



THE NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUITY IN ELECTED OFFICES.

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**National Commission for Women and Children
Royal Government of Bhutan**



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FOREWORD

The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) as the dedicated national machinery for protecting and promoting the rights of women and children in the country have been responsible for various initiatives towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in the country. Through these developments, Bhutanese women have witnessed great progress and improvement in their lives. Despite this, a significant gap continues to however lie in the area of women's political participation.

The Royal Edict in 1998 was a huge milestone for women in the country, which placed strong emphasis on the need for women's representation in the National Assembly. In 2008, Bhutan embarked upon a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy, holding its first ever elections. Unfortunately, in the three national elections since then, women's representation have continued to remain low as a result of deep-rooted social and cultural norms despite the serious efforts from the Royal Government of Bhutan. The scenario at the local level is no different.

Series of consultations towards this national plan of action revealed the urgent need of the following:

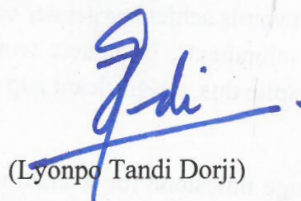
- To recognise the discrimination and challenges women experience in contesting elections, despite a non-discriminatory legal and policy framework;
- To establish a more enabling environment for women's political participation;
- To develop a diverse cadre of women to participate in the political arena at all levels and through all relevant institutions; and
- To nurture and protect Bhutan's newly-established political and electoral system.

Therefore, the revised National Plan of Action to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office is developed taking a comprehensive approach to the promotion of women's political participation in the country. The strategies of this revised Plan of Action are mapped across four domains of change:

- i) Social and cultural change ii Individual change iii) Institutional change vi) Legal and policy change

This national plan of action is an outcome of collective effort and numerous consultations with various stakeholders, and in line with the recommendations coming forth from relevant research and studies conducted by the NCWC. NCWC will continue to remain committed to addressing

these deep-rooted gender gaps, which have disproportionately impacted women's political participation in the country.



(Lyonpo Tandi Dorji)

Chairperson

National Commission for Women and Children

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ACRONYMS

BNEW	Bhutan Network for Empowering Women
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against women
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
FYP	Five Year Plan
GAW	Gender at Work
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
NKRA	National Key Results Area
NPAPGEEEO	National Action Plan to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office
TSMs	Temporary Special Measures

1. Background

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2008 ensures non-discrimination against women in all spheres of life. Article 9 (17) states that, “the state shall endeavor 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”. Further, the Constitution recognizes all international Conventions, Covenants, Treaties, Protocols and Agreements duly acceded to by the government as the deemed law of the Kingdom. Therefore, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified without any reservation in 1981 may be considered as the deemed law of the country.

The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) was established in 2004 as a dedicated national machinery for protecting and promoting the rights of the women and children in the country. Since its establishment, the NCWC has, amongst others, conducted numerous sensitizations, advocacy and training programmes, including research studies on women’s empowerment and gender equality. It has been through these programmes and developments that gender equality and women’s empowerment has received increasing prominence, helping to establish stronger understanding among the people, both officials and general public, of existing gender gaps. One of these significant gaps is in the area of women’s political participation. Although, there was democratic practice in electoral processes at the local level prior to the introduction of democracy in 2008, the participation of women in decision making or leadership role has traditionally been minimal. It did not improve much post 2008 elections as well.

2. Women and Political Participation in Bhutan

A milestone in women’s participation is the Royal Edict in 1998, which emphasized the need for women’s representation in the National Assembly thereby encouraging women to participate. With the introduction of the Democratic Constitutional Monarchy, the first elections were held in 2008 with only two political parties running for 47 seats in the National Assembly. On the other hand the National Council, was formed with 25 Members, one from each of the 20 Dzongkhags and five Eminent Members appointed by His Majesty the King. From a gender perspective, women were disproportionately represented both as contestants and elected members in the National Assembly as well as in the National Council. In 2008, women represented only 13.8 percent of the total members (Table 1) although 54 percent of the total electorate that exercised their franchise were women.

In the second parliamentary elections held in 2013, no women candidates were elected to the National Council except for the two Eminent Members, who were re-appointed by His Majesty the King. In the National Assembly, the elected women member remained the same at four. As such, women’s representation in the Parliament reduced from 13.8 percent in 2008 to 8.3 percent in 2013 despite significant efforts by the government and non-government

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organizations. Nevertheless, for the first time in the history of Bhutan, a women Cabinet Minister was appointed in 2013.

In 2018, during the third parliamentary elections, the representation of women in the parliament increased from 8.3 percent to 15.3 percent, which is just one percentage point increase compared to the first democratic elections of 2008.

Table 1. Women's representation in the National Assembly and National Council, 2008-2018

Year	2008			2013			2018			Total
	Male	Female	Female %	Male	Female	Female %	Male	Female	Female %	
National Assembly										
National Assembly, elected	43	4	8.5%	43	4	8.5%	40	7	14.9%	47
National Council										
National Council, elected	16	4	20.0%	20	0	20.0%	18	2	20.0%	20
National Council, appointed	3	2	40.0%	3	2	40.0%	3	2	40.0%	5
National Council, total	19	6	24.0%	23	2	8.0%	21	4	16.0%	25
Parliament										
Total	62	10	13.8%	66	6	8.3%	61	11	15.3%	72

Source: Statistics from ECB

After the adoption of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan in 2008, the first election at the local government was held in 2011. A total of 236 women contested for the various posts, of which 113 women were elected, a 48 percent success rate. However, from the 205 seats available for the position of Gup, only one out of the 21 contesting women was successful (4.8%) despite special efforts made by the NCWC and its partners to enhance women's participation. It was also around this time that the NCWC with support from its partners conducted a national study on women's participation in the local elections. The findings of the study reinforced existing understanding of the factors that constrain women's participation, such as candidates' low self-esteem and low functional literacy rates, gender roles and stereotypes, gender-neutral electoral processes, and inadequate training opportunities for women. In 2016, of the 1439 candidates elected as local government leaders, 164 were female and 1275 male. The women representation in local government increased from 7.6 percent in 2011 to 11.4 percent in 2016.

3. The National Plan of Action to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office (NPAPGEEO)

The second elected Government pledged that “quota legislation will be drafted” to ensure at least 20 percent women’s representation in all elected offices. Further, the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2013-2018) included, ‘gender friendly environment for women’s participation’ as one of the National Key Result Areas (NKRAs) with the drafting of legislation to introduce a quota for women’s participation as the Key Performance Indicator.

In 2013, the Government submitted its Interim Report to the UN CEDAW Committee. The Committee, in its Concluding Observations recommended that:

“the State party implement, as a matter of urgency, sustained policies aimed at the promotion of women’s full, active and equal participation in decision-making in all areas of public and political life. In particular, the Committee encourages the State party to review criteria required for certain positions when such requirements turn into obstacles or barriers to women’s access to decision-making. It also recommends the use of temporary measures...”

The NCWC as the nodal agency of the Royal Government for gender equality and women’s empowerment subsequently initiated a *National Consultation on Gender Equality in Elected Office* in December 2013. The participation of all the relevant stakeholder organizations in the consultation was ensured given the existence of multiple constraining factors and that enhancing women’s political participation will require multiple approaches. A draft “National Action Plan to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office (NPAGEEO)” was developed at the end of the two-day consultation.

In April 2014, the NCWC in partnership with Bhutan Network for Empowering Women (BNEW) organized a *National Consultation for Women in Politics* in Terma Linca, Thimphu with the objective to consult and take stock of the opportunities and challenges faced by the Bhutanese women in politics and to explore ways and means to enhance their participation. The Consultation resulted in the “Terma Linca Statement” that provided recommendations and guidance for the NCWC and relevant partners to use and build on to translate the Government’s commitment towards increasing women’s participation in politics into action.

Using the outputs from the two Consultations as the basis, the NCWC conducted a third Consultation in 2014 involving key players to finalize the action plan. The NPAPGEEO, therefore, a result of the numerous consultations held and in line with the recommendations coming forth from the research and studies conducted by the NCWC. The NPAPGEEO comprised of two parts:

- i) Part A - identified and prescribed ways and means of creating a demand for women’s participation (at the nomination level) in the Local Government, National Council and National Assembly elections.

- ii) Part B - focused on a variety of interventions to ensure that a consistent and adequate number of women contest the different elections. The interventions included creating awareness and providing the required support to create a level playing field by eliminating inequalities resulting from gender differences.

The NCWC submitted the NPAPGEE to the Cabinet in 2016. While part A was approved, the Cabinet recommended the draft be revised through further consultation.

4. Revision of the NPAPGEE

The review of the NPAPGEE was conducted based on the recommendation of the Cabinet and outcome of 2nd and 3rd National Conference on Women in Politics. The “2nd National Conference on Women in governance, leadership and politics in Bhutan with a regional Dimension” was organized by the NCWC in collaboration with BNEW from 8-10 March 2017. The consultation resulted in the adoption of “Thimphu Declaration” with the following goals:

- Goal 1 (2018-2019): Ensure 30% of women candidature in upcoming elections by political parties.
- Goal 2 (2020-2021): Increase the number of women elected as local leaders by 30% using fast track measures.
- Goal 3: Increase the number of women executives and leaders in civil services/ public service by 25% by 2025.

The 3rd National Conference on Women in Politics, Leadership and Governance was held from 27 to 28 November 2018 with the objective to review the NPAPGEE. The review and reassessment of strategies involved hearing the experiences of women candidates at local and national level – both successful and unsuccessful shared during the conference. Bilateral consultations were held with a wide range of stakeholders across government, non-government sectors and political parties to consider more appropriate mechanisms to promote women’s political participation in the country. His Excellency the Prime Minister, Honourable Chairperson of the National Council and parliamentarians were also consulted during the review process.

Key concerns raised in these consultations included the need to:

- recognise the discrimination and challenges women experience in contesting elections, despite a non-discriminatory legal and policy framework;
- establish a more enabling environment for women’s political participation;
- develop a diverse cadre of women to participate in the political arena at all levels and through all relevant institutions;
- nurture and protect Bhutan’s newly-established political and electoral system.

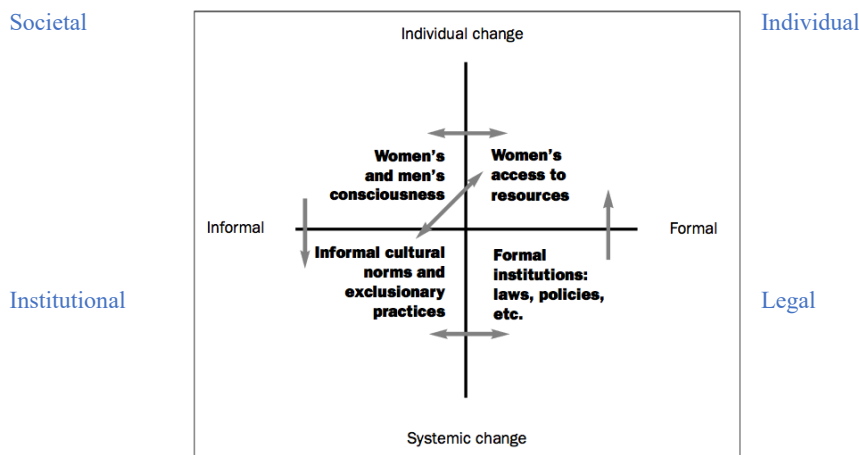
5. A comprehensive approach to women's political participation in Bhutan

In light of these concerns, this revised Plan of Action takes a comprehensive approach to the promotion of women's political participation, drawing on the globally recognized "Gender at Work" (GAW)¹ Framework. Since the early 2000s, the GAW Framework has been used to identify sustainable and effective entry points for gender mainstreaming in institutions, as a means by which to promote both gender equality and women's empowerment. This framework aims to highlight the interrelationship between gender equality, organisational change and institutions or 'rules of the game', held in place by power dynamics within communities (Figure 1). At its heart, the GAW Framework is an argument for both individual and institutional level change: "changes in resources, capacity and knowledge are necessary but not sufficient for sustainable change. Ultimately, changes of formal and particularly informal institutions are required."²

¹ The Gender at Work Framework is outlined at <http://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>

² Aruna Rao and David Kelleher, (2005) "Is there life after gender mainstreaming?" *Gender and Development*, 13(2) p.61.

Figure 1: “What are we trying to change?”



Source: Aruna Rao and David Kelleher (2005) “Is there life after gender mainstreaming?” *Gender and Development*, 13(2):60.

The GAW Framework is highly applicable to the field of women’s political participation and leadership as both formal and informal institutions and norms contributes to maintaining and reproducing gender gaps in political and leadership positions. Evidence generated through an extensive academic and practitioner literature can be usefully mapped across the four quadrants of the GAW Framework, clarifying specific interrelationships between individual and institutional level changes.

6. Strategies

The strategies of this revised Plan of Action are therefore mapped across four domains of change: societal, individual, institutional and legal. Each section is presented with some of the key challenges and strategies/actions based on the review and the consultations.

6.1 Social and cultural change

Social norms – informed *inter alia* by traditional customs and religious teachings – define a set of ‘appropriate’ roles for men and women in society. These norms keep women largely responsible for domestic work and child care even when they work outside the home; reduce women’s mobility and ability to network; reinforce inequality through gender-based violence and a restriction of women’s choices; and justify numerous forms of discrimination. These same norms devalue the important contributions of women to decision-making, including in the setting of a country’s policy direction, and hamper democratic development.

Societal change strategies include a collective re-evaluation of women's roles in the community and an acknowledgment of their existing and potential political leadership capacity. This might manifest in: the discontinuation of stereotypes of women as 'nurturers' and 'carers' while men are 'strong' 'natural decision-makers'; and a redefinition of the concept of leadership – at all levels (household, village/community, local/ national government). This kind of change might be driven by gender equality champions (including men and boys) and civil society organisations that raise women and men's consciousness around human and political rights.

Bhutanese culture appreciates the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment. Participants of the consultative workshop for this revised Plan of Action noted that the *Gyentag* – the symbol of responsibility conferred upon women leaders in Bhutan - recognizes the contribution of women to society as well as the equal status of women in the country. This symbol recognizes that gender equality is society's responsibility. The participants also believe that, the respect for women extends to respect for women as mothers, and women as decision makers in all areas of social, cultural and political life in most societies.

"I don't believe women are just home makers. In my house, women are rulers."

(Participant, Consultative Workshop)

However, certain societal norms and practices based on tradition and culture continue to constrain women's equal political participation. Women leaders are seen through a cultural lens which expects them to be primary care givers and not a political leader. They were often questioned about taking care of their children rather than their plans and party manifestos. The stereotype of a leader – usually masculine, dressed in a suit, loud – is hard to challenge. As the ECB's 2014 *Study of the Determinants of Voters' Choice and Women's Participation in Elective Offices in the Kingdom of Bhutan* found, "a significant 30.8% [of respondents] believe that men are better leaders, [while only] 5.9% believe that women make good leaders." This stereotypical norm plays a very important role while electing political leader.

"What people say and what people do is different. The voters say they will support you, and [that] I was the best speaker, but they voted for men."

(Female candidate, Political Party)

Women's low level of education and training is another major factor that constrains women's participation in political sphere. While there are equal proportion of boys and girls at the primary and secondary level, the gap widens at tertiary level; the ratio of females to males in tertiary institutes was 86:100 in 2019. 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, and the perception that girls will eventually be 'taken care of' when they get married. Moreover, there are much lower numbers of girls in the interdisciplinary and applied science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, which is traditionally seen as a domain for boys.

Therefore, the social and cultural barriers to women's political participation entails a deeper look at the societal norms and practices and change in mindset of community, family and individuals to change these practices and perceptions. The participants in the consultative workshop shared similar thoughts and highlighted the need to have deeper reflection on the way women and girls are brought up in our society

"I am tempted to look at the structure of the home. Is it open? Let's make it open."

(Speaker, National Assembly)

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Strategy	Actions	Responsible parties	Timelines		
			Short	Medium	Long-term
1. Create a reliable evidence bank to advocate for women's increased political leadership	1.1 Conduct participatory action research with women and men leaders on women's contribution to political decision-making	NCWC, Royal University of Bhutan, other relevant partners		M	
	1.2 Carry out time use survey (research on time spent in domestic duties and leisure activities by each occupant of the household)	NCWC, National Statistics Bureau, Royal University of Bhutan, Centre for Bhutan Studies, other relevant partners		M	L
	1.3 Conduct longitudinal study of gender stereotypes	NCWC, Royal University of Bhutan, other relevant partners		M	
2. Strengthen awareness on discriminatory social, political, economic and cultural beliefs and practices that constrain women's political participation	2.1 Organize seminars on gender-sensitive parenting (equal role of boys and girls in managing household responsibilities) at all levels	NCWC, Colleges/BNEW/DLG/ECB/MoE/Schools/Media/CSOs, other relevant partners	S	M	
	2.2 Create awareness on women's leadership for school children through various extra-curricular activities.	NCWC, MoE/schools/CSOs other relevant partners	S	M	
	2.3 Create awareness on the importance of gender equality using existing mechanisms and forums in educational institutions- Democracy in school clubs, Volunteer voice	NCWC, MoE/CSO/ECB/Schools, other relevant partners	S	M	
	2.5 Conduct gender-sensitization/ training programs for media (social and mainstream)	NCWC, BNEW, BMF, JAB, CSOs, MOIC, BICMA, other relevant partners	S	M	
3. Showcase role models of women's political leadership	3.1 Organise regular debates and discussions with women leaders through media	NCWC, BNEW, media organizations, other relevant partners	S	M	
	3.2 Organize events for female politicians to speak and interact with women of all ages	NCWC, BNEW, DLG, MoE, ECB and other relevant partners	S		

6.2 Individual change

Women are often in a less advantaged socio-economic position (measured in terms of education, paid employment and assets) than men that will enable them to engage in political discourse (e.g. as voters) and launch a political career (e.g. as candidates). Limited formal education can impact on women's understanding of political/electoral processes and can reduce their interest and confidence in engaging with politics. Lower levels of paid employment mean that women candidates are often less likely to attract (or have) the requisite financial resources to run electoral campaigns.

Individual change strategies drive improved education outcomes that increase women's resilience, knowledge, confidence and skill-base to make their own informed choices about electoral candidates (as voters), and from which to organise and manage (as lobbyists or electoral officials), as well as personally run and win (as candidates), electoral campaigns. Change strategies are underpinned by increased women's economic empowerment which improves women's collective ability to generate sustainable funding sources that support women candidates, and that allow individual women candidates to demonstrate their leadership capacity to a potential constituency. Increasing women's opportunities to cultivate and maintain sustainable sources of electoral support that include their personal campaign teams and well-regarded male advocates would also increase women's individual capacity to win elections.

Bhutan ranks 131 out of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, which uses indicators of political participation, health, education and economic empowerment to assess the extent of gender parity. While unemployment continues to fall, 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. Furthermore, women perform about 71 percent of unpaid care and domestic work which largely goes unrecognized. This inequity translates into a range of formal and informal barriers that further disadvantage women as candidates. At a formal level, government studies consistently show women have a lower level of education compared with men, and consequently, lower levels of income. This means that women are less likely to have sufficient savings to spend on an electoral campaign, including to pay the party registration fee. Moreover, certain aspects of the formal requirements to run as a candidate discriminate against women such as door to door campaign, and in some instances, the threat of physical insecurity when staying away from home overnight. Campaigning can involve long periods away from home and family, requiring funds to stay overnight, or to pay for someone else to take on their usual care responsibilities. Women candidates noted that they spent days walking through electorates, sometimes to meet very few potential voters, and this required family support:

"I stayed in a lodge owned by my cousin"

(Participant, consultative workshop)

Informally, the absence of mentoring and support networks for women further disadvantage women to contest equally with male counterparts who usually have access to networking opportunities.

“An apprentice system does not exist for women in politics.”

(Participant, consultative workshop)

There was strong consensus in the consultations for a need of networking opportunities among the women leaders and aspiring leaders such as an ‘old girls’ network’³ as a strategy to inform women of the rules of the political game as well as to support women when they are elected. Such a network would provide women with a source of mentoring and positive role models.

Building confidence of women leaders and aspiring leader was identified as another important strategy to increase women’s political participation by the participants of the consultative workshop. It was noted, for example, that a ‘large majority of participants at political meetings are women’ and yet the number of women candidates remains low. The interactions with women candidates indicated that, “passion for democracy” and “a desire to clean up politics” were some of the motivations to participate in politics.

“Politics is addictive – when you lose you don’t want to do it again, but then the next election comes along and you are re-invigorated.”

(Female candidate)

3 An ‘old girls’ network’ is similar to the idea of an ‘old boys’ network’, being an informal group of acquaintances – gained through school or work – which supports and nurtures its members, including through promotional or job opportunities, or material benefits.

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Strategy	Actions	Responsible parties	Timelines		
			Short	Medium	Long-term
4. Expand and diversify the network of women political aspirants	4.1 Develop a program of activities including mentoring & informal education seminars for women political aspirants/community leaders. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leadership training, • public speaking, • coaching, • community mobilization • National Plans, Laws, Policies 	NCWC, CSOs, DLG, ECB, DPs, NAS/NCS and other relevant partners	S	M	
	4.2 Conduct national conferences on women in politics, following each election (national and local)	NCWC, CSOs, DLG, ECB, DPs, NAS/NCS, and other relevant partners	S	M	L
5. Establish a network of male champions for women in politics	5.1 Develop a program of activities including mentoring. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • importance of gender equality, • negotiation and persuasion, • dealing with constituents 	NCWC, CSOs, DLG, ECB, DPs, NAS/NCS and other relevant partners	S	M	
	5.2 Facilitate formal and informal partnerships between women leaders and male community influencers (including leaders of political parties)	NCWC, CSOs, DLG, ECB, DPs, NAS/NCS and other relevant partners		M	

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6. Create a more equitable playing field for women candidates	6.1 Provide additional support to women candidates in fulfilling nomination/ registration requirements For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of time to file their nominations • Facilitate registration and reporting requirements, • waving the registration fee • Preparation for the Functional Literacy Test 	ECB, CSOs, DLG and other relevant partners	S	M	L
	6.2 Allow flexible arrangements for women candidates (on and as needs basis)	ECB, NAS, NCS, DLG, PMO and other relevant partners	S	M	
	6.3 Establish a campaign fund through which women candidates can access funds for child care or baby sitters while campaigning	ECB, NAS, NCS, DLG, PMO and other relevant partners		M	L
	6.4 Establish a campaign fund for women candidates to support participation in local government elections	ECB, DLG and other relevant partners	S	M	L
	6.5 Establish incentives for media organizations to provide women candidates with additional air time, or subsidised campaign advertising, stories on women in decision making (e.g. leaflets, newspaper/online advertisements)	ECB, MOIC, NCWC and other relevant partners	S		
	6.6 Encourage private and corporate entities to shoulder social responsibility such as logistics support for female candidates	BCCI, NCWC, MoEA, CSOs, DHI and other relevant partners		M	L
7. Equip women with the skills to campaign successfully	7.1 Develop training manuals and campaign handbooks for women candidates	ECB, NCWC, CSOs other relevant partners	S	M	
	7.2 Organize capacity building workshops for women candidates before nominations close	ECB, NCWC, BNEW, political parties	S	M	L

6.3 Institutional change

Political institutions such as political parties, electoral management bodies, parliaments, local governments and traditional leadership structures – work on the basis of both formal rules and informal internal (masculine) cultures and practices that have historically cast ‘others’ (women) as outsiders. As outsiders, women are either completely excluded from, or have found it difficult to prove their ‘legitimacy’ in, these institutions. In male-dominated environments, women are often less likely to have the ‘institutional power’ to reform processes and practices, and challenge dominant norms around acceptable behaviour (formal and informal hierarchies which *inter alia* inform appointments to positions of leadership; job descriptions and work arrangements/schedules; modes of dress and address; institutional understandings of harassment/intimidation and gender equality).

Institutional change strategies encourage men and women to take joint responsibility for assessing the extent to which political institutions informally discriminate against women and men, as well as jointly consider and implement actions to address such cultural discrimination.

The Study on Women’s Political Participation in 2011 Local Government Election, commissioned by NCWC, asked respondents about the kinds of candidates they field in elections. Most respondents were of the view that political parties are most likely to field “the most eligible candidates”, that is, the candidates they think will win. Because parties often think that women are not always “the most eligible candidates”, they are less likely to be nominated by political parties. Hence, most often, women do not get elected.

While the consultations elicited the view that it is a “collective responsibility to build institutions of democracy”, it was evident that these institutions are not responsive to gender differentiated needs. Due to the lack of conducive environment and the perception about women leaders as primary care givers, some female parliamentarians do not avail parental leave to change the social and cultural perception. The findings from bilateral and stakeholder consultations revealed the existence of certain form of discrimination against party workers and candidates.” A female Member of Parliament confessed that she had been reluctant to highlight her two pregnancies while in office, and therefore had not requested any parental leave.

Participants of the consultations highlighted that creating conducive environment for women as an important strategy to overcome the barriers faced by women candidates and party workers due to existing institutions.

“There is a need to “*build a more conducive environment of women [including] in the Parliament.*”

(Chairperson, NCWC)

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As the Chairperson of NCWC, the Minister for Foreign Affairs remarked,

Strategy	Actions	Responsible parties	Timelines		
			Short	Medium	Long-term
8. Enhance the gender sensitivity of political parties	8.1 Conduct a gender sensitisation/ consultation workshop for all party secretaries/leaders on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> gender-sensitive party manifestos establishment of gender-focussed committees/ caucuses and gender mainstreaming processes consultation mechanisms with external NGOs 	Political parties, with support of relevant agencies (NCWC, ECB, CSOs)		M	
	8.2 Implement recommendations from the consultation in collaboration with relevant agencies	Political parties, relevant agencies (NCWC, ECB, CSOs)		M	L
	8.3 Institute mechanism to encourage political parties to maintain a minimum number of women candidates	ECB, Political Parties, BDD, CSOs			
9. Enhance the gender sensitivity of the Election Commission of Bhutan	9.1 Conduct a facilitated gender assessment using the standard (example-UNDP/ UN Women Electoral Gender Mapping) Framework, with a view to formulate recommendations for change	NCWC, Education Institutions /CSOs	S	M	
	9.2 Establish mechanisms to ensure systematic consultation of CSOs focused on gender equality when reviewing electoral processes	ECB, DLG NCWC and other relevant partners	S	M	
	9.3 Conduct Gender sensitisation workshop to the officials of ECB	ECB, NCWC, CSOs, and other relevant partners			

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10. Enhance the gender sensitivity of the parliament	10.1 Conduct a facilitated gender assessment using the standard tools (example- IPU self-assessment toolkit “Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments”) with a view to formulating recommendations for change	NAS/NAC, NCWC, CSOs, and other relevant partners		M	
	10.2 Conduct Gender sensitisation workshop for all MPs including the importance and types of Temporary Special Measures	NAS/NAC, NCWC, CSOs, and other relevant partners		M	
	10.3 Organize orientation program for newly elected women	NAS/NAC, NCWC, CSOs, and other relevant partners	S	M	
	10.4 Conduct capacity building for women MPs. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public speaking, • legislating, • mentoring, • parliamentary procedures • Team building and networking 	NAS/NAC, NCWC, CSOs, and other relevant partners	S	M	
	10. 5 Provide separate platform for the female MPs to discuss issues and interventions related to women’s political participation and also support each other in reviewing the legislations from a gender equality perspective.	NA, NC with support from relevant agencies	S	M	
	10.6 Train parliamentary committee /research staff in gender analysis	NAS/NAC, NCWC, CSOs, Development Partners and other relevant partners	S	M	
11. Enhance the gender sensitivity of local government	11.1 Conduct a facilitated gender assessment using a standard tool (example- IPU self-assessment toolkit “Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments”) with a view to formulating recommendations for change	DLG, NCWC, CSOs, and other relevant partners	S	M	
	11.2 Organize orientation program for newly elected women	DLG, NCWC, CSOs, and other relevant partners	S		

	11.3 Conduct capacity building for newly elected women For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public speaking, • legislating, • mentoring, • parliamentary procedures • Team building and networking 	DLG, NCWC, CSOs and other relevant partners	S	M	
12. Enhance the gender sensitivity of primary and secondary schools	12.1 Review the curriculum of primary and secondary schools, to ensure it is gender responsive	MOE, REC, RUB with support from relevant agencies		M	L
	12.2 Institutionalize training on gender equality in the teaching curriculum to ensure teachers understand the negative impact of gender stereotyping in education (and ensure students of university degrees in teaching take courses in gender sensitisation)	MOE, RUB and relevant agencies			L
	12.3 Develop initiatives to encourage equal gender representation in the teaching profession across primary and secondary schools (including, where necessary, more male teachers as gender equality role models)	MOE, RUB, RCSC			L
	12.4 Conduct self-assessments in schools to ensure gender-sensitive learning environments	NCWC, MOE, RUB, Education Institutions	S	M	

6.4 Legal and policy change

Policy and legal frameworks can have the effect of restricting and/or guaranteeing women's inclusion in political and electoral processes. Globally, discriminatory frameworks for example can (sometimes unintentionally) preclude women from registering, voting and nominating as candidates due to a lack of access to identity documentation. Research has shown that certain kinds of electoral systems make it more difficult for women to contest elections where only one person per district is elected, reducing the opportunity for women to compete with men – particularly male incumbents. Non-existent or loosely enforced campaign finance laws and regulations can also disadvantage women candidates. CEDAW, however, encourages State Parties to adopt temporary special measures (TSMs) such as

electoral gender quotas, that guarantee women's place in the political system (e.g. through reserved seats, voluntary or legislated candidate quotas).

Legal and policy change strategies essentially involve a re-assessment of legislative frameworks to ensure they do not discriminate against women or make women's involvement in political and electoral processes – in all capacities, including as voters, electoral administrators, candidates and candidate support teams, etc. – legally more difficult for women than men. Change may also involve the adoption of measures that positively discriminate against women and guarantee women's inclusion in the political process, such as electoral gender quotas.

Currently there is uneven mainstreaming of gender issues across policies, programs and projects in the country. While there are several provisions in place, they remain either *ad hoc*, or with inadequate accountability or monitoring approaches. To increase women's political participation and leadership, alignment of effort is required across all policy and legal frameworks, with particular emphasis on the electoral process, but also in relation to education, health and employment. While there are mixed perception about instituting "quota" among the participants of the consultative workshop, there was general consensus for the the need to have deeper understanding of the existing legal and policy framework to address the barriers faced by women to increase women's political participation.

"I'm worried politics will be masculine. If we try to paint the picture that everything is ok, we might miss some solutions ... We need a conscious effort to break down the barriers."

(Participant, consultative workshop)

The option of instituting reserved seats met with significant reservation during consultations. A participant said, *"seats cannot just be given out because they are women; it is not in the interest of any party to take any women."*

This notwithstanding, the words of the Speaker resonated loudly when he said,

Strategy	Actions	Responsible parties	Timelines		
			Short	Medium	Long-term
13. Eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in the policy and legal framework around the electoral process and ensure <i>de facto</i> and <i>de jure</i> gender equality	<p>13.1 Conduct a gender assessment of the existing electoral legal and policy framework – including the Election Act, the Political Parties Act as well as regulations and by-laws such as the charters/ manifestos of each registered political party – with a view to formulating recommendations for change on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • state funding for local government election campaigns • requirement to campaign door-to-door • villagers’ attendance at common forums • requirement that candidates resign from civil service prior to nomination • requirement that candidates pass a ‘functional literary test’ to contest for local government • regulations governing expense claims for candidates 	NCWC, ECB, PMO, GNHC, Parliament and other relevant stakeholders	S	M	
	13.2 Enact new laws or amend discriminatory provisions of existing laws, as recommended in the gender assessment (13.1)	NCWC, ECB, PMO, Parliament and other relevant stakeholders		M	L

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14. Eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in the policy and legal framework relating to <u>education, health and employment</u> and ensure <i>de facto</i> and <i>de jure</i> gender equality	14.1 Conduct a gender assessment of the following laws and policies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Service Act 2010 • Tertiary Education Policy 2010 • Economic Development Policy • Other relevant policies or laws 	MOE, NCWC, MOEA, Parliament	S	M	
	14.2 Enact/formulate new laws/policies or amend discriminatory provisions of existing laws and policies, as recommended in the gender assessment (14.1)	NCWC, ECB, PMO, GNHC, Cabinet Parliament and other relevant stakeholders		M	L



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