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Promoting Women's Presence and Leadership in Public Institutions: Insights from a Project in Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius and Senegal

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Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government



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Abbreviations and acronyms

BCSR	Bhutan Civil Service Rules
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GEPA	Gender Equality I Public Administration
GFPs	Gender focal points
HR	Human resources
HRC	Human Resources Committee
ICT	Information and communications technology
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LWU	Lao Women's Union
MGEFW	Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
MoHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
NCAWMC	National Committee for the Advancement of Women, Mother and Child
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
NGP	National Gender Policy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RCSC	Royal Civil Service Commission
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEA	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

Gender equality is key to expanding opportunities and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in its General Recommendation No. 40 (2024) emphasizes 50:50 gender parity in decision-making as a principle of good governance. While women make up nearly half of the global civil service, they remain underrepresented in higher-level positions and certain policy areas, such as information technology, due to occupational segregation. Increasing women's leadership in public administration strengthens governance, promotes equality, and sets an example for other sectors. However, formal equality often doesn't lead to substantive equality, highlighting the need for policies that address these disparities.

The project "Building Capacities for Promoting Women's Presence and Leadership within Public Institutions at National and Local Levels," implemented by UN DESA in partnership with other United Nations agencies from 2022 to 2024, supported Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal in developing action plans to promote gender equality in public administration. Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 16, the initiative focused on increasing women's leadership and promoting inclusive decision-making. The project built on the OECD/UNDP framework to assess gender equality and conducted national reviews in the four project countries. It included training and capacity-building for stakeholders to develop gender equality strategies and supported the drafting of national action plans in the four countries. A peer review process facilitated knowledge exchange and refined the action plans to promote gender-inclusive leadership. This study evaluates the strategies, progress, and challenges faced by the four project countries, offering recommendations for future initiatives to promote gender equality in public institutions.

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IDENTIFIED BY NATIONAL REVIEWS

At the inception of the project in 2022, Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal were at different stages of promoting gender equality in public administration, with established frameworks but on-

going challenges. Except for Lao PDR, these countries did not meet the global average of 46 per cent women's participation. Women were underrepresented in leadership roles: Lao PDR (17 per cent), Bhutan (20 per cent), and Senegal (31 per cent), all below or equal to the global average of 31 per cent, while Mauritius had 39 per cent.

In 2023, national reviews identified several barriers to women's leadership in public administration in the four project countries. While legal frameworks were in place, policies were often difficult to implement or do not apply specifically to public administration. Many regulations failed to address specific gender needs. Issues with gender infrastructure within leading agencies were noted, including constrained resources, limited technical capacity and a lack of functional autonomy, in some cases. Coordination challenges were also identified. Accountability mechanisms presented challenges, including unclear reporting processes and limited enforcement of sanctions. The reviews called for quotas or special measures to support women's recruitment and address gender-neutral human resource policies. They also highlighted gaps in gender parity awareness and leadership training for women officials, limited career advancement opportunities due to factors such as unclear promotion criteria, maternity leave, as well as a persistent gender pay gap. Work-life balance was also identified as a challenge, with inadequate childcare infrastructure and insufficient policies in some countries. Workplace harassment needed to be addressed, as most countries lacked training or reporting mechanisms.

National reviews highlighted the lack of sex-disaggregated data, caused by insufficient agency capacities for data collection and coordination and gaps in mechanisms for promoting and tracking gender equality in public administration. Limited use of data prevented the identification of gender gaps, compounding efforts to achieve and monitor gender parity. Reviews noted the need for better data management systems and dedicated units for data analysis.

Finally, reviews highlighted the prevalence of traditional gender roles and negative stereotypes that limited women's opportunities, particularly in leadership roles. Social expectations around family responsibilities and mobility restricted women's advancement, while biased attitudes toward wom-

en leaders persisted, with many perceiving men as better suited for leadership positions. These factors contributed to women hesitating to pursue promotions or leadership roles.

AREAS OF FOCUS CHOSEN BY PROJECT COUNTRIES IN THEIR ACTION PLANS

The action plans developed by Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal outline objectives, actions, indicators, timeframes, resources and responsibilities for addressing barriers to women's leadership in public administration.

A key focus is on legal and policy reforms, including strengthening gender equality provisions and revising civil service rules. The plans include measures to enhance policy implementation through executive orders, administrative decrees, and implementing decrees. They also address the need for greater awareness of gender equality issues through training programmes, workshops and awareness campaigns. Strategies to improve gender infrastructure include strengthening gender units and focal points and enhancing coordination across sectors. Additionally, the plans aim to improve monitoring and accountability.

A second focus is improving gender equality through human resources policies, by enhancing recruitment through gender-responsive systems and temporary special measures. Efforts also include promoting gender balance in leadership roles, competitive exams and recruitment committees. Work-life balance is addressed by proposing childcare facilities, flexible work options, and improved family leave policies. Gender equality training for staff and managers is a focus, with specific initiatives to expand training access for women and integrate it into civil servant programmes. Leadership development, especially for women, and information and communications technology (ICT) training are prioritized to reduce gender gaps. The plans also aim to strengthen harassment protection mechanisms through sensitization campaigns, complaint systems, and the development of harassment manuals.

A third focus is strengthening national frameworks for evidence and data-based analysis to support gender equality in public administration, with a key priority of improving data disaggregation. This includes enhancing gender-disaggregated data collection across all levels, positions, and sectors, establishing national databases or platforms for tracking and managing gender data and building capacities for data collection, management and

analysis, as well as improving civil servants' ability to access and interpret gender data. Additionally, the plans seek to strengthen monitoring systems, with mechanisms and resources to track progress, set implementation targets and ensure coordination across ministries.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The project engaged a wide range of stakeholders across four countries, with national governments being the largest group, followed by subnational governments and civil society organizations (CSOs). The involvement of key government institutions in developing the action plans indicates the level of political backing and support. However, there were variations in the level of involvement. In some countries, key officials were deeply involved in drafting and refining the plans, while in others, the leadership and institutional arrangements required further clarification.

Project stakeholders identified key risks in implementing the action plans, including limited understanding of gender equality issues in public administration, insufficient accountability and socio-cultural norms. They emphasised that successful implementation would require ongoing awareness-raising efforts and policy changes. Stakeholders also highlighted challenges such as the need for improved coordination among agencies, financial resources and monitoring systems. They noted potential delays in legislative changes and data collection, as well as the need to promote recognition of women's leadership. Political commitment and shifting societal attitudes were seen as crucial factors for advancing the action plans. Additionally, stakeholders stressed the importance of ongoing technical and financial support.

REMAINING CHALLENGES

Advancing women's leadership in public administration faces several challenges, including the effectiveness of action plans in addressing contextual barriers. Key issues include a lack of specificity in targets, unclear accountability mechanisms and limitations in gender-specific policy revisions in some cases. There are challenges in addressing the gender pay gap, promotion requirements, and work-life balance. While some countries' plans aim to address these, others do not consider crucial issues such as gender-balanced recruitment and harassment prevention. Additionally, there is a need for clear monitoring mechanisms, supported

by disaggregated gender data, and improved coordination between national and subnational levels.

Social norms and biased attitudes toward women in leadership also pose significant challenges, requiring long-term cultural shifts. Financial constraints are another major hurdle, and action plans could benefit from clearer funding strategies and more strategic prioritization of activities based on available resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the four project countries, several recommendations can guide future projects aimed at advancing women's leadership in public administration. Political support is crucial for the long-term success of action plans. Projects should involve diverse stakeholders—government, civil society, international partners—from

the outset to promote shared responsibility and sustainability. Clarifying roles and enhancing coordination among gender equality mechanisms at both national and subnational levels is crucial for effective action. Action plans should be based on local needs, capacity and resources, and projects should allow for flexibility in design and implementation to fit each country's unique context.

Addressing cultural barriers to women's leadership requires sustained efforts, including public awareness campaigns, media strategies and community engagement. Identifying long-term funding sources, reallocating existing resources and embedding gender equality in national financial plans are essential for sustaining progress. Regular reviews of progress should be conducted to ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of gender equality initiatives, with potential funding from development partners for these assessments.

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1. Introduction

The project “Building Capacities for Promoting Women’s Presence and Leadership within Public Institutions at National and Local Levels” was implemented by UN DESA in partnership with other United Nations agencies and national governments from 2022 to 2024. This initiative aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically focusing on two key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, with an emphasis on increasing women’s participation and leadership opportunities and SDG 16, which promotes peaceful, just, and inclusive societies by ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels.

Four countries - Bhutan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Mauritius, and Senegal - received support through this project to develop and implement action plans that prioritize gender equality in public administration at national and local levels. The countries were selected from among the least developed countries and small island developing states based on their socio-economic contexts, varying progress in achieving gender parity within the executive branch of government and their commitment to addressing gender imbalances.

The project helped these countries identify key

areas for improvement and provided guidance on the policies and resources needed to drive change and foster inclusivity in the civil service. This included implementing targeted temporary special measures (such as quotas), recruitment and promotion strategies, and earmarked training budgets for on-the-job professional development and leadership building for women.

This study outlines the approaches and processes employed by these countries and analyses the strategies they have developed to enhance the presence and leadership of women in public institutions. It examines the progress made throughout the project’s implementation in conducting national reviews and developing action plans to address identified gaps, prioritise gender equality in public administration and support women’s advancement into leadership roles. Additionally, the study explores perceptions of progress, factors contributing to it and remaining challenges in promoting gender parity in public administration.

This study is relevant to policymakers, advocates, and stakeholders dedicated to advancing women’s representation, especially in leadership roles, within public institutions across diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts. Based on the lessons learned from this project, the study offers recommendations for future initiatives to advance gender equality in similar contexts.

2. Gender Equality in Public Administration

Gender equality¹ is crucial for broadening individual opportunities, achieving a just and sustainable world and achieving the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is at the core of human rights and the values of the United Nations, embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in its General Recommendation No. 40 (2024) on equal and inclusive representation, emphasises 50:50 parity between women and men as a key pillar of decision-making systems, meant to be a permanent principle of good governance, not a temporary measure.²

Despite constituting nearly half of the global civil service, women remain underrepresented at all levels of public decision-making, particularly at higher hierarchical levels.³ Additionally, their presence in public administration varies significantly across policy areas.⁴ For instance, information technology is one of the areas with the lowest representation of women.⁵ The concentration of men and women in different types of roles, with women often occupying lower-paying, administrative

positions while men dominate higher-level, decision-making roles, is referred to as occupational segregation.⁶

Increasing women's leadership in both national and subnational public administration promotes gender equality and strengthens accountable governance. It can also act as a "driver of integrity" by disrupting collusive networks.⁷ A gender-equal public administration not only demonstrates a government's commitment to gender equality but also sets a standard for other workplaces. As the largest employer in many countries, public administration has both a duty to ensure and significant potential to promote women's right to equal and full employment and participation.

As noted in the national reviews conducted by the project countries as well as studies conducted worldwide,⁸ formal equality in laws does not systematically translate into substantive equality. Public policies are critical in addressing these disparities by implementing measures that contribute to promoting equality and fostering a fairer and more inclusive public administration.

1 According to the UNDP-OECD Framework for Assessing Gender Equality and Women's Leadership in Public Life (Unpublished), gender equality is defined as equality under the law, equality of opportunity, and equality of voice (the ability to influence and contribute to policymaking). This encompasses the concept of gender equity in terms of women's and men's fair and equal access to information, services, justice, resources, benefits and responsibilities.

2 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/grecommendations/gr40/CEDAW-general-recommendation-40-flyer.pdf>

3 UNDP, University of Pittsburgh, Gender Equality in Public Administration, 2021, (p. 48). https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ao/UNDP_AO_UPitt_2021_Gender-Equality-in-Public-Administration-EN1.pdf

4 *Ibidem*, pp. 66, 79.

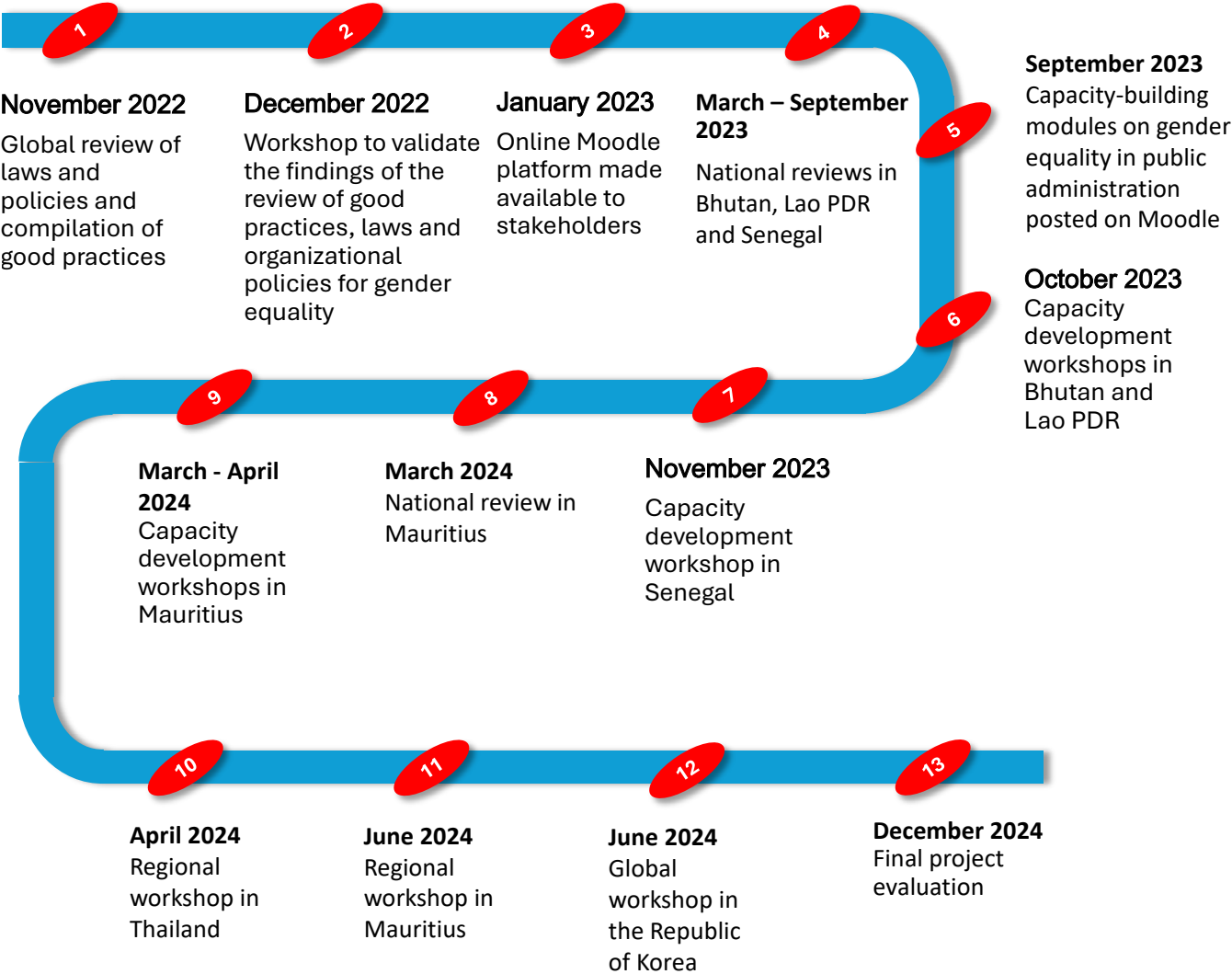
5 <https://www.oecd.org/mcm/Policy-Framework-for-Gender-Sensitive-Public-Governance.pdf> (p. 8) and Gender Equality in Public Administration report, figure 4.1 - Women's participation in public administration, by policy area, p. 68.

6 *Ibidem*, p.118.

7 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/grecommendations/gr40/CEDAW-general-recommendation-40-flyer.pdf>

8 See, for example, Spanish Directorate-General for the Civil Service and EUPAN, Gender Equality in the Civil Service, p.2.

Figure 1 – Project timeline and milestones



Source: Author's elaboration.

3. Project Approach and Methodology

The project adopted a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality in public administration in Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius and Senegal through several key actions. These countries were selected through a desk review process. Initially, 87 countries were considered, including Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States and other developing countries prioritized by the project donor. Countries were excluded if they had a high Fragile State Index, above-average female representation in public administration, low decentralization, lacked statistical data, or did not report challenges in increasing the representation of women in decision-making roles in their Voluntary National Reviews. After further screening, Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal were selected for their alignment with key criteria, including their expressed need for capacity-building in promoting women's leadership in public institutions, the inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment objectives in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and synergies with existing UN DESA initiatives.

The project built on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/UNDP framework for Assessing Gender Equality in Public Life establishing a broad analytical framework comprising four dimensions of gender equality in public administration: institutional and policy frameworks; human resources policies and practices; evidence and data-based analysis; and socio-cultural factors. Global reviews of laws and

practices⁹ were conducted in 2022-2023 to understand the current landscape and identify good practices across different contexts.

Next, the project involved an assessment of each country's specific situation through national reviews (Figure 1 illustrates the timeline for project milestones). This helped in identifying the unique challenges and opportunities present in each country's public administration landscape.

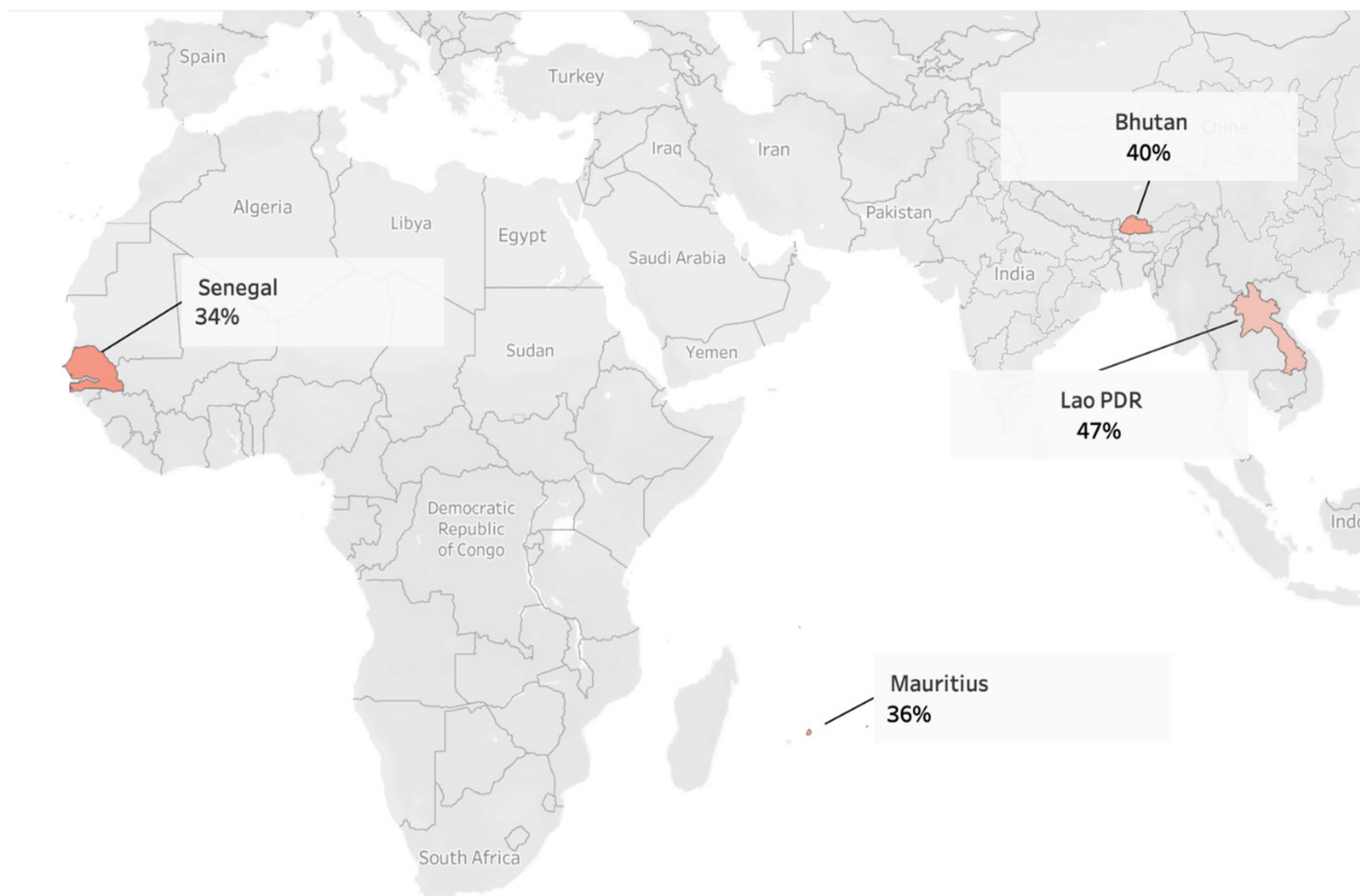
To foster effective implementation and buy-in, the project engaged in training and capacity-building activities with relevant stakeholders at both national and subnational levels. This ensured that key actors were equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to collaboratively develop whole-of-government strategies to promote gender equality.

Following these activities, the project supported the drafting of national action plans tailored to the needs and context of each country. These action plans were designed to address identified gaps and support the advancement of gender equality in public administration at all levels.

Finally, the project facilitated learning and exchange among countries and stakeholders, including through a peer review of the action plans. This collaborative process helped refine the plans and increased awareness among public sector officials and stakeholders about the priorities for achieving more gender-inclusive leadership in public administration.

⁹ See the project website, <https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/projects/building-capacities-promoting-presence-and-leadership-women-within-public-institutions>

Figure 2 – Women's representation in public administration at project inception



Source: National Review of Bhutan, p.vii; National Review of Lao PDR, p.23; Draft National Review of Mauritius, p.13, and National Review of Senegal (English version), p.2.

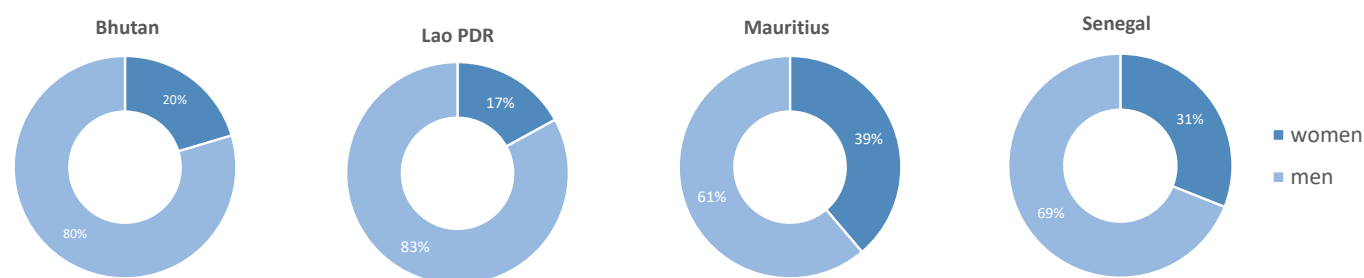
4. Gender Equality in Public Administration at Project Inception

At the start of the project in 2022, Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius and Senegal were at different stages in promoting gender equality in public administration. While each country had made commitments by establishing institutional and policy frameworks to promote gender equality, as outlined in Table 1, challenges persisted, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2 shows that, except for Lao PDR, the project countries had not reached the global average of 46 per cent¹⁰ women's participation in public administration. Figure 3 indicates that although

women made up a large segment of public administration employees in the four project countries, they were underrepresented in leadership roles¹¹. In Lao PDR, women's representation at the leadership level was 17 per cent, versus 20 per cent in Bhutan and 31 per cent in Senegal—all below or equal to the global average of 31 per cent for top leadership positions.¹² Mauritius, however, was slightly above the global average at 39 per cent, although this was still lower than the 50:50 recommendation set by CEDAW (see section 2). Data on women's representation at the local government level was unavailable for all the project countries.

Figure 3 – Women's representation in leadership roles in public administration



Source: Author's elaboration of data from National Review of Bhutan, pvii, National Review of Lao PDR, p.8, Draft National Review of Mauritius, p. 15 and National Review of Senegal (English version), p.16.

¹⁰ UNDP, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh op. cit. p. 26.

¹¹ According to UNDP and the University of Pittsburgh, op. cit. p.161, decision-makers are identified "using their job functions, and the extent to which civil servants perform leadership tasks – managing others, making decisions over budgets and setting agendas. (...) Top leaders are described using terms such as 'top-level decision-making positions' and 'chief executive positions.' Senior managers are often described as 'senior managers' but also with terms such as 'senior positions', 'senior leaders', 'senior officials', 'senior civil servants' and 'executive levels.'"

¹² Ibidem, p.43.

Table 1 - Institutional and policy framework on gender equality at project inception

COUNTRY	KEY LEGAL AND POLICY MEASURES	KEY ENTITIES
BHUTAN	National Gender Equality Policy 2020: aims to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender Equality Strategy in the Bhutanese Civil Service 2018-2023: Aims at creating an enabling environment, enhancing capacities, balancing decision-making, mainstreaming gender in human resource policies, and monitoring progress to achieve 15 per cent women's representation at the executive level by 2023.	Royal Civil Service Commission and its Secretariat: central civil service personnel management agency. National Commission for Women and Children: national lead agency for promoting gender equality, established in 2004, and the network of gender focal points.
LAO PDR	<u>Five-Year National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2020-2025)</u>: sets specific targets for women's leadership and aims to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions within the government.	The Ministry of Home Affairs: responsible for creating policies and measures for women to attain leadership positions at every level. National Committee for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children: leads the implementation of the Five-Year National Plan of Action on Gender Equality. <u>Lao Women's Union</u>: responsible for, among other duties, ensuring that women have equal rights and benefits as men.
MAURITIUS	<u>National Gender Policy (NGP) 2022-2030:</u> maps strategies, governance tools and institutional settings to "drive and support gender equality goals."	<u>National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming</u>: Established in 2010, monitors the implementation of the NGP and provides a platform for exchange for their gender focal points. <u>Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare</u>: lead agency on gender mainstreaming.
SENEGAL	<u>National Strategy for Gender Equality and Equity (2016-2026)</u>: aims to eliminate inequalities between women and men. <u>Gender Parity Law No. 2010-2011</u> requires parity between women and men in electoral lists.	Ministry of Women, Family, and Childhood Protection: aims to ensure effective progress in gender equality, economic and social development and public management.

5. Barriers to Women's Leadership Identified by National Reviews in Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius and Senegal

5.1 Institutional and Policy Framework

The national reviews and dialogues conducted in the four project countries, beginning in 2023, identified several institutional barriers to women's leadership in public administration, as summarized in Table 2. Despite existing legal and policy frameworks promoting gender equality, measures to achieve gender parity are not always applicable to the civil service or are challenging to implement. For example, the national review for Senegal noted that Gender Parity Law No. 2010-11, enacted in 2010, does not directly apply to public administration, highlighting the need to institutionalize gender policies and integrate them into procedures and initiatives within the public service.¹³ Moreover, the national reviews revealed that most public service regulations and policies in the four project countries are gender-neutral and fail to address gender-specific needs, with some exceptions for parental leave and flexible working arrangements. Reviews in Bhutan and Lao PDR highlighted that the implementation of gender policies faces challenges, particularly due to limited human capacity, financial resources and, in the case of Lao PDR, the absence of mechanisms to monitor law implementation. In contrast, the reviews in Mauritius and Senegal point to challenges related to the institutionalization of these policies. Additionally, the four national reviews highlighted a general lack of awareness and understanding of current gender equality policies among civil servants, with the reviews for Lao PDR and Mauritius specifically noting this issue at the subnational levels.

Regarding gender infrastructure, the national review in Bhutan indicated that the leading agencies face challenges related to constrained resources, limited technical capacity, and a lack of functional autonomy. It mentioned that the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) has experienced diminished independence in recent years,

operating as a division under the Ministry of Education and Skills Development following civil service reforms.¹⁴ In Lao PDR, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) and the National Commission for the Advancement of Women and Children (NCAWMC) lack implementation guidelines to achieve targets for women's representation in leadership positions.¹⁵ In Mauritius, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (MGEFW) grapples with human and financial constraints, as well as insufficient systemic approaches and technical capacity, hindering effective gender mainstreaming.¹⁶ Challenges related to the gender infrastructure were not addressed in Senegal's national review.

National and regional dialogues organized by the project (see the Annex) emphasized the importance of addressing human and financial constraints while establishing clear roles and sectoral implementation guidelines to enhance the effectiveness of institutions and mechanisms responsible for gender mainstreaming and promoting women's leadership in the public sector. They also emphasized the need for all ministries to appoint and empower designated gender focal points selected based on well-defined criteria, who should have clearly defined responsibilities, increased resources and the ability to devote time to gender mainstreaming tasks.

Reported coordination challenges within the gender infrastructure in Bhutan include unclear responsibilities and undefined leadership roles among key entities, such as the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC), NCWC and line ministries (see Table 2). In Lao PDR there are unclear interaction mechanisms between NCAWMC, the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and MoHA. In both countries, reviews indicated limited coordination between the national and subnational levels. Additionally, there is a need to empower gender unit coordinators to improve coordination in Senegal. Challenges related to lead actors were not ad-

¹³ The National Review of Senegal (English version), p. 10, states that Law No 2010-11 of 2010 refers to parity among elected officials.

¹⁴ National Review of Bhutan, p.7.

¹⁵ National Review of Lao PDR, p. 29.

¹⁶ Draft National Review of Mauritius, p. 12.

dressed in Mauritius's draft national review.¹⁷

According to the national review of Bhutan, accountability mechanisms for gender parity are absent at the RCSC.¹⁸ In Lao PDR, there is a lack of clarity regarding accountability and reporting mechanisms. In Mauritius, the implementation and monitoring functions of the National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming Accountability are not clearly established, and no uniform reporting process exists. In Senegal, the review noted insufficient results from existing account-

ability and monitoring mechanisms.

According to Lao PDR's review, weak enforcement and sanctions to address discrimination against women further hinder effective accountability. Mauritius's review emphasised the limited capacity of MGEFW to implement sanctions or incentives,¹⁹ which exacerbates accountability challenges. Issues related to enforcement and sanctions were not examined in the national reviews of Bhutan and Senegal.

¹⁷ The National Review of Mauritius, cited as a draft in this study, is awaiting approval from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare.

¹⁸ National Review of Bhutan, p.7.

¹⁹ Draft National Review of Mauritius, p. 12.

Table 2 - Institutional and policy challenges noted in the national reviews²⁰

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Legal frameworks and policies	Policies are mostly gender-neutral, except for parental leave and flexible work.	Laws and regulations are written in gender-neutral terms.	Challenges of gender inequality in legislation and policies. Human resources policies are gender-neutral.	Policies and rules are often neutral, general and without consideration of gender. The gender parity law is not directly applicable to public administration.
Implementation	Ineffective implementation of gender-equality laws and policies.	Weak implementation due to limited human capacity and financial resources. Absence of mechanisms to monitor the implementation of laws and regulations on gender equality.	Fifteen ministries have gender policy documents and action plans. However, they have had limited success in fully institutionalizing these documents and plans.	Need to institutionalize gender policies and integrate them into procedures and initiatives within the public service.
Awareness	Limited awareness of gender equality.	Lack of awareness of gender policies within the public service, especially at the subnational level.	Lack of awareness of gender policy and measures at national and local levels.	Lack of gender awareness by decision-makers in the public service.
Gender infrastructure	Role of the National Commission of Women and Children (NCWC) constrained by a lack of resources and independence. Limited institutional capacity of the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) to advance gender equality.	Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) and (NCAWMC) lack implementation guidelines for achieving targets for women's representation in leadership positions.	The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (MGEFW) faces human and financial constraints, as well as insufficient systemic approaches and technical capacity, which hinder effective gender mainstreaming.	Not addressed in the national review.

²⁰ Information taken from the national reviews of Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius (draft), and Senegal. See the Annex for further information.

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Gender Focal Points	Weak role of gender focal points due to lack of functional authority, resources and clear responsibilities.	Not all ministries have a gender equality focal point.	Limited time devoted by gender focal points to gender mainstreaming tasks.	Need to empower gender focal points.
Coordination mechanisms	Low coordination between the RCSC, NCWC, and line ministries and agencies. Limited coordination capacity of the NCWC at the national and subnational levels.	Unclear coordination and interaction mechanisms between NCAWMC, Lao Women's Union (LWU), and MoHA and other entities and between national and subnational levels.	Not addressed in the draft national review.	Need to empower gender unit coordinators.
Accountability mechanisms	Accountability mechanisms are absent at the RCSC.	Lack of clarity on accountability and reporting mechanisms.	Implementation and monitoring functions of the National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming Accountability not clearly established – no uniform reporting mechanisms.	Insufficient results from existing accountability and monitoring mechanisms.
Sanctions and enforcement	Not addressed in the national review.	Weak enforcement and sanctions to tackle discrimination against women.	Weak capacities of MGEFW to implement sanctions or incentives.	Not addressed in the national review

5.2 Human Resources Policies and Practices

National reviews in Bhutan, Lao PDR and the draft national review in Mauritius identified that human resource (HR) policies and practices in public administration tend to be gender-neutral or blind, failing to address the specific needs and experiences of both male and female officials. For instance, Table 3 shows that in Bhutan, recruitment policies lack explicit targets for the representation of women in HR bodies. Male officials dominate recruitment committees in Bhutan's Human Resource Committee and Mauritius's Public Service Commission. Both countries also reported occupational segregation, particularly at the subnational level. The review in Mauritius highlighted the importance of considering quotas or temporary special measures, while the review in Lao PDR noted the need for special measures targeting women during recruitment. In Senegal, the lack of adequate consideration of gender parity among those with discretionary power in appointments was emphasized.

The reviews in all four countries show the need for raising awareness and promoting gender equality training for staff and managers. In Bhutan, uneven awareness of gender issues among HR officials underscores the importance of targeted initiatives for male leaders and civil servants at both national and subnational levels. Lao PDR faces similar challenges, with many staff unaware of existing gender equality policies within the public sector. In Mauritius, there is a lack of awareness about policies promoting gender parity in decision-making positions. In Senegal, insufficient capacity and skills upgrading for officials at the central and local levels highlight the need for awareness-raising strategies to promote gender equality in the public sector.

The reviews also underscore the need for targeted training and leadership development for women to address gender gaps. In Bhutan, regular capac-

ity-building programmes are necessary to empower female civil servants and enhance their leadership potential. In Lao PDR, women have limited access to training and qualifications, particularly at the subnational level. Mauritius also faces limited leadership training opportunities for women. In Senegal, women officials experience inadequate training and skills upgrading, and many lack the time or freedom to pursue further development, hindering their advancement in the public sector.

The reviews in Lao PDR and Bhutan mentioned that promotion criteria often disadvantage women, particularly those on maternity leave, due to ambiguous prerequisites for promotion (Lao PDR)²¹ and exclusion from annual reviews (Bhutan). In Senegal, where awareness of alternative options for submitting promotion files is limited, women find it more difficult than men to navigate administrative procedures for career progression. Reviews from all four project countries noted a persistent de facto salary gap, despite official policies suggesting the contrary. This discrepancy results from unequal promotion opportunities, disparities in access to leadership roles, and other contributing factors.

According to the national review, work-life balance remains a critical challenge in the project countries, with disproportionate childcare responsibilities and inadequate infrastructure in Mauritius and Senegal hindering women's career advancement. While policies addressing work-life balance—such as paternity leave in Bhutan and Mauritius²²—exist, the reviews note that available measures are often insufficient as seen in Senegal's lack of an official teleworking policy.

Workplace harassment remains inadequately addressed across the project countries. In Mauritius, there is no training on workplace harassment. In Bhutan, sexual harassment incidents are rarely reported due to unclear definitions and low awareness of reporting mechanisms, while Lao PDR and Senegal reported the lack of such mechanisms.

²¹ According to the National Review of Lao PDR (2024, p.34), many women civil servants are "confused about the interpretation" and meaning of some of the additional prerequisites for promotion, such as the "compliance with the Lao Women Union's slogan for "three goods": 1) a good citizen, 2) a good wife, and 3) a good mother".

²² During the national capacity development workshop in Mauritius, participants mentioned the need for an extended paternity leave beyond the current allowance of five days. See the Report of the National Workshop for Mauritius, p.16.

Table 3 – Challenges in human resources policies and practices noted in the national reviews²³

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Recruitment and placement	Recruitment policies and rules lack explicit provisions for gender-responsive actions or targets for women's representation. Women are underrepresented in decision-making bodies such as the Human Resources Committee and selection committees. Occupational segregation is prevalent, particularly at the subnational level.	Need for special measures targeting women during recruitment processes.	Recruitment policies are gender-neutral at the national and subnational levels. Need to consider introducing quotas across public bodies or temporary special measures. Recruitment panels (e.g. at the Public Service Commission) are male dominated. Glass walls (create barriers to the recruitment of women in certain occupational fields).	Lack of consideration of gender parity by those who have discretionary power in appointments.
Promotion and advancement	Promotion rating rules disadvantage women on maternity leave.	Need for a policy change to ensure that maternity leave does not hinder women's career development due to exclusion from staff annual reviews. Ambiguous prerequisites for promotion affect the promotion of female civil servants.	Promotion policies are gender-neutral at the national and subnational levels and perpetuate gender gaps in leadership positions.	Women have less availability than men to navigate administrative procedures necessary for career progression. Women have weak professional networks.
Remuneration	There is no formal gender pay gap, but a de facto gap exists due to unequal opportunities for women and men.	Disparity in the representation of women at higher salary scales or leadership positions compared to men.	Despite equal pay policies, remunerated participation in public committees and boards is not gender balanced.	Remuneration regulations do not take gender into account.

23 Information taken from the national reviews of Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius (draft), and Senegal. See the Annex for further information.

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Work-life balance	Disproportionate childcare burdens and lack of gender-responsive infrastructure limit women's career advancement opportunities. Need to extend paternity leave and flexible working arrangements for fathers.	Need for work-life balance measures, including providing facilities and services to address parental needs.	Need for improved work-life balance policies and measures to alleviate women's care burden. Care facilities (for children and older persons) are lacking. Need for flexible working arrangements.	Policies to promote work-life balance are rare, and there is no official teleworking policy in place. Absence of childcare facilities in public agencies. Need for integrating paternity leave into public administration.
Gender equality training and awareness-raising for staff and managers	Need to raise awareness on gender equality for male leaders and civil servants at the national and subnational levels. Need to enhance awareness and capacities on gender issues among HR officials.	Need to promote a better understanding of gender equality as staff remain unaware of gender equality policies.	Lack of awareness of policy and measures to promote gender parity overall and in decision-making positions at national and local levels.	Need for awareness-raising strategies to promote gender equality in the public sector. Insufficient capacity and skills upgrading for officials at the central and local levels.
Training and leadership development for women	Need for regular capacity building programmes for female civil servants.	Women civil servants have limited access to training, including leadership training, especially at the subnational level as well as opportunities to achieve qualifications.	Limited training opportunities in leadership for women.	Low level of training among women officials. Women lack sufficient time and freedom to pursue further training.
Workplace harassment protection	Sexual harassment incidents are rarely reported due to a lack of clarity about the types and nature of sexual harassment and low awareness of existing mechanisms.	Low awareness of what constitutes harassment. Need for mechanisms to address harassment in the workplace.	No training on harassment in the workplace.	No specific mechanism to report sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

5.3 Evidence and Data-based Analysis

National reviews in the project countries reveal significant gaps in data and mechanisms necessary for promoting and tracking progress on gender equality in public administration, which are summarized in Table 4. A critical issue identified by all four countries is the lack of sex-disaggregated data, which hinders effective analysis and understanding of gender dynamics within organizations. This deficiency arises from inadequate agency capacities for data collection, management, and coordination at both national and subnational levels, as seen in Bhutan and Lao PDR. Additionally, the review in Mauritius highlighted insufficient capabilities for measuring the impact of gender equality initiatives.

Limited use of data and data analysis prevents identifying specific gender gaps, further challenging efforts to promote gender parity. For example, Bhutan's review noted the need to disseminate its gender indicator handbook and conduct regular gender-based analyses to understand barriers faced by women civil servants. The review in Lao PDR highlighted the absence of a database to monitor gender equality, while the review in Mauritius emphasised the need for a dedicated

unit within the Commission of Women's Affairs to compile and analyse subnational data, as well as the importance of publishing surveys on staff harassment conducted by the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative, and Institutional Reforms. Lack of data on sex-based discrimination (as reported by Bhutan) and insufficient dissemination of data (as reported for Mauritius) may impede the development of targeted interventions and diminish the visibility of issues affecting women's safety and equality in the workplace.

While the national review of Senegal did not address this issue, the reviews in Bhutan, Lao PDR and the draft national review of Mauritius noted gaps in monitoring gender parity at decision-making levels. For instance, Bhutan's review highlighted the need to incorporate a gender perspective into human resources audits. Lao PDR's review highlighted the absence of a monitoring system to track progress on targets for women in leadership positions, while Mauritius's review noted the lack of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework. Regional reviews and dialogues emphasised that without robust mechanisms to track and report on gender equality, public agencies cannot monitor progress and ensure accountability.

Table 4 - Evidence and data-based challenges noted in the national reviews²⁴

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Data disaggregation	Lack of disaggregated data on completed training, promotions and other human resource-related statistics.	Absence of gender-specific data including on workplace harassment.	Official statistics do not include sex-disaggregated data for various (administrative) ranks and sectors or sexual harassment in the workplace.	Lack of data of data disaggregated by executive and non-executive categories at the subnational level.
Data capacity building	Need to enhance agency capacities for collecting, managing and utilizing sex-disaggregated data, while improving coordination at national and subnational levels.	Need to improve coordination at national and subnational levels and clarify responsibilities for leading data collection.	Need to develop the capacity to assess the impact of measures to achieve gender equality and women's access to leadership positions.	Not addressed in the national review.
Use of data	Need to disseminate the gender indicator handbook. Lack of regular gender-based analysis including of the barriers faced by female civil servants.	Lack of a database to monitor gender equality.	Need to set up a unit within the Commission of Women Affairs to compile and analyse subnational government data. The results of the surveys of the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms on staff harassment are not published.	Not addressed in the national review.
Monitoring mechanisms	Need to enhance gender equality monitoring and include a gender perspective into human resources audits.	Absence of a monitoring system to track progress on targets for women in leadership positions.	Lack of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework and insufficient human resources within the Gender Unit of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare to undertake monitoring and oversight. A systematic approach is needed to monitor progress on gender equality.	Not addressed in the national review.

²⁴ Information taken from the national reviews of Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius (draft), and Senegal. See the Annex for further information.

5.4 Contextual Factors

National reviews in Bhutan, Lao PDR and Senegal and the draft national review in Mauritius, identified gender roles, social norms, and women's unequal burden of childcare and domestic responsibilities as key barriers to women's full participation and leadership in public institutions. As shown in Table 5, the reviews highlighted the prevalence of traditional gender roles and occupational segregation and the persistence of negative gender stereotypes.

For instance, the review of Mauritius reported that gender stereotypes and family commitments contribute to the lower representation of women in leadership roles and recommended a shift in male attitudes towards sharing domestic responsibilities. In Senegal, the review noted the weight of customs, traditions, and stereotypes, which restrict women to tasks perceived as less demanding, with traditional expectations around family and mobility further limiting their opportunities.

Reviews underscored biased attitudes toward women leaders in public administration in Bhutan, Lao PDR and Mauritius, partly due to the expectation that women balance work and family responsibilities. The review in Bhutan noted that social norms and attitudes around traditional gendered roles among women civil servants reinforce the belief that men are better leaders. In Lao PDR, the review mentioned that officials, including female staff, often prefer not to have a woman as leader. These factors can cause women to hesitate to pursue promotions or leadership positions, as reported in the national review of Lao PDR and the draft national review of Mauritius.

Additionally, Bhutan's review highlighted a culture that tolerates sexual harassment in public administration, while Mauritius reported harassment by male officials unwilling to accept women's authority. Harassment was not addressed in the reviews from Lao PDR or Senegal.

Table 5 - Socio-cultural factors noted in the national reviews²⁵

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Gender Stereotypes	Prevalence of stereotypes around occupational segregation and traditional gender norms. Perceived traditional gendered roles are prevalent, particularly at the subnational level.	Need for a mindset shift from negative (gender) stereotypes ²⁶ .	Gender stereotypes persist across public administration and are among the reasons explaining the lower percentages of women in leadership positions.	Persistent weight of customs, traditions and stereotypes. For certain civil servants, gender “is other people’s business”.
Traditional Gender roles	Women’s disproportionate burden of childcare and domestic responsibilities.	Many women hesitate to pursue promotions or leadership positions, due to fear of additional burdens and the perception of needing to meet extra prerequisites ²⁷ . Men can socialize after work, but women are expected to handle household chores and childcare.	Some women avoid pursuing higher public administration positions because of family commitments. A change in the mindset of men to share household responsibilities is required.	Women are most often confined to tasks that require less physical effort (secretarial work, assistance, etc.). Problems linked to the mobility of married women as they are perceived to have to stay near their home area, especially when they have a family.
Attitudes and perceptions towards women in leadership positions	The existence of social norms and attitudes around traditional gendered roles among women civil servants reinforces the belief that men are better leaders.	Officials, including female staff, often prefer not to have a woman as leader. Women in leadership roles are expected to come from financially independent families and be married with a “complete and warm family,” while performing “tasks as men would”.	Some men in public administration still have biases against women in leadership positions.	Not addressed in the national review.
Harassment culture	Prevalence of a culture that tolerates incidents of sexual harassment.	Not addressed in the national review.	Harassment of women in senior roles by male officials unwilling to accept their authority.	Not addressed in the national review.

²⁵ Information taken from the national reviews of Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius (draft), and Senegal. See the Annex for further information.

²⁶ The national workshop further highlighted that a male-dominated culture makes it difficult to challenge gender stereotypes.

²⁷ See footnote No. 22.

6. Areas of Focus Chosen by Project Countries in their Action Plans

As part of the project, Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal have developed action plans designed to address barriers identified in their respective national reviews.

At the end of a national capacity development workshop, with the assistance of a national consultant, each project country developed a draft action plan. The national consultants then worked with government officials from the project countries—Bhutan’s NCWC, Lao PDR’s MoHA and NCAWMC, Mauritius’s MGEFW, and Senegal’s former Ministry of Women, Family, and Child Protection—to finalise and validate each draft action plan.

Each project country subsequently presented its draft action plan in a regional workshop, attended by government officials and other stakeholders, under the guidance of the United Nations. This workshop provided an opportunity for validating and peer reviewing the plans from a regional perspective. Feedback gathered during the workshops contributed to the finalisation of the plans by each country’s government, with ongoing support from the national consultants.

In line with a pre-established template provided by UN DESA, the action plans include a description of actions, their objectives, indicators, means of verification, timeframes, necessary resources, responsible entities, and the required capacities for each action.

The four plans follow the general structure of the national reviews and encompass three broad dimensions: institutional and policy frameworks, human resources policies and practices and evidence and data-based analysis. Each of these dimensions is examined in the following sections.

6.1 Institutional and Policy Framework

The action plans developed by the four countries highlight significant commitments to address institutional barriers to women’s leadership in public administration, summarized in Table 6. At the legal and policy level, Bhutan’s action plan focuses on strengthening provisions in the National Gender Equality Policy to enhance women’s leadership in public administration and revising its 2023 Civil

Service Rules and Regulations. Lao PDR’s plan envisions the revision of existing laws and regulations with a gender lens. The plan for Mauritius aims for gender parity in senior official postings, although it does not specify the legal implications of this goal. Senegal’s plan considers the drafting of a bill to promote gender equality in public administration.

The plans envision different ways to enhance policy implementation. Bhutan’s plan refers to the issuance of executive orders and notifications requiring ministries and agencies to address gender equality gaps. Lao PDR’s plan mentions administrative decrees to guide the implementation of revised policies and improve reporting mechanisms. Senegal’s plan refers to an implementing decree for gender equality in labour law and the need to continue institutionalizing gender across ministries.

The four plans also identify ways to address the lack of awareness of gender equality issues among civil servants, including: launching gender awareness programmes for senior managers in Bhutan; organizing policy dialogues and workshops to engage stakeholders at the national and subnational levels in Lao PDR; conduct information, education, and communication programmes to raise awareness of gender parity in decision-making in Mauritius; and conducting an awareness campaign to promote the National Strategy for Equity and Gender Equality in Senegal.

In terms of gender infrastructure, Bhutan’s plan aims to strengthen the capacity of the NCWC to lead national gender initiatives. Lao PDR’s plan aims to define the roles and responsibilities of key institutions involved in gender equality. Senegal’s plan aims to institutionalize gender equity units across sectoral ministries.

Regarding gender focal points, Bhutan’s plan aims to review and strengthen their roles across public agencies at the national and subnational levels. Lao PDR’s plan envisions mapping existing gender focal points and creating a network to facilitate collaboration. Senegal’s plan aims for all gender units to have a designated gender focal point.

The plans also include actions to improve coordination. Lao PDR’s plan aims to enhance cross-sector and inter-ministerial collaboration. Bhutan’s

plan foresees to hold a coordination meeting with heads of agencies and senior management. Senegal's plan aims to implement control and regulation measures at both national and local levels.

Moreover, Bhutan's plan intends to enhance monitoring and accountability of gender equality progress across civil service agencies. Lao PDR's plan intends to define institutional oversight functions

to ensure accountability for gender equality policies. Senegal's plan envisions the establishment of a National Observatory on Workplace Discrimination, the enhancement of accountability through gender audits, and stricter enforcement of gender equality regulations at the workplace. None of the action plans include sanctions to strengthen the enforcement of accountability measures.

Table 6 - Commitments in the action plan to transform the institutional and policy framework²⁸

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Enhancement of policy and legal framework implementation	Strengthen provisions to enhance women's presence and leadership in public administration in the National Gender Equality Policy. Revise the Bhutan Civil Service Rules and Regulations (BCSR) 2023 to further enhance provisions on gender equality in public administration. Issue executive orders and notifications mandating ministries and agencies to implement interventions to address gender equality gaps.	Develop administrative instructions, executive order or Decree, or Minister's instructions on how to implement the updated/revised policies mechanisms for online reporting.	Not included in the action plan.	Issue the implementing decree of the law for the effective consideration of gender equality in the labour sector (...). Continue the process of institutionalizing gender in sectoral ministries.
Enhanced awareness	Carry out gender awareness and sensitization programmes for senior managers and relevant officials.	Initiate policy dialogue, and dissemination workshops at the national and subnational level.	Raise awareness continuously on equal representation and participation of men and women in decision-making through gender-responsive information, education, and communication programmes using innovative tools. Target audience: Public officers/ Local Authorities.	Conduct an awareness and dissemination campaign so that stakeholders and recipients take ownership of the National Strategy for Equity and Gender Equality.

²⁸ Excerpts from the four action plans for promoting gender equality in public administration in Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal. See the Annex for further information.

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Gender infrastructure	Strengthen the institutional capacity of the National Commission for Women and Children to effectively discharge its functions as national gender machinery.	Define oversight functions, roles and responsibilities of related key institutions: National Committee for the Advancement of Women, Mother and Child, Ministry of Home Affairs, Lao Women's Union, etc.	Not included in the action plan.	Continue the process of institutionalizing gender in sectoral ministries.
Gender Focal Points	Review the terms of reference of Gender Focal Points (GFPs) and system of appointment to strengthen their roles across public agencies, at the national and subnational levels.	Identify key existing focal points in line ministries/ departments at both national and subnational levels, and specify their roles (terms of reference). Develop gender focal points/stakeholder mapping (also containing contact details of focal points from line agencies). Establish gender equality in public administration (GEPA) networking groups, so that the key GEPA focal points can link up and provide support inside/outside their own agencies.	Not included in the action plan.	Generalization of the designation of GFPs at the gender cell level.
Coordination mechanisms	Coordination meeting/ engagement with heads of agencies and senior management to take stock of progress and discuss issues on gender equality.	Increase coordination mechanisms. Develop a mechanism for the coordination of divisions across sectors at the administrative level.	Not included in the action plan.	Implement control and regulation mechanisms at the national and local levels with the integration of gender units of ministries.
Accountability mechanisms	Develop and implement interventions to enhance accountability of gender equality results across civil service agencies. Strengthen monitoring of gender equality results/progress, including enhancing the gender equality monitoring system.	Increase (...) accountability mechanisms. Define oversight functions/ roles and responsibilities of related key institutions.	Not included in the action plan.	Establish a National Observatory on Workplace Discrimination. Conduct gender audits. Implement control and regulation mechanisms at the national and local level with the integration of gender units of ministries.
Sanctions and Enforcement	Not included in the action plan.	Not included in the action plan.	Not included in the action plan.	Not included in the action plan.

6.2 Human Resources Policies and Practices

The action plans include a range of measures, summarized in Table 7, which aim to enhance human resources policies and practices to promote gender equality. To accelerate the recruitment of women into leadership positions while addressing structural inequalities and occupational segregation, Bhutan's plan considers implementing temporary special measures including gender-responsive recruitment systems, such as gender-balanced interview panels and ensuring equal representation of women in human resources committees. Mauritius's action plan aims to ensure that human resources guidelines for interview panels in public administration, including local authorities, are gender inclusive. Senegal's plan emphasises the promotion of a skilled and gender-diverse workforce, with plans to rotate the presidency of competitive exam juries and recruitment committees to ensure gender balance.

Regarding promotion and advancement, Lao PDR's plan sets a target to increase the representation of women in leadership roles, aiming for 25-30 per cent of women to be promoted to Director General positions by 2030. Regarding remuneration, the action plans of the four countries do not include specific measures, although Bhutan's plan aims to integrate gender equality into staff remuneration through the ongoing revision of the Bhutan Civil Service Rules (BCSR).

The plans also consider measures to improve work-life balance. Bhutan's plan refers to providing workplace childcare facilities, promoting flexible working arrangements and creating gender-responsive infrastructures and services. In Mauritius, the plan proposes advocating for a five-day paternity leave on full pay to encourage men to share childcare responsibilities, along with improving family leave mechanisms for the care of elderly persons and children. Senegal's plan refers to the development of a programme to better reconcile family and professional life for civil servants.

The four plans identify actions for raising awareness and promoting gender equality training for

staff and managers. Bhutan's plan integrates gender equality training into pre- and in-service programmes for civil servants, including senior managers, gender focal points, and human resources officers. It also promotes male allies as gender champions through awards and talk shows. Lao PDR's plan aims to expand access to gender equality training by developing a curriculum, guidelines, and training trainers, with specific targets for female civil servants to attend training programmes. Mauritius's plan focuses on building leadership, managerial and decision-making skills for officials in decision-making roles, with an emphasis on gender inclusion, following a training needs assessment. It envisions providing ongoing professional development for officers in leadership, management, and decision-making with a gender lens. Senegal's plan aims to organise workshops and forums to strengthen officials' capacity on gender issues.

The reviews also include targeted training and leadership development for women to address gender gaps. Bhutan's plan prioritises capacity-building programmes for current and potential women leaders, including mentoring, coaching, and knowledge-sharing forums. Lao PDR's plan aims to set targets for female civil servants to attend leadership development courses. Senegal's plan proposes a communication campaign to encourage women's participation in decision-making. Additionally, both Bhutan's and Lao PDR's plans focus on improving ICT training access to female civil servants. Bhutan's plan aims to identify their ICT capacity needs, while Lao PDR's plan prioritises reducing the gender gap in technology through ICT training.

In terms of harassment protection, Bhutan's plan envisions the strengthening of mechanisms to address sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in the workplace. Mauritius's plan includes the establishment of a system to address harassment, including sensitization campaigns, awareness-raising activities and a toll-free complaint line. Senegal's plan includes the development of a manual on sexual harassment in the workplace. Lao PDR's plan only refers to assessing sexual harassment in the public sector.

Table 7 – Commitments in the action plan to transform human resources policies and practices²⁹

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Recruitment and placement	Develop and implement temporary special measures to enhance women's presence and leadership in the civil service, including: - Gender responsive recruitment systems (e.g. gender-balanced panel, gender-related questions in the interviews); - Equal representation in decision-making bodies for example human resources committees. Unspecified measures to address structural inequalities and occupational segregation.	Not included in the action plan.	Ensure that the human resources guidelines for interview panels for public administration including Local Authorities include both genders.	Establish a rotating presidency within competitive exam juries and recruitment committees to ensure balanced gender representation.
Promotion and advancement	Not specifically addressed in the human resources section of the action plan, but the revision of the Bhutan Civil Service Rules (BCSR) and Regulations aims to promote gender equality in staff promotions, among other objectives ³⁰ .	Target of 25–30 per cent of women in Director General positions by 2030 (210–300 women). Provide technical leadership and political theory training for women because this is a key requirement for career advancement.	Not included in the action plan.	Not included in the action plan.
Remuneration	Not specifically addressed in the human resources section of the action plan, but the revision of the BCSR aims to promote gender equality in staff remuneration among other objectives ³¹ .	Not included in the action plan.	Not included in the action plan.	Not included in the action plan.

²⁹ Excerpts from the four action plans for promoting gender equality in public administration in Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal. See the Annex for further information.

³⁰ Bhutan, National Action Plan to Promote Gender Equality in Public Administration, p. 15.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 15.

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Work-life balance	Develop and implement measures to address barriers faced by working parents including measures to enhance work-life balance: • Workplace childcare facilities • Work from home and flexible working arrangements • Gender-responsive facilities, infrastructures, and services.	Not included in the action plan.	Advocate paternity leave for 5 days on full pay (outside of vacation leave) to encourage men to share responsibilities for childcare. Improve mechanisms for family leave to care for elderly persons and children.	Develop a programme to reconcile family and professional life.
Gender equality training and awareness-raising for staff and managers	Build gender capacities of civil servants including sr. managers through: • Integration in the pre-and in-service training institutes; • Development and integration of a module on gender equality in the civil service training tab (ZEST system); • Targeted gender training programmes for senior managers, gender focal points and human resources officers. 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.	Promote and increase the number of civil servants with access to and understanding of gender equality in public administration and other issues related to women's equality: • Disseminate instructions and implementation guidelines; • Develop a training curriculum and training sessions on gender equality and GEPA. • Train GEPA resource persons – training of trainers.	Provide continuous professional development for "administrative cadre." Build the capacity of officers of administrative cadre in managerial/ leadership skills/ decision-making through a gender lens.	Raise awareness among communities and administrative authorities about the issues of gender integration in commissions. Organize workshops at local level and forums at national level to strengthen officials' capacities.

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Training and leadership development for women	Develop and implement targeted capacity building and empowerment programmes for actual and potential women leaders, including mentoring and coaching. Institute knowledge-sharing forum for senior/mid-level female civil servants to share their experiences, issues, challenges and build their confidence. Identify Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) capacity needs of female civil service, particularly in the support service category.	Set specific targets for female civil servants to attend various training courses. Improve ICT technical capacity and knowledge and reduce gender gap in IT.	Conduct trainings needs assessment at decision making position for officers at the administrative cadre.	Carry out a communication campaign to encourage the participation of women in decision-making bodies.
Workplace harassment protection	Strengthen mechanisms to address sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment at the workplace.	Assess sexual harassment at the workplace in the public sector.	Put in place a mechanism (sensitization; raising awareness; possibility of toll-free line and complaint desk) to address harassment at the workplace.	Develop a manual on sexual harassment in the work environment.

6.3 Evidence and Data-based Analysis

The action plans include a series of measures aimed at strengthening national frameworks for evidence and data-based analysis to support gender equality in public administration, as summarised in Table 8. A key priority for all four countries is improving data disaggregation. In Bhutan, the action plan focuses on enhancing the civil service database with gender-disaggregated data across all levels, positions and sectors and developing a guidance note on data collection and management. Lao PDR's plan seeks to establish a national gender database system to collect sex-disaggregated data for both decision-making and non-decision-making positions, with systematic reporting from each ministry at all levels. Mauritius's plan envisions the collection of sex-disaggregated data for the publication of a Gender Statistics in Public Administration Yearbook, which would be managed by Statistics Mauritius. Senegal's plan envisions the creation of a national data management platform that disaggregates information by gender and the strengthening of advocacy for consolidating gender data at the central level.

The four plans also focus on building data capacities. Bhutan's plan aims to enhance the capacity of

relevant agencies on gender-disaggregated data collection, management, and use. Lao PDR's plan prioritizes improving civil servants' capacities to access and interpret gender data. Senegal's action plan envisages building the capacity of actors involved in gender-responsive data collection and analysis through training sessions at both central and territorial levels.

In terms of data usage, Bhutan intends to publish periodic gender-disaggregated reports to assess gender equality within the civil service including measures taken by ministries and agencies to address gender issues and mainstream gender into organizational climate surveys across agencies. Senegal's plan includes the use of data to carry out gender sectoral studies to identify and address gender disparities in various sectors.

The plans also refer to the strengthening of monitoring systems on gender equality. For instance, Lao PDR's plan aims to create a monitoring mechanism to track implementation progress with clear key targets, indicators and tools, coordinating with line ministries and ensuring adequate budget allocations. Mauritius's plan aims to establish a monitoring and evaluation system within the MGEFW, while Senegal's plan focuses on preparing periodic reports to track progress on gender equality as part of its monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

Table 8 - Commitments in the action plan to enhance evidence and data-based analysis³²

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Data disaggregation	Strengthen the existing civil service database to include gender-disaggregated information at all levels (national and subnational) across all positions and sectors. Develop a guidance note on collection, management and use of gender-disaggregated data within the public administration including a data sharing protocol.	Establish a national gender database system for sex-disaggregated data that includes decision-making and non-decision-making positions. Systematic reporting from each ministry from national to subnational levels.	Collect sex-disaggregated data for the publication of a Gender Statistics in Public Administration Yearbook (responsibility assigned to Statistics Mauritius).	Establish a national information and data management platform disaggregated by gender. Strengthen advocacy for the consolidation of gender-sensitive data at the central level.
Data capacity building	Build capacities of the National Commission for Women and Children, Royal Civil Service Commission, National Statistical Bureau and relevant agencies on gender-disaggregated data collection, management, and use.	Provide GEPA-related digital training on data collection and storage techniques. Provide on-the-job training on how to access, read and interpret gender data.	Build capacity of statistics unit in each ministry to collect, analyse and share sex-disaggregated data using e-HR systems.	Strengthen the capacities of actors in the production of gender-sensitive disaggregated data. • Training session for actors at central level • Dissemination session at territorial level Strengthen the capacities of agents on data collection and analysis tools. Strengthen the capacities of consultants on gender-sensitive data analysis methodology. Fund doctoral research grants, articles or certifications on data production on specialist topics that are not covered by standard surveys.

32 Excerpts from the four action plans for promoting gender equality in public administration in Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal. See the Annex for further information.

CATEGORIES	BHUTAN	LAO PDR	MAURITIUS	SENEGAL
Use of data	Compile and publish periodic gender disaggregated information and thematic analysis on the situation of gender equality within the civil service, including progress, gaps, opportunities. Mainstream gender into the organisational climate survey of respective agencies. Publish an annual “state of gender equality” report including measures taken by respective ministries and agencies to address gender issues.	Not included in the action plan.	“(..) evidence-based gender policy-making (...)”.	Carry out gender-sensitive sectoral studies.
Monitoring mechanisms	Implement interventions to strengthen monitoring of gender equality results and progress, including enhancing the gender equality monitoring system.	Establish a monitoring mechanism to track implementation progress with specific key targets, indicators and tools. • Coordinate with line ministries/departments via gender focal points; • Assist line ministries in establishing their implementation plan and monitoring system; • Line ministries to allocate a suitable budget for implementation.	Establish a monitoring system at the level of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare for the collection of accurate, relevant and adequate data.	Establish a platform monitoring and evaluation mechanism. Preparation of periodic reports.

7. Perceptions of Progress and Remaining Challenges

The project's main outputs at the national level were the action plans on gender equality in public administration. At the end of the project in December 2024, action plans had been developed in the four countries. However, the action plan had been formally adopted by the Government only in Bhutan. In the three other countries, the formal adoption and proper institutionalization of the plans were still pending.

The project did not extend to the implementation of the national action plans. Whether these plans are adopted by the government and owned by all relevant actors and how they might guide action in coming years, will impact progress on gender equality in public administration in the four countries.

The following sections analyse stakeholders' perceptions of the action plans, drawing on feedback gathered during workshops organized by the project and consultations conducted as part of the external evaluation of the project. They aim to explore the feasibility of implementing the action plans, identify additional elements that may need to be addressed and examine remaining challenges and the critical steps required for successful implementation.

7.1 Stakeholder Perceptions of the Action Plans and Their Likelihood of Implementation

Bhutan

Bhutan's action plan was formally adopted by the Government in November 2024. It outlines several risks,³³ including a limited understanding of gender equality and its barriers, especially among local civil servants and insufficient sectoral ownership and accountability, with misconceptions about gender equality roles and limited technical capacity for gender mainstreaming, potentially also undermining institutionalization and sustainability of the plan. Additionally, the plan highlighted that

socio-cultural norms around women's leadership and gender roles may slow progress in promoting women's presence and leadership in public administration. Limited budget and resources could also constrain the scope and impact of gender equality initiatives.

Information from stakeholder consultations during the project evaluation³⁴ indicates that the government of Bhutan has aligned the action plan with the five-year plan cycle (2024-2029). However, there is a need for continued technical and financial support to implement the plan, as it requires consistent advocacy, awareness-raising and policy changes. To mitigate these risks, Bhutan envisions regular awareness and advocacy efforts for civil servants, ongoing dialogue between leading public institutions, line ministries, and local governments, as well as continuous monitoring, support, and gender-disaggregated data collection. The plan has been presented to the RCSC to determine the steps needed for successful implementation, with agencies taking responsibility for executing the plan. Despite concerns about mobilizing resources for some activities, initial actions have begun. They include orienting agencies on their responsibilities, disaggregating data by sex and region, and securing commitment from gender focal points. Civil service managers were consulted and many have accepted the action plan. A draft of sexual harassment standard operating procedures is in place and a request has been made to the RCSC to include a gender course for civil servants and a gender component in civil service examinations. Additionally, the RCSC was asked to incorporate specific gender equality measures in the RCSC dashboard to support the evaluation of progress.

Lao PDR

Stakeholder consultations at the end of the project³⁵ revealed that the implementation of Lao PDR's action plan will require support in terms of technical expertise. Furthermore, there are concerns about the action plan's effective implementation, should the MoHA not secure the required financial resources. It was noted that the govern-

³³ Bhutan, National Action Plan to Promote Gender Equality in Public Administration, p. 7.

³⁴ Summary of Information on Project Countries' Action Plans – Future implementation, Source: Stakeholder consultations, shared by the project evaluator.

³⁵ Ibidem.

ment may not be able to execute all activities as planned. For instance, the review and development of legislation could face delays due to the lengthy amendment procedures, which take time to be endorsed and enforced. Additionally, turnover within government agencies and the need for better coordination among agencies highlight the necessity for both internal and external resources to support implementation. A lack of monitoring and evaluation by relevant stakeholders, along with challenges in managing the systematic collection of data, further complicates the process.

A key challenge to the successful implementation of the action plan, particularly in promoting gender equality in the public sector, is fostering understanding and recognition of women's leadership. Stakeholders mentioned that this challenge can be addressed over time. Thus, there is a positive outlook for pursuing the action plan in coordination with other development agencies. Given that there was no prior action plan on gender equality in Lao PDR, the government will take responsibility for its implementation, recognizing the importance of this initiative as highlighted in stakeholder consultations.

Mauritius

Stakeholders in Mauritius³⁶ mentioned that because the participants in the action plan validation workshops held senior positions within the public sector, there is an expectation that they will continue to advocate for the implementation of the action plan. The plan was also disseminated to all ministries to allow them to provide their views and comments, as its implementation will involve agencies throughout the public sector. Several factors will influence the implementation of the action plan, including political commitment by the new government after the National Assembly Elections held in November 2024.

Funding is also a critical factor in implementing the activities outlined in the action plan. Once the action plan is approved by the Cabinet, a roundtable meeting with development partners will be necessary to discuss funding. Another key factor is the commitment from the MGEFW. The ministry has stated that it will lead certain sections of the action plan, but the Ministry of Public Service Administrative and Institutional Reforms will be responsible for leading gender equality initiatives

within the public sector. Stakeholders perceived a need for greater proactivity within the ministry to drive the action plan forward. Additionally, to advance the agenda that the action plan supports, a shift in societal mindset will be required. A review of the existing legislation is necessary, though legislative changes will be a lengthy process, especially because of the perception, held by some stakeholders, that focusing on gender is discriminatory.

Senegal

Limited feedback was gathered from stakeholder consultations in Senegal,³⁷ aside from the recognition that the results of the project and national review are valuable for advocacy and generating commitment from authorities to strengthen the presence and leadership of women in the public sector. As in the other countries, stakeholders in Senegal also highlighted the need to secure funding and move forward with the implementation of the action plan.

7.2 Institutional Roles and Political Will in Action Plan Development

Political will and appropriate institutionalization of the national action plans will be critical to their impact. In this regard, the roles taken by specific institutions in the development of the action plan are crucial in understanding the political will behind the plan and the level of support it has garnered.

In some project countries, such as Bhutan and Lao PDR, key government officials were fully involved throughout all stages of capacity development, including the drafting and refinement of the action plans. In Bhutan, this process culminated in the formal adoption of the plan by the NCWC, while in Lao PDR, the action plan will be reviewed and finalised through an inter-ministerial consultation chaired by MoHA. A second consultation will validate the action plan with the participation of government line ministries among other stakeholders. MoHA will then submit the finalised plan to the Office of the Prime Minister for final endorsement.

In Mauritius, initial exchanges between the MGEFW and the Ministry of Public Service Administrative

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Ibidem.

and Institutional Reforms led to the identification of the former as the lead agency for developing the action plan. However, during the regional workshop to peer review the plan, it became apparent that the latter Ministry needed to be more involved. This prompted concerns regarding the leadership of the initiative within the country. The report of the event noted that the designation of the entity responsible for gender equality in the public sector had “not yet (been) finalized, as all ministries need to have an opportunity to comment on the draft action plan before it is approved” requiring “another stakeholder meeting (...) to finalize institutional arrangements.”³⁸

In Senegal, the former Ministry of Women, Family and Child Protection took a strong leadership role during the capacity-building and action plan development phases of the project. However, the political transition following the 2024 elections shifted the momentum. The delegation from Senegal that attended the June 2024 regional workshop to peer review and refine the action plan, was led by the Ministry of Civil Service and Public Service Reform. Adopting the action plan remains a significant challenge “due to the change of President of the Republic and Government during the programme’s implementation.”³⁹ This highlights the need for “sensitization among ministries in charge of civil service and family issues to ensure the plan’s adoption.”⁴⁰ Participants in the Africa regional workshop emphasized the importance of strengthening synergies within the gender equality institutional framework,⁴¹ securing political will, and establishing effective government structures to support the plan’s success.⁴²

Key institutional challenges for the effective implementation of the action plans include the need to improve coordination among the various entities that make up the gender machinery (see section 6.1). The extent to which the project has facilitated collaboration among key state actors is unclear

in most project countries. Bhutan is the exception, where the responsibilities of the NCWC and the RCSC are clearly outlined in the action plan. Lao PDR’s action plan proposes strengthening coordination and accountability mechanisms by defining the oversight functions and responsibilities of key institutions, such as NCAWMC, MoHA, LWU, as well as developing coordination mechanisms across sectors at the administrative level.⁴³ However, since these roles were not clearly defined before drafting the action plan, there are concerns about whether the plan can effectively address coordination gaps among these institutions.

In Senegal, although the plan acknowledges the need to continue institutionalizing gender policies, as highlighted in the national review,⁴⁴ our analysis identifies a lack of detail on how to strengthen the coordination role of the Ministry of Family (previously the Ministry of Women, Family and Child Protection). Additionally, the plan does not specify how coordination between national and subnational levels will be improved to support women’s career advancement in public administration. Similarly, in Mauritius, there is a need for measures to promote a coordinated approach across ministries.⁴⁵

7.3 Stakeholder Engagement in the Development of the National Action Plans

The project engaged a wide range of stakeholders, though there were notable variations across countries. After the national reviews, project activities involved a total of one hundred organizations across the four project countries, with the majority being national governments, followed by subnational governments and a smaller number of CSOs, as shown in Figure 4.

38 UN DESA, UNDP, Regional Workshop, Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Africa, p.12.

39 UN Women Donor Report, 2024, p.10

40 Ibidem, p. 14

41 Also emphasized in the Global Workshop Report, p. 16

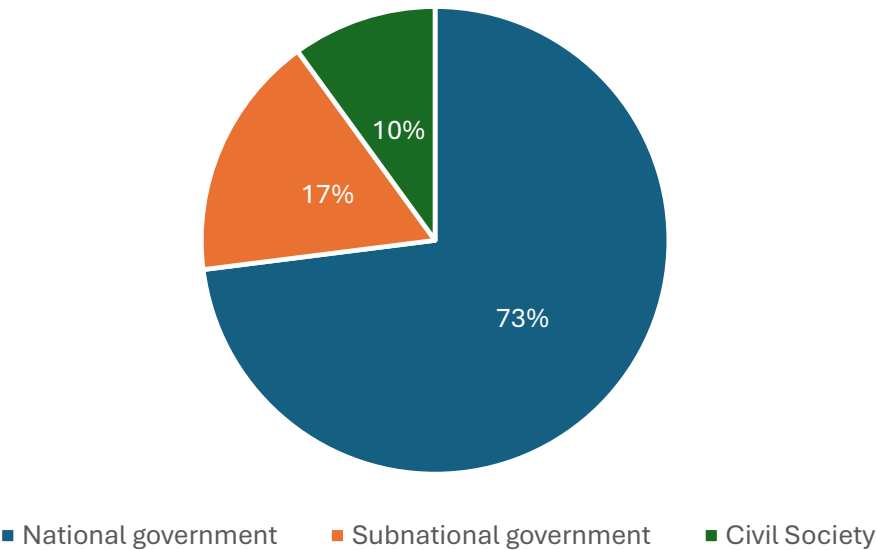
42 UN DESA, UNDP, Regional Workshop, Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Africa, p.21

43 Lao PDR action plan, Action 2.1

44 National Review of Senegal (English version), p. 40.

45 UN DESA, UNDP, UN Women, Regional Workshop Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Africa, 2024, p.10.

Figure 4 – Stakeholder organisations participating in project activities⁴⁶



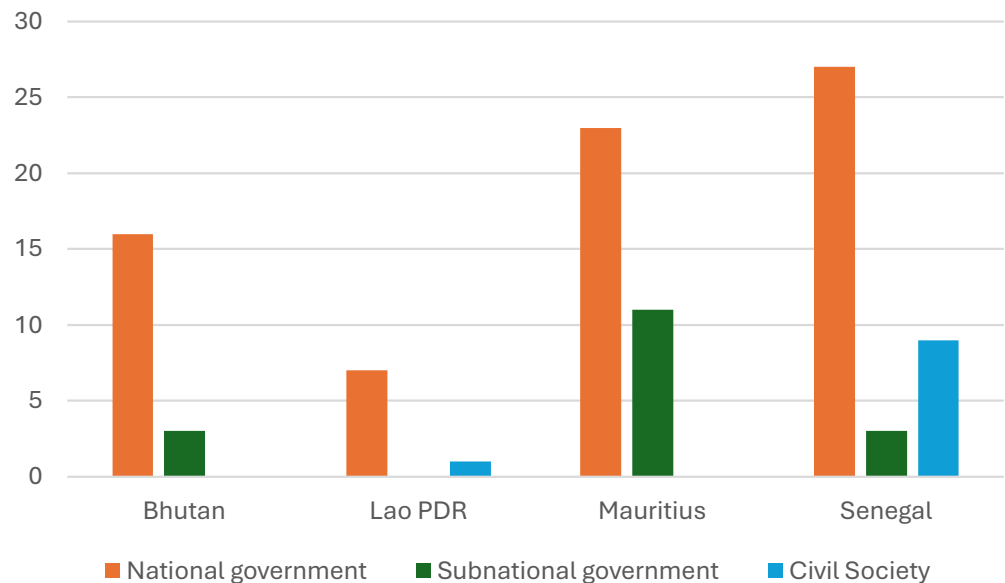
Source: Author's elaboration.

When disaggregating the stakeholder organisations by country, the proportion of national versus subnational government entities varies. For example, Mauritius had the highest representation of local government entities (23), indicating strong subnational government involvement, while Lao PDR had no representation from subnational gov-

ernments. This suggests that stronger engagement from local governments in some countries could be key to driving gender parity at the grassroots level, where disparities are more entrenched. Other countries may require additional support to enhance participation at the subnational level.

⁴⁶ Elaboration of figures from attendance sheets of national capacity development workshops held in Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal, regional and global workshops.

Figure 5 – Stakeholder organizations by country⁴⁷



Source: Author's elaboration.

In terms of CSO engagement, Senegal had the highest number of CSOs (9) involved, reflecting a strong commitment from civil society to support the gender parity agenda. However, countries like Bhutan and Mauritius did not engage CSOs at all, highlighting a potential gap in involving these key stakeholders. The global lesson-sharing workshop underscored the importance of early identifica-

tion of key stakeholders to ensure inclusivity and shared ownership of the agenda.⁴⁸ It also emphasised the need for inclusive consultation processes with diverse stakeholders to ensure successful implementation.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Elaboration of figures from attendance sheets of national capacity development workshops held in Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal, regional and global workshops.

⁴⁸ Global Workshop Report. p 15.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 17.

7.4 Remaining Challenges to Advancing Women's Leadership in Public Administration in the Project Countries

Advancing women's leadership in public administration faces several challenges at both national and subnational levels. Key questions remain about the effectiveness of action plans in addressing contextual barriers and whether additional support mechanisms are needed. Some reviews, which were conducted by project countries and formed the basis of the action plans, overlooked sensitive issues related to gender infrastructure, such as coordination challenges discussed in section 7.1.

Furthermore, despite a shared framework, not all reviews referenced critical components, such as gender policy documents and action plans from line ministries (see Table 2).

Based on feedback from peer countries in regional and global workshops, as well as an analysis of the alignment of action plans with country-specific challenges identified in the national reviews, the challenges are categorized into seven dimensions. 1) accountability, targets and monitoring; 2) revision of policies; 3) human resources policies and practices; 4) disaggregated data and monitoring; 5) coordination; 6) social norms; and 7) financing the action plans.

Accountability, targets and monitoring

A challenge is the lack of specificity in the plans which can undermine accountability for their implementation. While the action plans present comprehensive strategies to address gender gaps, some elements remain unclear and need further clarification. During the Asia and Pacific workshop, participants emphasized that policymaking “needs to adhere to existing mandates, and gender equality commitments must be publicly announced and owned.”⁵⁰ While the action plans include measures aimed at increasing the proportion of women in the civil service, in some cases, the targets set fall short of the CEDAW guidance

which calls for 50-50 parity between women and men in decision-making systems as a starting point and universal norm. Only Mauritius's draft action plan targets 50 per cent women in leadership positions by 2030, while Bhutan's action plan aims for 30 per cent representation of women in decision-making roles within the civil service by 2029. Lao PDR targets 25-30 per cent female representation at the Director General level. Although Senegal tracks the percentage of women in senior executive positions, its plan lacks explicit targets for gender parity across all decision-making roles.

Government representatives from Mauritius and Cape Verde, who participated in the peer review of the action plans of the project countries, stressed the importance of accountability measures, which represent a key remaining challenge at the institutional level.⁵¹ Bhutan's plan includes monitoring gender parity in leadership positions, indicators like audit reports and a performance dashboard but does not explicitly address incentives or consequences for non-compliance. In Lao PDR's plan, the reporting and enforcement mechanisms remain vague and the plan does not mention sanctions for gender-based discrimination against women. Similarly, Senegal's plan could benefit from addressing sanctions or enforcement mechanisms.

The need for clear targets and success indicators also hinders effective monitoring and evaluation. Discussions during the Asia and Pacific workshop⁵² highlighted the importance of establishing practical and accessible indicators of success before implementation. For instance, the Lao PDR action plan's measure to “outline/develop coordination mechanisms across sectors at the administrative level” would benefit from clearly defined indicators.

Revision of policies

Regarding the institutional framework, there are issues related to law and policy revision. The action plans of both Bhutan and Lao PDR include revisions to existing policies and regulations, as recommended by their national reviews. Lao PDR's action plan focuses on revising gender-neutral laws and regulations but could be more explicit

50 UN DESA and UNDP, Regional Workshop Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Asia and the Pacific, 2024, p.17

51 Ibidem, pp. 11 and 15.

52 UN DESA, UNDP, Regional Workshop, Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Asia and the Pacific, p.17.

in outlining measures to promote women's advancement into leadership positions and remove discriminatory requirements⁵³ (see section 6.1). Similarly, Bhutan's action plan proposes revisions to the Gender Equality Policy and the Civil Service Rules and Regulations to strengthen measures for women's leadership but could more clearly address promotion requirements and the performance evaluation system, which negatively impact women. The action plan of Mauritius does not address inequality in legislation and policies, an aspect that was identified in the national review. Senegal's action plan acknowledges the need for a gender equality law focused on public administration, as noted in the national review. However, it is unclear what the "bill on the effective consideration of gender equality in public administration" will entail, as the plan does not provide further details beyond the creation of the National Observatory on Discrimination at Work and does not explicitly mention a revision or gender analysis of all laws, as recommended by the 8th CEDAW report for Senegal.⁵⁴

Human resources policies and practices

The action plans overlook measures to explicitly address the gender pay gap and ensure equal compensation for work of equal value. They also do not identify actions to adjust some promotion requirements that disadvantage women in the civil service. For instance, Bhutan's action plan does not address promotion requirements and the performance evaluation system that negatively impact women, as outlined in the national review.⁵⁵ Laos's plan could include clearer strategies for revising promotion prerequisites; Senegal's plan does not outline specific actions to reduce administrative burdens for women living outside the capital, negatively affecting their promotion prospects. The action plan of Mauritius does not address the issues of gender balance in recruitment panels, affirmative action, temporary special measures, or strategies to tackle occupational segregation, as recommended by the national review.⁵⁶

Although the plans include work-life balance measures, strategies, such as those from Bhutan and Senegal, do not explicitly address the recommended extension of paternity leave as highlighted in the national reviews or workshops.⁵⁷ Participants in the Africa regional workshop highlighted the importance of addressing harassment in the workplace and women's fear of reporting it.⁵⁸ Despite this, the Lao PDR action plan does not include mechanisms to address harassment in the workplace, which was recommended by the national review.⁵⁹ Senegal's plan could clarify "labour-related complaint and dispute resolution mechanisms," while Mauritius's plan could further specify the proposed "mechanism" for addressing workplace harassment.

Disaggregated data and monitoring

Regarding evidence and data-based approaches, participants in the Asia and the Pacific workshop recommended that "standards of reporting must be agreed upon. Data must be publicly available. Data should go beyond numbers and should target gender gaps intentionally."⁶⁰ Bhutan's plan, for example, addresses the national review findings on the lack of disaggregated data and related capacity. However, it does not explicitly mention establishing reporting standards or disseminating the gender indicator handbook, as recommended in the national review. As noted in section 6.3, the action plans of the project countries all contemplate establishing or strengthening monitoring mechanisms and setting key targets, indicators, and tools to track implementation progress. A government representative from South Africa, who participated as a peer reviewer of the project countries' action plans, called for improvements in data collection and refinement of monitoring and evaluation components within the action plans.⁶¹ Only Bhutan's action plan includes a timeframe for mid-term and final reviews of the plan. However, none of the action plans specify a mechanism for adjusting priorities and targets based on monitoring and evaluation findings.

⁵³ Including those affecting women with disabilities.

⁵⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Senegal*, 2022, p. 3 (para. 10(b)).

⁵⁵ National Review of Bhutan, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Draft National Review of Mauritius, p. 23.

⁵⁷ National Review of Bhutan, p. 15; Report of the National Workshop for Senegal (English version), p. 10.

⁵⁸ UN DESA, UNDP, Regional Workshop, Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Asia and the Pacific, p. 12.

⁵⁹ National Review of Lao PDR, p. 40.

⁶⁰ UN DESA, UNDP, Regional Workshop, Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Asia and the Pacific, p. 17.

⁶¹ UN DESA and UNDP, Women Leaders for Future-ready Public Administration report, 2024. P. 12.

Coordination

The global workshop emphasized that achieving lasting gender equality in public administration requires action plans that address the diverse needs at both the national and subnational levels.⁶² The Africa regional workshop underscored that the process of adopting an action plan is as crucial as its outcome, with ownership at all levels being essential for successful implementation.⁶³ Despite the project's analytical framework highlighting the need to analyse and address coordination challenges at various levels of public administration, an examination of the action plans reveals several challenges in this area.

Bhutan's action plan addresses the national-subnational institutional dimension by highlighting gender focal points at both levels. However, it overlooks institutional coordination challenges between national and subnational levels, including the roles of the RCSC and NCWC in data collection and monitoring, as noted in the national review.⁶⁴ The plan could also be more specific on identifying and addressing subnational differences and challenges, such as mentoring and capacity building, as recommended by peer countries at the regional workshop.⁶⁵ These omissions may hinder the plan's effectiveness in addressing stereotypes around occupational segregation and traditional gender norms, particularly at the subnational level, where efforts to encourage women applicants are weaker.⁶⁶

Lao PDR's action plan responds to the national review's call for improved coordination and accountability mechanisms at both levels.⁶⁷ It includes action 2.1, which identifies key focal points in ministries and specifies their roles at both levels, as recommended by the national workshop⁶⁸.

The plan also addresses the need for better policy dissemination at the subnational level, including training for all civil servants.⁶⁹ However, it lacks specific measures to improve training opportunities at subnational levels, as recommended in the national review.⁷⁰ The action plan's proposal for a gender database does not clarify whether it will address the need for improved coordination in collecting accurate statistics across levels of public administration.⁷¹

Mauritius' action plan does not address the need to "consider subnational differences in implementation strategies" noted in the regional workshop.⁷² The draft national review included a recommendation for all local authorities to conduct joint consultations to devise a gender equality action plan, proposed the development of a template for gender policy and action plans for ministries and local authorities and recommended that a unit within the Commission of Women's Affairs compile and analyse subnational data.⁷³

Senegal's action plan does not explicitly address coordination between national and subnational levels or actions to counter the overly centralized administration, as noted in the national review.⁷⁴ The plan could also be clearer on mechanisms to enhance the availability of gender-disaggregated data at both levels as recommended by the national workshop.⁷⁵ Additionally, it could include the recommended training in local administration⁷⁶ and actions to raise awareness among those with discretionary power at the local level.⁷⁷

Social norms

As highlighted in section 5.4, national reviews emphasised biased attitudes toward women civil servants, particularly female leaders in public administration. The four action plans include action

62 Ibidem, p.16.

63 UN DESA, UNDP, Regional Workshop, Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Africa, p.12.

64 National Review of Bhutan, p. 19

65 Report of the National Workshop for Bhutan, p.p. 17–18.

66 National Review of Bhutan, p. 13.

67 National Review of Lao PDR, p. 31

68 Report of the National Workshop for Lao PDR, p. 20.

69 National Review of Lao PDR, p. 31

70 National Review of Lao PDR, p. 32-37

71 National Review of Lao PDR, p. 31

72 UN DESA, UNDP, Regional Workshop, Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Africa, p.20.

73 Draft National Review of Mauritius, p. 33

74 National Review of Senegal, p. 38

75 Report of the National Workshop for Senegal, p.10

76 National Review of Senegal, p. 38.

77 National Review of Senegal, p. 37

points aimed at shifting cultural norms, promoting dialogue, and fostering support for gender-inclusive leadership within the civil service, such as raising awareness about equal representation and participation of men and women in decision-making in Mauritius. However, assessing the success of these actions is challenging, as cultural changes typically require a long-term timeframe. Discussions during the final workshop under the project, which promoted the exchange of lessons among project countries, recommended aligning policies with global standards to “build a solid foundation for gender-inclusive leadership and address cultural and societal norms that create long-term impediments to women’s equal participation and leadership in public administration.”⁷⁸

Financing the action plans

Lastly, securing financial resources is critical for successful implementation as indicated by project stakeholders (see section 7.1) and during regional and global workshops.⁷⁹ While all plans propose budget estimates for various activities, identifying potential funding sources—such as internal budgets, reallocated funds, or grants—is crucial for carrying out the proposed measures. Related to the resource challenges is the fact that some action points can be quite ambitious. As recommended at the Asia and Pacific workshop, although all the listed action points are crucial for increasing women’s participation and access to leadership roles in public administration, it may be more effective to prioritize them according to each country’s context, political commitment, and available resources.⁸⁰

78 UN DESA, UNDP, Workshop, Gender-inclusive Leadership and Public Sector Innovation for Sustainable Development: Empowering Women Leaders for Future-ready Public Administration, Report, 2024, p. 16.

79 UN DESA and UNDP, Women Leaders for Future-ready Public Administration report, 2024, p.16; UN DESA, UNDP and UN Women, Regional Workshop Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Africa, 2024, p.20.

80 UN DESA, UNDP, Regional Workshop, Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Asia and the Pacific, p.17.

8. Recommendations for future capacity development efforts by the United Nations

Based on the findings and experiences from the four project countries —Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal—as well as the project evaluation, several recommendations can inform future efforts in designing and implementing similar governance transformation projects aimed at advancing women’s leadership in public administration.

The fact that the four countries were at different stages in adopting their respective action plans at the end of the project underscores the critical importance of sustaining political will and institutional commitment, even during periods of political transition. As seen in Mauritius and Senegal following elections in 2024, political buy-in must be broad enough to withstand changes in government. Securing consensus on gaps identified by the national reviews, as demonstrated in the project countries, is crucial. Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders committed to advancing gender equality in public administration from the outset promotes shared responsibility in shaping and implementing strategies, promoting transparency, and holding public officials accountable for the successful execution of action plans.

Future projects should prioritize multi-stakeholder engagement, involving government, civil society, international partners and other stakeholders in the design of action plans. Building synergies among these stakeholders enhances impact and sustainability. Additionally, establishing mechanisms for institutional resilience, securing support from development partners and creating ongoing engagement platforms —such as online communities of practice⁸¹—are crucial for sustaining gender equality efforts beyond the project’s conclusion. These platforms facilitate the exchange of knowledge, good practices, and experiences at both inter-regional and intra-regional levels, fostering peer learning and long-term collaboration.⁸²

A major challenge identified in the national reviews was unclear institutional roles and lack of coordination among the gender equality mechanisms at the national and subnational levels. Future initiatives should help countries define insti-

tutional roles in advancing gender parity across government entities at all levels. This includes developing robust coordination mechanisms, such as inter-agency task forces, to drive action plans and foster collaboration among government bodies, civil society, and other stakeholders.

The success of the project was linked to the development of tailored gender parity action plans based on contextual analysis in the four project countries. The analysis in the previous sections clearly shows that Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius and Senegal put varying emphasis on the three dimensions (institutions, human resources and data) that were at the core of the project, and within those, chose to focus on different levers, action points and mechanisms. Future initiatives should prioritize actions based on locally identified needs, capacity assessments, and resource availability. While global frameworks should provide guidance, projects should allow flexibility in action plan design and implementation, as demonstrated by varying stages of adoption across countries. Projects should encourage countries to conduct gap analyses and adjust action plans to fit political, cultural, and resource contexts. Flexibility in timelines and prioritizing actions based on a country’s unique circumstances - rather than adhering to a strict result matrix agreed at project inception - will contribute to more realistic, actionable, and sustainable action plans.

Lessons from the project underscore that cultural shifts toward gender-inclusive leadership are slow and require sustained effort. Due to the difficulty of addressing deep-rooted societal and cultural barriers to women’s leadership in public administration, sustained public awareness campaigns, media strategies, and community engagement, along with the involvement of male champions, can support medium-term capacity-building efforts. These measures could be integrated into broader gender equality initiatives to build a culture of inclusion over time. The project’s use of the Moodle platform to facilitate continuous learning and long-term community engagement is an ex-

⁸¹ In this regard, the project evaluation emphasized the value of knowledge sharing and peer review through regional workshops in refining gender parity action plans.

⁸² Terminal Evaluation report, p.67.

ample of how to sustain momentum beyond the project's lifecycle. This is demonstrated by the Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission in New Zealand, which used the online modules developed under the project to "create a valuable and rich discussion" within its Equal Pay Taskforce.⁸³ Future projects can support the creation of similar platforms to ensure ongoing knowledge sharing.

Financial sustainability is critical for the successful implementation of gender parity action plans. Project partners can support countries in identifying long-term funding sources and tapping into international funds. Governments may want to explore the possibility of reallocating existing resources, embedding gender parity objectives within national financial plans and developing mechanisms for ongoing resource mobilization.

The dynamics observed throughout the project demonstrate that an inclusive approach—where all relevant stakeholders are engaged in validating the action plan and ensuring its implementation—will be crucial for advancing the gender

parity agenda. Future initiatives aimed at achieving gender parity in public administration need to support a collaborative approach that involves a whole-of-government strategy. This should promote active engagement from the gender machinery in each country. Furthermore, efforts should be made to strengthen stakeholder engagement, particularly by involving local governments and civil society organizations from the outset to ensure broad-based support for the action plan and increase the likelihood of its successful implementation.

In each country, it will be important to review the progress made on the action plan after a few years. Development partners could consider funding such reviews to assess the implementation and sustainability of gender equality goals beyond the project's lifecycle, which would contribute to ensuring that the initiatives remain relevant and effective. For instance, the Ministry of Education of Bhutan has proposed such a review with support from UN DESA and UNDP.⁸⁴

83 Testimonial by the Equal Pay Task Force sent via e-mail to UN DESA on 5 September 2024.

84 UN DESA and UNDP, Women Leaders for Future-ready Public Administration report, 2024, p.15.

9. Conclusions

Effective gender policies in public administration require a clear understanding of barriers to women's leadership and actionable commitments to addressing existing gaps at the national and sub-national levels. Securing political commitment and fostering long-term cultural shifts through sustained engagement and financial sustainability are also essential to achieving gender parity in decision-making within public administration as a principle of good governance, in line with SDGs 5 and 16.

The analysis of the strategies adopted by Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mauritius, and Senegal re-affirms the necessity to further incorporate the subject of gender equality in public administration in the development agenda.⁸⁵ It underscores the critical need to address both systemic and cultural barriers to

women's leadership in public administration. Action plans developed through collaboration among all relevant stakeholders can be a step forward to addressing gaps in institutional frameworks, human resource policies, and monitoring mechanisms. Key challenges to be addressed include helping governments to set clear targets, more comprehensive coordination of public administration at all levels, stronger accountability to gender equality results, as well as monitoring and evaluation measures to ensure the success and sustainability of these initiatives over time. Moving forward, support from international organizations could continue to focus on creating tailored action plans as part of a multi-faceted whole-of-government strategy⁸⁶ that reflects each country's unique context.

⁸⁵ Terminal Evaluation report, p.59.

⁸⁶ Ibidem, p.11.

Annex - Resources from the project

National Workshop Reports:

UN DESA, NCWC, UNDP, *Capacity Development Workshop Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels*, in Bhutan, [Report](#), 2023.

UN DESA, MoHA, UNDP, *Capacity Development Workshop Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Lao PDR*, [Report](#), 2023.

UN DESA, Ministry of Family and Solidarity, UN Women, *Capacity Development Workshop Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Senegal*, [Report](#), 2023.

Regional Workshop Reports:

UN DESA, UNDP, *Regional Workshop Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Asia and the Pacific*, [Report](#), 2024.

UN DESA, UNDP, UN Women, *Regional Workshop Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women Within Public Institutions at the National and Local Levels in Africa*, [Report](#), 2024.

National Reviews:

UN DESA, NCWC, UNDP, *Gender Equality in Public Administration in Bhutan, An in-depth Review of Measures for Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women and Gender Equality in Public Administration in Bhutan*, 2024.

UN DESA, MoHA, UNDP, *In-depth Review of Measures for Promoting the Presence and Leadership of Women and Gender Equality in Public Administration in Lao PDR*, 2024.

UN DESA, MGEFW, UNDP, *Status of Women in Public Administration in the Republic of Mauritius, Draft Report*, 2024.

UN DESA, Ministry of Family and Solidarity, UN Women, *The Status of Women in Public Administration - Gender Gaps in Central and Local Administration in Senegal, 2023* ([English](#) and [French](#) versions).

Global Workshop Report:

UN DESA, UNDP, Workshop, *Gender-inclusive Leadership and Public Sector Innovation for Sustainable Development: Empowering Women Leaders for Future-ready Public Administration*, [Report](#), 2024.

Global Reviews:

UN DESA, *Global Review of Good Practices for Promoting Women's Access to Leadership Positions in Public Administration*, 2022.

UN DESA, *Global Review of Existing Legislation and Organizational Policies and Analytical Framework for Promoting Women's Access to Leadership Positions in Public Administration*, 2022.

National Action Plans:

National Action Plan to Promote Gender Equality in Public Administration for Bhutan.

Draft Action Plan for Promoting Women in Decision-Making and GEPA 2023–2025 in Lao PDR.

Plan d'Actions National Sénégal, 2024.

Website of the project *Building capacities for promoting the presence and leadership of women within public institutions at national and local levels*.



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



Attestation de participation

Madame Fatou MBODJ DIOUF a suivi avec succès la formation de développement des capacités sur :

LA PROMOTION DE LA PRÉSENCE ET DU LEADERSHIP DES FEMMES DANS
L'ADMINISTRATION PUBLIQUE AUX NIVEAUX NATIONAL ET LOCAL,

organisée conjointement par l'ONU Femmes, l'ONU DAES, le PNUD et le Ministère de
la Femme, de la Famille et de la protection des Enfants,

du 14 au 17 Novembre à l'hôtel Fleur de Lys Point E.

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