

NATIONAL REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

1. The education system at the beginning of the twenty-first century: an overview

1.1 *Major reforms and innovations introduced in the education system at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in particular concerning:*

Education System:

Bhutan adopts a 7-year primary cycle followed by 6-years of secondary education leading to tertiary education. Basic education in Bhutan is defined as 11 years of education (primary + 4 years of secondary education till class X). Children begin their schooling at the age of 6 when they enter the first grade of primary, known as Pre-Primary class (PP). At the end of Primary cycle, children are required to sit for a national level examination set by the Bhutan Board of Examinations but administrated and assessed by the school. In a few years time examination at this level would be replaced by standardized Tests (National Education Assesment). At present, about **87%** of students, reaching the end of the Primary (gradeVI) continue to the next level of education, while others repeat and few drop out.

The secondary education programme comprises of four years of secondary education. The four years are either offered at the Middle Secondary Schools (MSS) or two years (Classes VII and VIII) at the Lower Secondary Schools (LSS) and remaining two years at the MSS. Students have to appear at the National Examinations at the end of class VIII, X and XII. In few years examination at class VIII level would be administered and assessed at the school level like the class VI examination. About **95%** of those entering the secondary education would complete class X (basic education). After the basic education about 40% based on merit are enrolled into class XI in the Higher Secondary Schools (HSS). About 25% join the class XI in the private Higher Secondary Schools. Rest of the students would have to look for training and other opportunities.

At the end of the higher secondary education students enroll at the only under grade college in the country, or based on merit are sent on scholarship outside the country for professional studies such as medicine, engineering, agricultural sciences and business studies. The remaining students enroll in training institutes within the country or find employment. While education up to grade X that constitutes basic education is intended to be universal, post-basic education is presently more restrictive and aligned to cater to the human resource requirement of the country.

The Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), through its federated system of colleges, provides the tertiary education in Bhutan. The RUB has eight colleges spread across the country.

(a) **The legal framework of education:**

Education is recognized both as a basic right and as a pre-requisite for achieving the wider social, cultural and economic goals. Though Bhutan at the moment has no legal framework or an education act, the government has strong commitment to pursue universal basic education. Education is provided free to all the children even beyond basic level. More importantly, education is considered

as one of the fundamental needs required to achieve Gross National Happiness the framework for the overall development of Bhutan.

**(b) The organization, structure and management of the education system:
Organization, Structure and Management:**

At the national level, the National Assembly elects the minister, which is a political post, for a term of 5 years. The Secretary, who is the head of the Secretariat of the ministry, supports him. The Secretariat is organized into the Policy and Planning Division (PPD) and the Administrative and Finance Division (AFD), each headed by a Deputy Secretary. The Internal Audit Unit headed by a chief of Internal Auditor reports directly to the Minister. The Bhutan Board of Examination (BBE), School Planning and Building Cell (SPBC), Education Media and the National Commission for UNESCO are directly accountable to the Education Secretary. There are four Departments under the Ministry: Department of School Education (DSE), Department of Adult and Higher Education (DAHE), Department of Youth Culture and Sports (DYCS) and the Dzongkha Development Authority (DDA). Each department is headed by a director, who is responsible for implementing the policies and programmes for the department. Each director is supported by joint directors who head the various divisions under the department.

The Department of School Education is organized into four Divisions as follows: Education Monitoring and Support Division (EMSD), Programmes Division (PD), Teacher Development Division (TDD) and the Curriculum and Professional Support Division (CAPSD). The Programme Division administers the following programmes: School Information Technology (IT), Special Education (SE), Early Childhood and Care Development (ECCD), School Agriculture, School Nutrition and Feeding Programme and Private Schools development. The School Liaison and Coordination Unit (SLCU) is placed directly under the Director.

The Department of Adult and Higher Education is organized into the Tertiary Education Division (TED), Scholarship Division (SD) and Non Formal and Continuing Education Division (NFECED). The overall function of this Department is to coordinate the higher education and non formal education activities at the national level.

The Department of Youth, Culture and Sports is organized into Career Education and Counseling Division, Games and Sports Division and Scouts and Culture Division. The Games and Sports Division also has the support of the National Sports Federations. The Department is further supported by the Youth Information Centre for advocacy of information related to youth, and the Youth Centre for organization of youth programmes.

A Director General heads the Dzongkha Development Authority, which has the mandate to develop and promote the national language.

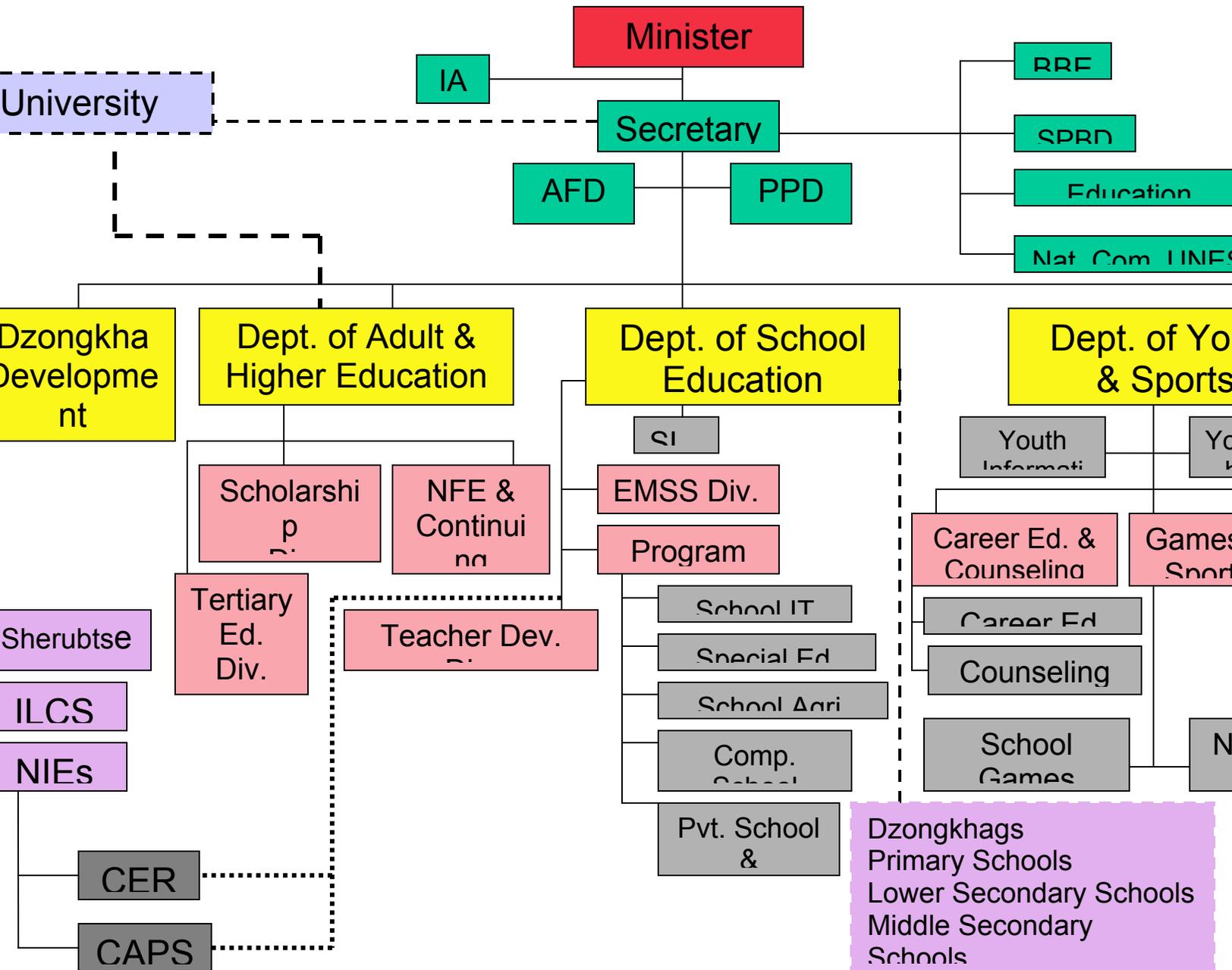
National Institutions of Education (NIES- Two institutions), Institution of Language and Culture Studies (ILCS) and Sherubtse College are placed under the University Secretariat but the NIEs maintain their links with the Department of School Education.

At the District (Dzongkhag) level, the Dzongkhag Education Officer (DEO) heads education. They report directly to the Dzongdag (District Head) but are also accountable to the Minister of Education.

In line with the decentralization policy of the government, the village head (Gup) is the chair of the school management Board.

The Ministry of Education also shoulders the responsibility for the provision of school supplies at all levels of the school. Supplies include stationeries, text books including reference and also the whole gamut of games and sports items. The procurement section that falls under the administration and finance division has the mandate to look after the procurement and distribution. The Education Centre Store coordinates the supplies throughout the nation. There are three regional educational centre stores spread across the country that facilitate the efficient delivery of the educational supplies.

Organisational Structure Ministry of Education



c) Curricular policies, educational content and teaching and learning strategies:

Bhutan has a national curriculum. The Curriculum and Professional Support Division carry out curriculum related functions. Presently a review and restructuring of the curriculum especially English language and mathematics is in progress. Through this exercise the Education Ministry hopes to make curriculum more responsive to the social and economic environment, including a greater role in information communication technology. A greater focus is being provided to reading programme and linking this to development of language skills amongst students. Continuous assessment is being introduced as part of teaching-learning program in schools through series of in-service workshops for teachers and also is integrated into the pre service teacher training. Piloting of resource centers for disseminating new ideas as well as for accessing education resources for curriculum implementation has been successfully completed and is being expanded. Environment and Value Education, counseling and youth related issues such as substance abuse and reproductive health are being integrated both within the formal school curriculum as well as extra-curricular activities. Examination systems are being reviewed and standardized tests (NEA) are being piloted to provide meaningful feedback on the quality of education to the educators and the general public.

A major policy shift in recent times is to make secondary education more relevant by introducing a basic skills training programme in the form of clubs and introducing career counselling to orient youth to the world of work. At the same time, significant effort has been made to bring technical education under a national framework to provide coordination, standards and relevance. The Royal Government of Bhutan has created a new Ministry (The Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development) to tackle this issue in the ensuing years.

1.2 Major achievements, both quantitative and qualitative, and lessons learned especially in terms of :

(a) Access to education:

Before the introduction of modern education, the only form of education provided in Bhutan was monastic education. During the commencement of planned development in the early 60's Bhutan had only 11 schools and approximately 400 students. Today, Bhutan has 433 schools, with enrollment of 135,987.

The rugged terrain and scattered settlements have challenged the school enrollments. Further, long hours walk to school is believed to be the main cause of non-enrolment and dropouts in primary schools. The commitment as well as the policy of the government is to cut down the walking distance by establishing additional community primary schools closer to the community. Where students had to walk more than half an hour, mid day meals are provided through WFP support. The community primary schools are very small schools with minimum facilities: three classrooms, two units of staff quarters, one toilet and a store room. The average enrolment in a remote community is between 50 to 120 students. More than 35 such schools are planned to be built annually. In places, where it is impractical to construct schools nearer the communities, boarding schools have been established. To accommodate the increasing primary graduates, construction of substantial numbers of secondary schools are planned in the 9th Five Year Plan.

The main thrust of the whole development process at the macro level is to provide quality education for all. The education sector has been receiving a budget of 10-13% of the country's total allocation in every plan period. The Royal Government of Bhutan during the past decades, had to resort to loans from the international agencies such as World Bank to construct more schools. As of now, the government has taken a loan of more than 70 million USD from World Bank under three projects. In the 9th Plan the Ministry of Education was able to seek assistance from various bilateral and multilateral organizations, more than 90% of our capital funds have been secured. Due to unprecedented demand for schools, the Ministry of education initiated an innovative approach of constructing schools using light gauge steel frame (LGSF) to beef up the construction time in lieu of traditional construction that take more than three years to complete one school.

The rising demand for education and the limited resources compelled the government to implement a number of cost-saving measures such as involving the communities and district authorities in assisting in the construction of community primary schools in their localities. The Government provides the design and materials and the community supply the labour. In order to make education accessible to everyone, free tuition, text books, sports items, meals and boarding facilities, where required are provided by the government.

In order to make education diversified and to provide options for parents who can afford, private entrepreneurs are encouraged to establish private schools. Presently, there are 19 private schools, inclusive of nursery, primary and secondary schools in the whole of the country.

(b) Equity in education:

Although, primary enrolment is not compulsory general public has overwhelmingly appreciated the importance of education. The government is struggling to provide enough places to meet the increasing demand for education. The requests for establishment of schools originate from the community through the gups (Village heads). There is no evidence of gender preference for school enrollment. Girl student enrollment at the primary level is 48.4%. The upcoming trend is that the girls are outnumbering the boys in some to the urban schools.

(c) Quality of education:

Ever since the start of the modern education the medium of instruction has been English. Dzongkha is taught as a subject. The government places great importance to the quality of teachers, only trained teachers is employed. Annually, about 320 teachers graduate from the two national teacher training institutes. At a national level, the teacher pupil ratio is 1:31. A system to continuously up date the qualification and professionalism of teachers have been instituted through National Based In-Service Programs (NBIB), Dzongkhag (district) Based In-Service Program (DBIP) and School Based In-Service Program (SBIP). Another avenue for the teachers to enhance their qualification is through Distance Learning modules, a regular program conducted by the National Institute of Education. Furthermore, a system is in place to continuously provide managerial and leadership training program for the head teachers.

To address the teacher shortage and the need to combine different class levels in the small schools, where the enrolment is low, due to scattered settlements, the Multigrade teaching strategy has been adopted. A regular program towards enhancement of the Multigrade teaching techniques through special arrangement in some of the bush schools in Australia has been formally instituted and is

expected to accrue tangible impact in the delivery of quality education even in the remotest part of the country.

One of the main policy objectives in the 9th five year plan is to enhance the quality of education in order to achieve competency in language, communication skills and Mathematics comparable to international standards.

(d) Content of education - major trends and challenges for curriculum development.

The Curriculum and Professional Support Division (CAPSD) under the Ministry of Education centrally develop curriculum. All the textbooks and other relevant teaching learning materials are developed and printed by the Ministry of Education and distributed to all the schools through the supply chain instituted within the education system. A major review of the curriculum especially in English language and Mathematics is in progress.

(e) Policy dialogue, partnerships and participation by civil society in the process of education changes.

Within the policy framework of decentralization, all most all the education matters have been decentralized. Schools of all levels are fully under the administration and management of Dzongkhags and Geogs. In terms of formulating the plan, the proposal is submitted by the actual beneficiaries at the grass root. The proposal would be discussed in the Geog Yargay Tshochung (GYT – Block Development Committee) under the chair of the village headman. The proposal would be forwarded to the Dzongkhag Yargay Tshokdue (DYT- Dzongkhag Development Committee). After thorough discussion and deliberation the proposal would be further put to the Planning Commission for endorsement in the plan. Thus the five year plans are derived and documented. Even at the school level, there are many bodies such as Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or School Management Board (SMB). These bodies are the basic unit at the operational level where all the decision takes place. In the SMB, the chairperson is the headman of the village, the headmaster is the member secretary and the member consists of parents, teachers and also some of the senior students of the school. Any developmental activities required for the schools should get endorsement of the SMB.

One of the most decentralized decision making process is the Annual Education Conference (AEC, conducted at the end of December). It is from this forum where all the major decisions and education policies would emanate. As a preparation to this forum, all the schools would conduct their school level meeting chaired by the head-teacher. The recommendation and other issues emanating from this meeting would be taken to the Dzongkhag level Education Conference, chaired by the District Administrator organized by the District Education Officer (DEO). The Annual Education Conference will base all the discussion on the points brought from the entire 20 Districts. The participants consists of all the District Education Officers, heads of all the tertiary institutes, selected principals of higher secondary schools and selected headmasters of Middle Secondary, Lower Secondary and primary community Schools. At the end of the conference, the resolution is passed based on the collective decision of all the participants. This resolution is treated as the policy of the Education Ministry and circulated to all the schools and institutions.

1.3 The main problems and challenges facing the education system at the beginning of the twenty-first century

As Bhutan progresses towards achieving Universal Primary Education, Gross Primary Enrolment Ratio for 2004 being 84.3% an increase of 3.3% over 2003. The un-reached in terms of distance created by remoteness and scattered settlements as well as by disabilities would continue to be a major challenge. In fact these would be the major contributors to the un-enrolled 15%. Further, the rugged terrain and long walking distances to schools also discourage parents from school enrollment. The swollen streams during the monsoon make regular school attendance very difficult and there are instances where children get carried away by these streams.

The high altitude schools (above 4000meters) can function for only six months in a year. As the communities are yaks and cattle herders the demand for more helping hands at home pressure parents to keep children at home. Many students from these schools drop out as soon as they become physically fit to help their parents.

Education in Bhutan is free. However, parents pay a small token fee towards the welfare of the students. (Primary students: Nu.30, Lower secondary students: Nu.100, Middle/Higher Secondary: Nu.200). Students also need to buy uniforms for the schools. There is also the travel cost when children graduate from Primary Schools and need to move into the Lower Secondary schools as boarders. Parents (few) from economically disadvantaged background tend to withdraw their children from schools.

The Government has been struggling to meet the demand for seats in the schools. Quite often schools are over stretched beyond their capacities. School sizes have doubled but facilities remained the same. This definitely would impact the quality of education provided. Along with this issue, the associated issues are employment opportunities for students after the basic education. Further, the relevancy of curriculum to prepare students for the world of work is a serious concern. The other major challenges are sustaining the free basic education.

2. Quality education for all young people: challenges, trends and priorities

2.1 Education and gender equality:

There is no gender bias in Bhutan, every girl or a boy is eligible for education, starting at age six at the primary level. The country does not have a policy on gender sensitivity but the concept of Community Primary School has helped in the enrolment of the girl child in the remote part of the country. Gender concerns are taken into consideration while developing curriculum. However, for the benefit of the rural and remote part of the country, there are advocacies and awareness campaigns through radio, TV and other print media. The situation of equity in Bhutan, is not the lack of awareness in educating children, especially girl child but it is the question of the proximity of the schools. As stated earlier, children are either not enrolled or drop out when schools are long distance away from home. It is because of this that the idea of community schools in the rural and remote region of the country is born, so that the schools are brought nearer to the beneficiaries.

2.2 Education and social inclusion:

As a means to achieve Education for All by 2015, for which the Government has strong commitment. The objective of the education policy is to establish a program of inclusive education for children with physical, intellectual and sensory impairments. The Ministry of Education has plan in place to support special education program and expand the special education program to children with hearing impairment and children with moderate to severe learning disabilities. This is a new area for the Education Ministry and the programmes have been initiated through technical assistants from Unicef and Danida. In principle, the Ministry of Education has adopted policies on Inclusive Education. The school for visual impairment was established in the early eighties. The students are boarded at this institution but attend mainstream schools in the vicinity.

A unit for students with hearing impairment has been set up in a Lower Secondary School at the end of 2003 and ten students are enrolled. To support this programme national sign language has been developed. A school in Thimphu has been provided with resource unit and other conveniences to enroll children with physical disabilities. The Education Ministry would also be entering into the areas of learning difficulties and into the strategy for differentiated teaching. These programmes are in keeping with the 9th plan education sector plan *'Establish a program of inclusive education (for children who are physically and mentally challenged) to enable them to partake in the general education that is provided to all children so that they could live with dignity and participate in the development of the Bhutanese society'*.

2.3 Education and competencies for life:

While the main objective of education is to provide literacy, numeracy and functional life skills, it has now become more comprehensive and complete. With a purpose to produce citizens with spiritual and social values, the concept of all round and wholesome education has been an established philosophy of education in Bhutan. The enhancement of formal education curriculum with the introduction of basic skills development program and youth programs has far reaching impact. The incorporation of basic knowledge on health, a nutrition, sanitation and reproductive health in the school curriculum not only improves the personal hygiene and health of the students but sensitized students on the important emerging issues such as HIV and AIDS.

The importance of information communication technology (ICT) has been recognized and incorporated into the school curriculum. The national objective as specified in the plan is to enhance the quality of education in order to achieve competency in language, communication skills and mathematics comparable to international standards; and also to improve and expand youth guidance and career counseling and value education towards a program for wholesome development of the youth.

2.4 Quality education and the key role of teachers:

The quality of education is directly related to the quality of teachers. For Bhutan, all the teachers are trained in the two National Institutes for Education (NIE). The entry qualification for the teachers to under take courses has been raised to assure the quality. In the past the entry qualification for Primary Teacher Training Course (PTTC) was class X. The PTTC has now been upgraded to three

year B.Ed. with Class XII as the entry requirement. Further, to upgrade the qualification of teachers, they are encouraged to sit for the Class X and XII examinations. Opportunities are also created for teachers to enroll into the B.Ed distance education programme offered by the NIEs. Many in-service training programs are organized during the breaks to update and acquaint teachers with the new techniques and the latest developments in the field of teaching and learning. Schools are encouraged to organize professional development programmes. In a bid to attract better individuals to join teaching, the teachers are paid 30% more salary than their counterparts working elsewhere.

Teachers are highly revered in a Bhutanese society. In most of our rural communities teachers would be the most educated persons and the communities would look up to them for guidance and leadership. The Education Ministry has a policy in place to send the best teachers to the remote schools. However, not many teachers opt for the remote schools and the Ministry had to resort to 'all young teachers to serve at least two years in the remote schools'. A lot of the rural schools are used as Non Formal Education Centres, the head teachers and some of teachers would be engaged in the programme. Nonformal education is a powerful avenue for advocacy on reproductive health and ECCD practices.

Every teacher is involved in the decision-making process through a bottom-up approach. The highest decision making forum of the Education Ministry is the Annual Education Conference, chaired by the Minister. The agendas for the conference originate from the schools, including the smallest Community Primary Schools. Such a process ensures individual teachers' participation in a decision that affects them.

2.5 Education for sustainable development:

Sustainability is one of the main criteria of Bhutan's development philosophy. It requires that, all development is consistent with environmental conservation and cultural values, and that it enhances the capacity to increasingly provide, from its resources, the financial and other services required to support self-sufficiency. In 1995, the Bhutanese National Assembly issued a declaration that the country must maintain at least 60% of the land under forest cover for all times to come. Presently, 72.5% of the country is under forest cover and 26% of the total land area is under protected park management. Further, respect for life and nature is a deep-seated Buddhist value. Hydropower harvested now and the potential for the future is seen as Bhutan's economic future. To ensure that the catchments of the hydroelectric dams are protected, water shed management including bio diversity conservation are in place.

All these important aspects of sustainable development are in the curriculum. Environmental studies begin from class III. Agriculture is an important extra curricular activity in all the boarding schools. The School Agriculture Programme (SAP), spearheaded by the Ministry of Agriculture, is actively involved in the promotion of agriculture in the schools. The King's Coronation day is celebrated as the Social Forestry Day, where students and communities participate in tree plantation and activities related to environment conservation. With support from the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN), an Ngo, public awareness and conservation education are actively carried out through network of school nature clubs.

Bhutan has 85% of the population living in the rural areas. One challenge that the Government faces at this point in development is to stop or slow the migration of people from rural to urban areas. The Education Ministry complements efforts of the government to slow this process. Community Primary schools are established close to the community. Not only does this improve access to primary education, it supports students imbibe the traditional conservation values that are important for sustainable development.

3. Documentary references used for the preparation of the national report

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