

**United Nations Country Team
Bhutan**

**Joint Report presented to the pre-
session meeting of the United
Nations Committee on the
Elimination of Discrimination against
Women**

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List of acronyms

<i>ADR</i>	Alternative Dispute Resolution
<i>ANC</i>	Ante-natal care
<i>ART</i>	Anti Retroviral Therapy
<i>BCSR</i>	Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulations
<i>BHU</i>	Basic Health Unit
<i>BLSS</i>	Bhutan Living Standard Survey
<i>CEDAW</i>	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women
<i>CPS</i>	Community Primary School
<i>CRC</i>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<i>CSOs</i>	Civil Society Organisations
<i>DPT</i>	Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (Party of Blissful Harmony)
<i>DSP</i>	Decentralisation Support Programme
<i>ECB</i>	Election Commission of Bhutan
<i>EmOC</i>	Emergency Obstetric Care
<i>HHs</i>	Households
<i>HIV</i>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<i>IFAD</i>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<i>ILO</i>	International Labour Organisation
<i>MDG</i>	Millennium Development Goal
<i>MMR</i>	Maternal Mortality Ratio
<i>MoE</i>	Ministry of Education
<i>MoH</i>	Ministry of Health
<i>MPs</i>	Members of parliament
<i>MSMEs</i>	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
<i>NA</i>	National Assembly
<i>NC</i>	National Council
<i>NCWC</i>	National Commission for Women and Children
<i>NER</i>	Net Enrolment Ratio
<i>NFE</i>	Non-Formal Education
<i>NGO</i>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<i>NPAG</i>	National Plan of Action for Gender
<i>NSP</i>	National Strategic Plan

<i>ORC</i>	Outreach clinic
<i>PAR</i>	Poverty Analysis Report
<i>PDP</i>	People's Democratic Party
<i>PLWHA</i>	People living with HIV and AIDS
<i>RGoB</i>	Royal Government of Bhutan
<i>RBP</i>	Royal Bhutan Police
<i>SAARC</i>	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
<i>SNV</i>	Netherlands Development Organisation
<i>STI</i>	Sexually Transmitted Infection
<i>UN</i>	United Nations
<i>UNAIDS</i>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<i>UNCDF</i>	United Nations Capital Development Fund
<i>UNCT</i>	UN Country Team
<i>UNDAF</i>	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
<i>UNDP</i>	United Nations Development Programme
<i>UNESCAP</i>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
<i>UNESCO</i>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<i>UNFPA</i>	United Nations Population Fund
<i>UNICEF</i>	United Nations Children's Fund
<i>UNIFEM</i>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<i>UNV</i>	United Nations Volunteers
<i>VAW</i>	Violence against women
<i>WFP</i>	World Food Programme
<i>WHO</i>	World Health Organisation

Introduction

1. The present report is mainly based on the Concluding Comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women¹ (2004). In order to avoid duplication of efforts, it refers to the State Party's Seventh Periodic Report (2007) for information and data already provided by the government. Rather than strictly following the reporting guidelines for UN Country Offices reports, this report is therefore intended to highlight major progress made in critical areas as well as main challenges and issues considered a priority by the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Bhutan, including non-resident UN agencies such as UNIFEM². It also provides updated information in certain areas based on recent developments and on documents that became available recently. This report also takes into account the State Party's combined Initial to Sixth Periodic Reports (2003) and the UNICEF report presented to the pre-sessional working group of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2007).
2. UNDP supported the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB), through the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), in preparing the Seventh Periodic Report in conformity with the CEDAW guidelines. The preparation of the 7th periodic report was based on a review of studies, plans, and other relevant documents and on information obtained through a series of consultative meetings and workshops with government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Discrimination

3. ***Constitutional provisions:*** The Draft Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan³ guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms in its Article 7, including the right to life, the right to liberty and security of person, the right to equal and effective protection of the law, the right to be free from discrimination, and the right not to be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; these rights being

¹ Hereafter referred to as the CEDAW Committee.

² Currently, UNIFEM provides support to the National Commission for Women and Children through the UN Trust Fund to end violence against women. Moreover, UNIFEM always includes Bhutan for all regional meetings and workshops convened by the agency: Beijing follow-up (Sixth South Asia Ministerial meeting Commemorating Beijing -January 2008); SAARC Gender Database focal point meetings (2007-2008); CEDAW (training of trainers 2006); etc.

³ *The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan. Draft of Tsa Thrim Chhenmo as on 1st August 2007.* Hereafter referred to as the Draft Constitution.

guaranteed to all persons -women and men. In its Article 9 on Principles of State Policy, the Draft Constitution also refers to the right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work, and to free access to basic public health services in both modern and traditional medicines.

4. The Draft Constitution states that all persons are equal before the law and guarantees to Bhutanese citizens the right to equal access and opportunity to join the Public Service, the right to equal pay for work of equal value, and to all children equal access to higher education on the basis of merit.
5. The Draft Constitution contains anti-discrimination provisions to protect women. Article 7, Section 15, states that *“All persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal and effective protection of the law and shall not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, sex, language, religion, politics or other status”*.⁴ Article 9, Section 17, states that *“The State shall endeavour to take appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination and exploitation against women including trafficking, prostitution, abuse, violence, harassment and intimidation at work in both public and private spheres”*.
6. However, many fundamental rights and freedoms included in the Draft Constitution (e.g. the right to freedom of speech and religion, the right to vote, the right to be elected, the right to information, the right to freedom of association, etc.) are limited to Bhutanese citizens only. Moreover, the Draft Constitution does not refer explicitly to the principle of equality between women and men, nor does it include a guarantee of substantive equality (equality in results) between women and men. Finally, the anti-discrimination clauses in the Draft Constitution mentioned above (para 5) do not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of other grounds such as marital status⁵, sexual orientation, HIV status⁶, and disability that are recognised important to ensure the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all areas of women’s lives.

⁴ Note that Section 3 of the Civil and Criminal Procedure Code of Bhutan, 2001 states that *“All persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal and effective protection of the law without discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”*.

⁵ Note that the definition of discrimination in the Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan, 2007, refers explicitly to direct and indirect discrimination, as well as to marital status as a basis for discrimination.

⁶ Note that one of the priority areas of the National Strategic Plan (NSP) for the Prevention and Control of STIs and HIV and AIDS concerns the creation of an enabling environment for successful implementation of the national response to HIV and AIDS and STIs, which includes ensuring a supportive legal and policy environment. Moreover, the NSP recognises the important role of the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, the Royal Civil Service Commission and the private sector in ensuring non-discrimination against employees on the basis of real or perceived HIV status.

7. The Draft Constitution has been subject to extensive debate by the first democratically elected Parliament during its first session that was held recently. Among the proposed changes, very few have finally been endorsed by the Parliament. The new version of the Draft Constitution is yet to be made public. It is interesting to note that women members of parliament (MPs) insisted on replacing the masculine pronouns in the Draft Constitution and advocated the use of gender sensitive language in the Supreme Law of the State. Some of the arguments raised in favour of the use of gender sensitive language were that it would lift the morale of every girl and make a big difference by boosting girls' psychological strength. After a heated discussion on this issue, the Parliament resolved to make the alterations by using both masculine and feminine pronouns⁷ in the Constitution as female MPs proposed.⁸ The Constitution will be adopted very soon this year.
8. ***Sanctions for breach of anti-discrimination provisions:*** The Section on prohibition against discrimination of employees and job seekers in the Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan, 2007, provides a fine of minimum one year to a maximum of three years of the Daily Minimum National Wage Rate (Nu. 36,500 to Nu. 109,500) for breaches of the anti-discrimination clauses.
9. ***Temporary special measures:*** In its Concluding Comments, the CEDAW Committee urged the State Party to apply temporary special measures according to Article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and General Recommendations 23 and 25, in politics, education, and the employment and professional fields. So far, Bhutan has not adopted and implemented temporary special measures in the form of quota systems, preferential treatment, targeted recruitment, hiring and promotion, in order to accelerate the achievement of women's de facto equality with men in these areas. In its 7th periodic report, the RGoB mentions that Bhutan will consider the adoption of such measures where needed. The government still has tendency to take a gender-neutral stance and to consider qualification and merit as the leading factors in the selection, appointment, election to public and political office, as well as in the areas of education and employment in the public and private sectors. While some progress is visible with a gradual increase of women's participation in these areas, the pace has been slow. The government recognises that gender gaps continue to exist in these areas; yet, there is still

⁷ i.e. he/she; his/her; himself/herself.

⁸ Sonam Pelvar, "One up for women!", *Bhutan Times*, Thimphu, June 1, 2008. Tshering Palden, "Keeping the Constitution politically correct", *Kuensel*, Thimphu, May 31, 2008.

a lack of political will and capacity to design strategies and targeted measures to effectively address these gaps and to assess the impact of seemingly gender neutral criteria -whether in laws, policies and programmes- on gender equality. There is also a need to create greater understanding of the nature and meaning of ‘special temporary measures’ among decision-makers and the general public.

10. One of the education targets for the Tenth Plan is to enhance enrolment of girls in tertiary institutes to 80 girls for every 100 boys.⁹ Taking into account the current female to male ratio at higher secondary (0.77) and tertiary (0.51) levels in-country¹⁰, the achievement of this high target will represent a major challenge, especially in the absence of accompanying targeted measures. Similarly, the Road Map for Local Governments has as a milestone in 2013 that 30 percent of elected local representatives are women. Given the still very low number of female representatives in local government, such a milestone requires a thorough and determined set of actions for it to be realised.

Public and political life

11. Twenty four March, 2008, marked a smooth and successful change of political system in Bhutan from an absolute monarchy to a democratic constitutional monarchy.¹¹ The first National Assembly (NA) elections took place on that date. Elections for the National Council (NC) were held in two phases on 31 December 2007 in 15 districts and 29 January 2008 in the remaining five districts.¹²
12. ***Women’s participation in the electoral process:*** A very low proportion of women candidates stood for election. For the NA elections, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) nominated six women candidates out of 47 and the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (Party of Blissful Harmony, DPT) nominated four. Four women were elected to the NA, all from DPT (the party who won 45 out of 47 seats). In the NC elections, four women were elected (out of 20 elected members). Among the five members of the NC that were

⁹ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. I: Main Document*, February 2008.

¹⁰ Ministry of Education, RGoB (2007), *General Statistics, 2007*.

¹¹ Under the new political system, the Parliament comprises the Monarch (as head of state), a National Council, and the National Assembly. The National Council serves as the upper house and comprises 25 members, one from each of the country’s 20 districts and five nominees of the Monarch. The National Assembly comprises 47 elected members belonging to the two political parties that received the highest and second highest number of votes in the preliminary round of elections.

¹² The elections were not held in five districts on 31 December 2007 since they did not have any candidate or had only a single candidate till the last date for filing the nominations.

nominated by His Majesty the King, two are women. The percentage of women MPs now stands at 14 percent (see Table 1); although still low, this represents an improvement compared to the situation in 2006. There are no women ministers in the new 10-member cabinet.

13. Both political parties have women's support groups, which proved to be very active during the recent electoral process. They held women's meetings and consultations across the country before the elections to encourage women's participation and better understand what women consider to be pressing issues, although the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) decided three weeks before the NA elections that they should not convene meetings of women during the campaign unless they were coordinated with the candidate meetings, to avoid inconvenience of the voters. Women actively attended party and candidate meetings and debates, although most party workers and representatives were men.
14. Gender parity was almost achieved with regard to the number of staff recruited by the ECB to work in the polling stations. Voter turnout for the NA elections was about 79 percent, with more female voters (representing about 53 percent of the total number of voters) than male voters¹³. In terms of the registered voter population for the NA elections, there were also 3,873 more women registered voters than men.
15. ***Women's representation in the election administration:*** One of the three Election Commissioners is a woman and a woman also heads the Anti-Corruption Commission. For the recent NA elections, it was found that although many women (mainly teachers) were involved as Presiding Officers, Polling Officers and National Observers, only one woman was involved as Returning Officer.¹⁴ The very low number of female officers in the ECB is an issue that was also brought up during an e-discussion dealing with women in politics on Solution Exchange Bhutan¹⁵. One of the recommendations made by the European Union Election Observation Mission is to ensure that women are well-represented among election officials at all levels throughout the country.¹⁶

¹³ Source: <http://www.bhutan.gov.bt/government/newsDetail.php?id=541%20&%20cat=2>

¹⁴ This information is based on a personal communication with the ECB.

¹⁵ Solution Exchange Bhutan (2007), *E-discussion: Women in Politics?* Solution Exchange Bhutan is an information and knowledge sharing network that was initiated by the UNCT in Bhutan.

¹⁶ European Union Election Observation Mission (2008), *Bhutan. Final Report. National Assembly Elections, 24 March 2008*.

16. ***Eligibility to run for elections:*** Certain candidate qualifications, such as the requirement for candidates to hold a bachelor degree in order to stand for the NA and the exclusion of candidates for an elective office if married to non-citizens, restrict the right to be elected. The academic qualification for candidacy affects women's participation more directly, as there are much fewer women with a bachelor degree compared to men. This criterion in itself limits the pool of potential women candidates. In addition to these restrictive qualifications for candidacy, it is generally agreed that socio-cultural perceptions and structural barriers (some of them being already mentioned in the 7th periodic report) limit women's participation in politics in Bhutan.
17. ***Awareness-raising campaigns and training programmes:*** UNDP provided support to the ECB for creating greater awareness and understanding of the electoral process among voters, particularly women, youth, illiterates and people in remote areas. In collaboration with the NCWC, UNDP also provided support to build the capacity of a core team of trainers in creating awareness on the importance and necessity to involve women, youth and people with disabilities in the electoral process. The core team was then involved in various education and social mobilization activities undertaken by the ECB to prepare the Bhutanese people for the 2008 elections, and developed a training manual that was incorporated into the ECB's Bhutan Electoral Education Training Strategy. Training programmes in leadership skills and project management for women and gender sensitization programmes were conducted in 14 districts last year by the National Women's Association of Bhutan through another UNDP-SNV supported project¹⁷.
18. Despite their small number (10 in total), it seems that voices of women MPs are well asserted in the parliament. As mentioned above, during the first session that was held very recently, they succeeded to convince the house to incorporate the feminine pronouns ('she', 'her', and 'herself') in the Constitution.
19. In June 2008, the NA session established 14 standing committees from among its members to provide a 'check and balance' mechanism to the government. According to the Prime Minister, the primary role of the committees will be to point out the mistakes the government might make and render support to rectify them. The specific roles and responsibilities of the committees however need to be chalked out. Two of these committees are particularly worth mentioning here: the committee on women and children and the committee on human rights.

¹⁷ Through that project, 139 women were trained in leadership skills and 24 male village leaders were sensitized to gender issues and trained in gender mainstreaming.

20. Sub-national elections will take place later this year. Given the limited targeted measures to address existing barriers to women's participation in decision-making at local levels, the scenario is not expected to change significantly in the very near future. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see that the Draft Tenth Plan document mentions that "... *efforts in the Tenth Plan will be directed towards increasing women's participation in local governance through capacity building and raising awareness*".¹⁸
21. As also indicated in the 7th periodic report, women remain thus clearly under-represented in public and political life. As mentioned above, some progress in this area is visible but the pace has been slow. Greater awareness has certainly been created, especially since 2006, through increased media coverage on this issue and various activities of the NCWC. There is a tendency to attribute women's low participation in politics and public decision-making to the late start of their participation in the modern education system and to believe that the situation will improve naturally given the increasing number of educated women. It is essential that the government addresses the socio-cultural and structural barriers and seriously considers implementing special temporary measures in order to accelerate the progress in this area. Women's participation in governance is one of the seven areas covered by the National Plan of Action for Gender (NPAG), which identifies a series of interventions to be undertaken within the next five years. The interventions for governance include gender sensitization and training among relevant stakeholders, gender-sensitive civic and voter education (campaigns and integration into education system), leadership programmes, use of the media to portray a positive image of women, and, provision of day care facilities. Recommendations (including quotas in the parliament, voluntary quotas by political parties, possibility for civil servants to return to the civil service if not elected, etc.) that the government should consider were also made by participants to the e-discussion on women in politics that took place on Solution Exchange Bhutan.¹⁹ The NCWC, with support of UNDP, is planning to undertake a study this year on the reasons for low participation of women in decision-making positions and on existing perceptions, attitudes and stereotypes and their impact on women's equal participation in different spheres of life. It is hoped that the findings of this study will assist the government in taking appropriate measures to increase

¹⁸ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. I: Main Document*, February 2008.

¹⁹ Solution Exchange Bhutan (2007), *E-discussion: Women in Politics?*

women's participation, especially in the areas of public and political life, higher education and employment.

Nationality

22. Women are granted the same rights as men in relation to nationality.
23. In its Concluding Comments, the CEDAW Committee raised its concern about the fact that restrictive citizenship laws might prevent women from freely choosing a spouse and recommended the State Party to amend its citizenship and nationality laws to bring them in conformity with Article 9 of the Convention.
24. Marriage to an alien or the change of nationality by a husband does not affect the wife's nationality. Nevertheless, there are provisions in national legislation such as the Marriage Act and the Election Bill that restrict rights of Bhutanese nationals (women and men) married to non-citizens: e.g. right to stand for office, promotion for government employees, employment in foreign and defence services, 'kidu', cash loans, medical treatment in foreign countries, training under government scholarship, etc. Except for the right to stand for office, it seems however that these restrictions do not apply in practice. While protectionist concerns (especially with regard to neighbouring countries) have probably motivated such legal restrictions on some fundamental rights of Bhutanese married to non-citizens, they are discriminatory and should be removed.
25. The Draft Constitution and the Citizenship Act give the right to non-Bhutanese husbands to acquire the Bhutanese citizenship by naturalisation provided they fulfil the set criteria as mentioned in para 168 of the 7th periodic report (including lawful residence in Bhutan for at least 15 years).
26. The requirement that both parents be citizens for a child to obtain Bhutanese citizenship is very restrictive by modern standards. Some of the children with one Bhutanese parent may be stateless, depending on the nationality laws of the country of the non-Bhutanese parent.
27. As mentioned in its 7th periodic report, Bhutan does not allow dual citizenship and the Draft Constitution states that there will be an automatic loss of Bhutanese nationality by persons who acquire another nationality. It would be preferable, from a human rights' perspective, to restrict the scope of such rules to voluntary acquisition of another nationality. Nationality is sometimes acquired automatically by marriage to a citizen of another country or, in the case of children, by naturalization of parents or by the remarriage of a widowed or divorced parent.

28. Another issue concerns the nationality of children of foreigners or stateless persons born in Bhutanese territory. Bhutan's commitment under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to ensure that every child under its jurisdiction has the right to acquire a nationality would encourage an interpretation according to which Bhutanese nationality would be granted to children born in its territory who otherwise would have no nationality.²⁰
29. The 7th periodic report (para 176) states that *"Pending their choice of citizenship, such children [children with one Bhutanese parent] enjoy equal rights as other Bhutanese children with regard to residence and free access to all social services"*. As far as education is concerned, it should be noted that the common practice to enrol a child in school requires her/his parents to provide a copy of their citizenship identity cards. Although the actual situation in such cases is unclear, this may pose a problem for children with one Bhutanese parent as well as children of those parents who are from Lhotshampa (Nepali) origin and whose citizenship status (census dropout cases, pending cases) is pending with the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs. Moreover, to continue their studies in Bhutan after Class X, children are required to produce their citizenship identity card and a security clearance from the police, which constitutes a barrier for many children of Lhotshampa families with pending citizenship cases.

Education

30. Enormous achievements can be observed in the education sector: expansion of education services to even the most remote areas; almost 100 percent gender parity in primary enrolment, with an increasing trend in secondary education; overall improvement (i.e. at national level²¹) of education quality indicators like teachers/pupil ratio and class size.
31. **Primary education:** The Bhutan Living Standard Survey (BLSS) 2007, the Poverty Analysis Report (PAR) 2007, and the Ministry of Education (MoE) statistics 2007 provide updated information on education and literacy. The recent figures confirm that the primary net enrolment ratio (NER) is increasing (83.7 percent in 2007 based on the MoE statistics; 82.1 percent based on the BLSS 2007), and that the gender gap for

²⁰ UNICEF - Bhutan Country Office, *UNICEF comments on child rights issues in Bhutan. Report presented to the Pre-session Working Group of the United Nations Committee on the Child Rights. October 2007.*

²¹ Although recent statistics show an improvement in the national average for teachers/pupil ratio and class size, disparities can be observed between urban and rural areas and between districts.

primary NER has virtually been eliminated (0.4 percentage point in 2007 based on the MoE statistics; 1.8 percentage points based on the BLSS 2007 - see Table 2 and Table 3). There are disparities between urban and rural areas (gender gap for primary NER larger in urban areas) and between districts (Gasa, Samdrupjongkhar, and Trashigang districts with the largest gender gaps in favour of boys; Gasa, Samtse, Sarpang and Tsirang districts with a much lower primary NER for girls than the corresponding national average). The re-opening of seven community schools located in the South (in Sarpang, Samtse, Tsirang and Chhukha districts), which is planned for this year after a gap of more than 17 years due to security issues -as reported in the media recently²², is expected to improve the situation in those districts. The PAR 2007 reveals disparities in NER at primary school level between poor and non-poor girls and boys (girls: poor 67.5 percent, non-poor 86 percent; boys: poor 70.9 percent, non-poor 87.2 percent).²³

32. The RGoB already highlighted in its 7th periodic report (para 219 and 240) the lack of role models for girls in remote communities given the small proportion of female teachers in community primary schools (CPS). Targeted interventions such as those included in the NPAG to address this issue (awareness-raising on the importance of having female teachers particularly at primary level in remote and rural areas through campaigns and career counselling; development/review incentive system for teachers posted in rural, remote, very remote and difficult areas; provision of adequate facilities to attract female teachers, particularly in rural, remote, very remote and difficult areas) need to be implemented. Note that UNICEF and WFP advocate the need for more female teachers, especially in remote areas.
33. **Secondary and higher education:** Enrolment beyond primary school is still quite low for both girls and boys, and falls off even further at the higher secondary level (see Table 2). There is almost complete gender parity in enrolment at lower and middle secondary levels. Despite significant progress, gender gaps remain visible at higher secondary level (classes XI-XII: 0.77 girl to boy ratio in 2007), in tertiary education (0.51 girl to boy ratio for in-country tertiary institutes in 2007) and vocational training (0.49 girl to boy ratio in 2007).²⁴ The merit-based system for admission to higher education levels in public schools and institutes tends to indirectly discriminate against girls due to the fact that

²² Tandin Pem, "Southern schools to reopen", *Bhutan Observer*, Thimphu, May 16, 2008.

²³ National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Poverty Analysis Report 2007*.

²⁴ Ministry of Education, RGoB (2007), *General Statistics, 2007*.

girls' performance at higher level is lower than that of boys, and girls are therefore at a disadvantage to gain access to publicly funded higher education services. The enrolment figures provided by MoE for classes XI-XII show a vast difference between the girl to boy ratio in public schools (64 girls for every 100 boys) and in private schools (98 girls for every 100 boys).²⁵ A similar trend can be found at tertiary level with regard to government scholarships for students to study abroad as compared to students who study abroad through private funding. Slots for government scholarships to study abroad are limited and entirely merit based. There is a vast difference between the proportion of Bhutanese female students abroad with government scholarships (19 percent of total number of Bhutanese undergraduate students abroad with government scholarship) and that of Bhutanese privately funded higher education female students abroad (43 percent of total number of Bhutanese undergraduate students abroad with private funding).²⁶ Given limited resources and the limited number of government facilities for higher education, only students attaining the highest grades gain admission to higher education levels in public schools/institutes. Promotion rates in 2006 are higher for girls than for boys across grades from class I up to class VI, are a bit lower for girls at lower secondary level and significantly lower for girls at middle secondary level (class IX: boys 88.4 percent, girls 83.6 percent; class X: boys 94.7 percent, girls 90 percent). Meanwhile, repetition and drop-out rates are higher for girls than for boys from class VII onwards, with class VII and Class X having a particularly higher drop-out rate for girls (class VII: boys 3.9 percent, girls 6.5 percent; class X: boys 4.3 percent, girls 8.9 percent).²⁷ Students who do not meet the grade cut off for public schools/institutes can continue their studies in private schools inside the country or go study abroad under private funding. Therefore, those students from families who cannot afford have no other choice than to enter the job market. Similarly, admission to the vocational training institutes is limited to class X pass students. There is a need to address the causes for girls' lower performance at higher level. As mentioned earlier, the achievement of the target set by the government for the Tenth Plan regarding enrolment in tertiary institutes (80 girls for every 100 boys) will represent a challenge in the absence of special measures.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

34. ***Compulsory and free primary school:*** The Draft Constitution guarantees access to free education for all children of school going age up to the tenth standard. Although in principle education is free till class X included, it does cost money. As mentioned in para 185 of the 7th periodic report, uniforms, contributions to the school development fund (Nu. 30 per year at primary level and Nu. 100 at secondary level), and other contributions (e.g. for annual religious ceremonies) are beyond the means of some poor families. In the BLSS 2007, money was the second most frequently stated reasons after age why non-school going children aged 6 to 16 did not attend school, with a higher percentage for non-school going girls compared to boys, especially in urban areas (23 percent compared to 4 percent for non-school going boys - see Table 4). The need to work as the main reason for not attending school is also among the four most frequently stated reasons in both urban and rural areas, with a slightly higher percentage for non-school going girls compared to boys. Table 5 shows that money is the most frequently stated reason among the non-poor in urban areas and the second most frequently stated reason after age among the poor in rural areas. Table 6 presents the average amount of money (in Nu.) spent on educational expenses per school going child for the academic year: it shows that the total amount spent per person in urban areas (3,500 for boys; 3,300 for girls) is practically twice that spent in rural areas (2,000 for boys; 1,800 for girls). There is a need for the government to consider the introduction of schemes like 'cash for education' or provision of stipend for children from economically disadvantaged families to ensure 100 percent enrolment of girls and boys in both urban and rural areas. Moreover, the government does not have a policy of compulsory primary education. Although compulsory basic education (i.e. till class X included) was discussed at numerous occasions²⁸, the government has been very cautious with introducing such policy as it first would like to ensure feasibility of its implementation in the current context.
35. ***Teaching material and practices:*** Given the major theme of the education sector for the Tenth Plan (enhance the quality of education at all levels), efforts will be made to improve curricula and teaching methodologies. Although efforts have been made to mainstream a gender perspective within the curriculum reform initiated in 2004 with the assistance of a gender adviser from abroad, it is important that these efforts continue, even though the gender adviser left the country. The important role of the education sector in challenging prevalent gender roles and stereotypes has been recognised in the

²⁸ The need to make education compulsory has also been discussed during the first session of the Parliament when MPs were debating about the clause on education in the Draft Constitution (Article 9, Section 16).

NPAG, which identifies two relevant interventions in this respect: (i) review teaching materials and curricula content from a gender perspective at all levels of education and training; (ii) integrate gender sensitivity training into the teachers/lecturers/Non-Formal Education and vocational training instructor training curriculum.²⁹ Implementation of these interventions is essential.

36. **Early marriage or pregnancy:** As is mentioned later in the sections on women and health (para 61) and on marriage and family relations (para 83), early marriage and teenage pregnancy continue to exist. Although there is no such policy that prohibits married students and pregnant girls to attend school, it is believed that many of them would discontinue their studies, especially in the case of pregnancy because of the attached stigma. Practice seems to vary between schools regarding the possibility for pregnant students to continue their education, which will mainly depend on the attitude of the school discipline committee and/or the school principal. Nevertheless, it seems that the girl is generally advised to continue her studies after delivery whether in the same school or in another school if she feels she would be stigmatised. The need is felt for clear directives on this issue from the MoE shared with all schools in order to ensure that married or pregnant girls are allowed and encouraged to continue their studies.

37. **Access to sexual and reproductive health education for adolescents:** As mentioned in the 7th periodic report, access to information on adolescent reproductive health issues is provided through different means: high level advocacy campaigns by Her Majesty the Queen, Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck; health care system; comprehensive school health programme; scouts programme; school-based parent education programme; media. Teachers have been trained in important areas such as life skills education in adolescent reproductive health, adolescent mental health, HIV/AIDs, STIs, hygiene and sanitation and first aid.³⁰ However, it was found that *“Although Bhutan is sexually a fairly liberal society, there is as yet little preparation for sexual maturity, nor much effort to impart ‘life skills’ to enable young men and women to handle their sexuality. Parents and children rarely discuss the subject. Teachers too are reluctant: they will give the biological facts and help girl boarders with issues arising out of menstruation, but generally they are uncomfortable about discussing sex openly with adolescents and*

²⁹ National Commission for Women and Children and Planning Commission, RGoB (2007), *National Plan of Action for Gender 2007-2013*.

³⁰ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. II: Programme Profiles*, February 2008.

children".³¹ While values education is provided in the schools, integration of life skills education as such into the school curriculum has not taken place yet. The Draft Tenth Plan however recognises the importance of strengthening the comprehensive school health programme and of imparting life skills education to children and youth.³² Positive developments are thus expected to take place in this area, with support from UNICEF and UNFPA. Note that UNICEF and UNFPA already assisted the MoE in including life skills based education in the curriculum of Non-Formal Education (NFE). As mentioned later in the section on women and health (para 65), use of modern contraceptives is especially low among teenagers. Greater emphasis needs therefore to be put on Behaviour Change Communication. Behaviour Change Communication programmes together with implementation of reproductive health and life skills education in all schools and educational institutes, peer-based education programmes, availability of youth friendly reproductive health services at all levels, and condom promotion are target interventions that have been identified for the youth in the National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of STIs and HIV and AIDS.³³ In general, more efforts are needed to reach out to out-of-school youth.

38. ***Sexual abuse and harassment:*** At a National Consultation on Violence against Children that was organised by the NCWC, in collaboration with UNICEF, adult participants mentioned sexual abuse and harassment among forms of violence that are occurring in schools and institutions. There is however a lack of information on the nature and extent of this issue. Ensuring a safe and protective environment for both girls and boys, particularly female students in boarding schools, is essential to encourage parents to permit their daughters to attend school. The government should ensure that separate hostel facilities for girls and boys are available and that female staffs are appointed to supervise female boarders and are provided with adequate facilities. There is also a need to have procedures in place for reporting and dealing with any form of abuse and harassment in educational facilities. These interventions are included in the NPAG. In addition, as mentioned by the government in its 7th periodic report (para 239),

³¹ Black M. and Stalker P. (2006), *A Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Bhutan 2006*, Thimphu, UNICEF Bhutan.

³² Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. II: Programme Profiles*, February 2008.

³³ RGoB (2008), *National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of STIs and HIV and AIDS*.

there is the issue of ‘informal boarders’ and their particular vulnerability to abuse due to a lack of proper protection in some cases.

39. ***Access of rural women and girls to education and vocational training:*** As the government pointed out (para 242 of the 7th periodic report), there are practical difficulties (small population, scattered population in rural and remote areas, limited resources) in making secondary and tertiary education as well as vocational training facilities accessible to rural women and girls (as well as rural men and boys) in the places where they live. Nevertheless, measures such as those mentioned above like providing financial support to girls from economically disadvantaged families and providing girls with adequate protection would help to ensure equal access de facto to higher level educational facilities for rural women and girls. In a major shift from the Draft Tenth Plan that refers to a consolidation strategy rather than continued expansion of primary education infrastructure, a recent article in the media mentions that the MoE will be building around 104 new primary and CPS over the next five years.³⁴ The new government would increase the total number of schools to 615 to ensure 100 percent enrolment by 2012. According to the article, the new education minister said that *“This is to ensure that children located in remote areas or those who have not been able to attend schools, will not have to walk more than an hour to reach school or be too far away from their family”*. The concept of extended classrooms would be re-introduced in areas with fewer than 20 but more than 10 students. Vulnerable groups would be receiving fee waivers, stipends and free uniform and boarding facilities to encourage enrolment. In order to tackle the issue of teacher shortage, the MoE is taking temporary steps by hiring graduates and retired teachers although the long-term strategy would be enhancing intake of the teacher training colleges and hiring teachers from outside.³⁵ The RGoB is also planning to expand vocational training infrastructure through the establishment of 8 new vocational training institutes and 2 institutes of Zorig Chuzum.³⁶
40. ***Literacy:*** The BLSS 2007 confirms an increase in the reported literacy rate among the population 6 years and above (now estimated at 56 percent) compared to 2003 (estimated at 43 percent as per the BLSS 2003). Improvement is particularly visible in rural areas. This is largely due to the expansion of the NFE programme. Nevertheless, literacy rate

³⁴ Tenzing Lamsang, “More not less schools”, *Kuensel*, Thimphu, June 14, 2008.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. II: Programme Profiles*, February 2008.

among women of 6 years and above is still low (46 percent), especially among rural women (39 percent). While gender disparities are practically absent amongst the youngest age group, a gender gap in literacy rate can already be observed in the age group 10-14 years old, and this gender gap widens with age (see Table 7). Female literacy rate is the lowest in Gasa. Other districts that have female literacy rates much lower than the corresponding national average are Monggar, Pemagatshel, Samtse, Trashigang, and Trashiyangtse (see Table 8). Realising the national objective set for the Tenth Plan with regard to literacy (i.e. to enhance adult literacy rate to at least 80 percent with special focus on empowerment of girls and women, particularly in rural areas)³⁷ will be a challenge. While women represent the majority of learners enrolled in the NFE programme, there is a lack of disaggregated data (by sex and age) on drop-out and completion rates. It is hoped that this need will be taken into account as part of the efforts to further strengthen the NFE programme within the Tenth Plan.

41. As part of their activities to support the education sector in Bhutan, UNICEF and WFP place special emphasis on achieving gender parity in terms of enrolment and retention by requesting the MoE for disaggregated data, promoting and supporting implementation of the child-friendly school concept with gender sensitiveness being one of its core components, and supporting the construction of separate toilets for girls and boys. UNICEF also supports the engagement of Bhutan in the UN Girl Education Initiative.

Employment and work

42. The National Labour Force Survey 2006 and the BLSS 2007 provide updated information with regard to employment. Similar patterns as those presented in the 7th periodic report can be observed with regard to labour force participation and unemployment rates, economic activity, and employment status (see Table 9 to Table 12, and Figure 1). The figures confirm that there is still a long way to go to achieve substantive equality in the field of employment. As mentioned above (para 9), the government continues to adopt a gender neutral approach in the field of employment as well, with a system entirely based on merit and qualification and no special measures in place.
43. The Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulations (BCSR), 2006 are found to be completely gender-neutral. Although they refer to equal opportunity with regard to

³⁷ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. I: Main Document*, February 2008.

recruitment, selection and appointment, training, and career advancement, they do not contain a specific reference to equality between women and men, nor do they include anti-discrimination clauses. The only reference made to discrimination is in the Code of Conduct and Ethics, where it is stated that a civil servant shall avoid all forms of discrimination and favour in discharging official responsibilities. The BCSR, 2006 also do not explicitly prohibit sexual harassment.

44. **Sexual harassment:** Although the definition of sexual harassment in the Labour and Employment Act, 2007 contains a vast range of unwanted behaviours, there is a need to revisit the definition of sexual harassment provided in Section 205 of the Penal Code of Bhutan, 2004, which states “*A defendant shall be guilty of sexual harassment, if the defendant makes unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal abuse of sexual nature*”. Moreover, it is important to note that effective complaints procedures are still lacking. Sexual harassment is believed to be relatively common at the workplace. According to a recent study on violence against women conducted by RENEW, of the 168 single women working, about 38 percent said that they do face harassment at the workplace from their male counterparts and 17 percent said that they have been touched by a male colleague. Only six reported to their boss although majority said that they just kept quiet and did nothing.³⁸
45. **Maternity leave:** While the labour rules’ minimum standards are being drafted under the Labour and Employment Act, 2007, it seems maternity leave will now be 2 months instead of 1.5 months. According to Kuensel online, it has been suggested during meetings held with private employers and employees that, instead of having the earlier 1.5 months maternity leave for three babies, it be made 2 months but for only two babies.³⁹
46. As is the case for women working in the civil service, women working in the private sector should be entitled to paid maternity leave for a period of 3 months. It is important that the government takes into account the International Labour Organisation’s recommendation with regard to maternity leave (i.e. minimum of 14 weeks maternity leave in both the public and private sectors).
47. **Equal access to social security:** As mentioned in the 7th periodic report, Article 9, Section 22, of the Draft Constitution states that “*The State shall endeavour to provide security*

³⁸ RENEW (2007), *Violence against Women*.

³⁹ Kuenselonline.com, June 16, 2008. Source:
<http://www.bhutan.gov.bt/government/newsDetail.php?id=695%20&%20cat=2>

in the event of sickness and disability or lack of adequate means of livelihood for reasons beyond one's control". The government also mentioned in para 291 that women and men working in the agricultural sector, informal sector and at home, which comprise the majority of the Bhutanese labour force, are still not protected under any social security scheme. The NPAG points out that a large proportion of older women are likely to be left out from pension schemes such as the National Pension and Provident Fund, without any means of independent support, given that the working force in the formal sector is still predominantly male. The fact that many women who reach old age are likely to become totally dependent on their husband, if he is still alive, or on other relatives for support renders them more vulnerable to poverty and economic insecurity. Despite the highly supportive and informal care giving environment still prevalent in Bhutan, certain trends such as erosion of traditional family patterns with a move towards more nuclear family households, and rapid urbanisation and migration patterns of younger family members indicate the need for the country to take initiative in matters related to social security.⁴⁰

48. In addition to the clauses already mentioned in the 7th periodic report regarding paid leave, retirement benefits and accident compensation, Chapter 6 of the Labour and Employment Act, 2007 also provides for compensation by an employer to all his or her employees against (a) death due to work accident or occupational diseases; (b) total permanent disablement; (c) temporary partial disablement, which applies to all types of employment. Any employer who contravenes the provisions on compensation and retirement benefits commits an offence of a felony of fourth degree. Entitlement to gratuity and other retirement benefits is also included in the BCSR.
49. **Access to child care facilities:** Various issues regarding access to and affordability of child care facilities have been highlighted in the 7th periodic report (para 315, 320, and 329). Interventions in this area (development of a policy to increase access to affordable day care services and provision of affordable day care facilities and parental support at national level) are included in the NPAG.
50. **Right to equal pay for work of equal value:** As reported by the government in the 7th periodic report, the right to equal pay for work of equal value has been enshrined in the Draft Constitution as well as in the Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan, 2007. Effective implementation of these provisions will require greater understanding of the meaning of 'equal pay for work of equal value' as understood in Article 11, 1 (d) of

⁴⁰ National Commission for Women and Children and Planning Commission, RGoB (2007), *National Plan of Action for Gender 2007-2013*.

CEDAW as well as awareness on General Recommendation 13 on equal remuneration for work of equal value. Chapter 11 of the BCSR on remuneration and benefit refers to the ‘*principle of equal pay for equal value of work*’, which is defined as “*employees with the required qualifications and experience and performing comparable jobs as determined through the job evaluation process, should be compensated similarly; that is, within the same salary range*”.⁴¹ However, it has been reported in the media that the Chairperson of the Pay Commission said “*that the PCS [Position Classification System] clause on equal pay for equal work had to be reviewed*”.⁴² The article did not provide more details in this respect.

51. Additional challenges in the employment and professional fields that will need to be addressed by the government include: increasing access for women to professional, technical and vocational training; generating employment for youth and women, particularly in rural areas to address poverty and ensure a balanced and gender equitable development; enhancing skills of women farmers and vulnerable groups of women to improve agricultural production and encourage diversification of their income-generating activities; promoting cottage and small rural-based enterprises, and providing increased access to financial services to accelerate growth in such enterprises; making rural-based skills training programmes more women friendly to encourage more female participants; addressing the problem of rising female unemployment, especially in urban areas; better understanding the extent and nature of women’s involvement in the informal sector; encouraging men to share household responsibilities; and, addressing socio-cultural perceptions and prevailing stereotypes that affect women’s participation in the formal employment sector. The NPAG identifies a series of interventions to address these challenges. Although the Draft Tenth Plan document mentions the government’s intention to address some of these challenges⁴³, no specific targets to increase women’s participation in the employment and professional fields can be found among the targets set for the employment and other related sectors in the Draft Tenth Plan.

⁴¹ Royal Civil Service Commission, *Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulations 2006*.

⁴² Pushkar Chhetri, “PCS to be reviewed”, *Bhutan Observer*, Thimphu, May 30, 2008.

⁴³ See sections on ‘strategic measures to promote gender mainstreaming’ and ‘industrial policy and strategy’ in: Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. I: Main Document*, February 2008. See section on ‘rural development training programme’ in: Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. II: Programme Profiles*, February 2008.

Child Labour

52. With regard to child labour, Bhutan has certainly made progress in terms of legislation. Article 9, Section 18, of the Draft Constitution and Chapter X of the Labour and Employment Act, 2007 on minimum age for admission to employment provide a legal and institutional basis to prevent and regulate child labour. It should be noted that changes were made to the Draft Act and that the information included in the 7th periodic report⁴⁴ is not up to date anymore. Under the Labour and Employment Act, 2007, the minimum age of employment is 18 years (Section 170). Section 171 of the Act further states that *“The employment of a child between 13 to 17 years of age shall be limited only to the categories of work and in workplaces as specified in the rules and regulation to this Act subject however, to the conditions laid down under section 9 [Prohibition of the worst forms of child labour]”*. Any person failing to comply with Sections 170 and 171 commits an offence of a felony of the third degree, which is punishable with a minimum term of imprisonment of five years and a maximum of less than nine years. Section 175 now reads as follows: *“If a person causes or permits a person to: (a) work as a domestic servant in a home which is not the home of the person’s immediate family; or (b) participate or assist in a business, trade, calling or occupation carried on for profit: the person is deemed to be employed whether or not he or she receives payment or other reward for his or her participation or assistance”*.
53. One of the targets set for the employment sector in the Draft Tenth Plan is that 100 percent of the private sector agencies comply with the Labour and Employment Act provisions.⁴⁵ As for many provisions of the Labour and Employment Act, 2007, enforcement of the provisions regarding minimum age of employment will be a challenge. It is essential to create greater awareness on the Act and the Rules and Regulations among employers and employees. Following up on such legislation will also require an effective system of labour inspection and the establishment of effective complaints procedures.
54. A child protection study conducted with support of UNICEF⁴⁶ found that children are working in enterprises (such as hotels, restaurants, shops, and workshops and as weavers

⁴⁴ See information on protection of minors under the employment section in: RGoB (2007), *Seventh periodic report of Bhutan to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*.

⁴⁵ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. I: Main Document*, February 2008.

⁴⁶ Pathak N. and Yonten K. (2004), *Assessment of the Protection Factors for the vulnerable children in Bhutan*, RGoB and UNICEF, Thimphu.

and handy boys) and within homes as domestic helpers; most of these children are below fifteen years of age. Employment of domestic workers seems to be a growing phenomenon in urban areas, as more mothers in middle-class families are working outside the home or families have enough income to afford domestic help. The lack of affordable child care facilities also contributes to this phenomenon. The majority of domestic child workers are young girls who tend to come from poor or very poor families. The study found that they work on average twelve hours a day, seven days a week, for an average of about Nu.30 per day. Many of them admitted to receiving corporal punishment from their employers and a few of them have experienced severe beatings. Four girls out of the 23 interviewed disclosed that their employers or relatives of their employers had subjected them to sexual abuse; one of them had become pregnant and was coerced to have an abortion. There is also evidence of exploitation and abuse of children working in enterprises. So far, there are no support systems for working children and no measures in place to monitor their situation. The NCWC, with support from UNICEF, is now in the process of recruiting a local consultancy firm to conduct a study on child labour, with a focus on domestic helpers. It is expected that this study will provide information on the nature, extent and incidence of child labour in Bhutan, the characteristics and general conditions of child labourers, and their perceptions and experiences, and therefore assist the RGoB and other relevant stakeholders to design appropriate measures in this area.

55. There is a need to have rules and regulations in place so that children who work are not deprived of other rights such as the rights to education (e.g. through the NFE programme), health, protection from abuse and exploitation, rest and leisure⁴⁷, as well as mechanisms in place to monitor the situation of working children and ensure their protection. There is also a need for public education on the issue of domestic child workers.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ UNICEF - Bhutan Country Office, *UNICEF comments on child rights issues in Bhutan. Report presented to the Pre-sessional Working Group of the United Nations Committee on the Child Rights. October 2007.*

⁴⁸ Pathak N. and Yonten K. (2004), *Assessment of the Protection Factors for the vulnerable children in Bhutan*, RGoB and UNICEF, Thimphu.

Worst forms of child labour

56. Although Bhutan is not a member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Labour and Employment Act, 2007 prohibits the worst forms of child labour in line with ILO Convention 182.
57. **Trafficking:** Legal provisions protecting children against trafficking and their use for prostitution can be found in the Draft Constitution, the Penal Code of Bhutan, 2004 and the Labour and Employment Act, 2007. Although no formal reports of organised trafficking of women and children have been made so far, there is an urgent need to conduct research and collect information in this area, develop a comprehensive prevention, response and monitoring plan, and strengthen coordination between relevant sectors and regional and international cooperation to prevent and combat trafficking in women and girls. The recommendations made by the CEDAW Committee in its Concluding Comments with regard to trafficking remain thus valid.

Women and health with special attention to sexual and reproductive health

58. Bhutan has made impressive progress in the area of women's health, both in terms of increasing access to and enhancing the quality of health care services, including reproductive health services, and of improving health outcomes. In addition to expansion of infrastructure and services, as indicated by the government in its 7th periodic report, human resource development too has witnessed a qualitative change with employment of more and better skilled and trained health workers.⁴⁹
59. The BLSS 2007 and the PAR 2007 provide updated information and useful insight on access to health care facilities and on some sexual and reproductive health aspects.
60. **Access:** Table 13 confirms that access to a hospital or Basic Health Unit (BHU) is high across the country. Despite tremendous efforts of the government to bring health care services closer to rural communities, the table however also indicates that the average time to reach the nearest health facility remains high in rural areas (more than one hour), especially for poor households (almost two hours). For both women and men in rural areas, lack of transport and/or large distance and lack of time are found to be important factors determining the choice not to consult a health care provider (see Table 14).

⁴⁹ Ministry of Health, RGoB (2007), *Annual Health Bulletin 2007*.

61. **Teenage pregnancy:** Updated information confirms that the issue of pregnancy among young girls is one area that still requires improvement. Table 15 shows that 11 percent of women who gave birth during the 12 months prior to the interview are aged 15 to 19 years old. The proportion is higher among the rural poor. It is also observed that teenage pregnancy is twice as common in rural areas than in urban areas.
62. **Ante-natal care:** The Ministry of Health (MoH) has been trying to reach ante-natal care (ANC) to every pregnant woman through the development of a wide-ranging network of BHUs and outreach clinics (ORCs) and through awareness-raising. There is no doubt that ANC coverage has increased over the reporting period (from 51 percent in 2000 based on the National Health Survey to 70.1 percent in 2006 based on the household survey⁵⁰). According to the BLSS 2007 report, about 90 percent of women who gave birth during the 12 months prior to the interview received pre-natal care from a doctor or qualified nurse (see Table 16). While this holds true for those women in the age group of 15 to 19, the proportion is smaller for older women (40-49). Note that based on an in-depth analysis of the data of the 2000 National Health Survey, older (30+ years old) and non-married women were found to be low users of ANC services.⁵¹ Table 16 also indicates that overall the proportion of women that received pre-natal care during their pregnancy is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. There is a need to promote the recommended standard of four ANC visits in one pregnancy and to target the groups that are particularly low users.
63. **Maternal Health:** Despite significant progress made in this area and although the country is on track towards achieving the MDG target of reducing the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) by three quarters to 140 or less per 100,000 live births⁵², too many women are still dying as a result of childbirth. The main problem is the low percentage of deliveries that are attended by a trained health professional (57.1 percent in 2006 according to the MoH statistics, with a much lower percentage in Dagana followed by Pemagatshel, Haa and Trashiyangtse⁵³). Based on the BLSS 2007, a quarter of the women who gave birth in the past 12 months reported having done so at home without specialised assistance; ten percent reported having given birth at home with a midwife

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Between 1994 and 2000, the MMR per 100,000 live births fell from 380 to 255.

⁵³ Ministry of Health, RGoB (2007), *Annual Health Bulletin 2007*.

and 5 percent at home with medical assistance. In rural areas, about a third of the deliveries were done at home without specialised assistance, while in urban areas, there were only ten percent of such type of deliveries (see Figure 2). Few of the home births in rural areas are attended by trained personnel as there is no cadre of village-level trained birth attendants. Even under the care of a skilled professional, many women delivering at home are still at risk of dying due to complications that would not be possible for trained health personnel to deal with within a home and because they are often not within close range of an Emergency Obstetric Care (EmOC) centre.⁵⁴ According to MoH, there were 17 maternal deaths in 2006.⁵⁵ However, MoH recognises that a significant proportion of maternal deaths in the country go unrecorded and that most of them are preventable.⁵⁶ There is a need to strengthen maternal death investigation and reporting systems.

64. A positive step towards reducing the number of maternal deaths is the decision of the MoH to promote 100 percent institutional delivery, including the efforts made towards this end in terms of equipment provided to BHUs and training of health workers. However, focus on achieving 100 percent delivery attended by skilled personnel would be more realistic given the Bhutanese context and the fact that there are major obstacles to overcome in order to implement a policy of 100 percent institutional delivery. Many families and women are used to child birth taking place at home, and if they have not seen a maternal death or have not had problems with previous deliveries at home, they are reluctant to change. Overcoming cultural preferences to deliver at home is a challenge that will need to be adequately addressed. Other challenges include the highly dispersed nature of settlements and the walking distance to the local health units, and the limited capacity to deal with complications at BHU level. Regarding challenges to increase the availability of EmOC, the 7th periodic report already mentions in para 367 the difficulty of maintaining the number of comprehensive EmOC centres given frequent transfer of staff between health facilities. The retention of doctors who have been trained in comprehensive EmOC provision has also proven to be a problem (it seems only one out of the six doctors that were trained between 2002 and 2006 is now available for such services). In order to achieve the goal of 100 percent institutional delivery, significant efforts and substantial input of resources would be needed; efforts

⁵⁴ United Nations Bhutan (2006), *Common Country Assessment for Bhutan 2006*.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Health, RGoB (2007), *Annual Health Bulletin 2007*.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Health, RGoB (2006), *Annual Health Bulletin 2006*.

should focus on encouraging women to travel to use the services available and on improving the quality of services to ensure women want to use them.

65. **Family planning:** Although the contraceptive prevalence rate seems to have increased over the reporting period, it still remains low. The BLSS 2007 found that while about 70 percent of women of reproductive age knew about modern contraception methods (81 percent in urban areas; 69 percent in rural areas), only half of these women were actually using them. Use of modern contraceptives is particularly low among teenagers (about 5 percent in urban areas; 15 percent in rural areas). There are hardly any differences in utilisation rate between rural and urban women in the age categories 20-29 and 30-39. Older women (40-49) in rural areas are less likely to use modern contraceptives compared to their counterparts in urban areas (see Figure 3). Table 17 shows differences in knowledge and utilisation rates between districts, with Samdrupjonkhar having the lowest knowledge rate and Trashiyangste having the lowest utilisation rate but also the biggest gap between knowledge and utilisation rates. The main reason given for not using contraceptives by the majority of women who had knowledge about modern contraception methods but did not use these methods (83 percent) was that they were 'not concerned' (see Table 18). About 10 percent did not want to respond; less than 1 percent said it was because they were not available. It is also interesting to note that about 3 percent mentioned 'husband/family objection' as the main reason for not using contraceptives, with a higher percentage in rural areas. Based on an in-depth analysis of the data of the 2000 National Health Survey, the lowest level of information and the lowest level of use of family planning methods was found among 9-19 years old; non-married women; rural residents and farmers; residents of Eastern Bhutan; and, unemployed adults. Tackling the main barrier to contraceptive use, i.e. 'lack of concern', will be a major challenge. For the younger generation, in addition to promoting contraceptive use and increasing access, empowerment of young girls to be in a position to take their own decisions such as negotiating condom use with their partners will also be important.⁵⁷

66. The RGoB is well aware of the major challenges ahead in the health sector, including those related to maternal and reproductive health. The Draft Tenth Plan document states "*... the sector still faces dire shortage of human resource in all categories in its move for universal access to health services. ... With the limited number of health personnel and considering the low pace of new*

⁵⁷ United Nations Bhutan (2006), *Common Country Assessment for Bhutan 2006*.

entrants to the health services, strengthening the pool and quality of human resources would need to be provided priority focus. ... The culture of using information, be it routine information or research, for strategic planning and decision making needs to be developed further. ... rates of Maternal Mortality (MMR), Infant Mortality (IMR) and Under Five Mortality (U5MR) still remain high compared to international standards. An important challenge in reducing maternal and neonatal mortality will depend to a great extent on the ability to increase institutional deliveries (i.e., deliveries attended by trained birth attendants) through expansion and further strengthening of Emergency Obstetric Care (EmOC) facilities. ... There is also need to further strengthen strategies and activities that focus on safe motherhood and adolescent reproductive health, prevention and management of complications related to reproductive health and cervical cancer. There is also an urgent need to develop strategies to reach the un-reached. Inadequacy of human resource and vital information remains major issues... Despite the improved nutritional status in the last two decades, malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies are still major health problem, especially among children and pregnant women.”⁵⁸ The government intends to address the maternal and reproductive health related challenges through the following strategies: scaling up institutional deliveries to achieve all births attended by skilled health personnel; expansion of Basic and Comprehensive EmOC centres through construction of new and remodelling, up-gradation and relocation of existing health facilities; capacity development for institutional deliveries; intensifying maternal and child health care with emphasis on postnatal care; intensifying advocacy in reproductive health; intensifying safe-motherhood initiatives and promotion of nutrition for mothers and children; expansion of family planning services; intensifying surveillance of cervical cancers in women through routine screening system; establishment of perinatal services at three referral hospitals.⁵⁹ Note that the health sector targets to move beyond the MDG target related to maternal mortality as it aims to reduce the MMR to less than 100 per 100,000 live births by the end of the Tenth Plan.⁶⁰

67. Additional challenges that call for particular attention from the government are the following: address socio-cultural barriers to the use of maternal health services; ensure male involvement and male responsibility in safe motherhood; increase awareness on women’s reproductive rights; address the issue of teenage pregnancy; collect information

⁵⁸ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. II: Programme Profiles*, February 2008.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. I: Main Document*, February 2008.

on the extent and nature of unsafe abortions practiced inside and outside the country and design and implement appropriate measures to monitor and prevent unsafe abortion (e.g. review criteria for medico-legal abortions); improve collection, analysis and use of sex disaggregated/gender-related health information and strengthen gender mainstreaming into health plans, policies and programmes. The NPAG includes specific interventions to address most of these challenges.

HIV and AIDS

68. As of February 2008, the National STI (Sexually Transmitted Infection) and HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Programme under the MoH reported a cumulative total of 144 HIV infected cases. The most common route of transmission is the heterosexual route (89 percent) followed by mother-to-child transmission (9 percent). HIV infections have been reported in various occupational groups across the country: the cases reported range from government and corporate employees, to business people, farmers, members of religious groups, housewives (who represent almost one quarter of all detected cases) to sex workers.
69. During the last few years, the number of infected women has progressively increased. As of February 2008, they represented 49 percent of all cases detected. The majority of the infected women are below the age of 30 years while the bulk of infected men are between 25 and 39 years old (see Table 19). This indicates that there may be a tendency for younger women to be infected by older men. Several factors are assumed to enhance women's vulnerability to HIV infection in Bhutan. Initiation of early sexual activity compounded by lack of awareness and limited access to information on protection from HIV and AIDS, lack of skills to negotiate abstinence or safer sexual relations, unwanted sex put women and girls at very high risk. More research is required to comprehensively understand the gender dynamics involved in the HIV and AIDS epidemic.⁶¹
70. According to the results of the third biennial HIV Sentinel Surveillance Survey, 2006, the prevalence of HIV in the surveyed population was 0.05 percent. The prevalence among women attending antenatal clinics was estimated to be 0.02 percent. The armed forces and the 'others' category that includes clinical suspected patients, drivers, businessmen and mobile population were estimated to have higher than average prevalence rates (0.11 percent and 0.07 percent respectively).

⁶¹ RGoB (2008), *National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of STIs and HIV and AIDS*.

71. Interventions to prevent vertical transmission include provision of information to pregnant women concerning risk of vertical transmission and provision of health care services by integrating STI screening with ANC service. Attendees of ANC are offered counselling and testing services. A policy to offer peri natal prophylaxes of AZT (Zidovudine) to HIV positive pregnant women has already been in place since 2001. Since 2004, treatment is also available for all infected persons -women and men- based on the CD4 count. As of February 2008, 18 infected persons were receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART).
72. **National multi-sectoral strategic framework:** The National HIV/AIDS Commission recently approved the National Strategic Plan (NSP) for the Prevention and Control of STIs and HIV and AIDS⁶², which is intended to guide the nation's response to the epidemic. The NSP recognizes the need to place HIV and STI on the agenda of multiple sectors. It defines clearly the roles and responsibilities of all partners, including NGOs and community-based organizations that can play a critical role in reaching populations from all walks of life particularly those groups considered most at risk.
73. The NSP aims to: (1) Integrate STI and HIV prevention into the core activities of multi-sectoral partners; (2) Create a supportive environment that facilitates the implementation of programmes and services, and reduces stigma and discrimination towards women and men living with or affected by HIV and AIDS; (3) Improve the quality and coverage of the national response to HIV and AIDS and STIs. The primary focus of the NSP is prevention targeted at the general population. One of the guiding principles of the NSP is that *"All Bhutanese women and men must be empowered with knowledge and skills to protect themselves from HIV infection and made aware of their own responsibility in HIV and AIDS prevention"*. It is further stated that *"Particular attention shall be given to the adequacy and appropriateness of prevention interventions to women, considering almost half of the reported HIV and AIDS cases to date are women and half of the infected women are housewives"*. Prevention interventions will also target population groups considered most at risk: youth (both boys and girls in and out-of-school); sex workers and their clients; men having sex with men; uniformed personnel; mobile and migrant workers; substance abusers; prisoners; and, women and men working in the tourism industry. In addition to the focus on HIV prevention, the strategy has identified the importance of strengthening care, support and universal access to treatment for people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA). The government is committed to providing equal access to basic health care and other

⁶² Ibid.

services and ART to PLWHA. Another priority area identified in the NSP is the creation of a supportive environment for women and men living with or affected by HIV and AIDS. The NSP recognizes the need for PLWHA to play a more proactive and supportive role. It aims to build upon activities already undertaken to facilitate support networks among people with HIV. The involvement of individuals, families and communities in the care and support of people with HIV is also considered crucial. Moreover, the plan underlines the importance of reducing stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS and ensuring PLWHA are not discriminated against. Ensuring that the existing legal and policy framework in the country protects the fundamental rights of PLWHA and does not represent a barrier to the acceptance and integration of PLWHA makes an integral part of the strategies identified to create an enabling environment for successful implementation of the national response to HIV and AIDS and STIs. Finally, the NSP recognises the importance of generating strategic information (through research and monitoring and evaluation) for evidence-based action.

74. Among the guiding principles of the NSP, it is mentioned that “*Gender issues shall be addressed in all areas of prevention, treatment, care and support programmes and services*”.⁶³ Note also that the NPAG points out the need to adopt a gender-based approach in the efforts to prevent and control HIV and AIDS. However, research to better understand the gender dynamics involved in the epidemic, as mentioned above in para 69, and capacity building of relevant stakeholders to effectively address gender issues will be required.
75. ***Protection against discrimination:*** As mentioned above in para 73, one of the priority areas of the NSP concerns the creation of an enabling environment for successful implementation of the national response to HIV and AIDS and STIs, which includes ensuring a supportive legal and policy environment. Moreover, the NSP recognises the important role of the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, the Royal Civil Service Commission and the private sector in ensuring non-discrimination against employees on the basis of real or perceived HIV status. The nation’s response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic is also guided by a Royal Decree issued by His Majesty the Fourth King on May 24, 2004, which stresses that “*It is also important that those who are found to be HIV/AIDS positive are treated with understanding and compassion. We must ensure that they do not face any discrimination in our society*”.

⁶³ Ibid.

Women in rural areas

76. Information on the situation of rural women with regard to education, employment and health has already been presented above in the sections dealing with those areas.
77. **Population statistics:** Based on the Population and Housing census 2005⁶⁴, 52.5 percent of the total resident population in Bhutan are males and 47.5 percent are females. 69 percent of the total population live in rural areas while 31 percent live in urban areas. The distribution of households between rural and urban areas is similar. About one in three households is headed by a woman (census data 2005: 28 percent; BLSS 2007: 31 percent). In the BLSS 2007, the head of the household was defined as “*the person who manages the income earned and expense incurred by the household and who is the most knowledgeable person concerning other members of the household*”. The proportion of female-headed households is much higher in rural areas (35 percent) than in urban areas (21 percent).⁶⁵ The BLSS 2007 also confirms that Bumthang, Lhuentse, Punakha and Trongsa are districts with a higher proportion of female-headed households. As far as single-person-households are concerned, the percentage of one-man households (3 percent) is slightly higher than the percentage of one-woman households (2.7 percent). However, among households with children less than 15 years of age, there are more one-woman households than one-man households (1.2 percent compared to 0.4 percent).⁶⁶ Table 20 also shows that there is a bigger share of single-person households among the non-poor than among the poor.
78. **Poverty data:** Based on the PAR 2007, the percentage of the poor persons in the country is now estimated at 23 percent, with a much higher percentage of poor people in rural areas (31 percent compared to less than 2 percent in urban areas). The PAR 2007 established the poverty line at Nu. 1,096.94 per person per month. Further, poverty is deeper and more severe in rural areas than in urban areas. Female-headed households are observed to be, on average, less poor than the male-headed households. This is particularly true in rural areas, but not so much in urban areas. The depth and severity of poverty is also observed to be higher among male-headed households. (see Table 21)
79. **Living conditions:** Although 91 percent of the population have sustainable access to an improved water source⁶⁷, disparities exist between rural (88 percent) and urban (99.5

⁶⁴ Office of the Census Commissioner, RGoB (2006), *Results of Population & Housing Census of Bhutan 2005*, Thimphu.

⁶⁵ National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ i.e. piped water, public tap, pump, protected wells, protected spring or rainwater.

percent) areas and between the poor and the non-poor in both areas. 96 percent of the population (99 percent in urban areas; 95 percent in rural areas) have access to improved sanitation⁶⁸. The disparity between poor and non-poor is more pronounced in urban areas. The proportion of rural population that use solid fuels (i.e. biomass and coal for cooking and heating) is almost three times that in urban areas (80 percent compared to 28 percent). Gender disparities are not apparent regarding access to both improved water source and improved sanitation, and use of solid fuels (see Table 22). In rural areas, only three out of five persons belong to households that have access to electricity (compared to 99 percent in urban areas).⁶⁹ Road infrastructure and bridges, electrification and water supply topped the list of priorities mentioned by the rural population for improving their living conditions.⁷⁰

80. The focus on poverty reduction and strategies for rural development in the Tenth Plan is expected to improve the quality of life in the rural areas. Based on the new poverty data, new targets have been set for the Tenth Plan (instead of some of the targets mentioned in para 448 of the 7th periodic report): to reduce the proportion of the population living below the poverty line to 15 percent; to reduce the proportion of the rural population living below the poverty line to 20 percent; to sustain access to safe drinking water - above 95 percent; access to safe sanitation - above 96 percent; rural population with access to electricity - 84 percent; proportion of rural population living within half a day's walk from nearest road head - 85 percent; proportion of population within three hours of a BHU or Outreach Clinic - above 90 percent.⁷¹

81. **Participation by rural women:** The CEDAW Committee in its Concluding Comments urged the State Party to ensure that rural women participate fully in the formulation and implementation of all sectoral policies and programmes. As indicated in the 7th periodic report (para 150), women are virtually absent in decision-making structures of local governance (i.e. block and district development committees). The block development committees are the highest decision-making body closest to where women live and where the major decisions affecting their well-being and development are made prior to

⁶⁸ i.e. facilities including sewers or septic tanks, flush-latrines, simple pits or ventilated improved pit latrines.

⁶⁹ National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. I: Main Document*, February 2008.

submissions to the district development committees. A mid-term evaluation of the Decentralisation Support Programme (DSP) 2003-2006 (UNDP, UNCDF and SNV) noted that *“Women’s ‘invisibility’ and ‘voicelessness’ starts from that critical layer (community) of local governance. The MTET [Mid-Term Evaluation Team] saw signs of women participation at village level meetings but besides from that women appear to have little or no say in what is being planned and decided”*.⁷² It is worth noting that women are relatively better represented at the level of ‘tshogpas’ (village representatives), which appears to be least wanted post (by men) but an important line of communication between the community and the block development committees. A gender assessment that was conducted as part of the mid-term evaluation of the DSP and the decentralisation outcome evaluation⁷³ found that in village level meetings conducted by ‘tshogpas’ and ‘mangmis’ (elected assistants to the block leader), 75 to 80 percent of the attendees were women. However, it was found that when the ‘gup’ (elected leader of the block) himself comes to conduct a village meeting, all men try their best to be there. According to the gender assessment, *“At this stage of devolution, we learnt that although women might be present in big numbers, they lack the exposure and confidence to really participate and hence their needs are rarely expressed nor heard and addressed / incorporated in the long shopping wish lists that Gups and tshogpas gather for planning purposes ie. five year plans or annually... Women who regularly attended village meetings said they went to escape the fine (of Nu.50) imposed on absentee households and basically listened to the ‘news and instructions from the government’ and nodded affirmatively to most things being discussed or asked of them... The men who are present and the gup / Tshogpa decide what’s best for us, and we usually agree with ‘him’ was the unanimous response from almost all women”*.⁷⁴ The challenges identified in the context of decentralisation are as follows: *“Here, a key requirement is to analyse and address women’s inability to break into the local governance power structure and reduce the increasing ‘invisibility’, ‘voiceless-ness’ of women and combating women’s indifferent attitude towards these institutions where women appear to feel that they don’t have a role to play. The challenge is to overcome these problems and to encourage increased numbers of women to be nominated for the next round of elections for gups, mangmis, chimis [people’s representative and member of the NA under the previous political system] as well as to help women gain confidence to campaign actively for support. Psychological barriers with regard to bias against women’s participation amongst the masses will have to be overcome through voter education and public campaigns*

⁷² Mid-Term Evaluation. *Bhutan Decentralisation Support Programme. Final Report*, January 2006.

⁷³ “The Gender Question in the context of decentralisation in Bhutan – An assessment” in: *Mid-Term Evaluation. Bhutan Decentralisation Support Programme. Final Report*, January 2006.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

to increase awareness. It will be equally important to support any women in-service to do a good job".⁷⁵

Note that the Draft Tenth Plan mentions that *"With the adoption of the Draft Constitution in 2008 and increased autonomy at the local government level, efforts in the Tenth Plan will be directed towards increasing women's participation in local governance through capacity building and raising awareness"*.⁷⁶

Marriage and family relations

82. **Early marriage and forced marriage:** The 1996 Amendment to the Marriage Act of Bhutan has raised the minimum age for marriage to 18 for both boys and girls. The Marriage Act prohibits marriages of minors (section Kha 1-11) and states that no marriage certificates shall be granted for such marriages (section Kha 1-14). Further, any person who performs child marriages is made liable under Kha 8-20 of the same Act. Women have the right to enter into marriage and to freely choose a spouse. Express consent of the parties involved to the marriage is required. As per section Kha 1-2, *"... a person has the right to marry any other person, irrespective of status, caste, wealth or appearance, provided the persons contracting the marriage thereof have expressly consented to their marriage"*.
83. Despite prohibitions regarding marriage of children less than 18 years of age, the 2005 census figures (as presented by the government in para 486 of its 7th periodic report) indicate that under-age marriages have continued to occur. Given the figures, it is not totally excluded that some underage girls may be forced into marriage union by parents or other relatives. However, we should be aware that marriage in the Bhutanese context does not necessarily mean a formal union for which a marriage certificate has been obtained; traditionally, a couple going and staying together is considered as a married couple. Although the 2005 census seems to have taken care of distinguishing between persons not legally or formally married but living together and those who are legally married, caution should be taken when analysing and interpreting the data. No regular and systematic system is in place to monitor the situation with regard to under-age and/or forced marriage.
84. **Polygamy:** The CEDAW Committee recommended action by the State Party to end the practice of polygamy, in accordance with the Committee's General Recommendation 21 on Equality in Marriage and Family Relations. Bhutan did not take any concrete step in

⁷⁵ UNDP (2006), *Decentralisation Outcome Evaluation Report - Bhutan*.

⁷⁶ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. I: Main Document*, February 2008.

this regard. However, as mentioned in the 7th periodic report (para 78), the practices of polygamy and polyandry are not widespread in Bhutan and are fast declining.

Violence against women

85. Data and information available on violence against women (VAW) have been presented in the 7th periodic report⁷⁷. The efforts made by the NCWC (including those efforts in collaboration with the police, judiciary and health sector) and RENEW (local NGO) to raise awareness on and deal with VAW, and offer protection to victims of VAW are commendable. Below are some issues that will require further attention from the government and other relevant stakeholders.
86. **Domestic violence:** Although the Penal Code of Bhutan, 2004 covers common assault and battery offences and a number of gender-based violence offences (such as different categories of rape, and sexual harassment), it does not include specific domestic violence offences (except marital rape, which is a petty misdemeanour). The CEDAW Committee in its Concluding Comments requested the State Party to enact legislation on domestic violence as soon as possible. There is an urgent need to follow up on this recommendation. In addition, the lack of systematic data collection on domestic violence remains an issue. Finally, a concern may need to be raised in relation to the promotion of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), particularly at this stage given the low literacy rate of women, especially in rural areas, and the limited awareness on legal rights and entitlements. It is hoped that with the promotion of ADR, the use of such processes like mediation will not be made permissible for family disputes in abusive contexts such as in situations where domestic violence is known to take place.
87. **Sexual harassment:** Information in this respect can be found above under the education and employment and work sections (para 38 and 44 of this report).
88. **Rape and sexual assault:** The Bhutan Penal Code of Bhutan, 2004 differentiates between rape offences on the basis of age of the victim, with the offence being considered less serious in adults compared to children aged between 12 to 18 years, and in children of this age category compared to children below 12 years of age. Moreover, the definition of rape is restrictive as it only refers to sexual intercourse and does not

⁷⁷ See RGoB (2007), *Seventh periodic report of Bhutan*. p.20, para 16 to 22, para 49, para 59, para 74, para 139 to 141, para 373 to 380, para 386 and 387, para 392, para 494, para 500, Annex 4A on the National Consultation on Women and Child Friendly Police Procedures, and, Annex 4B on the National Consultation on Women and Child Friendly Judicial Procedures.

explicitly include penetration of anus, vagina and mouth by any object. There is thus scope for revisiting the provisions covering sexual assault offences.

89. The Draft Tenth Plan document mentions that the “... *strategies to combat violence against women will include: strengthening the existing legal framework related to domestic violence and sexual harassment; promoting women and child-friendly police and court services; taking appropriate measures to prevent violence against women and care for victims; and raising awareness through community-based awareness programs, help-lines and mass-media campaigns*”.⁷⁸ In the document presenting the programme profiles for the Tenth Plan, the only section under which some of these strategies appear is the one dealing with ‘Strengthening the Advancement of Women and Children’, for which the NCWC is mentioned as the executing and implementing agency.⁷⁹ There is a need to recognise VAW as a cross-cutting issue that requires a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach, and at the same time as a major threat to public health.
90. Additional challenges in the area of VAW and required interventions that have been identified in the NPAG include: systematic collection and analysis of data on all forms of VAW disaggregated by sex and other relevant factors; continuous efforts in the establishment of women and child friendly procedures; enhance men’s and boys’ role in preventing VAW; take appropriate measures to prevent VAW and care for survivors of all forms of violence (including complaints and response mechanism within the police, women and child friendly health care facilities and services, legal aid, help lines, shelters, counselling services); and, transform traditional gender roles and stereotypes. It will also be essential to strengthen the capacity of duty bearers and rights holders (line ministries, police, judiciary, parliamentarians, local leaders, youth forums, women’s groups, civil society (NGOs/media/networks), and private sector).
91. Note that several of these interventions have already been/are being undertaken. The NCWC conducted two National Consultations on Women and Child Friendly Procedures with the police (2005) and the judiciary (2006), and a Workshop on Violence against Women with the police, judiciary and health sector (2006)⁸⁰. Another

⁷⁸ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. I: Main Document*, February 2008.

⁷⁹ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. II: Programme Profiles*, February 2008.

⁸⁰ This workshop was organised by the NCWC and RENEW with support from the UN Trust Fund to end VAW, UN Resident Coordinator, UNDP and UNFPA.

consultation with the police is planned to take place this year, during which police officials from all district and sub-district police stations will be trained on CRC, CEDAW and Women and Child Friendly Police Procedures, which is expected to contribute to the development of standard operating procedures for women and children in conflict and in contact with the law. A Women and Child Protection Unit was established at the police station in Thimphu in April 2007; the unit has a detention room, a recreational room and has been provided with equipment and a counsellor by the NCWC. Moreover, the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) has plans to establish Women and Child Friendly Desks in other major urban centres (Phuentsholing, Samdrup Jongkhar, Gelephu and Samtse). A Complaints and Response Mechanism was established on a pilot basis within the RBP in 2007, which will be officially launched this year and be strengthened with mobile police stations. RENEW opened an emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence and their children in 2007 in Thimphu as an interim measure until the establishment of a rehabilitation centre; RENEW also established a counselling unit that provides individual and family counselling services and a 24-hours service help line, and provides skills training to RENEW beneficiaries either directly or in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources. UNDP, UNICEF, UNIFEM through the UN Trust Fund to end VAW project with the NCWC, and, UNFPA have provided/provide support to these initiatives and will continue to provide support in the area of violence against women and children.⁸¹

Concluding Comments of the CEDAW Committee

92. Information regarding progress made and obstacles faced by the country in implementing the specific recommendations of the CEDAW Committee regarding the areas covered above has already been provided in this report where relevant. Therefore, the information provided below concerns only those specific recommendations of the CEDAW Committee that have not been addressed earlier in this report.
93. ***Primacy of international Conventions ratified by Bhutan over domestic law in case of conflict:*** Article 10, Section 25, of the Draft Constitution states that *“Except for existing International Conventions, Covenants, Treaties, Protocols and Agreements entered into by Bhutan, which shall continue in force subject to section 10 of Article 1, all International Conventions, Covenants, Treaties, Protocols and Agreements duly acceded to by the Government hereafter, shall be*

⁸¹ For example, UNICEF will also assist the NCWC and RENEW in developing innovative mechanisms for care, empowerment and rehabilitation of child and women victims of violence and abuse through media related approaches and psycho-social therapy, and RENEW in developing case management guidelines and providing greater counselling services to the victims of abuse and violence.

deemed to be the law of the Kingdom only upon ratification by Parliament unless it is inconsistent with this Constitution". As per Article 1, Section 10, of the Draft Constitution, "All laws in force in the territory of Bhutan at the time of adopting this Constitution shall continue until altered, repealed or amended by Parliament. However, the provisions of any law, whether made before or after the coming into force of this Constitution, which are inconsistent with this Constitution, shall be null and void". This would mean that the treaties entered into by Bhutan before the adoption of the Constitution are considered laws that are in force in the territory of Bhutan, except for those provisions that are inconsistent with the Constitution.

94. ***Awareness-raising and sensitization of judiciary and other law enforcement authorities about CEDAW:*** Awareness-raising and sensitization of the judiciary and other law enforcement authorities about CEDAW have taken place as part of the National Consultation on Women and Child Friendly Police Procedures in 2005, the National Consultation on Women and Child Friendly Judicial Procedures in 2006, the Workshop on Violence against Women in December 2006, and through study tours and participation to international and regional workshops and conferences abroad. Sensitizing the police and judiciary on women and child friendly procedures and coordinating with the police in developing comprehensive women and children protection mechanisms in all districts are part of the strategies mentioned in the Draft Tenth Plan to strengthen the advancement of women and children.⁸²
95. ***Wide dissemination of CEDAW and other international instruments:*** Small booklets with the entire text of the CEDAW in English, Dzongkha and Lhotsampa have been printed and are regularly distributed by the NCWC during events and meetings. Moreover, a summary of the combined initial to sixth periodic CEDAW reports of Bhutan containing background information on CEDAW, information on the country's progress in implementing the provisions of the Convention and on remaining areas for consideration and further action was published and widely distributed. Information on CEDAW, the combined initial to sixth periodic CEDAW reports of Bhutan, the Concluding Comments of the CEDAW Committee, and the Beijing Platform for Action has also been presented as part of the various awareness-raising and training programmes on gender conducted by the NCWC. Moreover, these documents (except for the Committee's Concluding Comments as such) and relevant SAARC Conventions can also be downloaded from the NCWC website. As per the Draft Tenth Plan, sensitization and

⁸² Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. II: Programme Profiles*, February 2008.

awareness-raising on gender equality, gender issues and the government's international commitments, including CEDAW and CRC, will continue.⁸³ More efforts could be done to widely disseminate other international instruments such as the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW, the General Recommendations of the CEDAW Committee, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Declaration on the Elimination of VAW, etc., as well as relevant regional instruments.

96. ***National Machinery for the Advancement of Women:*** The NCWC was established in 2004 initially attached to the MoH till a separate Secretariat was established. The Secretary of MoH was appointed as the Chairperson of the NCWC. Para 53 and 56 of the 7th periodic report describe the mandates of the Commission. The NCWC is guided in its work by CEDAW and CRC as well as the SAARC Conventions related to women and children issues that were ratified by Bhutan. In keeping with its mandates, the NCWC has been very active in creating a supportive environment for the protection of women's and children's rights. This is especially true since the establishment of its Secretariat outside the MoH in 2005. The 7th periodic report contains information regarding the numerous activities organised and conducted by the NCWC. The Commission's activities have resulted considerably in increasing gender awareness and in strengthening collaboration and networking with relevant gender stakeholders such as the national gender focal points and the Planning Commission - now Gross National Happiness Commission (especially when developing the NPAG) and NGOs. According to the Draft Tenth Plan, the NCWC will continue to coordinate with relevant sectors on gender mainstreaming.⁸⁴
97. Nevertheless, the need for a strong national women's machinery provided with adequate decision-making power (authority and status) and human and financial resources -as articulated in the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Comments- to be able to work effectively for the promotion of women's human rights at all levels is still valid. UNDP, UNICEF, and, UNIFEM through the Trust Fund to end VAW, currently provide support to the NCWC. Their experience with the Commission has shown that it is operating under tremendous human resource constraints (only few permanent government staffs) and with limited financial support from the government. Note that the resources allocations for the Tenth Plan by agency and sector indicate that the

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

NCWC will receive 0.05 percent of the total plan outlay.⁸⁵ Moreover, confusion with regard to the NCWC's mandate still exists among the government and other agencies. The status of the Commission is not very clear. Despite the establishment of its secretariat outside the MoH, the NCWC is still considered to be under the MoH for matters related to finance, staffing, vehicle use, etc. Currently, it seems the NCWC tends to be performing the roles and responsibilities of a women's ministry or department rather than those of an independent commission. Although discussion has taken place on 'de-linking' the Commission from the RGoB, it is yet to become fully autonomous and it is not clear whether it would then function as an agency taking care of the needs and concerns of women and children or as a watchdog to the government. The UN system in Bhutan would like to recommend the NCWC to take up the role of watchdog and the RGoB to seriously consider the need for a separate implementing department or agency to look after women's and children's issues.

98. **Gender mainstreaming:** The development of the NPAG -that was supported by UNDP- constitutes an important step to strengthen gender mainstreaming efforts in the country. The NPAG is a result of a series of consultations and brainstorming sessions with national gender focal points and key stakeholders. It covers seven critical areas for action: good governance; economic development with a focus on employment; education and training; health, including HIV and AIDS; ageing, mental health and disabilities; VAW; and, prejudices and stereotypes. As can be seen from the information provided earlier in this report, it identifies specific interventions -together with responsible agencies and partners for implementation- aimed at addressing many of the challenges existing/remaining in these seven areas of concern. The NPAG, which time frame coincides with the end of the Tenth Pan, is expected to serve as a reference from which government and autonomous agencies, NGOs and individuals can strategise for mainstreaming gender into policies, plans and programmes. Note that UNDP is having a two years project (2007-2009) with the NCWC aimed at supporting implementation of key interventions identified in the NPAG under three of the seven critical areas for action, namely good governance, VAW, and prejudices and stereotypes.
99. As per the Draft Tenth Plan, *"As such, there remains a need to strengthen and develop appropriate policies and strategies that take into consideration the different needs, roles and capabilities of women on the basis of the principles of gender mainstreaming. It is for this reason that under the Tenth Plan, each*

⁸⁵ Gross National Happiness Commission, RGoB (2008), *Draft Tenth Five Year Plan [2008-2013]. Vol. I: Main Document*, February 2008.

sector is required to effectively mainstream gender issues into their policies and programmes. Sectors are also required to maintain gender disaggregated data to help identify and monitor potential gender gaps. Mainstreaming gender meaningfully across all development issues within the Tenth Plan will be extremely important if the country is to fully realize the goal of a truly egalitarian and equitable society portrayed in Bhutan's Vision 2020.⁸⁶ There is thus growing evidence of the intention to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes.

100. As mentioned in the 7th periodic report, the NCWC has been conducting various awareness-raising and training activities on gender issues, gender analysis and gender mainstreaming, particularly for the national gender focal points but also for other relevant stakeholders. Nevertheless, capacity to effectively mainstream gender remains limited. There is a need for regular capacity development in gender analysis and mainstreaming, especially among policy-makers, planning and statistical officers, and national gender focal points. Moreover, it is important that the role and responsibilities of the national gender focal points be formally recognised as part of their job description and be taken into account during the job evaluation process. Given the on-going decentralisation process, capacity-building in gender analysis and gender mainstreaming will also be needed at local levels.

101. While the NPAG has been taken into account to some extent when drafting the Tenth Plan (especially in its section on 'women in development' in which critical issues in the seven areas have been highlighted), there is still plenty of scope to integrate the NPAG within the Tenth Plan and sectoral policies, plans and programmes (especially in terms of strategies and targets). It is important to ensure adequate budgetary allocations for the implementation of the NPAG and that interventions are implemented at the earliest.

102. **Compilation and analysis of sex-disaggregated data:** Although the availability of disaggregated data improved a lot during the recent years⁸⁷, the capacity to analyse such data is still weak, and reflection on and effective use of such data for policy-

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Note that this is partly due to the support from the UN agencies. For example: UNFPA has provided support to the RGoB to undertake the Population and Housing Census 2005, which provides sex-disaggregated data. Support for the conduct and analysis of the BLSS 2007 and PAR 2007, which provide sex-disaggregated data, was provided by the UN system. UNICEF is currently supporting the National Statistics Bureau in undertaking a socio-economic data analysis using the 2005 census with sex-disaggregated data (the report will be available very soon). Moreover, UNICEF is supporting implementation of a MDG- and national plan-based monitoring system (DevInfo/BhutanInfo) and the conduct of a child well-being study with disaggregated data wherever possible.

making and planning purposes are often missing. Here too, continuous efforts to build capacity at national and local levels in this area will be required.

103. ***Gender stereotypes:*** The 7th periodic report already includes some information on societal perceptions and existing stereotypes. As mentioned above (para 98), prejudices and stereotypes constitute one of the areas covered by the NPAG, which identifies specific interventions to challenge cultural prejudices and stereotyped views under this particular area and other areas as well such as education and good governance. One of these interventions is to conduct a study to analyse various socio-cultural beliefs and perceptions and their impact on gender roles and relations. As mentioned earlier (para 21), this study is expected to be conducted this year. Encouraging the media to portray a positive image of women is another intervention to be implemented under the NPAG.
104. ***Ratification of Optional Protocol to CEDAW:*** Bhutan has not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

Information regarding programmes and activities to advance gender equality currently being undertaken by UN agencies in Bhutan

105. Information regarding activities to advance gender equality that have been/are currently being undertaken by UN agencies in Bhutan has already been provided earlier in this report wherever relevant. Therefore, this section will focus on programmes and activities to advance gender equality that will be undertaken by the UN system in Bhutan within the next five years, based on the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and Common Country Programme Action Plan 2008-2012⁸⁸.
106. The UNDAF identified the following five areas of national priority to be supported by the UN system in Bhutan: (1) To halve poverty by 2013; (2) To improve the accessibility, quality and sustainability of the health care delivery system; (3) To improve the quality, relevance and coverage of education; (4) To foster good governance as a core value for development; and, (5) To enhance environmental sustainability and disaster management. Gender was considered to be one of the cross-cutting issues for UN assistance under the UNDAF and has therefore been mainstreamed to the extent

⁸⁸ RGoB and UN in Bhutan (2007), *United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the Kingdom of Bhutan 2008-2012*, UN House, Thimphu, June 2007. RGoB and UN in Bhutan (2007), *Common Country Programme Action Plan (cCPAP) 2008-2012. Common Country Programme Action Plan Between The Royal Government of Bhutan and the United Nations System in Bhutan*, UN House, Thimphu, December 2007.

possible within the five areas of planned support. An overview of the key outcomes and strategies that are relevant to/specifically aimed at advancing gender equality under the different programme components is given below.

107. ***UNDAF Outcome 1: By 2012, opportunities for generation of income and employment increased in targeted poor areas (MDGs 1 and 8)***

To improve rural livelihoods, the UN will provide support to improve access to social and economic services as well as access to information and markets. UNDP will support the establishment of community information centres in selected communities and ensure that the needs of women and youth be given particular consideration in the efforts to improve access to information and extension services and to create employment opportunities. The UN will work closely with the government, civil society organisations (CSOs) and the private sector to help improve the overall policy environment to promote private sector development. UNDP, together with other UN agencies such as UNESCO, will support the government in formulating a private sector development framework that is comprehensive, pro-poor, gender sensitive and youth-oriented, and culture- and heritage-based, particularly focused on the development of micro, small and medium rural enterprises. Income generation and employment opportunities will be supported through promotion of community-based micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), with particular emphasis on women and youth. Pilot projects in selected rural areas will be used to develop innovative means to promote MSMEs for women and youth employment. UNDP, IFAD, and UNV will continue to provide a comprehensive package of MSME development services, including access to microfinance, information, market linkages and business development services. The ExCom agencies (i.e. UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, and WFP), UNIFEM and UNESCAP will strengthen support toward capacity development of the National Statistics Bureau and other relevant agencies for disaggregated data collection, analysis and use, ensuring that government and UN development efforts are evidence-based and targeted.

108. ***UNDAF Outcome 2: By 2012, increased access and utilization of quality health services, with emphasis on reproductive health, maternal and child health and nutrition, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other non-communicable diseases (MDGs 4, 5, and 6)***

The UN system will support capacity building of the RGoB to formulate and implement evidence based policies and strategies to create an enabling environment for reproductive health, maternal and child health, STIs, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria

programmes. UNFPA will assist the MoH and other partners in revising reproductive health policies and strategies and implementing interventions on improving safe motherhood and reproductive health services. UNAIDS will facilitate the operationalization of the NSP on HIV/AIDS. UNICEF and UNFPA will strengthen health information system to provide data requirements for result oriented programme and policy formulation and also support capacity development to conduct joint Demographic Health Survey and Multi Indicators Cluster Survey. UNICEF and UNFPA will strengthen quality services and expand EmOC and essential newborn care through training of health personnel and upgrading of existing health centres, supplying of medical equipment, improvement in infrastructure. UNFPA will collaborate with the MoH in achieving its goals of universal access to reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention services through provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health package including maternal health, family planning and advocacy. UNFPA will also work towards addressing gender equity by collaborating with relevant institutions through appropriate interventions. UNICEF and UNFPA will provide technical assistance to the MoE to develop life skills-based education addressing HIV prevention, adolescent reproductive health, and drug and substance abuse among young people. UNICEF will enable health facilities to provide prevention of mother- to-child transmission and paediatric ART services at national and sub-national level. UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO will support the empowerment of village health workers, religious bodies and community leaders, to increase demand for use of health and nutrition services, particularly within the maternal and newborn care package. UNICEF and UNFPA will continue to strengthen advocacy on behavioural change communication with policy makers, village health workers and religious and community institutions, in partnership with front-line service providers.

109. ***UNDAF Outcome 3: By 2012, access to quality education for all, with gender equality and special focus on the hard-to-reach population, improved (MDGs 2 and 3)***

The child friendly school concept will be implemented with assistance from UNICEF to strengthen the quality of education. UNICEF and WFP will support the government in enhancing school enrolment, particularly for girls, through improved facilities, school feeding and targeted advocacy: WFP will support the government in its policy of improving access to education by providing nutritious meals for primary and secondary school students, particularly those from rural families who are vulnerable to food

insecurity; UNICEF will assist the government in promoting the importance of education in rural/remote communities; in areas with low primary net enrolment, communications strategies will be developed and implemented to increase enrolment, while support also will focus on increasing retention and completion rates; support will also be provided to innovative strategies to increase the enrolment in underserved areas; WFP will place special emphasis on increasing girls' enrolment, especially at the secondary level, by increasing the availability of safe boarding facilities equipped with matron quarters and trained matrons, while UNICEF will provide training to matrons on health, hygiene and protection issues; UNICEF and WFP will also assist the MoE in improving sanitation and hygiene practices at selected schools through the upgrading of water and sanitation facilities and advocacy on good hygiene practices. UNICEF, UNFPA and UNESCO will strengthen the capacity of government counterparts to revise the curriculum to incorporate values education/life skills at basic education level. UNICEF will support provision of life skills education to young people enrolled in NFE centres as well as through partnership with CSOs.

110. ***UNDAF Outcome 4: By 2012, institutional capacity and people's participation strengthened to ensure good governance (MDGs 1, 3, and 8)***

UNDP, UNESCO and UNV will promote e-governance at both national and local levels to narrow the urban-rural and female-male digital divide. The UN system will help strengthen national capacity and systems to formulate, review and implement national legislation in line with ratified international conventions: the UN, including UNDP, UNICEF and UNIFEM, will develop national capacity in international treaty reporting obligations, including CRC and CEDAW reporting; capacity also will be developed among relevant institutions to share information with partners and the public on ratified international conventions; the government will be supported to formulate a coordinated and comprehensive national framework, structures and service systems to protect women and children from abuse and violence, and to develop national capacity in this regard; the capacity of the judiciary and law enforcement and other relevant agencies will be developed to uphold the rule of law, implement juvenile justice and practice women- and child-friendly procedures; national capacity also will be developed to draft, review and implement national policies and legislation. UNDP will support on-going capacity development of the new democratic governance system, including that of the NC, the Parliament, the Prime Minister's office, the ECB and the judiciary, to ensure gender-inclusive democratic governance and rule of law. The UN will support the government in

integrating the NPAG into the formulation of the Tenth Five-Year Plan. In partnership with the NCWC and relevant agencies, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNV will provide support to local governments and CSOs in developing the capacity and empowering women in districts and communities to effectively participate in making decisions on development activities.

Annex 1: Tables and figures

Public and political life

Table 1: Number and percentage of women members of Parliament, 2008

	MPs			Percentage of women MPs
	Number of women	Number of men	Total	
National Council				
- Elected members	4	16	20	20%
- Appointed members	2	3	5	40%
National Assembly	4	43	47	8.5%
Parliament	10	62	72	13.9%

Education

Table 2: Net Enrolment Rates by level of education, sex and area, 2007

Level of Education	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes
Primary	92.4	89.6	91.0	79.7	78.2	79.0	83.0	81.2	82.1
Lower Secondary	43.6	45.1	44.4	15.9	15.1	15.5	22.5	23.4	23.0
Middle Secondary	37.6	38.7	38.2	12.2	12.3	12.2	18.0	20.0	19.1
Higher Secondary	29.6	23.0	25.6	5.1	4.7	4.9	10.7	10.3	10.5
Bhutan	68.7	62.0	65.1	47.7	46.2	46.9	52.9	50.6	51.7

Note: Net enrolment rate is the proportion of children in the specified level of education by the total number of children between the ages specified for particular level of education.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Table 3: Indicative Net Primary Enrolment and Gender Parity Index per district, 2007

	NER			
	Boys	Girls	Both Sex	GPI
Bhutan	83.9%	83.5%	83.7%	99.5%

	NER			
	Boys	Girls	Both Sex	GPI
Bumthang	95.3%	98.0%	96.7%	102.8%
Chukha	78.7%	79.9%	79.3%	101.5%
Dagana	86.2%	88.0%	87.1%	102.1%
Gasa	71.2%	50.6%	60.8%	71.1%
Haa	88.0%	87.8%	87.9%	99.7%
Lhuentse	83.3%	81.6%	82.5%	98.0%
Mongar	83.8%	83.0%	83.4%	99.0%
Paro	87.7%	86.6%	87.1%	98.8%
Pemagatshel	94.2%	94.8%	94.5%	100.6%
Punakha	84.7%	94.8%	89.6%	111.9%
Samdrupjongkhar	84.8%	77.9%	81.3%	91.8%
Samtse	71.6%	71.9%	71.7%	100.4%
Sarpang	72.6%	73.6%	73.1%	101.3%
Thimphu	91.2%	92.8%	92.0%	101.7%
Trashigang	87.0%	80.5%	83.8%	92.5%
Trashiyangtse	91.4%	88.7%	90.1%	97.0%
Trongsa	92.8%	96.4%	94.6%	103.8%
Tsirang	72.5%	71.8%	72.2%	99.0%
Wangdue	87.1%	87.2%	87.2%	100.1%
Zhemgang	90.9%	90.6%	90.7%	99.7%

Source: Ministry of Education, RGoB (2007), *General Statistics, 2007*.

Table 4: Distribution of children between 6 to 16 years of age not attending school by reason, area and sex (percent), 2007

Reasons for not attending	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Not interested	4.3	4.6	4.5	11.3	8.2	9.5	10.7	7.6	8.9

Reasons for not attending	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Cannot afford	4.3	22.9	17.6	13.1	16.8	15.2	12.3	17.8	15.5
Needs to work	13.1	14.8	14.3	13.7	14.3	14.1	13.7	14.4	14.1
Did not qualify	22.9	6.2	11.0	8.8	7.4	8.0	10.1	7.2	8.4
School is too far	1.4	2.3	2.0	8.5	8.8	8.7	7.8	7.8	7.8
Illness	5.8	5.0	5.2	3.1	4.1	3.7	3.4	4.2	3.9
Poor teaching	-	-	-	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Too young/old	15.9	9.8	11.5	20.5	17.9	19.0	20.1	16.6	18.0
Problems in home	11.2	19.2	16.9	6.3	9.6	8.2	6.7	11.1	9.3
Pregnancy	0.0	0.6	0.4	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.7
Caring sick relative	-	-	-	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2
Others	21.1	14.7	16.5	13.5	11.9	12.6	14.2	12.3	13.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: “-” indicates a sample estimate less than 100 households.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Table 5: Reasons for not attending school by poverty status and area (percent), 2007

Reason for Not Attending School	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Poor	Non-poor	Total	Poor	Non-poor	Total	Poor	Non-poor	Total
Not interested	-	4.7	4.5	9.2	9.8	9.5	9.1	8.7	8.9
Cannot afford	-	18.2	17.6	17.6	12.9	15.3	17.5	14.1	15.6
Needs to work	12.3	14.4	14.3	12.5	15.7	14.1	12.5	15.4	14.1
Did not qualify	36.9	10.1	11.0	6.4	9.7	8.0	6.7	9.8	8.4
School is too far	-	2.1	2.0	10.2	7.1	8.7	10.1	6.0	7.8
Illness	-	5.4	5.2	2.7	4.7	3.7	2.6	4.9	3.9
Poor teaching	-	-	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Too young/old	13.4	11.5	11.5	19.4	18.5	19.0	19.4	17.0	18.0
Problems in home	37.4	16.2	16.9	9.2	7.2	8.2	9.5	9.2	9.3
Caring sick relative	-	0.4	0.4	0.4	1.1	0.7	0.4	0.9	0.7
Pregnancy	-	-	-	-	0.4	0.2	-	0.3	0.2

Reason for Not Attending School	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Poor	Non-poor	Total	Poor	Non-poor	Total	Poor	Non-poor	Total
Other	-	17.1	16.5	12.4	12.8	12.6	12.3	13.8	13.1

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Poverty Analysis Report 2007*.

Table 6: Average per capita education expenses (Nu.) by households with currently school going children by area and sex, 2007

Item	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes
Token fee/School development fund	1,400	1,200	1,300	300	300	300	600	600	600
Boarding fees	200	200	200	100	100	100	200	100	100
Books, supplies	500	600	500	200	200	200	300	300	300
Private tutoring	100	100	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
Public transport from/to school	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Other educ. exp (uniform, etc.)	1,200	1,100	1,200	1,200	1,100	1,200	1,200	1,100	1,200
Total	3,500	3,300	3,400	2,000	1,800	1,900	2,400	2,300	2,400

Note: Figures rounded off to nearest hundreds; totals may not add up due to rounding.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Table 7: Literacy rate of the population 6 years and above by area, sex and age, 2007

Age Group	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes
6 - 9	77.1	76.8	77.0	57.5	54.0	55.8	62.7	59.9	61.3
10 - 14	97.7	89.6	93.4	88.1	83.0	85.5	90.5	84.8	87.6
15 - 19	96.5	86.5	90.5	84.6	74.8	79.6	87.3	78.2	82.5
20 - 24	86.5	76.2	80.5	73.6	55.0	63.8	77.4	62.2	69.1
25 - 29	87.2	63.4	74.8	64.3	38.3	50.2	73.0	47.4	59.3
30 - 34	81.9	50.3	66.4	56.9	23.7	38.6	66.0	32.0	47.9
35 - 39	80.4	40.7	62.4	49.0	15.1	31.1	60.4	22.7	41.4
40 - 44	77.6	39.7	60.3	42.7	9.9	24.9	52.6	16.5	33.8

45 – 49	74.9	30.5	56.4	42.6	5.8	22.9	50.5	10.0	29.8
50 – 54	78.2	19.8	54.1	39.4	5.1	22.0	47.3	7.3	27.7
55 +	57.3	9.5	34.6	27.9	2.6	15.8	31.0	3.3	17.8
All Ages	84.0	64.9	74.2	59.3	39.2	49.0	65.7	45.9	55.5
(Standard Errors)	(0.8)	(0.8)	(0.7)	(0.6)	(0.6)	(0.6)	(0.6)	(0.6)	(0.5)

Note: Figures rounded off to nearest hundreds; totals may not add up due to rounding.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Table 8: Literacy Rate (and Standard Errors) by district and sex, 2007

Dzongkhag	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Dzongkhag	Male	Female	Both Sexes
Bumthang	76.9 (2.3)	50.5 (2.5)	63.2 (2.2)	Samdrupjongkhar	65.4 (2.6)	44.2 (2.3)	54.8 (2.3)
Chhukha	67.3 (1.9)	48.1 (1.8)	57.6 (1.7)	Samtse	61.1 (2.4)	37.9 (1.9)	49.6 (2.0)
Dagana	64.9 (2.0)	43.2 (2.8)	53.6 (2.1)	Sarpang	72.4 (1.8)	47.3 (2.1)	59.5 (1.7)
Gasa	51.3 (4.4)	29.3 (4.8)	40.3 (4.3)	Thimphu	81.3 (1.5)	63.1 (1.4)	72.0 (1.2)
Haa	74.6 (2.5)	55.3 (3.1)	65.1 (2.5)	Trashigang	55.2 (1.6)	39.8 (1.7)	47.3 (1.4)
Lhuntse	60.6 (3.0)	41.8 (2.5)	50.4 (2.4)	Trashiyangtse	55.5 (1.7)	38.7 (2.2)	47.3 (1.5)
Monggar	56.5 (1.8)	37.7 (1.8)	46.4 (1.5)	Trongsa	70.4 (1.8)	56.2 (2.2)	63.0 (1.8)
Paro	60.6 (2.3)	46.1 (2.2)	52.7 (2.0)	Tsirang	65.6 (2.1)	43.3 (2.3)	54.0 (2.0)
Pemagatshel	58.6 (2.5)	37.1 (1.9)	47.6 (1.8)	Wangdue	63.1 (2.1)	40.1 (2.4)	51.3 (2.0)
Punakha	62.0 (2.7)	44.2 (3.0)	52.9 (2.6)	Zhemgang	60.9 (2.0)	42.2 (1.8)	51.2 (1.6)

<i>Dzongkhag</i>	Male	Female	Both Sexes	<i>Dzongkhag</i>	Male	Female	Both Sexes
				<i>Bhutan</i>	65.7 <i>(0.6)</i>	45.9 <i>(0.6)</i>	55.5 <i>(0.5)</i>

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Employment and work

Table 9: Labour force participation and unemployment rates among 15 years of age and above by sex for 2004 and 2006

	2004	2006
Labour Force Participation rate (percent)		
Female	42.7	53.9
Male	67.5	69.8
Unemployment rate (percent)		
Female	3.3	3.8
Male	2.1	2.6

Source: Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, RGoB (2006), *National Labour Force Survey 2006*.

Table 10: Labour force participation and unemployment rates (percent) for population 15 years and over by sex and area, 2007

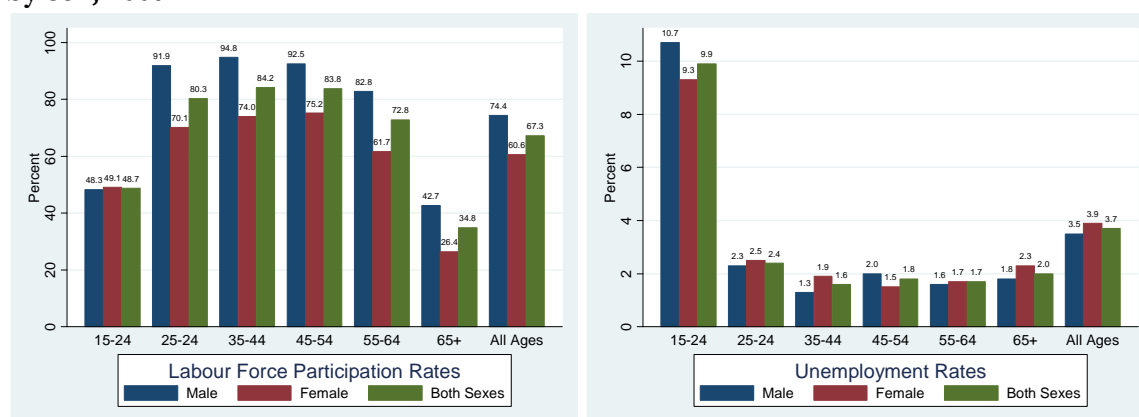
Area/Sex	Labour Force Participation Rate	Unemployment Rate
Urban	58.6 (0.77)	6.8 (0.44)
Male	76.8 (0.87)	5.3 (0.45)
Female	41.5 (1.28)	9.5 (0.84)
Rural	70.4 (0.44)	2.8 (0.18)
Male	73.6 (0.50)	2.9 (0.22)
Female	67.3 (0.63)	2.7 (0.22)

Area/Sex	Labour Force Participation Rate	Unemployment Rate
Bhutan	67.3 (0.40)	3.7 (0.18)
Male	74.4 (0.43)	3.5 (0.20)
Female	60.6 (0.63)	3.9 (0.25)

Note: Figures in parentheses are the standard errors of the estimates.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Figure 1: Labour force participation and unemployment rates among varying age groups by sex, 2007



Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Table 11: Distribution of employed persons by major sector, area and sex (percent), 2007

Area/Sex	Main Sector of Employment					Total Number of Employed Persons
	Agriculture	Industry	Services	Others	Total	
Urban	6.9	42.0	48.2	2.9	100.0	60,400
Male	2.3	24.0	37.5	1.0	100.0	39,000
Female	13.2	51.1	30.2	5.5	100.0	21,400
Rural	83.5	6.8	7.4	2.2	100.0	213,600
Male	76.9	8.3	11.9	2.8	100.0	107,700
Female	90.3	5.3	2.9	1.6	100.0	106,000

Area/Sex	Main Sector of Employment					Total Number of Employed Persons
	Agriculture	Industry	Services	Others	Total	
Bhutan	66.6	14.6	16.4	2.4	100.0	274,100
Male	57.4	16.0	24.2	2.5	100.0	146,700
Female	77.3	13.0	7.4	2.3	100.0	127,300

Note: Figures rounded off to nearest hundreds; totals may not add up due to rounding.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Table 12: Distribution of employed persons by status in main occupation by area and sex, 2007

Status	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Regular Paid Employee	29,300	8,600	37,900	14,500	3,500	18,000	43,800	12,100	55,900
Casual Paid Employee	1,800	900	2,700	6,900	1,800	8,800	8,700	2,800	11,500
Unpaid Family worker	1,500	4,200	5,700	52,300	76,600	128,900	53,800	80,800	134,500
Own account worker	6,300	7,500	13,800	33,400	23,500	56,900	39,700	31,000	70,700
Employer	100	100	200	200	100	300	300	200	500
Other and Unspecified	100	100	100	300	400	800	400	500	900
All	39,000	21,400	60,400	107,700	106,000	213,600	146,700	127,300	274,100
Sample size	3,000	1,700	4,700	8,400	8,400	16,800	11,500	10,000	21,500

Note: Figures rounded off to nearest hundreds; totals may not add up due to rounding.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Women and health with special attention to sexual and reproductive health

Table 13: Access and distance to health facilities by area and poverty status, 2007

Access	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Poor	Non-Poor	Total	Poor	Non-Poor	Total	Poor	Non-Poor	Total
Proportion of HHs with access to Hospital or BHU	96.7	99.3	99.3	99.2	99.1	99.1	99.2	99.2	99.2
Average time to reach nearest Hospital/BHU	21	19	19	111	76	84	109	56	65

Access	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Poor	Non-Poor	Total	Poor	Non-Poor	Total	Poor	Non-Poor	Total
(Minutes)									

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Poverty Analysis Report 2007*.

Table 14: Distribution of persons who did not consult any health care service provider according to reason by sex and area (percent), 2007

Area/sex	Not necessary	No time	No money	No transport/ Too far	No trust	Others	Sample size
Urban	75.0	17.0	2.0	3.5	1.3	33.0	200
Male	82.0	13.6	1.1	2.5	2.9	24.4	100
Female	69.0	19.9	2.8	4.4	-	40.2	100
Rural	58.1	31.8	8.1	30.7	4.3	24.3	800
Male	59.8	33.8	6.8	28.0	6.7	23.0	400
Female	56.9	30.3	9.0	32.6	2.6	25.2	500
Bhutan	61.2	29.1	7.0	25.7	3.7	25.9	1,000
Male	64.2	29.8	5.7	23.0	5.9	23.3	400
Female	59.0	28.5	7.9	27.7	2.1	27.8	600

Note: Figures rounded off to nearest hundreds; totals may not add up due to rounding.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Table 15: Distribution of women of reproductive age who gave birth during the 12 months prior to the survey by age group, area and poverty status, 2007

Age Group	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Poor	Non-Poor	Total	Poor	Non-Poor	Total	Poor	Non-Poor	Total
15-19	-	6.9	6.8	14.7	11.9	13.0	14.5	10.1	11.3
20-29	82.4	68.8	69.1	54.1	57.0	55.9	54.7	61.4	59.5

Age Group	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Poor	Non-Poor	Total	Poor	Non-Poor	Total	Poor	Non-Poor	Total
30-39	17.6	21.3	21.2	22.3	25.4	24.2	22.2	23.9	23.4
40-49	-	3.0	2.9	8.8	5.7	6.9	8.7	4.7	5.8
Total number of women	3,900	100	4,000	6,700	4,100	10,900	10,600	4,200	14,800

Note: Figures rounded off to nearest hundreds; totals may not add up due to rounding.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Poverty Analysis Report 2007*.

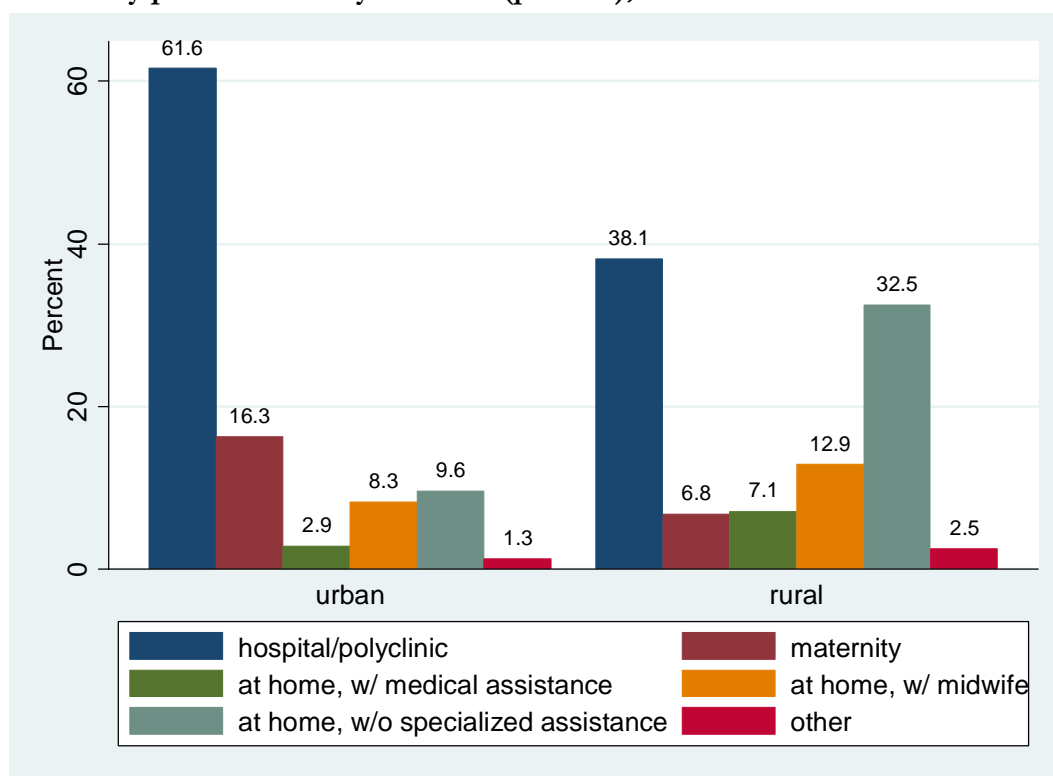
Table 16: Percentage of women who gave birth in the past 12 months that received pre-natal care by age group and area, 2007

Age group	Urban	Rural	Bhutan	Sample size
15-19	94.8	89.0	89.9	100
20-29	96.2	86.1	89.3	700
30-39	87.6	86.0	86.4	300
40-49	67.3	78.8	77.2	100
All ages	93.4	86.0	88.0	1,200

Note: Figures rounded off to nearest hundreds; totals may not add up due to rounding.

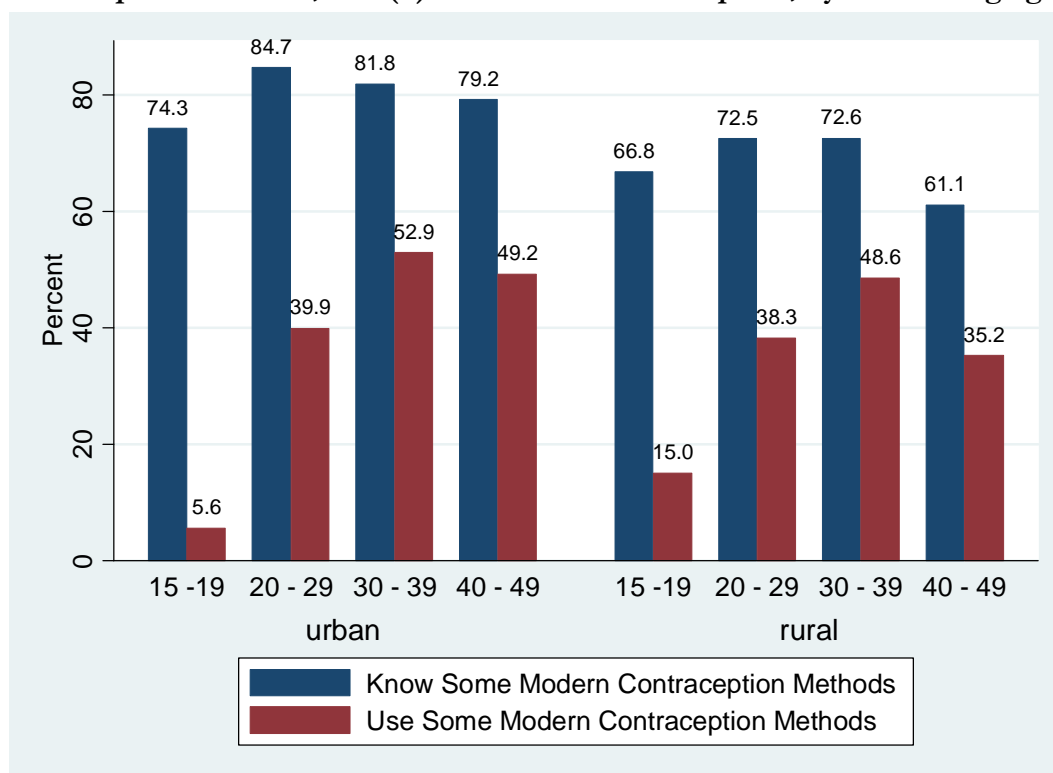
Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Figure 2: Distribution of women of reproductive age who gave birth in the past 12 months by place of delivery and area (percent), 2007



Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Figure 3: Percentage of women of reproductive age who (a) know some modern contraception methods, and (b) use modern contraception, by area and age group, 2007



Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Table 17: Proportion of women of reproductive age who know some modern contraception methods and proportion of women who use modern contraception, by district, 2007

District	Knowledge rate	Utilisation rate	District	Knowledge rate	Utilisation rate
Bumthang	73.2	22.3	Samdrupjongkhar	45.3	23.3
Chhukha	60.3	24.7	Samtse	61.7	36.9
Dagana	86.5	77.1	Sarpang	85.5	47.4
Gasa	74.3	29.2	Thimphu	88.0	36.5
Haa	72.7	37.3	Trashigang	50.3	27.3
Lhuntse	68.3	31.4	Trashiyangtse	79.4	19.6
Monggar	78.1	40.8	Trongsa	86.9	38.0
Paro	89.3	42.6	Tsirang	76.7	35.8
Pemagatshel	56.8	32.3	Wangdue	64.6	31.0
Punakha	78.0	43.7	Zhemgang	87.5	39.8
Bhutan	72.4	35.4			

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

Table 18: Distribution of women of reproductive age not using modern contraception by reason, area and age (percent), 2007

Area/Reason for not using contraceptives		Age group				
		15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	All ages
Urban	Not concerned	84.3	82.1	78.7	85.5	82.6
	Not available	0.2	0.2	-	-	0.1
	Religious/moral objection	-	0.1	0.7	-	0.2
	Husband/family objection	1.0	1.9	1.1	-	1.3
	Side effects	0.2	3.4	10.3	2.2	3.3
	Does not want to respond	14.4	12.4	9.2	12.3	12.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Area/Reason for not using contraceptives		Age group				
		15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	All ages
Rural	Not concerned	85.5	84.5	79.3	80.9	83.3
	Not available	0.3	0.2	1.1	0.8	0.5
	Religious/moral objection	-	0.6	1.2	1.4	0.6
	Husband/family objection	3.0	3.3	4.4	4.6	3.6
	Side effects	-	2.9	6.9	4.6	2.9
	Does not want to respond	11.2	8.5	7.0	7.7	9.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Bhutan	Not concerned	85.1	83.5	79.1	81.9	83.1
	Not available	0.3	0.2	0.7	0.6	0.4
	Religious/moral objection	-	0.4	1.0	1.1	0.5
	Husband/family objection	2.3	2.7	3.3	3.6	2.8
	Side effects	0.1	3.1	8.1	4.1	3.1
	Does not want to respond	12.3	10.1	7.8	8.7	10.3
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: “-” indicates a sample estimate less than 100 persons.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

HIV and AIDS

Table 19: Number of HIV reported cases by age group and sex, February 2008

Age groups	Number of males	Number of females	Total
< 5 years	2	9	11
5-14 years	1	1	2
15-19 years	0	6	6
20-24 years	5	19	24
25-29 years	25	14	39

Age groups	Number of males	Number of females	Total
30-39 years	30	15	45
40-49 years	10	7	17
50+	0	0	0
Total	73	71	144

Source: National STI and HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Programme, MoH, February 2008.

Women in rural areas

Table 20: Composition of poor and non-poor HHs by presence/absence of children (under 15 years) and by number of adults in HH, 2007

Adults in Household	Poor		Non-Poor		Total	
	With Children	Without Children	With Children	Without Children	With Children	Without Children
At least one adult of each sex	86.8	9.3	66.5	21.5	70.0	19.4
One man	0.1	0.0	0.5	3.1	0.4	2.6
More than one man	0.2	0.9	0.2	1.5	0.2	1.4
One woman	0.7	0.2	1.3	1.8	1.2	1.5
More than one woman	1.6	0.2	2.0	1.6	1.9	1.3
Total	89.4	10.6	70.5	29.5	73.7	26.3

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Poverty Analysis Report 2007*.

Table 21: Poverty incidence, poverty gap and poverty squared gap by area and sex of HH heads (percent of HH heads), 2007

Area	Sex of Head	Poverty Incidence		Poverty Gap		Poverty Squared Gap		Share of Household Heads
		Index	Contribution to Total	Index	Contribution to Total	Index	Contribution to Total	
Urban	Male	1.1 (0.2)	83.9	0.2 (0.06)	76.6	0.1 (0.2)	75.3	78.5
	Female	0.8 (0.3)	16.1	0.2 (0.1)	23.4	0.1 (0.3)	24.7	21.5
	Both Sexes	1.1 (0.2)	100.0	0.2 (0.1)	100.0	0.1 (0.02)	100.0	100.0
Rural	Male	26.6 (1.0)	73.0	6.7 (0.3)	74.5	2.4 (0.1)	75.4	65.4

Area	Sex of Head	Poverty Incidence		Poverty Gap		Poverty Squared Gap		Share of Household Heads
		Index	Contribution to Total	Index	Contribution to Total	Index	Contribution to Total	
	Female	18.5 (1.0)	27.0	4.3 (0.3)	25.5	1.5 (0.1)	24.6	34.6
	Both Sexes	23.8 (0.8)	100.0	5.9 (0.1)	100.0	2.1 (0.1)	100.0	100.0
Bhutan	Male	17.9 (0.7)	73.2	4.5 (0.2)	74.6	1.6 (0.1)	75.4	69.3
	Female	14.8 (0.8)	26.8	3.5 (0.2)	25.4	1.2 (0.1)	24.6	30.7
	Both Sexes	16.9 (0.6)	100.0	4.2 (0.2)	100.0	3.3 (0.1)	100.0	100.0

Note: Figures in parentheses are the standard errors of the estimates.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Poverty Analysis Report 2007*.

Table 22: Proportion of population with access to improved water source, improved sanitation and using solid fuels by area and sex (percent), 2007

Indicator	Urban			Rural			Bhutan		
	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes
Proportion of population with sustainable access to an improved water source	99.6 (0.1)	99.4 (0.2)	99.5 (0.1)	87.6 (0.8)	87.9 (0.7)	87.8 (0.6)	90.8 (0.5)	91.0 (0.5)	90.9 (0.5)
Proportion of population with access to improved sanitation	98.8 (0.2)	98.9 (0.2)	98.9 (0.1)	95.4 (0.4)	95.5 (0.5)	95.4 (0.3)	96.3 (0.2)	96.4 (0.2)	96.4 (0.2)
Proportion of population using solid fuels	27.7 (0.9)	28.6 (0.1)	28.2 (0.9)	80.0 (1.2)	79.5 (1.1)	79.7 (1.0)	66.2 (0.8)	66.1 (0.8)	66.1 (0.8)

Note: Figures in parentheses are the standard errors of the estimates.

Source: National Statistics Bureau, RGoB (2007), *Bhutan Living Standard Survey 2007 Report*.

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