. After her sister learnt about Draktsho on TV, she came to Thimphu.

Tshering has the support and care of her family. Her sister helps her get dressed and walks her to the institute every morning. The sisters believe that walking for about 30-40 minutes every morning and evening would help with Tshering's mobility.

"She does not like to take the bus but when we walk to the center, people do make fun of her," her sister Sonam Zangmo says. "She knows when her period is due and prepares her undergarments by lining them with the pads."





“I have to sit on the floor to use my feet to change the sanitary pads,” she says. “So, when I get my period, I stay home as I can change the sanitary napkin in my room.”

“Some of my friends also stay home during their menstruation. For girls with disabilities, we need toilets that are comfortable to use and that have water and soap,” says Tshering.

As part of its commitment to advancing disability rights, the United Nations supports the country to advocate for equitable access to menstrual hygiene management for girls and women with disabilities. Through collaborative efforts with organizations like Red Dot Bhutan, the United Nations aims to destigmatize menstruation and disabilities, ensuring that individuals like Tshering can manage their periods safely and comfortably.

Tshering's journey exemplifies the transformative impact of UN-supported initiatives on the lives of individuals with disabilities in Bhutan. Her resilience, coupled with her family and the community's support, is testament to the progress made in advancing disability rights and social inclusion in the country.

The United Nations supports the Royal Government to ensure supportive environment, accessible WASH facilities including regular water supply and changing rooms, and easy access to sanitary supplies have assured the girl students, including those with disabilities, to be comfortable with their menstruation process and not skip school fearing shame or stigma.

Moreover, UN support extends beyond menstrual hygiene to encompass broader initiatives aimed at promoting disability inclusion and enhancing social services. By working closely with the Royal Government and civil society organizations, the United Nations strives to create an inclusive society where individuals with disabilities are empowered to realize their full potential.

As Bhutan continues its journey towards achieving the SDGs, UN commitment is steadfast to supporting efforts to promote disability inclusion and enhance social services, ensuring that no one is left behind. Through collaborative partnerships and targeted interventions, Bhutan and the United Nations are paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable society, where individuals like Tshering can thrive with dignity and respect.

# Outcome 3: Governance

**By 2023, Government institutions provide equal opportunities for all, and women and vulnerable groups hold leaders accountable.**

In 2023, the United Nations, in collaboration with key partners spearheaded initiatives to bolster entrepreneurship and digital inclusion among Bhutanese youth and MSMEs.

Six regional Business Advocacy Workshops were conducted, educating 402 potential youth entrepreneurs on critical aspects of business setup, including licensing procedures, post-license services, government incentives, and regulations. These workshops aimed to empower aspiring entrepreneurs with essential knowledge and tools to navigate the business landscape effectively.

Building on the 2022 future workforce study, 166 individuals from rural cottage and small industries were empowered with the skills and knowledge to thrive in the evolving labor market, and 33 youth entrepreneurs have obtained valuable skills through a comprehensive six-month training program, which helped ten startups scale up to navigate the business landscape. Spurring



innovation, the United Nation supported the establishment of the country's first national innovation platform, generating 40 ideas and solutions. Supporting the Royal Government's digital transformation initiative, a National Digital Strategy has been developed in collaboration with Gov-Tech. Supported by the United Nations, Strategic Foresight and Anticipatory Governance has gained traction. Guiding in planning and policymaking, it is now being institutionalized for new civil servants/ recruits and parliamentarians.

Additionally, through a cost-sharing approach, in partnership with the Royal Government and the Loden Foundation, the Springboard Plus 2023 Programme provided intensive online entrepreneurship training to 36 youth entrepreneurs through the Youth Co:Lab. The program culminated in an award ceremony honoring 11 outstanding entrepreneurs marking a significant milestone in promoting a culture of innovation and enterprise among Bhutanese youth.

In collaboration with national stakeholders, the United Nations conducted an in-depth gender assessment of Bhutanese civil servants and organized a capacity-building workshop to enhance women's presence and leadership in public administration. The workshop, attended by 25 senior and mid-level officials from the Royal Government, laid the groundwork for a national action plan to promote gender equality within the civil service.

The United Nations reinforced its partnership with Parliament by delivering a comprehensive training course on social policy to 34 parliamentarians and research officials. This capacity-building initiative aimed to enhance skills in policy formulation, enactment, and implementation, thereby contributing to the development of a child-friendly governance framework.

However, ensuring equitable access to training and workshops in remote areas posed logistical challenges and overcoming traditional gender norms and biases to promote women's leadership and participation in public administration required sustained effort. Securing adequate funding and resources for long-term sustainability of initiatives remained a persistent challenge.

Efforts to foster entrepreneurship and digital inclusion intersect with initiatives aimed at gender equality and good governance, demonstrating synergies across pillars of sustainable development. By prioritizing gender equality, youth empowerment, and inclusive governance, UN interventions strive to leave no one behind, ensuring that marginalized groups have equal access to opportunities and resources.

A United Nations partnership with the National Council of Bhutan leveraged a citizen engagement platform to advance human rights, SDGs, gender equality, and disability inclusion in policymaking. Notably, the National Assembly's effective use of

**Business Advocacy Workshops:**

**6** Regional workshops conducted

**402** Youth entrepreneurs educated

**Digital Skilling Program:**

**166** MSME holders and potential entrepreneurs equipped

**Springboard Plus 2023 Programme**

**36** Youth entrepreneurs trained

**11** Outstanding entrepreneurs honored

**Gender Assessment Workshop**

**25** Senior and mid-level officials attended

**Training for Parliamentarians**

**34** Parliamentarians and research officials trained

**Legal Aid Services:**

**53** Indigent individuals reached

**34** including women

the platform facilitated citizen dialogue, leading to the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRC). As a direct outcome, the lifting of Article nine reservation under the UNCRC promises improved access for persons with disabilities (PwDs) to participate meaningfully in private and public life, alongside enhanced access to basic services.

The United Nations continued to support legal aid services, reaching 53 indigent individuals, including 34 women. This effort promotes inclusivity and strengthens the justice sector, ensuring fair access to legal assistance. Awareness workshops, especially with local leaders, empower grassroots communities, while collaboration with CSOs facilitates easier access to legal aid, as is exemplified by partnerships with CSO Community Service Centres and the Legal Aid Center.

Additionally, sensitization and training initiatives have garnered increased support from private lawyers, expanding the service provider base and improving overall legal aid delivery.

**An innovative advocacy campaign that harnessed the power of sports to combat violence against women and girls**



## PUTTING THE BOOT TO GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Violence against women and girls is a devastating reality throughout the world. Bhutan is no exception. The National Commission for Women and Children, in partnership with the United Nations, conducted a study in 2017 that found that 30 per cent of women and girls reported experiencing one or more forms of violence. The prevalence was higher among younger women. In 2021, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the reported cases of gender-based violence rose by 53.5 per cent.

The United Nations stands against all forms of gender-based violence. Working in support of the Royal Government of Bhutan, the United Nations launched a 'Kick for Equality' campaign as part of the 16 Days of Activism in 2023. This campaign was the first of its kind in Bhutan. It was launched with a friendly all-women football match involving national women's football and representatives from the community in Gelephu.

“Empowering women and girls are not just a goal; it is a fundamental necessity for building a sustainable and equitable future. In our effort to leave no one behind, we must prioritize women and girls. The UN in Bhutan stands unwaveringly committed to supporting the Royal Government to ensure every woman and girl can live free from violence.” said Karla Robin Hershey, UN Resident Coordinator.





The Kick for the Goals campaign also showcased female athletes as role models, breaking barriers, and inspiring young girls to participate in football and other sports. The campaign reached over 150,000 people on different social media platforms.

The campaign's activities included the #OrangeTheWorld TikTok Challenge, urging users to share stories and support for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. Additionally, a Women in Sports Panel Discussion in Thimphu featured leading female athletes and leaders, focusing on shattering stereotypes and empowering women through sports. Bhutan also joined the global Bodyright Campaign, aiming to combat online body abuse by adding the Bodyright symbol to digital content, advocating for the protection of bodily autonomy online and calling for action from tech companies and policymakers to address human rights violations in the digital sphere.

Speaking during the launch, Yangchen Lhamo from the Girls Football Academy in Gelephu said as sportswomen, they carry the responsibility of being role models, inspiring the next generation to dream big and pursue their passions fearlessly.

Their journey is not just about personal achievements but about breaking barriers and shattering stereotypes, proving that gender is never a limitation to success.

As a young footballer, she believes in the power of sports to inspire positive change, both on and off the field. Football for the Goals has given her the platform to dream of a world where her passion for football mirrors her passion for dismantling barriers that spread gender-based violence.

“As athletes, we have a unique platform, a microphone that carries our voices beyond the stadium walls. Let us use it to raise awareness, to inspire change, and to amplify the call for a world where every person, regardless of gender, can pursue their dreams without the shadow of violence,” said Yangchen Lhamo.

Being part of this event has inspired hundreds of young women like Yangchen fuel their commitment to building a world free from gender-based violence. Together, as players, fans, and advocates, these young women are inspiring other women to be the architects of a future where the principles they learn on the football pitch lay the foundation for a society that champions equality, respect, and dignity for all.

# Outcome 4: Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction

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**By 2023, Bhutan's vulnerable communities and its economy are more resilient to climate-induced and other disasters and biodiversity loss.**

In 2023, the United Nations made significant progress in advancing sustainable development and resilience-building efforts across the country. Through strategic interventions and collaborative partnerships, the United Nations contributed to enhancing natural resource management, promoting climate resilience, empowering local communities, and fostering inclusive growth.

One of the key achievements was the operationalization of nine climate-risk informed biological corridors, including new Biological Corridor 9 (BC9)- a new biological corridor connecting Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary and Bumdelling Wildlife Sanctuary in eastern Bhutan, which falls within the landscape of an ecotourism

project. These corridors not only support biodiversity conservation but also facilitate sustainable tourism development, enhancing awareness and advocacy for their establishment.

Following the successful partnership between the Royal Government and the United Nations in transforming the Electric Vehicle (EV) ecosystem, 19 EV fleets were distributed replacing conventional pool vehicles in the Royal Government. This initiative resulted in an annual offset of 35.88 metric tons of greenhouse gases (GHG) and an estimated cost saving of USD 37,000 in fuel and maintenance. The 16 charging stations helped ease access to clean energy for EV owners.



# 1 Biological Corridors

Number of climate-risk informed



**9**

biological corridors operationalized

# 3 Infrastructure Resilience



**100**



100 People directly benefited from infrastructure improvements

**50.3 KM**



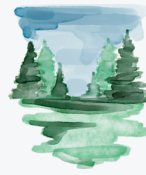
Length of irrigation channels made resilient

**102 KM**



Length of roads made resilient

# 2 Forest Management:



**237,719.83 hectares.**  
Forest areas under management

**Over 6,500**



Farmers benefited

# 4 Emergency Preparedness:

**Over 1,100**

Frontliners prepared through disaster simulation exercises

Through UN's support, Bhutan launched its first NAP and has its second (enhanced) NDC. The focus has been on helping the government to translate these national documents by mobilizing resources in the areas of water, urban, agrifood systems, and transition to zero-emission transport. The establishment of a Flood Forecast Early Warning System, a web-based meteorological services platform, development of a national-level mobile weather application for climate-informed agriculture planning and rolling out of the Get Airport Ready for Disaster initiative further prepared Bhutan in the face of climate-induced disasters.

Additionally, substantial forest areas totaling 237,719.83 hectares were brought under participatory sustainable management regimes, supported by initiatives like the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA III), the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and the Joint Support to Bhutan (JSB) project and were made productive for agriculture purposes, benefiting over 6,500 farmers, with a notable focus on women's empowerment in agriculture.

In terms of infrastructure development, efforts were made to enhance climate resilience through the construction of irrigation channels and access to roads. This intervention aimed at improving natural resource management and climate resilience directly benefited over 700 people. Approximately 50.3 kilometers of irrigation channels and 102 kilometers of roads were made more resilient to climate variability and change, benefiting thousands of farmers and improving access to markets for agricultural products.

Furthermore, advancements were made in enhancing institutional capacities, such as strengthening the Animal Nutrition Lab at the National Research Centre for Animal Nutrition. Despite challenges, the lab's enhanced capacity contributed to improving the quality of animal feed and fodder, thereby supporting food security and livelihoods.




In alignment with national priorities, the United Nations fostered food self-sufficiency, innovative financing, and inclusive business environments. Through initiatives like BIOFIN, financing strategies and instruments were applied to leverage innovative and diversified sources of finance, supporting sustainable development initiatives.

Efforts were also directed towards promoting gender equality and youth empowerment, with initiatives like the Innovation Challenge aimed at creating sustainable livelihoods for women and youth. Additionally, rural development and training centers were equipped with protected and precision farming technology, empowering rural communities with the knowledge and tools for year-round production of vegetables, thereby increasing income and nutrition.

In 2023, the United Nations continued to support the Royal Government in strengthening emergency preparedness and response. A comprehensive drone training program enhanced government agencies' skills in drone technology, covering applications of drones, manual flight, mission planning, and data processing to enhance capabilities in leveraging the technology for emergency preparedness and responses. Support was also provided to digitized disaster reporting, while disaster simulation exercises prepared over 1,100 frontliners for various scenarios, streamlining data collection processes for more accurate reporting. UN support was also pivotal in the establishment of a national logistics preparedness working group and developing a five-year action plan to address identified gaps in humanitarian supply chain and logistics management. The UN also supported the development of an emergency preparedness and response strategy for De-Suung (national service volunteers), which focuses on emergency preparedness and response coordination, logistics, telecommunications and food security. Additionally, the United Nations contributed to the development of an emergency preparedness and response strategy, focusing on enhancing coordination, logistics, telecommunications, and food security. Furthermore, a collaborative workshop aimed at enhancing disaster preparedness and response capacity of Paro International Airport identified potential impacts during natural hazards and recommended measures for improvement. The United Nations

worked together on defining strategic priorities and initiatives to contribute to Bhutan's food systems transformation. Efforts include the development and rollout of digital tools and the Digital Village Initiative for online marketing and extension services, promoting climate-smart production technologies to engage youth in the agriculture sector, and supporting private contract and organic farming initiatives for youth and women.

Additionally, the United Nations is providing startup funds for food system transformation, proposing projects for funding under the Global Environment Facility, and implementing Technical Cooperation Programme projects to enhance livestock production efficiency and support post-COVID-19 recovery through digitalization.



**One of the key achievements was the operationalization of nine climate-risk informed biological corridors, including new Biological Corridor 9 (BC9)**

UN support spans the entire agriculture value chain, focusing on increasing demand for nutritious foods, strengthening production capacity, post-harvest management, marketing, and policy coordination which includes empowering rural women, smallholder farmers, supporting youth cooperatives and private enterprises, enhancing digital market information services, and strengthening supply chain linkages.

**A story of Lunana, a remote highland community in Bhutan nestled among glaciers, where climate change is an everyday reality.**



## Living in Constant Fear of Floods

Wangmo lives in Techoe village in Lunana, one of the most northern regions in Bhutan. She vividly remembers how she and others in the community ran for their lives when a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) struck Lunana on October 7, 1994. It was Bhutan's first major such flood triggered by the partial burst of Luggé glacial lake, one of the four glacial lakes in Lunana.

Glacial lake outburst floods present a constant threat in Bhutan. It is a threat that is steadily growing as the mountains become warmer and glaciers retreat rapidly due to climate change. The glaciers are shrinking at a speed never seen before. They risk triggering what Bhutanese glaciologists describe as a 'tsunami in the sky'. Of the 567 glacial lakes in the country, 17 have been identified as lakes that present the great risk of glacial lake outburst floods.

At over 4,000 metres above sea level, Lunana is one of the highest human settlements on earth. Climate change is an everyday reality in this remote highland community that's home to four glacial lakes- Baytsho, Raphstreng, Thorthomi and Luggé. The later three are among the 17 potentially most dangerous glacial lakes in Bhutan.

Dorji Wangmo from Thanza, the village closest to the lakes, said the fear of glacial lake outburst floods keeps her up at night. In case of such a flood, Thanza villagers have only 20 minutes to evacuate or move to safer ground. This is how close the community lives to the lakes.





In 2008, the country launched a mammoth task of manually lowering the water level of Thorthomi glacial lake to safe levels. The effort, supported by the United Nations through the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA I), wrapped up in 2012. Early warning systems were also put in place and communities' disaster preparedness and response capacity improved. This was preceded by a three-year project to lower the Raphstreng lake water level by four meters.

More than a decade after the work at Thorthomi, the GLOF threat persists or rather has grown as warming temperatures cause glacier meltdown. Bhutan has 700 glaciers, and they are retreating fast, according to the National Center for Hydrology and Meteorology (NCHM).

The thinning of glaciers in Bhutan and across the world has become a new reality as the global climate crisis intensifies. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report warns the glaciers in whole of the Hindu Kush Himalayan region will keep shrinking with cascading consequences of floods, landslides, and GLOFs if the world fails to slash emissions drastically.

Bhutan and its people, despite doing little to cause climate change, is bearing the brunt of the crisis.

From erratic weather patterns characterized by intense rainfall, less snowfall and fast melting glaciers, a resident of Lunana said they could see and feel the effects of climate change everywhere in Lunana.

“In the past, we would get the first snowfall of the year by October. But now sometimes we get snow only around March and April. By then it's already warm and the snow melts quickly leading to reduced snow cover on our mountains,” said Kaka.

The United Nations has played a crucial role in supporting Bhutan in addressing the challenges posed by GLOFs. Through collaborative efforts with the Royal Government and other partners, the United Nations has worked to enhance the country's resilience to the impacts of climate change. This support has included initiatives aimed at reducing the risk of GLOFs through the implementation of early warning systems, infrastructure development, and community-based disaster preparedness programs. Additionally, the United Nations has provided technical assistance and capacity building to strengthen Bhutan's ability to monitor and mitigate the risks associated with GLOFs. By prioritizing the protection of vulnerable communities and critical infrastructure, the United Nations support has contributed to safeguarding lives and livelihoods in Bhutan's mountainous regions susceptible to glacial melt and associated hazards.

## 2.3. Support to Partnerships and Financing the 2030 Agenda



In 2023, the United Nations in Bhutan showed a strong commitment to fostering partnerships and leveraging financing for the achievement of the SDGs. Through innovative collaborations and strategic alliances, the United Nations played a pivotal role in advancing efforts towards the 2030 Agenda, driving progress across various sectors.

One notable partnership initiative that significantly contributed to SDG advancement was the multi-sectoral initiative- Football for the Goals aimed at leveraging the power of football to drive positive social change and promote sustainable development in Bhutan. While Bhutan has made remarkable strides in national development; however, challenges related to mental health, substance abuse, gender-based violence, and climate change persist. The initiative harnessed the popularity of football to address these challenges, fostering unity, inclusivity, and shared responsibility among communities.

Recognizing that football, as one of the world's most popular sports, has the potential to serve as a powerful platform for advancing the SDGs, this initiative, through various campaigns focused on different aspects of social development by equipping young Bhutanese with the knowledge and skills necessary to harness the influence of football and become catalysts for change in their communities. Reaching over 5,000 young people in person and over 100,000 online, this initiative helped in educating about the importance of the SDGs and inspired youth to take concrete steps towards their achievement. By linking the universal language of football with the universal agenda of the SDGs, the initiative fostered a sense of ownership and commitment among youth towards sustainable development.

The United Nations leveraged the Joint SDG Fund to mobilize financial resources and support transformative projects aligned with the 2030 Agenda. The establishment of a landmark Social Security System for monks and nuns in Bhutan benefited from UN facilitation. This pioneering initiative aims to provide comprehensive social protection to the monastic community, with a seed fund of Nu 10 million, monks and nuns will receive a monthly social security deposit of Nu. 7,360 upon reaching the age of 65, when they meet some minimal criteria. Currently, 323 individuals, out of more than 7,000 registered monks and nuns across the country, are eligible for the pension scheme.

This initiative complements existing welfare schemes initiated by the Central Monastic Body, including medical treatment, support during parents' demise, and peaceful old-age homes. The establishment of the pension fund marks a significant milestone in the welfare of the monastic community, providing financial security for retirees and serving as an inspiration for young monks. With 46 percent of monks and nuns in monastic schools aged between 4 and 24 years, this social security system will significantly contribute to reducing vulnerabilities within this community. It will safeguard not only the elderly monks and nuns but also the children and adolescents in monastic institutions from economic hardships and social exclusion.

In partnership with the Royal Government, the United Nations supported aligning tax policy to SDGs and tax reforms in tax administration- a key support to advancing the SDGs. By developing the digital property tax system and advocacy materials, public awareness of taxation has been enhanced, contributing to improved tax compliance, which is expected to generate estimated USD\$ 7.0-8.0M more revenue in 2024 from domestic sources.



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The UN also supported Invest Bhutan, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment, in developing Bhutan's Digital Foreign Direct Investment Action Plan, which details strategies to attract and facilitate investments for the digital transformation of the economy, as well as the Ministry of Finance in drafting Bhutan's Sustainable Finance Framework, which is undergoing a Second Party Opinion to comply with Sustainability Bond issuance best practices.

In terms of financing the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations played a crucial role in influencing government expenditures to align with SDG priorities. Through advocacy and technical assistance, the United Nations supported the realignment of government budgets, including the elimination of fossil-fuel subsidies and the integration of climate-sensitive and gender-sensitive reforms. This ensured that financial resources were directed towards essential areas such as climate action, disaster risk reduction, and social protection, maximizing the impact of investments on sustainable development outcomes.

Overall, the United Nations support to partnerships and financing for the 2030 Agenda in Bhutan demonstrated a commitment to collaboration, innovation, and impact. By mobilizing resources, advancing partnerships, and promoting strategic investments, the United Nations played a catalytic role in driving progress towards sustainable development, leaving no one behind in the journey towards a more equitable and resilient future.

## 2.4. Results of the United Nations working more and better together



In alignment with the ongoing UN development system reform and recognizing the imperative of adopting a modular approach to country presence, the United Nations in Bhutan has made significant achievements in enhancing collaboration and coherence to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. By tailoring its configuration and functions based on the country's priorities and development plans, the United Nations has achieved positive results, benefiting the Royal Government, partners, and ultimately, the people of Bhutan.

The UN adoption of a modular approach to country presence has allowed for flexible configurations of the United Nations, driven by the priorities outlined in the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for 2024-2028 articulate the collective vision and contribution of the UN system to support Bhutan accelerate actions towards the achievement of its national development priorities and the 2030 Agenda, and the country's 13th FYP. This approach ensures that the UN composition, skill sets, functions, and focus are aligned with the country's development priorities, enabling more effective and relevant support to national efforts.

Recognizing the graduation of Bhutan from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, the United Nations used integrated programming across outcome areas to support the country in traversing the 'last mile.' By addressing the complex challenges and interdependencies inherent in this transition, the United Nations has provided augmented capacities and innovative solutions to drive progress towards sustainable development goals.

The United Nations has delivered joint programmes with multiple agencies in critical areas such as SDGs, gender equality and women empowerment, disability inclusion, and resilience building. This collaborative approach has enhanced the effectiveness and impact of UN interventions, ensuring a coordinated response to key development challenges.

The UN coordination structure, particularly the specialized working groups (WGs), has fostered enhanced collaboration and delivery on the UNSDPF. In 2023, these WGs facilitated targeted efforts in key areas such as gender, youth, disaster risk reduction, data, emergency preparedness and response, and economy-producing tangible results aligned with national priorities. This strategic and coordinated approach has maximized the impact of UN interventions and strengthened partnerships with government and other stakeholders.

Joint work plans, results groups, and joint programs have played a pivotal role in reducing transaction costs and redundancies while enhancing efficiency. The Annual Work Planning (AWP) formulation process facilitated collaborative decision-making and resource allocation, ensuring a cohesive and synchronized approach to United Nations interventions benefiting from streamlined processes and shared resources, maximizing impact, and minimizing duplication.

Efforts to provide more integrated policy advice to the Royal Government have resulted in enhanced collaboration and alignment with national development priorities. In support to the formulation of the country's 13th FYP, the United Nations supported the Royal Government with an international consultant to conduct a detailed assessment of demographic trends and provide policy recommendation on sustainable population for the 13th FYP.



Additionally, the United Nations support was used to bring in two Results-based Management (RBM) experts to develop the overall RBM and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework for the 13th FYP. These experts were also engaged in providing technical support to the Lab Sessions for officials from the Royal Government.

The UN system supported the Royal Government to develop the Digital Eco-system Analysis and Digital Economy Development and Transformation Strategy aimed towards building a digital economy for Bhutan. The implementation of the Business Operations Strategy and common premises served as a catalyst for enhanced collaboration within the UN system. Recognizing the direct link between the effectiveness and efficiency of supporting internal operations and the impact of UN programmes at the country level, continuous efforts are made through a dedicated UN Common Service Unit to push for greater operational efficiency. Quantifiable efficiency gains have been achieved through the establishment of common Long-Term Agreements, streamlined administrative processes and sharing of common services such as administrative support, financial management, procurements, IT infrastructure, security and facilities management allowing more efficient use of resources and reduced duplication of effort. A total of USD 834,866 cost avoidance has been achieved mainly from labour cost reduction, joint implementations of operational activities thus, permitting agencies to focus their resources on their core activities and lower their operational support cost for programme implementation.

Going forward, the Operations Management Team is expanding its capacities by aligning its operational efforts with the overarching objectives of the UNSDCF resulting in the contribution of the delivery results through review of available business services and enhancing joint plan design and implementations. Unified communication and advocacy efforts around initiatives such as the 16 Days of Activism, climate action, nutrition campaigns, and youth engagement have amplified the impact of UN interventions and raised greater awareness and engagement among stakeholders. By speaking with one voice and leveraging collective expertise and resources, the UN has effectively communicated key messages and advocated for positive change in Bhutanese society.

Overall, the UN commitment to increased coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency has translated into tangible benefits for the UN, the Royal Government, and partners, driving progress towards shared development goals and priorities in Bhutan. Through collaborative frameworks, innovative approaches, and integrated policy advice, the United Nations remains steadfast in its support for national development efforts and the achievement of the SDGs.

# 2.5. Evaluations and Lessons Learned



The 2019-2023 UNSDPF served as a strategic roadmap to support the development priorities and aspirations of Bhutan. In 2023, the United Nations undertook a final evaluation of the UNSDPF which presents the findings and lessons learned from the implementation of the UNSDPF, highlighting achievements, challenges, and recommendations for future endeavours. The following are summarized findings from the evaluation:

**Relevance:** The UNSDPF has been a crucial instrument aligned with national priorities, especially the 12th FYP (2018-2023). It responded adeptly to evolving needs in Bhutan, with a strong focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups, ensuring compliance with the "Leave No One Behind" principle. The UN response to the COVID-19 pandemic through its Socio-Economic Response Plan (SERP) exemplified timely, evidence-based, and coordinated action, emphasizing the needs of vulnerable populations.

**Effectiveness:** In Bhutan, the United Nations made significant contributions across various outcome areas, including statistical development, human rights, gender equality, good governance, economic development, climate change, environmental sustainability, and social development. Efforts to engage diverse groups with Parliamentarians and reform the justice sector underscored the commitment to promoting inclusive and equitable development. However, improvements in data infrastructure and joint results group capabilities are necessary for enhanced effectiveness.

**Coherence:** While the United Nations strengthened inter-agency coordination infrastructure, further improvements are needed to foster greater collaboration among agencies. Challenges persist in joint implementation as "One UN," with cooperation primarily focused on information sharing rather than joint programming. Streamlining thematic groups, optimizing coordination mechanisms, and bolstering the capacities of UNRCO are recommended for improved coherence.

**Efficiency:** The total expenditure under the UNSDPF amounted to US\$ 103 million, representing approximately 83% of the planned total. Lengthy and complex fund transfer procedures, coupled with changes in the representatives of the Royal Government within the Outcome Groups, contributed to some inefficiencies. Streamlining administrative processes and enhancing decision-making mechanisms are imperative to improve efficiency.

**Sustainability:** As Bhutan transitions from LDC status, challenges arise from decreasing development finance availability. To address this, the United Nations must pursue government co-financing, partnerships with international financial institutions (IFIs) and the private sector and integrate these elements into its resource mobilization strategy. Opportunities for greater engagement with civil society, the private sector, and climate financing should be explored to ensure sustainability and support improved development coordination.





To enhance UN collaboration with national counterparts, improve programme effectiveness, and contribute to sustainable development in Bhutan, the evaluation report recommends developing a comprehensive results framework aligned with the country's SDG framework, involving national counterparts, improving agency M&E alignment, automating UNINFO for timely reporting, establishing transparent financial tracking, and strengthening joint results groups through RBM trainings.

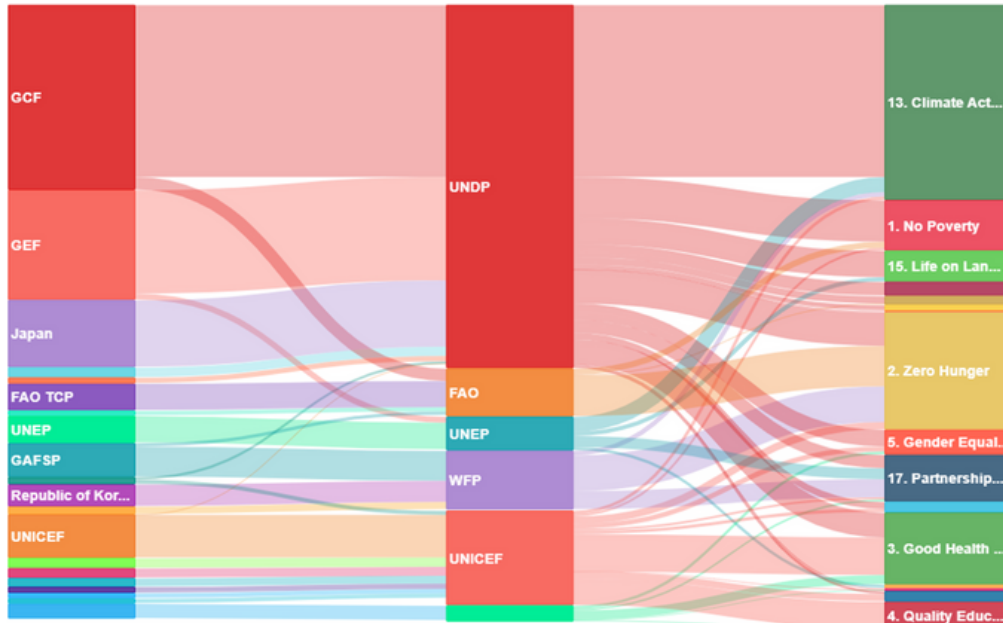
Additionally, it also recommends streamlining UN coordination infrastructure, strengthen outcome and thematic groups, ensure effective communication of appointments, enhance agency engagement, and bolster the PME Team for coordinated M&E. To enhance the role of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) in planning, promoting joint programming, and increasing staff awareness of UN reform, it is recommended to involve government officials in Joint Annual Work Plan (JWAP) preparation.

It was also recommended that the United Nations recognize CSOs as valued partners, strengthen engagement, explore systematic involvement in UN coordination, and promote involvement in policy processes, and strengthen engagement with the private sector, aligning with SDGs and exploring innovative resource channels.

# 2.6. Financial Overview and Resource Mobilization

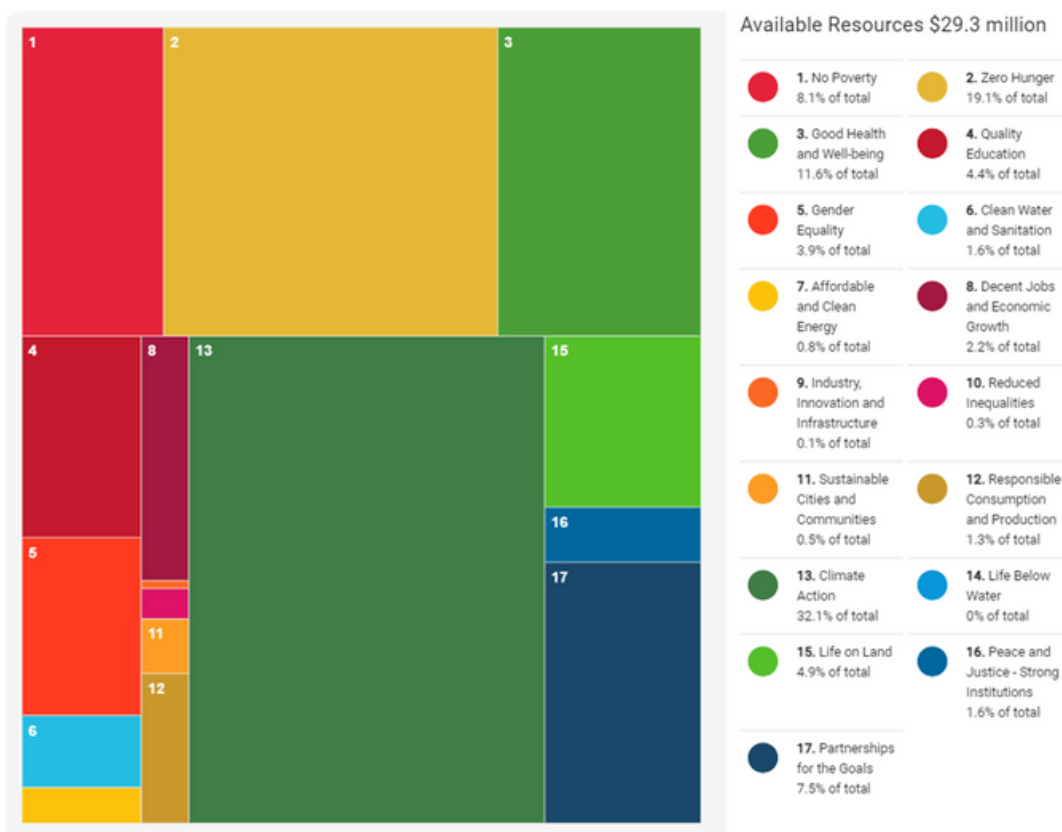


This graphic shows how UN funding is contributing to the work of different agencies and partners to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The width of the lines represents the relative amount of resources being contributed.



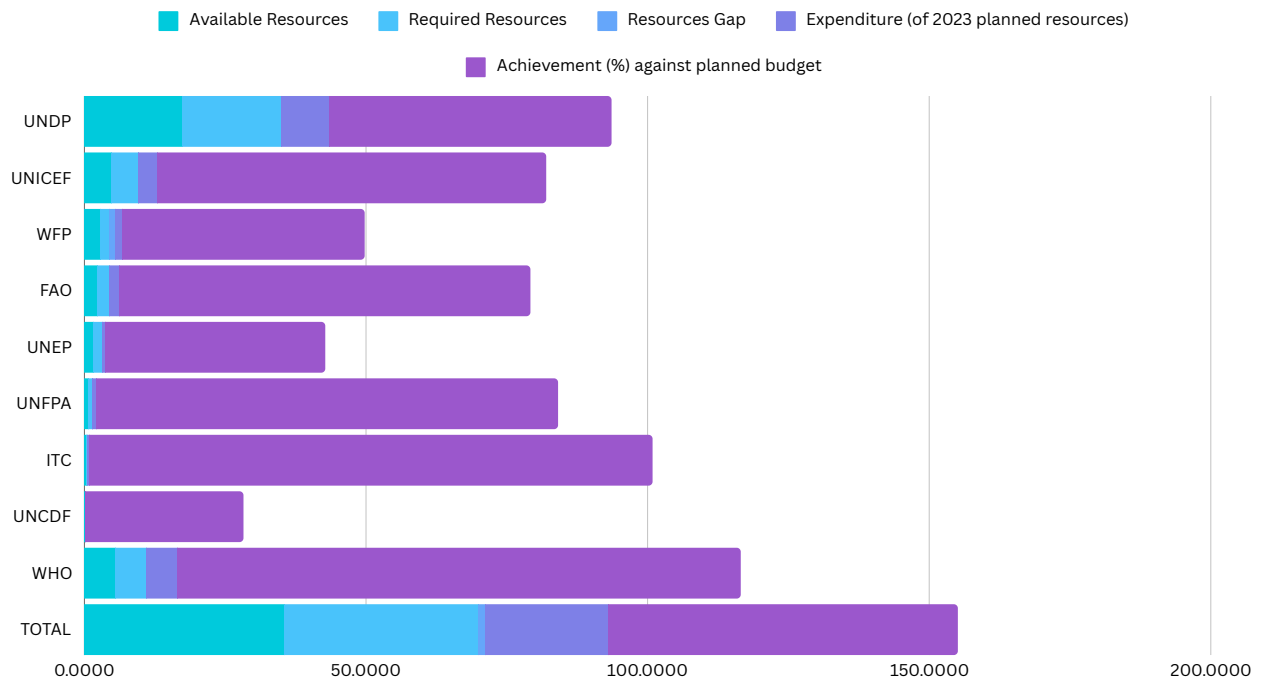
The graphic below provides a visual representation of resource allocations dedicated to each SDG by default, based on the available resources in joint workplan.

Where is the money going? How the UN contributes to the SDGs

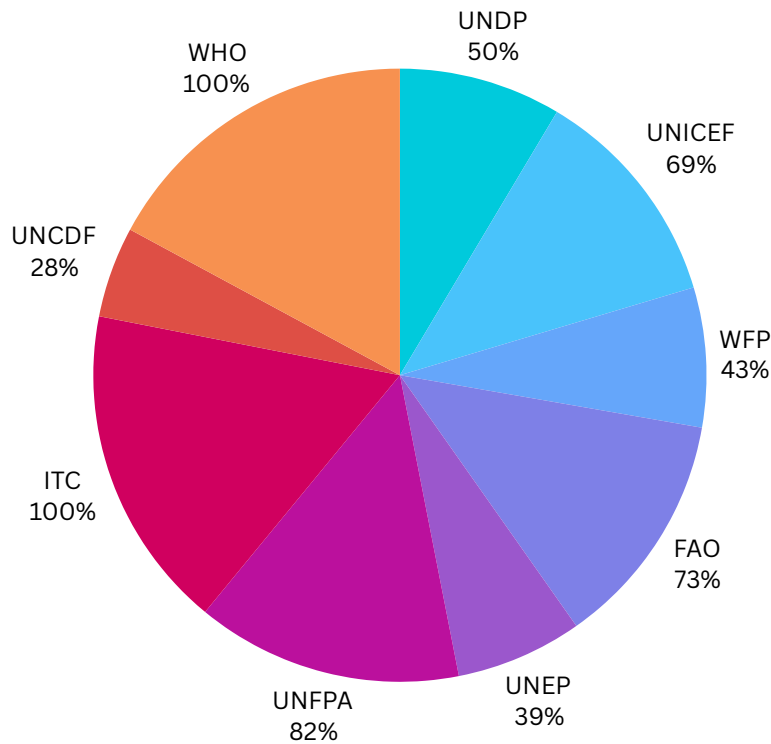




The table below represents the delivery of respective agencies in the Annual Work plan 2023, based on the available and required resources. (US\$ Millions)



The chart below shows the achievement in (%) against available resources. (US\$ Millions)

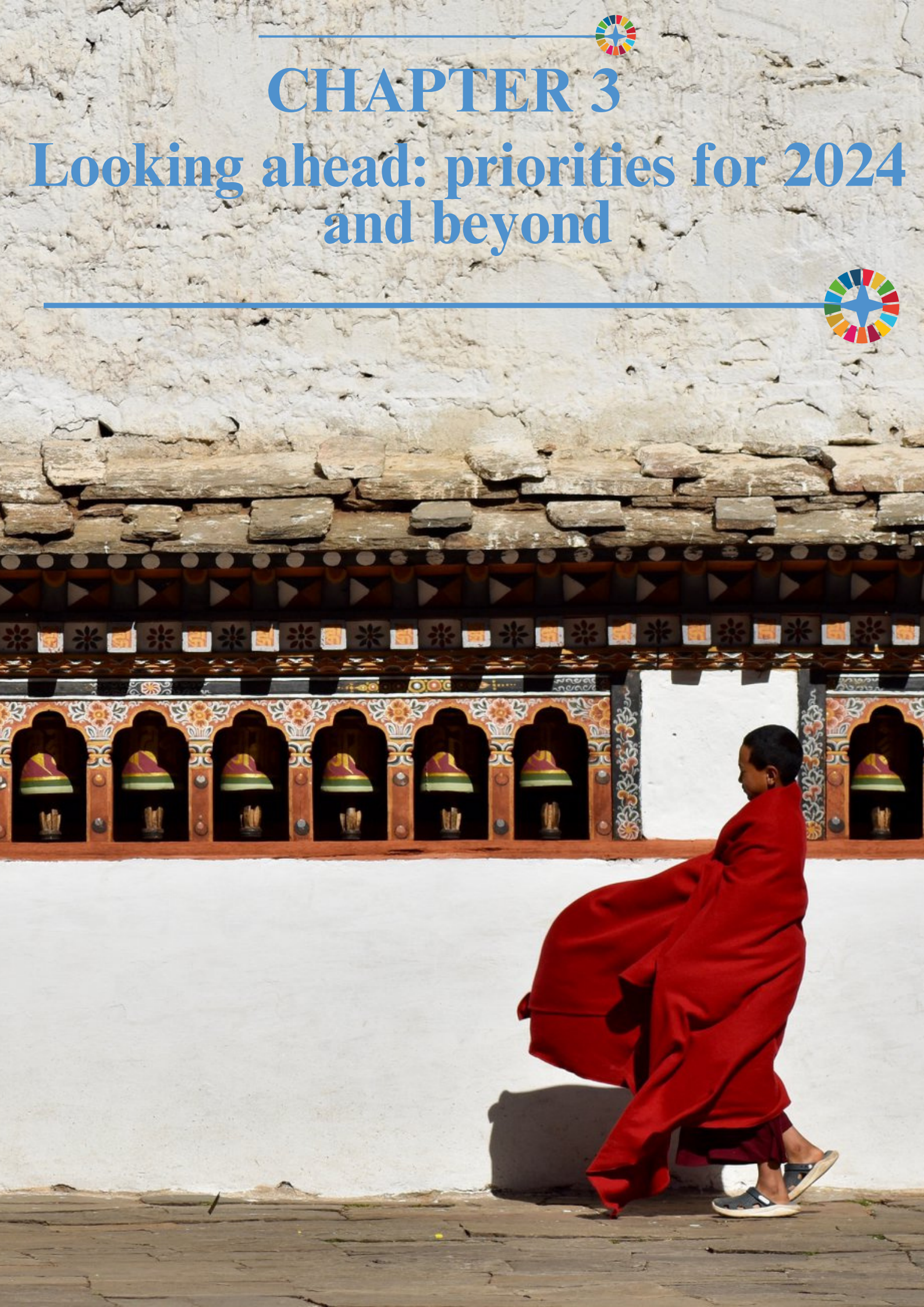


**NOTE:** IFAD provided blended support of highly concessional loans and grants to the Royal Government of approximately US\$ 5 million annually in the agri-food sector. The two ongoing projects are: US\$ 40 million Commercial Agriculture and Resilient Livelihoods Enhancement Programme, and US\$ 22 million for Building Resilient Commercial Smallholder Agriculture including Global Agriculture and Food Security Program co-financing of USD 13 million.



# CHAPTER 3

## Looking ahead: priorities for 2024 and beyond





The United Nations in Bhutan has its eye on the future. Amid a rapidly changing global landscape and situated in a region of incredible diversity and growth, Bhutan and the United Nations will take several novel steps in 2024. The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2024 to 2028) will begin. The Government will embark on its 13th FYP and a new leadership will take office following elections in early 2024.

The United Nations will undertake a comprehensive update on the 2023 Common Country Analysis (CCA), reflecting the evolving needs and priorities of Bhutan which will provide a robust foundation for evidence-based decision-making and programmatic interventions.

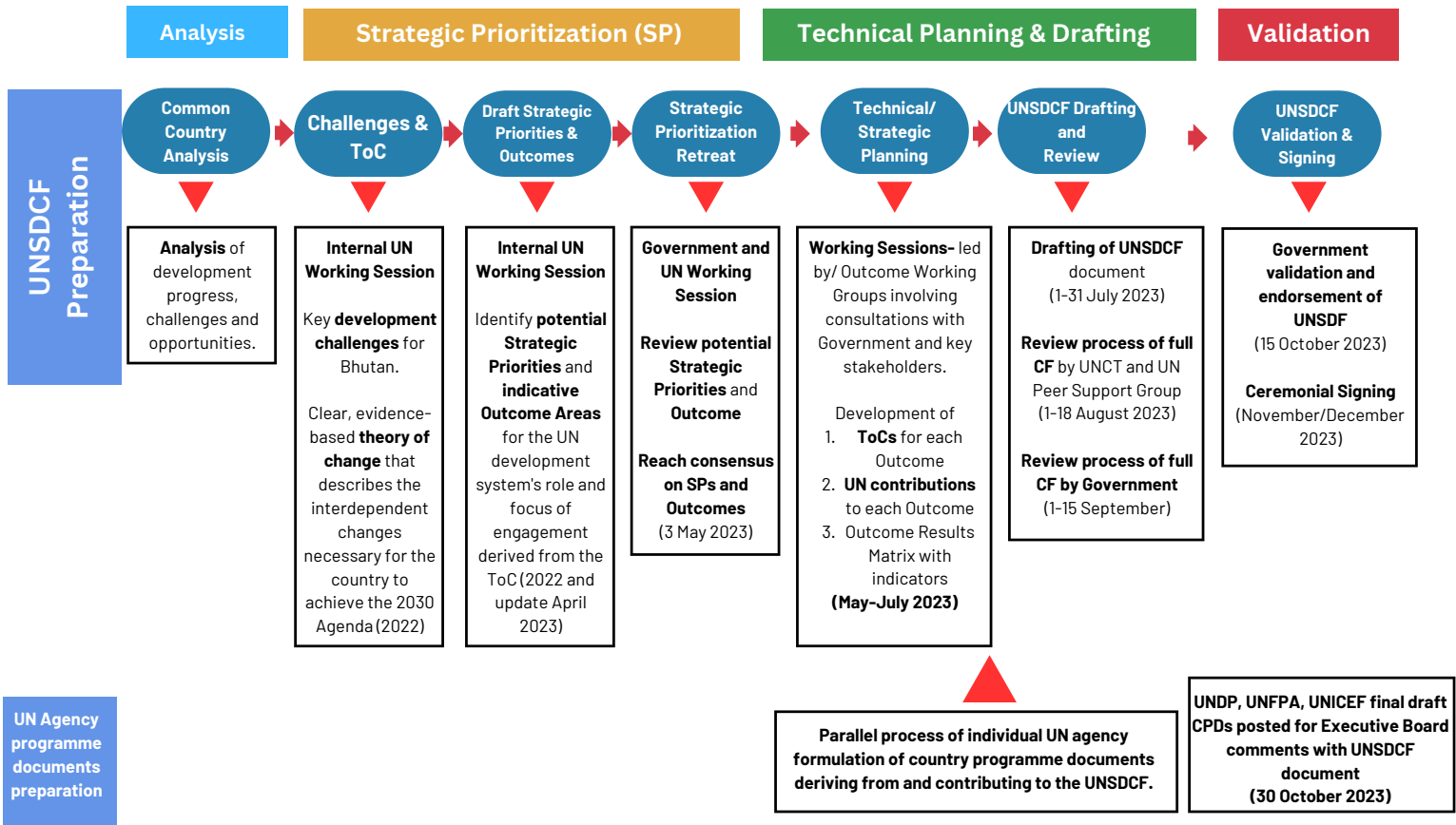
With a focus on advancing synergy and coherence among UN agencies, funds and programmes, the CCA update will serve as a collaborative platform for stakeholders to identify emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities within Bhutan's development context. By engaging in inclusive consultations with counterparts from the Royal Government, civil society organizations, and other key actors, the United Nations aims to capture diverse perspectives and insights, ensuring a holistic understanding of Bhutan's evolving needs. Furthermore, the CCA update will enable the United Nations to refine its strategic priorities and interventions, leveraging new data, evidence, and

analysis to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of its support to Bhutan.

As Bhutan enters a new phase marked by the recent elections and the formation of a new government and parliament, the United Nations will focus on facilitating orientation of the new government and parliament to the role of the United Nations system, its mandate, and ongoing initiatives in Bhutan. In addition to the orientation, UN priorities will include building strong relationships and networks with key stakeholders within the new government. Through ongoing engagement and dialogue, the United Nations aims to establish robust channels of communication and collaboration, enabling timely exchange of information, coordination of efforts, and alignment of priorities.

With 2024 being the first year of the implementation of the country's 13th FYP and the UNSDCF, the United Nations will provide comprehensive support to ensure the successful realization of national development priorities. The upcoming year presents a pivotal opportunity to focus efforts on assisting Bhutan in laying the groundwork for the effective implementation of these critical frameworks.

# UNSDCF Bhutan- Process



In the upcoming year, the United Nations is set to concentrate its efforts on supporting the Royal Government in the critical process Bhutan's graduation from the category of least developed country. This significant milestone marks a pivotal juncture in the development journey of Bhutan, signifying its transition from a least developed nation to a middle-income country. As Bhutan embarks on this transformative phase, the United Nations will remain steadfast in its commitment to providing comprehensive support to ensure a smooth and sustainable transition.

The United Nations recognizes that LDC graduation represents both opportunities and challenges for Bhutan. While it signifies significant progress in socio-economic development and international recognition of Bhutanese achievements, it also brings forth the need for strategic planning, policy adjustments, and institutional strengthening to navigate the complexities of transitioning to a middle-income status.

In 2024, the United Nations will be dedicated to advancing the implementation of the CRPD. This commitment underscores the unwavering UN dedication to promoting inclusivity, empowerment, and the full realization of human rights for all individuals, including those with disabilities through a multi-faceted approach aimed at addressing the diverse needs and priorities of persons with disabilities across the country.

Furthermore, the UN activities will prioritize initiatives aimed at raising awareness, promoting social inclusion, and combating stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities. Through advocacy campaigns, public outreach activities, and community mobilization efforts, a culture of respect, acceptance, and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities will be sought in all spheres of life.



At the heart of the UN focus for the next year is the unwavering commitment to supporting the Bhutanese journey towards achieving its development goals in alignment with the 13th FYP through the UNSDCF. Through strategic partnerships, technical expertise, and resource mobilization, the United Nations aims to facilitate the first stages of implementing these frameworks, setting a strong foundation for sustainable and inclusive development in Bhutan.

The United Nations will work closely with the Royal Government and other stakeholders in supporting Bhutan's new socio-economic ambitions in the 13th FYP and beyond where United Nations support can have the greatest impact, leveraging its expertise and resources to address complex development challenges and promote resilience-building efforts.

Furthermore, the United Nations will prioritize cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and disaster resilience, ensuring that these principles are mainstreamed across all development interventions. By adopting a holistic and integrated approach, the United Nations seeks to contribute to transformative change that benefits all segments of Bhutanese society.

The United Nations will provide tailored assistance and capacity-building support to the Royal Government to effectively manage the LDC graduation process. This will encompass a range of strategic interventions aimed at addressing the specific needs and priorities of Bhutan during this transition period.

Finally, the United Nations will remain committed to strengthening partnerships and collaboration with the Royal Government of Bhutan, civil society organizations, the private sector, and other stakeholders. By fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, the United Nations aims to leverage collective expertise, resources, and networks to address complex development challenges more effectively.



# UNITED NATIONS BHUTAN



Leaving No One Behind

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