



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

Distr.: General  
26 August 2019

Original: English  
English, French and Spanish only

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**

**Concluding observations on the combined eighth and ninth  
reports of Bhutan**

Addendum

**Information provided by Bhutan in follow-up to the  
concluding observations\***

[Date received: 15 May 2019]

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\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



**Follow-up information relating to paragraph 19 (e) of the concluding observations (CEDAW/C/BTN/CO/8-9)**

*Paragraph 19 (e): Develop a clear plan and adequate budget for the implementation of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013, undertake a needs assessment to establish the demand for shelters by women victims of violence and provide funding for NGOs operating such shelters.*

1. Implementation of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013 (DVPA) and its Rules and Regulations is given high priority and included in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2018-2023), with specific budget. Based on consultations with the relevant stakeholders, a number of guidelines and standard operating procedures has been developed during the period to set minimum standards in the provision of services to victims of domestic violence and ensure proper coordination among the stakeholders working on the issue. Key performance indicators include establishing comprehensive forensic services in the regional referral hospitals, family and child benches in the selected dzongkhag courts and Women and Child Protection Desks (WCP Desks) in all police stations were also included in the plan.
2. A Women and Children Welfare Committee with representation from relevant government (National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), Royal Bhutan Police (RBP), Ministry of Health (MoH), Royal University of Bhutan), and non-government (Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW)<sup>1</sup>, Nazhoen Lamtoen<sup>2</sup>) has been formed at the national level to ensure effective implementation of the Act and institutionalize support mechanism for women and children in need of care and protection. Likewise, Dzongkhag<sup>3</sup> and Thromde Women and Children Committees (D/TWCCs) have been formed in all the 20 districts and four thromdes<sup>4</sup> to assist the Competent Authority (the NCWC) in implementation of the DVPA and provide timely and adequate services to the victims of domestic violence. To institutionalize the capacity building and awareness programs at the local level, an awareness and sensitization program on gender, child protection, the DVPA, the Child Care and Protection Act 2011 (CCPA), the Child Adoption Act 2012 (CAA), relevant standard operating procedures (SOP) and guidelines, and services available such as the toll-free helpline for women and children (1098) was carried out for the members of the D/TWCC. They were also sensitized on the Central Management Information System (CMIS), an integrated system for collection of information on cases pertaining to women and children established by the NCWC.
3. Training on the CMIS has also been conducted for the relevant stakeholders such as the RBP, Office of the Attorney General (OAG), One Stop Crisis Center, Dratshang Lhentshog and Judiciary. Further, trainings on management of cases related to women and children was conducted for the Gender and Child Focal Points who are also designated as the Protection Officers/Probation Officers at the local level to enhance their understanding on the legislations and procedures while dealing with women and children.
4. The NCWC has been working closely with non-government organizations towards building an effective, reliable and accessible protection system for women and children in need of care and protection. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed with RENEW to collaborate on increasing the efficiency of shelter

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<sup>1</sup> RENEW is a Civil Society Organization dedicated to the empowerment of women and girls with special focus on the survivors of gender-based violence.

<sup>2</sup> Nazhoen Lamtoen is a civil society organization that works towards supporting children in difficult circumstances and children in conflict with law.

<sup>3</sup> Dzongkhag refers to an administrative and judicial district.

<sup>4</sup> Thromde is municipal.

services for victims of domestic violence and children in difficult circumstances. Based on the MoU, the government through the NCWC has provided financial support of Nu. 1,300,000 in 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 fiscal years to meet the operational cost of the shelter managed by RENEW. Similarly, the NCWC has also earmarked Nu. 600,000 to meet the operational expenses of the shelter services managed by RENEW and Nazhoen Lamtoen in the fiscal year 2019-2020.

5. In addition to the financial support, a caregivers training was also provided to the shelter managers to enhance their understanding on dealing with the beneficiaries of their shelter services particularly children. Similarly, an MoU has been signed between the MoH and RENEW to strengthen coordination and collaboration between the Multi-sectoral Task Force<sup>5</sup> and Community Based Support System<sup>6</sup> and identify common approaches to addressing social issues particularly gender-based violence at the local level. This MoU resulted in forging stronger collaboration between the government and CSO thereby increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of interventions. An assessment is also being carried out on improving the coordination mechanism between the government and CSOs to strengthen the protection services being provided for women and children in need of care and support. Further, the NCWC has conducted awareness for the Civil Society Organizations on the accreditation guidelines for shelter and other services and this will help streamline the quality of services provided by them.

6. To address the information gap on the prevalence of violence against women and girls in the country, a nationwide survey on violence against women and girls has been carried out by the NCWC with collaboration with United Nations Development Program and financial assistance from the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) in 2017. The study adopted the World Health Organizations (WHO) questionnaires on multi-country study on gender-based violence and covered 2200 households and 2184 women and girls. The Draft National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) that has now been submitted to the Gross National Happiness Commission and the Cabinet for approval includes clear policy directives for addressing violence against women and girls. A National Plan of Action for Gender Equality (NPAGE) will also be developed to implement the provisions of the policy.

### **Follow-up information relating to paragraph 19 (f) of the concluding observations (CEDAW/C/BTN/CO/8-9)**

***Paragraph 19 (f):** Continue to enhance the capacities of the Royal Bhutan Police and other law enforcement agencies to prevent and respond to cases of gender-based violence against women and girls through the institutionalization of capacity building programmes and by increasing the number of Women and Child Protection Units.*

7. The Woman and Child Protection Division (WCPD) under the Royal Bhutan Police oversees and coordinates the functioning of the three Woman and Child Protection Units (WCPUs), and ten WCP Desks. Two additional WCP Desks were established in July 2018 and Feb 2019 respectively making the total number of WCPU/Desk to 13 with trained police personnel. The RBP has also started recruiting and training more women in the police. They are posted to the WCPUs/WCP Desk and police stations to create a conducive environment for victims of gender-based

<sup>5</sup> Multi Sectoral Taskforce- The Taskforce was established in all the 20 dzongkhags with representation from all sector heads and chaired by dzongda to address HIV/AIDS and other public health issues at the local level.

<sup>6</sup> Community Based Support System is a network of RENEW volunteers working towards addressing gender-based violence at the local level.

violence for reporting the cases. As of April 2019, there are 553 (528 NCOs/ORs and 25 officers) female officers in the RBP.

8. Women and child friendly/sensitive procedures have been developed by the RBP with support from relevant partners and incorporated in the training curriculum of the Police Training Institute. Likewise, the DVPA 2013 has also been incorporated in the training curriculum for the recruits and cadet officers thereby ensuring all the police personnel graduating from the training institutes were adequately equipped with understanding on the Act and women and child friendly police procedures.

9. Consistent and regular capacity building programmes are carried out for the RBP officials to enhance their understanding on women and children issues and to ensure that the cases of gender-based violence are dealt with in an appropriate and sensitive manner. A total of 11 officials were trained on implementing the DVPA 2013 and CCPA 2011 through the Australian Award Fellowship Program from 2016-2018. Officers were also trained on comprehensive integrated program on mainstreaming gender in UN peace keeping to ending conflict related to child sexual violence in Australia and Delhi. Opportunities for the RBP officials to attend international training on investigating cases of gender-based violence as international crime; child psychology; counselling and rehabilitation, and protection of victim of gender-based violence are being provided to gain better understanding on such issues through exchange of experiences with other countries. A total of five officers were provided with such opportunity during the reporting period. Support for a female officer to attend the police training of trainers course on child protection was also provided to strengthen the capacity of RBP in dealing with child protection issues.

10. To ensure that the cases of gender-based violence are managed in an appropriate manner by the law enforcement agencies, a training on the standard operating procedure on management of cases related to women and children in difficult circumstances has been conducted for the senior police officers and an awareness on the same has been carried out for the Officer Commanding of all the police stations. 170 officials (108 male and 62 female) are being trained on Zero Tolerance Policy of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV). A sensitization programme for the police personnel and their spouses on the negative impact of domestic violence particularly on the children, and the new sexual harassment policy at workplace was conducted by a team of officers from the RBP headquarters. 25 officers (22 male and 3 female) were trained on Domestic Violence Prevention - Consensus Building by RENEW in collaboration with RBP. The consensus building program was initiated by RENEW in partnership with relevant stakeholders to provide timely and adequate services to the victims of gender-based violence. To ensure sustainability of the training program, a MoU has been signed between the RBP and RENEW and all Officer Commanding were trained on dealing with cases of domestic violence in 2017.

11. Three rollout trainings on combating Trafficking in Persons (TIP) were conducted for the law enforcement agencies including the Office of the Attorney General, RBP, Ministry of Labor and Human Resource (MoLHR), Department of Law and Order (DLO), Department of Immigration (DoI), Bhutan National Legal Institute (BNLI) and the NCWC. A sensitization on TIP for taxi drivers, hoteliers, local government officials, employees of the entertainment places, labour recruitment agencies and schools was carried out by the DLO in collaboration NCWC, RENEW and Ministry of Information and Communications (MoIC) in 2018.

12. Besides the training programs, the government also facilitated and supported the RBP officials to attend international and regional conferences, workshops and meetings with the objective of providing them with a platform to exchange knowledge and experiences. An officer attended the consultative meeting for the taskforce

members for building a sustainable woman and child protection system and another officer attended regional meeting for the third review conference on Gender and Arms to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all aspects in 2018.

### **Follow-up information relating to paragraph 29 (b) of the concluding observations (CEDAW/C/BTN/CO/8-9)**

*Paragraph 29 (b): Legalize the termination of pregnancies including in the case of risk for the health of the woman and severe impairment of the foetus and decriminalize it in all other cases; and ensure that medically safe modern methods of abortion are available and accessible.*

13. The Penal Code of Bhutan 2004 (PCB) provides for medical termination of pregnancies in situations when a pregnancy is a result of **rape, incest** and when the mother is of unsound mental condition or to save the mother's life. Section 146 of the PCB states that “*A defendant shall be guilty of the offence of illegal abortion, if the defendant unlawfully aborts or induces expulsion of an embryo or foetus or prevents a child from being born alive, except the act is caused in good faith for the purpose of saving the life of the mother or when the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest, or when the mother is of unsound mental condition*”.

14. To guide the health workers of the complications of abortion, a “Guideline for Health Workers on Management of Complications of Abortion” is also in place.

### **Follow-up information relating to paragraph 29 (c) of the concluding observations (CEDAW/C/BTN/CO/8-9)**

*Paragraph 29 (c): Take appropriate measures to address economic barriers and substance abuse in order to reduce suicide rates among women and girls.*

15. The government accords high priority on prevention of suicides particularly among youths and an indicator, “suicide rates” has been incorporated as the National Key Performance Indicators in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP. The target is to reduce the overall suicide rates by less than 12 persons per 100, 000 population by the end of the plan period. To ensure that the interventions are carried out in an effective and coordinated manner, efforts to establish institutions and systems for suicide prevention was taken up as a priority. A Suicide Prevention Unit with trained human resources has been established in the MoH for overall coordination and monitoring of the implementation of Suicide Prevention Action Plan. The unit also coordinates the meeting of the National Taskforce for Suicide Prevention that provides technical advice on suicide prevention efforts and oversees the situation of suicide in the country.

16. Similarly, a Suicide Prevention Unit has been established under the Crime Prevention Division, Crimes and Operation, RBP in 2017 with the objective to increase effectiveness of RBP's response to cases of suicide. The unit also coordinates the capacity building programs for the RBP officials in suicide prevention and responses and carry out targeted awareness program. Officials of the units were also trained on suicide prevention and management of data related to suicides including attempted suicides that are reported to the RBP. Furthermore, training on suicide prevention was conducted for 45 officers and 688 non-commissioned officers during the reporting period.

17. To ensure systematic collection of information on suicide at the national level, a suicide registry has been set up in all the 20 districts and accordingly the information

was collected with effect from January 1, 2016. This is envisaged to guide formulation of appropriate policies, plans, and program to address the issue.

18. A major emphasis was made on implementing interventions that facilitates the development of positive attitude, sound health, and engage and empower youth with appropriate skills, knowledge and values. A multisectoral approach to these interventions are being adopted with engagement of government and non-government partners including the religious institutions. To inculcate positive values and prevent youths particularly students from committing (attempting) suicides, activities that promote cultural and spiritual values (positive) are carried out in all the schools and are monitored by the Education Monitoring Division, Ministry of Education through the annual performance indicators of the schools.

19. Considering the significant role of the school guidance counsellors in preventing and responding to suicides in schools and families, importance was given to building their capacity in preventing and responding to such incidences and establishment the of a mechanism to ensure systematic referrals by them. A form for reporting and referral of such incidence was developed with a checklist to guide them to report/refer such incidence and training conducted for all the guidance counsellors. The dzongkhag/thromde education officer coordinates services for schools where there are no guidance counsellors from the nearby schools and the counselors receives support from the Ministry of Education.

20. To institutionalise suicide prevention programs in in the schools, the Suicide Prevention Action Plan was disseminated during the biannual dzongkhag education officers' conference and central school immersion program in 2016. The conference highlighted the need to facilitate the development of student's mental wellbeing and subsequently, 73 school guidance counsellors and teachers were oriented on mental health facilitation in schools. Furthermore, the mental health facilitation training was made mandatory for all the counsellors certified by the Bhutan Board of Certified Counsellors (BBCC), a body established in 2016 to increase the pool of trained counsellors and develop certification standards and protocol for certification of counselling professionals such as psychologist, social workers and counsellors. Therefore, all the new certified counsellors now are equipped with skills and knowledge on such issues. Standard training materials on mental health promotion, identification of behavioral and drug use and suicide risk factors was also developed Ministry of Education and shared with all the schools for implementation.

21. Based on recommendation from the second school guidance counsellors' conference in 2016, a situational analysis of school environment focusing on school connectedness, school climate, issues in schools and effectiveness of guidance counsellors was conducted. The analysis helped to identify strengths, gaps, opportunities of the program and the risks (risky behavior, vulnerability) faced by the students.

22. Furthermore, a framework for student safety and wellbeing is currently being developed following consultations with school principals (186), dzongkhag education officers (20) and thromde education officers (4) and taking into consideration the wellbeing of students. The school guidance counsellors were trained on Trauma & Neurobiology; planning, designing and implementation of psychosocial support and care for vulnerable children and adolescents to ensure the wellbeing of the students. Furthermore, peer helpers programme has been initiated in 119 secondary schools to increase access to counselling services for students and a of 1071 students were referred by the peer helpers to the school guidance counsellors for support. Subsequently, the students from the economically disadvantaged families are enrolled in the Central Schools. The Central Schools are established to improve the quality and access to education particularly for children from rural communities and are

located in convenient catchment areas, integrated and resourced-based with residential facilities. Students are provided free uniform, sportswear, shoes, bedding, and three meals a day. Currently, there are 64 Central Schools benefiting around 28 percent of the total students.

23. To increase access for the students to counselling services and ensure early identification of students who are at the risk of committing suicides and other vulnerable students, basic counselling skills workshop has been planned for all the teachers in both government and private-owned schools. A monitoring framework has also been developed to assess the effectiveness of the initiatives and document all related information. This is envisaged to guide the formulation and implementation of similar initiatives in future.

24. Efforts are being made to engage the parents in initiatives to prevent youths from indulging in harmful behavior and committing suicide and a Framework for Parents Participation in Education was developed to encourage and enhance parent-child interaction. 182 primary school teachers have been trained in counselling including parenting education and School Parent Education Awareness Program (SPEA) has been initiated in 119 secondary schools. This is basically to strengthen the skills of parents to identify mental, emotional and behavior needs of the children. Similarly, community parenting program has also been initiated and currently it is extended to a total of 12 communities across the country.

25. A mental health facilitators training was also conducted for the members of the Community Based Support System, counsellors from various agencies, and medical professionals to increase their understanding on psycho-social issues and equip them with adequate skills to identify and provide necessary support to those who are in difficult circumstances and are at the risk of committing suicide.

26. To prevent suicide and provide timely and effective response to those who commits or are at the risk of committing suicide at the local level, Dzongkhag Suicide Prevention Response Team (DSPRT) with representation from relevant sectors and led by the Dzongda<sup>7</sup> has established in six Dzongkhags. In addition to the capacity building programs for the team, all the Dzongdas, members of the Community Based Support System and Multisectoral Taskforce, and the sector heads are sensitized on the Suicide Prevention Action Plan.

27. The access to support services for those in need has been strengthened through the established of Suicide Helpline (112) with the Jigmi Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital and appropriate training was conducted for the helpline managers. Similarly, a toll-free helpline for women and children has been established by the NCWC in October 2018 and is also being managed by trained counsellors. Appropriate referral and services are provided by the NCWC and other relevant partners based on the need.

28. Over the recent past, concerted efforts have been made to reduce the supply of psychotropic substances, increase awareness on the harmful impact of substance abuse, provide support for those at the risk of being involved in substance abuse and increase access to counselling and other support services has been made by the government and non-government partners.

29. In addition to the number of awareness programs on harmful impact of substance abuse in the schools by the Bhutan Narcotic Control Agency, RBP and other partners, training of school guidance counsellors and teachers were conducted. 14 school guidance counsellors and school principals were certified as addiction counsellors after being trained on universal treatment curriculum to enable them to

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<sup>7</sup> Dzongda is the head of the district.

identify those who are at the risk of or into early initiation of substance abuse and provide necessary support.

30. Family Support Groups in the communities were initiated to strengthen the engagement of communities in preventing the youths from engaging in substance abuse. These groups engage community members and parents to identify vulnerable youths, prevent them from indulging in harmful behaviours and provide support (including referral to relevant agencies). Over the last few years, a greater number of women were involved in these groups and 10 such groups were established in the military centres with 1969 women.

31. Furthermore, to strengthen the support services for those who are engaged in substance abuse, mobile drop in centres were established in 8 dzongkhags which are managed by trained counsellors. Additional female counsellors were recruited and trained to cater to the needs of women and girls abusing substances in the rehabilitation centres.

32. To address the economic vulnerabilities and provide meaningful employment opportunities for young people, the government aims to promote Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) as mainstream education and it is being taken up as a flagship program in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP. The program aims to address the issues related to quality of highlighted by the Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) Blueprint developed by the MoLHR in 2016. The Blueprint provides strategies to create a gender-friendly environment to encourage girls to take up vocational education. Likewise, the Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014-2024) developed by the Ministry of Education highlights that 20 percent of the higher secondary school leavers should have access to Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) by 2024.

33. The government will be providing 1000 scholarships for the unemployed youths in the private technical training institutes as well as increase the intake capacity of the existing government training institutes by 400 trainees during the plan period. To address the mismatch between the available jobs in the labour market and skills of job seekers, TVE will be provided as electives in the mainstream schools.

34. The government has also initiated the establishment of Start-up Center targeting young people to help new and start-up businesses. The Center support the young entrepreneurs with affordable infrastructure and facilities and common business development services. The new Startup Center established in Thimphu consist of 30 Start-up units, 2 training hall and a resource room. As of April 2019, there are 23 Start-ups (youths and women) undergoing 2-year business incubation program at the new center and additional 8 Start-ups at the old service center. The 7 Start-ups will be graduating in June 2019 and the rest in July 2020.

35. Vocational skills training for vulnerable and disadvantaged women and girls was also provided to empower them to become economically independent and a total of 900 women and girls were trained during the reporting period. Initiatives to increase access to finance, particularly for those in rural areas are also being initiated to provide opportunities for them to set up small businesses. The Royal Monetary Authority has introduced priority sector lending scheme in 2017 to promote micro, small and medium enterprises especially for the young people, women and those in the agricultural sectors. Similarly, a micro finance loan was also implemented by RENEW for the rural population to inculcate saving culture and develop entrepreneurship. A total of 18600 people in 10 dzongkhags benefited from the scheme as of March 31, 2019.