

# **THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION**

**National Report of Bhutan**

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## **The National Report on the Development of Education**

### 1. The Education System Facing the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An Overview

#### 1.1 Major reforms and innovations introduced in the education system, in particular concerning:

- a) The organization, structure and management of the education system

#### **Organization and Management<sup>1</sup>**

The responsibility for the administration of education in Bhutan is shared amongst several organizations: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labor and Human Resources, the Royal University of Bhutan, the Dzongkhags and the Gewogs. The administration of monastic education is the responsibility of the central monastic body and independent monasteries.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for policy planning, curriculum development and administration of Basic (Primary up to Middle secondary), Higher Secondary and continuing education. For tertiary education the Ministry of Education is responsible for selecting students for international scholarships, for designing and implementing Higher Education policy and for liaising with the Royal University of Bhutan.

As a result of decentralization, Dzongkhag and Gewogs are entrusted with a range of responsibilities for Basic, Higher Secondary and continuing education, mainly focusing on school construction and maintenance, and implementation of national policies. To fulfill these responsibilities every Dzongkhag employs Dzongkhag Education Officers (DEOs), supported by one or two assistant DEOs. They report to the Dzongdag (District Governor) and to the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Labor and Human Resources is responsible for vocational training after class X and the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) is responsible for planning, curriculum development and administration of public tertiary education after class XII.

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

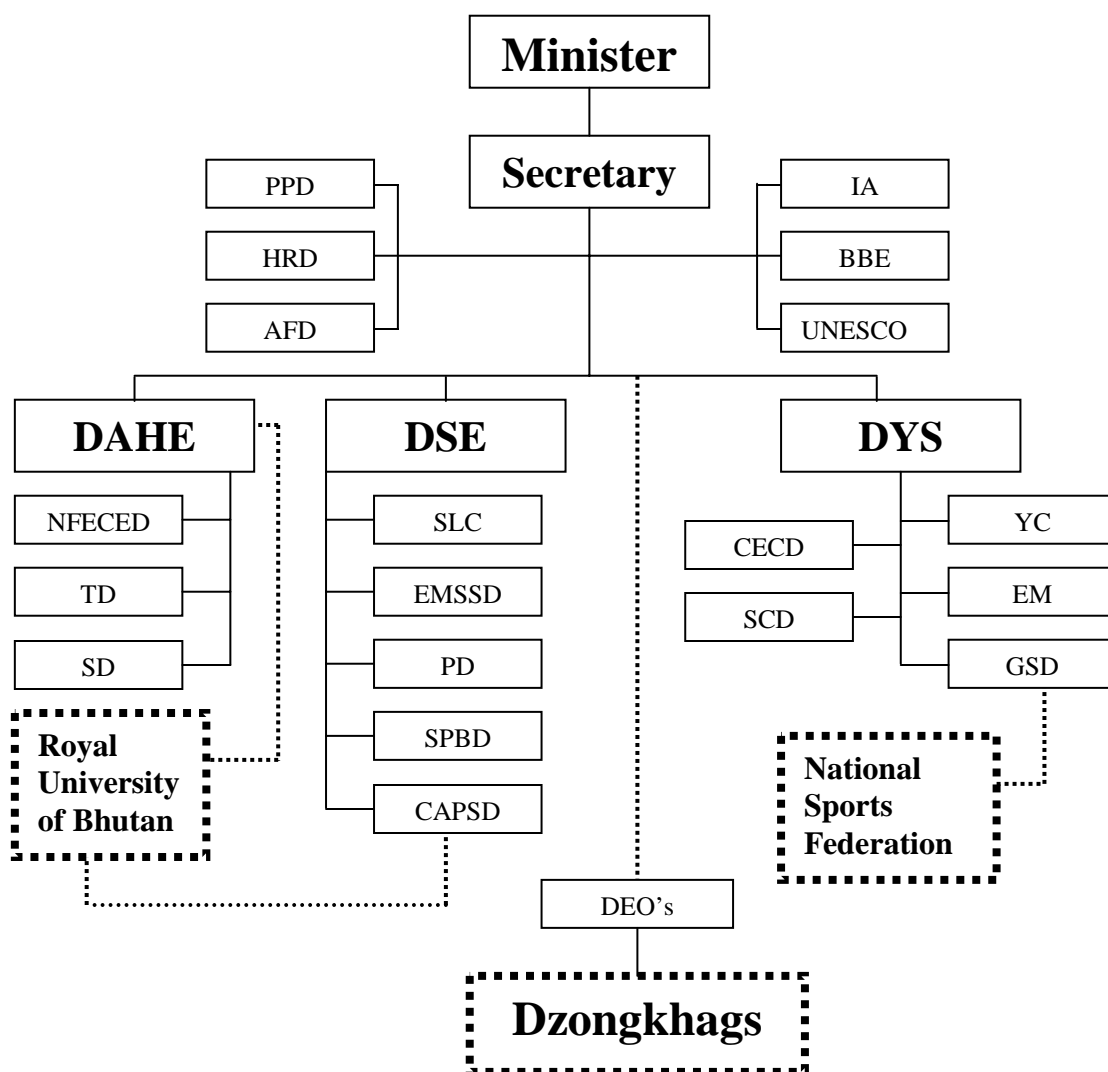
In recent years, the responsibility for the procurement of school supplies had been decentralized to the dzongkhags. Currently, the Ministry shoulders the responsibility only for the development and supply of textbooks to the schools. The Education Centre Store coordinates the supply throughout the nation. There are three regional educational centre stores spread across the country that facilitate the efficient delivery of the educational supplies.

The figure below gives an idea of the organizational structure of the Ministry of Education.

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<sup>1</sup> Education Statistics, 2008

## Organizational Structure, Ministry of Education



### *List of Abbreviations*

PPD Policy and Planning Division  
 AFD Administrative and Finance Division  
 HRD Human Resource Division  
 IA Internal Auditor  
 BBE Bhutan Board of Examinations

**DAHE** Department of Adult and Higher Education  
 NFECED Non Formal and Continuing Education Division  
 TD Tertiary Education Division  
 SD Scholarship Division

**DEO** District Education Officer

**DSE** Department of School Education  
 SLC School Liaison and Coordination Unit  
 EMSSD Education Monitoring & Support Service Division  
 SPBD School Planning and Building Division  
 CAPSD Curriculum and Professional Services Division

**DYS** Department of Youth and Sports  
 YC Youth Center  
 CECD Counseling Division  
 EM Education Media  
 SCD Scouts and Culture Division  
 GSD Games and Sports Division

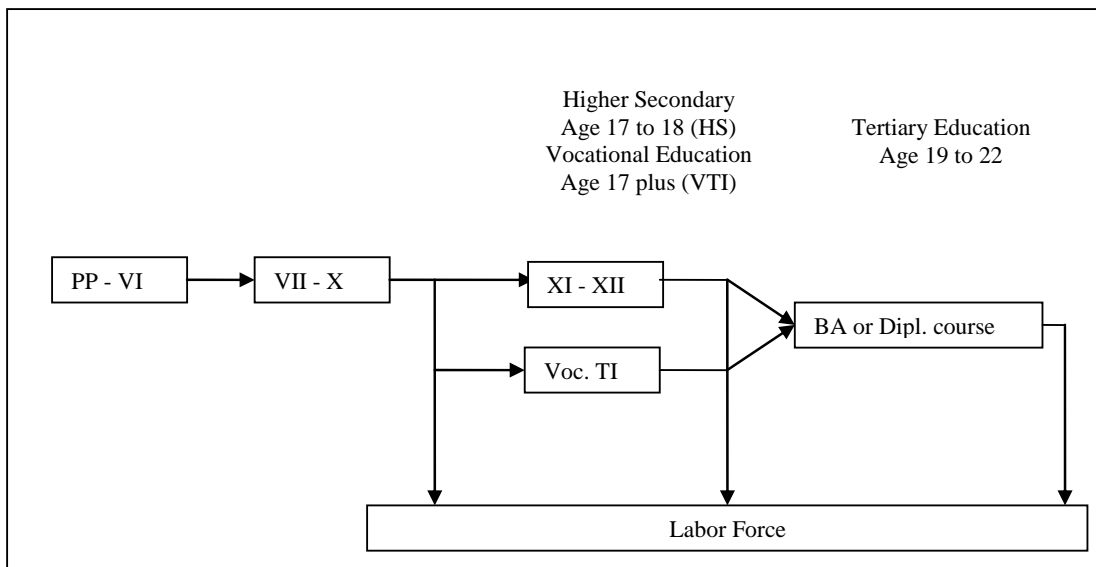
## Structure

The school-based education structure in Bhutan starts with 11 years of free Basic Education from classes PP to X. The 11 years of basic education are divided into 7 years of Primary Education, which starts at the age of 6, and 4 years of Secondary Education. At the end of the cycle, or class X, students sit for National Board Examinations.

Beyond class X, students can continue their general education in classes XI and XII in Higher Secondary Schools join the vocational training institutes or enter the labor market. Access to class XI in government schools and to vocational training in government institutes is based on the students' performance in the Board Examinations at the end of Class X. Students who are not selected for government funded education, but who want to continue their education can attend private higher secondary schools in Bhutan or abroad, or vocational courses organized by private training institutes. The duration of vocational training in both government and private institutes varies depending upon the type of course.

After graduating from class XII (public and private), students can enter the job market or enroll in the tertiary level academic courses. Some graduates from the Vocational Training Institutes are selected to continue education at the tertiary level. Students either join one of the institutes of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) for a diploma or a bachelor's degree or join an institute abroad. Selection for the RUB is based upon the class XII examination results. A limited number of students are eligible for government scholarships for professional studies abroad, while others who can afford it fund themselves to tertiary education institutes abroad.

Figure 2: Structure of the Education System



b) The aims and purposes of education at each level

As articulated in the Bhutan 2020 (Planning Commission, 1999), the vision for education is to provide a quality education, the achievement of which must meet the following objectives: ensure the realization of the innate potential of each and every child; instill an awareness of the nation's unique cultural heritage, and values, both traditional and universal; prepare young people for the world of work, instilling in them the dignity of labour; and create an awareness of the potential and importance of agriculture as an occupation. Sometimes the goal of education is referred to as the provision of a wholesome education. Wholesome education should prepare students to be responsible, mature, and productive citizens who will uphold the pride of the nation and their parents (CERD 2002).

Therefore, education is considered as one of the fundamental needs required to achieve Gross National Happiness, which is the framework for the overall development of Bhutan.

c) Curricular Policies, educational content and teaching and learning strategies

Activity based learning is applied uniformly across all levels to impart the curricular content. Within the last plan period, the curriculum for English, Mathematics and Dzongkha have been reformed to make it more relevant and computer applications have been introduced as elective subjects at middle and higher secondary education levels. In line with the introduction of constitutional democracy the civics curriculum has also been changed

Through these reforms and policies, the Education Ministry strives to make the 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 has been 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 National education Assessments (NEA) are carried out to provide meaningful feedback on the quality of education to the educators and the general public.

In order to make secondary education more relevant, orientation to basic skills and vocations continues in the form of vocational clubs. At the same time, children in middle and higher secondary schools now have access to career counseling both in

school and through local career fairs organized by the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB).

At the same time, the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources works closely with the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders in developing plans and strategies for aligning and integrating technical and vocation education with mainstream education.

- d) The legal framework of education (in particular, new legal provisions)

Education is recognized both as a basic right and as a pre-requisite for achieving the wider social, cultural and economic goals. Accordingly, although Bhutan at the moment has no legal framework or an Education Act, the recently adopted Bhutanese Constitution obligates the State to provide free basic education to all children of school going age. Within the Ministry of Education, work is underway on the development of a comprehensive Education Policy that would lead the way towards the development of an Education Act.

- e) Objectives and principal characteristics of current and forthcoming reforms

With the RGoB's focus on a high quality education, as being the key to all economic and social development, many reforms are being initiated to assess and improve the quality of education. In the current plan period, the emphasis is on improving access so as to reach the last 10 percent or so out of school children, and on improving the quality of education system wide so that the standard of children graduation from the school system is comparable to world standards. Towards that, the Royal Government has initiated comprehensive studies on a variety of topics. These studies focus respectively on the quality of education, on strategies to improve access, enrolment and retention, on improving assessment strategies, and on the quality of education services and resources.

#### 1.2 Main Policies, achievements and lessons learned especially as regards:

- a) Access to education (focusing on actions being taken to reach children, youth and adults that are currently excluded);

Despite the challenges posed by the rugged terrain, scattered settlements, and the resource and infrastructure constraints, the strategies for increasing access in the 9<sup>th</sup> Plan have succeeded greatly in improving the enrolment rates. The gross primary enrolment rate has now increased to 112% and the Net Primary Enrolment Rate has increased to 88%. This success can be attributed to the strategies of establishing small community primary schools on a cost sharing basis, wherein the local communities contribute labour towards the construction and maintenance of the schools, the provision of school feeding for children who have to walk long distances to school and who are from poverty pockets, as well as the provision of boarding facilities and free stationeries (for those from rural and remote schools) in addition to free tuition.

Moreover, private entrepreneurs have also helped in increasing access through the establishment of private schools at various levels in the urban areas, including day care centers.

The table below provides an overview of the status of education in Bhutan in 2008:

<b>SUMMARY OF SCHOOLS, INSTITUTES &amp; CENTRES 2008</b>			
	No of Schools	Enrolment	Teachers
<b>A Early Childhood Development</b>			
1 Day Care Centres	10	294	26
<b>B School Education</b>			
1 Community Primary Schools	261	29,702	1,000
2 Primary Schools	81	22,813	799
3 Lower Secondary Schools	89	48,706	1,627
4 Middle Secondary Schools	44	32,292	1,177
5 Higher Secondary Schools	24	16,155	754
6 Private Schools	24	7,444	388
<b>Sub-Total (B)</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>157,112</b>	<b>5,745</b>
<b>C Special Institutes*</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>D Tertiary Institutes under RUB</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4,190</b>	<b>695</b>
<b>E Vocational Institutes</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1,284</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Total (Schools and Institutes) (A+B+C+D+E)</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>162,948</b>	<b>6,585</b>
<b>F Monastic Education (Lobdra, Shredra,etc)</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>12,154</b>	
<b>G Non-Formal Centres</b>	<b>747</b>	<b>13,829</b>	<b>736</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>1,690</b>	<b>188,931</b>	<b>7,321</b>

However, one of the main lessons has been that rapid expansion, with limited resources, imposes severe challenges to quality. This is especially true when the human resource base or teachers in this case, has not been able to keep up with the demand for education leading to shortage of teachers along with other quality concerns. Moreover, unlike in the past where only a select few could go to a limited number of well-equipped schools, today the efforts to provide mass education have meant that everyone has access to education in schools spread across the country and which are unable to meet the same standards as the few well-equipped schools from the past.

At the same time, it has been found that cost sharing measures with local communities have imposed heavy burdens on the poor who are mostly in the rural and remote areas. Moreover, while the strategies for increasing access have been successful until now, it may now be necessary for new interventions to reach the last percent that are out of school. This also includes the need for strategies to reach those children with special needs such as children from disadvantaged and poor backgrounds, disabled children, and children with learning difficulties, among others.

With regard to youth and adults who are out of school, basic and post basic literacy courses are provided through Non Formal Education Centres. This programme has a very high success rate, with over 70% of the participants being young women. This programme has been found to be an effective vehicle for health and nutrition education as well as for the dissemination of other social messages.

With regard to out of school adults who had dropped out of school without completing secondary education, since 2006, the RGoB has started a continuing education programmes in a few private higher secondary schools. This programme allows adults who had not completed their secondary education to enroll for two-year programmes in classes IX and XI to complete either class X or class XII and upgrade their academic qualifications. In 2007, 21 class X and 83 class XII candidates graduated from this school. Now there are three private secondary schools offering continuing education courses. In 2008, 20 class X and 226 class XII candidates will be appearing the examinations. The number of continuing education candidates is increasing with 301 candidates enrolled in class XI in 2008. Currently, the classes are conducted in the evenings and weekends. With the evident popularity of this programme, efforts are being made to expand it both in terms of levels as well as enrolment space and locations.

Enrolment and literacy have increased considerably over the years in Bhutan. The main challenge is to reach the difficult to reach. There are considerable differences between regions, between gender (especially older women) and between socio-economic classes.

- b) Early childhood intervention (as a means to support children's development, transition to primary education and learning)

Given the extreme resource constraints that Bhutan faces, early childhood interventions have been up until now limited to health interventions such as pre and ante natal care, and immunizations, and advocacy on ECCD and the establishment of a few private day care centers in urban areas. At the programme level, to support the development of ECCD, an ECCD Unit has been established within the Department of School Education and a draft ECCD policy is currently under development. In the Bhutanese context with a lot of extended families, ECCD has long been seen as the responsibility of the family. However, it is now being recognized that ECCD can be a critical input in quality education, especially with regard to leveling the playing field between children of advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds in primary education.

- c) Learning outcomes, particularly concerning efforts to improve learning achievement (how well are students performing at various levels?) and reduce inequalities (how have disparities in achievement been reduced?);

With regard to the monitoring of learning outcomes and overall education standard, the National Education Assessments were conducted for class VI in literacy and numeracy (2004) Dzongkha (National Language) (2005) and class X English and Mathematics (2007). The second cycle of these assessments will be carried out in 2009 and 2010.

The findings of the first NEA show that children of farmers, meaning rural children, perform less well and that children staying with friends instead of with their parents also perform poorer. Efforts are being made to lessen these circumstantial disparities through the provision of selective boarding and other support services.

Another way of assessing learning outcomes is to look at pass percentages in the class X and class XII exams. These percentages have been very high, on average around 90% for each level over the last 10 years.

In terms of numbers, the number of students appearing these examinations has increased dramatically over the last 10 years. The number of students appearing for class X examinations increasing from 1476 students in 1997 to 7924 in 2007 and for Class XII from 252 in 1997 to 5027 in 2007.

The results of the policies to increase enrolment have resulted in highly improved learning outcomes. As can be seen from these numbers, more and more are now able to, and have the opportunity of reaching the higher stages of secondary education.

Looking at the overall results, girls performance is poorer than boys' from class X onwards. Girls' enrolment also dwindles beyond class X. The Ministry of Education is currently carrying out a study focusing on girls' enrolment in class X and XII.

- d) Pre-service teacher training, recruitment, deployment, working conditions and in-service professional development.

Pre-service teacher training is provided by the National Colleges of Education under the Royal University of Bhutan once the candidates have been selected by a committee in which the Royal University and the Ministry of Education are represented. All the successful candidates from the two colleges of education are recruited by the Ministry of Education. Once recruited, the Ministry of Education sends the new teacher graduates to the various districts based on the requisitions. These teachers are then deployed as required by the district administration to various schools under their jurisdiction. Currently, the Ministry of Education continues to face teacher shortage and particularly in subjects such as Dzongkha, Mathematics and Science. While efforts are made to provide residential quarters for teachers in rural and remote schools, most teachers have to face very difficult living conditions, without access to roads, proper health facilities, markets, electricity and regular and safe water supply. These conditions, have led to problems of deployment and equitable distribution of teachers to all districts.

For in-service teachers, every winter and during the summer breaks, in-service workshops are held for orienting teachers on new or revised curriculum, for updating teachers on new teaching methodologies etc. In addition, teachers have special facilities for upgrading their qualifications such as the B.Ed programme through Distance Education mode, Masters in Education Leadership through Distance Education, Post Graduate Diplomas in English, Mathematics and IT, and regular long and short term courses both in and outside the country. For those teachers who do not have the current academic qualification requirements, they can sit for classes X and XII examinations as private candidates. This opportunity is available only for teachers.

1.3 The role of the education system in combating poverty as well as other forms of social exclusion and cultural marginalization (how is it envisaged? What kind of contribution is expected? What kind of strategies should be implemented?)

It is an accepted fact that education is the key out of poverty and towards economic and social development. In Bhutan this can be seen in the following ways:

a) Education for knowledge and skills

Knowledge and skills acquired in the process of education will help the population to find employment or have the capacity to be self-employed. Whether a person is going to be a farmer, a blue collared worker or a doctor, education will help him or her towards being that person in the best way possible.

b) Education for improving the quality of life

Education as an end in itself, should improve the quality of a person's life through the understanding and knowledge that a person acquires and which enables that person to lead a better life and be a better person based on his/her understanding and knowledge. Therefore, education should provide the basis for social cohesion and mutual understanding so that all members of society can live together in harmony.

c) Education for developing loyalty and patriotism

Through education, the citizens of a country should develop into productive citizens who are loyal and have both love for their country and a sense of national pride. This should also lead to a spirit of brotherhood, which would translate, into social cohesion and acceptance of different cultures.

d) Education for democracy

Lastly, and especially in the Bhutanese context, for participatory democracy to succeed, and for there to be equitable distribution of the benefits of development, all citizens of the country need to be educated equally well. In fact, education is the only tool that can empower people to understand their rights, and exercise their franchise.

## 2. Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future

### 2.1 Approaches, Scope and Content:

- a) How is inclusive education conceptualized? What is the current vision of inclusive education in Bhutan?

Inclusive education is conceptualized as education that is not only non discriminatory in terms of access, but also takes into account special needs of every individual learner. In Bhutan, the vision of inclusive education would be an education system that is accessible to all children, regardless of gender, socio-economic background, religion, ethnic, culture or physical or mental condition. The quality of education accessed should be of equal standard for all through the provision of equal facilities and where required, special facilities and resources to level the playing field and enhance the advantage of those who are disadvantaged by circumstances.

- b) What are seen as the most important challenges for ensuring educational and social inclusion? How have these challenges changed in recent years?

The most important challenges have been to do with our own level of development. While the idea of inclusion and fairness has always been there, the concept of inclusive education is relatively new and it has been a challenge to integrate it into our mental make up. In recent years, with increasing exposure to international trends and an

increasing percentage of the population becoming literate, this concept has slowly come to be regarded as an important part of the development process.

- c) What specific legal or regulatory frameworks refer to inclusive education issues? What groups are considered as excluded in these frameworks and how are they categorized?

The Constitution obligates the State to provide free basic education of 11 years for all children in Bhutan. Bhutan is also signatory to the CRC and CEDAW and as such no groups are considered to be excluded from these frameworks.

## 2.2 Public policies:

- a) What are the current dimensions of the phenomenon of exclusion from and within education? What kind of indicators and data are used to inform inclusive education policies?

Currently, exclusion from education is judged in the form of out of school children. The main indicators are the Net Enrolment Rates and Drop Out and Repetition Rates.

- b) Which inclusive education issues have been, are, or are going to be relevant for educational policies in Bhutan?

Issues related to the education of special needs groups such as the disabled children, children with learning difficulties and children from poor backgrounds are, and will continue to be the main issues in Bhutan.

- c) What groups are considered to be most vulnerable to various forms of exclusion from and within education? Who are the excluded groups that current policies have yet to take into account?

The main groups vulnerable to exclusion are those with disabilities, those with learning difficulties, children of very poor parents and children of migrant or nomadic parents.

- d) In what ways do current reforms address inclusive education?

With the help of external expertise, the Ministry of Education has carried out some work on inclusive education, mainly by way of identifying issues of inclusion within the education system and by developing strategies and materials to create awareness about these schools and to support the incorporation of ideas to make education more inclusive in the schools. In a similar vein, the Ministry of Education is also currently piloting the Child friendly Schools concept. It is expected that piloting and ultimately scaling up of the child friendly schools concept will eventually lead to inclusive education in all the schools in the near future. With regard to special needs education, the Ministry of Education has established a Special Education Unit under the Department of School Education to work towards the development of programmes geared towards reaching

those children with special needs. One of the activities under this unit will be a study on the prevalence of disabilities in the country. Based on the study, five special education resource centers will be established in regular schools to provide education for disabled children in regular schools.

### 2.3 Systems, links and transitions:

- a) What are the main barriers (e.g economic, political, social) to inclusive education?

Currently the main barriers are lack of awareness among the teachers, schools, children and parents of such issues, and then the lack of resources to enable inclusive education programmes.

- b) What are the most important facilitators of inclusive education?

Awareness and understanding of the issues, commitment towards inclusive education and resources are the most important facilitators for inclusive education.

- c) What specific approaches and measures have been adopted to make the education system more inclusive?

A few special education facilities have been established to facilitate access of disabled children to education. With regard to primary children, schools have been provided within one hour's walking distance wherever possible. In many cases, where children have to walk long distances or come from very poor families, school feeding and boarding facilities are being provided. In rural and remote areas, all stationeries are also provided free of cost and schools have the option of not requiring uniforms if the parents cannot afford them.

The Child-friendly-school concept is being piloted, and will slowly be scaled up once the appropriate tools and infrastructure are in place.

- d) What specific approaches and measures have been adopted to make the education system more flexible in order to offer additional educational opportunities to those who have dropped out or not attained an appropriate level of qualifications?

The Non Formal Education Centres allow those adults and youth who have either dropped out or never been to school to learn basic literacy and numeracy, followed by post basic literacy. For those who have had up to secondary level education, there is the option, currently at a small scale, to attend evening and weekend classes for grades IX to XII at subsidized rates.

Outside the purview of the Ministry of Education, the monastic education system is a parallel system. A considerable number of boys are being educated in the monasteries.

### 2.4 Learners and teachers:

- a) What new approaches to teaching and learning are being implemented to increase educational opportunities for all, improve student learning outcomes and reduce disparities?

Studies have been carried out on the quality of education. A study is also currently underway to assess the impact of policies and strategies for expanding access to education. These studies will inform on various needs and strategies to improve student

learning outcomes and reduce disparities. Another study is also under way to assess the training needs of teachers. This will be followed by the development of need based trainings and professional development courses for all teachers in the system and inform the existing teacher training curriculum.

With regard to students, a child tracking system is also being implemented which will help schools and teachers assess and support the educational development of their students.

Based on the findings from all of the above, strategies on improving learning outcomes and reducing disparities can be developed and implemented.

- b) In what ways is the curriculum being designed and organized to respond to the diversity of learners?

The new English, Mathematics and Dzongkha curriculum are designed in such a way as to take the diversity of learners into account in the teaching learning process. For instance, the content is made more relevant and contextual, and at the same time very interactive so that each and every child is engaged in the learning process. This method of skills and activity based learning is supported by the system of continuous assessment which ensures formative assessment whereby each child is monitored and supported continuously throughout the year. Thus, the differential learning needs and pace of learning of each child can be accounted for, monitored and supported.

- c) In terms of curriculum time, how many instructional hours per year are dedicated to learning reading in the early primary grades? During how many years?

A minimum of one period per work day (5 days a week) is allocated to each of the languages (English and Dzongkha). During the language periods, at least half of the time (average of about 40 minutes per period) is devoted to learning reading in the primary grades which extend for about four to seven years. However, emphasis on learning of reading extends up to the end of higher secondary education.

- d) How can teachers be trained and better equipped to meet the learners' diverse expectations and needs?

Based on the training needs analysis of the teachers and the report in the quality of education in Bhutan, the training at the teacher training colleges will need to be revised, and relevant in-service workshops provided. The most important trainings will be on handling the wide range of learning difficulties that children face.

Moreover, increasing the incentives to attract better-qualified teachers into the system will be important.

- e) How can the formal and non-formal learning environments be more effectively organized in order to ensure the inclusion of all learners?

Ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of issues of inclusion, and providing adequate resources to facilitate inclusive education are important factors for organizing the inclusion of all learners.

3. Documentary references used for the preparation of the national report.
  1. ICE Report 2004, Ministry of Education, Thimphu
  2. General Statistics 2008, Ministry of Education, Thimphu
  3. Draft 10<sup>th</sup> Plan, Volumes 1 and 2, GNHC
  4. National Education Assessment Report, 2004, Ministry of Education, Thimphu