

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Response on the questions and comments regarding education and child rights by the Chief Planning Officer of the Ministry of Education, Mrs. Dechen Zam, at the Human Rights Council on 30 April 2014 under the UPR mechanism

As custodians and the future of the country, children and their development stand at the top of Bhutan's agenda. Education continues to be free and accessible to all, and the adjusted net primary enrolment ratio has increased to 98.5 percent as of 2013.

The draft National Education Policy, which takes into account the needs of all children, including those with special needs and those from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds, is in the final stages of approval by the government.

The Educating for Gross National Happiness programme has been introduced in all schools to infuse the values and principles of GNH into the school system, enabling teachers and students to learn and co-exist harmoniously. The programme promotes inclusiveness in education through child friendly teaching learning environments, gender responsiveness, spirit of brotherhood, and critical thinking skills while at the same preparing children to face current and emerging challenges of a globalizing world.

To provide vulnerable children and specifically children from poor socio-economic backgrounds and disadvantaged families an early headstart, 118 community based early childhood development and care (ECCD) centres have been established in rural and remote communities.

The provision of support services like scholarships for girls from disadvantaged families, establishment of girl child friendly infrastructure such as separate hostels and sanitation facilities, and placement of caregivers and counsellors, aid the enrolment and retention of girls in school.

To protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities, Bhutan ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010. While disability-related programs are integrated into our socio-economic development plans, specific initiatives addressing inclusiveness and special needs include the upgradation of 5 additional schools into special education resource centres, and the appointment of a network of focal points from different sectors and the mapping of their roles to address the needs of children with disabilities.

Several active CSOs have also emerged to enhance support and services to children with special needs.

To assess the extent and prevalence of disabilities in the country, Bhutan conducted the second stage disability study in 2012. The findings of the study are now used as a basis for identifying regions and areas for targeted special needs services, mainly in education and health.

Towards protection and promotion of child rights, the Child Care and Protection Act of 2011 and the Child Adoption Act of 2012 were enacted by the Parliament.

The CCPA has specific provisions for the protection and care of children in difficult circumstances and in conflict with the law.

To implement the CCPA, a comprehensive mapping and assessment of the child protection system in Bhutan was carried out in 2011 and 2012. This has been followed by the development of a National Plan of Action for Protection of Children.

In accordance with the CCPA, a National Child Welfare Committee to advise and supervise institutions established under it and to coordinate with the stakeholders on identification and prevention of issues relating to children, will be established within 2014.

The draft Rules and Regulations of the CCPA, has provisions for alternative care such as kinship, foster, and residential institutions. Continuous awareness and advocacy programmes on child rights and protection are being organized by NCWC, and relevant organizations. And to enhance access to child protection services, women and child protection units and desks have been established in police stations.

Corporal punishment in schools continues to be banned, and support mechanisms are being strengthened through teacher training on positive disciplining, placement of counsellors and awareness programmes.

As a member of the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children, Bhutan participated in the campaign against Corporal Punishment and advocacy and communication strategies are being developed to address issues of violence against children.

Concurrently a study on violence against children is also underway. To support schools in empowering young people to understand and make critical decisions pertaining to health and sexuality, life skills education in

adolescent reproductive sexual health has been provided to all teachers and school health coordinators.

Within the monastic system, to address child protection issues, an 11 Member Expert Committee was formed, followed by the development of guidelines for alternative forms of discipline. Additionally, a Child Care and Protection Office with shelter services for child monks and nuns in difficult circumstances was established last year.

With regard to child labour, the Labour and Employment Act of 2007 puts the minimum age of employment at 18, but also lists out acceptable occupations for children aged 13-17.

Four regional employment and labour offices and a field office were set up with trained labour inspectors to monitor and assess children engaged in worst forms of child labour, and particularly in hazardous works.

In the context of few reports of child labour in the country, it must be noted that traditionally children are expected to help their parents outside of school hours, with household chores, farm work and other domestic work, all of which are not exploitative in nature but contribute to skills building and promotion of family and communal values.

Thank You.