



BHUTAN



UNITED NATIONS
BHUTAN

●
Leaving No One Behind

United Nations Country Results Report 2024



FOREWORD

BY THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR

Kuzuzangpola!

As Bhutan continues its journey towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, the United Nations (UN) remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting the country’s aspirations for inclusive, sustainable, and resilient development. The year 2024 has been a year of transformation, marked by the commencement of the 13th Five-Year Plan (FYP), the transition to a new government, and the deepening of Bhutanese engagement with regional and global development initiatives. In this evolving context, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) has worked closely with the Royal Government of Bhutan, civil society organizations, development partners, and the private sector to ensure that our collective efforts are aligned with national priorities and the overarching ambition to Leave No One Behind.

Through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2024-2028, we have strengthened our collaboration to advance economic diversification, social inclusion, climate resilience, universal health coverage, health emergencies preparedness and effective governance through digital transformation. The UNCT worked closely with the government to support the expansion of digital transformation, green finance, and entrepreneurship, while also addressing emerging challenges such as youth unemployment and outmigration. A key milestone in 2024 was the enhanced focus on disability inclusion.

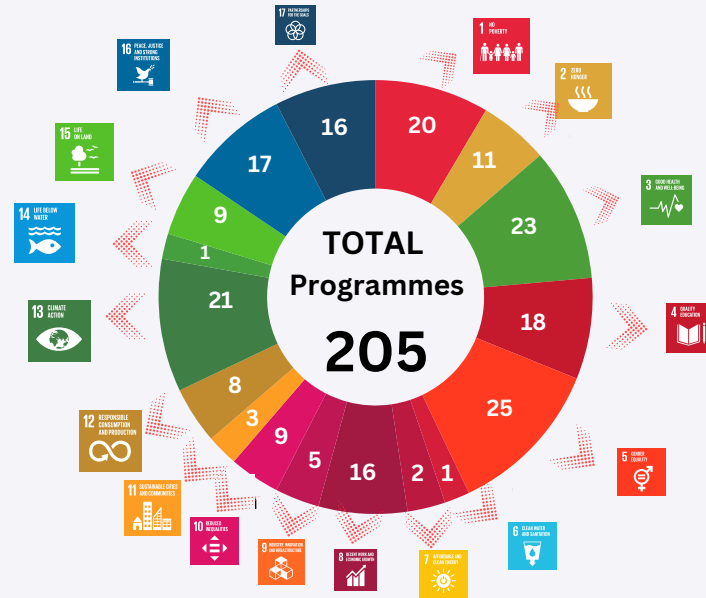
These achievements would not have been possible without the unwavering commitment and leadership of the Royal Government of Bhutan. I extend my deepest gratitude to the government, development partners, civil society organizations, and the people of Bhutan for their collaboration and trust in the United Nations system. As we move forward, our focus remains on strengthening partnerships, mobilizing resources, and leveraging innovative solutions to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These achievements reflect the strength of the Bhutanese commitment to sustainable development and the invaluable partnerships that drive progress.

As we look ahead, the United Nations remains dedicated to accompanying Bhutan on this journey, ensuring that development gains are inclusive and resilient.

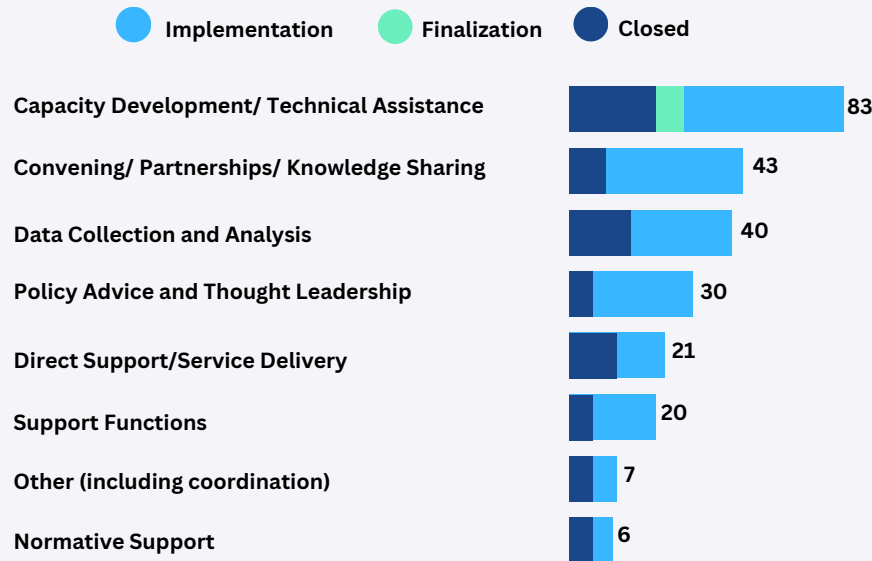
These achievements stand as a testament to Bhutan’s unwavering commitment to sustainable development, driven by a collective vision and strengthened through invaluable partnerships. The progress reflects not only the resilience and determination of the Bhutanese people but also the power of collaboration in shaping a more inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous future.



Karla Robin Hershey
Resident Coordinator
United Nations Bhutan



This visual displays the number of programmatic interventions by Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) function in 2024. These functions guide the operational activities of the UN agencies to work together cohesively to support the global development goals.



Resident Agencies



Non-resident Agencies



Key Development Partners



Donors





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CHAPTER 1

Key developments in the country and regional context

2024 was a year of significant transformation in Bhutan. The elections in early 2024 brought in a new government, which prioritized policies around economic diversification, social equity, and environmental sustainability. Using existing momentum in policy development from the preceding government, the new 13th FYP was launched in 2024, commencing on 1 July. The Cooperation Framework (2024–2028) is fully aligned with key Government priorities, ensuring commitment to sustainable development and an overarching ambition to Leaving No One Behind.

Bhutan is making notable progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in the areas of health (SDG 3), water (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7) and climate (SDG 13). The 13th FYP is committed to further strengthening progress in other areas as well. With planned financial outlays of around Nu 456 billion, it underscores the Bhutanese focus on infrastructure development, human capital investment, and economic diversification. The plan has also intensified efforts to balance economic ambitions with environmental and social well-being. The Government of India has made a particularly generous commitment to supporting the Royal Government of Bhutan, contribution Nu 100 billion to the 13th FYP.

Nevertheless, despite notable progress, Bhutan faces several challenges. First, after the COVID-19 pandemic, a rapid outmigration of mostly young Bhutanese has taken place. Between 2022 and 2024, it is estimated that up to 10 per cent of the population may have left, seeking economic opportunities abroad, raising concerns about long-term sustainability and domestic skilled labor shortages. This has also affected the implementation capacity of government and other partners. Second, Bhutan remains highly vulnerable to

climate change, with increasing risks related to glacial lake outburst floods, erratic weather patterns, and sustainable water resource management. Third, gender equality and social inclusion remain critical areas requiring sustained intervention, particularly in ensuring women's empowerment, equitable economic participation, and access to quality services for all.

Addressing these interlinked challenges requires an integrated and comprehensive approach. The country's commitment to renewable energy generation (especially hydropower) has a positive climate impact but lacks employment creation opportunities. For that reason, while Bhutan continues to rely on hydropower as an economic growth engine, it is investing in agribusiness, digital transformation, and sustainable tourism. These efforts are crucial for creating decent employment and positioning the country in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

One of the most transformative national projects under development is the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC). The GMC is proposed to become an economic and social hub, promoting economic growth with mindfulness, holistic living, and sustainability. It is in the southern lowlands of Bhutan and will be a hub for South Asian economies.

With a stronger emphasis on improved and equitable social service delivery and inclusive governance, the Bhutanese commitment to encouraging sustainability, resilience, and social cohesion remains a priority. The development journey of Bhutan continues to be guided by the principles of Gross National Happiness (GNH), ensuring that economic growth and modernization efforts remain deeply rooted in environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and holistic well-being.

CHAPTER 2

UN support to national development priorities through the Cooperation Framework

2.1 Overview of Cooperation Framework Results in 2024

Bhutan is undergoing a major transformation toward sustainable growth, social equity, and environmental resilience. Guided by the Cooperation Framework and the 13th FYP, the country is advancing economic diversification, climate action, and inclusive governance.

The Bhutan 21st Century Economic Roadmap – 10X National Economic Vision, developed under the United Nations Building Opportunities for Leadership in Development (BOLD) initiative, sets an ambitious goal for Bhutan to attain developed country status within the next 15 years. The roadmap targets a tenfold increase in real GDP, reaching Nu 1.9 trillion by 2050.

To drive this economic transformation, Bhutan will prioritize three core sectors—hydropower, agriculture, and tourism—while also fostering growth in five emerging sectors: digital economy, services, energy, manufacturing, and mining.

Supporting this vision, the Bhutan Policy Innovation Lab (PIL), established within the Prime Minister's Office, serves as a platform for the Royal Government to test, refine, and develop policies through systematic review, recalibration, and redesign, ensuring effective and adaptive policy implementation.





The Bhutan Agrifood Trade and Investment Forum (BATIF) served as a pivotal platform to highlight investment potential in Bhutan’s agrifood systems and strengthening global partnerships.

With over 70,000 youth entering the workforce over the next five years, United Nations programmes in digital skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational training have directly and indirectly benefited over 100,000 individuals, creating employment and income opportunities. Investments in renewable energy and tech startups are fostering an innovative economy.

Following its graduation from LDC status in December 2023, Bhutan continues to enhance healthcare, education, and social protection to ensure no one is left behind. United Nations support has improved maternal, child and mental health services, expanded digital health systems including the nationwide training on International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 11th Revision for more than 1,300 health workers, thereby enabling Bhutan to become the first country globally to fully adopt ICD-11, a milestone that will enhance health monitoring and policymaking. The country has also integrated climate resilience into schools, benefiting over 15,000 youth. With the nationwide screening of

Non-communicable Diseases (NCD), Bhutan has been able to advocate for early detection and prevention of NCD complications.

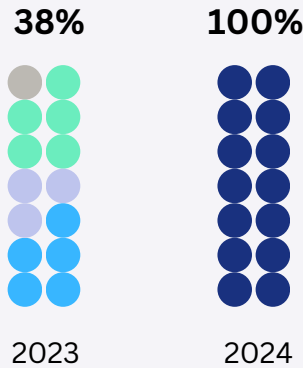
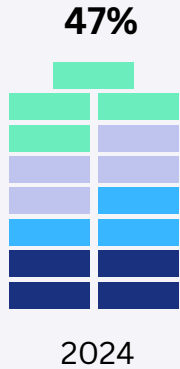
Bhutan remains a global leader in environmental sustainability, with 181,503 individuals benefiting from integrated water management. The “Advancing Climate Resilience of Water Sector in Bhutan (ACREWAS)” project promotes access to assured and safe domestic and irrigation water for communities through climate proofing of water infrastructure and watershed protection while biodiversity conservation and ecotourism initiatives are boosting incomes and reducing human-wildlife conflict.

Disaster preparedness has improved through the Punakha-Wangdue Valley GLOF Early Warning System and climate resilience training for farmers that benefitted over 59,500 people. Governance reforms, supported by capacity building and gender equality initiatives, are strengthening civic participation and legal inclusivity. Despite challenges in governance reform and investment gaps, continued collaboration with the United Nations and other partners will be crucial in ensuring a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient future.

UNCT 2024 Gender Scorecard Ranking

Exceeds Meets Approaches Missing

In 2024, Bhutan undertook UNCT-SWAP Comprehensive Assessment to feed in to the new Cooperation Framework.

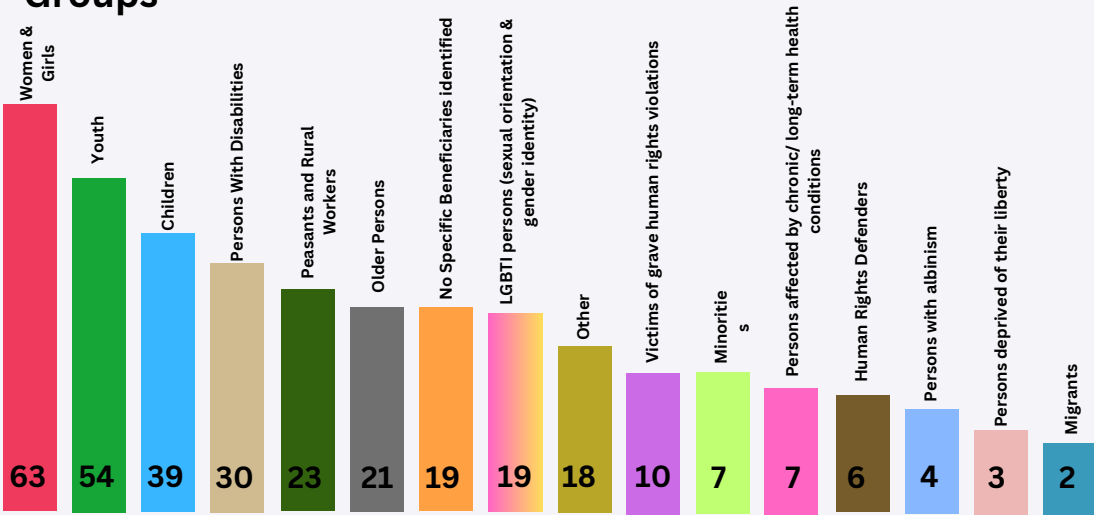


Progress on Disability Inclusion

Exceeds Meets Approaches Missing Not Applicable

In 2024, Bhutan was a global leader by Exceeding Requirements for all 14 indicators under the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy.

Number of Programmatic Interventions Targeting LNOB Groups



There are 20 global standard Leave No One Behind (LNOB) groups identified and targeted through various programmatic interventions at the country level. The above is a representation of Bhutan’s programmatic intervention and its impact on the LNOB Groups.

Outcome 1: By 2028, Bhutan has sustainable and diversified economic growth, decent employment and livelihoods and shared prosperity.

Bhutan is advancing sustainable economic growth, employment, and shared prosperity under the Cooperation Framework and the 13th FYP. The United Nations in Bhutan supports innovation, institutional strengthening, and multi-sector partnerships to drive progress.

Key milestones in 2024 include the 10X Economic Roadmap, which sets priorities for economic diversification and private sector growth, and the Industrial Transformation Mapping report, identifying sectors for inclusive development. The United Nations in Bhutan also backed tax digitization, the first gender impact analysis of tax policies, and the global registration of "Made in Bhutan" and "Grown in Bhutan" brands.

To enhance food security, the UN supported the Peri-Urban and Urban Agriculture Framework, benefiting farmers like Kinley from Thimphu (see page 9). Bhutan's first Agrifood Trade and Investment Forum (BATIF) showcased six innovative products, attracted investors, and strengthened agrifood systems. To reduce food imports, the UN supported quinoa and Nameko mushroom production, and the Noble Yak fibre value chain roadmap to boost exports.

The Sustainability Bond framework, developed with United Nations support, is attracting climate

investments and green jobs. Additionally, the Bhutan AgriSustain Fund, launched by Prime Minister Dasho Tshering Tobgay at the World Food Forum 2024, enhances climate resilience, strengthens agrifood value chains, and empowers marginalized communities.

With 70,000 youth entering the workforce by 2029, the United Nations is strengthening digital and entrepreneurial skills, supporting startups at the Bhutan Innovation and Technology Centre (BITC), and implementing a digital FDI action plan. The National Youth Symposium 2024 engaged over 250 participants, featuring the Youth-led Agrifood Innovation Challenge, where Phurpa Dorji won the Best Innovative Award at the Asia-Pacific Youth Development Forum (APYDF). The event also launched the World Food Forum Bhutan Chapter and introduced the SDG Action Card Game 'X' to engage youth in agrifood transformation.

The United Nations is empowering youth and persons with disabilities through biotech workshops, digital marketing training, and seed funding, benefiting 72 individuals, mainly women and youth. Two entrepreneurial projects, eco-friendly food products and natural dye production—received funding, demonstrating the impact of these initiatives.



PROGRESS SNAPSHOT

10X Economic Roadmap developed under the Bhutan Opportunities for Leadership Development (BOLD) initiative in 2024.

541 individuals benefitted from UN-backed agricultural programs, with 235 women receiving targeted support.

Industrial Transformation Mapping report identified potential growth sectors for sustainable development.

AgriSustain Fund launched to address challenges in agriculture and empower marginalized communities.

Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Framework developed to enhance resilience and food security, benefiting farmers.

Nu 10 billion allocated in the 13th FYP to equip 70,000 young Bhutanese with skills.

Sustainability Bond Framework launched to attract sustainable investments and promote green jobs.

Digital skills development supported for young entrepreneurs through the Bhutan Innovation and Technology Centre (BITC).

BATIF hosted in 2024, showcasing six innovative products and attracting international investors, boosting FDI.

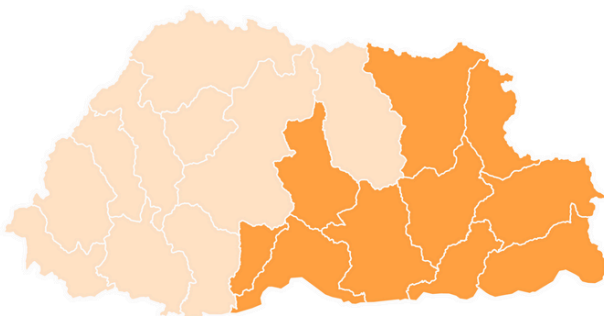
National Youth Symposium in 2024 with over 250 participants and 32 innovative business proposals in the Agrifood Innovation Challenge.

Food imports are reduced through initiatives like the One Country, One Priority Product and Nameko mushroom production.

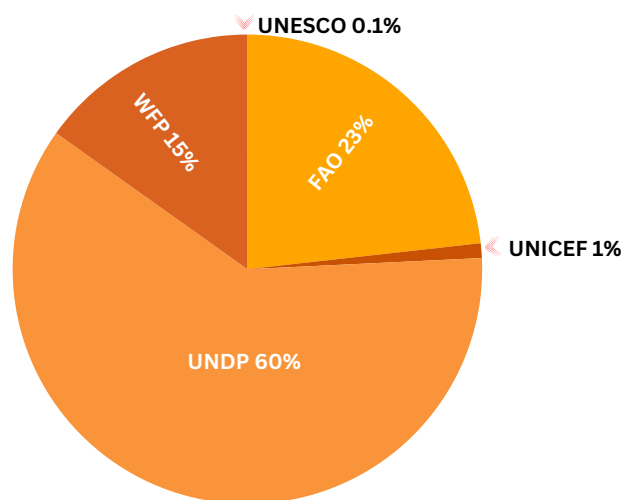
72 individuals (primarily youth and women) trained in biotechnology, seed funding, and digital marketing.

Outcome 1: By 2028, Bhutan has sustainable and diversified economic growth, decent employment and livelihoods and shared prosperity.

Programmatic Interventions Across Dzongkhags



2024 Expenditure share in percentage

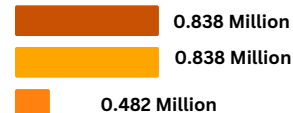
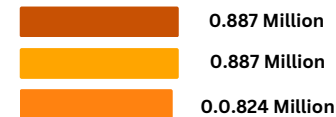


IFAD and ESCAP provide programmatic support without financial details in the Annual Workplan.

UN Agencies:



2024 Financial Delivery



All figures in USD

Co-chair: Royal Government of Bhutan

Ms. Kunzang Lhamu, Director General, MoICE

Co-chair: United Nations Bhutan

Mr. Ken Shimizu, Representative, FAO

BOX STORY

Growing Fresh, Growing Smart

Kinley's Hydroponics Journey in Bhutan

Turning crisis into opportunity, Kinley Wangmo pioneered hydroponics in Bhutan, tackling food insecurity with innovation. With FAO's support, she's scaling up, proving fresh food can thrive—no soil needed.

Growing Fresh, Growing Smart: Kinley’s Hydroponics Journey in Bhutan

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kinley Wangmo and her family lost their source of income, like millions around the world. But instead of giving up, Kinley found an innovative solution: hydroponic farming, a method of growing plants using nutrient-rich water instead of soil.

Initially sparked by curiosity, Kinley's interest blossomed into a deep passion. After completing online training, she realized hydroponics could address food security and land fragmentation challenges in Bhutan.

Hydroponics uses less water, is more productive, and can be done year-round. Challenged by the cost of setting up, Kinley used her background as a contractor to build a low-cost, efficient hydroponic system. Using the deep-flow technique, her system recycles water, making it practical for small-scale farmers in Bhutan's rugged terrain.

In 2020, Kinley founded Bhutan Hydroponics in a small greenhouse in Thimphu. In early 2024, she was one of 30 recipients of funding through the Peri-Urban and Urban Farming project, supported by FAO. The support provided land development, equipment, and technical assistance, allowing her to establish three greenhouses.

Hydroponics offers faster plant growth and uses less space, Kinley explains. "In a greenhouse, we can control everything to ensure the plants grow well," she says. She is also an advocate for self-sufficiency, sharing her knowledge and offering affordable hydroponic systems.



With about a third of the Bhutanese population facing food insecurity, urban farming is becoming a crucial strategy. Kinley aims to increase access to fresh, nutritious food in urban areas while promoting healthier eating habits.

Her business now employs nine people, including single mothers and youth. She currently grows lettuce, which she supplies to hotels and markets. Kinley plans to expand her crop variety and hire more staff as demand grows.

Through innovation and dedication, Kinley is helping to shape the future of agriculture in Bhutan, promoting sustainable, technology-driven solutions that inspire others to follow suit.



Outcome 2: By 2028, people in Bhutan benefit from strengthened quality, inclusive and lifelong social services and practices.

Bhutan's transition from LDC status is marked by efforts to balance economic growth with social equity. The United Nations has been instrumental in supporting the strengthening of healthcare, education, and social protection, ensuring resilience for future generations.

In healthcare, maternal and neonatal care have improved, with the Integrated RMNCAH+ Strategy enhancing service quality and advancing Universal Health Coverage. The United Nations facilitated Bhutan's adoption of infertility services and expanded contraceptive choices through South-South cooperation. The Bhutan Newborn Action Plan has significantly reduced neonatal mortality rates. A Post-Flagship Action Plan accelerates cervical cancer elimination by addressing service quality and resource gaps.

Digital transformation in healthcare has positioned Bhutan as a global leader in ICD-11 adoption, integrating it with the Electronic Patient Information System for high-quality health data by 2025. National Health Service Standards now guide equitable access, resource optimization, and service accountability. Mental health services have expanded through a National Mental Health Strategy and the training of 173 counselors.

Efforts to combat gender-based violence include survivor-centered care training in 86% of hospitals and 41% of health facilities.

Traditional medicine is being integrated with modern healthcare, supported by research, treatment guidelines, and medicinal plant conservation. Public health collaboration has strengthened local health systems, with a revised National Medical Devices List improving procurement and regulation. A nationwide NCD screening program and a multi-sectoral action plan (2025–2030) target disease prevention, while infection control investments enhance healthcare resilience.

In education, the National Education Policy (2024) ensures inclusive and lifelong learning. Life skills education is now part of the monastic curriculum, and assessments of 9,000 students guide learning improvements. Teachers are trained to adapt Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) materials for children with disabilities. Technology-driven education initiatives, including the National Innovation Challenge and UPSHIFT, have empowered 15,000 youth. Climate resilience is integrated into early childhood education, and climate-resilient water supply systems are being implemented in schools.



PROGRESS SNAPSHOT



86% of hospitals and 41% of health facilities in Bhutan now provide survivor-centered care for GBV cases.



65 teachers from 35 inclusive schools have been trained to adapt CSE materials for students with disabilities.



173 counselors have been trained to support mental health services across Bhutan.



Over 15,000 adolescents and youth empowered through entrepreneurship and innovation programs.



National Tuberculosis Strategic Plan (2024-2028) and updated STI treatment guidelines have been implemented.



6 schools implemented climate-resilient water supply schemes in 2024.



Newborn Action Plan and advancements in maternal and neonatal care have significantly reduced neonatal mortality.



Digital lesson plans for Dzongkha, English, Science, and Social Studies have been developed for PP-VI students.



Cervical Cancer Elimination Roadmap has been developed, focusing on standardized screening and treatment.



A national social protection framework and action plan for the National Senior Citizen Policy have been formulated.



9,000 students from 246 schools participated in a nationwide inclusive education assessment for Grades III and VI.

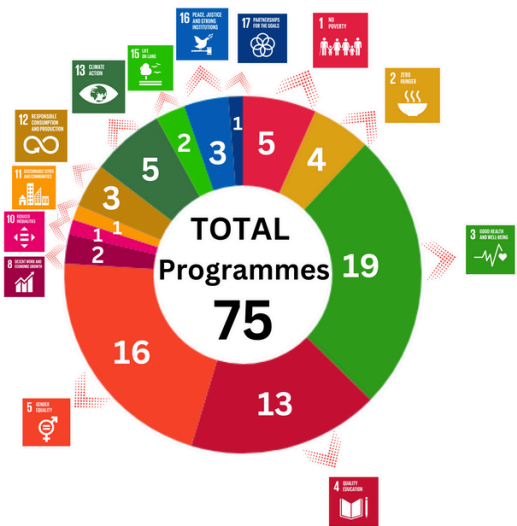
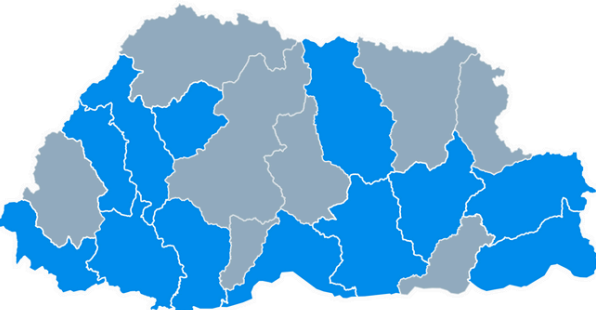


The National Health Survey (NHS) 2024 and Bhutan Living Standards Survey (BLLS) 2022 were completed in 2024.

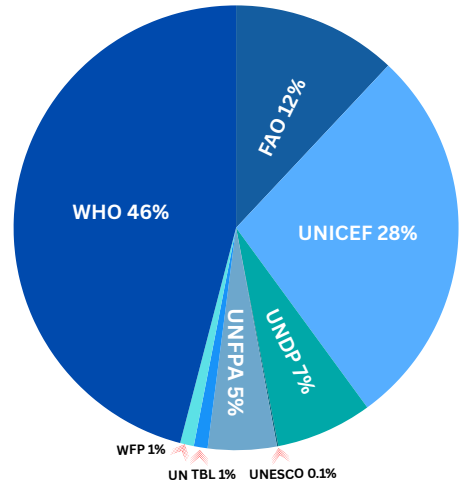
Outcome 2: By 2028, people in Bhutan benefit from strengthened quality, inclusive and lifelong social services and practices.



Programmatic Interventions Across Dzongkhags



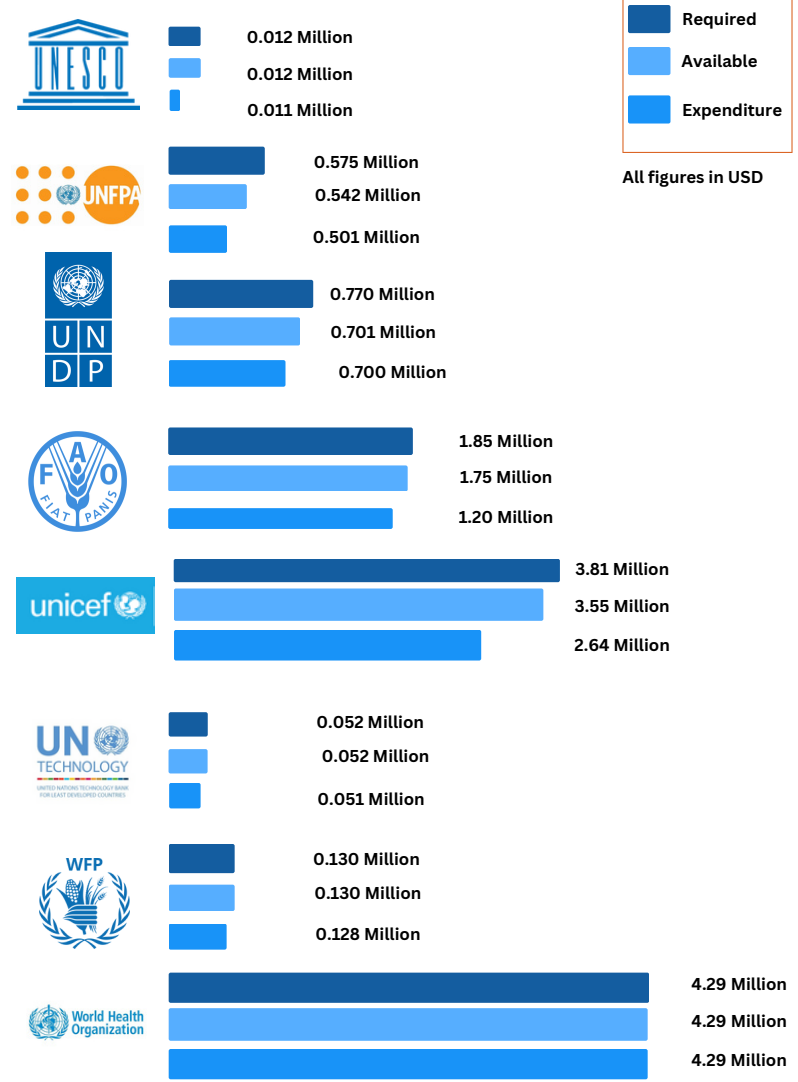
2024 Expenditure share in percentage



UN Agencies:



2024 Financial Delivery



All figures in USD

Co-chair: Royal Government of Bhutan

Mr. Tashi Namgay, Director, MoESD

Co-chair: United Nations Bhutan

Ms. Andrea James, Representative, UNICEF

BOX STORY

Nurturing Dreams in Monastic Schools

Celebrating World Children's Day with New Hope for Monastic Students

On World Children's Day, Bhutan's monastic schools launched the Integrated Child-Friendly Intervention (ICFI) with the Central Monastic Body and the UN, enhancing health, education, and well-being for young monks and nuns.



Bhutan’s Surge in Disability Inclusion

In 2024, the United Nations in Bhutan made significant advances toward disability inclusion, setting a benchmark for collaborative, transformative action in the region. Through Resident Coordinator leadership and a unified vision, remarkable milestones were achieved, demonstrating the power of innovation, partnership, and coherence.

Under the direct focus on persons with disabilities in Outcome 2, Agenda Chikha was established. It is the largest-ever collaboration on disability inclusion in Bhutan, with eight United Nations agencies joining forces with the Royal Government of Bhutan, development partners, and civil society organizations. Agenda Chikha brings together USD 8 million of commitments for a set of transformative projects aimed at empowering persons with disabilities. Launched with the patronage of Her Royal Highness, Princess Eeuphelma Choden Wangchuck, the President of the Bhutan Paralympics Association, Agenda Chikha focuses on four key pillars: empowering lives, lifting our game, changing mindsets, and building knowledge. This initiative emphasizes the value-addition of the United Nations as a convener, bringing diverse stakeholders together to create meaningful change.

In a push for inclusivity, the United Nations system in Bhutan created four new positions through the United Nations Volunteers Special Initiative for persons with disabilities. This brought the total number of persons with disabilities employed within the United Nations system in Bhutan from one to five.

Phurpa Wangchuk, a United Nations staff member said, “As someone who navigates the world on wheels, being part of this transformative journey is empowering and meaningful. United Nations Bhutan’s initiative isn’t just about inclusion; it is about creating a future where ability, not disability, defines opportunity. Here in Bhutan, I see that change unfolding every day.”

The Include Ability campaign, launched by the Prime Minister, reached over 100,000 people, raising awareness and sparking conversations about disability inclusion across the nation. With powerful storytelling, community engagement, and targeted outreach, the campaign became a cornerstone of UNCT advocacy efforts, bringing disability rights to the forefront of national discourse.

Inclusion is now a guiding principle for United Nations operations in Bhutan. Disability-inclusive actions have been mainstreamed across the Operations Management Team, ensuring accessibility and equity in daily work processes. Nearly all staff, including senior UNCT leaders, participated in Disability Equality Training (DET) sessions led by the Disabled Persons Organization of Bhutan (DPO-B), advancing a culture of awareness and accountability.

Today, the momentum continues. Plans are underway to support the establishment of a sustainable business model for providing sign language interpretation services. This initiative aims to further empower the community, creating economic opportunities for persons with disabilities while reinforcing the broader agenda of inclusion.

The surge in disability inclusion in Bhutan illustrates the distinct value of the Resident Coordinators Office (RCO) in driving coherence and delivering results. From resource mobilization to advocacy, these efforts reflect a deep commitment to leaving no one behind. As this experience demonstrates, when teams work together with a shared purpose, the impact can be transformative, paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable future.



Outcome 3: By 2028, Bhutan’s environment remains sustainably managed, and its people are more resilient to disaster risks and climate change.

In 2024, the United Nations played a pivotal role in advancing environmental sustainability and climate resilience in Bhutan. A key milestone was the completion of a 38-kilometer irrigation scheme in Phangyul, Wangdue Phodrang, which ended a decades-long water crisis and revitalized 1,241 acres of farmland. Over 59,500 farmers adopted climate-resilient agricultural practices, while 181,503 individuals benefited from integrated water resource management initiatives, strengthening Bhutan’s preparedness against climate vulnerabilities. The nationwide rollout of WASH FIT improved water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services in health facilities, while WASH audits in three districts enhanced drinking water quality. Additionally, the United Nations supported 13 local governments in strengthening water governance, completing 320.3 kilometers of farm irrigation schemes under climate resilience projects.

Bhutan’s biodiversity conservation and ecotourism efforts also saw significant progress. The United Nations facilitated the development of integrated tools for 26 national entities, surpassing the initial target of four, through initiatives such as the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action

Plan (NBSAP), ecotourism projects, and the Small Grants Programme. The Tourism Master Plan introduced nine tourism products, promoting sustainable livelihoods and economic diversification through community-led homestays and lodge services. These interventions led to a 13% increase in household incomes and a 32% reduction in human-wildlife conflicts. Meanwhile, efforts to promote clean energy solutions continued, with a United Nations-supported programme enabling 3,250 individuals to transition to electric cookstoves, contributing to Bhutan’s goal of installing 25,000–30,000 stoves by 2025.

In global conservation efforts, the Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference secured commitments to mobilize USD 1 billion over the next decade for tiger and habitat protection. To drive investments in nature-positive businesses, the United Nations launched the Tiger Landscapes Investment Fund, promoting biodiversity conservation alongside sustainable community development. Bhutan’s climate commitments under its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) also saw progress, including the establishment of the

Highland Trust Fund and a crowdfunding initiative for sustainable highland development. The United Nations supported Bhutan in preparing its first Biennial Transparency Report to meet UNFCCC obligations and initiated planning for NDC 3.0 to enhance national climate ambitions.

Strengthening disaster resilience remained a priority, with the development of the Punakha-Wangdue Valley Glacier Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) Early Warning System, a national disaster loss and damage database, and the Bhutan

Climate Projection Report. Over 60,847 individuals received climate adaptation training, including 59,504 farmers and 31 National Center for Hydrology and Meteorology (NCHM) officials, equipping them to conduct climate risk analyses and improve disaster response mechanisms. In emergency preparedness, the United Nations supported Bhutan in developing its first 13 emergency operation manuals, including the country’s first-ever national logistics manual, ensuring standardized coordination and response mechanisms for future crises.



PROGRESS SNAPSHOT



59,500 farmers adopted climate-resilient farming.



181,503 people benefited from water management and sustainable farming initiatives.



900 households and 10,000 people benefited from a climate-resilient water supply.



26 national entities developed biodiversity conservation tools.



3,250 people benefited from the UN electric cookstove program.



Household incomes rose 13% through UN-backed ecotourism.



32% reduction in human-wildlife conflict incidents due to ecotourism interventions.



Goal set to raise \$1 billion in 10 years for tiger conservation.



112 households in four gewogs received irrigation tools for water efficiency.



60,847 people engaged in UN-led climate and disaster resilience training.



59,504 farmers trained in climate adaptation, DRR, and geospatial technology.



13 emergency operation manuals developed, including Bhutan's first logistics manual.

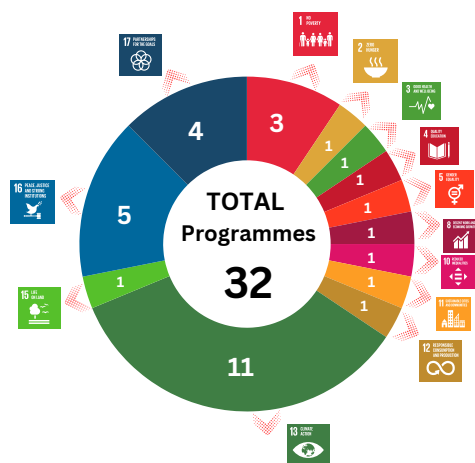


Outcome 3: By 2028, Bhutan's environment remains sustainably managed, and its people are more resilient to disaster risks and climate change.

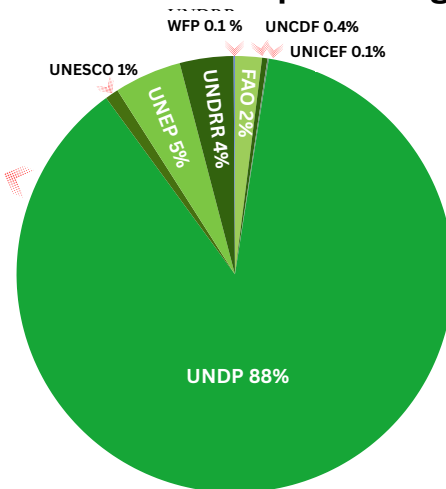
Programmatic Interventions Across Dzongkhags



ESCAP provide programmatic support without financial details in the Annual Workplan.



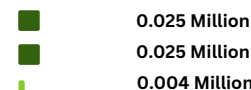
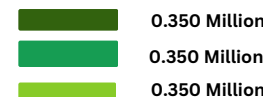
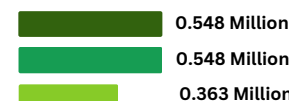
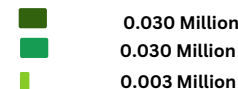
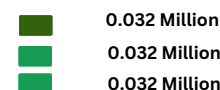
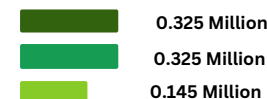
2024 Expenditure share in percentage



UN Agencies:



2024 Financial Delivery



All figures in USD

Co-chair: Royal Government of Bhutan

Mr. Sonam Tashi, Director, MoENR

Co-chair: United Nations Bhutan

Ms. Carrie Morrison, Country Director & Representative, WFP

BOX STORY

Protecting Yaks, Preserving Highlands

Peace on the Peaks: Protecting Highland Communities and Their Yaks

"Peace on the Peaks" safeguards Bhutan's highland communities by protecting yaks and endangered snow leopards through crowdfunding for predator-safe enclosures, ensuring harmony between people, wildlife, and nature.



The situation is challenging. Every year, an average of 159 yaks are killed by wild animals, many of them calves. This has led to retaliatory killings of the predators, including the elusive snow leopards, which play a vital role in maintaining the balance of the Bhutanese mountain ecosystems.

In response, "Peace on the Peaks" is working to protect both yaks and snow leopards through a unique crowdfunding campaign. The initiative seeks to raise funds to distribute portable iron mesh to 149 yak-herding households, helping to shield the yaks from predators and reduce human-wildlife conflict. At the same time, the campaign aims to raise awareness about the importance of protecting snow leopards.

"We rely on our yaks for everything—our livelihoods, our warmth, our sustenance," says Sangay Dorji, a yak herder from Gasa district. "This campaign is not just about protecting our yaks, it's about preserving the way of life for all of us here in the highlands."

Peace on the Peaks: Protecting Highland Communities and Their Yaks

In the remote highlands of Bhutan, where the air is thin and the land rugged, yaks have long been more than just animals. They are the lifeblood of the highland communities, embodying the resilience and spirit of the people who depend on them. With their thick, warm coats and unwavering strength, these majestic creatures offer warmth from their wool, sustenance from their milk, and steadfast companionship in the harshest climates.

But as these highland communities face mounting challenges, the bond between the people and their yaks is under threat. The "Peace on the Peaks" initiative was created to preserve this cherished tradition and support the remote communities who rely on yaks for their livelihoods. The programme not only aims to protect the yaks but also the unique mountain ecosystem they help sustain, including the endangered snow leopards that prey on the yaks.

For Damcho Tshering of the Laya Yak Association, life as a yak herder is a tough one. "We live a tough life, relocating almost every year, staying up all night guarding our yaks from bears, tigers, snow leopards, wild dogs, and Himalayan wolves," he says. This struggle is compounded by the decline in the yak population—a 28% decrease since 2019, with threats from inadequate feed, disease, and wildlife predation.



Outcome 4: By 2028, Bhutan has more inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance and rule of law.

In 2024, Bhutan made significant strides in strengthening inclusive and accountable governance through collaboration between the government and the United Nations. Efforts focused on public service delivery, gender equality, technology, access to justice, and civic participation. The addition of eight new public services streamlined government processes, while the AI Readiness Assessment set the stage for future technology-driven governance. The establishment of a Policy Lab under the Prime Minister's Office fostered policy innovation, and integrating the SDG dashboard into the Bhutan Statistical Database System (BSDS) enabled real-time, data-driven decision-making. Training programs, including R software training for 22 statistical officers and National Transfer Accounts (NTA) analysis for policymakers, strengthened Bhutan's ability to analyze economic and demographic shifts.

Bhutan also advanced its international human rights commitments with United Nations support, achieving key milestones such as the national review of Beijing+30, the submission of its fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and the presentation of its

multi-stakeholder consultations and engagement with 6th and 7th reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The United Nations facilitated parliamentarians to enhance oversight on treaty implementation, including a parliamentary review on disability rights. The National Council's Social and Cultural Affairs Committee conducted public consultations, culminating in a State of Persons with Disabilities report presented to Parliament with key policy recommendations.

Gender equality remained a priority, with the development of an action plan for gender equity in public administration and a networking forum for women in leadership to address systemic challenges. Legal aid programs supported 154 individuals, including persons with disabilities, strengthening access to justice. Bhutan also introduced the Justice for Children action plan, trained 53 lawyers in child-friendly legal aid, and expanded Women and Girls' Support Services to ten districts. Nationwide, the establishment of Women and Child Protection Desks (WCPDs) in all districts enhanced gender-based violence prevention and response, benefiting 612 women and children.

Bhutan's disability inclusion agenda gained momentum with the Agenda Chikha initiative, promoting empowerment and knowledge-sharing for persons with disabilities. Disability Equality Training (DET) led to tangible policy changes, including Drukair's introduction of priority check-in and boarding services. The access-to-justice program prioritized individuals with disabilities, while civic engagement efforts empowered youth and women to shape governance.

To strengthen justice sector capacities, the United Nations collaborated with the Legal Aid Centre (LAC) and the

Office of the Attorney General to develop a pretrial legal aid toolkit and guidelines for protecting child victims and witnesses. Training for 21 Royal Bhutan Police officers improved child-friendly policing, while life skills programs supported the rehabilitation and reintegration of children at the Youth Development and Rehabilitation Centre (YDRC). Additionally, Bhutan's first summer school on Justice for Children provided 20 professionals with specialized training on child rights and legal frameworks.



PROGRESS SNAPSHOT



8 new public services introduced to streamline government processes.



AI Readiness Assessment completed; SDG dashboard integrated into the BSDS.



22 statistical officers trained in R software.



National Transfer Accounts (NTA) analysis introduced to assess population aging impact.



Gender equality action plan for public administration developed.



154 received legal aid, including 149 with disabilities.



18 justice officials engaged in the Justice for Children action plan.



3-day orientation for new parliamentarians on SDG-aligned legislative goals.



Legal aid prioritized for persons with disabilities.



Youth and women engaged in governance, focusing on young girls in leadership.



Data journalism workshops conducted; community radio workshop held to enhance freedom of expression.

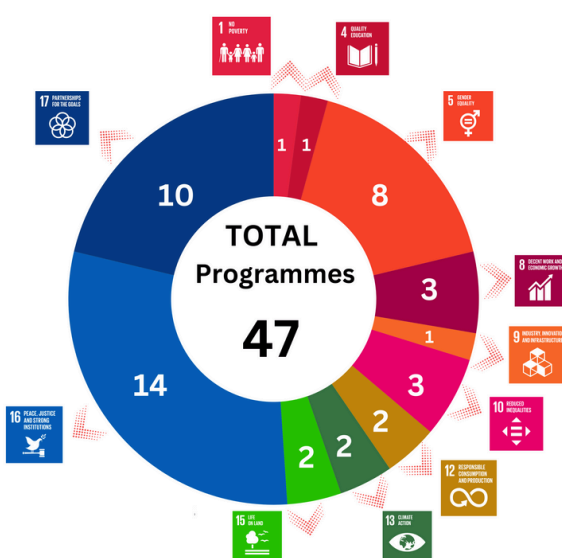
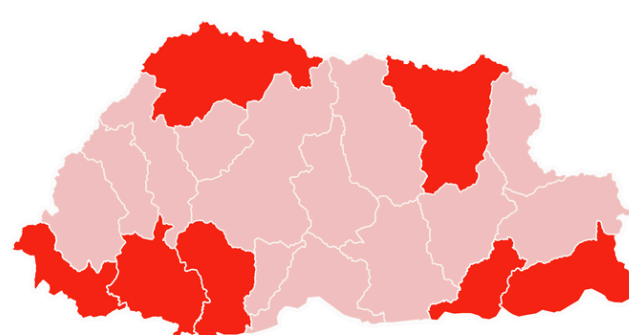


National GBV elimination strategy developed; care economy policy brief released.

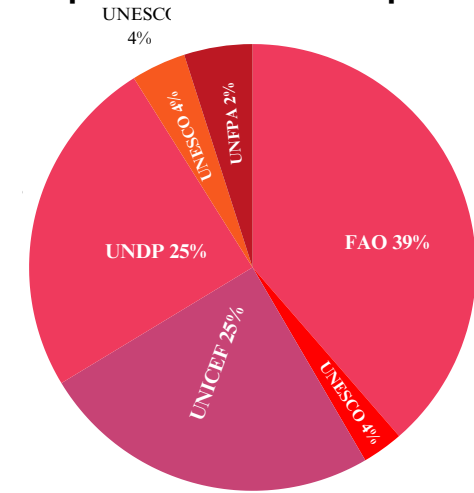


Outcome 4: By 2028, Bhutan has more inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance and rule of law.

Programmatic Interventions Across Dzongkhags



2024 Expenditure share in percentage



UN Agencies:



2024 Financial Delivery			
			0.807 Million
			0.807 Million
			0.339 Million
		0.046 Million	
		0.046 Million	
		0.027 Million	
		0.345 Million	
		0.303 Million	
		0.220 Million	
		0.221 Million	
		0.221 Million	
		0.221 Million	
		0.037 Million	
		0.037 Million	
		0.031 Million	
		0.042 Million	
		0.042 Million	
		0.042 Million	

Required

Available

Expenditure

All figures in USD

Co-chair: Royal Government of Bhutan
Ms. Sonam Palden Thaye, Director, RCSC
Co-chair: United Nations Bhutan
Mr. Mohammad Younas, Resident Representative, UNDP

BOX STORY
Empowering Women, Transforming Governance
Empowering Bhutanese Women: A Bold Step Towards Gender Equality in Public Administration

Bhutan's National Action Plan for Gender Equality in Public Administration paves the way for women's leadership in governance. With bold reforms and targeted policies, it aims to break barriers, ensuring women's voices shape the nation's future.



Bhutanese Women in STEM Leading the Way

In Bhutan, where tradition and modernity coexist, women are breaking barriers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The country has made significant progress in gender equality and the empowerment of women. While the representation of women in STEM fields remains low, a new generation of Bhutanese women and girls are challenging these norms, proving that science and innovation are for everyone.

From space engineers to climate scientists. From IT specialists to health researchers. Bhutanese women are increasingly making their mark in STEM.

One such trailblazer is Dr. Pooja Lepcha, a Deputy Executive Engineer at the Division of Telecom and Space under the Government Technology (GovTech) Agency. Dr. Lepcha has played a pivotal role in Bhutan’s space journey.

A graduate in electrical engineering from the College of Science and Technology, Royal University of Bhutan, she was awarded the UN/Japan Long-Term Fellowship (PNST) in 2017. This fellowship enabled her to pursue a master's degree in Space Engineering at Kyushu Institute of Technology, where she later completed her doctoral studies. Dr. Lepcha’s work on the BIRDS-2 satellite project culminated in the launch of BHUTAN-1, the country’s first satellite. She has since contributed to more than ten satellite projects while in Japan, specializing in Electrical Power Systems (EPS). She is currently leading Bhutan’s next satellite development project as the satellite systems engineer with a team of Bhutanese engineers at GovTech’s facilities. She also coordinates joint satellite projects with students from Royal University of Bhutan’s colleges.

Passionate about advancing STEM education and space technology, Dr. Lepcha aspires to build in-country capacity in space systems engineering, and promote international collaboration in space, increasing Bhutan’s participation in global space initiatives.

Dr. Lepcha challenges any notion that women cannot stand shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts in STEM.

“Girls just need a little push firstly from their family and then from the society to be who they want to be and reach far beyond the stars. Everyone faces challenges, but how resilient you are defining who you become,” she says. “Each time a girl takes a step forward in STEM, she is not just defying stereotypes but inspiring countless other girls to believe in themselves too. Believing in yourself, especially when the whole world says otherwise, can pave a path for more girls to follow.”

Executive Engineer Dechen Dema holds a similar view. Ms. Dema champions Bhutan’s leadership in sustainable energy. With an Australia Awards Scholarship, she earned a Master’s in Renewable and Sustainable Energy from Murdoch University, equipping her to lead key initiatives in renewable energy development, energy efficiency and policy planning.

She organized Energy Week, Bhutan’s first webinar series on renewable energy and energy efficiency. She mobilizes resources for energy projects and contributed to Bhutan’s SDG 7 roadmap, Bhutan Energy Data Directory 2022 and Bhutan’s first Green Hydrogen Roadmap.

Ms. Dema believes that STEM is more than just an academic pursuit—it’s a powerful catalyst for change, especially for women and girls. As an executive engineer working in the energy sector, she has gained valuable experience that has not only allowed her to grow professionally but have also opened doors to international collaborations, high-level forums, and leadership roles that she once thought were beyond reach. She hopes that the young girls of Bhutan today can have similar opportunities.

The United Nations in Bhutan, in partnership with the government, supports initiatives like Girls in ICT Day, mentorship programs, and STEM scholarships. A four-day STEM hackathon in Gelephu introduced girls to neural networks, space technology, AI, and digital literacy. Among the participants was Kinley Pem, an 11th-grade student whose idea was shortlisted from 129 schools.

“Girls are just as smart as boys and have innovative ideas to improve our communities through technology,” she says.

As Bhutan continues its journey towards a knowledge-based economy, the contributions of women in STEM will be instrumental in driving sustainable development, innovation, and economic growth. By creating an inclusive and supportive environment, Bhutan is ensuring that women are not just participants but leaders in shaping the country’s technological and scientific future.

"When we empower girls with STEM education, we are not just changing their lives; we are changing our future towards one that is sustainable, prosperous and leaves no one behind. We are building a legacy for the next generation of women and girls" says Karla Robin Hershey, Resident Coordinator of UN Bhutan.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science and 30 years since the Beijing Declaration. The Pact for the Future, adopted by UN Member States, reinforces commitments to breaking barriers for women in STEM.

As Bhutan continues its journey towards sustainable development, ensuring equal opportunities for women in STEM will be crucial. By breaking barriers today, Bhutanese women are not just transforming their own futures—they are shaping a better tomorrow for all.

Story originally published on 11 February 2025

2.3. Support to Partnership and Financing the 2030 Agenda

In 2024, the United Nations strengthened strategic partnerships to advance SDGs and leverage financing for the 2030 Agenda. These partnerships have strengthened innovation, multistakeholder collaboration, and facilitated financing mechanisms with national development priorities.

Key initiatives include:



Bhutan SDG Partnership Week

The United Nations and government organized the inaugural Bhutan SDG Partnership Week, launched by Her Royal Highness Princess Euphelma Choden Wangchuck, President of the Bhutan Paralympic Committee. This weeklong event united stakeholders to strengthen partnerships for a sustainable future. The week featured dialogues, exhibitions, and initiatives promoting innovative, inclusive solutions to accelerate the SDGs. Young people, the private sector and people with disabilities played crucial roles throughout the week. It culminated in a vibrant SDG Festival on at Clock Tower Square, Thimphu’s equivalent of Times Square.

Prime Minister Lyonchhen Dasho Tshering Tobgay emphasized the Bhutanese alignment with the SDGs, stating: “Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness philosophy complements the Sustainable Development Goals. The Bhutan SDG Partnership Week reflects our shared vision for a future where no one is left behind.”

A key highlight was the unveiling of Agenda Chikha, a collaborative initiative advancing disability inclusion through four pillars: empowering lives, lifting our game, changing mindsets, and building knowledge.

Support to the 13th FYP

In 2024, the United Nations supported the government to review the indicator framework for the 13th FYP, comprising ten national key performance indicators and 289 indicators across four clusters: sustainable economic development, social development, security, and governance. Recommendations were categorized for immediate, short- to medium-term, and long-term implementation.

Immediate actions included establishing an institutional mechanism for data coordination, creating a metadata repository, and conducting a data needs assessment. In the short to medium term, Bhutan should enhance macroeconomic modelling for consistency and develop a data dissemination platform. Lessons learned for the 14th FYP include early involvement of the National Statistics Bureau (NSB), adequate time for indicator development, improved data literacy and clear guidance for agencies.

Catalysing USD 1 billion for tigers and tiger landscapes

The Bhutan Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference marked a watershed moment for global conservation efforts. The conference, which brought together tiger range countries, visionary private and public sector donors, international development agencies, the Tiger Conservation Coalition and other conservation organisations, ended with a commitment to mobilise an additional USD 1 billion for protection for tigers and tiger landscapes. Tigers represent more than endangered animal. As keystone species, they are critical indicators of our ecosystem health and are intricately tied to the wellbeing the people and planet. Therefore, protecting tigers is protecting the planet.

UPSHIFT Programme- Empowering young minds to become social innovators

Rinchen Yoezer Wangmo, a 12-year-old student of remote Tshatshi Primary School in the eastern district of Pemagatshel, is one of the students experimenting in producing fruit juices to replace alcohol in their communities. Through drama and role play, the students showed their solutions to the problems alcohol was causing in their homes and to themselves.

Rinchen’s experience captures the experience of more than 5,000 adolescents and youth spread across Bhutan, engaged in the programme through 64 schools and 10 youth centres.

UPSHIFT is a youth-focused initiative designed to empower young people with entrepreneurial and innovation skills to address social and environmental challenges.

Through mentorship, capacity-building workshops, and seed funding, UPSHIFT has nurtured innovative solutions that contribute to SDG acceleration. The programme fosters cross-sector partnerships by engaging government agencies, private sector stakeholders, and development partners to support youth-led social enterprises, ensuring sustainable impact.

Enhancing collaboration with development partners

UNCT members travelled to New Delhi to meet with development partners to strengthen collaboration and advance the ambitino of the repositioned United Nations Development System. During the meeting, updates on the Cooperation Framework and ongoing initiatives were provided while inviting partners to share suggestions for enhancing engagement. Development partners were encouraged to join existing working groups and visit also included bilateral meetings, strengthening productive exchanges between UNCT members and partners.

A United Nations Bhutan Newsletter was launched in 2024. It serves as a key platform for strengthening collaboration and information sharing among development partners and United Nations Bhutan. It highlights progress on joint initiatives, policy developments, and opportunities for engagement in the development agenda in Bhutan. In 2024, three editions of the newsletter were circulated, providing regular updates on sectoral coordination, ongoing projects, and strategic priorities. Through this initiative, development partners stay informed and connected, enhancing collective efforts to sustainable development.

Bhutan AgriFood Trade and Investment Forum (BATIF)

BATIF 2024 served as a strategic platform for the United Nations to engage with policymakers, private sector leaders, and development partners in advancing sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The event focused on enabling policies for investment in agri-food systems, innovative financing, trade facilitation, and leveraging partnerships and technology for resilience. Recognizing the crucial role of trade and investment in SDG achievement, the United Nations actively participated in discussions on market linkages, climate-smart systems, green finance, agrifood systems transformation, digital transformation, and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Through various panel discussions and engagements, the United Nations highlighted the importance of aligning investments with Bhutanese development priorities through enabling policies, innovative financing and leveraging on technology for agrifood systems. The forum underscored the commitment to foster a business environment that prioritizes both social and environmental sustainability in Bhutan's economic development. The forum also highlighted opportunities to foster innovation, strengthen business linkages, and promote technology adoption to enhance productivity and resilience in the agri-food sector.

By supporting platforms like BATIF 2024, the United Nations reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening partnerships that drive innovation, empower local entrepreneurs, and create economic opportunities that leave no one behind. It also acknowledges the reality that private investment must play a crucial role in sustainable development.

Strengthening Partnership to Combat SEA

The PEMA Secretariat and the United Nations signed a Letter of Understanding (LoU) to strengthen responses to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA). The agreement ensures a survivor-centred, human rights-based approach.

The PEMA Secretariat will act as the primary complaint mechanism, receiving SEA reports through its helpline and other channels, and promptly notifying the United Nations Resident Coordinator and PSEA Coordinator for action. Survivors will be connected to essential services with their consent.

The United Nations will provide specialized training to the PEMA Secretariat’s complaint intake teams, emphasizing survivor-centred methodologies. The LoU also establishes shared training packages, regular consultations, and improved referral pathways, reinforcing the commitment to preventing and addressing SEA.

G-ZERO

Bhutan, Madagascar, Panama, and Suriname launched the G-ZERO Forum, a coalition of carbon-negative and carbon-neutral countries, at COP29 in Baku, with UN support. Led by Bhutan, the G-ZERO Forum is a groundbreaking initiative is aimed at advancing global efforts towards a net-zero, climate-resilient and nature-positive world. In a Joint Declaration, the G-ZERO nations expressed unified commitment to advancing global climate action, leveraging the unique voices, perspectives, and capabilities. With a permanent Secretariat proposed to be hosted in Bhutan, the Forum will amplify the voices of carbon-neutral nations and drive innovative, inclusive climate solutions.

ESCAP Trade facilitation

With United Nations support, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal—the Eastern South Asia (ESA) subregion—are strengthening trade and industrial growth, particularly for landlocked and graduating LDCs. Key investments in trade and transport infrastructure, including Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) in India, Bhutanese dry ports, and the Agartala–Akhaura rail link, will improve cross-border connectivity.

However, challenges remain, including outdated customs procedures, inadequate warehousing, and restrictive trade policies. The United Nations is supporting ESA countries through capacity-building, technical assistance, and regional frameworks like the Asian Highway, Trans-Asian Railway, and a Cross-Border Paperless Trade Agreement.



World Food Forum 2024

At the World Food Forum (WFF) 2024, the Prime Minister of Bhutan delivered a keynote address, officially launching the Bhutan AgriSustain Fund. This strategic initiative aims to foster sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agrifood systems, reinforcing Bhutan's commitment to food security and environmental sustainability. Aligned with the WFF 2024 theme, "Good Food for All, for Today and Tomorrow," the announcement underscores Bhutan's dedication to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals through transformative actions in the agrifood sector.

National Youth Symposium 2024

In 2024, the United Nations reaffirmed its commitment to youth-driven agrifood transformation by supporting the National Youth Symposium in Thimphu (August 12-13). Bringing together over 250 young participants, the event fostered innovation, policy dialogue, and awareness in Bhutan's agrifood sector. A key highlight was the National Youth-Led Agrifood Innovation Challenge, which attracted 32 business proposals, with the top 10 selected for further support.

TechWiz, led by AI student Phurpa Dorji, won the competition with an AI-powered crop monitoring app that helps farmers detect pests and predict yields. Using IoT sensors, real-time analytics, and drones, the app addresses local farming challenges while contributing to SDGs like zero hunger and climate action. Pure Bhutan, specializing in health-focused agri-products, and Bhutan Astro Food, promoting local alternatives to imported dried goods, secured second and third places. Winning teams also participated in the Asia-Pacific Youth Development Forum in Thailand, where Phurpa Dorji's innovation earned the Best Innovative Award.

Beyond the competition, the symposium amplified youth voices in policy discussions, identifying key barriers such as market access, infrastructure gaps, and the perception of farming as unprofitable. Participants called for policies integrating technology, entrepreneurship training, and financial incentives. The event also launched the WFF Bhutan Chapter, now a recognized Community-Based Organization, linking Bhutanese youth to global networks in food systems transformation. Additionally, the SDG Action Card Game 'X' was introduced to engage youth in tackling agrifood challenges.

2.4. Results of the United Nations working more and better together: United Nations coherence, effectiveness and efficiency

Signing of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

The United Nations and the government signed the Cooperation Framework for Bhutan through 2028, focused on the principle of "Leaving No One Behind." This framework supports progress across economic, social, and environmental pillars, with a commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities. It aims to ensure all people, especially the most vulnerable, benefit from sustainable development, contributing to SDG achievement and a prosperous, secure Bhutan.

The Cooperation Framework's strategic priorities and outcomes, developed jointly by the government and the United Nations, will remain consistent throughout the implementation cycle but allow for flexible adjustments based on evolving national priorities. The United Nations has committed to supporting the development priorities of Bhutan as outlined in the 13th FYP, and to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Joint Steering Group Meeting

The Joint Steering Committee (JSC) serves as the highest coordination body between the government and the United Nations. Its purpose is to ensure the strategic direction and effective oversight of the Cooperation Framework's implementation, aligning it with national, regional, and international development processes, mechanisms, and goals. 2024 marked the transition from the 2018-2023 Cooperation Framework to the 2024-2028 one. This transition symbolizes a dynamic evolution in the collaborative approach to sustainable development, reflecting the commitment of the government and the United Nations to adapt and contribute meaningfully to the development journey of Bhutan.



Bhutan Opportunities for Leadership in Development Initiative

At the government's request, the United Nations played a key role in shaping the economic roadmap of Bhutan. As part of this effort, the United Nations led the BOLD Initiative, engaging stakeholders from the public and private sectors to assess economic challenges and opportunities.

In collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and Cabinet, the United Nations is spearheading the establishment of PIL under the BOLD Initiative. This initiative is a crucial step toward the stated goal of achieving high-income status by 2034, leveraging systemic innovation, real-time analytics, and collaborative policymaking aligned with the principles of GNH.

PIL convened policymakers, planning officers, and experts to define its vision and address critical challenges, including climate change, youth migration, and sustainable urbanization. Through this initiative, Bhutan is building a culture of innovation and systemic change, paving the way for a future-ready nation that balances progress with its core values while inspiring global innovation.

Sectoral Coordination

The Bhutan Agricultural Discussion Group (ADG) and the Bhutan Economists Working Group (BEWG) have been instrumental in strengthening sectoral coordination within the development community in Bhutan. Through ADG collaboration in the Bhutanese agricultural sector is advanced by aligning development interventions with government priorities, promoting evidence-based policymaking, and encouraging cross-sectoral collaboration. Its work contributes to resilient food systems and sustainable agriculture. Similarly, BEWG enhances economic coordination by facilitating data sharing and supporting evidence-based policymaking. By aligning its efforts with national priorities like the 13th FYP and the SDGs, BEWG ensures economic insights are integrated into the Cooperation Framework, strengthening policy coherence and the effectiveness of United Nations interventions.



BCP exercise

A United Nations Joint Business Continuity Plan (BCP) Exercise was conducted in 2024 across multiple locations in Thimphu, testing emergency protocols and response capabilities. The goal was to assess UNCT preparedness in operations, security, and emergency response, identifying gaps for improvement. A simulated 6.4 magnitude earthquake scenario prompted discussions by the Crisis Management Team (CMT). The exercise successfully met its objectives, enhancing BCP awareness while revealing limitations in programmatic, financial, and administrative operations. Key recommendations included earlier BCP reviews, increased UNDSS engagement, and improved personnel communication tracking.

United Nations Coherence, Effectiveness, and Efficiency

In 2023, the Business Operations Strategy (BOS) improved United Nations collaboration in Bhutan, with OMT process streamlining and cost savings of USD 834,866 (109 per cent of target). During 2024, the United Nations committed to further cost efficiency and service quality in line with the Cooperation Framework's objectives.

Updated procurement guidelines enhanced disability inclusion, an LNOB checklist for United Nations events was developed, and a disability module was added to external venue reviews. Accessibility was made a procurement criterion, with all applicable procurements meeting this standard by October 28, 2024, pending ongoing monitoring.

A four-year accessibility plan for common services and premises was developed, addressing accommodation procedures and staff needs. Partnering with DPO-B, a 1.5-hour disability equality training for all staff was conducted, including leadership, reinforcing commitment to inclusion. In collaboration with United Nations Volunteers, a special initiative was launched to hire persons with disabilities, raising their representation from one to at least five, one of the highest proportions in United Nations premises globally. An all-staff survey on disability status and accessibility priorities provided valuable insights for future improvements.

Efforts to communicate and advocate together

The United Nations and the Bhutan Media Foundation celebrated World Press Freedom Day with the Annual Journalism Awards, highlighting the role of press freedom in democracy and sustainable development. For International Youth Day, the theme "From Clicks to Progress" boosted events like a Hackathon and Youth Symposium, using the #YouthDay2024 hashtag. A disability inclusion campaign mobilized media and influencers, resulting in 14 stories on SDGs and human rights. A three-day co-design workshop generated 25 story ideas, with 18 published. Social media campaigns, including #IncludeAbility and an Instagram collaboration on LGBTIQ voices, furthered advocacy.



2.5 Lessons Learned and Evaluations

Over the past year, the United Nations has refined its strategies through ongoing consultations with government, civil society, and development partners, ensuring responsiveness to national priorities. The Cooperation Framework has been guided by evidence-based decision-making, feedback, and lessons learned. Evaluations, reviews, and real-time monitoring have informed programme improvements, enhancing interventions in youth employment, climate resilience, and gender equality.

A key lesson from the year has been the need for flexible programming to address challenges like youth outmigration, socioeconomic changes, and climate impact.

A stronger focus on integrated programming, particularly regarding social inclusion, digital transformation, and economic diversification, has become essential. Collaboration with the private sector and regional partners, especially India, is necessary to support the 13th FYP. Additionally, the shift toward localized, community-driven approaches highlights the importance of participatory decision-making and grassroots capacity-building.

The evaluation of the preceding Cooperation Framework highlighted progress in education, healthcare, and environmental conservation, but stressed the need for better coordination across agencies to maximize synergies. It recommended strengthening data systems for tracking SDG progress, ensuring inclusivity for marginalized groups, and adopting a more proactive approach in engaging youth and using technology to improve services and economic opportunities.

In response to these findings, several programming adjustments have been made. United Nations agencies have increased their focus on skills development and employment generation, particularly for young people, to address outmigration and labour market shortcomings. Efforts to enhance climate resilience have been expanded, with new initiatives supporting sustainable agriculture, disaster risk reduction, and green financing. The United Nations has also strengthened mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, ensuring that real-time data and evidence continue to inform decision-making. Furthermore, partnerships with civil society and local actors have been deepened to promote more inclusive governance and service delivery, aligning with the principles of Leaving No One Behind.

Moving forward, the United Nations remains committed to applying these lessons to improve the effectiveness and impact of United Nations support in Bhutan. By developing a culture of continuous learning, adaptive programming, and strong partnerships, the United Nations will ensure that its interventions contribute meaningfully to the long-term sustainable development of Bhutan, reinforcing the country's vision for GNH and achieving the 2030 Agenda.

2.6 Joint Programmes

Building Capacities for Women's Leadership in Public Institutions

Bhutan is advancing gender equality by strengthening women's leadership in public institutions. The "Building Capacities for Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women within Public Institutions" joint programme supports the development and implementation of a gender equality action plan in public administration, aligning with NKRA 10 on Gender Equality and the Royal Civil Service Commission's commitment to women's leadership. The project enhances women's representation in parliament, local government, and the civil service by identifying barriers to career progression and promoting gender-responsive policies. A national consultant was engaged to assess the role of women leaders at both local and parliamentary levels.

Direct beneficiaries include government officials and elected local representatives (Gups and Mangmi), while citizens and communities benefit from more inclusive governance. The project contributes to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Strong Institutions) by fostering equitable career progression and leadership opportunities. With a USD 86,400 budget and a July 2022–June 2024 timeframe, the initiative is implemented by the United Nations and national partners. Moving forward, efforts will focus on institutionalizing gender-inclusive policies to sustain progress in women's leadership.

Bhutan Mindful Futures

In late 2024, the Mindful Futures initiative was launched to bridge Bhutan's investment gap by leveraging UN expertise and investment banking strategies. The initiative focuses on attracting sustainable financing flows in agriculture, education, employment, and social protection to address key development challenges, including youth unemployment (19.2 per cent), teacher shortages, and gaps in social safety nets. Through this joint programme, a portfolio of potential bankable investment projects is being identified, aligning with Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan and national SDG priorities. Additionally, financing strategies are under development to attract targeted impact investors, ensuring long-term, sustainable funding. The initiative has so far engaged over 50 stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector leaders, and development partners.

Mindful Futures is expected to contribute to FDI policy dialogues, supporting Bhutan's ongoing economic reforms to enhance investment flows and strengthen Bhutan's investment ecosystem. The programme will support the newly established Economic Development Board (EDB) which leads investor facilitation in Bhutan. The United Nations will continue to provide technical support where needed, particularly in capacity-building for private sector engagement. As investments materialize, the initiative aims to establish self-sustaining financing models, reinforcing Bhutan's commitment to sustainable development.

Strengthening Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response through the One Health Approach

Bhutan remains highly vulnerable to pandemic threats due to gaps in disease surveillance, detection, and response. Increased livestock demand, cross-border trade, and rich biodiversity heighten the risk of zoonotic spillovers, including anthrax, rabies, and avian influenza. To address these challenges, the Strengthening Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response (PPR) through the One Health Approach initiative was launched with a \$5 million grant from the Pandemic Fund, leveraging an additional \$13 million in co-financing and \$24 million in co-investment. This joint initiative between the United Nations and the Royal Government of Bhutan aims to enhance national health system resilience and emergency preparedness.

The initiative focuses on four key areas. First, operationalizing the Bhutan One Health Secretariat (BOHS) has established a sustainable coordination mechanism integrating agriculture, health, and environmental sectors. Second, strengthening disease surveillance and early warning systems has improved real-time monitoring through upgraded web-based platforms, trained 500 health workers, and integrated zoonotic disease data with electronic patient records. Third, upgrading laboratory systems has enhanced biosafety, certified human and animal health laboratories for molecular testing, and aligned efforts with the World Bank-supported laboratory expansion initiative. Lastly, investing in human resource development has created a national workforce registry, trained professionals in antimicrobial resistance (AMR), epidemiology, diagnostics, and risk communication, and enhanced emergency response capabilities. By reinforcing multi-sectoral coordination, early disease detection, and rapid response, the One Health approach is strengthening Bhutan's pandemic preparedness and resilience. Moving forward, the focus will be on institutionalizing these efforts to ensure long-term sustainability, safeguarding public health, and enhancing economic stability.



CHAPTER 3

Key focus for 2025

As Bhutan progresses into the next phase of its development agenda, the United Nations will continue implementing the Cooperation Framework, ensuring alignment with the national priorities outlined in the 13th FYP. The United Nations will be guided by well-established, as well as more recent global policy priorities, including the Pact for the Future.

The coming year will focus on consolidating efforts to advance the country's sustainable development trajectory while responding to emerging challenges and opportunities in a rapidly evolving context. The implementation of the joint annual workplan will be central to this approach, ensuring coordinated and results-driven support across United Nations agencies.

Key priorities for the next year will be shaped by the country's ongoing socioeconomic transformations, particularly the implications of rapid outmigration, climate vulnerability, and the evolving policy landscape under the new government. The commitment of Bhutan to set its new NDCs (NDC 3) under the Paris Agreement will require intensified efforts in climate resilience, sustainable energy, and green financing. United Nations agencies will also continue supporting the country's engagement in the World Social Summit, ensuring social protection policies are inclusive and aligned with the principles of Leaving No One Behind. Additionally, efforts to operationalize the Pathfinder Fund and Global Accelerator for jobs and social protection will strengthen social safety nets and create economic opportunities.

To address gender disparities and enhance social inclusion, a Gender Surge initiative will be initiated, promoting policies and programmes that empower women and marginalized communities. The Bhutan Disability Surge will also remain a key area of focus, reinforcing efforts to mainstream disability inclusion across sectors and ensuring equitable access to services and opportunities.

Given these evolving priorities, the United Nations will continue to optimize its support structure. Enhanced collaboration with regional and global partners will facilitate resource mobilization and technical assistance, ensuring the effective implementation of key initiatives. A targeted resource mobilization strategy will be pursued to secure funding for critical programmes, leveraging multi-stakeholder partnerships and innovative financing mechanisms. The United Nations in Bhutan will also explore new modalities for engagement, including digital transformation and data-driven decision-making, to enhance efficiency and impact.



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