



UNITED NATIONS
BHUTAN

Leaving No One Behind



DECADE
OF
ACTION

2022 UN COUNTRY ANNUAL RESULTS REPORT

BHUTAN



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TABLE OF CONTENTS



FOREWORD	4
UN COUNTRY TEAM	5
KEY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS OF THE UN DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN THE COUNTRY	6
CHAPTER 1: KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COUNTRY AND THE REGIONAL CONTEXT	7
CHAPTER 2: UN DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM SUPPORT TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES THROUGH THE COOPERATION FRAMEWORK	9
<i>2.1 Overview of Cooperation Framework Results</i>	
<i>2.2 Cooperation Framework priorities, outcomes, and outputs</i>	
Outcome 1: Data and Policy	12
Outcome 2: Essential Social Services	14
Outcome 3: Governance	18
Outcome 4: Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction	21
<i>2.3 Support to Partnerships and Financing the 2030 Agenda</i>	
<i>2.4 Results of the UN working more and better together: UN coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency</i>	
<i>2.5 Evaluations and lessons learned</i>	
<i>2.6 Financial Overview and Resource Mobilization</i>	
CHAPTER 3: UNCT KEY FOCUS FOR NEXT YEAR	32

FOREWORD BY THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR



At the United Nations in Bhutan, the first quarter of the year is an opportunity for us to reflect on the results that the UN Country Team's (UNCT) 31 agencies, funds, and programmes has achieved, together with the Royal Government of Bhutan and our many implementing partners, in supporting the country to realize its national development priorities and progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In 2022, the UN supported the Royal Government with USD 22.5 million through various development projects and programmes, delivering in four outcome areas:

- (1) Strengthening institutions under the Royal Government to become more capable in producing timely and reliable data and statistics under the **Data and Policy outcome**.
- (2) The UN continued to support the country in making progressive improvements towards protecting children, adolescents, women, and unreached populations with equitable, accessible, quality health, education including comprehensive sexuality education, and care services including services related to gender based/sexual violence together with improved nutrition based on primary healthcare under the **Essential Social Services outcome**.
- (3) The UN continued to support the country in strengthening democratic institutions, including supporting decentralization, broadening civic space for participation, supporting the achievement of gender-equal elective offices, public institutions and promoting women's participation at decision-making levels, as well as promoting rule of law and enhanced delivery of justice services, particularly for vulnerable groups under the **Governance outcome**.
- (4) Under the **Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction outcome**, the UN helped the agriculture sector become more resilient to climate-induced shocks through the adoption and scaling up of climate-resilient farming infrastructure and technologies, food systems and sustainable natural resource management to help improve economic conditions as well as resilience amidst the uncertainty posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In support of Bhutan's education reform efforts, the UN supported the Royal Government in identifying the strategic transformations necessary to reimagine education fit for the 21st century in line with the Transforming Education Summit's priorities for the country- to accelerate progress for the last mile, recover learning losses, and foster innovation. As a follow up from the UN Food System Summit, the Royal Government developed a document entitled "Food Systems for Gross National Happiness, Transformative Pathways for Bhutan." This document articulates eight pathways for transformation of the country's food system, which will guide all future developments for the Renewable Natural Resources (RNR) sector in Bhutan. The UN is also currently supporting the revision of Bhutan's Agriculture (RNR) Strategy 2030, which will support the development of a holistic and sustainable food systems in Bhutan in collaboration with the Royal Government and key development and civil society stakeholders.



UN Bhutan is leading cross-boundary efforts to strengthen collaboration on climate change, disaster response, emergency preparedness and economic and social development with regional UN country offices in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan.

Additionally, UN Bhutan has championed the UN General Assembly's Efficiency Agenda, aimed at providing more cost-effective support services by reducing duplication of functions and transaction costs, by sharing resources and pooling services within the agency funds and programmes. UN Bhutan has prioritized 40 common service activities and has successfully implemented a new Business Operations Strategy, resulting in harmonization of relevant administrative processes as well as improved service quality and cost savings in several areas.

The year was especially important for UN Bhutan as it reaches its final year of implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Partnership Framework and is currently in the process of preparing the Cooperation Framework for the period 2024–2028 in line with Bhutan's 13th Five Year Plan 2024-2029. In addition, Bhutan is set to graduate from the Least Developed Countries category in 2023, which will present several impact and challenges. The UN supported the development of Bhutan's smooth transition strategy, proposing key elements covering implications on LDC-specific international support measures related to international trade and development cooperation for consideration by the Royal Government.

Looking ahead, the UN Country Team will work towards ensuring a smooth transition for Bhutan after its graduation by aligning its new Cooperation Framework to the national priorities under the 13th Five-Year Plan. We also look forward to further strengthening our efforts regarding collective partnerships while at the same time building new alliances to bolster our development efforts for the country and the people of Bhutan.

Tashi Delek!

Karla Robin Hershey
Resident Coordinator

UN COUNTRY TEAM



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 eight resident agencies and 23 non-resident agencies.

The 23 United Nations non-resident agencies (NRAs) 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, with the overall goal to support a just, harmonious, and sustainable society where no one is left behind.

Resident Agencies



Non-Resident Agencies



KEY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS OF THE UN DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN THE COUNTRY



1

ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN

The Prime Minister's Office; National Assembly of Bhutan; National Council of Bhutan; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock; Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources; Ministry of Education and Skills Development; Ministry of Home Affairs; ; Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment; Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport; Government Technology Agency (GovTech); Office of the Attorney-General, Dratshang Lhentshog; Royal Civil Service Commission; Election Commission of Bhutan; Royal Monetary Authority; National Commission for Women and Children; National Statistics Bureau; Anti-Corruption Commission; Department of Environment and Climate Change; National Center for Hydrology and Meteorology; Department of Tourism; District Administrations; Royal Bhutan Police; and National Film Commission.

2

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION

Civil Society Organizations Authority; RENEW; Tarayana Foundation; Bhutan Youth Development Fund; Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy; Ability Bhutan Society; Draktsho Vocational Training Centre for Special Children and Youth; Nazhoen Lamtoen; Disabled Persons Organization of Bhutan; Loden Foundation; Bhutan Nuns Foundation; Bhutan Stroke Foundation; Bhutan Women Parliamentary Caucus; PHENSEM, Parents Support Group Bhutan; SAARC Business Association of Home Based Work; Bhutan Board for Certified Counselors; Bhutan Cricket Council Board; Bhutan Ecological Society; Bhutan Toilet Organization; Clean Bhutan; Greener Way; Handicrafts Association of Bhutan; Bhutan Cancer Society; Bhutan Kidney Foundation; GNH Centre Bhutan; Lhak-Sam; Royal Society for Senior Citizens; Royal Textile Academy; Lhomon Society/Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative; Gyalum Charitable Trust Fund; Association of Bhutanese Industries; Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators; Film Association of Bhutan; Guide Association of Bhutan; Hotel and Restaurant Association of Bhutan; VAST; Bhutan, Center for Research on Bhutanese Society; PRIDE Bhutan; Bhutan Taxi Association; Journalists' Association of Bhutan; Evaluation Association of Bhutan; Bhutan Network for Empowering Women; Bhutan Transparency Initiative; Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs; Bhutan Animal Rescue and Care; Bhutan Media Foundation; Chithuen Phendhey Association.

3

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

World Bank; Asian Development Bank; Austrian Development Agency; Bhutan Canada Foundation; Bhutan Foundation; Bhutan Red Cross Society; European Union Delegation to India and Bhutan; European Investment Bank; Helvetas; International Finance Corporation; International IDEA; Japan International Cooperation Agency; Korea International Cooperation Agency; SAARC Development Secretariat; Save the Children; Savings Bank Foundation for International Cooperation; SNV; World Wildlife Fund; Bangladesh Embassy; Indian Embassy; Kuwait Embassy; Consulate of France; Consulate of the Netherlands; Consulate of Sweden; Consulate of the UK; Austrian Embassy (New Delhi); British High Commission (New Delhi); High Commission of Canada (New Delhi); German Embassy (New Delhi); High Commission of the Republic of Singapore (New Delhi); Embassy of Switzerland to India and Bhutan (New Delhi); Embassy of Sweden (New Delhi); Embassy of the United States of America (New Delhi); Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland; and Norwegian Embassy (New Delhi).

4

ACADEMIA

Royal University of Bhutan; Wangsel Institute for the Deaf; Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law; College of Natural Resources; Paro College of Education; Royal Thimphu College; Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan; College of Language and cultural studies, Faculty of Nursing and Public Health, Royal Institute of Management; and Sherubtse College.

5

PRIVATE SECTOR & NGO

Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Fablab, Bhutan Trust Fund for Environment Conservation, Bhutan for Life Secretariat

CHAPTER 1



KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COUNTRY AND THE REGIONAL CONTEXT



As of 2022, Bhutan had a total estimated population of 763,249 (365,518 females and 397,731 males), with a relative gender parity of 1:1 across age groups. The prevalence of disability in the country is estimated at 2.1 per cent of the population. Bhutan is one of the least populated countries in the region and its fertility rate has fallen below replacement level to 1.9. Due to declining fertility rates and increasing life expectancy, the number of people in the age group of 65 years and above is expected to rise from 6 per cent in 2022 to 17 per cent by 2050, and the old-age dependency ratio will increase from 11 per cent to 26 per cent by 2050.

Bhutan has made impressive socio-economic advancements over the past six decades, leading to significant improvements in average living conditions. The country is expected to graduate from the Least Developed Country (LDC) group in 2023. Despite this positive momentum, Bhutan is highly susceptible to external and sectorial shocks, principally due to the country's difficult terrain, sheer remoteness, and fragile mountain ecosystems as well as high dependence on trade and transit and strong reliance on a handful of key sectors for value-added creation.

The country's economy suffered serious setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic and faced inflationary pressures during the fiscal years of 2021 and 2022, which were further compounded by rising food and fuel prices because of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. All these elements pose significant challenges, especially for the most vulnerable groups in society, including the 12.4 per cent of the population that remain under the recently revised poverty line of BTN 6,204 (approximately USD 78) per person per month in 2022. Bhutan's rapid economic growth, averaging 7.5 per cent per year since the 1980s, dropped to a historic low of negative 10 per cent in 2020, from 5.8 per cent in 2019. Economic activity in the country has begun to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, growing at 4.1 per cent in 2021 and 5.0 per cent in 2022 (estimated), however the economy is not expected to return to pre-COVID levels before 2023.





Guided by its philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), Bhutan’s development approach is highly synergistic with the 2030 Agenda. The country’s national economic and development Five-Year Plans are closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With the objective to achieve a “dynamic, prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy in pursuit of GNH”, the 12th FYP will respond to challenges within the three sectors of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental, as well as serving as the country’s transition strategy as it graduates from Least Developed Country status.

In line with the evolving needs of the Royal Government during the COVID-19 pandemic, UN agencies in Bhutan quickly repurposed and sourced additional resources and funds to address the immediate impacts, adjusting priorities to support pandemic response and recovery efforts, while continuing to work on building livelihoods, human capital development, strengthening institutional capacities and systems in nutrition, food systems and disaster risk management.

As the pandemic hit the country, the UNCT demonstrated flexibility by quickly formulating a joint response framework – the “UN Bhutan COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan.” The SERP was later integrated into the UNSDPF, ensuring complete alignment with the Royal Government’s new plans and priorities.

The revised UNSDPF – with support from eight resident and six non-resident agencies – included both short-term measures to mitigate negative health, social and economic consequences and medium to long-term investments to strengthen the capacity of the country to build forward better and ensure resilience in future crises.

The UNCT also conducted a range of rapid assessments of the pandemic’s impact on various sectors such as tourism, education, agriculture, and vulnerable groups. These assessments were instrumental in supplying the Royal Government and development partners with the required data for joint interventions aimed at alleviating the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, with a focus on vulnerable groups at risk of being left behind.

Despite notable progress, the quality, inclusiveness, and sustainability of key social services within the country remains a concern, with poor quality and reach of sexual and reproductive health services, the triple burden of malnutrition and low learning outcomes among children presenting key issues. While income and multidimensional poverty are overwhelmingly concentrated in rural areas, emerging pockets of poverty in urban areas are also a concern.

While a strong conservation ethos has enabled Bhutan to maintain its rich biodiversity with the provision of clean air, water, and other services, rising global and regional average temperatures render the country increasingly vulnerable to the additional impacts of climate change. With water resources as the sector most likely to be severely affected by such changes, there are far reaching implications for its hydropower and

agriculture-based economy, for the livelihoods of people dependent upon nature as well as its biodiversity, ecosystem services and overall societal well-being. At the same time, with development imperatives, Bhutan faces the critical challenge of managing co-benefits and trade-offs, balancing conservation with development.

While the country’s CO2 emissions are considered negligible on a global scale, heavy reliance on fossil fuels and a trend of increasing emissions poses risks to the Royal Government’s carbon neutral commitment. Additionally, energy security is a key concern given the rapid growth in demand for electricity amid risks to the hydropower sector, thereby necessitating investment in other clean and renewable energy sources. These challenges are compounded by the rapid and haphazard nature of urbanization.

The Dashboard to Enhance Well-Being of All (DEWA) launched in 2021 with the support from the UN continues to play a catalytic role in improving data accessibility, effective planning, monitoring and evaluation within the country. The common integrated platform should be able to provide data on the progress and status of Bhutan’s socio-economic development via website and app, enabling every interested organization and individual to view and visualize Bhutan’s development progress through the lens of the SDGs, Five-Year Plan goals and the philosophy of Gross National Happiness.



CHAPTER 2



UN DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM SUPPORT TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES THROUGH THE PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK



2.1 Overview of Partnership Framework Results

Bhutan has made significant progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. As the country prepares for its LDC graduation by 2023, the Royal Government plans to pivot. With the country's 12th Five-Year Plan coming to an end in October 2023 and the UN Sustainable Development Partnership Framework also coming to its final year, the UNCT is aligning its priority areas with that of the Royal Government.

Emphasis on improved efficiency and sustainable use of natural resources will be reinforced by the recently developed Sustainable Consumption and Production Strategy. A national climate change policy, REDD+ strategy, and an updated environment strategy, among others, have been adopted as part of national efforts to manage the impacts of climate change. Bhutan has submitted its Third National Communication to the UNFCCC and developed its second Nationally Determined Contribution alongside sectoral low-emissions strategies. Gender-climate analyses have been initiated and a roadmap for disaster risk management is in place. The COVID-19 pandemic was a significant shock for the world, and Bhutan was no exception. The measures taken to contain the pandemic within the country were immediate and firm. The Royal Government developed the National Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19 with the objective of enhancing the capacity of the country's health sector regarding surveillance, early detection, control and prevention, response, and recovery. The UNCT provided comprehensive emergency support to the Royal Government during this time, ensuring continuity and the provision of regular health services, as well as overall health-system strengthening beyond the immediate crisis, including building linkages between health and environmental outcomes.





The UNCT was instrumental in ensuring that COVID-19 vaccines were procured and delivered on time despite supply chain disruptions. The UN-supported Bhutan Vaccine System contributed to the smooth and effective vaccination of 93 per cent of the population in a record two weeks' time. The UNCT further supported the development of Bhutan's National Contingency Plan to ensure the availability of essential health services in the wake of the pandemic, and as an overarching guide for hospitals and primary health centres, alongside regularly published operational guidelines, on the evolving epidemiological profile of COVID-19 transmission across the globe.

In both its regular programmes and in its post-pandemic response, the UNCT has focused first and foremost on those left furthest behind, using an integrated programming approach across priority areas to achieve results. The UNCT has championed gender equality and human rights, the lifeblood of sustainable development, together with good governance.

Recognizing the critical role of the Parliament in the realization of human rights, the UNCT has supported the capacity development of Parliamentarians on SDG monitoring and implementation, and on specific issues such as gender, justice, and social protection. In order to ensure citizen engagement and participation in decision and policy making, and intervention, a digital platform (Ten-Drel) has been developed in partnership with the National Council Secretariat. In the judiciary sector, the UNCT's interventions included enhancing the capacity of bench clerks with regard to the interpretation of laws, development of the Justice Sector Strategic Plan, development of a child-centered curriculum and a family law course based on international and national standards, assessment of options for the diversion of "children in conflict with the law"- with standardization of procedures for their effective rehabilitation, production of a policy brief on child-sensitive and shock-responsive social protections in Bhutan, in partnership with the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, the establishment of an e-litigation system and the country's first legal aid center has been established.

To improve access to quality social services for unreached children and adolescents, including those with disabilities, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in the development of policies and strategies for water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). The UNCT also supported the upgrading of the Education Information Management System which provides systematic and quality data for critical indicators in areas of disability, WASH, health status and dietary habits of school children. The UNCT provided support for health systems strengthening and the development of the National Education Assessment Framework to improve learning outcomes and integrated life-skills-based comprehensive sexual education into the mainstream school curriculum.

The UNCT supported the Royal Government and CSOs in creating an enabling environment for advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was approved with the capacity to mainstream



Bhutan set to graduate from its LDC status in 2023

UN developed a joint response framework aligned with the UN Framework for the Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19



In support to Bhutan response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic UN demonstrated flexibility by aligning the Joint Annual Workplan with the Royal Government's new plans and priorities

UN supported the establishment of the Bhutan Vaccine System (BVS) which contributed to the smooth and effective vaccination of 93% of the population in a record two weeks' time



mainstream disability across all sectors, including education, health, access to finance and infrastructure, and was improved through the adoption of the Action Plan for the National Policy.

To prevent and combat trafficking in persons, the landmark achievement is Bhutan's accession to UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in December 2022 the adoption of the Bhutan Penal Code (Amendment Act) was adopted in February 2021. A National Prevention and Response Strategy with a National Action Plan was developed with the support of the UNCT. The UNCT organized capacity building workshops for judiciary officials and launched an official training manual.

The UNCT's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment in Bhutan reached a new milestone with the Royal Government's endorsement of the Gender Equality Policy, followed by the development of the National Plan of Action for Gender Equality. The National Gender Equality Policy underwent further revision to include LGBTQ+ concerns and needs, thus making it more inclusive in nature. The UN also facilitated the inclusion of female perspectives into the drafting of the 10th Periodic Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women report. The UNCT's pilot project on the primary prevention of gender-based violence supported the testing of adaptations of evidence-based primary prevention at the community level by targeting adolescents and caregivers. A significant contribution by the UNCT has been the support for policies aimed at the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in academic institutions which are now being advocated as a national policy by higher level authorities and institutions. Towards providing a framework for legislation, coordination, and programs for





senior citizens by mainstreaming the issues and challenges of senior citizens in the country, the UNCT supported in developing the National Policy for Senior Citizens of Bhutan.

The UNCT’s support for environmental sustainability in Bhutan has addressed gaps in climate change adaptation and disaster risk management (primarily in the areas of data, awareness, coordination, and preparedness). The UNCT supported the development of Bhutan’s first National Adaptation Plan, as well as Bhutan’s “Direct Access to Climate Financing” for locally led adaptation efforts, and by assisting the Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation’s accreditation with the Green Climate Fund. In addition, the UNCT supported the development of the Roadmap for Disaster Risk Management in Bhutan (Towards a Safer and Resilient Bhutan) and the establishment of the National Logistics Preparedness Working Group.

The UNCT has made contributions towards bolstering the nation’s economy, most notably in agriculture, and making Bhutan’s vulnerable communities more resilient to climate-induced disasters and biodiversity losses. The UNCT provided support to farmers to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change by scaling up climate-resilient technologies and practices, and by transforming the food system through the adaptation of innovative farming systems. The UN Food System Summit 2021 dialogues resulted in the submission of Bhutan’s pathway document, “Food Systems for Gross National Happiness – transformative pathways for Bhutan”. The UNCT also supported the revision of the Renewable Natural Resources Strategy 2030, in line with the aim to support the development of a holistic food system approach in Bhutan. To reduce human-wildlife conflicts, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in the development of a new institutional framework using a science-based safe-system intervention.

The UNCT supported the development of the first-ever Governance Framework for Civil-Society Organization (CSO) Engagement, which promotes CSOs as equal partners on key matters such as justice, governance, and anti-corruption efforts. To expand the civil space in the country, empowering people to be active in their communities, two major activities were undertaken – the amendment of the CSO Bill and the formulation of the Guidelines for CSO-Government collaboration.



UN has championed gender equality and human rights, the lifeblood of sustainable development, hand in hand with good governance

UN has supported the capacity development of parliamentarians on specific issues, including human rights, gender, justice, and social protection



UN supported to enhance access to quality social services for unreached children and adolescents including children with disabilities

The UN’s contribution to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment reached a new milestone with endorsement of the Gender Equality Policy



The UN supported the development of Bhutan’s first National Adaptation Plan.

The UN also made contributions towards making the economy, foremost agriculture, more robust and vulnerable communities more resilient to climate-induced disasters and biodiversity losses



One of the cornerstones of UN’s support in Bhutan has been its partnership with the media. The UNCT collaborated closely with the Journalists’ Association of Bhutan, Bhutan Media and Communications Institute, Bhutan Media Foundation, and Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, as well as contributed capacity building support for journalists and organized a series of events to engage mainstream media freelancers, independent filmmakers, and social media influencers on climate reporting and reporting on human trafficking stories. Further, the UNCT’s engagement with the Bhutan Media Foundation and World Wildlife Fund led to the initiation of regular meetings with climate action journalists as well as workshops centered around the SDGs and climate change to bring stakeholders together to discuss key issues. Through these partnerships, membership in the Journalists’ Association of Bhutan has now been extended beyond the mainstream media.





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.



Support to development of the Bhutan Statistical Database System



Support to strengthen the education system capacity for evidence-based decision-making



Support to strengthening monitoring and evaluation system in the country



Support to strengthen statistical, monitoring and reporting system in the agricultural sector



The UNCT continues to support the Royal Government in strengthening its capacity to produce timely and reliable data and statistics, with the goal of delivering quality statistical data to users and the public in support of evidence-based decision making. To this end, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in the development of the Bhutan Statistical Database System, created to monitor and report on the progress of the nation's Five-Year Plans at the grassroots level. Bhutan Statistical Data System is helping to build a strong data system in the country, enabling interphase of different data systems from the grassroots to the national levels.

Activities such as assessment of data gaps, flow of data from the Gewogs to Dzongkhags and eventually to the National Statistics Bureau, have seen improvement. The UNCT also provided support in the development of terms of reference for sector heads and statistical officers at the Gewog, Thromde and Dzongkhag levels to assign enhanced roles and responsibilities to operationalize the database system. The terms of reference will also enhance capacity building efforts in the data flow system. Relevant local government officials are currently being trained on data collection formats, methods and data flow plans along with assigned responsibilities to use the system and to enter data accordingly.

To strengthen the capacity of the country's education system, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in rolling out the Education Information Management System, an online platform within the Royal Government. Health and nutrition information were integrated in the system to measure and ensure access to nutritious food for school students under the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme. This platform enhanced the availability of relevant data regarding health and nutrition for evidence-based policy and decision-making purposes and provides crucial data for understanding body mass index, dietary diversity score and WASH facilities.





To strengthen statistical, monitoring and reporting systems in Bhutan's agricultural sector, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in the development of monitoring and reporting data collection modules using the Mobile Operational Data Acquisition platform (also integrated with the Bhutan Statistical Database System and National Statistics Bureau). Gewog agriculture extension officials and Dzongkhag agriculture officers in 20 Dzongkhags, and officials from the Department of Agriculture were trained on the use of the platform. For longer-term planning, the platform is expected to produce better statistical, monitoring and evaluation systems to improve production planning, targeting of agricultural services to farmers and to support feedback and learning across the sector.

With the support of the UNCT, the Royal Government has been working on strengthening the country's monitoring and evaluation systems. The Evaluation Association of Bhutan- a platform for promoting evaluation culture, developing capacity, and generating demand for evaluation in Bhutan, completed two international webinars with the Asia Pacific Evaluation Association on "Fostering Evaluation Ecosystem: Case of Bhutan", and "Evaluation in Bhutan: Policy Formulation, Processes and Practice". The UNCT also supported the development of a professional module and an evaluation communications strategy to engage evaluation experts, boards of directors, members of the Association and EvalYouth Bhutan, a global multi-stakeholder partnership and network that supports and promotes young and emerging evaluators.

ENHANCING DATA GAPS

In response to the growing demand for quality statistics, the Royal Government has prioritized providing relevant, reliable, and timely statistics to facilitate planning and evidence-based decision making. This was accomplished through many initiatives, by strengthening institutions and mechanisms to collect, compile and disseminate statistics through improved governance, innovations, and technology.

An editorial published in Kuensel, the national newspaper in Bhutan, claimed that with the use of data, statistics, and information, Bhutan will not repeat past mistakes in its planning processes: "Planning and priorities need not be based on pleasing voters or a constituency. Information is power and if there is reliable information through research, people can question policymakers even at the planning stages."

In a digital transforming world, data plays a catalyzing role in every aspect of the public sector as well as in public service delivery, helping governments to meet citizens' needs to know how, when, and where to access services. With the SDGs squarely in mind, the development sector in Bhutan has embraced large-scale and large-volume data use. To fully implement and monitor progress towards the SDGs, data and statistics that are timely, accurate, sufficiently disaggregated, relevant, accessible, and easy to use are required.

To monitor and report on the progress of Bhutan's Five-Year Plans, the Royal Government has developed the Bhutan Statistical Database System. The development of a database system of this kind will enhance the assessment of data gaps, flow of data from the Gewogs to Dzongkhags and eventually to the National Statistics Bureau. This will result in an improvement in data collection.

The Bhutan Statistical Database System will establish a proper system of maintaining data at all levels and will provide easy access to quality data from a single system, streamlining proper administrative data collection, validation, and dissemination from the local to the national level. This system will help to establish closer collaboration among the stakeholders in the production, use and dissemination of official statistics. Currently, there are many data and information systems within the Royal Government, with the introduction of the database system, it will be easy to facilitate the integration of all existing data and information systems into one centralized database system, stored and managed in a single unit.





OUTCOME 2: ESSENTIAL SOCIAL SERVICES

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



27,444 people sensitized to improved sanitation and hygiene practices



2,206 child monks and 15,271 school children benefited from WASH training



13 colleges have the capacity to prevent and respond to the management of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Gender-based Violence cases in colleges



17,460 children aged 6-23 months across 20 Dzongkhags received Multiple Micronutrient Powder supplementations



In 2022, Bhutan made progressive improvements towards protecting children, adolescents, women and unreached population groups with equitable, accessible quality health, education, and care services, together with improved nutrition based on primary healthcare.

The UNCT supported the Royal Government in strengthening its capacity in cold-chain management and supply systems. Following an assessment of 289 health facilities, additional cold-chain equipment was procured and installed for storage and transportation of COVID-19 and routine vaccines, expanding Bhutan's cold-chain capacity fourfold. This has equipped all healthcare centres across the country to store vaccines at different temperatures and ensure the vaccines' potency are maintained. An assessment of the national medical oxygen system was performed in 52 hospitals and oxygen cylinders were procured to fill the gaps.

Demand-generation activities in health services conducted with 5,966 households in Bhutan helped sensitize 27,444 people to improved sanitation and hygiene practices. The UNCT supported the Royal Government in building the capacity of 59 health coordinators in 49 monastic institutions regarding WASH, through which 2,554 children (145 girls) in monastic institutions benefitted. The UNCT supported the construction of two inclusive toilets each for schools (both secular and monastic) benefitting 2,003 children (976 girls), including 92 children with disabilities (35 girls) and 100 monks respectively. To address the issue of quality WASH services in healthcare facilities, the UNCT provided support for 34 Primary Health Centres from five Dzongkhags, equipping them with inclusive hand washing stations and safe drinking water at the point of care, benefitting 690 people.





Additionally, 41 monks from 40 monastic schools, 10 nuns from five nunneries and 45 support staff (five female) from 45 schools were trained in sustainable and quality WASH services. Through this training, 2,206 child monks, 287 child nuns and 15,271 school children (7,797 girls) benefited. The UNCT supported the installation of environmentally friendly heat pump hot-water systems in five monastic institutions, benefitting 150 monks and 125 nuns. Through the use of UN safe water filtration systems installed in 10 monastic institutions and one nunnery, 530 child monks and 25 child nuns now have access to safe drinking water.

The institutionalization of comprehensive sexuality education empowers young people, particularly adolescents, with the knowledge, skills, and capabilities to make informed choices regarding their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The UNCT provided support in enhancing the capacity of all managers of Youth Centres and Youth-Friendly Integrated Service Centres. Additionally, the capacity of five colleges in the country has been strengthened with training of 106 faculty members- 13 colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan now have the capacity to work to prevent and to respond to cases of sexual exploitation, abuse, and gender-based violence.

A milestone achievement for the country's youth in securing health, well-being, dignity and, most importantly, a future with the ability to make informed decisions came through the UNCT's support for training focal persons (including 60 scouts) about comprehensive sexuality education in 34 per cent of schools around the country.

More than 500 community members in one of the most remote Dzongkhags were sensitized on sexual and reproductive health, comprehensive sexuality education and gender-based violence prevention through high level advocacy led by the UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, Her majesty the Queen Mother Sangay Choden Wangchuck. During the visit 145 women (coverage 93.5 per cent) were screened for cervical cancer and 95 women screened for breast cancer and three schools and 87 students made aware of the comprehensive sexuality education.

The Red Dot Campaign continues to call for more action and investment in destigmatizing and clearing up misconceptions about menstruation, as well as providing more resources for menstrual hygiene. In 2022, the UNCT supported a campaign calling on boys and men to champion these efforts. Themed "We are committed – Men take lead", Menstrual Hygiene Day was observed with the Royal Patron of Red Dot Bhutan, Her Royal Highness Princess Euphelma Choden Wangchuck.

The UNCT is supporting the newly established Pema Centre Secretariat in coordinating a multisectoral approach to mental health and psychological support. The respective sectoral intervention includes a new maternal mental health screening tool piloted at the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital. Additionally, with the aim of increasing access to mental health and psychosocial support for children, and to continue efforts to develop the capacity of Bhutan's social service workforce, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in training 225 (132 female) frontline workers in child-protection case management. To increase access to mental health and psychological support services, the "I support my friends" package concerning psychological first aid was used to train 3,330 peer helpers in 128 schools. Approximately 23,450 parents and caregivers (16,158 female) were reached with positive parenting skills training to better support and understand

their children's needs. To strengthen the policy environment for children's well-being in monastic institutions and nunneries, a Strategy and action plan has been developed by the Bhutan Nuns' Foundation and the Child Protection Strategy and Action Plan for monastic institutions and nunneries is being reviewed and updated by the UNCT and the Dratshang Lhentshög- the Council for Religious Affairs.

The UNCT and its partners continued to reinforce the country's child protection system to be more responsive to the needs of women and child survivors of violence. The UNCT supported the capacity building of 225 (132 females) case managers to provide enhanced services, in line with the national guidelines on gender-based violence and child protection case management. Additionally, the UNCT supported safe spaces in three Dzongkhags, providing case management, livelihood and other services for vulnerable women and girls. As a result, in 2022, 16,398 (10,111 females) women, boys and girls were provided with protection and gender-based violence prevention and response services. Additionally, knowledge and reporting platforms on various forms of exploitation related human trafficking, social media safety and cyber security was enhanced in institutions across the country covering 21,032 (11,432 females) children and youth.

Several partners from the Royal Government, CSOs and media partners worked together with the UNCT to implement the Ending Violence Against Children campaign, to ensure the protection of children from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect. This multi-sectoral campaign has resulted in less duplication of efforts and improved understanding of a shared common goal. The campaign made huge achievements with the Royal Government announcing to roll out an anti-bullying campaign in schools from 2023, local leaders initiating the integration of child well-being as part of the agenda in local meetings and sports organizations have integrated child well-being as part of their training programmes while the media has taken up child well-being as a subject of talk shows.

In committing to the realization of Agenda 2030 and efforts towards inclusive education and care for unreached children, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in starting the first inclusive-model Early Childhood Care and Development Centre. The school is designed for children with disabilities and the urban poor and can accommodate about 30 children. The Centre is located strategically next to an inclusive school to facilitate transition for children with disabilities to formal schooling. Additionally, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in piloting home-based Early Childhood Care and Development interventions in six Dzongkhags to ensure that 123 children (62 girls) in remote locations have access to early learning and stimulation.

Additionally, a total of 30 adult scout leaders from 24 special education needs schools were trained in how to integrate fundamental scouting principles and methods, basic life skills and other global scouting practices into the curriculum to improve learning outcomes for and empower children with disabilities.





To ensure that no one is left behind, the UNCT also supported the training of more than 50 nurses and health assistants from 13 hospitals in providing competent, respectful midwifery care, gynecological and family planning services in accordance with revised standards, which includes specific diverse groups (including menopausal and perimenopausal women, people living with HIV/AIDS, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ and adolescents). Further to enhance the adolescent-friendly health service utilization and to enhance coordination between the school counsellors and focal, the UNCT supported the capacity development of focal persons from 96 per cent of the hospitals in all the 20 Dzongkhags and 96 schools in 11 Dzongkhags. Meanwhile, Bhutan's Every Newborn Action Plan 2016 - 2023 is being reviewed, and the findings will guide the planning for improvement of newborn health services. The UNCT also supported the training of health workers from 20 Dzongkhags in Bhutan's child development screening tools for early detection and intervention of milestone delays and disabilities.

Towards building the competency of mother and child health care providers in delivering quality care of services and working towards reducing maternal and newborn mortality, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in the procurement and supply of obstetric simulation programs and models. Additionally, the UNCT supported in training institutes to facilitate on-site competency and skill building on key lifesaving interventions at birth.

The UNCT continues to facilitate the transformation of the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme into an inclusive health and wellness programme. Through this, it aims to improve the quality of school meals by optimizing menus using the School Menu Planner (SMP) PLUS digital tool, promoting healthy dietary habits both within and outside of schools, and improving school kitchens and storage facilities.

To make school kitchens safe and hygienic, the UNCT supported the construction and refurbishment of 16 kitchens and storages, improving the ability to store and prepare school meals, while also encouraging efficiency and more sustainable cooking solutions, such as replacing firewood with clean electricity. The UNCT also engaged students, parents, caregivers, and teachers from 25 schools across

the country in formative research on food and snack consumption behaviors. The findings were validated by the Social Behavioral Change taskforce and will be used to develop the Social Behavior Change Strategy and Action Plan 2023.

Additionally, as a part of the supply chain optimization of the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme, the UNCT supported two pilot workshops with the objective to streamline processes and validate potential cost savings.

Based on the 2021 household food and nutrition assessment, which highlighted opportunities and challenges faced by communities in improving their dietary practices, a food mapping exercise was carried out as part of a baseline study. The study was undertaken to create a database of available local foods, types of foods cultivated, preparation methods and consumption patterns by households. The exercise was carried out in four Dzongkhags of Lhuentse, Zhemgang, Trongsa and Tsirang, covering eight Gewogs and 16 villages. It included 420 households with a population of 1,896 (991 females) out of which 182 were children under five.

The UNCT supported the Monastic Health and Nutrition Assessment, the data for which was analyzed in December 2022 and will be disseminated in 2023. Another important survey to generate data on many of the health indicators is the National Health Survey which the UNCT is one of the key contributing partners.

The UNCT supported the Royal Government in ensuring the delivery of essential health and nutrition services for children, adolescents, and women in 2022, with approximately 79 per cent of women receiving second postnatal care, and over 85 per cent of children being vaccinated with a third dose of the pentavalent vaccine (which provides protection from five deadly diseases). The UNCT continues to offer essential nutrition services for infants and young children in Bhutan. In 2022, the UN supported the Royal Government in ensuring that 17,460 children aged 6-23 months across 20 Dzongkhags received Multiple Micronutrient Powder supplementation to prevent stunting and anaemia, improving their overall nutrition. This effort was also scaled up in all health facilities.





RANGI BUZHI; RANGI NORBU- OUR CHILDREN; OUR WEALTH



"I didn't think he would ever do something like this. He was my father's friend. I tried running away but he held me and took me to his house. He said that if I told anyone, he would kill me".

These are the words of a young person who survived sexual violence and is still recovering. Violence against children- be it physical, emotional, or sexual abuse- happens everywhere, in every country, in every community and in every segment of the society. But all too often, it is hidden in the shadows.

While violence against children and young people remains underreported in Bhutan, records show that in the past four and a half years, 970 cases of violence against children and young people aged one to 24 years were reported. Among these cases, neglect, at 34 per cent, is the most reported form of violence, followed by emotional violence at 26 per cent and physical violence at 22 per cent. Records show that the prevalence of all forms of violence was higher among females; 68 per cent of total cases reported were among girls and women.

In 2022, Bhutan launched a campaign to end violence against children, with 17 different sectors participating, including the Royal Government, CSOs, members of the private sector, media, and volunteers. This campaign was aimed at addressing the barriers preventing children and young people from availing protection services and raising awareness regarding the prevalence of violence against children in the country. One of the largest multi-sectoral collaborations to date, the campaign focused on sexual, online, and physical violence, including among peers, and

specifically targeted the three Dzongkhags and Thromdes of Thimphu, Trashigang and Samtse. The pilot districts were chosen based on the demography of children and young people, the prevalence of reported cases of violence against children and regional representation. Using multiple communication and community engagement platforms, more than 120,000 people were reached with information regarding the prevention of violence against children. Additionally, the UNCT also supported the training and mobilization of more than 20,000 community influencers (9,000 females) in the implementation of this multi-pronged social and behavioral change campaign; 23,450 parents and caregivers (16,158 females) were reached with positive parenting skills to better support and understand their children's needs.

Advocacy efforts were enhanced by engaging the Prime Minister's Office, government ministers, parliamentarians, district administrators and the national media. The campaign took advantage of World Children's Day and the World Cup to advocate for the protection of children from all forms of violence. These efforts, among others, resulted in the Royal Government announcing the roll-out of an anti-bullying campaign in schools across the country from 2023 onwards, as well as protection helplines recording a three-fold increase in calls.

A multi-sectoral partnership such as this is a commitment from all stakeholders in enhancing efforts to end violence against children, to be certain that every child counts, to ensure that every girl and boy in Bhutan grow up feeling safe, secure, and protected. Children are a nation's greatest wealth. *Rangi Buzhi; Rangi Norbu- Our Children; Our Wealth.*





OUTCOME 3: GOVERNANCE

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



Support to enhancing access to justice for vulnerable groups particularly, women and children



Support to strengthen the child justice system through the review of Standard Operating Procedures to deal with Children in Conflict with the Law



9,923 students trained in preventing and combatting Trafficking in Persons in Bhutan



supported the Parliament of Bhutan in revising their Strategic Development Plan for 2024-2028



The UNCT continued to support the country throughout 2022 in strengthening its democratic institutions, decentralization, broadening civic space for participation, the achievement of gender-equal elective offices, public institutions, the promotion of women’s participation at decision-making levels and the enhancement of delivery of justice services, particularly for vulnerable groups, including women and children.

The UNCT assisted in the establishment of the first-ever National Legal Aid Centre to support vulnerable individuals who cannot afford legal services. The Centre provides legal information to the walk-in clients as well as those applicants who are not eligible for three legal aid services (legal representation, legal advice, and legal assistance) upon assessment. The Centre in coordination with the Bar Council of Bhutan has been able to provide the services (especially legal representation) by the private lawyers registered under the Bar Council of Bhutan pro-bono. Since its establishment, the Centre has received 25 walk-in clients (13 females). Out of 25, five were provided with representations services by the Centre. Working with the Cabinet Secretariat, a Legal Impact Assessment handbook was developed to provide the basis and rationale of drafting of the legislation and to enhance preparation of the Explanatory Memorandum and the Financial Memorandum that will be submitted to the Parliament along with the Bills for consideration by the Parliament.

As a response to the pandemic and to ensure justice services are not disrupted, the UNCT supported the development of a platform to enable online hearing facilities through the e-litigation pilot. The project provided support to the review of the e-litigation rules and regulation and video conferencing equipment for 20 courts of justice. Since its launch, the courts have conducted over 1,020 cases through virtual hearing.

The UNCT also continued to strengthen the children’s justice system through the review of standard operating procedures (SOPs) in dealing with children in conflict with the law by the Child Justice Technical Working Group, enhancing protection for child victims and





witnesses in line with international best practices and standards. Additionally, rights-based mechanisms to prevent and combat human trafficking in Bhutan was strengthened by training 789 local government leaders, CSOs and frontliners from 20 Dzongkhags on the effective implementation of SOPs to prevent and combat human trafficking in Bhutan. To determine the effectiveness of non-custodial measures in rehabilitating affected children, the UNCT assisted with an assessment of such measures carried out by the nation's courts, identifying gaps and challenges. As a result, 168 of 453 children (five girls) who came into conflict with the law were diverted from formal judicial proceedings by non-custodial sentencing. Moreover, women and children in 17 Dzongkhags now have access to women and child-friendly police services.

Building on the systems understanding of youth employment from the previous year, the UNCT supported programmatic and policy solutions to create an ecosystem supportive of economic opportunities for youth and vulnerable groups. The support covered a total of 1,142 youth (53.3 per cent female), which represents 17 per cent of the country's total unemployed youth (2021). Of these, 755 unemployed youth (445 female) and 168 employers participated in the Royal Government's GOWA programme that connects talents with the labour market. This programme was taken to remote Dzongkhags of Trashigang, Chhukha, Gelephu, Mongar and Trashiyangtse in addition to Thimphu- 246 (54 females) out of 755 youth were employed on the spot. A National Career Strategy document was also developed which provides a roadmap to connect school-age youth and those in institutions with potential employers. In addition to supporting 212 youth, the targeted employment programme offered help to people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups by providing post skills-training support. Additionally, this springboard program has created opportunities for 18 established entrepreneurs to further grow their businesses.

The UNCT supported the Royal Government in introducing a certificate course in Sherubtse College in Trashigang, which helped 31 newly elected local government authorities (one female) to understand the interlinkages and gaps between policy making at the central level and implementation at the local level, as well as the factors determining effective policy formulation and implementation. At the same time, the new course set a good foundation for engagement with local authorities in promoting child-friendly local governance.

The UNCT supported the creation of 35 training and awareness programmes centered around the prevention of trafficking in persons through an initiative targeting local leaders, volunteers, health officials, law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. These programmes covered 9,923 (5,340 females) senior students and teachers from schools and institutes in seven Dzongkhags. The judiciary have strongly recommended that the trainings be continued, as well as to be rolled out to all bench clerks, while the Royal Bhutan Police recommended that the training should cover all officers in-charge, police personal spread across 20 integrated checkpoints and Investigation Bureau officers.

To improve the capacity of Members of Parliament to gather input from citizens and to make informed decisions, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in the development of a citizen engagement platform, Ten-Drel. The digital platform has allowed the Parliament to be more agile, anticipatory, and adaptable as it can facilitate the gathering of public input on policy issues and legislative initiatives systematically and on demand. The platform has also increased participation from citizens, with 7,359 individuals taking part in a regional conversation on climate change and 4,676 participating in a conversation on economic development and environmental conservation. This input has helped to inform the Natural Resources and Environment Committee's deliberations on the Forest and Nature Conservation Bill, leading to the inclusion of key objectives, such as the harmonization laws designed to strengthen regulation, as suggested by citizens through the platform.

The UNCT also contributed towards improved public service delivery through the roll out of the series of interventions in service evaluation tool (a citizen feedback tool), empathy skills training and shortening of turn-around time through process, re-engineering and simplification of nine critical services. Process reengineering and simplification benefited 20 per cent of the service users and a 40 per cent reduction in turn-around time was noted for one of the critical services, for issuance of citizenship identification cards.

At the same time, the UNCT also supported the Parliament of Bhutan in revising its Strategic Development Plan for 2024 - 2028. This plan will strengthen the institutional capacity of the National Assembly and National Council Secretariats, improve legislative capacity and processes, enhance the oversight capacity for SDG implementation and monitoring and strengthen representational and outreach capacity.



A BRIGHT LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS



During the COVID-19 pandemic, many vulnerable men and women experienced challenges that required legal intervention. The UNCT, in partnership with the Royal Government, initiated an experiment to extend legal aid services to the most vulnerable women in Bhutan. Many independent lawyers came forward and offered their professional services at a reduced “low-bono” rate. A beneficiary of this programme described it as a “bright light in the darkness”.

Established by royal command in 2022 in a much-awaited development, the Bhutan National Legal Institute established the Legal Aid Centre at the Supreme Court Complex in Thimphu, thereby enabling those who cannot afford to hire lawyers or legal advisors’ access to legal aid services, both in civil and criminal cases, with funding support from the state. The President of the Bhutan National Legal Institute, Her Royal Highness Princess Sonam Dechan Wangchuck, attended the inaugural ceremony.

The establishment of the institute will further strengthen the rule of law and the justice system in the country, enabling all people to access the courts and to be properly represented in legal processes as enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan. To have fair and full access to the justice system, legal aid is indispensable, especially for indigent people, victims, and vulnerable persons. Legal aid services provided include legal advice, assistance, and representation, subject to both means and merit tests.

In the absence of a formal legislative framework, the center is guided by the Legal Aid Rules 2022, covering all aspects related to the delivery of legal aid services, such as determination of eligibility criteria, application and review processes, assignment of service providers and service standards.



OUTCOME 4: CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

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



182,636 farming population have been made more resilient to climate induced shocks



422,169 hectares of forest were brought under sustainable forest management



42,730 people benefitted from irrigation channels and farm roads



Supported in developing Bhutan's first National Adaptation Plan defining priority adaptation actions



In 2022, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in improving the economic conditions of the country as well as resilience amidst the uncertainty posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through various initiatives, approximately 182,636 (91,318 females) individuals in farming have been made more resilient to climate-induced shocks through the adoption and scaling up of climate resilient farming infrastructure and technologies, food systems and sustainable natural resource management.

Through the sustainable management of natural resources, approximately 943 hectares of forest area were brought under participatory and sustainable management, with risk-informed and climate resilient technologies, benefiting 139,000 people (69,500 females). This included sustainable management of natural resources through 28 local forest-management plans, resulting in the maintenance of 422,169 hectares of forest area in Bhutan (a natural carbon sink, which contributes to the country's effort to maintain its constitutional obligation of 60 per cent forest coverage).

The UNCT also supported efforts to climate-proof 26 kilometers of irrigation channels, 246 kilometers of farm and Gewog connectivity roads, benefiting 42,730 people (20,510 females), providing assured access to irrigation water in both summer and winter and supporting crop diversification, leading to increased income opportunities. These efforts were complemented by the provision of other crop management technologies, prompting crop- and income-diversification initiatives. This, in turn, has helped in the agriculture stimulus plan, increasing production with lean-season vegetables. While enhancing water conveyance efficiency, high density piped irrigation has led to the reduction of landslides and to the reduction of annual maintenance work labor requirements (normally and to a large extent performed by women).





To contribute to the country's economic growth and to poverty-reduction initiatives by the Royal Government, the UNCT supported efforts to enhance the capacity of the 109 organized farmers' groups in contractual supply services, business management skills and group management. Through this initiative, 2,855 farmers (60 per cent females) have earned more than USD 1.49 million through secured access to sustainable income through market linkages established with 96 schools and three hospitals in the country. A total of 1,142 youth (53.3 per cent females), have been engaged through youth employment portfolios, leading to the employment of 246 youth through GOWA. This has enabled the exploration of new markets, improved management of food prices and food-safety improvements in horticulture, while at the same time enabling farmers, artisans, and exporters to receive training in contract negotiation, compliance with food hygiene standards, sanitation measures and Codex guidance.

Under the Food Security and Agriculture Productivity programme, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in increasing agricultural productivity, improving socio-economic conditions and nutrition services. A total of 474 farmers have benefited from a capacity development programme, including development of a behavior-change communication strategy, which has impacted the Household Dietary Diversity Score based on the 12 food groups observed (the mean score in the project areas increased from 7.5 in 2019 to 8.0 in 2021). Additionally, the proportion of households consuming a greater number of food groups has generally increased as compared to 2019. There is an increase of 11 percentage points in households consuming 10 food groups (10 per cent in 2019 vs. 21 per cent in 2021). The proportion of households consuming at least eight food groups has also increased by 16 percentage points (48.6 per cent in 2019 to 64.9 per cent in 2021). An increase in marketed volumes (35 per cent) and the values of major crops (10 per cent) above baseline was also seen.

Informed by low-emissions development strategies for human settlement, transport, industry, and the agricultural sector, the UNCT supported the Royal Government in developing the nation's enhanced second Nationally Determined Contributions with clear strategies and targets aimed at meeting the country's climate commitment to remain carbon neutral, while providing opportunities to leverage global financing instruments to create improved livelihood opportunities by building resilience.

The UNCT, through its support for the Bhutan's Low-Emission Urban Transport Project, aimed at replacing fossil-fueled taxis with electric vehicles, has helped to eliminate 1,047 metric tons of CO₂ emissions from the transport sector, contributing to the nation's goal to remain carbon negative. This was achieved through an accelerated uptake of electric vehicles, made possible by addressing structural barriers and creating a favorable policy and regulatory environment.

The UNCT provided support for the development of Bhutan's first National Adaptation Programme of Action, defining priority actions as the country adjusts to the effects of climate change. The draft was informed by a gender-sensitive vulnerability assessment undertaken in the high-priority sectors of agriculture, forest and biodiversity, health, and water. In addition to setting the nation's climate-change adaptation priorities, this programme will be an important national instrument in efforts to mobilize international climate financing. Concurrently, the Royal Government has approved the Crop and Livestock Damage and Loss Assessment Methodology with the objective of providing uniform and standard tools to collect information regarding loss and damage resulting from climate-induced disasters and other natural hazards, as well as to mitigate human-wildlife conflict in the highlands.



A DRONE'S EYE VIEW OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE



Having a wider perspective can help humanitarians get a better grasp of the whole picture. Drones can help to facilitate rapid post-disaster assessments and the mapping of large areas accurately, saving time and improving emergency response efficiency.

The UN uses drones in 80 countries worldwide for data collection, cargo delivery and connectivity and is working on several projects to integrate machine learning with drone technology. As a part of its capacity strengthening assistance to Member States, the UN trains government agencies and development partners in the use of drones for disaster risk reduction and climate change monitoring.

Drones can be prepositioned in high disaster risk countries for strengthening local emergency preparedness efforts as well as for supporting emergency response when disaster hits. With Bhutan facing increased risks of multiple natural hazards, capacity strengthening, upgraded data systems and increased awareness are priority areas for the Royal Government. Should a natural disaster impact Bhutan today, as the country works to move beyond the socio-economic pressures imposed by COVID-19 and other global

crises, it would have devastating impacts on the country and its people.

In Bhutan, drone training from the UN includes increased the use for monitoring glacial lakes, mapping forest fires, and conducting search-and-rescue and disaster-impact analyses. Among other areas, the training focuses on areas such as thematic application of drones, manual flights, mission planning and data processing – all using disaster simulation exercises featuring drones.

Training 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 first responders to react more efficiently in the aftermath of a disaster, where timely access to information is critical to properly allocate resources and to reach people in need.



2.3 Support to Partnerships and Financing the 2030 Agenda

Joint SDG Fund

To support the Royal Government in its delivery of national plan and to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the Joint Programme, “Building a Bhutan Integrated National Financing Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and Gross National Happiness” was developed as an underpinning framework to guide the country’s approach to financing through strengthened policies and coordinated institutions.



This Joint Programme was developed to support the preparation of Bhutan’s 13th Five-Year Plan financing strategy including identification of possible sources for resource mobilization and ways to strengthen the policies and institutional arrangements governing finance. Given Bhutan’s natural constraints in terms of size and geography, significant attention and innovative approaches are needed to catalyze private sector investment and increase access to finance.

Thus, leveraging partnerships for innovative financing beyond official development assistance and public finance is central to realizing the country’s priorities and the SDGs. To support the collaborative process, a first-of-its-kind partnership dialogue was organized with key agencies from the Royal Government, the private sector and civil society organizations in 2022.

The Joint Programme supported the Royal Government in drafting the Renewable Natural Resources (RNR) Financing Strategy which will support resource mobilization for key priorities and programmes in the RNR Sector, which aligns with the Bhutan’s food systems pathways and will eventually support the financing of the country’s RNR Strategy 2030. This Joint Programme is also supporting the Royal Government to develop an Emergency Health Financing Strategy as a lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The strategy is expected to help the Royal Government fine-tune mechanisms to identify financing measures for the health sector and to put in place clear institutional arrangements and legislation for use of public financing for emergency financing needs.

To leverage private sector financing and partnerships to revitalize the country’s economy and to help mitigate potential fiscal deficits, the Joint Programme assisted in the revision of the Public Private Partnership Policy. The policy will help to bring coherence and coordination between the Royal

Government and the private sector in building back better and to encourage private financing in realizing the SDGs. The revision of the policy aims to simplify the process and to create an investor- friendly system to activate and increase project uptake under the framework.

In addition, the Joint Programme is supporting the development of a fiscal risk management framework to respond to revenue shocks, internal and external, including those attributable to macroeconomic and programmatic forces, as well as pandemics and climate change. This framework will assist in the comprehensive analysis and management of fiscal risks, the performance of fiscal stress tests, and will support policy makers in simulating shocks and strengthening policy response. Through this Joint Programme, the UN is also supporting a review and assessment of current national budgetary processes to enhance the efficiency, transparency, and accountability regarding the government budget. The review recommended implementation of performance budgeting and multi-year rolling budgets, ensuring fiscal prudence and alignment of budget with national priorities and the SDGs, contributing towards macroeconomic stability, which is timely given Bhutan’s shrinking fiscal space and rising expenditure/investment needs.

In 2022, the Joint Programme supported review and assess utilization efficiency and effectiveness of Block Grants at the local government level. The findings helped revise the block grant guidelines and enhance ownership and accountability of the local government.





Green Bonds

The UNCT continues to support the Royal Government in its monumental step in tapping into the domestic resources market and preparing Bhutan to enter the international capital market. With the increasing need for financing to mitigate climate impacts and adaptation activities, the UNCT is supporting Bhutan in developing a framework for sovereign green bonds and green taxonomy along with training support to relevant stakeholders on green bond issuance. Furthermore, the first-ever Bhutan sovereign bond has encouraged unprecedented private-sector participation, including many individual investors. The bond issuance is evidence of a contribution from the international community, especially the UN, in working together with a Member State to provide technical assistance in strengthening its capital market.

At the request of the Royal Government in 2017, the UNCT began providing technical assistance and capacity building support to assist in the implementation of necessary reforms and the development of infrastructure for the bond market, including setting up a bond working committee, rules and regulations for bond issuance and relevant pre-issuance work. The UNCT has also helped to raise Bhutan's profile as a model for bond market development in a small country.

Bhutan has completed the offering of a 3-year domestic bond of USD 41 million (BTN 3 billion) at an annual coupon rate of 6.5 per cent to support increasing fiscal needs. The transaction was very well received with more than 300 per cent oversubscription. The issuance was mainly dominated by financial institutions, while non-bank institutions such as pension and insurance companies as well as civil society organizations and individual investors also participated.

Transforming Education Summit

The UN Secretary General's call for the Transforming Education Summit in 2022 was timely for Bhutan as the Royal Government has already started reform in education sector. The country started a process of educational reform beginning in 2021 with initiatives aimed at recovery from learning loss, review of school curricula, emphasis on critical subjects such as information and communications technology, mathematics and science, review of all subjects in terms of relevance, school leadership development and teacher competency enhancement. Bhutan is also currently piloting Bhutan Baccalaureate in selected schools as an initiative towards education reform.

The UNCT supported the Royal Government in preparing a document following the guidelines set for the Summit by taking into consideration the SDGs, global experiences and trends in education, the implications of learning loss and educational disruptions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and outlines the way forward identifying main strategic transformations for reimagining an educational system fit for the 21st century.

Bhutan has committed to affirming five thematic actions identified in the lead-up to the Summit to rethink and reimagine the purpose, content and delivery of education, and as key levers for transformation of education, focusing on areas that need urgent attention. The Royal Government also recognizes that such collective actions at the national, regional, and global levels will enable children, adolescents, youth, and adults to live meaningful and constructive lives.

Food Systems Summit

Bhutan faces the challenge of feeding its growing and urbanizing population with safe, healthy, and nutritious food while preserving its unique environment. Achieving food self-sufficiency is a challenge for Bhutan due to the country's limited arable land, rugged topography, the growing threat of climate-related impacts and natural disasters, as well as substantial seasonal variations in water supply.

Bhutan's food system is dominated by small, fragmented, and isolated landholdings that are characterized by low productivity and high production costs. With little access to markets, inputs and services, farmers have limited means and incentives to produce, while the absence of aggregators hinders the achievement of economies of scale and competitiveness. Rural-urban migration, particularly among young people seeking better prospects in urban areas, has led to shortages in farm labor and more land being left fallow.

As a follow up to the UN Food System Summit, the Royal Government developed a document entitled, "Food Systems for Gross National Happiness- Transformative Pathways for Bhutan", which articulates eight pathways for transforming the country's food system. These pathways are meant to guide all future developments for the Renewable Natural Resources (RNR) sector in Bhutan.

The UNCT, in collaboration with the Royal Government and other development partners, is currently supporting the revision of the country's Agriculture (RNR) Strategy 2030, which will support the development of a holistic and sustainable food system approach in Bhutan.



MOVING MOUNTAINS: TOWARDS A CROSS-BOUNDARY COLLABORATION

United Nations leaders in five South Asian countries have joined forces to strengthen collaboration on climate change, disaster response, emergency preparedness, and economic and social development.

The highest-ranking representative of the UN Development System at the country level- the Resident Coordinators from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan came together to work on a series of joint activities to build a transboundary partnership in the lead up to the International Mountain Day on 11 December. The awareness-raising and knowledge sharing initiative aims to address common problems related to global warming, including biodiversity loss, increased glacial melting, and less predictable water availability—all of which will impact livelihoods and well-being in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region and its mountain range which runs through these five countries as well as China, Myanmar, and Afghanistan.

To ensure that the voices of young people are reflected in the Transboundary Partnership the offices of the Resident Coordinators organized a Youth Panel Discussion which gave youth representatives from the five countries the platform to share their views on how climate change is impacting young people's lives across the region.

In another recent panel discussion, the five Resident Coordinators highlighted how, in line with the objectives of the Transboundary Partnership, their country teams are supporting their respective host countries meet the challenge of the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. From building resilience to combating risks from climate change to disaster risk reduction, the five country teams are scaling up their support to turn their climate ambitions into concrete actions.

Opening the discussion, Sonam Wangchuk, founding-director of the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh emphasized the importance including women in these efforts

fight climate change and find innovative solutions to mitigate natural disasters across the Hindu Kush Himalaya region.

For the communities in the mountains, the impact of climate change is already being felt. To bring stories from these vulnerable mountain communities and visibility to the transboundary partnership, a video compilation comprising of five stories from five countries was released on International Mountain Day through social media platforms of the five UN country offices. The video features vloggers and mountaineers highlighting how climate change has impacted the lives of people living in the mountains.

As well as rallying support and raising awareness of climate related threats across the region, the five Resident Coordinators also aim to provide strong leadership to facilitate greater knowledge sharing between the UN country teams and strengthen coordination with development partners. Through this enhanced regional cooperation, the UN country teams can continue to scale-up their evidence-based responses to climate change across the 'Third Pole' region.

As part of the initiative, the UN country teams pledge to develop and strengthen efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are a set of 17 objectives adopted by UN-member countries in 2015 that aim to help build peace and prosperity and address environmental issues across the globe. Each SDG addresses a specific topic. The priorities for coordination under the Transboundary Initiative include those to combat hunger, build sustainable cities and communities, address climate change, and ensure responsible production and consumption.

The initiative will provide Resident Coordinators, United Nations country teams and other development partners with consistent support on inter-connected issues that have cascading impacts across borders.





2.4 Results of the UN working more and better together: UN coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency

With majority of UN agencies housed under one roof, the UNCT/Bhutan has a comparative advantage when it comes to working cohesively together, sharing resources, and pooling common services such as reception and facility management. In addition, the Business Operations Strategy (BOS) platform provides a mechanism by which the UNCT can realize efficiency gains and quality enhancement to support its goals and objectives. Collaborations are underway in five common service areas: Administration; Finance; Human Resources, Information and Communications Technology and Procurement. Within these service areas, the UNCT has prioritized 41 common service activities.

The successful implementation of BOS includes harmonization of relevant administrative processes, reduced duplication of staffing efforts, improved service quality and cost savings in several areas. Since the BOS implementation from 2019 to date, 81 per cent of the cost avoidance target has been achieved from total target of USD 712,771 mainly from using several long-term agreements for security services sustainable/renewable utilities solutions and common premise management services. The annual review outcome confirmed that the BOS implementation has contributed to implementation of Secretary General's efficiency agenda whereby we saw 65 per cent of the realized cost was due to labor cost avoidance and reduction in staffing efforts.

Besides the efficiency gains, the UN Bhutan invested heavily and achieved in number of transformational results in line with the sustainable development goals.



Initiatives promoting SDG 13- Climate Action

Working towards achieving carbon neutrality, the UNCT has discontinued the use of single-use plastic within the UN House and with all the long-term agreement hotels, which has eliminated the consumption of 28,000 plastic bottles annually. Through procurement services UN Bhutan aims to bring about social behavioural change by influencing the way suppliers and supply chain operates. Implemented waste segregation facilities contribute to the Egg Tray Factory youth initiative, and an investment in five hybrid vehicles and two electric cars has contributed to ever-greening of fleet operations.

In line with Business Operation Strategy 2.0, the installation of a photovoltaic solar system completed in 2021 continues to offset 77 per cent of the electricity consumption of the UN House and exports 3 per cent to grid. In addition to being more

environmentally sustainable, this initiative has so resulted in the mitigation of approximately 82 metric tons of carbon dioxide, the saving of 10,177 trees.

The UNCT established a common UN carpool system consisting of three cars (two hybrid and one electric vehicle). Using low-level emissions reducing harmful gas emissions, minimize vehicle use through an effective carpooling option and encourage less fleet maintenance for smaller agencies who can now rely on larger organizations for transportation.





Initiatives promoting SDG 8- Decent work and economic growth, and SDG 19- Reduced inequality

Noting the urgent need for the UN to improve its performance with regard to disability inclusion in its efforts to support Member States to achieve the SDGs, leave no one behind and prioritize those furthest behind in all United Nations pillars, the UNCT has started to take appropriate measures, including annual consultation with the Organization for People with Disability to ensure optimum accessibility for persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment at the UN House. UN Bhutan has taken the initiative of installing ramps, elevators, railings and handrails, designated rest rooms and wide-open entrances to cater to wheelchair users, people with limited walking abilities and the visually impaired.

Initiatives promoting SDG 3- Good health and well-being

Recognizing that the workplace environment is an essential factor for increasing productivity and for improving the overall well-being of staff, the UNCT has taken initiatives to foster a healthy and vibrant atmosphere. The UN House was enhanced with new exterior cafeteria space design to accommodate more people for informal meetings and coffee breaks, most importantly to encourage interactions for building meaningful partnership and increased collaboration.

Initiative promoting SDG 17- Partnerships to achieve the Goals

In 2022, the UN took a different approach towards promoting continuous learning while simultaneously targeting Delivering as One. The One UN Purpose Lab, a professional coaching programme aimed at living and leading with purpose and consisting of representatives from all UN agencies, created a space for people to grow together, to discuss, debate, decide and deliver outcomes that go the extra mile and to create leaders with purpose. Through the learnings from the Lab, individuals were able to experiment, practice and replicate the tools in their respective professional and personal spaces. The initiation of the One UN Purpose Lab has resulted in participants identifying their personal purpose for life and life-giving goals, strong partnerships being built, more bonding between agencies and commitment to contribute to and promote delivering as One UN.



2.5 Evaluations and lessons learned

Evaluation of UNSDPF

The final evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework (UNSDPF) for Bhutan 2019 - 2023 was commissioned by the UN Country Team in Bhutan in close partnership with the Royal Government in 2022. It was conducted by a team of two independent evaluators (one international and one national). The UNSDPF is a medium-term strategic planning document that articulates the collective strategic vision of the UN system and the Royal Government for the period of 2019 - 2023. It lays out the activities to be implemented by the UN system, in partnership with the Royal Government, and in close cooperation with international and national stakeholders. The UNSDPF's overall goal "a just, harmonious and sustainable Bhutan where no one is left behind" directly supports the achievements of the Royal Government's 12th Five-Year Plan, covering the period 2019 - 2023 and beyond.

The ongoing evaluation will examine the progress made by the UN system and its national stakeholders in the implementation of the UNSDPF and provide an assessment of UN agencies' joint contributions towards national priorities and the achievement of the SDGs. The evaluation assesses how UNSDPF results addressed inequalities (focusing on the Leave No One Behind principle, and building the country's resilience to humanitarian emergencies), and cross-cutting issues (human rights, conflict sensitivity, youth, gender equality and women's empowerment, disability inclusion and environmental sustainability), as well as promoting innovative approaches and deepening strategic partnerships.

The report aims to inform the Royal Government and other implementing partners about what worked well and what are the areas that require further attention and to inform the preparation of the upcoming United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. The evaluation report is expected to be completed by mid-2023.

Lessons Learned

In 2022, the ongoing COVID-19 response measures and related restrictions impacted the smooth implementation of programmes and projects. The finalization and implementation of the Joint Annual Workplan between the Royal Government and the UN saw significant changes following re-prioritization exercises. Additionally, the year 2022 also witnessed the roll out of the civil service transformation initiative, which changed/transformed the governance structure, resulting in organizational change of key counterparts at leadership and technical level.

Towards the second half of the year, UN agencies, funds and programmes challenges in bringing technical experts into the country due to the imposition of the revised Sustainable Development Fee (SDF of USD 200 per night). The SDF application hindered bringing in timely technical support of consultants and technical experts based outside Bhutan.

However, the key challenges were discussed and recognized jointly during the 2022 reporting Country Programme Board Meeting revitalizing the partnership between the Royal Government and the UN.

Common Country Analysis

The UNCT in Bhutan worked on the new generation of Common Country Analysis to provide the evidence base for its new Cooperation Framework, which will be closely aligned with the Royal Government's 13th FYP (2024-2029). The analysis will serve as a core, integrated analytical tool for UN team-wide future casting discussion and will be updated annually as new data and analyses become available.

The Common Country Analysis is based on most recent existing data and analyses that integrate extensive stakeholder consultations, including knowledge products of the Royal Government and international agencies—supplemented with additional CSO consultations for the analysis. This collaborative process was brought together under the lead of the UNCT, substantive contributions of in-house expertise and specialist inputs from across the UN system including non-resident agencies.



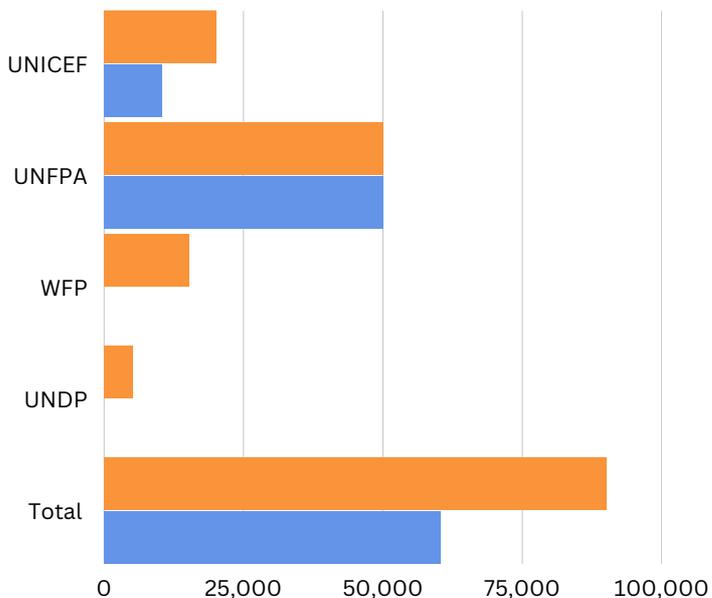


2.6 Financial Overview and Resource Mobilization

The overall financial delivery for the 2022 Annual Workplan against the planned budget is 95 per cent with the total expenditure of USD 21.455 million against the planned budget of USD 22.5 million.

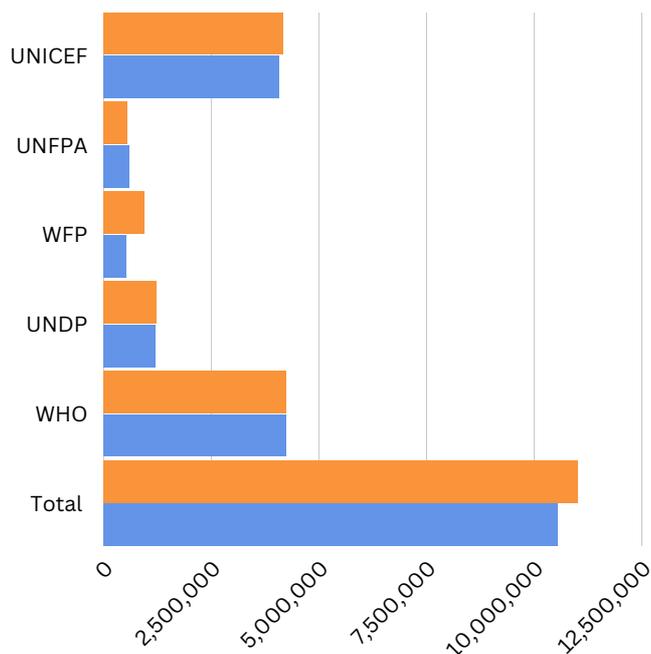
Financial Delivery Outcome 1

In Outcome Group 1, the budget allocation from 2022 is USD 0.090 million (90,000) of which the delivery rate is 67 per cent, the low delivery is due to non-utilization of budget allocated by UNDP and WFP. The allocated resources were not utilized due to change in priorities and delay in implementation.



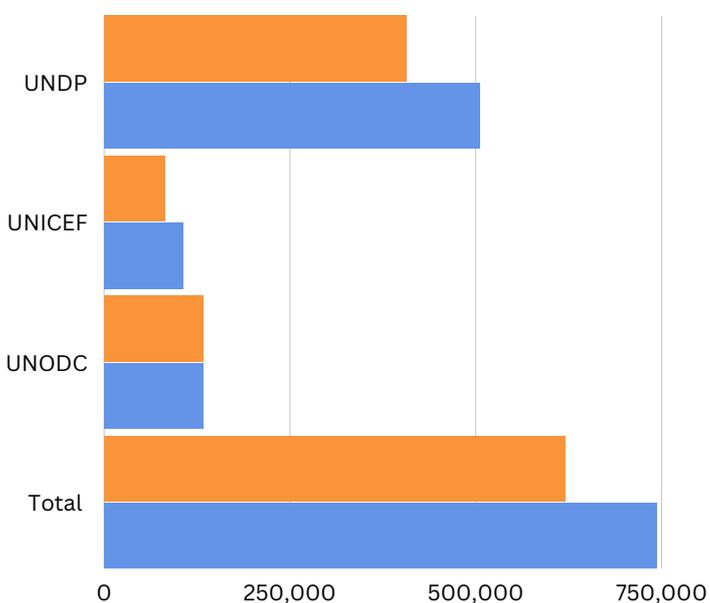
Financial Delivery Outcome 2

In Outcome Group 2, the budget allocation from 2022 is USD 6.8 million of which the delivery rate is 92 per cent, the delivery was impacted by the challenges posed by the extended COVID-19 restrictions which caused delay in the implementation of activities.



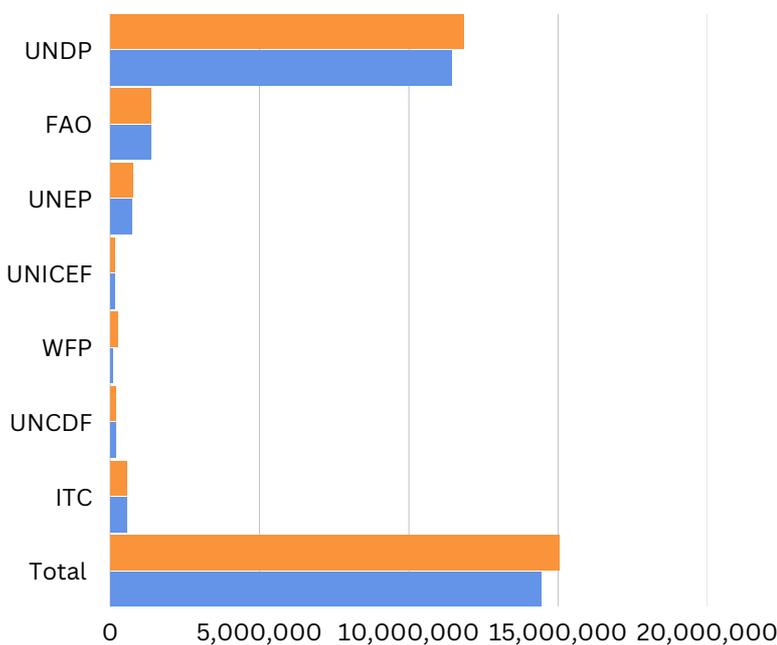
Financial Delivery Outcome 3

In Outcome Group 3, the budget allocation from 2022 is USD 0.619 million against which the delivery rate is 118 per cent, the high delivery is due to the change in modality of implementation and availability of additional resources for few activities during the mid-term review of the Annual Workplan.



Financial Delivery Outcome 4

In Outcome Group 4, the budget allocation from 2022 is USD 22.5 million against which the delivery rate is 95 per cent, this is due to the delay in reporting of exact financial figures for expenditure during the end year review process.

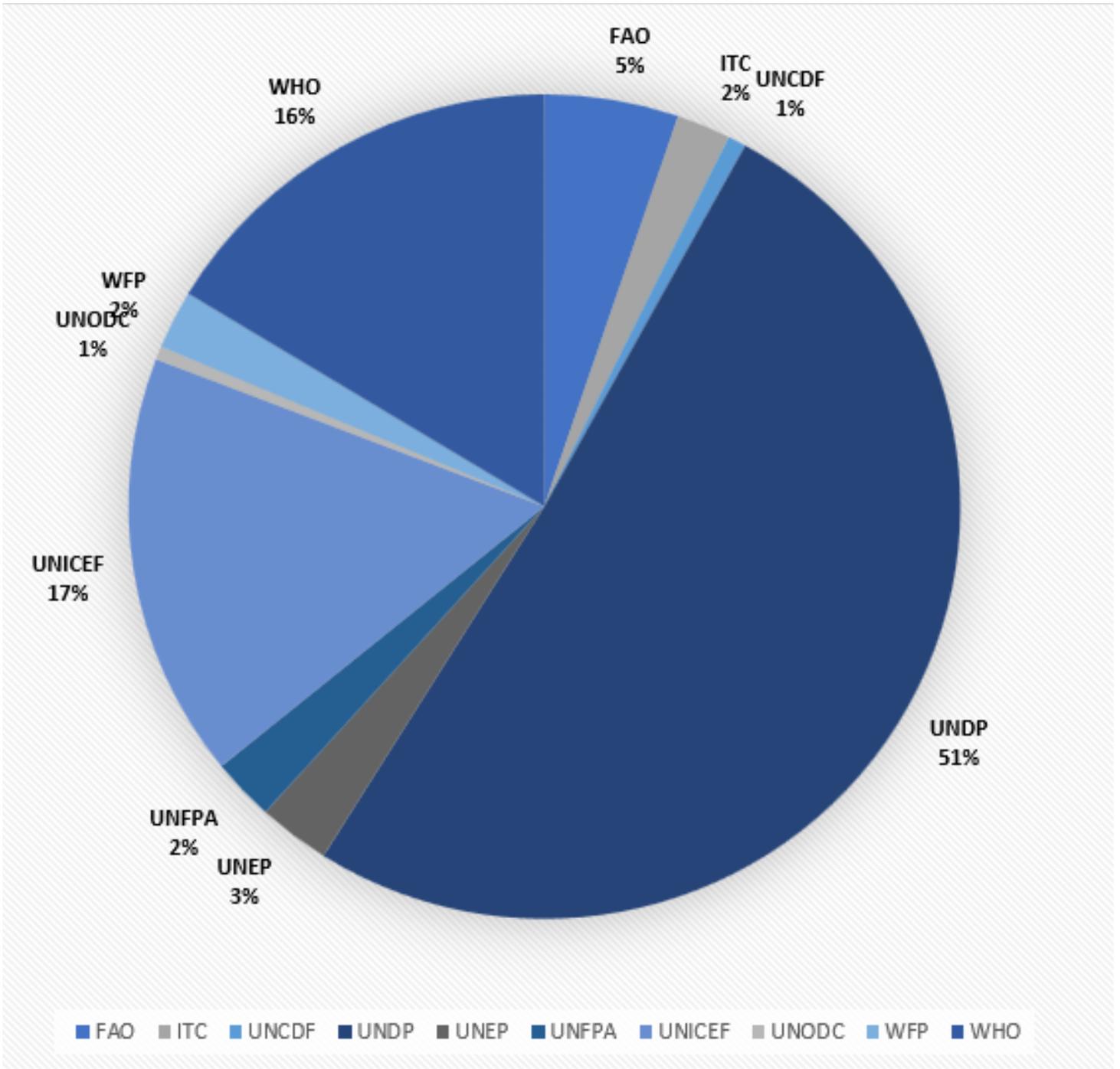


■ Total Planned Budget 2022

■ Expenditure of 2022 planned resources



Achievement against planned budget



CHAPTER 3



UNCT KEY FOCUS FOR NEXT YEAR

UN Bhutan is in its last year of implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Partnership Framework and is currently in the process of preparing the new Cooperation Framework for the period 2024 – 2028. To make the most meaningful contribution in achieving the 2030 Agenda, the Cooperation Framework will be based on the UN Common Country Analysis (CCA) for Bhutan. This document analyzes the historical trends to provide understanding of the development trajectory and structural challenges with the most current data to reflect the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for Bhutan.

The Cooperation Framework design process will engage all stakeholders, including national partners (the Royal Government's planning agencies, experts of line ministries and departments, civil society, private-sector representatives, think tanks, academia, representatives for youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities), the UN, both resident and non-resident agencies, international, bilateral, and multilateral development partners, as well as international financial institutions.

Areas of Royal Government's engagement are:

- To co-lead the consultation process
- To identify the right stakeholder to engage in the prioritization process, creating space for active and meaningful engagement
- To co-design and validate the strategic priorities and Outcomes of the cooperation framework
- To agree on the development indicators and targets identified in the Results Framework
- To review and validate the UNCT configuration
- To approve and co-sign on the UNSDCF 2024-2028

The preparation timeline for the new Cooperation Framework began with the prioritization workshop in 2023, and jointly sign the UNSDCF in September 2023. This process is designed to determine priorities for the next programming cycle in line with the UN 2030 Agenda and will be linked to national development priorities.

The preparation timeline for the new Cooperation Framework began with the prioritization workshop in early 2023, and the joint signing of the UNSDCF in 2023. Bhutan is set to graduate from the Least Developed Countries' category in 2023, following the country's request to the UN for the graduation date to coincide with the end of the implementation of the 12th Five-Year Plan. The UN supported the Royal Government in preparing the national smooth transition strategy, proposing key elements for consideration by the Royal Government, its development and trading partners and other interested stakeholders.

The UNCT will work towards ensuring a smooth transition for Bhutan after its graduation by aligning its new Cooperation Framework to the national priorities which the Royal Government is currently in the process of developing for its 13th Five-Year Plan. The Royal Government is preparing the next Plan under the four clusters of economic, social, security and governance with the overall direction to guide the long-term socio-economic development efforts of the country. The UNCT, upon the request of the Royal Government, is in the process of consultation to provide technical and financial support for the development of the 13th Five Year Plan.





UNITED NATIONS
BHUTAN

Leaving No One Behind

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