



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



National Action Plan to Promote Gender Equality in Public Administration



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FOREWORD

The Royal Government of Bhutan remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing gender equality in all aspects of public life, in alignment with the nation's constitutional principles and its obligations under international frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) 2020 envisions a society where substantive equality is practiced, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender, have equitable opportunities to achieve their full potential and contribute to Bhutan's social, economic, and political development.

This Action Plan to promote Gender Equality in Public Administration marks a significant milestone in Bhutan's efforts to enhance women's representation and leadership across public institutions at both national and subnational levels. Developed within the framework of the project, "Building Capacities for Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women within Public Institutions," the plan has been developed with support from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with financial support from the Government of Italy. The findings from the 2023 national review of gender-based participation in public administration serve as the foundation for this action plan. It outlines strategic interventions aimed at eliminating institutional barriers, promoting gender parity, and promoting women's leadership in public administration. These initiatives are not only vital for achieving gender equality but are also essential for enhancing the effectiveness, responsiveness, and inclusivity of governance in Bhutan. The alignment of this action plan with Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan (2024-2029) emphasizes its centrality to the nation's long-term development agenda.

The successful formulation of this action plan is a result of the dedicated efforts of multiple stakeholders. I extend my sincere appreciation to the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) Secretariat for their leadership in this endeavor, as well as to UNDP, UN DESA and the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) for their invaluable support. I would also like to acknowledge the input and collaboration of various national stakeholders who contributed their expertise and insights to shape this action plan.

As we move forward with the implementation of this action plan, the Royal Government of Bhutan reaffirms its dedication to promoting a public administration that is gender-inclusive, equitable, and capable of delivering enhanced outcomes for all citizens. We are confident that by empowering women to take up leadership roles in public institutions, we will pave the way for more representative and effective governance, advancing Bhutan's vision of a just and equitable society.

Kesang Deki
Cabinet Secretary/ Chairperson to NCWC

FOREWORD

Women leadership in public institutions, especially in decision-making roles is crucial for effective, inclusive, and accountable public policy making and service delivery. Yet, the presence of women leadership in the public administration remains insignificant not only in Bhutan but worldwide, undermining the development policies and services that reflect the needs of all members of society.

At the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), gender equality remains central to our support to countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gender-equal governance is particularly essential for achieving SDG 5, which seeks to empower all women and girls.

The *Action Plan to Promote Gender Equality in Public Administration*, a joint initiative led by the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) with support from UNDP and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) represents a significant milestone in the Royal Government of Bhutan's efforts to close gender gaps in the Bhutanese public service.

The Action Plan outlines strategic interventions to promote women's presence and leadership across critical areas of policy and institutional frameworks, human resource policies and practices, and evidence and data.

UNDP remains committed to continuing our partnership with the Royal Government to support successful implementation of the action plan and bring about transformative changes in the civil service that help realize both national and international gender equality goals.

Tashi Delek!

Mohammad Younus
Resident Representative
UNDP

FOREWORD

Fostering women’s leadership in public institutions is a critical step toward achieving gender equality, as outlined in numerous international frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The adoption of the Action Plan to Promote Gender Equality in Public Administration in Bhutan marks a significant milestone toward a more inclusive and effective public sector. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) is proud to have supported this achievement in collaboration with the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) of the Royal Government of Bhutan and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through the project “Building Capacities for Promoting Women’s Presence and Leadership within Public Institutions at National and Local Levels.”

The strategic interventions and policy measures outlined in the action plan aim to overcome barriers that hinder women’s full participation in decision-making processes while enhancing institutional practices and accountability. These measures will not only support the advancement of women’s leadership but will also improve the effectiveness of public administration.

UN DESA looks forward to the successful implementation of this action plan and the transformative changes it will bring to Bhutan’s public administration and more broadly to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.



Juwang Zhu
Director
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government
UN DESA

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The action plan was developed as part of the project, *“Building Capacities for Promoting Women’s Presence and Leadership within Public Institutions at National and Local Levels,”* a joint initiative of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC). It builds on the in-depth review of measures promoting the presence and leadership of women in Bhutanese public administration.

The successful development of this action plan would not have been possible without the collective efforts and collaboration of all relevant agencies and individuals. We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to all those who contributed to this important initiative.

The action plan was prepared by Mr. Tshering Chophel, National Consultant, with technical support from Ms. Müge Finkel, Director, Ford Institute for Human Security, and Co-Director, Gender Inequality Research Lab; Ms. Valentina Resta, Senior Governance and Public Administration Officer, UN DESA; Ms. Koi Mayo, Gender Advisor and Gender Team Leader, UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau in Bangkok; Ms. Tshering Choden, Regional Gender Specialist, UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau in Bangkok; Ms. Joanna Hill, Gender Specialist, UNDP global team; Ms. Tshewang Lhamo, Gender Analyst, UNDP Bhutan; Mr. Tashi Namgay, Director, DoEP/Head, NCWC Secretariat; Ms. Ugyen Tshomo, Chief Program Officer, NCWC Secretariat; Ms. Wangchuk Zangmo, Deputy Chief Program Officer, NCWC Secretariat; Ms. Deki Yangzom, Program Officer, NCWC Secretariat and Ms. Kuenzang Choden, Sr. Human Resource Officer, RCSC Secretariat.

The report benefited from substantial input and comments from the RCSC, gender and child focal persons, and human resource officers of relevant ministries, agencies, and local governments. Invaluable insights and expertise provided by partner countries during the regional validation workshop also contributed to improving the action plan.

The timely finalization of the action plan was made possible through the excellent leadership and guidance provided by the NCWC throughout the process, and with financial support from the Government of Italy.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BCSR	Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulation
BPfA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSAB	Civil Service Act of Bhutan
DPIDG	Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government
FYP	Five Year Plan
GFPs	Gender Focal Points
HR	Human Resource
HRO	Human Resource Officer
ICT	Information, Communication and Technology
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
NGEP	National Gender Equality Policy
NSB	National Statistics Bureau
PMC	Professional and Management Category
RCSC	Royal Civil Service Commission
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEA	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNECA	UN Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCAP	UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
ZES _t	Zhiyog Electronic System

INTRODUCTION

The action plan for the promotion of gender equality in Bhutan's public administration was developed as part of the project on "*Building capacities for promoting the presence and leadership of women within public institutions at the national and local levels*", funded by the Government of Italy, and implemented by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The project was based on the premise that increasing the presence and leadership of women in public administration - at both national and subnational levels - is essential for enhancing gender equality, fostering inclusive, responsive, and accountable governance; improving service delivery; and promoting effective citizen engagement. Greater representation and leadership of women in public institutions promote their equal participation to advance the gender-responsiveness of public policies and services. A gender-balanced public administration, enabled through women's empowerment, helps to implement policies and strategies that address gender disparities and promote women's rights, thereby ensuring that public administration is representative, just, equal, and effective.

The action plan is based on the findings of the in-depth "*Review of Measures for Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women and Gender Equality in Public Administration*" in Bhutan, carried out under the project in 2023. It also includes inputs from the in-country "*Capacity Development Workshop on Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women in Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels*" conducted from 17 to 20 October 2023 in Paro, Bhutan. The workshop also served as a platform to validate the findings of the national review and propose action points based on the national review findings¹.

This action plan responds to the provisions of several international agreements that require signatory countries, including Bhutan, to uphold gender equality and promote women's participation in public administration. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)² requires signatory countries to implement policies and legislation that ensure women equal rights to participate in the formulation and implementation of development policies and programmes, including access to decision-making positions in public institutions. In particular, CEDAW general recommendation No. 23 and Article 7 require state parties to ensure that women participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy and hold public office at all levels. State parties are responsible for appointing women to senior decision-making roles, where it is within their control, and for consulting and incorporating the advice of groups that represent women's views and interests. Furthermore, they must take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in public life and to enjoy

¹The report of the workshop is available at: https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/BHUTAN_PostworkshopReport_12-12-23_0.pdf

² CEDAW 1979 adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

equality with men. Similarly, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) call for the equal participation of women and men in public life and decision-making. Likewise, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development upholds “women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”³ and “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels”⁴. The *Our Common Agenda*⁵ report of the United Nations Secretary-General calls on Member States to promote the “active and equal participation of women and girls” to establish a “meaningful social contract” grounded in a “comprehensive vision of human rights”. The report emphasizes the need to update the “governance arrangements to deliver better public goods and usher in a new era of universal social protection (...)”.

The national review and the development of this action plan were supported by the project under the leadership of the UNDP in collaboration with the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) Secretariat of Bhutan.

³ [SDG 5.5.files/2023-12/BHUTAN_PostworkshopReport_12-12-23_0.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf)

⁴ SDG 16.7.

⁵ United Nations, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General* (Sales No. E.21.I.8), available at https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf.



OBJECTIVE

The action plan aims to implement strategic interventions to achieve gender equality and enhance the representation of women in leadership roles at both national and subnational levels in public administration. Women's advancement and representation in higher leadership positions in Bhutan's public sector at the national and subnational levels will be achieved by:

- a) Integrating gender equality principles, policies, regulations, and mechanisms to attain and maintain gender parity in public administration;
- b) Addressing discriminatory institutional practices and norms;
- c) Developing institutional mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and long-term sustainability of gender equality initiatives at the national and subnational levels.

3. SCOPE

Bhutan is divided into 20 *Dzongkhags* (districts), four *Thromdes* (municipalities) and 205 *Gewogs* (blocks). These subnational or local level territories deliver local public services, supported by an administrative apparatus consisting of civil servants both at the central and local levels. The *Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC)* with a permanent Secretariat established in line with the *Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan* (Article 26, Section 1 & 8) functions under the *Civil Service Act* of Bhutan as the central personnel agency of the Government to discharge its public duties (Article 26, Section 10). The Civil Service Act of Bhutan 2010 (CSAB 2010) defines agencies as public institutions within the Legislature, Ministries, the Constitutional Office, Autonomous Agencies, *Dzongkhag*, *Gewog*, *Thromde*, or statutory bodies of the Royal Government (unless otherwise specified) that employ civil servants, who are defined as individuals registered with the RCSC and working in these agencies. Accordingly, the implementation of this action plan is intended for all **public agencies or institutions** that receive **support from the civil service machinery** to carry out their public service functions.

The action plan is developed within the context of relevant legislations, policies, and strategies of Bhutan, that have provisions related to gender equality, as well as the international agreements that Bhutan has ratified. The action plan is organized around three broad thematic areas:

- (i) Institutional and Policy Framework
- (ii) Human Resource Policies and Practices; and
- (iii) Evidence and Data-Based Analysis.

The following sections present a qualitative description of activities within these three overarching themes. They also outline the rationale and expected results of their implementation aimed at enhancing gender equality in public administration in Bhutan. The qualitative description of actions within each theme is followed by the action plan table which presents a list of specific action points and activities with the respective indicators, timeline and implementation responsibilities. To maintain consistency with the national Five-Year planning and implementation cycle of the Government of Bhutan, this Action Plan corresponds to the current 13th Five Year Plan (FYP) period (2024-2029). The plan will contribute to achieving the gender mainstreaming targets of the 13th FYP and the implementation of actions to promote gender equality in public administration, in particular.

4. INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM AND IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

A strong institutional mechanism with clear roles and responsibilities for key ministries and agencies including the local government underpins the operationalization of this action plan. The NCWC, as the national gender machinery, will lead efforts to advance gender equality in public administration and oversee the implementation of this action plan. It will be supported by the RCSC as the lead agency for public administration, and line ministries and agencies. The roles and responsibilities of the agencies are as follows:

The **NCWC** will:

- Take the lead in driving the implementation of the action plan, providing strategic direction, and ensuring alignment with national gender equality policies and priorities
- Monitor and evaluate gender equality initiatives across ministries and agencies, ensuring timely updates and tracking of progress and impact of actions
- Provide technical support to ministries and agencies, offering policy advice, training, and resources to enhance gender mainstreaming efforts
- Organize and lead coordination meetings and workshops to ensure regular engagement with key ministries, agencies, and other relevant stakeholders

The **RCSC** will:

- Support institutionalization of gender equality within the public administration
- Facilitate gender capacity building of civil servants in collaboration with the NCWC
- Create awareness on gender equality for civil service and support initiatives to create a workplace that is inclusive and free from gender-based discrimination and sexual exploitation, abuse and exploitation.

The **Ministry of Finance** will:

- Facilitate resource mobilization for the implementation of the Plan

The **Ministries** and **Agencies including local government** will:

- Support sectoral implementation and ownership of the action plan in collaboration and with support from NCWC and RCSC
- Collect gender-disaggregated data and assess gender gaps within their agencies
- Provide timely updates and report on the status of action plan implementation to the NCWC
- Support gender capacity and awareness of civil servants within their agencies
- Create a workplace and organizational culture that creates equality between employees

The **gender focal points (GFPs)** will:

- Provide technical assistance to implement the actions within the respective agencies
- Support the integration of relevant actions from the plan into their sectoral plans, policies and actions
- Support gender capacity building and awareness within their respective agencies
- Collect gender disaggregated information within the agencies
- Monitor implementation of the action plan within their agencies and provide timely updates to NCWC

Development partners such as UNDP will:

- Support resource mobilization for the implementation of the plan
- Provide technical assistance

5. RISK AND ASSUMPTIONS

The action plan is developed based on the assumption that the government demonstrates a continued commitment to accelerating the progress on gender equality particularly in leadership positions., and there is a willingness among the civil servants, including those at the decision-making level, to engage in the awareness and capacity building programs.

Potential risks for the implementation of this action plan include:

- Limited understanding of gender equality and barriers, particularly among the civil servants at the local level. This may lead to misinterpretation of certain actions and concepts, and constrain effective implementation of the action plan.
- Limited sectoral ownership and accountability of the plan: the misconception about the role of sectors with regard to implementing measures to promote gender equality within the respective sectors/agencies coupled with limited technical capacity for gender mainstreaming, may compromise the institutionalization of gender equality actions within these sectors and hence their sustainability.
- Prevalence of socio-cultural norms and practices around women's leadership capacities, gender equality and tradition-gendered division of roles may slow the initiative to promote women's presence and leadership in public administration.
- Advancing gender equality within the public administration requires intentional efforts and resources. Limited budget and resources therefore may limit the scope of actions and their frequency with implications on their impact.

Regular awareness and advocacy among civil servants, including the senior managers; continued engagement and dialogue between the NCWC, RCSC and ministries and agencies including local governments; ongoing monitoring and support from the NCWC, and timely collection of gender-disaggregated data will be necessary to mitigate potential risks and accelerate the implementation of the plan.

6. GOAL

The current *National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) 2020* of Bhutan envisions a society where substantive equality is practiced, providing equal opportunities for all to achieve their full potential and benefit equitably from the social, economic and political development in the country.

The statistics from the national review show that women make up 40 percent (12,076) of the overall civil service workforce (30,194). Although there has been a steady growth in the size of the civil servants over the past decade with a 24 percent increase in 2022 compared to 2012, the number of women civil servants at all levels and in all categories (except in the Support 5 level)⁶ is lower than that of men. While the representation of women in the overall civil service appears to be increasing, the percentage of women holding senior leadership and decision-making positions⁷ (20.4%)⁸ significantly lags behind that of men (79.6%). At the same time, the concentration of women civil servants in the Professional and Management Category (PMC) establishes a necessary reservoir and provides opportunities to foster women in leadership positions as long as the enabling conditions with necessary strategies are put in place. In this context, the goal of the action plan is defined as:

By the end of 2029⁹, the proportion of women in the civil service in Bhutan has increased to 45 percent (baseline of 2023 is 40%), with the proportion of women at the 'decision-making level' increased to 30% (baseline of 2023 = 23%).

⁶ The Bhutanese civil service structure consists of four broad position categories: Executive and Specialist; Professional and Management Category; Supervisory and Support Category; and Operational. Each category contains several position levels totalling 21. Career progression within each level and category is achieved through promotion based on various criteria.

⁷ 'Decision-making position' is used interchangeably with 'senior leadership position'. The P1-Management level is a managerial position with a functional mandate and authority to make decisions, and the entry point to executive positions. Therefore, for the national review and this action plan, decision-making or leadership positions include P1-management and Executive-management positions.

⁸ Established during the national capacity development workshop in October 2023.

⁹ End of this five-year action plan that corresponds to Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan cycle (2024/2025 to 2028/2029).



7. ACTION PLAN

7.1. Institutional and Policy Framework

Based on recommendations from the in-depth national review, “Enhance institutional and policy frameworks for gender equality including institutional capacity and functional autonomy of the national gender machinery to ensure effective discharge of its functions including implementation of related legal and policy provisions.”, actions under this thematic area aim to:

- Strengthen policy and legal framework to promote gender equality in public administration,
- Enhance the institutional capacity of the national gender machinery and RCSC and
- Promote institutional mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and long-term sustainability of gender equality initiatives at the national and subnational levels.

Priority actions

1.1. Strengthen provisions to enhance women’s presence and leadership in public administration in the National Gender Equality Policy.

The current *National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) 2020* provides an overall policy framework on gender equality and women’s empowerment. The policy acknowledges the low representation of women in decision-making as a key issue and provides directives to increase their representation at all levels and across all sectors. However, there are additional opportunities to enhance the policy provisions promoting women’s leadership in public administration. This action entails a revision of the policy to strengthen measures that increase women’s leadership in public administration. This action will be led by the NCWC in partnership with RCSC and the Office of Cabinet Affairs and Strategic Coordination.

1.2. Review the terms of reference of Gender Focal Points and the system of appointment to strengthen their roles across public agencies, at the national and subnational levels.

The national review also revealed a lack of specific criteria for defining the position, educational qualifications, or sectoral relevance in the identification and nomination of Gender Focal Points (GFPs). At the central level, an agency has the discretion to nominate any official of the agency as the GFP, based on their understanding of the GFP’s terms of reference (ToR). At the local level, an executive order from the RCSC had required the legal officers to function as GFPs. However, not all Dzongkhags have a legal officer, and those Dzongkhags without a legal officer appoint any other official as a GFP. Currently, GFPs are of different seniority levels and professional backgrounds¹⁰, with not everyone adequately sensitised and trained on their functions. In this respect, this action will involve revising the ToRs for the focal points and developing guidance for their appointment to strengthen their roles across ministries and agencies at the national and subnational levels.

¹⁰ Legal officer; Human Resource officer; ICT officer; Planning officer; Education officer; Livestock officer; M&E coordinator; etc.

1.3. Coordination meeting/engagement with heads of agencies and senior management to take stock of the progress and discuss issues on gender equality

This action aims to enhance ownership and accountability for gender mainstreaming within ministries, agencies, and local governments by fostering partnerships and facilitating regular engagement of senior management in discussions on gender equality in public administration. Through the action, it is expected that there will be a clear understanding of the current state of gender equality within each ministry and agency, while emphasizing the importance of sectoral ownership of gender equality initiatives. To achieve this, coordination meetings will be organized between the national gender machinery (NCWC) and key ministries and agencies including local governments, providing an opportunity for dialogue.

1.4. Strengthen the institutional capacity of NCWC to effectively discharge its functions (as national gender machinery).

This action aims to enhance the institutional capacity of the NCWC secretariat including building its technical capacities on gender equality, women's empowerment and child protection. It includes consultations with the RCSC, Cabinet and other relevant agencies to enhance its autonomy to fulfil the Commission's coordinating, monitoring and reporting roles.

1.5. Implement interventions to strengthen monitoring of gender equality results/progress including enhancing the gender equality monitoring system.

This action intends to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of gender equality progress and results including through the development of a comprehensive monitoring framework. In addition, this action also includes improving the existing gender equality monitoring system of the NCWC based on the comprehensive framework.

1.6. Develop and implement interventions to enhance accountability of gender equality results across the civil service agencies.

This action aims to address challenges around limited sectoral ownership and accountability on gender equality results through interventions such as the integration of gender equality targets in the performance dashboard of GFPs. It also includes a review of the existing human resource procedures and standards to mainstream gender perspectives, as well as building capacities of human resource auditors on gender equality in public administration. This action will be led by the RCSC in partnership with the NCWC.

Results Matrix

1. INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK								
Sl. No.	Action	Indicator	Means of verification	Time frame	Resources required	Responsible agency	Required but missing capacities	
1.1	Strengthen provisions to enhance women's presence and leadership in public administration in the National Gender Equality Policy	Revised National Gender Equality Policy in place	Revised NGEF uploaded on NCWC's website	2024	Inputs from agencies, political will Budget: USD 5,000	Lead- NCWC Collaborating: RCSC and Cabinet		
1.2	Review the terms of reference of Gender Focal Points and system of appointment to strengthen their roles across public agencies, at national and sub-national level	Revised ToR made available through the NCWC and agency websites Executive order on roles of GFPs based on the revised ToR issued	Agency reports. Annual reports of NCWC, RCSC	2025	Institutional support Budget:	Lead: NCWC Collaborating: Office of Cabinet Affairs and Strategic Coordination Heads of ministries, agencies	Identify the regular civil servants as a Gender focal person, there is a need to identify an individual or a position. Further, it's important to ensure continuity of the gender focal point so that the focal point is there for all times to come	
1.3	Coordination meeting/ engagement with heads of agencies and senior management to take stock of the progress and discuss issues on gender equality	Coordination meeting/ engagement with atleast 10 key ministries and agencies including local level	Minutes of meeting Progress report from the ministries/ agencies including LGs	2025-2029	Support from heads of ministries, agencies and LGs Budget: USD 10,000	Lead: NCWC Collaborating: ministries and agencies including LG		
1.4	Strengthen institutional capacity of NCWC to effectively discharge its functions (as national gender machinery)	No. of full-time staff with expertise on gender equality, women's empowerment and child protection	Annual Report, HR report	2024- 2026	Support from lawmakers, RCSC Budget: USD 20,000	Lead- NCWC Collaborating: RCSC, Relevant Parliamentary Committees, Office of Attorney General		

1.5	Implement interventions to strengthen monitoring of gender equality results/ progress including enhancing the gender equality monitoring system	Improved GEMS based on a comprehensive monitoring framework in place.	GEMS/Monitoring framework	2025	Commitment and support from heads of agencies and gender focal points Budget: USD 30,000	Lead- NCWC Collaborating agencies: RCSC, Office of Cabinet Affairs and Strategic Coordination	
1.6	Develop and implement interventions to enhance accountability of gender equality results across the civil service agencies	Gender equality targets integrated in the Performance Dashboard of gender focal points. Gender perspective integrated in human resource audits.	Performance dashboard with gender equality target integrated. Annual performance evaluation report HR audit report	2025-2026	Commitment and support from heads of agencies, RCSC and gender focal persons Capacities of HR auditors Budget: USD 25,000	Lead- RCSC Collaborating agencies: NCWC, Office of Cabinet Affairs and Strategic Coordination, heads of ministries, agencies & LGs	

7.2. Human Resource Policy and Practice

Human resource policies and practices on recruitment; leadership and capacity building, work-life balance policies, and workplace harassment protection play a significant role in promoting gender equality and parity in leadership positions within public administration. Creating an institutional culture of gender equality in public administration involves developing a shared understanding of gender concepts and principles of equality; internalizing efforts to mainstream gender equality across public institutions; implementing interventions to address gender stereotypes and committing to challenge and change institutional culture and human resource practices that hinder inclusion in the public sector. This action within this thematic area aims to:

- Strengthen civil service policies, capacities and practices towards creating an institutional culture of gender equality within Bhutan's civil service.

Priority actions

2.1. Revise the Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulations 2023 to further enhance the provisions promoting gender equality in public administration.

Bhutan's civil service operates within the general framework provided by the Civil Service Act of Bhutan, and Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulation (BCSR). The latter are merit-based and provide equal opportunities for all eligible Bhutanese without discrimination of race, sex, language, religion, and other status. However, the in-depth review found that they do not provide guidance for gender-responsive measures to address gender-differentiated needs. This action aims to revise the BCSR 2023 to promote gender equality in staff recruitment, retention, remuneration, promotion and in the composition of human resource committees.

2.2. Issue executive orders, notifications mandating ministries and agencies to implement interventions to address gender equality gaps within their sectors including measures to address structural inequalities and occupational segregation.

This action aims to address the short-term specific barriers faced by female civil servants through measures such as executive orders or notifications by the NCWC requiring ministries and agencies to implement measures aimed at addressing gender equality gaps within their respective sectors. Actions could include the adoption of measures to tackle structural inequalities that perpetuate discrimination and barriers to the advancement of women and policies to address occupational segregation, where jobs or industries are dominated by men.

2.3. Develop and implement temporary special measures to enhance women's presence and leadership in the civil service including gender-responsive recruitment systems and improving the representation of women in decision-making bodies.

While women comprise 40 percent of the overall civil service workforce, they hold only 23 percent of the total executive positions. Further, the majority of human resource committee members are men. These committees are responsible for all the key decisions at the ministry and agency level. Therefore, improving the representation of women in these bodies along with implementing temporary special measures will accelerate the achievement of gender parity in the civil service, particularly at the decision-making level.

2.4. Build gender capacities of civil servants including senior managers

The in-depth review revealed that the limited capacity and awareness of gender across different sectors both at the national and subnational levels is one of the key challenges to addressing gender-related barriers in the civil service. Therefore, this action aims to further enhance the capacity of civil servants, including senior managers and human resource officials, to implement national policies and enhance the government's commitment as well as ministry and agency mandates to promote gender equality. Approaches such as the integration of gender modules in pre- and in-service training and the introduction of online modules on gender will be adopted to institutionalize gender capacity building within the civil service. In addition, targeted capacity-building programmes will be implemented for senior managers, gender focal points and human resource officers to better equip them to design, implement, and monitor interventions that promote gender equality.

2.5. Develop and implement targeted capacity building and women's empowerment programmes for current and future (women) leaders including mentoring and coaching.

This action will empower women leaders to overcome barriers to assuming leadership roles within the civil service. It will include targeted training programmes on leadership, public speaking, and communication skills, among others. In addition, targeted support through mentoring and coaching will be explored to share experiences, insights and foster professional growth.

2.6. Carry out gender awareness and sensitization programmes for senior managers, HROs and relevant officials.

Social and cultural stereotypes around traditional gendered roles, women's leadership capabilities and gender occupational segregation continue to exist within the Bhutanese society. These social norms and practices, which influence the workplace culture, especially at the subnational level, constrain women's career advancement, limit women's access to capacity-building opportunities and restrict their recruitment for some positions. This action will support awareness-building and advocacy programmes aimed at changing negative norms and perceptions. Furthermore, it will support gender perspective-building programmes for senior managers, human resources and other relevant officials within the civil service to increase their understanding of the significance of gender equality in public administration.

2.7. Institute a knowledge-sharing forum for senior/mid-level female civil servants to share experiences, issues, challenges and build their confidence.

This action intends to create common platforms/forums for women at all levels of the civil service to come together and openly discuss the challenges they face in their positions, including gender-specific barriers, workplace dynamics and leadership struggles and identify innovative solutions to overcome these barriers.

2.8. Strengthen mechanisms to address Sexual Exploitation, Abuse (SEA) and workplace harassment.

The civil service rules prohibit sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment within the workplace at all levels of the civil service. However, there is a limited understanding among civil servants on what constitutes sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, as well as legal provisions and reporting mechanisms. In addition, the prevalence of a culture of tolerance of harassment and the lack of confidence in redressal mechanisms lowers the reporting of such incidents. This action will strengthen the existing internal reporting systems and referral mechanisms. It will also create awareness, particularly among civil servants at lower levels and train human resource officers, gender focal points, senior managers and relevant officials on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

2.9. Institute and promote gender role models, including fostering gender champions among men as allies and advocates within the civil service through awards and talk shows.

This action intends to help shift cultural norms, promote dialogue, and inspire broader support for gender-inclusive leadership across the civil service. It will include encouraging and recognizing individuals, both women and men, who actively promote gender equality within the civil service through awards, talk shows and dialogues. By doing so, it will highlight the importance of collective action in addressing gender disparities in the workplace.

2.10. Develop and implement measures to address barriers faced by working parents including measures to enhance work-life balance.

Civil servants are entitled to up to 6 months of maternity and 10 days of paternity leave. In addition, to support breastfeeding, working mothers are entitled to flexible hours until their child reaches 24 months. However, these rules are often not applied uniformly across the civil service as decisions regarding their application, particularly of flexible working arrangements, are taken by the senior managers of the respective ministries and agencies. In addition, this action aims to implement additional provisions such as “work from home” and accessible childcare facilities at the workplace to ensure a healthy work-life balance.

2.11. Assess the impact of flexible work arrangements and childcare provisions

The action will entail undertaking a comprehensive assessment of flexible work arrangements and childcare provisions within the civil service to measure their effectiveness in supporting work-life balance, enhancing employee retention and satisfaction and advancing gender equality. This initiative, which will be carried out in collaboration with the RCSC, ministries and agencies, aims to understand the accessibility and utilization of options like telecommuting, flexible hours, and part-time roles, particularly for women balancing professional and family commitments.

Findings from the assessment will provide insights to guide policy recommendations that further strengthen family-friendly practices, cultivate a workplace environment that supports both policy recommendations to strengthen family-friendly practices and foster a workplace that supports working parents in achieving career success.

2.12. Identify Information, Communication and Technology capacity needs of civil servants particularly in female civil support service category and upskill them to respond to changing AI and ICT landscape

This action focuses on assessing the specific information, communication and technology (ICT) skill gaps and needs among female civil servants, particularly those working in support services, such as administrative roles, data management, and customer service to improve their efficiency and productivity as well as career advancement opportunities. It will also build technical capacities to respond to changing Artificial intelligence and ICT landscape, address gendered occupational segregation and encourage more women's representation in the ICT sector.

Results Matrix

2. HUMAN RESOURCE POLICY AND PRACTICE							
Sl. No.	Action	Indicator	Means of verification	Time frame	Resources required	Responsible agency	Required but missing capacities
2.1	Revise the Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulations (BCSR) 2023 to further enhance provisions on gender equality in public administration	Revised BCSR with provisions that support gender equality and women's leadership within the civil service	Revised BCSR Minutes/reports of bilateral and consultation meetings	2029	Support and ownership from relevant agencies Budget: USD 5,000	Lead- RCSC and NCWC Collaborating: HR officials and GPPs	Long term plan
2.2	Issue executive orders, notifications mandating ministries and agencies to implement interventions to address gender equality gaps within their sectors including measures to address structural inequalities and occupational segregation	Executive orders/ notification to support enabling actions for gender equality within the ministries and agencies issued	Approved executive orders/ notification. Consultation report Record of discussions	2025	Support from Cabinet and RCSC Budget: USD 5,000	Lead- NCWC Collaborating: RCSC, Cabinet	
2.3	Develop and implement temporary special measures to enhance women's presence and leadership in the civil service including: A) Gender responsive recruitment systems (example gender balanced panel, gender related questions in the interviews) B) Equal representation in decision making bodies for example- HRCs	Type and number of measures No. of agencies implementing measures	NCWC report Agency report	2025-2027	Gender expert, budget, inputs from agencies and Budget: USD 30,000	Lead- RCSC Collaborating- NCWC, relevant agencies	Gender expert

2.4	<p>Build gender capacities of civil servants including sr. managers through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Integration in the pre- and in-service training institutes b) Development and integration of modules on gender equality in the civil service training tab. (ZEST system) c) Targeted gender training programmes for Sr. managers, GFPs and HROs 	<p>No. of pre- and in-service training programmes with gender modules (sessions)</p> <p>No. of Sr. managers, HROs, and GFPs with gender capacity</p> <p>Sessions on gender equality integrated in the executive forum</p>	<p>Gender training curricula/ sessions</p> <p>Training programme</p> <p>Agency HRD report</p>	2025	<p>Budget, Technical expertise</p> <p>Budget: USD 40,000</p>	<p>Lead: RCSC, NCWC</p> <p>Collaborating: Training institutes and colleagues</p>	<p>The training is an ongoing process</p>
2.5	<p>Develop and implement targeted capacity building and women's empowerment programmes for women leaders and potential leaders including mentoring and coaching</p>	<p>No. of mid and sr. level female civil servants (potential leaders) undergoing leadership trainings and mentorship programmes</p>	<p>Training report</p>	2025-2029	<p>Budget: USD 30,000</p>	<p>Lead: RCSC</p> <p>Collaborating: NCWC, Ministries and agencies</p>	
2.6	<p>Carry out gender awareness and sensitization programmes for senior managers, HROs and relevant officials</p>	<p>No. of sr. managers and supervisors at the central and local levels sensitised</p>	<p>Agency report</p> <p>NCWC report</p>	2025-2029	<p>Budget: USD 25,000</p>	<p>Lead: NCWC and RCSC</p> <p>Collaborating: Ministries and agencies, HRO, GFPs</p>	<p>It will be a continuous process</p>
2.7	<p>Institute knowledge sharing forum for senior/mid-level female civil servants to share their experiences, issues, challenges and build their confidence</p>	<p>No. of forums/platforms organised</p>	<p>RCSC report</p>	2025-2026	<p>Budget: USD 35,000</p>	<p>Lead: NCWC</p> <p>Collaborating: RCSC, ministries and agencies</p>	

2.8	Strengthen mechanisms to address Sexual Exploitation, Abuse (SEA) and harassment at workplace	No. of agencies with well-established mechanisms to prevent and respond to SEA and harassment. No. of orientation/ awareness programmes on sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment	Document highlighting well-established mechanisms. Internal memos/orders/ approval Awareness/ orientation report	2025	Technical assistance Budget: USD 28,000	Lead: RCSC Collaborating: NCWC, GFPS, ministries and agencies	The awareness and orientation will be carried out on a regular basis
2.9	Institute and promote gender role models, including fostering gender champions among men as allies and advocates within the civil service through awards and talk shows	No. of role models recognised and incentivised with civil service awards (certificate of appreciation; promotion, etc.)	Annual reports Civil service awards	2025-2026	Budget: USD 20,000	Lead: NCWC Collaborating: NCWC, Ministries and agencies	
2.10	Develop and implement measures to address barriers faced by working parents including measures to enhance work-life balance: a) Workplace childcare facilities b) "work from home" and flexible working arrangements c) gender responsive facilities, infrastructures, and services	No. of ministries and agencies implementing: a) Workplace childcare facilities b) "Work from home" and flexible working arrangements No of ministries and agencies with gender responsive infrastructure, facilities, and services	Agency report Monitoring report	2025-2026	Support from the ministries and agencies Budget: USD 55,000	Lead: NCWC, RCSC Collaborating: Ministries and Agencies	
2.11	Assess the impact of flexible work arrangements and childcare provisions	Timeline by which the impact assessment is carried out	Assessment report	2029	Budget: USD 15,000	Lead: NCWC Collaborating: RCSC, Ministries, agencies	

2.12	Identify Information, Communication and Technology capacity needs of civil servants particularly in female civil support service category and upskill them to respond to changing AI and ICT landscape	ICT capacity assessment of civil service conducted No. of civil servants benefiting from upskilling programs (disaggregated by sex, occupational and position category)	Training report	2026-2027	Budget: USD 30,000	Lead: Gov tech, NCWC Collaborating: RCSC, Ministries, agencies, LGs	
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7.3. Evidence and Data-based Analysis

Civil service information is made available through the annual civil service statistics published by the RCSC. The data is disaggregated by position levels, age, and at the national and subnational level. Gender-disaggregated information is available for total civil servants, position level, occupation, education level and those who exited the civil service within a particular year. However, there is a lack of publicly available gender-disaggregated data from ministries and agencies at both the national and subnational level levels regarding promotions and completed training. In addition, the review pointed out the lack of regular gender-based analysis in the civil service, including of the barriers faced by female civil servants except for a study on factors constraining women's participation in civil service commissioned by the NCWC in 2014.

At the national level, information on the overall status of gender equality is compiled by the NCWC on an annual basis. The NCWC relies on administrative data of agencies and annual statistical reports published by the National Statistical Bureau (NSB), where disaggregated data is often not available for certain sectors and agencies. The NCWC has developed a gender indicator handbook, comprising relevant indicators across various thematic areas to support agencies to collect information on indicators relevant to their respective sectors. However, the agencies lack awareness of the indicator handbook as well as the capacity to integrate the indicators within their agency research. Therefore, actions under this thematic area aim to:

- Improve gender-disaggregated data collection, analysis and dissemination across all sectors and at all levels
- Enhance capacities of the NCWC, RCSC, human resource officers, gender focal points and relevant officials

Priority actions

3.1. Strengthen the existing civil service database to include gender-disaggregated information at all levels (national and subnational) across all positions and sectors, information on promotion and capacity building.

This action will be led by the RCSC and implemented in close collaboration with the NCWC and gender focal points of the respective ministries, agencies and local governments. It will include identifying data needs, and integration into the civil service statistics to strengthen gender-disaggregated data collection and dissemination.

3.2. Build capacities of the NCWC, RCSC, NSB and relevant agencies on gender-disaggregated data collection, management, and use.

This action aims to address the challenges of limited gender-disaggregated data and related capacities by progressively enhancing the ability to collect, analyse and disseminate gender-disaggregated data across all levels and sectors of public service. The NCWC has developed a gender indicator handbook that compiles selected gender indicators for agencies to incorporate into their survey assessments and data collection mechanisms. However, ministries and agencies lack awareness of the handbook as well as incorporation of related indicators in the surveys. As

such, the capacity-building initiatives will also include updating and dissemination of the indicator handbook.

3.3. Compile and publish periodic gender disaggregated information/thematic analysis on the situation of gender equality including progress, gaps, and opportunities within the civil service.

This action intends to support the NCWC in providing updated information on the status of gender equality, progress and gaps periodically for evidence-based policymaking. It is also expected to support identifying gender gaps in public institutions, glass ceilings and walls, and to implement appropriate policy and programmes to address these gaps.

3.4. *Develop a guidance note on the collection, management and use of gender- disaggregated data within the public administration including a data-sharing protocol.*

The action intends to improve the collection and use of gender-disaggregated data across public sectors through the development of a guidance note. Additionally, it aims to ensure that gender-related information including data on SEA is collected, managed and shared in an appropriate manner across the ministries and agencies including local governments.

3.5. *Mainstream gender into the organisational climate survey of respective agencies.*

The RCSC carries out organizational climate surveys regularly to understand civil servants' workplace experiences and to design appropriate interventions for improvement. This action aims to strengthen the gender-disaggregated information gathered by integrating gender components into the survey.

3.6. *Publish an annual "state of gender equality" report including measures taken by respective ministries and agencies to address gender issues.*

The action aims to create a common understanding among the policymakers, implementers and the public on the state of gender equality, progress made, and challenges and barriers; strengthen accountability of gender. The development of an annual report on the state of gender equality in the country will be led by the NCWC with support from RCSC, gender focal points and relevant agencies and individuals.

Results Matrix

EVIDENCE AND DATA-BASED ANALYSIS							
SI No.	Action	Indicator	Means of verification	Time frame	Resources required	Responsible agency	Required but missing capacities
3.1	Strengthen the existing civil service database to include gender disaggregated information at all levels (national and subnational) across all positions and sectors, information on promotion, capacity building	Information on gender-based composition of civil servants at national and subnational level, by all position categories and across all sectors, information on promotion, capacity building available publicly	Civil service statistics and annual reports	2025	Capacities on gender data Budget: USD 10,000	Lead: RCSC Collaborating: NCWC, HROs, and relevant officials	
3.2	Build capacities of the NCWC, RCSC, NSB and relevant agencies on gender-disaggregated data collection, management, and use	No. of officials with capacities on gender statistics No. of gender analysis reports	NCWC report	2025-2027	Technical expertise on gender statistics Budget: USD 35,000	Lead: NCWC, NSB Collaborating: RCSC, ministries, agencies, LGs	Technical expertise on gender statistics
3.3	Compile and publish periodic gender disaggregated information/thematic analysis on situation of gender equality including progress, gaps, opportunities within the civil service	No. of reports/thematic analysis report publicly available	Thematic reports	2026-2029	Budget: USD 30,000	Lead: NCWC, NSB, RCSC Collaborating: ministries, agencies, LGs	Annually The budget will change based on the scope and type of study/assessment/thematic analysis
3.4	Develop a guidance note on collection, management and use of gender-disaggregated data within the public administration including a data sharing protocol	Guidance note for gender disaggregated data developed	Guidance note and data sharing protocol	2026	Support from RCSC, ministries and agencies Budget: USD 20,000	Lead: NCWC, NSB, RCSC Collaborating: ministries, agencies, LGs	

3.5	Mainstream gender into the organisational climate survey of respective agencies	Gender gaps and gender related issues identified through the annual organisational climate survey report	Organisational climate survey report	2025-2029	Technical capacity Budget: USD 5,000	Lead: NCWC, respective sectors Collaborating: RCSC, heads of ministries and agencies	The GFPs will work with the HR of respective sectors to mainstream gender in the organizational climate survey. The NCWC will provide guidance and technical expertise to the GFPs
3.6	Publish an annual “state of gender equality” report including measures taken by respective ministries and agencies to address gender issues	Annual report published through NCWC website	Annual report	2025-2029 (annually)	Information from RCSC, Ministries, agencies, LGs Budget: USD 5,000	Lead: NCWC Collaborating: Ministries and Agencies including local government	

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As a lead agency to ensure the implementation of the action plan, the NCWC will be responsible for coordinating, monitoring and reporting on implementation progress. The results framework will serve as the key accountability framework. The NCWC will conduct a mid-term review in 2026 and a final review of the plan in 2029. The GFPs will work with senior management and human resource officials to provide biannual updates on the implementation progress to the NCWC, including through the annual gender focal points meeting. The GFPs will also share best practices and challenges from their respective sector.

DEFINITIONS

Decision-making positions: Jobs or occupations within public administration that come with the authority to make decisions and lead the development, interpretation and implementation of government policies; see also top leaders, senior managers and managers.

Gender: Refers to the norms, roles and social relations between men and women. It is socially constructed and varies from society to society. Gender roles can be changed.

Gender equality: the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men, and girls and boys; a condition under which 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 = equal opportunity + fair conditions + equal benefits.

Gender-based discrimination: Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made based on sex/ gender that impairs or nullifies the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of rights and freedoms by individuals, particularly women, regardless of their marital status.

Gender blind: A perspective or approach that overlooks or disregards gender as a factor that may influence outcomes, needs, or experiences. Gender-blind policies or programs treat all individuals the same, without considering the different impacts gender may have.

Gender norms: Ideals about how men and women should look, be and act. These are standards and expectations to which gender identity generally conforms, within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community at that point of time.

Gender-disaggregated data: Data collected and presented with gender in mind and separated into categories based on gender (e.g., 'women' and 'men').

Gender mainstreaming: the systematic incorporation of gender into all government institutions, decision-making processes and policies.

Gender-neutral: A concept or approach that avoids making distinctions based on gender, aiming to be inclusive of all genders. Gender-neutral policies or programs often apply a "one-size fits all" approach to both men and women, which can lead to unequal access and benefits.

Gender-responsive: Gender-responsive programs/policies take into account existing gender norms, roles, and inequalities, and include measures to address them. These policies and programs go beyond raising awareness and sensitivity, aiming to actively challenge and overcome historical biases.

Gender-responsive governance: Gender-responsive governance systems recognize and advance women's participation and leadership in governance and pursue opportunities to advance gender-responsive public policies and services that deliver for all citizens.

Gender roles: Behaviors, tasks and responsibilities that a society considers “appropriate for men, women, boys and girls”.

Gender parity: Equal numbers of men and women in positions.

Gender-sensitive: Policies and programs that recognize the different needs, priorities, and experiences of men and women and aim to reduce gender-based disparities and inequalities and promote equality of opportunities for all.

Gender stereotypes: Stereotypes are structured sets of beliefs about the personal attributes, behaviors, roles of a specific social group. Gender stereotypes are biased and often exaggerated images of women and men which are used repeatedly in everyday life.

Gender transformative: Gender transformative policies and programs challenge and change structural inequality and discriminatory norms and aim to ensure equality of outcomes for all.

Public administration: Set of executive branch public institutions (at the central/national, regional and local levels) responsible for planning, coordinating and controlling government operations and implementing government policies. For the purpose of this action plan, public administration refers to Bhutan’s civil service.

Sexual exploitation: Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting financially, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another person.

Sexual abuse: Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions

Sexual harassment: Any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favor, verbal or physical, or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature, that is likely to cause offense or humiliation to another individual. This includes behaviours that interfere with work performance, are made a condition of employment, or create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Temporary special measures: Targeted actions designed to address or reduce disparities between men and women in economic, social, and political spheres. These measures aim to correct past and present discrimination by providing temporary support or opportunities to women who have been historically disadvantaged.

