ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

Women and Children Division

Secretariat to the National Commission for Women and Children

Ministry of Education and Skills Development

Royal Government of Bhutan

About this Report

This report is an annual publication of the National Commission for Women (NCWC) and Children. The report outlines the Commission's functions and key achievements during the 2024-2025 fiscal year. It reflects NCWC's ongoing commitment to advancing gender equality, child protection, and promoting the overall well-being of women and children in the country. The report also highlights the vital contributions of key stakeholders who work in close collaboration with NCWC to uphold and promote the rights of women and children in the country.

The NCWC, as the national gender machinery, has navigated through a rapidly evolving landscape of issues affecting women and children in Bhutan. Despite various challenges, the Commission remained resilient and focused by spearheading efforts in gender mainstreaming, child protection, and wellbeing initiatives. The Commission has continued to invest in targeted programmes, policy implementation and research, ensuring all efforts are grounded in factual evidence. Hence, this report details NCWC's key performances and interventions aimed at overcoming challenges to gender equality and children's well-being. It also offers a comprehensive overview of strategic initiatives, key milestones, progress and the Secretariat programmes in service of women and children in 2024-2025 divided under four major outcomes.

Table of Contents

Foreword *1*
Gender At a Glance *4*
Children At a Glance *5*
PART I: Overview *8*
Vision & Mission *9*
Mandates and Functions *9*
Key Legislations and Regulations *11*
Governance Body *11*
Commission Members *12*
Gender Expert Group *13*
Gender and Child Focal Points *13*
Dzongkhag/Thromde Women and Children Committee (D/TWCC) *14*
National Commission for Women and Children Secretariat *15*
Working Modality *15*

PART II: Annual Performance Statement of the Commission (Financial Year July 2024-2025) *16*

- *Outcome I: Enhanced legislative, policy, and institutional frameworks effectively implement acts, rules, and regulations, ensuring better governance and compliance* *16*
- *Outcome II: Strengthened capacity, advocacy and sensitization effort lead to increased awareness, skills and engagement for sustainable development and social change* *23*
- *Outcome III: Enhanced network, coordination, and collaboration among key stakeholders to drive effective gender mainstreaming and improve child protection and well-being initiatives* *29*
- *Outcome IV: Improved reporting, monitoring, and data driven knowledge creation to enhance informed decision making and interventions for the well-being of women and children* *32*

Challenges *34*
Conclusion *35*
References *36*

Outcome and Programme Structure

Outcome 1

Legislative, policy and institutional frameworks effectively implement acts, rules, and regulations, ensuring better governance and compliance

Programmes

1. National Strategy and Framework of Action on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence
2. Gender Equality in Public Administration Report
3. Review of the Go-to-person SOP
4. Review of SOP on Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence
5. Development of CRC Action Plans

Outcome 2

Capacity, advocacy, and sensitization efforts lead to increased awareness, skills, and engagement for sustainable development and social change

Programmes

1. Early Identification and Safe Referral Training in Haa, Pemagatshel and Punakha.
2. Empowering Local Governance for Inclusive Planning and Budgeting: Addressing Issues Affecting Women and Children.
3. Joint Advocacy and Awareness Programme.
4. RESPECT Training for LG, Project sites officials

Outcome 3

Network, coordination, and collaboration among key stakeholders to drive effective gender mainstreaming and improve child protection and well-being initiatives

Programmes

1. Violence Against Children Conference
2. Gender Expert Group (GEG) Coordination Meeting

Outcome 4

Reporting, monitoring, and data-driven knowledge creation enhance informed decision-making and interventions for the well-being of women and children

Programmes

1. Consultation of the Draft 10th CEDAW Interim Progress Report
2. Public Advisory Notification on Protecting Women and Children: Adhering to Shelter Services Standards
3. Provisional Shelter Accreditation of The PEMA Home

Foreword

The National Commission for Women and Children is pleased to present its Annual Report for the fiscal year 2024-2025. This report captures our collective efforts in advancing gender equality, women empowerment and the rights and wellbeing of children in Bhutan. The report highlights the dedication and collaborative efforts of all the stakeholders and partners who have contributed to our shared mission of promoting and protecting the rights of women and children across the country.

As the Competent Authority for the Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011, the Child Adoption Act of Bhutan 2012, and the Domestic Violence Prevention Act of Bhutan 2013, the NCWC along with the government, CSO partners, Private sector and development partners has made every effort to address emerging challenges affecting women and children. We have implemented a range of programmes and initiatives to mainstream gender and child-related concerns into national policies, legislation, and programmatic interventions. Furthermore, the NCWC has prioritized in-depth research, knowledge management, and capacity building to ensure evidence-based decision-making and a sustained commitment to the continuous improvement of our plans and initiatives.

The achievements outlined in this report are a testament to the strong partnership we share with various stakeholders, and we remain grateful for their continued support and collaboration. As we look to the future, NCWC remains committed to working together to build a more equitable, just and inclusive society - one where every woman and child in Bhutan can thrive in safety, dignity and opportunity.

Chairperson

National Commission for Women and Children

The Situation of Women and Children in Bhutan (2024-2025)

Gender At the Glance

Bhutan continues to prioritise gender equality as a core element of its development agenda, reflecting the nation's broader commitment to equity, well-being, and balanced social progress. While notable successes have been achieved, particularly in education, health and youth development, gaps persist in economic participation, leadership representation and safety from violence. The following sections outline Bhutan's current gender landscape using the data reported until 2025.

Bhutan's current gender dynamics begin with a notable male-to-female imbalance in its population. According to recent estimates, about 53.3 percent of the population are male and 46.5 percent are female. It was reported by the National Statistics Bureau, that male constitutes to 407663 and female to 376380.

Number			**Percentage**	
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
407,663	376,380	784,043	52	48
Source: Bhutan at a glance, 2025, National Statistic Bureau				

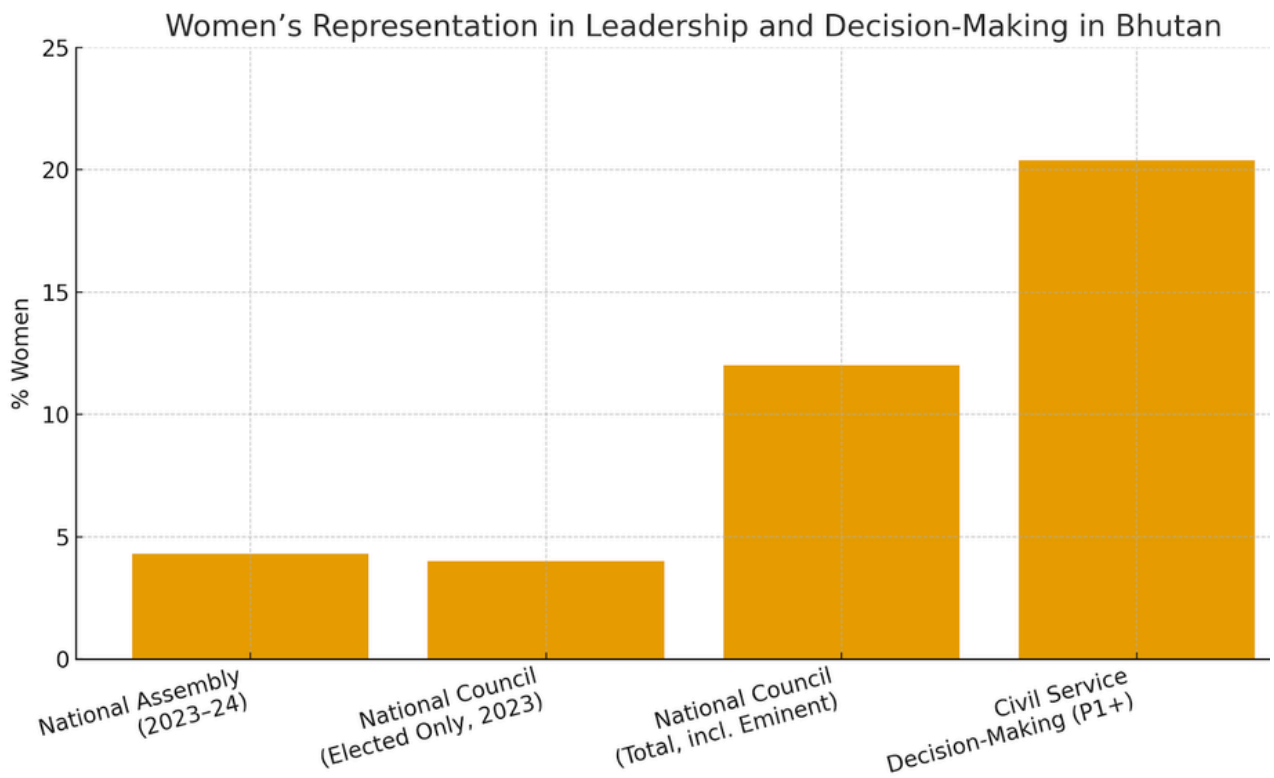
Women in Bhutan remain active contributors to the national economy, but still participate at lower rates than men. According to the Labour Force Survey Report 2024, it was shown that female labour force participation stands at 56.5 percent compared to 72.2 percent for men. Women's work is heavily concentrated in agriculture and subsistence-based activities, with about 58 percent of employed women working in agriculture compared to men.

Bhutan has achieved near gender parity among school-aged children, and youth literacy rates now exceed 97 percent, reflecting decades of progress. However, an adult literacy gap remains with 57 percent of women aged 15 and older being literate compared to 73.4 percent of men.

Women remain significantly underrepresented in Bhutan's leadership positions. The recent election cycles highlight persistent structural and social barriers that continue to shape women's access to decision-making roles. In the National Assembly, women hold only 4.3 percent of seats which is two out of 47 members making the 2023-2024 parliament the least gender-balanced since the introduction of parliamentary democracy. Political parties themselves noted challenges in recruiting women candidates, citing factors such as household responsibilities, limited political exposure, and sociocultural norms that discourage women from taking on frontline political roles.

Female representation in the National Council is comparatively higher but remains limited. Of the Council's 25 seats, only three which is 12 percent are held by women. In the 2023 National Council elections, just one woman won through the electoral competition. Two additional members were appointed as eminent members thereafter, increasing the total number of women in the upper chamber. 20.4 percent of decision making posts (P1 and above) are held by women in the Bhutanese civil service. Women are more concentrated in the education, health and administrative roles, while senior leadership and technical positions continue to be male-dominated.

According to the Gender Equality in Public Administration in Bhutan report, within the Legal, Judiciary and Legislative Services, men constitute 262 civil servants (0.87 per cent of the total civil service), while women account for 251 civil servants (0.83 per cent). This near-equal distribution indicates that gender parity has largely been achieved in terms of numerical representation within the judiciary-related occupational group. However, this parity at the aggregate level does not necessarily translate into equal representation in senior judicial, leadership, or decision-making positions, as broader civil service trends show that women remain underrepresented in executive and decision-making roles. This suggests that while access to the judiciary for women has improved, structural and progression-related barriers continue to limit women's advancement to higher levels of authority within the judicial system.

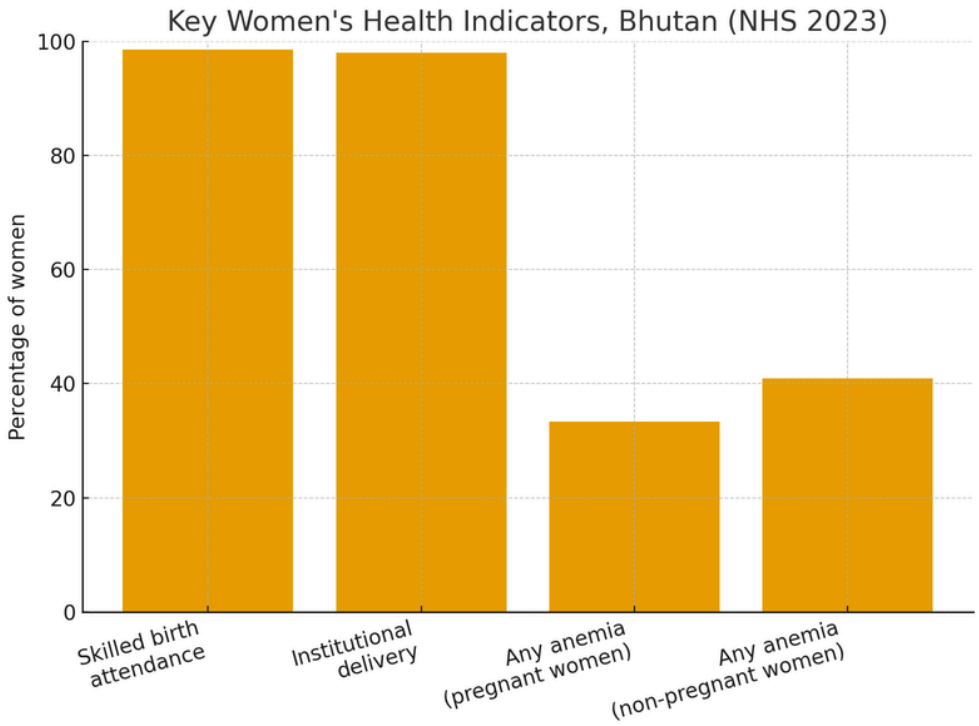


Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a critical challenge to women's rights and well-being in Bhutan. The National Health Survey 2023 finds that 24.9 percent of Bhutanese women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, and 10.8 percent experienced such violence in the 12 months preceding the survey. When all forms of abuse are combined (physical, sexual, emotional, economic and controlling behaviours) approximately 39.7 percent of women report lifetime exposure and 23.6 percent report abuse in the past year. A qualitative study on Bhutanese women's experience of turning points to seek help from Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) indicates that violence often coexists with harmful alcohol use, economic stress and social isolation, magnifying risks to women's mental health and well-being.

The Fifth National Health Survey shows that women benefit from strong coverage of core reproductive, maternal and child health services. Maternal health outcomes have improved markedly over the past four decades. According to the report, 98.5 percent take place in health facilities.

Children At the Glance

Bhutan has made steady and meaningful progress in improving the well-being of children over the past two decades, supported by strong public investments in health, education, and social protection. National survey data indicate significant reductions in child mortality, improved access to essential health and nutrition services, and near-universal participation in primary and basic education. At the same time, challenges remain in areas such as child nutrition, early childhood development, adolescent participation, and exposure to violence.



Bhutan has achieved near-universal access to primary and basic education. The SEI 2024 reports primary net enrolment at 94.27 percent and basic education enrolment (PP–X) at 92.71 percent, demonstrating strong levels of participation. The transition from primary to basic education is relatively smooth, reflecting effective policy reforms such as free education, improved school infrastructure and targeted support for disadvantaged students. However, participation in secondary education remains comparatively lower.

The secondary net enrolment rate (VII–XII) stands at 68.90 percent, indicating that almost one-third of secondary-age children are not enrolled in school. This decline may be attributed to distance, limited boarding facilities, household economic pressures and early involvement in domestic or agricultural labour. Strengthening secondary school accessibility, especially in rural areas, and expanding flexible learning pathways remain important areas for policy attention.

Recent administrative records and verified media reports suggest a concerning upward trend in the number of children in conflict with the law (CICL) in Bhutan over the past three years. In 2023, a total of 60 CICL cases were recorded nationwide. This figure rose to 67 cases in 2024, reflecting a gradual increase in juvenile offending and children's exposure to risky behaviors. However, the situation escalated sharply in 2025, with 106 cases reported in just the first six months of the year. This mid-year figure already surpasses the total annual caseloads of the previous two years, indicating a significant and rapid rise in children's involvement with the justice system. Such a spike may be associated with evolving social dynamics, increased urban exposure, greater access to digital platforms, and family-level vulnerabilities—although more systematic data is required to determine underlying causes.

Complementing these trends, findings from the National Health Survey (NHS) 2023 provide important indirect indicators of children at risk of falling into difficult circumstances (CIDC). The survey reveals that violent discipline is widespread, with 82 percent of children aged 1–14 years exposed to at least one form of violent disciplinary method at home. Psychological aggression, such as shouting, name-calling, or threatening behaviour, affects 73.5 percent of children, while 60.1 percent experience physical punishment, ranging from mild slapping to harsher forms of corporal punishment. These high levels of exposure to violence, harmful interpersonal dynamics, and punitive caregiving practices significantly heighten children's vulnerability to emotional distress, behavioural challenges, and long-term psychosocial harm.

Taken together, the rising number of CICL cases and the high prevalence of violent discipline indicate that a substantial proportion of children may be living in unstable, unsafe or unsupportive home environments—conditions that can push them into difficult circumstances or even into conflict with the law. This underscores the critical need for early identification, family counselling, strengthened school-based support, and community-level prevention programmes. Strengthening linkages between child-protection services, schools, health facilities, local government authorities, and law-enforcement agencies will be essential for addressing these risks holistically and ensuring a timely and child-sensitive response to emerging vulnerabilities.

The National Health Survey (NHS) 2023 reveals that 82 percent of children aged 1–14 years were subjected to at least one form of violent discipline in the past month. Violent discipline includes psychological aggression, physical punishment, and, in more serious cases, severe physical punishment. Psychological aggression such as shouting, scolding, or using insulting language—was experienced by 73.5 percent of children, making it the most widespread form of violence. Furthermore, 60.1 percent were subjected to physical punishment, which can range from slapping or hitting objects to forceful physical restraint. Alarmingly, 18.3 percent of children experienced severe physical punishment, including being hit on the face, head, or ears, or being beaten repeatedly, indicating that a significant share of children face high levels of harm within their own households.

PART I: OVERVIEW

National Commission for Women and Children

The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) was established in 2004 as the national machinery to promote and protect the rights of women and children in the country. In 2008, given the rising number of issues and the Commission's increasing responsibilities, the Commission was upgraded to a fully autonomous agency under the Royal Government of Bhutan reinforcing its roles as a central coordinating body for all matters related to women and children in the country.

Following the Royal Civil Service reformation initiatives in 2022, the NCWC was restructured and placed under the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD). The NCWC is supported by the Women and Children Division within the Department of Education Programmes, and serves as the Secretariat. Despite the structural reformation, the core mandate and responsibilities of NCWC remain intact. It continues to act as the Competent Authority for key legislations such as the Child Care and Protection Act 2011, Child Adoption Act 2012, and Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013, and leads national efforts to advance gender equality and safeguard the rights and wellbeing of women and children in Bhutan. Its functions encompass formulating and reviewing laws, policies, and institutional frameworks in line with national priorities and international treaties; instituting monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess implementation and impact; coordinating multi-sectoral initiatives and data management to inform evidence-based interventions; and prioritizing gender and child-responsive programmes that address empowerment, protection, and inclusion. The NCWC also ensures timely reporting to the Government and international treaty bodies, reinforcing Bhutan's commitment to upholding human rights and fostering a safe, equitable society.

Vision

A happy nation where children, women & men live in harmony with equality and respect in all spheres of life.

Mission

- To protect and promote the rights of women through gender-responsive interventions.
- To preserve and promote the rights of children through child-responsive interventions.

Mandates and Functions

Following are the mandates and functions of the NCWC:

1. **Legal and Policy Framework**

- The NCWC shall be the primary agency responsible in formulating and reviewing legislation, bylaws, policies, institutional frameworks, and procedures related to gender, child protection, and wellbeing. The Commission shall ensure that these measures conform to national, regional, and international standards and treaties aimed at advancing gender equality and safeguarding the rights of women and children.
- In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the NCWC shall conduct regular assessments and research to identify emerging issues and challenges by women and children and insights and recommendations will be utilised to inform the formulation of effective legal and policy framework.

2. **Regulatory and Monitoring**

- The NCWC shall institute effective monitoring mechanisms to assess implementation legislations, policies and institutional frameworks related to women and children including violation of their rights.
- The NCWC shall undertake systematic and periodic evaluations to assess the impact of current plans, programs, and policies from the gender equality and child centred perspectives.

3. **Coordination and Data Management**

- The NCWC shall function as the central coordinating body for initiatives concerning the rights and wellbeing of women and children, promoting collaboration among government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other relevant stakeholders. The Commission will also facilitate the exchange of programs addressing issues related to women and children.
- The NCWC shall collaborate with relevant government agencies, non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders to collect and analyze data related to the status of women and children in the country.

4. **Focus on the rights of women and children through gender and child responsive interventions**

- The NCWC shall prioritize activities that promote the empowerment, education, and wellbeing of women and children, encompassing considerations for their social, cultural, economic and political dimensions. Thorough consideration will be placed on addressing gender-based violence, violence against children, discrimination, and exploitation with the aim of fostering a safe and inclusive society.

5. **Reporting**

- The NCWC shall timely prepare and submit reports to the Government, regional, and international treaty bodies on the status related to gender and children.

Key legislations and regulations

1. Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan, 2011
2. Child Adoption Act of Bhutan, 2012
3. Domestic Violence Prevention Act of Bhutan, 2013
4. Domestic Violence Prevention Rules and Regulations 2015
5. Child Care and Protection Rules and Regulations 2015
6. Gender Equality Policy, 2020

Governance Body

The Commission members appointed by the Cabinet govern the NCWC. The Lhengye Zhungtshog approved the reconstitution of the NCWC on September 27, 2024, via Cabinet Order No. C-3/152/2023/1803. Ms. Kesang Deki, Cabinet Secretary, is the Chairperson of the Commission, and Tshewang Chophel Dorji, Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (Social Cluster), is the Vice Chairperson.

Commission Members

Kesang Deki
Secretary Cabinet
Secretariat Chair,
NCWC

Tshewang Chophel Dorji,
Secretary, MoESD Vice
Chair, NCWC

Hon. Dorji Wangmo
Member of Parliament
National Assembly of Bhutan

Pema Choden, Secretary,
Ministry of Foreign
Affairs and External Trade

Col. Passang Dorji
Deputy Chief of Police
Royal Bhutan Police

Pelden Wangmo,
Judge Family and Child
Bench
Royal Court of Justice

Tshering Dolkar
Executive Director
RENEW

Pelden Wangmo
Board Member
The PEMA Secretariat

Sangye Choden
Director, DEP/
Member Secretary to
NCWC

Gender Expert Group

Gender Expert Group (GEG) was formed in 2017 as a functional and effective national-level human resource pool on gender issues. GEG is responsible for bridging the gap between the high turnover rates of GFPs and the systematic limitations in gender-related capacities. GEG comprises committed, interested, and mid/senior-level government and private sector officials. The GEG, as a group or as individuals, with gender equality as the primary objective provides technical backstopping to the NCWC and supports in mainstreaming laws and policies through review or formulating, mainstreaming plans during formulation or reviews and ensuring laws, policies, and plans are implemented and monitored.

Gender and Child Focal Points

The NCWC works through a network of Gender and Child Focal Points (GCFPs). GCFPs are responsible for mainstreaming gender and children perspectives in their agencies/organisations, including Local Government (LG), at organisational, policy, and operational levels. Since its establishment in 2005, the GCFP network has contributed to NCWC's efforts to mainstream gender, enhance awareness of gender issues, and initiate activities that can mitigate gender inequalities. They are crucial in promoting gender equality and mainstreaming gender to ensure gender-responsive plans and policies. Currently, the GCFP network extends to central agencies, dzongkhags, civil society organisations, and private sectors.

Dzongkhag/Thromde Women and Children Committee (D/TWCC)

The Cabinet approved the formation of Dzongkhag/Thromde Women and Children Committee (D/TWCC) during the 162nd meeting held on June 19, 2024 as per Rule 25 of the CCPA 2011. D/TWCC functions as a facilitating body to implement provisions of the Acts effectively. D/TWCC was formed in 20 Dzongkhags and four Thromdes.

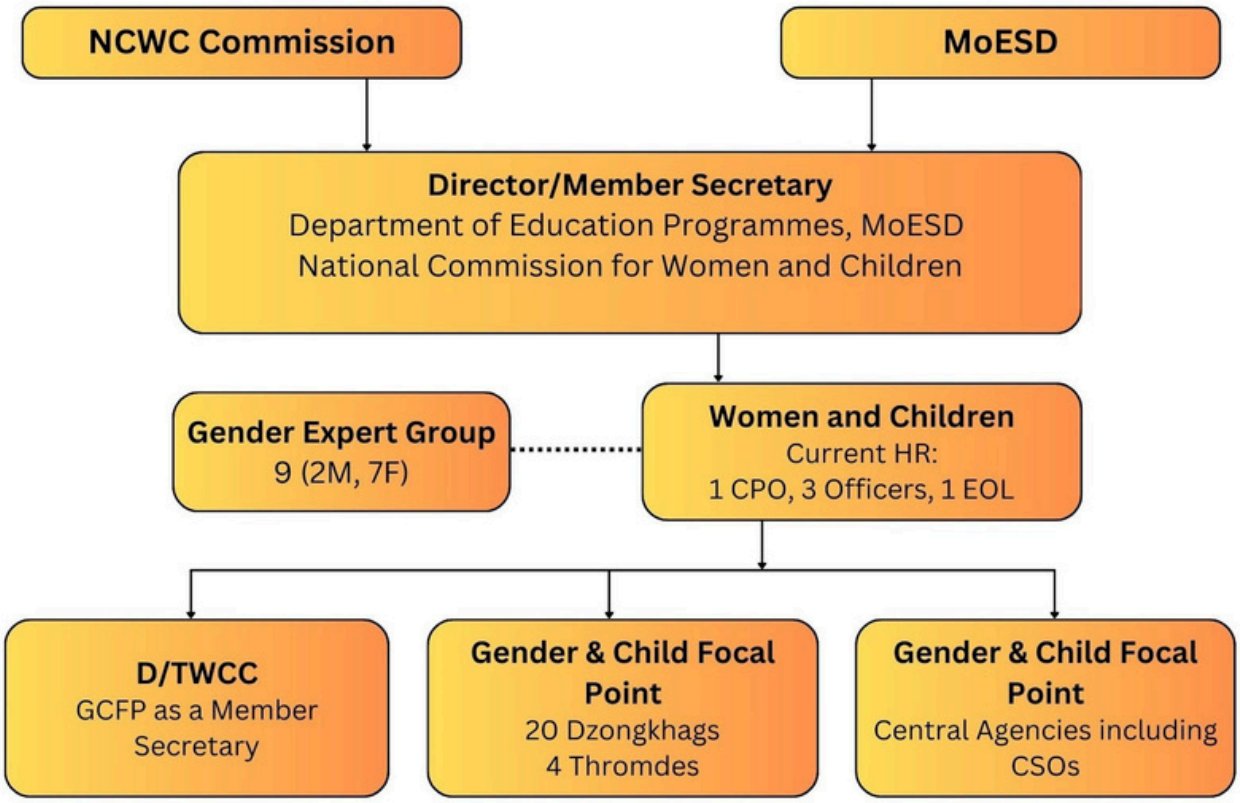
Members of the Committee

1. Dzongdag/Thromde Executive Secretary (Chairperson)
2. SP/OC, Royal Bhutan Police (Member)
3. Concerned Gup/Throme Thuemi (Member)
4. Dzongkhag/ Thromde Public Health Officer (Member)
5. CMO, Dzongkhag Hospital (Member)
6. Chief Dzongkhag Education Officer, Chief Thromde Education Officer, MoESD (Member)
7. One relevant representative from CSO/private at the discretion of the chairperson (Member)
8. Gender and child focal point (Member secretary to the committee)

National Commission for Women and Children Secretariat

The Women and Children Division (WCD) serves as the Secretariat to the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC). It is mandated to mainstream gender equality and child protection concerns into national and sectoral plans, policies, and programmes. The Secretariat coordinates and monitors initiatives that promote women's empowerment and safeguard the wellbeing and safety of children. In addition, the WCD is responsible for preparing and submitting periodic reports to international treaty bodies to which the Royal Government of Bhutan is a signatory, including CEDAW, CRC, and other conventions relating to women and children. It also oversees the implementation of policies and plans through a gender and child protection lens, ensuring that these perspectives are integrated across all relevant sectors. The Division works in close collaboration with stakeholders to promote gender mainstreaming and advance child wellbeing and safety within their respective plans, policies, and programmes.

Functioning Modality



PART II: Annual Performance Statement of the Commission (Financial Year July 2023 - June 2024)

Overview

In line with the commission's mandates to promote the rights of women and children in the country, the Secretariat has continuously strived to ensure timely programmatic interventions, coordination, and regulations. Hence, some of the significant accomplishments of Secretariat are highlighted as follows:

Outcome I: Enhanced legislative, policy, and institutional frameworks effectively implement acts, rules, and regulations, ensuring better governance and compliance.

Purpose

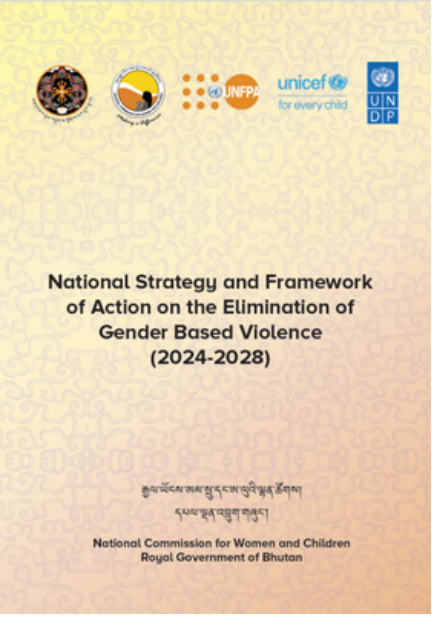
To establish and strengthen legal, policies and institutions to promote and protect rights of women and children in the country.

Key Activities

1. National Strategy and Framework of Action on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence
2. Gender Equality in Public Administration and National Action Plan for Gender Equality in Public Administration
3. Review of the Go-to-person SOP
4. Review of SOP on Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence
5. Development of CRC Action Plans

Summary and Key Achievements

1. **National Strategy and Framework of Action on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence**



Launched on the International Women's Day 2025, Bhutan's National Strategy and Framework of Action on the Elimination of Gender- Based Violence (2024- 2028) marks decisive national commitment to ending all forms of gender-based violence. Spearheaded by the National Commission for Women and Children in collaboration with the UN partners, the strategy promotes holistic approach. It aims to strengthen survivors support services, challenge harmful social norms, reinforce legal protection and build a robust evidence base to inform action and work collaboratively to transform societal attitudes, ensure accountability, and advance gender equality. It positions Bhutan to make measurable progress toward violence free and inclusive society.

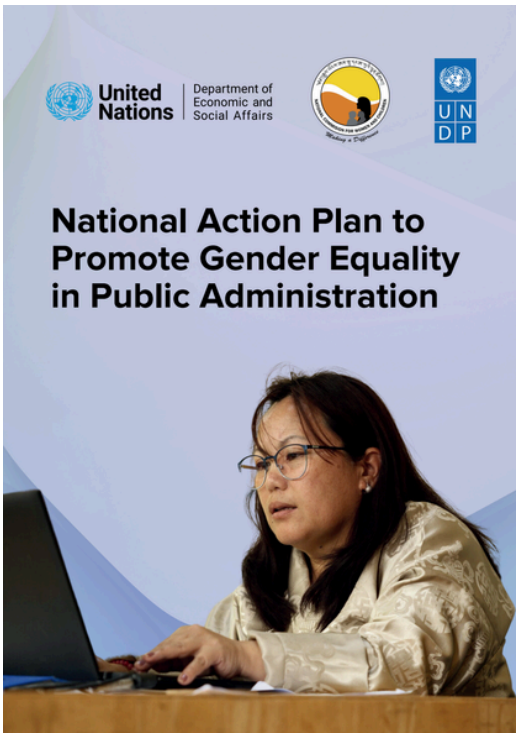
The National Strategy provides a comprehensive roadmap for coordinated and sustained actions to combat GBV to ensure a violence-free Bhutan where Bhutanese women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence. It is organized around four interconnected pillars of Response, Prevention, Enabling Environment, and Data and Evidence.

2. **Gender Equality in Public Administration Report**

a. National Action Plan to Promote Gender Equality in Public Administration

Women's leadership in public institutions is essential to achieving inclusive, accountable, and effective governance. Yet, as highlighted by the 2022–2023 national review on gender equality in public administration, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles across Bhutan's civil service—holding only 20.4% of such positions as of 2023.

To address this gap, the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), in partnership with UNDP and UN DESA, led the development of the National Action Plan to Promote Gender Equality in Public Administration (NAP GEPA). Developed within the framework of the project "Building Capacities for Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women within Public Institutions," and with financial support from the Government of Italy, the action plan sets out to accelerate gender equality and enhance women's representation in leadership roles at both national and subnational levels.



The NAP GEPA is aligned with Bhutan's National Gender Equality Policy 2020, the 13th Five-Year Plan (2024–2029), and global commitments such as CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It identifies a clear goal: to increase women's representation in the civil service to 45% and in leadership roles to 30% by 2029, up from the current baselines of 40% and 23% respectively.

Structured around three strategic pillars—1. policy and institutional frameworks, 2. human resource policies and practices, and 3. data, evidence and monitoring—the action plan outlines targeted interventions to eliminate systemic barriers and promote women's equal participation in decision-making.

The NCWC will lead implementation efforts, working closely with the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC), Ministry of Finance, line ministries, local governments, and gender focal points (GFPs). Development partners will continue to provide technical and financial support to ensure timely and effective execution.

The NAP GEPA represents a bold step toward building a gender-inclusive civil service that reflects the values of equality, fairness, and opportunity for all. It is not only a tool to address existing gender disparities but also a critical instrument for enhancing the overall performance, integrity, and responsiveness of public administration in Bhutan.

3.Strengthening Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response in the Civil Service

As part of our ongoing commitment to institutionalize gender-responsive governance and promote safe, respectful work environments, the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), in collaboration with the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC), has taken significant steps to enhance mechanisms for preventing and responding to sexual harassment within the civil service.

Building on the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) established in 2018, the NCWC and RCSC undertook a comprehensive revision of the SOP on preventing and responding to sexual harassment in the civil service to strengthen policies and procedures that promote a safe and inclusive workplace. This revision process was conducted through a two-day stakeholder consultation held in Punakha, engaging key government agencies, legal experts, law enforcement, civil society, and international partners including UNDP and UNFPA.

The updated SOP offers a clear, survivor-centered framework for reporting, investigating, and resolving sexual harassment cases, ensuring confidentiality and protection for victims, while aligning workplace practices with national legislation and international standards. It reinforces the RCSC's strategic goals of building trust, mutual respect, and a productive work environment.

Following the revision, a sensitization workshop was conducted on May 29, 2025, in Thimphu for Go-To Persons and their alternates from Thimphu and surrounding dzongkhags. Facilitated by RCSC and experts from UNDP and UNFPA, the workshop equipped participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively implement the SOP and promote zero tolerance for sexual harassment in their respective workplaces

This initiative addresses recommendations from the 2023 Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA) assessment conducted by the NCWC, supported by UNDP and UN-DESA. By establishing a network of trained 'Go-To Persons' as key contacts for sexual harassment cases, the initiative aims to create a supportive and safe reporting environment, empower employees, and promote a culture of dignity and respect across the civil service.

4.Review of SOP on Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence

As a part of the ongoing efforts to strengthen gender-based violence prevention and response, the 2020 Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) has been revised to address key implementation gaps and operational challenges.

The updated SOP reflects current institutional roles and coordination structures, and includes provisions of emerging forms of GBV, including technology-facilitated violence. The GBV SOP will be disseminated among relevant stakeholders for implementation.

5. Development of CRC Implementation Action Plans

The NCWC Secretariat with support from UNICEF Country Office organized a three-day action plan development workshop in Phuentsholing. The engaged stakeholders from government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners in developing actionable steps in fulfilling the UNCRC committee's concluding observations.

The official representatives from diverse agencies engaged in group activity and plenary discussions on the concluding observations. The plenary discussion was held on the thematic areas disaggregated among the agencies present and deliberated on the actionable inputs by the respective agencies. The Commission Representative Dy.Chief of Police Colonel Passang Dorji reiterated the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing and to continue the engagement among various stakeholders.

27-29 December 2024 (Phuentsholing)

A total of 35 (15F) officials representing government agencies, civil society organizations, relevant justice sectors, and development partners participated in the three-day action plan development workshop for the CRC COs. Additionally, a bilateral meeting brought together 10 (7F) officials from NCWCS and The PEMA Secretariat to review the action recommendations.

Furthermore, a bilateral discussion with the PEMA Secretariat was also held to include action recommendations that align their response and prevention mechanisms.

Outcome II: Strengthened capacity, advocacy, and sensitization efforts lead to increased awareness, skills, and engagement for sustainable development and social change

Purpose

To improve the understanding, knowledge and effectiveness of individuals and organisations involved in promoting gender equality and child protection.

Key Activities

1. Early Identification and Safe Referral Training in Haa, Pemagatshel and Punakha.
2. Empowering Local Governance for Inclusive Planning and Budgeting: Addressing Issues Affecting Women and Children.
3. RESPECT Training
4. Joint Advocacy and Awareness Programme

Summary and Key Achievements

1. **Early Identification and Safe Referral (EISR) Training in Haa, Pemagatshel and Punakha**

The EISR training has been timely for the health workers and teachers of Haa, Pemagatshel and Punakha Dzongkhags to understand the issues and how to respond appropriately, the training not only benefited in their work that they do but also in their day-to-day life. This training has also provided significant responsibility in addressing community issues as a front-line responder not only to identify and respond to children in conflict with law and in difficult circumstances but also to support women in difficult circumstances. The training sessions were held consecutively in Haa from July 30 to 31, in Pemagatshel from August 6 to 8, and in Punakha on October 14 and 15.

A total of 107 health workers and teachers, including 47 females participated, with 14 males and 18 females in Haa, 27 males and 12 females in Pemagatshel, and 19 males and 17 females in Punakha were equipped with early identification and safe referral skills and basic knowledge on violence, mechanisms for reporting and referring survivors and legal processes. The participants also include three Village Health Workers from Pemagatshel and one from Haa, hailing from remote areas in these two Dzongkhags.

2. **Empowering Local Governance for Inclusive Planning and Budgeting: Addressing Issues Affecting Women and Children.**

To reinforce the role of local government in community protection, the Secretariat conducted a three-day Capacity Building Program for 32 LG officials (12 women, 20 men). Aligned with the Local Government Act 2009 and the Child Care and Protection Act 2011, the training focused on strengthening prevention and response to gender-based violence, while promoting gender-responsive and child sensitive planning. Facilitators from key agencies addressed implementation challenges and equipped participants with skills to integrate social protection and violence prevention into local plans and programs.

3. RESPECT Training

The RESPECT Framework training sessions were successfully conducted in two batches from November 19th to 21st and 27th to 29th, 2024, in Bumthang. Funded by the World Health Organization (WHO), the sessions aimed to build the capacity of participants to address and prevent violence against women (VAW) in and around hydropower project areas. This initiative emphasized fostering safe and inclusive communities while aligning with broader efforts to promote gender equality and community well-being.

Batch III (19th - 21st November 2024)

A total of 61 participants attended the training sessions across two batches. The third batch comprised 29 participants (17 male, 12 female), while the fourth batch included 33 participants (22 male, 11 female). Participants included representatives from the study sample site projects and entities such as the Druk Green Power Corporation (DGPC), local governments, hydropower project plant, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

The training aimed to integrate evidence-based strategies outlined in the RESPECT Framework to prevent VAW, aligning interventions with findings from the Gender Assessment in Hydropower, Road, and Bridge Construction Sites Report. Through participatory discussions, participants explored strategies to enhance enabling environments for VAW prevention, applying the RESPECT Framework's implementation guidance.

Batch IV (27th - 29th November, 2024)

Recognizing the urgency of addressing gender-based violence in hydropower settings and surrounding communities, the training highlighted the importance of improving workplace safety and mitigating risks faced by female workers. Participants were guided on adopting comprehensive safety measures at construction sites and within nearby communities, fostering a culture of respect and dignity through evidence-based program planning and safety protocol development.

The sessions concluded with group discussions and the formulation of actionable work plans focused on recommendations for creating violence-free environments in hydropower project areas and beyond.

4. Joint Advocacy and Awareness Programme

The 4-Day Joint Advocacy and Awareness Program, organized by the Royal Bhutan Police in collaboration with the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), The PEMA and RENEW successfully brought together more than 1,543 participants from Dzongkhag Administration, Sarpang and Gelephu Thromde. The program included individuals from various sectors, including government agencies, the private sector, Desuups, local leaders, Thromde officials, and out-of-school youth.

The program focused on several critical topics relevant to the communities, such as gender-based violence, drug abuse, crime, mental health, suicide, and child protection, with particular emphasis on online safety and protection. These topics were carefully selected to address key challenges impacting individuals and families, with a focus on raising awareness and fostering a sense of collective responsibility.

Throughout the program, participants actively engaged in group discussions, sharing personal experiences and offering valuable insights into how these issues could be addressed within their communities. The collaborative nature of the sessions allowed participants to propose practical recommendations and strategies to mitigate the impact of these social challenges, such as enhanced awareness campaigns, prevention strategies, strengthened support services, and multi-sectoral collaboration, with a focus on youth empowerment, education, and timely interventions.

Through open dialogue and active participation, the program is laying the groundwork for stronger, more inclusive communities. By encouraging collective action and a shared vision, the program aims to create an environment where everyone feels responsible for building a safer and healthier society. The discussions highlighted the importance of community-based solutions and the power of unity in addressing social issues.

The success of this Joint Advocacy Program underscores the potential for cross-sector collaboration in tackling such challenges. It sets a positive example of how open communication and collective responsibility can drive meaningful change and contribute to a better future for all.

Outcome III: Enhanced network, coordination, and collaboration among key stakeholders to drive effective gender mainstreaming and improve child protection and well-being initiatives

Purpose

To enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of all projects, plans and programmes by fostering sense of ownership and commitment among key stakeholders .

Key Activities

1. First Ministerial Conference to End Violence Against Children and Online Information Sharing Meeting on VAC
2. Gender Expert Group (GEG) Coordination Meeting
3. International Women's Day March 8, 2025

Summary and Key Achievements

1. **The First Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children**

The Royal Government of Bhutan participated in the First Ministerial Conference to End Violence Against Children (EVAC) held in Bogotá, Colombia from 7–9 November 2024, co-hosted by the Governments of Colombia and Sweden in partnership with UNICEF, WHO, and the Special Representative of Secretary General on Violence Against Children. Led by Lyonpo Yeezang Dee Thapa, Minister for Education and Skills Development, Bhutan reaffirmed its commitment to the global movement by presenting national pledges focused on:

- Strengthening child-focused mental health and social support services
- Promoting parenting and caregiver support and safe school environments
- Enhancing reintegration and aftercare services
- Investing in child protection legal and policy reforms

The conference convened 1,400 delegates from 130 countries, with 372 pledges submitted, including 120 concrete government commitments to end violence against children.

Following this, Bhutan also participated in the Violence Against Children Online Information Sharing Meeting (VAC ISM) on 23 June 2025, organized by SAARC and UNICEF ROSA. The meeting reviewed progress on the Bogota Call for Action. Bhutan's updates were presented by the Member Secretary to NCWC, alongside representatives from the Ministry of Health, PEMA Secretariat, and the NCWC Secretariat.

2. **Gender Expert Group (GEG) Coordination Meeting**

The first Gender Expert Group (GEG) meeting was held on 7 February 2025 in Thimphu. Five of the eight GEG members along with officials from EU and NCWCS attended the coordination meeting . The GEG engaged in discussions such as the role of GEG in mainstreaming gender and child protection concerns in planning, programming and monitoring. While also forecasting prospective training to enhance knowledge and skills.

The GEG members also discussed the probable expansion of the Gender Expert Group for more outreach with different expertise. The GEG proposed to convene an annual GEG meeting or Annual GCFP Conference to enhance coordination.

3. **International Women's Day March 8, 2025**

The Secretariat, in partnership with RENEW observed the International Women's Day on 8 March in Thimphu. The event honored 25 years of Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck's transformative leadership and advocacy as UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, with a special award presented by the UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Director.

Under the global theme **"For ALL Women and Girls: Rights Equality. Empowerment",** the afternoon session featured a high-level Panel discussion," Transforming Gender Equality Commitments into Action." bringing together leaders from government, Civil Society Organization, and UN agencies. The Panelists addressed key issues including women's leadership, unpaid carework, gender, AI, and climate change.

The discussion emphasized the importance of gender-responsive planning, budgeting and decision making, and highlighted systematic barriers, cultural norms, and capacity gaps. The panel discussion highlighted critical areas to advance gender equality with key recommendations, including strengthening gender mainstreaming across sectors, enhancing tracking of gender related expenditures, investing in women's leadership, and engaging men and boys to shift their mindset.

Outcome IV: Improved reporting, monitoring, and data-driven knowledge creation, enhance informed decision-making and interventions for the well-being of women and children

Purpose

To systematically assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of programmes and initiatives that address the needs and challenges faced by women and children.

Key Activities

1. Public Advisory Notification on Protecting Women and Children: Adhering to Shelter Services Standards
2. Provisional Shelter Accreditation of The PEMA Home

Summary and Key Achievements

1. **Public Advisory Notification on Protecting Women and Children: Adhering to Shelter Services Standards**

The NCWC to ensure that every woman and children are protected in the homes established by organizations, agencies and individuals circulated an advisory notification for the well-being of women, children and vulnerable groups in the society. The advisory aims to ensure all shelters for women, children, and vulnerable groups operate in compliance with relevant laws and regulations. The NCWC emphasized the importance of compliance with CCPA 2011, DVPA 2013 and their respective regulations, Guidelines for Accreditation and Management of Shelter Homes for Women and Children in Difficult Circumstances. In doing so with legal righteousness and as a moral responsibility, the NCWC encourages all the stakeholders, or individuals to seek guidance for registration, compliance, and best practices for operating safe and effective shelter services in the country.

2. Provisional Shelter Accreditation of The PEMA Home

The NCWC as the monitoring and regulatory body issued a Provisional Shelter Accreditation Certificate to The PEMA Home. The NCWC as per its "Guidelines for Accreditation and Management of Shelter Homes for Women and Children in Difficult Circumstances" recognises the PEMA Home as an interim facility dedicated to support the wellbeing services for children in difficult circumstances for a year-long validity period with subject to formal accreditation by the committee in accordance with the guideline.

The accreditation of the Shelter Homes managed by government entities, Law enforcement agencies and CSOs are to facilitate effective monitoring and coordination with utmost service delivery for those seeking shelter support.

Challenges

- Lack of coordination among key stakeholders: The commission is mandated to work on cross-cutting themes of gender and child, which requires the necessary attention of critical stakeholders, including government, non-government, and private sectors. However, the lack of coordination poses a risk of duplication of efforts and an inability to cover those deeply in need.
- Inadequate capacity and awareness among stakeholders: The NCWC as the nodal agency for gender mainstreaming and child protection still needs to work on building the capacity of stakeholders for gender mainstreaming. Despite the efforts made by the government and stakeholders, the issues concerning gender equality and child well-being and safety evolve with time and with changes in socio-cultural aspects. Hence, any critical stakeholders involved in promoting the rights of women and children require time-to-time knowledge upgradation and skilling to deal with emerging issues.
- Lack of financial and human resources: The NCWC is mandated to address men, women, other gender, and children's well-being. The Commission still faces financial and human resource challenges in delivering the outputs.

Conclusion

The report highlights the overview and core mandates of the NCWC as gender machinery responsible for the integration of Gender and child concerns into policies, plans, legislations, and programs in aspiration to achieve gender equality and children's well-being in the country.

The Commission focused on the incorporation of gender and child concerns into the 13th Five-Year Plan, reviewing policy instruments such as NGEP, education policy, research and assessments on emerging issues on women and children, and capacity-building programs of key stakeholders and reporting to the national and international bodies on gender equality and child wellbeing. Some of the key features include reporting of the 10th CEDAW periodic report, South Asian Regional Child Conference, capacity building programs to gender and child focal points, implementation of the Parenting Without Violence project and Dekyid Thuendrel projects, capacity building programs for key stakeholders, including Royal Bhutan Police and RENEW.

However, the Commission is constrained by financial and human resource limitations in attaining our vision. The high turnover rate of the Gender and Child focal points in agencies remains a challenge. In addition, addressing gender and child issues requires multi stakeholder coordination and cooperation, including government, non-government, and private sectors. However, the lack of coordination may result in duplication of efforts and an inability to cover those deeply in need. Furthermore, the lack of awareness of gender and child-related issues remains a considerable challenge. All critical stakeholders involved in promoting the rights of women and children require upgrading and relearning to deal with emerging gender and child issues.

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