

DISABILITY INCLUSION MILESTONES: PROGRESSING THROUGH THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FRAMEWORK (2024–2028)

POLICY BRIEF



JUNE 2025



UNITED NATIONS
BHUTAN

Leaving No One Behind



Disability
Inclusion
Matters

Context



The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework will guide the work of the UN system in Bhutan through 2028. This Cooperation Framework is underpinned by the principle of Leaving No One Behind as the country makes progress on all three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. Leaving No One Behind includes a steadfast commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities. The collective results expected from the Cooperation Framework will contribute to a vision wherein all people in Bhutan, especially the most vulnerable, contribute to and benefit from sustainable development, leading to the achievement of the SDGs and to a healthy, prosperous and secured country.

-Page 1 of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2024-2028)



Implementing the 2024–2028 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Bhutan reaffirms its commitment to disability inclusion as a core principle of the "Leaving No One Behind" agenda. The Cooperation Framework articulates the collective vision and contribution of the United Nations system to support Bhutan to accelerate actions towards the achievement of its national development priorities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The following highlights reflect UN Bhutan's concrete progress and institutionalized efforts on disability inclusion in 2024, along with planned actions to build on this momentum.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE



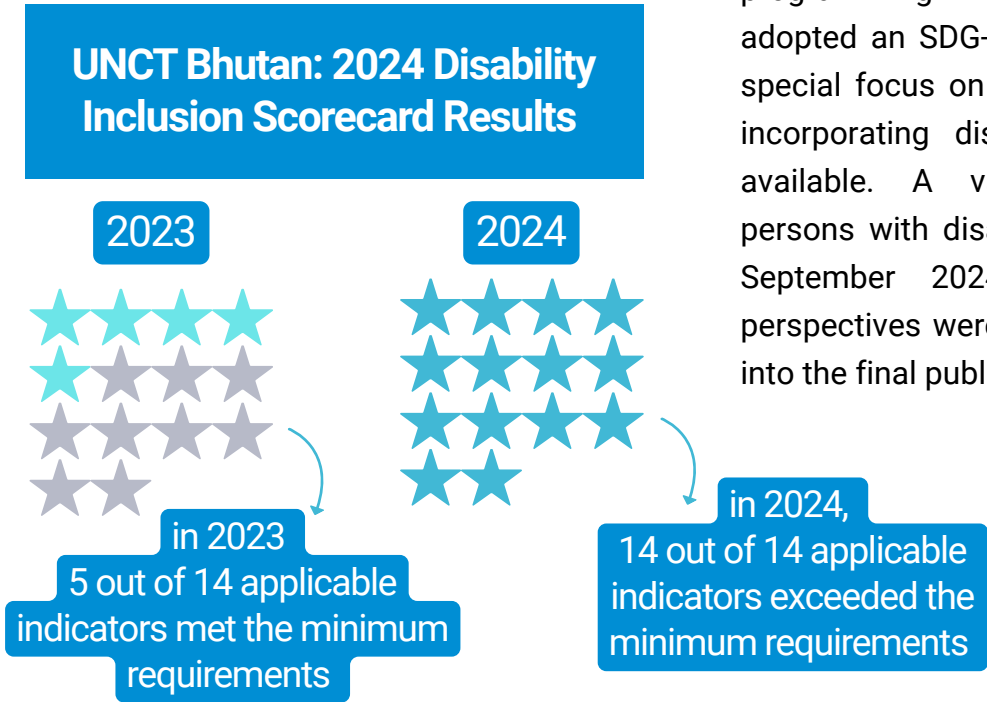
Leadership & Governance

Disability inclusion remains a priority for the UN Country Team (UNCT), with consistent support from the Resident Coordinator and the Heads of Agencies. It is a standing item on all monthly UNCT meetings and featured prominently during the most recent retreat of the UNCT, including a visit to the Wangsel Institute for the Deaf. A cross-agency normative working group helps coordinate efforts, and a staff-driven surge initiative generated new ideas and momentum. A dedicated Disability Inclusion Ideas online portal was launched, in which all UN staff members in Bhutan can propose ideas to make our operations and programming more inclusive.

Integration in Strategic Frameworks

Disability inclusion is systematically integrated into the Cooperation Framework at both outcome and output levels. All 4 Results Groups are guided to mainstream disability inclusion, and outcome indicators are being progressively disaggregated. The 2023 Common Country Analysis (CCA) included a dedicated focus group discussion with persons with disabilities and analysed disability-related issues across all thematic areas.

In 2024, a comprehensive, standalone assessment on the situation of persons with disabilities was commissioned. This study examined prevalence, barriers, and progress, and its findings informed UNCT programming. The 2024 CCA Update adopted an SDG-wide lens and featured a special focus on persons with disabilities, incorporating disaggregated data where available. A validation meeting with persons with disabilities was held on 25th September 2024, ensuring that their perspectives were captured and integrated into the final publication.





Joint Programming & Initiatives

Disability inclusion is a mandatory requirement for all new joint programmes and initiatives in Bhutan, with guidance provided by the normative working group and the RCO. A 2024 review found that 75% of existing joint efforts include practical disability inclusion measures. This includes Agenda Chikha, a joint initiative on disability inclusion co-chaired by the government, and the executive director of Disabled Peoples' Organisation of Bhutan (DPoB). Mindful Futures, another joint programme, supports the creation of Bhutan's first sign language enterprise. Impact on persons with disabilities is tracked through regular reporting, including in the 2024 Annual Results Report.

Accessibility & Operational Improvements

In partnership with DPoB, a baseline accessibility assessment of UN premises was conducted in 2022, with updates carried out in 2023, 2024, and again in 2025. Building on this, a dedicated Accessibility Plan for common premises and services was launched in June 2024, aligned with the start of the new Cooperation Framework cycle. The scope of assessments was expanded to include the web accessibility of all UN agencies' websites, leading to targeted improvements. Accessibility has since been established as a mandatory criterion in both procurement processes and external venue assessments. In parallel, a mapping of reasonable accommodation mechanisms available to UN staff in Bhutan was completed. The Operations Management Team (OMT) monitors the implementation of the Accessibility Plan and tracks reasonable accommodation requests.

Agenda Chikha Joint Initiative at a Glance

25
entities implementing

46
Projects Supporting
Disability Inclusion

with a total programming
value of USD

5,353,966



*"We must do far more to dismantle
barriers, open new doors, and
ensure that persons with
disabilities can realize their rights
and potential on an equal basis
with others."*

— António Guterres, UN Secretary-General
International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 3
December 2024



Consultation & Partnership

The UNCT maintains a close and structured partnership with the DPoB, formalized through an exchange of correspondence that outlines mutual expectations in areas such as disability equality training, joint programming, analysis, inclusive employment, procurement, communications, and consultation. DPoB is a member of the Joint Steering Committee, the highest body overseeing the implementation of the Cooperation Framework, and actively participates in emergency coordination platforms.

In 2024, the UNCT convened two formal consultations with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)—in March and September—covering both implementation of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) and practical issues, such as disability inclusion in emergency preparedness. OPDs were also engaged in the CCA update, evaluations, and the design of preparedness and response plans. UN emergency procedures and Terms of Reference were updated to ensure disability inclusion and now require that OPDs be consulted in emergency risk and needs assessments. The UNCT has adopted a standard practice of inviting persons with disabilities or their representative organizations to all UN events, ensuring their voices are integrated into planning and programming.



Consultation with Persons with Disabilities held on 25 September 2024



Data & Evidence

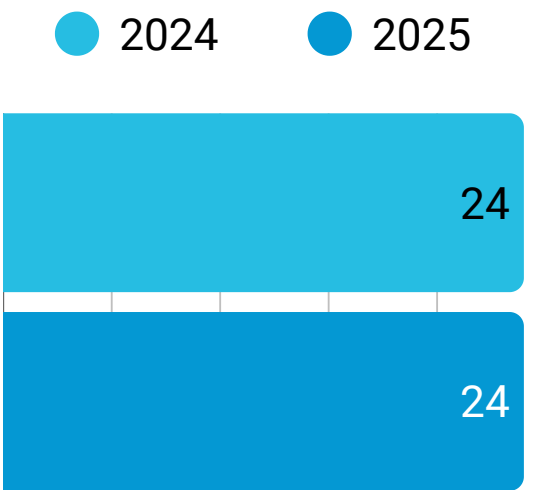
In 2024, UN Bhutan supported a national mapping exercise that identified available disability-related data and key data gaps across official statistical sources. This assessment provided a baseline to guide future efforts in data collection and disaggregation. Targeted training was also provided to strengthen national statistical capacity on disability data and its use for tracking inclusive development.

UN Bhutan collaborated with national partners to generate new data, including through the National Health Survey, which produced the country’s most up-to-date disability prevalence figures. To build on this, the Resident Coordinator’s Office conducted a system-wide stocktaking from August to October 2024 to map ongoing support to the national statistical system. The review found that 10 capacity-building initiatives were underway across UN Bhutan, with 6 explicitly integrating disability inclusion- highlighting progress while also identifying opportunities for more consistent mainstreaming of disability in data initiatives.

Monitoring & Evaluation

Disability inclusion is reflected in the 2024 Annual Results Report, which featured a dedicated section on persons with disabilities, with the report itself incorporating accessibility guidance. Hands-on training on disability data and indicators was delivered to the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation team, and encouraged participation in regional capacity-building efforts. disability disaggregation is now a standard recommendation across the results framework.

The UN in Bhutan maintained 24 targeted interventions for persons with disabilities in both 2024 and 2025





Emergency Preparedness

In 2024, UN Bhutan undertook an independent review of all emergency planning and response documents to assess inclusion of persons with disabilities, with inputs also reviewed by OCHA. As a result, updated plans now outline concrete measures to address the needs of persons with disabilities and emphasise the use of disaggregated data. Consultations with OPDs, including one in September, directly informed these revisions. Further drills and training with OPD participation are planned in 2025.

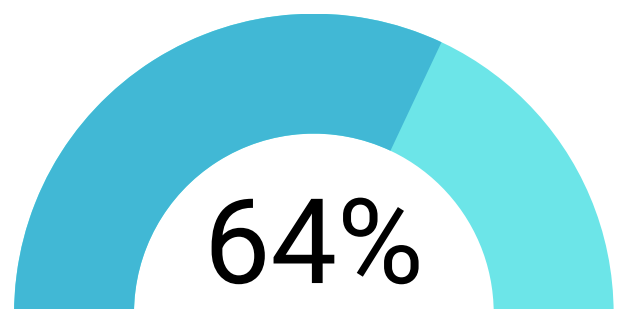
Capacity Building

Disability Equality Training (DET), delivered in partnership with DPOB, reached 89 out of 140 staff in 2024—including a dedicated session for UNCT leadership. An online repository of disability inclusion resources was launched, and staff were regularly invited to relevant learning opportunities, such as trainings on reasonable accommodation and disability statistics. Additional training sessions are planned for 2025.

Inclusive Employment & Workplace

A non-discrimination statement referencing persons with disabilities was adopted by UN Bhutan, with mandatory inclusion in all vacancy announcements. All job openings are shared with DPOB. Disability-inclusive outreach helped increase representation, and 4 fully funded UNV posts were opened exclusively for candidates with disabilities. The total number of staff with disabilities increased from 1 to 4. A workplace survey was conducted to assess barriers and guide follow-up actions, achieving a 57% response rate. Recruitment processes now include reasonable accommodation and outreach via OPD networks.

**89 out of 140 UN Bhutan Staff
Completed DET in 2024**





Communications & Visibility

Disability inclusion is reflected in both internal and external communications. The UNCT Communications Strategy mandates rights-based messaging on persons with disabilities, and the UNCG's annual work plan included targeted disability inclusion activities. The #IncludeAbility campaign, launched by the Prime Minister on World Press Freedom Day- engaged media and influencers to promote inclusive storytelling and led to improved coverage of disability issues.. Persons with disabilities have been consistently featured in UN events, campaigns, and publications such as the like the SDG Partnership Week, the Annual Results Report, and UN Bhutan website stories. The term 'persons with disabilities' has been formally adopted and is now consistently used across UN communications and documentation, in alignment with Government guidance.

Media Coverage of the #IncludeAbility Campaign (2024–May 2025)

28

stories featured in national
newspapers and television

200,000+

viewers reached through traditional
media

150,000+

reached through social media
platforms



“Over the past year, UN Bhutan’s collaborative efforts have significantly advanced disability inclusion through initiatives like Agenda Chikha, empowering persons with disabilities to lead and shape policies. Joint Disability Equality Trainings have deepened understanding and strengthened commitment to inclusion across sectors. Our collaborations have also enhanced access to justice and promoted sexual and reproductive health and rights for persons with disabilities, transforming lives and opening up opportunities.”

-Kinley Wangchuk, DPoB Executive Director

Next Steps (2025 and beyond)



In 2025, the UN in Bhutan will sustain progress on disability inclusion through continued leadership commitment, strengthened strategic planning, and integration across programming and operations. Efforts will focus on:

- Ensuring disability inclusion remains central to UNCT leadership, planning, and communications.
- Embedding disability inclusion in the Cooperation Framework and Common Country Analysis updates.
- Supporting Results Groups through focal points and annual reviews.
- Deepening partnerships with OPDs in programming and emergency planning.
- Improving accessibility in premises, procurement, and events.
- Expanding inclusive joint programmes such as Agenda Chikha and Mindful Futures.
- Enhancing data collection and disaggregation in collaboration with government partners.
- Strengthening inclusive M&E and reflecting progress in reporting.
- Advancing inclusive employment practices and addressing workplace barriers.
- Continuing staff training, including Disability Equality Training and practical skills building.
- Amplifying inclusive messaging through campaigns like #IncludeAbility and accessible materials.

Conclusion



The UNCT in Bhutan has made meaningful progress in operationalizing disability inclusion through leadership, planning, and programming within the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. As we enter the second half of the cycle, the focus is on deepening impact, enhancing quality, and sustaining momentum. Disability inclusion is not only a policy obligation but a pathway to truly inclusive and transformative development in Bhutan.



UNITED NATIONS
BHUTAN

•
Leaving No One Behind

