**GENDER EQUALITY POLICY, ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN**

1. ***Policy name***
2. ***Overview of the issue***
   1. Context
   2. Rationale
3. ***Current policy and legislations*** 
   1. Alignment with national policies and frameworks
   2. Alignment with international policies and standards
4. ***Policy statement and purpose*** 
   1. *Policy statement*
   2. *Purpose and objective*
5. ***Recommended actions and approaches in priority areas***
   1. Gender equality in the political and public domain
      1. Women’s participation in political decision making and public life
   2. Gender equality in the social domain
      1. Addressing gender-based violence
      2. Addressing other gendered vulnerabilities
   3. Gender equality in the economic domain
      1. Education
      2. Recognizing the value of women’s unpaid work
6. ***Implementation procedure and operational strategies*** 
   1. National Plan of Action on Gender
   2. National Key Result Areas and Agency Key Result Areas
   3. Protocol for Policy Formulation
   4. Institutional structures
      1. National Commission for Women and Children
      2. Gender Focal Points
      3. Gender Experts Group
   5. Gender responsive planning and budgeting
   6. Legislation
   7. Partnerships
      1. Multi-stakeholder partnerships
      2. Community engagement
   8. Communications
7. ***Monitoring, accountability and evaluation*** 
   1. Gender Equality Monitoring System
   2. CEDAW Reporting
   3. National Gender Equality Champions Group
   4. Gender Scorecard System
   5. Review of the Gender Equality Policy
8. ***Policy name:* GENDER EQUALITY POLICY *OF BHUTAN***
9. ***Overview of the issue***
   1. **Context**

Since its successful transition to a constitutional monarchy, Bhutan has adopted multiple legal and policy frameworks to abide by its international obligations of providing women and men with the right to full and equal participation in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life at all levels. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008 provides an overarching framework and foundation within which gender equality is enshrined. However, despite guarantees of formal equality, structural and cultural norms continue to pose barriers to the broader realization of gender equality in Bhutan. Bhutan ranks 121 out of 144 countries[[1]](#footnote-1) in the Global Gender Gap Report 2016, which uses indicators of political participation, health, education and economic empowerment to assess the extent of gender parity.

In terms of women’s political participation, the Constitution provides the right to vote and to participate in any lawful profession as a fundamental right of every Bhutanese citizen. The female voter composition in the general elections has been quite high, but the election results have been less favourable for women. In the recent 2016 elections, out of the **1,439** candidates elected as local government leaders, only **164 were** women.

The unemployment rate in Bhutan is on a declining trend which stands at 2.5% in 2015, with 3.1% female unemployed against 1.8% male. The labour force participation rate was 71.2% male, and 55.9% female in 2015 (increasing slightly from 54.8% in 2014, but largely on a downward trend over the last few years). Women have much lower participation in regular paid employment (6.1% as compared to 17.8% for men) and a more substantial engagement in agricultural occupations (38.2% against 23.7% for men), with over 70% of the employed women being in the agricultural sector. Women’s unpaid and domestic labour goes largely unrecognized in Bhutan.

As of 2016, women comprised 35.88% of the total civil servants in Bhutan, however a further disaggregation would reveal gaps in higher level positions for women pointing towards the ‘glass ceiling’ phenomena seen across many other countries. The recent civil service data also reveals a high attrition rate among women. The Bhutan Civil Service Regulations, 2012 prescribe several conditions to enable women’s participation in the civil service, which help to support a positive enabling environment for women to enter and remain in the workforce.

Bhutan has witnessed impressive achievements in terms of girls’ participation rates with an Adjusted Net Primary Enrolment Rate of 98.8% for girls as compared to 97% for boys, according to 2016 education statistics. Similarly, the Gender Parity Ratio was also in favour of girls with 103 girls for every 100 boys at the primary level. The survival rate for girls at the primary level stands at 94% exceeding that of boys at 84.4%. Unlike in the past years, representation of girls at the higher secondary level including in private schools is growing towards gaining gender parity, owing in part to the improvement in girls’ enrolment at the lower levels of education. Despite improvements, there is still a lag in the ratio of females to males in tertiary institutes, being 75:100 respectively in 2015. This can be attributed to several factors, from remote access and long distances to educational institutions, to teenage pregnancies that force young girls out of completing their education. There are also much lower numbers of girls in the inter-disciplinary and applied science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, which is traditionally seen as a domain for boys. The Ministry of Education is undertaking several measures to address this problem, which should be continued and bolstered.

Gender issues within the health sector point to critical areas of need, with high percentage of teenage pregnancies, as high as 30% of girls getting married before the age of 18, the growing issue of HIV (among the youth), and the feminization of HIV. The access and quality of health services that cater to women’s specific sexual and reproductive needs serious attention as it impacts all aspects of their lives. Women in rural Bhutan in particular face vulnerabilities and lack of opportunities. The government should enhance the healthcare infrastructure and develop targeted programmes towards economic development of the rural population, a large portion of whom are women.

Studies in Bhutan has revealed disturbing facts about the high levels of tolerance of VAW. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA), 2013 serves as a legislative measure that recognizes women’s vulnerability as survivors of violence, defines the act of domestic violence and its scope with the establishment of appropriate procedures and services that are required to adequately support the victims and hold the perpetrators accountable.

While trafficking is still not evidenced as a grave issue in Bhutan, reports in the media indicate the prevalence of trafficking. Some preliminary assessments have been conducted to map different actors under the prevention, protection and prosecution categories that could work together to prevent and combat human trafficking in Bhutan. Much more targeted awareness and capacity building programs need to take place.

* 1. **Rationale**

Currently there is uneven mainstreaming of gender issues across policies, programs and projects in Bhutan. While there are several provisions in place, they remain either adhoc, or with inadequate accountability or monitoring approaches. The Gender Equality Policy (GEP) outlines the relationship between national development and the advancement of women and gender equality. It provides the overarching policy directive to address the formal approach to equality[[2]](#footnote-2) as provided in various policies, and towards guaranteeing substantive equality by accounting for women’s particular needs and addressing existing gender gaps and inequalities.

This is also in line with the CEDAW Committee’s General Recommendation 25 which states that “it is not enough to guarantee women treatment that is identical to that of men”.[[3]](#footnote-3) The Committee emphasized that “a purely formal legal approach is not sufficient to achieve women’s de facto equality with men, which the Committee interprets as substantive equality”[[4]](#footnote-4).

1. ***Current policy and legislations*** 
   1. **Alignment with national policies and frameworks**

The GEP is aligned with, and internalizes the values and principles enshrined in the Constitution of Bhutan and other important policy documents.

The **Constitution of Bhutan** conveys a powerful message for gender equality through the articles on fundamental rights (Article 7), fundamental duties (Article 8), Principles of State Policy (Article 9)[[5]](#footnote-5).

**The Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness**, has the relevant development objectives on human development, equity and governance[[6]](#footnote-6).

The concept of **Gross National Happiness (GNH)**, which provides a people centric approach to development.

* 1. **Alignment with international policies and standards**

The GEP is aligned to the international agreements that the RGoB has agreed to and ratified.

The **Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women** (CEDAW) is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. Bhutan ratified the CEDAW on 31 August 1981. Article 9 (25) of the Constitution provides that “existing International Conventions, Covenants, Treaties, Protocols and Agreements entered into by Bhutan, shall continue in force”. This recognizes CEDAW as deemed law in the Bhutanese national legal framework.

The **Beijing Platform for Action** (BPfA) was agreed by governments of the world in 1995 at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. The document includes 12 critical areas of concern, each with its own strategic objectives and actions. Of specific reference to national policy in relation to gender is the objective on i[nstitutional mechanisms for the advancement of women](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/institu.htm).

**The Sustainable Development Goals** wereadopted by in September 2015 by countries of the world as a set of goals to **end poverty, protect the planet**, and **ensure prosperity for all over the next 15 years**. Of particular relevance is goal 5 that focuses exclusively on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. The SDG Goal 5 has also been imbibed by the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) as its Agency Key Result Area (AKRA).

The GEP also upholds the values of the **Universal Declaration on Human Rights** and the **UN Charter**.

1. ***Policy statement and purpose*** 
   1. **Policy Statement**

The GEP of Bhutan envisions a society where substantive equality is practiced providing equal opportunities for women and men to achieve their full potential and benefit equitably from the social, economic and political development in the country.

**4.2 Purpose and objectives**

The purpose of the GEP is to provide an effective framework within which policies, programmes and practices ensure equal rights, opportunities and benefits for women and men in the family, community, workplace and in society at large.ThePolicyserves as a guiding framework which echoes and reaffirms the commitment of the RGoB to ensure gender equality is mainstreamed in policies and programmes.

They key policy objectives of the GEP are to:

* Provide a coherent strategic framework of the government’s priority towards gender equality.
* Strengthen accountability and operational strategies to address priority gender issues.
* Facilitate deeper collaboration across sectors and stakeholders towards a common vision of gender equality in Bhutan.

1. ***Framework for key gender issues and policy provisions***

The GEP is premised on the belief that all individuals, families, communities and society at large will stand to benefit from the ability of both women and men to develop their capabilities and realize their full potential, without the limitations of gender stereotypes and discrimination. The Policy explores gender equality through the lens of three domains- **political, social and the economic**. A change in any one of these domains is likely to influence the others, and have positive impacts on broader manifestations of gender equality. Removing the barriers to gender equality will require a multi-sectoral approach that is emphasized in the operational strategies of the GEP.

* 1. **Gender equality in the political and public domain**

Women in Bhutan generally enjoy positions of influence and decision making within their households. However, this has not translated into the public sphere, in terms of gender parity in the political representation in government structures or in the private sector. Improving women’s participation and leadership in decision making is aligned with the overall development and good governance principles, wherein all individuals can engage in and be part of the development of the country.

* + 1. **Women’s participation in decision making**

The RGoB will make the following policy provisions for improving women’s participation in decision making across sectors and at all levels:

* Continue advocacy and dialogue to set minimum policy targets for increased number of female candidates in local and national elections in line with the GEP’s aim to increase women’s political participation.
* Develop a cadre of young women in public office as the next generation of women leaders, with strong public speaking skills and mentoring support of senior women in leadership positions.
* Build a coalition of women leaders, across party lines and across government, private sector and civil society that can help create collective agency, ownership and a common vision among all generations and sectors of women leaders. Promote male champions as allies and advocates for gender equality within such a coalition.
* Institutionalize a gender discussion/session in annual high-level forums for decision makers to dialogue on strategic gender considerations in the country.
* Design strategies and media campaigns to showcase role models that highlight women’s contributions in society, and create a new narrative of leadership, that is inclusive along gender lines.
* Create the enabling environment and provisions for increasing women’s participation in decision making and in the workforce. These interventions should focus on reducing women’s triple burden through:
  + institutionalizing six months of maternity leave to new mothers and designing incentives for the private sector to follow suit;
  + encouraging longer paternity leave to inspire work sharing at home between men and women;
  + creating a strict zero tolerance policy on sexual harassment and
  + creating care giving support structures such as fully serviced creches and nursing rooms for mothers.
* Design strategies with business associations that can help increase female representation at senior management levels in businesses, including on the Boards of larger private companies.
* Improve women’s local level engagement and participation by:
  + targeted skills building for women to participate as Mangmis and Tshogpas, which could gradually position them for higher posts
  + using village meetings as a platform to target women for leadership skills training to improve their engagement at the community level.
  1. **Gender equality in the social domain**

To influence changes in society and ensure real implementation of gender responsive policies in Bhutan, sensitization and awareness around gender issues needs to be bolstered, as changing mindsets and attitudes is a long process. Several aspects in the social domain, if addressed holistically will also be able to create positive impacts in the other domains (economic and political).

* + 1. **Addressing Violence Against Women (VAW)**

VAW remains one of the most serious impediments to the realisation of gender equality and women’s empowerment. It limits the choices of women and restricts their ability to reach their full potential in the economy or in decision making.

The RGoB will make the following policy provisions for addressing VAW:

* Create a culture of prevention and zero tolerance to VAW, for the current and future generations in Bhutan, such that every individual regardless of their gender is treated with equal respect and dignity.
* Establish and strengthen a coordinated system for the collection and analysis of VAW-related data, both quantitative and qualitative that can be used by the respective actors involved in responding to the issues of VAW, such as the Royal Bhutan Police, judiciary, health sector and civil society organizations.
* Strengthen the implementation of the DVPA through establishment of appropriate procedures and services that are required to adequately support the victims and hold the perpetrators accountable.
* Establish more shelters and support services for survivors of violence, that offers them full protection, counselling and rehabilitation, and create economic opportunities for their financial independence.
* Strengthen the capacity of the women and child units within the Royal Bhutan Police to respond more effectively to cases of VAW.
* Deliver and promote the utilization of high-quality reproductive health services, including services for maternal health, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, commodity procurement and supply and the management of health information; implement life-skills education, including sex education.
* Monitor and report on the concluding observations of international conventions, and develop a diversified partnership framework and an information management system on VAW.
* Provide socialization and awareness on the normative aspects of VAW, but also generate evidence on VAW as a crosscutting issue that requires multi-sectoral attention.
* Raise awareness among women and young girls about their rights related to VAW, the provisions in law and the related support services that are available.
* Develop policy and social advocacy on the costs of VAW on the systems and economy of the country, for e.g. the pressures on the health systems, negative impacts on productivity, thus also impacting the overall economy.
* Create initiatives and media campaigns using role models to engage men and young boys in questioning traditional constructs of masculinity, and in being able to play positive roles in preventing VAW.
  + 1. **Addressing gender issues through a vulnerability lens**

Cultural norms and traditional gender roles tend to create specific vulnerabilities for women and girls, from physical, mental to economic, which further intersect with factors of age, location/region, and (dis)ability. The manifestation of these, play out in several realms and place different types of risks for women and girls.

The RGoB will make the following policy provisions to address specific gender vulnerabilities:

* Conduct thorough research and analysis to understand the systemic issues and vulnerabilities of women related to trafficking, prostitution and working in Drayangs. Based on this diagnosis, develop more effective and responsive initiatives to address these challenges.
* Ensure safety nets, protection mechanisms and fair employment terms for Drayang workers.
* Advocate for criminalizing the demand side of prostitution and sensitize the police on dealing with commercial sex workers and upholding their rights.
* Accelerate implementation of specific provisions in the Labour Employment Act to address sexual harassment in the workplace.
* Acknowledge differential impacts of climate change on women and men, and the positive roles that women can play in adaptation and mitigation efforts. Ensure that these are reflected in all new climate change related initiatives of the government and development partners.
* Develop strategies for health education and health promotion models to be upscaled to address issues such as the feminization of HIV, sexual and reproductive health, early marriage and teenage pregnancies.
* Improve infrastructure for women to access basic services, especially in remote and rural areas, such as by creating specific women and child units within hospitals that can cater to their sexual and reproductive needs.
* Develop new initiatives that are inclusive of women and girls with disabilities, and consider their special vulnerabilities.
* Develop measures to protect those that identify themselves outside the traditional gender roles, based on specific gender identities.
* Identify and work with champions within the armed forces who can protect and cater to the needs of women and children living in campuses of armed forces.
  1. **Gender equality in the economic domain**

As women continue to shoulder the burden of home, care-work and employment, there needs to be an ecosystem that allows for their participation in the formal economy, and a greater recognition of their contribution in the informal segment of the economy. The persistence of gender stereotypes continues to permeate the economic domain of the types of sectors that men and women are employed within. With greater engagement and contribution of women in the economic domain, it will directly contribute to the development and productivity of Bhutan, thereby aligning with the vision of sustainable economic growth.

* + 1. **Achieving gender parity in education**

The RGoB will make the following policy provisions to address gender gaps in education:

* NCWC should play a more central role in advising on the introduction and implementation of new policies, wherein provisions in one sector or area is likely to have a bearing in other sectors (as it relates to gender equality). The Economic Development Policy, 2016 will focus on new job creation in STEM, which should be closely linked to the efforts of the Ministry of Education to increase the number of girls and their performance in STEM subjects. Thus, coordination and alignment of such policy efforts can help in achieving common goals around education, employment, economic development and gender equality.
* Continue special measures to enroll and retain girls in schools, and integrate issues of family planning, sexual and reproductive rights into the education curriculum to continue awareness raising in areas that tackle social barriers to girls’ education.
* Bolster non-formal education efforts, and connect closely with other measures being undertaken to build awareness and capacity of women at the local level to engage in political processes.
* Gain better insights into why certain subject areas like STEM have much lower number of girls, and address those gaps through targeted recruitment of girls in these subject areas.
  + 1. **The employment sector**

The RGoB will make the following policy provisions to increase women’s engagement in employment:

* Create mechanisms to increase women’s access to commercial loans, which are based on a thorough market and financial feasibility assessment.
  + develop alternatives by providing collateral-free or low interest loans, which are coupled with support for women business owners to develop viable business plans.
  + monitor and provide support to women small business owners so that they don’t lapse on their payments.
  + Impose fines and penalties on those found posing as proxy applicants.
* Conduct targeted skills training to support the transition of women from the agricultural sectors into others which are gradually going to become more prominent in the new economy of Bhutan.
* Conduct gender sensitive value chain analysis to identify opportunities for women’s employment in under-represented industries, and prioritize training and hiring of women and men in fields where they are under-represented.
* Improve capacity of women farmers and small business owners to access markets, and create platforms like trade fairs to showcase products and services of women-owned businesses.
* Create an enabling environment which can help ease the triple burden that women have, acknowledge and provide for women’s sexual and specific reproductive needs, make provisions for new and working mothers to be part of the workforce, and provide for a violence and harassment free life. Such structural barriers can be reduced by the following:
  + introduce affordable childcare options
  + implement flexi-time for professional jobs
  + introduce more part-time employment options
  + link home-based professionals with relevant employers
* Support women’s entrepreneurship by providing access to finance, skills development, knowledge of markets, business development and communication and negotiation skills.
* Ensure implementation for zero tolerance to sexual harassment in the workplace, including staff trainings and accountability mechanisms.
  + 1. **Recognizing the value of women’s unpaid work**

The RGoB will make the following policy provisions to account for women’s unpaid work:

* Develop formal recognition of the multiple roles that women play, and create costing of women’s unpaid care work, which remains invisible.
* Improve data gathering and analysis of women’s employment and entrepreneurship trends including women’s economic contributions through home-based and informal work.
* Advocate for women’s unpaid work to be costed and accounted for into the national economic indicators and data.
* Create campaigns and work with the media to increase the visibility of women and men contributing to families and the society in non-gender stereotypical.

1. ***Implementation procedures and operational strategies***

* 1. **National Plan of Action on Gender**

To support the effective implementation of the GEP, the RGoB will develop a new National Plan of Action on Gender (NPAG) for the period coinciding with the 12th Year Plan from 2019. The NPAG should be based on the three domain areas of the GEP, and be supported with outcomes, outputs and activities as well as indicators and targets, based on the provisions outlined in the GEP.

* 1. **National Key Result Areas and Agency Key Result Areas**

The RGoB will strengthen the coordination across ministries on their Agency Key Results Areas (AKRAs) towards the National Key Result Area (NKRA) of gender equality. This dual approach to address gender inequality, by standalone and specific interventions, as well as gender mainstreaming efforts will continue as per the GEP. All future result areas will be aligned with the priority areas identified in the GEP, and the AKRA key performance indicators on gender will be aligned with, and integrated with the Gender Equality Monitoring System (GEMS).

* 1. **Protocol for policy formulation**

The RGoB’s protocol for policy formulation using the GNH Policy Screening Tool by the proponent sector and the GNHCS will continue to examine gender mainstreaming efforts. The implementation of this will be strengthened through trainings on gender analysis, identifying gaps and being able to develop gender-responsive interventions within each sectoral policy.

* 1. **Institutional structures**
     1. **National Commission for Women and Children[[7]](#footnote-7)**

The RGoB will strengthen the technical capacity and allocate adequate human and financial resources to the NCWC as the custodian for the implementation of the GEP.

The NCWC will continue its role to advocate and lobby for gender issues, and will benefit from increased capacity to generate new research, use and socialize data to highlight existing gender gaps to inform and influence policy makers.

* + 1. **Gender Focal Points**

The RGoB will strengthen the Gender Focal Points (GFPs) system across sectors and organizations by ensuring that this function is contained in the job description, as well as reflected in the individual performance review of GFPs.

The RGoB will support the institutionalization of capacity efforts by anchoring gender sensitization modules within existing institutes, such as the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS). Trainings for GFPs will be strengthened and monitored through the introduction of experiential and adult training methodologies.

* + 1. **The Gender Experts Group**

The RGoB will provide additional provisions to strengthen the technical and advisory capacity of Gender Experts Group (GEG) through the introduction of quality assurance measures such as certification processes for the completion of courses and trainings.

The RGoB will strengthen the relationship between the GFPs and GEG through a twinning or mentoring process, to provide the GFPs with the necessary support to fulfil their responsibilities.

* 1. **Gender responsive planning and budgeting**

The RGoB will implement gender responsive planning and budgeting (GRPB) through the introduction of mandatory gender analysis and encouraging a minimum percentage of budget allocation to ensure the integration of gender at the time of submission of budgetary proposals. The Ministry of Finance should be a key proponent of the GRPB and trainings and guidelines for the same will be developed.

* 1. **Legislation**

The RGoB will encourage provisions in national legislation that explicitly recognize women’s specific needs and addresses any forms of discrimination by broadening the approach to include formal and substantive equality, by including terms of “equal benefits”, “equal opportunities”, “equal access” or “equality in practice” beyond just “equality before the law” and/or “the equal protection of the law”.

* 1. **Partnerships**

Since gender is a cross-cutting issue, partnerships and engagement will be a key tenet of the implementation of the GEP.

* + 1. **Multi-stakeholder partnerships**

The RGoB will create multi-stakeholder platforms that encourage open dialogue and discussion of gender issues within and across sectors, keeping critical issues on the agenda and visible. Such a multi-stakeholder platform will also help to build a collective agenda, support resource sharing for gender responsive plans and programs and allow for new emerging areas to be discussed.

* + 1. **Community engagement**

The RGoB will support the active community participation in the implementation of the GEP, especially the unreached rural population. Measures shall be introduced to ensure the local populations are better informed about the provisions of the GEP, and are able to voice their issues.

* 1. **Communications**

The RGoB will develop a range of communications and messages for a diverse audience that will help socialize the GEP to duty bearers (government agencies, civil society organizations) and to the rights holders (local communities and direct beneficiaries).

1. ***Monitoring and accountability*** 
   1. **Gender Equality Monitoring System**

The RGoB will strengthen the use of the GEMS to consolidate the reporting of each ministry’s gender related AKRA, which is also reflected in their performance management systems. The GEMS will be used to effectively coordinate monitoring of indicators, as well as reporting on results across sectors.

* 1. **CEDAW Reporting**

The RGoB will continue to report regularly on its progress to the CEDAW Committee, and in turn track areas which receive positive endorsement and those that are recommended for improvement. The CEDAW reporting will continue to serve as an accountability of the State on its commitments to gender equality. The RGoB will strengthen its coordination across sectors, ministries and organizations to consolidate reporting of progress towards gender equality in Bhutan.

* 1. **National Gender Equality Champions Award**

Introduce incentives and recognition initiatives to motivate actions for gender equality and mobilize others for advocacy and action. The RGoB will introduce an annual Gender Equality Champions Award that can be presented to a policy maker and a grassroots worker. Such a recognition platform will help identify, document, recognize and reward individuals for their efforts towards gender equality.

* 1. **Gender scorecard system**

The RGoB will introduce a simple gender scorecard to capture the status and levels of gender equality contributions across each sector. This will allow for a strong trend analysis to establish a baseline for each ministry/sector which can be monitored over time, and provide a comparison across sectors. The gender scorecard will have key elements focusing on internal policies (gender in workplace), programmatic efforts and communications and research initiatives. This data can also be used to recognize and reward sectors which show improvement on an annual basis.

* 1. **Review of the GEP**

The RGoB will conduct a five-year review of the implementation of the GEP to assess the changes in gender equality trends in Bhutan, and to review new emerging areas that may need consideration.

**ANNEX I: Definitions**

**Gender** refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age.

**Gender Equality** implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.

**Formal Equality** is also known as legal equality. This implies that one law should be applied to all people, wherein social and personal characteristics do not play a role. Formal equality treats people the same and does not account for factors of race, ethnicity, sex, age etc, which often fails to recognize diversity and is insufficient for promoting social inclusiveness.

**Substantive Equality** takes into account fairness and equity in providing a broader framework of equality, which recognizes differences and disadvantages. Substantive equality looks at the root causes of inequality, and focuses on removing barriers, thereby giving individuals the equality of opportunity.

1. http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/economies/#economy=BTN [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Under the formal approach to equality, biological, social and cultural differences between men and women including social perceptions and their impact on women are ignored. Men and women are seen as similar or same, and therefore provided with the same treatment. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 25, para. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Sources: Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan. 2008; and Planning Commission. 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness. Part 2, pp. 12–1 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The NCWC has the status of an autonomous agency, with its capacity and mandate strengthening over the years. The Women’s Division is responsible for initiatives related to women’s equality and gender mainstreaming, with the issues related to children being addressed by the Children’s Division. The NCWC within its ambit coordinates action and monitors implementation of the following Acts: Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011 (CCPA); Child Adoption Act of Bhutan 2012 (CAA); Domestic Violence Prevention Act of Bhutan 2013 (DVPA). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)