



EVALUATION OF THE INCLUSIVE AND SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN BHUTAN

2010-2020



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Evaluation of the Inclusive and Special Education Programme in Bhutan (2010-2020)





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This evaluation study was led by Dr Peter Grimes, Dr Kishore Chhetri, Arlene dela Cruz, Jan Erron Celebrado, and Rosalynn Estor from Beyond Education Consultancy.

Foreword

To ensure inclusion and education for all learners, Inclusive Education has been a priority for the Ministry of Education for more than four decades. The first special school for children with vision impairment was established in 1973. In 2001, a pilot-based programme on the integration of learners with disabilities into the mainstream system was started at the Changangkha Lower Secondary School, Thimphu. A school for children with deafness and Hard of Hearing was established in Drukgyel Lower Secondary School in 2003. With the evolvement of education for children with disabilities from special education models to inclusive approaches globally, Bhutan commits to valuing, accepting and supporting diversity in schools and ensuring that every child (including children with disabilities) has an equal opportunity to learn as per the Standard for Inclusive Education developed by the Ministry of Education in 2017. The Ministry of Education has taken concerted efforts to get over 900 children with disabilities into 26 inclusive schools (including in two specialized institutes) as of 2022. Major investments have been made in areas of expansion of access to quality inclusive education by the Ministry of Education. UNICEF has contributed towards the Ministry's commitments to leave no child behind supporting in the identification and establishment of new schools for inclusive and special education programmes; strengthen teacher capacity to deliver quality inclusive education; and advocate for rights-based approach to inclusive and special education in Bhutan.

This evaluation of Inclusive and Special Education programme in Bhutan was conducted by independent external consultants. The evaluation report points out several success stories of improving the lives of children with disabilities through education, protection, and empowerment, thereby justifying the relevance of the programme. The report also highlights lessons learnt in terms of quality as well as sustainability of the programme. The report recommends strategic shifts to focus on quality education, greater access and involvement of wider stakeholders including parents, Civil Society Organizations and policymakers to anchor future interventions on the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). With findings of the evaluation, the relevant agencies will be better prepared to confront the misconceptions and develop positive attitudes and services for children with disabilities. In particular, the Ministry of Education will be in a stronger position to build support for inclusive education within the schools and across the communities.

The Ministry of Education and UNICEF would like to congratulate the ECCD and Special Education Division, MoE, the evaluation team and Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Division, and the Education Section, UNICEF for successfully undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of Special and Inclusive Education in Bhutan.



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Acronyms and abbreviations

ABS	Ability Bhutan Society
AES	Annual Education Statistics
BCSEA	Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment
BhSL	Bhutanese Sign Language
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CFM	Child Functioning Module
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DEOs	District Education Officers
DFAT	Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DPOB	Disabled People's Organisation of Bhutan
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
ERIC	Ethical Research Involving Children
FGD	Focus group discussions
FYP	Five-Year Plan
GC4	General Comment No. 4 to Article 24 of the CRPD
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNH	Gross National Happiness
GNHC	Gross National Happiness Commission
HRBAP	Human Rights-Based Approaches
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health
IE	Inclusive education
IEP	Individual education plan
KII	Key informant interviews
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLHR	Ministry of Labour and Human Resources
NBIP	National-based In-service Programme
NCWC	National Commission on Women and Children
NGO	Non-government organisations
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NSB	National Statistical Bureau
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee
OPDs	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
PCE	Paro College of Education
RGOB	Royal Government of Bhutan
RNDA	Rapid Neurodevelopmental Assessment
RCSC	Royal Civil Service Commission
RUB	Royal University of Bhutan
SBIP	School-based In-service Programme

SCE	Samtse College of Education
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEN	Special Education Needs
SENCOs	SEN Coordinators
SPMS	School Performance Management System
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
TTIs	Technical Training Institutes
TVET	Technical, vocational education and training
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNICEF ROSA	United Nations Children’s Fund Regional Office for South Asia
WASH	Water, sanitation, and hygiene
WG	Washington Group on Disability Statistics



1 Introduction

1.1 Disability-Inclusive Education

In education, children with disabilities are one of the most marginalized groups of learners. Equitable access to the general school system remains to be a significant challenge for learners with disabilities. They are less likely to access education opportunities, and those who are able to enter the school system are more likely to drop out compared to their peers without disabilities

Inclusive education is a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures, and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences.

It encompasses a transformation in culture, policy, and practice in all formal and informal educational environments to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to remove the barriers that impede that possibility.

Source: United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016.

In recent decades, various international agreements, frameworks, and policies have established education as a fundamental human right (UN, 2018) and recognized inclusive education as a means to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, fulfil their right to quality and equitable education (UNESCO, 2018). In 2006, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) obligated governments to promote a rights-based model of disability, including ensuring that education systems are inclusive at all levels (UN, 2006). This was further strengthened through the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 which explicitly targeted persons with disabilities (UN, 2015) and commits governments to provide access to lifelong learning opportunities to equip persons with disabilities with the knowledge and skills needed to seize opportunities and to participate fully in society (UN, 2015; UNESCO, 2020).

In 2016, General Comment No. 4 (GC4) to Article 24 of the CRPD provided a more concrete framework for operationalizing the right to inclusive education. It conceptualizes inclusive education as a fundamental right of all learners, a principle that prioritises the well-being of learners, a means of realizing other human rights and the result of the collective commitment to eliminating the barriers that hinder the right to education (UN, 2016). The CRPD stresses that the traditional practice of segregating students with disabilities in self-contained classes, nor integrating them into general classes without adjusting the teaching and learning process, does not constitute inclusive education.

Country Context

Education in Bhutan is offered free up to Standard 10. Bhutan's general school education system consists of seven years of primary education (pre-primary to grade 6), followed by four years of lower and middle secondary (grades 7-10), and two years of higher secondary (grades 11-2) (Bhutan MoE, 2014; Gross National Happiness Commission, 2009).

Education for children with disabilities has long been a priority of the Royal Government of Bhutan. In 1973, the first special school¹ catering to children with visual impairments was instituted which became the Zangley Muenselling School for the Blind, currently known as the Muenselling Institute. A pilot programme based on an integration model in Changangkha Lower Secondary School in Thimphu paved the way for the expansion of special education in 2001. Two years later, a school for children with hearing impairments was established in Drukgyel Lower Secondary School, known today as the Wangsel Institute.

Although the concept and practice of inclusive education are relatively new (Bhutan MoE, 2017) and the government is yet to ratify the CRPD and establish a national education law, significant strides in legislative and policy reforms have been made in recent years toward providing equitable learning opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities. Education for children with disabilities has been consistently prioritised in national development plans (see Figure 1). Bhutan’s focus on the education of children with disabilities has been strengthened since the 9th Five-Year Plan which resulted in the establishment of a Special Education Unit within the Ministry of Education (MoE) (Bhutan Planning Commission, 2002; Gross National Happiness Commission, 2009; Schuelka, 2012). The main strategy of the government was to integrate children with disabilities into regular classrooms (Bhutan Planning Commission, 2002).

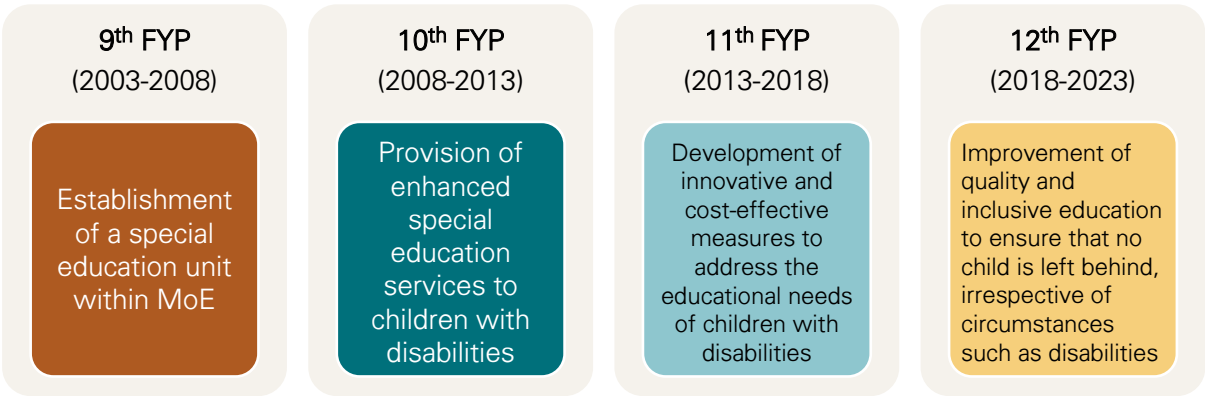


Figure 1. Inclusion of education of children with disabilities in Bhutan’s Five-Year Plans

Over the years, the conceptualisation of education for children with disabilities has evolved and gradually shifted from the notion of special education towards promoting more inclusive perspectives and approaches. Bhutan’s Standards for Inclusive Education define inclusive education as ‘the process of valuing, accepting and supporting diversity in schools and ensuring that every child has equal opportunity to learn’ (Bhutan MoE, 2017, p.4), including children with disabilities. While admission to school remains conditional on the severity of a child’s disability, inclusive education aims to ‘provide access to general education in regular schools for all children with disabilities, including those with physical, intellectual, and other types of impairment’ (Bhutan MoE, 2020a, p. 48). Further review of the international and national context in relation to inclusive education is provided in Appendix A.

¹The evaluation team advocates the use of more inclusive language and moving away from terminology such as special needs, special education, special teachers, etc. In this report however, terminology used in government’s official documentation and policy documents have been retained.

1.2 Objective of Evaluation: The Inclusive and Special Education Programme

The object of this evaluation is the Inclusive and Special Education Programme (IE/SEN Programme) of the Ministry of Education. The programme is currently being implemented as an integral part of the broader education improvement agenda of the government, supported by various development partners. This evaluation was jointly commissioned by Ministry of Education (MoE) and UNICEF Bhutan.

Bhutan is divided into 20 districts or dzongkhags. Out of 606 government schools, 23 schools (including 2 specialised institutes for children who are deaf and with vision impairment) offer the Inclusive and Special Education Needs (IE/SEN) Programme. Two Draktsho Vocational Training Centres are catering to children and young people with disabilities providing technical and vocational education. Supported by the MoE and its partners, these schools accommodate learners with various disabilities ranging from mild to severe (Bhutan MoE, 2020a).

To strategically reach children with disabilities in different parts of the country, inclusive and special education schools are located across all regions. While only a small percentage of schools are currently implementing the programme, the government's long-term goal is to transform all schools into inclusive schools. An increasing number of children with disabilities enrolling in schools IE/SEN programmes² and special institutes has been evident over the last decade, from 168 in 2010 to 997 students in 2020 (Bhutan MoE, 2020a).

The government follows a twin-track approach to inclusion, wherein it addresses inequalities in education for all learners while at the same time, acknowledging and providing the specific educational needs of children with disabilities.

1.2.1 Theory of Change

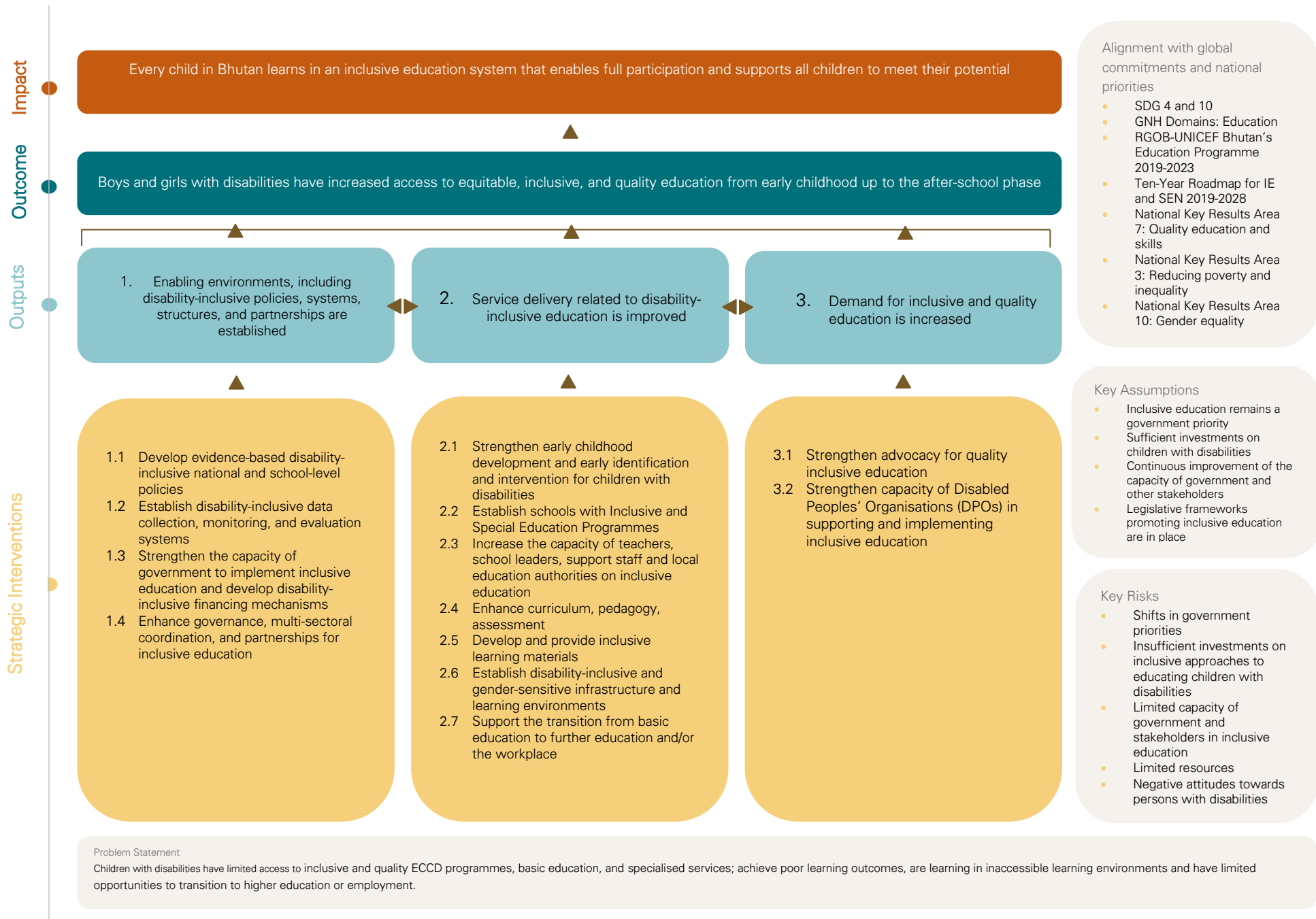
Informed by the Terms of Reference (Appendix B) and in the absence of a dedicated programme design document that outlines the logic model and components of the programme, the evaluation team organised the key initiatives in inclusive education undertaken within the last ten years into a retroactive Theory of Change. The evaluation team constructed the programme's key activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact through a desk review of key documents including:

1. Bhutan's 10th to 12th Five-Year Plans
2. Education Blueprint 2014-2024
3. Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education 2019-2028
4. UNICEF's Work Plan from 2010-2020

In consultation with MoE and UNICEF, the ToC was revised and feedback to the initial draft were incorporated into further iterations. It is important to note that the ToC does not present a comprehensive summary of every activity and output targeted and achieved over one decade of

² Schools with IE/SEN programme refers to schools offering both inclusive and special education. The evaluation team advocates the use of more inclusive language and moving away from terminology such as special needs, special education, special teachers, etc. In this report however, terminology used in government's official documentation and policy documents have been retained.

implementation. Rather, it aims to give an overview of the main goals and priorities articulated by the MoE, supported by its partners, including UNICEF, and describe the logical links between them. The ToC is further elaborated in Appendix C.



1.2.2 Programme Components

The programme's three main components as articulated in the Terms of Reference and reflected as outcomes identified in the Theory of Change include (1) enabling environment, (2) service delivery, and (3) demand creation. Each component is elaborated into different dimensions reflecting the requirements of the GC4. The principles of quality, equity, gender equality, and human rights cut across all components.

Table 1. Programme components

Programme Component/ Evaluation Themes	Description	Dimensions
1. Enabling environment	The enabling environment includes interrelated conditions that enable or facilitate the development of the Inclusive and Special Education Programme.	1.1 Legislative and policy frameworks 1.2 Data (including monitoring and evaluation) 1.3 Governance and management (including inter-sectoral coordination and partnerships) 1.4 Planning and financing
2. Service delivery	Service delivery deals with the availability, access to and quality of various services in support of the Inclusive and Special Education Programme.	2.1 Early childhood development and early identification and intervention 2.2 Establishment of schools with Inclusive and Special Education Programme including specialised institutes 2.3 Capacity development for teachers, school leaders, and other support staff 2.4 Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment 2.5 Learning materials 2.6 Infrastructure and learning environment 2.7 Transition to vocational, further education and the workplace
3. Demand creation	Initiatives supporting children with disabilities and their families to improve knowledge of their rights, demand inclusive education, encourage changes in attitudes and behaviour and increase participation in education.	3.1 Awareness, attitudes, and practices 3.2 Advocacy 3.3 Participation of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)
4. Cross-cutting themes	Cross-cutting themes/issues are integrated into all aspects of the programme.	Quality Equity Gender equality Human rights

1.2.3 Programme Stakeholders

1.2.3.1 Programme Beneficiaries

1. The primary beneficiaries of the programme (i.e., rights holders) are children with disabilities enrolled in schools with Inclusive and Special Education Programme, including the special institutes.
2. The programme also has a benefit on other direct or indirect beneficiaries and duty bearers including children without disabilities, national and local education authorities, teachers, school leaders, other support staff, families, parents, or caregivers.

1.2.3.2 Principal Duty Bearers

Table 2. Principal duty bearers

Duty bearers		Roles/Interests
Government	Royal Government of Bhutan	The Royal Government of Bhutan guarantees the right of all citizens to free education up to Standard 10.
	Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC)	Leads and coordinates implementation of the national policy for persons with disabilities and its action plan
	Ministry of Education (MoE)	MoE provides overall policy guidelines for the development of education in the country.
	Ministry of Education, ECCD and Special Education Needs Division	Leads the implementation of the Inclusive and Special Education Programme and ensures that special education services are provided to children with disabilities (Bhutan MoE, 2019c)
	Ministry of Health (MoH)	Provides health services for persons with disabilities and ensures access to early identification and intervention, community-based rehabilitation, and assistive technologies.
	Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (MoLHR)	Responsible for introducing vocational and need-based training programmes for persons with disabilities, including women and girls (GNHCS, 2019)
	National Commission on Women and Children (NCWC)	Implements training and awareness-raising activities on the rights of persons with disabilities and social protection
	Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment (BCEA)	Led the development of the National Education Assessment Framework in 2019 which features disability-inclusive learning assessment methods (Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment, 2019)
	Department of Curriculum and Professional Development (DCPD), Ministry of Education	Develops relevant curriculum and teaching and learning materials for school education and provides teacher development programmes

Duty bearers		Roles/Interests
	(formerly Royal Education Council)	
	Royal University of Bhutan (RUB)	RUB, in coordination with MoE, is responsible for improving pre-service programmes for teaching children with diverse needs in schools (GNHCS, 2019)
	Paro College of Education	Provides pre-service and in-service training for teachers
	Dzongkhag Education Office (DEO)	Responsible for planning, implementing, and coordinating education programmes at the local level
	Local leaders	Local government leaders have a role in local decision making, programming and service delivery
Development partners	UNICEF	Since 1974, UNICEF has been supporting the Bhutanese government in ensuring the education of all children, including children with disabilities.
	Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Save the Children	Since 2009, GPE has been supporting the Royal Government of Bhutan.
		Through Save the Children, GPE's COVID-19 accelerated fund supported the country's COVID-19 response plan. This includes assistance to the education sector for special education (GPE, 2021).
	Bhutan Foundation	Since 2008, Bhutan Foundation has been collaborating with MoE to build the capacity of teachers in teaching children with disabilities. The foundation provides schools with teaching and learning materials and resources that will enable children with disabilities to succeed in the classroom (Bhutan Foundation, 2021).
	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)	From 2007 to 2011, NORAD supported a development project in Bhutan to improve the ICT competence of visually impaired students and adults (Media Lunde Toleffsen, 2021).
	Australia Volunteers for International Development	The Australian Volunteers Program has been highly engaged in improving the standards of Special Education in Bhutan (DFAT, n.d.).
	Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)	The Government of Australia, through DFAT, continues to support the Bhutanese government through the strengthening of the capacity of institutions in Bhutan through Public Sector Linkages Programme (DFAT, 2014), including capacity building in inclusive education.
CSO/OPD	Ability Bhutan Society (ABS)	ABS is a public benefit organisation that promotes empowerment among persons with disabilities in Bhutan. Their work includes providing educational and psycho-social support to families and caregivers of persons with disabilities (Ability Bhutan Society, 2021).

Duty bearers		Roles/Interests
	Disabled People's Organisation of Bhutan (DPO)	DPO advocates for the empowerment of persons with disabilities in all spheres of life. One of the objectives of the organisation is to provide support for the education of persons with disabilities (Disabled People's Organisation, 2021).
	Draktsho	Draktsho Vocational Training Centre is an NGO that provides technical vocational training for youth with disabilities. Draktsho received funding support from MoE and project-based funding support from UNICEF and UNDP.
Schools	School leaders	Responsible for running an inclusive school through the development of inclusive policies, cultivating an inclusive culture, and ensuring inclusive practices within the learning environment (Bhutan MoE, 2017)
	Teachers	General teachers are responsible for creating inclusive classrooms for all learners while teachers in schools with SEN programme SEN programme coordinators (SENCOs) are responsible for guiding and supporting general teachers in creating inclusive learning environments for learners with disabilities (Bhutan MoE, 2017).
	Support staff	Adequately and appropriately trained teacher assistants provide learning support in classes with students with diverse needs (Bhutan MoE, 2017).
Community	Parents	Parents/caregivers and the members of the local community play a critical role in creating an inclusive environment for children with disabilities. Schools need to build relationships within the school community (Bhutan MoE, 2017) to support learners holistically.
	School management board	Can facilitate implementation of inclusive education in the community

1.2.4 Programme Resources

The government is supported by various development partners in strengthening the implementation of the programme. Table 2 outlines the estimated funding support directed towards education for children with disabilities prior to 2010 up to 2020.

Table 3. Programme resources

Programme	Estimated funding (USD)
1. NORAD: ICT programme for persons with vision impairment in Bhutan (2007-2011)	5,000,000
2. Bhutan Foundation: Capacity building in special education for special education teachers (2009-2012)	166,000
3. Royal Government of Bhutan: Awareness, outreach, rental, infrastructure development and others for inclusive and special education (2010-2020)	201,618 ³
4. Save the Children: Procurement of furniture, equipment, and others (2017-2018)	30,000
5. Bhutan Foundation: Long-term capacity building for special education teachers (2018-2019)	35,000
6. Bhutan Foundation: Technical support in special curriculum development and implementation (2019-2020)	25,000
7. Australia Volunteers for International Development: Technical support for inclusive education (2016-2018)	105,844
8. AusAid Public Sector Linkage Programme: Capacity building in inclusive education (2011-2012)	166,470
9. Global Partnership for Education and Save the Children: COVID-19 accelerated fund to support Bhutan's education sector for special education (2020-2021)	170,703
10. UNICEF: Support to quality education (2010-2020)	4,108,277

Source: Ministry of Education

1.3 Structure of the Report

This evaluation report is divided into six sections. **Section 1** provides an overall context of the evaluation and introduces the object of the evaluation, the Inclusive and Special Education Programme. **Section 2** outlines the evaluation design and methodology. In **Section 3**, key evaluation findings are presented and organized around the six evaluation criteria. **Section 4** presents the conclusions from the evaluation while **Section 5** draws out key lessons learned from the ten-year programme implementation. Finally, the main recommendations for expanding and improving the programme are enumerated in **Section 6**.

³ excluding remunerations for the schools



2 Evaluation Design

2.1 Purpose, Objectives and Scope

The evaluation aims to establish whether there have been significant changes in the education of children with disabilities. The evaluation also provides baseline data on the programme which can be used as a basis for monitoring progress, setting targets, and evaluating results. It provides a set of actionable recommendations to improve the delivery of inclusive and special education, as well as strengthen coordination among relevant stakeholders. The evaluation process intends to raise awareness and understanding among children with disabilities and their parents of the quality of inclusive education services provided by the duty bearers (teachers, communities, school authorities, central, and local governments) in realizing their rights.

2.1.1 Objectives

Specifically, the evaluation:

1. assessed the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the Inclusive and Special Education Programme in realising the right to education of children with disabilities;
2. ascertained the quality of services being delivered by the duty bearers to address special educational needs;
3. documented good practices as well as challenges and created an inventory of knowledge base for use by community practitioners;
4. assessed the changes in capacities of primary duty bearers in the provision of inclusive and special education; and
5. assessed the extent to which equity and gender responsiveness are integrated into the programme.

2.1.2 Scope

The evaluation assessed the programme implementation from 2010 to 2020. It focused on 23⁴ schools (including two specialized institutes) and two Draktsho Vocational Training Centres implementing the programme. As recommended by the Evaluation Reference Group, the evaluation also included four ECCD centres, four monastic institutions, four technical training institutes, and four general schools⁵. The evaluation covered Bhutan's education system at the central, regional, and local government levels.

Some adjustments were made to the scope and methodology, in consultation with the Reference Group. Appendix D outlines the deviations from the Terms of Reference.

⁴ The scope covers the implementation period from 2010 to 2020. In 2021, 3 additional schools began implementing inclusive and special education, and therefore were not included in the evaluation.

⁵ In this evaluation report, 'general schools' refer to schools not implementing the inclusive and special education programme. Specifically, the term refers to the 16 sample schools including: 4 ECCD centres, 4 monastic institutions, 4 technical training institutes, and 4 mainstream schools.

2.1.3 Significance of the Evaluation

The first independent evaluation of the IE/SEN programme took place at a critical point in time, after a decade of programme implementation since 2010. Within the last ten years, many national reforms have been put in place to strengthen inclusive education in the country. In 2019, MoE developed a Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive Education and Special Needs Education setting out the long-term direction for the inclusion of learners with disabilities in education. Meanwhile, UNICEF, the government's key partner in disability inclusion is at the tail end of implementing its Strategic Plan 2018-2021 which supports the government's priorities. The findings of the evaluation provide evidence bases for developing a concrete implementation action plan supportive of the Ten-Year Roadmap, inform ongoing reforms promoting equitable access to education, and provide strategic direction to UNICEF's future education programming.

2.1.4 Evaluation Audience, Uses, and Dissemination

The direct audience of the evaluation includes various government agencies such as the Ministry of Education, Gross National Happiness Commission, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, National Statistics Bureau, National Commission for Women and Children, Dzongkhag Education Office (DEO) /Thromde Education Office (TEO) and the Royal University of Bhutan. Primary audience also includes local and international development partners, such as UNICEF Bhutan, CSOs and OPDs. The evaluation findings can be utilized to inform strategic planning, policy development and implementation, strengthening advocacy work, and identifying priority areas where investments are most needed. Appendix E details the evaluation audience, and dissemination.

2.2 Overall Approach

The evaluation is a combination of formative and summative approaches. It is formative or learning focused as it aims to identify progress, challenges, and opportunities. There is a key focus on the processes and the likelihood of such processes to lead to the achievement of target results. The evaluation will gather evidence-based lessons to inform the improvement of programme implementation. At the same time, the evaluation is summative as it also assessed the achievement of outcomes and outputs and measure the extent to which the Programme has brought about changes. The evaluation is unique in the sense that it aims to measure programme results and establish baseline information at the same time. As such, all results are to be interpreted as evaluative findings and as baseline information.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for this study. A mixed-methods design is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods which allow the development of a more reliable understanding of the subject (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In a mixed-methods study, it is assumed that the strengths of quantitative and qualitative approaches will offset the weaknesses of each method (Creswell, 2012). Quantitative data reveals trends among a certain group of people while qualitative data can provide a more nuanced understanding of the meaning behind the trends. Qualitative data collection through key informant interviews and focus group discussion is especially important in this evaluation in ensuring that the participation and the voices of the main beneficiaries of the programme are represented.

The approach was participatory and inclusive wherein principles of gender equality, equity, and human rights were mainstreamed in all aspects of the evaluation both at the conceptual (evaluation design, framework) and practical levels (data collection, analysis, formulating recommendations).

2.3 Evaluation Themes, Questions, and Criteria

2.3.1 Evaluation Criteria

Aligned with the TOR, the criteria for evaluation are based on the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) evaluation criteria: *relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability*. To explicitly address the issues of gender, equity and human rights, an additional criterion (cross-cutting issues) was added.

The criteria are defined by OECD-DAC as follows:

Criteria	Definition
1. Relevance	The extent to which the objectives of an intervention are consistent with recipients' requirements, country needs, global priorities, and partners' policies.
2. Coherence	The extent to which other interventions (particularly policies) support or undermine the intervention and vice versa.
3. Effectiveness	The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives and its results, including any differential results across groups.
4. Efficiency	The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.
5. Sustainability	The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.
6. Cross-Cutting Issues	
6.1 Equity	The basic fairness of the processes and outcomes of decision making. This implies that all children have an opportunity to survive, develop and reach their full potential, without being subjected to discrimination, bias, or favouritism.
6.2 Gender Equality	Gender equality is the "concept that women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment, and opportunities for realising their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development." (UNICEF ROSA, 2017, p. 3)
6.3 Human Rights-Based Approaches	Five core guiding principles underpin HRBAP: normativity, non-discrimination, participation, transparency, and accountability (UNICEF, 2012).

2.3.2 Evaluation Themes

As mentioned under 'Programme Components', the programme is being implemented using a three-pronged strategy which makes up the programme's components and the evaluation themes: (1) enabling environment, (2) service delivery and (3) demand creation.

2.3.3 Evaluation Framework

Aligned with the TOR and following the advice from the Evaluation Reference Group, the evaluation focused on the following key evaluation questions (KEQ). The complete evaluation framework is detailed in Appendix F.

Table 4. Key evaluation questions

Evaluation criteria	Theme	Key Evaluation Questions
1. Relevance	Enabling environment	1.1 Alignment: To what extent are programme strategies aligned with international and national rights and equity-focused approaches, including gender equality, to meet the needs of children with disabilities?
	Enabling environment, service delivery	1.2 Responsiveness: To what extent have the activities and outputs addressed the national priorities and needs of children with disabilities?
2. Coherence	Enabling environment	2.1 Internal policy coherence: To what extent are domestic laws and policies governing inclusive and special education coherent?
		2.2 External policy coherence: To what extent are domestic laws and policies aligned or not aligned with the SDGs and GC4-CRPD?
	Enabling environment	2.3 Cross-sector Collaboration: To what extent did the programme enhance the coordination mechanisms (horizontal and vertical; central and district levels) among stakeholders?
3. Effectiveness	Service delivery	3.1 Access and participation: To what extent have children with disabilities been able to access and participate in inclusive and special education? Are there significant differences in access between boys and girls?
	Enabling environment, service delivery, demand creation	3.2 Positive or negative unintended results: Were the results, intended and unintended (outputs and outcomes) achieved? If so, for whom, to what extent and in what circumstances?
	Service delivery	3.3 Resources and implementation strategies: Were the inputs and strategies identified realistic, appropriate and adequate to achieve the results?
	Demand creation	3.4 Advocacy: To what extent has the programme increased awareness and demand for inclusive education?
	Service delivery	3.5 Gender mainstreaming: Does the programme actively contribute to promoting gender equality and addressing gender disparities in education access and learning outcomes? To what extent did the programme benefit women, men, or both? Who benefited and who did not?

Evaluation criteria	Theme	Key Evaluation Questions
4. Efficiency	Enabling environment	4.1 Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation: What were the planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting systems in place for improving programme effectiveness and efficiency? What were the gaps? To what extent are these systems gender and disability-inclusive?
	Enabling environment	4.2 Financial and Human Resources: To what extent were the resources (financial and human resources) allocated to the programme adequate to support the implementation of the work plan to achieve quality and equity-focused results for children with disabilities?
	Enabling environment, service delivery, demand creation	4.3 Implementation strategies: Was the process of achieving results efficient? What strategies (advocacy, policy, technical, financial, etc.) were most efficient in influencing improvements in access, quality, equity, and sustainability?
	Service delivery	4.4 Cost-effectiveness: To what extent is mainstreaming children with disabilities in schools with IE/SEN programme cost-effective compared to enrolling them in specialized institutes?
	Enabling environment, service delivery, demand creation	4.5 Situation Analysis: What were the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the design and implementation process?
5. Sustainability	Enabling environment/service delivery	5.1 Sustainability: What were the efforts made to establish an enabling environment (necessary and appropriate policies, legislation, budgets) for the expansion and improvement of services? What measures were implemented to ensure the services provided were sustainable? ⁶
	Enabling environment, service delivery, demand creation	5.2 Scalability: What interventions were adopted for the programme to be scalable?
	Enabling environment, service delivery, demand creation	5.3 Capacity development: How were capacities strengthened at the individual and organizational level (including contributing factors and constraints)? To what extent has gender equality and equity principles been mainstreamed in capacity development initiatives?
6. Cross-Cutting Themes	Gender equality, equity, human rights	6.1 Equity, gender equality, and human rights-based approaches: In what ways and to what extent has the IE/SEN programme integrated a gender-responsive and

⁶ In the inception report, these two questions were presented separately. Analysis of the data showed that responses pertaining to enabling environments and service delivery are intricately connected. Therefore, the responses to the KEQs are presented together.

Evaluation criteria	Theme	Key Evaluation Questions
		overall equity-based approach into its design and implementation? Did the programme promote women's and girls' empowerment? To what extent?

2.4 Methodology

2.4.1 Sampling strategy

The sampling strategy for the evaluation followed the Terms of Reference and advice from the ERG during the inception phase of the study, wherein:

- All 23 schools implementing IE/SEN programme (including two specialised institutes) and two Drakstho vocational training centres) were covered in the study.
- 16 general schools (4 ECCD centres, 4 monastic schools, 4 TTIs, and 4 general schools) were added to the sample, as recommended by the ERG. Convenience sampling was employed in selecting the additional schools wherein the main criterion was its proximity to an IE/SEN-implementing school.
- All teachers in 23 IE/SEN schools and 16 general schools were targeted to respond to the online survey. However, 50 per cent of teachers in IE schools and 51 per cent of teachers in schools not implementing the programme responded to the survey. Upon agreement with MoE and UNICEF, the turnout of responses was deemed reasonable to proceed with data analysis.

2.4.2 Data collection methods

Primary and secondary data were collected through multiple data collection methods which allowed the generation of comprehensive information, triangulation, and validation. Various research activities were conducted at different levels of the education system.

- a. Desk review.** Relevant literature, policy documents, and country reports from 2010 to 2020 related to the programme were reviewed and analysed during the inception stage to collect secondary quantitative and qualitative data deemed significant to the evaluation study. A desk review was also carried out after the inception stage to support the analysis of data collected through other methods. The list of documents consulted is in Appendix G.
- b. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions.** Relevant education stakeholders were interviewed between September to November 2021. Semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with a total of 1,066 individuals including:
 - key representatives from government ministries at the central (16 key informants) and district levels (20);
 - officials from Draktsho Vocational Training Centre (2)
 - UNICEF staff (6);
 - CSOs/OPD representatives (2);
 - school leaders (20);
 - SENCOs (20);

- teachers teaching in schools with IE/SEN programme (131);
- teachers teaching in general schools (27);
- parents of children with disabilities (105) and without disabilities (105) from schools with IE/SEN programme
- parents of children without disabilities from general schools (42)
- children with disabilities (228) and without disabilities (211) in schools with IE/SEN programme
- children without disabilities from general schools (131)

KIIs and FGDs with key representatives from government ministries were conducted either online via Zoom, face-to-face, or an online questionnaire, whichever was feasible and accessible. KIIs and FGDs at the school level were conducted face-to-face through the assistance of trained field enumerators, supervised by the local evaluation consultant. An overview of the KII and FGD participants is provided in Appendix H.

- c. Online survey.** A structured online survey was developed and administered to teachers in all sample schools. The survey aimed to examine knowledge, attitudes among, and inclusive classroom approaches employed by teachers. A total of 417 teachers from schools implementing the IE/SEN programme and 97 teachers from general schools participated in the online survey.
- d. Classroom observation.** Teacher-enumerators conducted a total of 20 classroom observations in schools with the IE/SEN programme using an observation checklist to investigate the physical accessibility of the school/classroom, school culture and learner-centred teaching and learning approaches.
- e. Case study.** A semi-structured interview was conducted to support the case study on the disability-inclusive programming in two vocational schools: Draktsho Vocational Training Centre in Thimphu and Trashigang. The case study focused on documenting promising practices of the centres in supporting the transition from basic education to higher/vocational education.

The list of all schools and institutions visited is in Appendix I. All data collection tools are enclosed in Appendix J.

2.4.3 Data analysis

All primary and secondary data collected were analysed following the evaluation framework, using a variety of data analysis methods and tools.

Quantitative Data

1. Descriptive analysis

Quantitative data from primary and secondary sources were analysed using descriptive analysis to present emerging trends and generate a set of baseline information. Quantitative data were disaggregated to ensure that vulnerable groups, such as women, girls, children with disabilities, are visible in the evaluation findings.

2. Trend analysis

This statistical procedure was applied to quantitative information to find patterns in data and to determine differences in results among different populations, e.g., boys and girls, children from different geographic settings, children of different abilities, teachers who are males and females.

Qualitative Data

1. Content analysis

Qualitative data gathered from different data collection methods and tools (i.e., key informant interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observation, case study, and online survey) were transcribed, translated from the local language to English (if necessary), and organised. Data was sorted into coded categories and grouped based on the predetermined themes (i.e., evaluation criteria and questions) and new emerging themes (using inductive coding) to develop substantiated inferences about the programme. Data collected through qualitative methods such as FGDs were not interpreted as quantitative data (e.g., percentages and frequencies). Qualitative descriptions (e.g., few, some, most) were used to describe the trends in responses instead.

2. SWOT analysis

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis is an assessment tool that identifies the project's existing resources (strengths), issues and challenges (weaknesses), external aspects that may overcome weaknesses and build on strengths (opportunities), and external aspects that may threaten the range of opportunities for change (threats) (IFAD, 2002). SWOT analysis will be utilised to establish a general situation analysis of where the Programme is currently operating. This method will respond to the evaluation question under Efficiency: 'What were the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the design and implementation process?'

3. Gender scale

Using UNICEF's gender continuum model⁷, the extent to which gender lens is integrated and addressed in all aspects of the Programme will be determined. Figure 2 elaborates the gender continuum model.

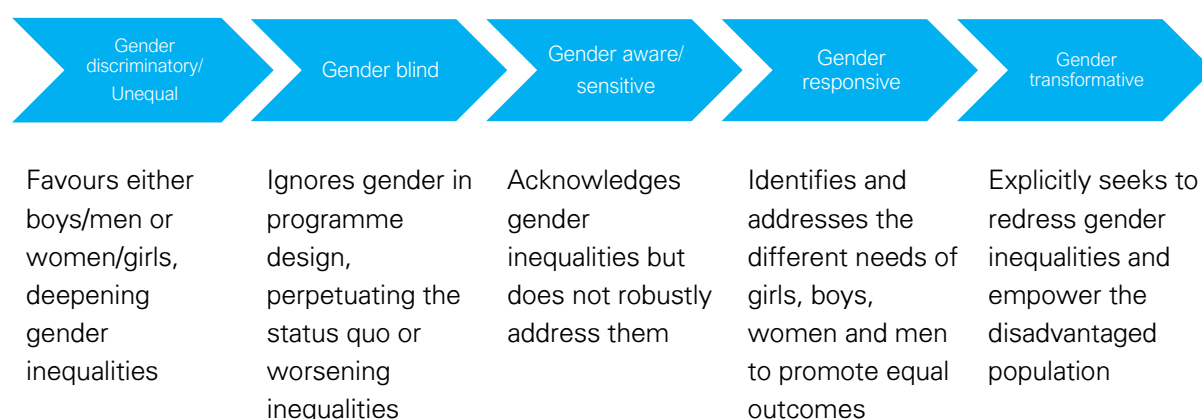


Figure 2. Gender continuum

⁷ UNICEF adapted this scale from UNDP's Gender Results Effectiveness Scale. See

<https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/8794>, for a more comprehensive description of the Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES).

Triangulation and generation of evaluative findings

Organised and coded quantitative and qualitative data gathered through various sources and methods will be triangulated to corroborate the findings. Based on these, evaluative statements per key evaluation question will be formulated, elaborated, and refined systematically through an iterative process.

Validation

Key findings will be validated through a series of validation interviews and consultation meetings with key stakeholders to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings. The conclusions and recommendations generated will also be validated to ensure that they are substantiated by evidence, formulated based on Bhutan's education and development context, and are pragmatic to increase the likelihood of implementation.

2.5 Limitations

1. **Absence of baseline data.** The evaluation team acknowledged that baseline data and Theory of Change or a logical framework were absent. As such, the team utilised available secondary data from country documents which formed the basis for the reconstructed Theory of Change.
2. Measuring learning outcomes through primary data collection using assessment tools is not within the scope of this evaluation.
3. **Limited data received from the respondents.** There were instances when the evaluation team received limited or incomplete data from the respondents. As such, the team used the available secondary data to complement the information gathered.
4. **Turnout gap in the online survey.** The aim was to cover all teachers in schools offering IE/SEN Programme. As mentioned, only a little over 50 per cent of the total number of teachers from schools with and without IE/SEN Programme responded. Discussions and agreements with UNICEF/MoE resulted in the decision to move forward with data analysis.
5. The quality of the virtual training for enumerators in high-risk areas for COVID-19 was limited by difficulties in internet connectivity. Enumerators assigned in high-risk areas had issues understanding some sections of the questionnaires. The national consultant provided support through phone calls.

2.6 Ethical Protocols

The design and implementation of the evaluation study adhered to the ethical principles for research and evaluation such as the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (UNEG, 2020), the UNICEF's Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis (UNICEF, 2021), and the Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) Guidelines (Graham et al., 2013). An ethics review approval (Appendix K) was granted by the HML Institutional Review Board in Washington through the assistance of the UNICEF Regional Office in South Asia. The study operationalized the ethical principles of integrity, accountability, respect for dignity, and beneficence as elaborated in Appendix K1-K2.



3 Findings

3.1 Relevance

3.1.1 Alignment: To what extent are programme strategies aligned with international and national rights and equity-focused policies approaches, including gender equality, to meet the needs of children with disabilities?

- 3.1.1.1 The majority (86 per cent) of stakeholders from government agencies (at the national and district levels) and development partners agree that the IE/SEN Programme is attuned with the principles promoted by international human rights frameworks, such as the CRC, SDG4, and CRPD. Respondents who expressed disagreement (14 per cent) cited inadequate resources such as lack of assistive devices, trained teachers, and accessible infrastructure as hindrances to better respond to the educational needs of children with disabilities.

The Programme does not have a dedicated programme design document that outlines a clear results hierarchy framework (impact outcomes, outputs, activities, inputs). Nevertheless, commitments and strategies to implement the Programme are articulated in key government policies and strategic plans from the recent decade, summarized in the reconstructed Theory of Change.

At the core of the Programme is the goal to provide equal learning opportunities for all children, including children with disabilities. In Bhutan, free education is provided up to the 10th standard which aligns well with Article 28 of the CRC. Although not a State party to the CRPD yet, the Bhutan government reinforces Article 24 and GC4 to Article 24 of the Convention that promotes the right of persons with disabilities to inclusive education without discrimination. The establishment of general schools offering inclusive and special education for children with disabilities around the country has enabled more learners with disabilities in-school to participate in general education, as opposed to learning in segregated settings.

SDG 4's call to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'⁸ is the fundamental aspiration of the IE/SEN Programme. The Programme's focus on empowering children with disabilities through increasing access to and quality of learning opportunities can facilitate the fulfilment of other rights advocated in other SDGs.

- 3.1.1.2 As much as the Programme's purpose and objectives are aligned with international frameworks, the Programme is also founded on the principles of various national laws and policies. Respondents from government and development partners unanimously agree that in principle, the programme is attuned to domestic legal frameworks⁹ in terms of guaranteeing access to education, eliminating barriers, addressing discrimination, and providing the necessary support services.

The same philosophy of providing education for all is echoed in the recently adopted Standards for Inclusive Education (2017) and the Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education in Bhutan 2019-2028. The goals of the draft National Education Policy (2019) are reinforced in the Programme's strategy of "facilitating access and participation in school: and "providing specialized support, appropriate educational services and facilities, including trained personnel" (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2019, p.5).

- 3.1.1.3 It is difficult to establish whether the Programme had identified gender-responsive outcomes from the outset, due to the absence of a design document. However, policies supporting inclusive education, notably, the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2019 mandates the MoE to ensure girls have equal access to education at all levels. The stakeholder interviews found that there are no significant differences in the implementation strategies tailored to address the gender-specific needs of either boys or girls with disabilities. Respondents highlighted however the imperative to put in place gender-appropriate and accessible WASH facilities for girls with disabilities and that the Programme must address this gap moving forward. Broadly speaking, providing accessible toilets in the schools for both girls and boys with disabilities, must be a priority.
- 3.1.1.4 In terms of its fundamental principles, the IE/SEN Programme supports the directives of both international and national policies. However, in practice, the situation is much more complex. In terms of implementation, some respondents noted that there is room to improve consistency with the ideals of normative frameworks and domestic policies. Limitations in resources and capacity, especially among teachers, are reported as the most persistent challenges. It is necessary to augment the resources allocated to inclusive education to successfully carry out the promise of the policies.

"It's probably in terms of implementation that we need to improve. We have probably nailed down the policy requirements to an adequate limit, so the policy itself is quite robust and holistic. What we need now is probably commitments in terms of resources so that all the policy interventions are carried out."

– Representative from GNHC

The IE/SEN Programme's implementation approach is therefore gradual, wherein, the government targets to establish at least one inclusive school per district in the short to medium term, with the

⁹ Frameworks cited include: The Constitution of Bhutan; Draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs 2012; National School Curriculum Framework; Education Blueprint 2014-2024; Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011; Child Care and Protection Rules and Regulations of Bhutan 2015; Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013 and its Rules and Regulations of Bhutan 2015; and the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2019

long-term view to make all schools in Bhutan inclusive. There is recognition among government and non-government government agencies that inclusion is a continuous process and that the country still has a long way to go.

3.1.2 Responsiveness: To what extent have the activities and outputs addressed the national priorities and needs of children with disabilities?

3.1.2.1 There is strong evidence of the Programme's responsiveness to the diverse needs of children with disabilities, based on the literature review and stakeholders' perspectives. **As mentioned earlier, the IE/SEN Programme does not have a dedicated programme design document.** Nonetheless, various policy documents and national strategic plans from the recent decade had expressly outlined national priorities related to the education of children with disabilities, their needs, and the imperative to address such needs. In the Tenth Five Year Plan 2008-2013, the government articulated that the most significant need is to increase access to inclusive education. This led to subsequent initiatives that address different aspects of inclusive education programming.

In terms of creating an enabling environment, policies and standards have been put in place as outlined above. Development partners have supported the capacity-building of rights-holders including children with disabilities, their parents, CSOs and OPDs to demand the fulfilment of children's right to education. Access has significantly increased over the years through the expansion of the Programme to a total of 23 schools, including two specialized institutes, as of 2020. In addition, two Draktsho vocational training centre provides vocational education for young people with disabilities. While this increasing trend is promising, only 1 in 4 persons with disabilities in Bhutan are literate or had attended formal education (MoE & National Statistics Bureau, 2021). This means that majority of persons with disabilities are not participating in educational opportunities. In terms of responsiveness, there has been good progress in the last ten years, but the Bhutan government needs to accelerate its efforts to reach the most marginalized learners.

The Programme's overarching approach to inclusive education is a twin-track approach wherein interventions are implemented to create an inclusive education system accessible to all children; while at the same time, providing targeted support according to the individual learning needs of a child. It should be noted however that the twin-track approach to inclusion aims to improve the overall inclusivity of the system for all children, whilst addressing specific needs of individual children. It does not advocate the perpetuation of special schools.

3.1.2.2 At the classroom level, all teachers in schools with IE/SEN Programme agree that the Programme is highly relevant in meeting the educational needs of children with disabilities. Some of the strategies employed by teachers in responding to the individual needs of children with disabilities include modification and adaptation of the curriculum based on the child's needs; allowing the child to learn at their own pace; recognizing strengths in children and providing support where needed; preparing and following an individual education plan (IEP); simplifying teaching and learning materials; improving accessibility of the physical learning environment; provision of assistive devices; and focusing on teaching children with disabilities life skills, numeracy and literacy. Access to secondary and vocational education

is addressed by Draktsho Vocational Training Centers which provide vocational education for youth with disabilities (See Appendix L for a case study on Draktsho).

- 3.1.2.3 Teachers in schools implementing the Programme agree that inclusive education is very important as it provides equal opportunities for quality education for children with and without disabilities; supports children with disabilities to realise their full potential and develops academic and life skills in children with disabilities among children that equip them to lead an independent life. Some teachers reported that awareness and understanding of disability have increased and discrimination and stigma toward children with disabilities lessened resulting from the implementation of the Programme.
- 3.1.2.4 On the same note, all parents of children with disabilities in schools with the IE/SEN Programme reported positive outcomes:
- Improvement in learning outcomes, behaviour, mobility, communication skills, and socialization skills was evident among children.
 - Children gained more self-confidence and have become more independent compared to before they attended the Programme.
 - Children have been provided with more resources such as assistive devices and financial resources that support their learning.
 - Some parents noted that SENCOs and other special education providers provide better care for children.
 - Some parents reported the programme has helped them understand the needs of their children better and learned ways in which they can be supported at home.

"My child has improved her speech a lot."

"There is more and more opportunity for children to interact with other people. Children have learned more in the institute that they could not have learned otherwise. Children can socialize now."

"Before her child was very dependent. Now she has become almost fully independent."

-Parents from a school with IE/SEN Programme

3.2 Coherence

In assessing coherence, the design of the evaluation is focused on internal and external policy coherence and the current collaborative mechanisms among key stakeholders. The evaluation team reviewed Bhutan's main national policies and international commitments to find synergies and contradictions. Although government and non-government stakeholders were consulted on their perspectives about the current policy environment in Bhutan, the analysis of the coherence criterion is heavily informed by explicit statements in policy documents. It is important to note that this evaluation is not a comprehensive policy review and only key national policies related to children with disabilities and education were selected including:

1. Draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs 2012

2. Draft National Education Policy 2019
3. National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2019

Furthermore, in interpreting the evaluation findings, it must be considered that the Draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs (2012) is envisioned to be merged with the current working draft of the National Education Policy (2019). The findings aim to present key strengths and areas needing further refinements in both the draft SEN policy and Education Policy as MoE finalizes the latter.

3.2.1 Internal policy coherence: To what extent are domestic laws and policies governing inclusive and special education coherent?

- 3.2.1.1 The basic principles espoused in select national policies mutually reinforce rights-based perspectives and approaches to disability-inclusive education. No contradictions in their fundamental policy statements were found. Non-discrimination clauses, the right to free primary education for all children and appropriate measures and accommodations for children with disabilities are evident in all policy documents.
- 3.2.1.2 The review's main finding is the need to replace outdated language (i.e., 'special needs', 'Special Education Needs Coordinator and similar terms) in all the policies. There must also be a clear and consistent articulation of the twin-track approach (especially in further iterations of the draft National Education Policy) currently being implemented through the IE/SEN Programme. The twin-track approach to inclusion, wherein mainstream and targeted support are both valued, must not be viewed as a justification for maintaining separate forms of education (e.g., in special institutes). Policies and its implementation plans must be strengthened further by stating the ways in which the twin-track approach can facilitate the transition from special institutes to more inclusive settings, and how it is or could be implemented without risking further marginalization.

3.2.2 External policy coherence: To what extent are domestic laws and policies aligned or not aligned with the SDGs and GC4-CRPD?

Articles 28 and 29 of the CRC guarantee the right of all children to education. Article 28 obliges State parties to make primary education compulsory and available free to all (paragraph 1). It promotes the establishment of various forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education and furthers that the right to education must be fulfilled on the basis of equal opportunity. Article 24 of the CRPD, operationalized by General Comment No. 4, reinforces the right to education, specifically of persons with disabilities, and mandates governments to develop an inclusive education system and opportunities for lifelong learning, within the communities in which they live. Reiterated by SDG 4, persons with disabilities are entitled to inclusive and equitable quality education.

- 3.2.2.1 The evaluation found the overall objectives of the Draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs (2012), draft National Education Policy (2019) and the National Policy for Persons with Disability (2019) to be consistent with the fundamental aims of the CRC, CRPD and SDG 4. All three policies expressly ensure the right of all children to education, without discrimination.

- “Children irrespective of abilities shall have equal access and opportunity to education from early childhood to vocational/technical and tertiary without any form of discrimination. – Draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs 2012, policy statement 5.1
- “All children of school going age shall have equitable access and opportunity to free quality and inclusive basic education as defined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan. – Draft National Education Policy 2019, policy statement 7.1
- The policy commits the government to enable access to education, eliminate environmental, informational, and attitudinal barriers, institutionalize early identification and intervention programmes, and develop and implement disability-inclusive curriculum, assessment and examination strategies. – Summary of policy intervention 7 of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2019

3.2.2.2 Draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs 2012

In terms of language, the policy remains subscribed to terminology emphasizing the traditional notion of ‘special needs’ and ‘special education’ which reinforces the charitable/medical model of disability. ‘Special needs’ allude to the idea that a child with a disability requires specialized ways of teaching, usually outside the general classroom setting, thereby reinforcing segregation in special classes or special schools. While the policy is explicit about its anti-discrimination position, this is undermined by certain provisions that promote separate classroom settings based on ability grouping in a ‘self-contained class’, which is against the philosophy of the CRPD.

Moreover, strengthening the principles of inclusion and equity in the policy would require replacing terminology and moving away from practices that encourage segregation by any means. Using terms that reinforce inclusive principles (e.g., replacing ‘Special Educational Needs coordinators or ‘SENCO’ with ‘Inclusive Education Coordinators’; ‘children with special needs’ with ‘children with disabilities’) and support stakeholders’ to think about education for children with disabilities differently can help transform ongoing initiatives to be more effective and inclusive. The policy must be reviewed and revised to apply inclusive language and terminology to ensure inclusive principles are clearly and consistently reflected and advocated.

3.2.2.3 Draft National Education Policy 2019

In the policy, inclusive education is conceptually aligned with the CRPD. Principles of inclusion and equity are evident throughout the document, and it has adequate provisions for ensuring equitable access to quality education from early childhood care and development (policy statement 6), pre-primary, primary and secondary education (policy statement 7), monastic education (policy statement 8), tertiary (policy statement 10) and vocational education (policy statements 10.9, 11.2, and 11.4) for all boys and girls. This is attuned with the CRC, CRPD and SDG 4.

There are no policy statements that contradict international frameworks. However, since the policy is in draft form, there is an opportunity to strengthen the emphasis on inclusive education as high-quality education for all learners. Further review and amendments to the

policy in the future should also consider making basic education compulsory for all learners in alignment with the CRPD.

Similar to the observations on the Draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs, aligning some terminology (i.e., special needs, specialized) with the language of the CRPD would enhance the effectiveness of the policy. Notably, there is no mention of special schools and/or self-contained classes. Policy statements for school education (no. 7) could articulate more clearly that access to equitable and inclusive basic education means education within the general education system.

The policy speaks broadly about the necessary support for the inclusion of children with disabilities.

“Policy statement 7.1.3. Schools shall put in place appropriate measures for all students, including children with special educational needs, across all grades to ensure equitable access to and participation in school. This includes support with specialized, appropriate educational services and facilities, including trained personnel.”

Inclusive approaches could be reinforced and stated explicitly in the policy such as the provision of reasonable accommodation, the application of Universal Design for Learning in curriculum, assessment, instruction and infrastructure, training teachers in inclusive, learner-centred pedagogies not only to benefit children with disabilities but for the effective learning of all children, and the use of technology and multiple means of communication to facilitate learning.

3.2.2.4 National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2019

The policy commits the government to enable equitable access to education, eliminate environmental, informational, and attitudinal barriers, institutionalize early identification and intervention programmes, and develop and implement disability-inclusive curriculum, assessment, and examination strategies (policy intervention 7). The main features of inclusive education described in the instructive guidance of the GC4 can be found reinforced across the policy document. The emphasis on early identification and intervention is particularly essential in the overall improvement of the development trajectory of a child identified or at risk of having a disability or functional difficulty and should therefore be prioritized by the government.

The policy contains suggested classroom strategies to make teaching and learning accessible, in recognition of diversity and individual learning needs. Stakeholder interviews also affirmed that the CRPD was the cornerstone for the development of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities.

The policy should aim to shift the focus, and consequently the government’s investments, away from strengthening access to specialized institutes (policy statement 7.1.3) to transforming education delivery in general classrooms to become more inclusive for all learners. Strikingly, improving access for girls with disabilities is specifically stated in the policy (policy statement 7.1.3), however, the evaluation found, as earlier stated, that no

gender-specific measures have been put in place to bring more girls with disabilities to school. This warrants a review of gender-specific needs and barriers girls with disabilities face in accessing and participating in education, and ideally, implementing more interventions towards more equitable access for girls with disabilities.

3.2.3 Cross-sector Collaboration: To what extent did the programme enhance the coordination mechanisms (horizontal and vertical; central and district levels) among stakeholders?

The establishment of the Inclusive and Special Education coordination committee was initiated in 2019, after the adoption of the Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other competing priorities, the committee had not been able to convene. The committee includes key actors in disability inclusion: the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, National Commission for Women and Children, GNHC, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labor and Human Resources, Department of Curriculum and Professional Development¹⁰ of the MoE, Royal Education Council, Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment, Royal University of Bhutan, international development agencies (UNICEF, UNDP, GPE, Bhutan Foundation, Australian Volunteers International Development Office, Save the Children) CSOs/OPDs (Ability Bhutan Society, Disabled People's Organization of Bhutan, Draktsho), parents' groups, and persons with disabilities (including a Deaf adult, Bhutan Sign Language interpreters, and a person with vision impairment).

- 3.2.3.1 Despite the lack of formality of the cross-sectoral committee, the Ministry of Education described a strong collaboration among key partners with each partner with specific roles and responsibilities in delivering inclusive and special education. For instance, MoH is responsible for the early identification of children with disabilities and supports teacher training on the Rapid Neurodevelopmental Assessment (RNDA). GNHC supports the MoE in mobilizing resources and is the lead agency for coordinating plans and programmes supporting the implementation of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2019). CSOs and DPOs implement awareness-raising activities and provide support services to children with disabilities.

However, some stakeholders indicate the need to strengthen the involvement of CSOs and OPDs working directly with persons with disabilities. Collaboration between the central ministries and Dzongkhag seems to also need further improvement. DEOs could be more involved in consultations and strategic planning, beyond their role as implementers. Some respondents noted that to some extent, efforts from different ministries concerning children with disabilities are fragmented and are often carried out in silos. MoE confirmed that further actions will be taken in the immediate future to formalize the inter-sectoral committee which has the potential to ensure joined-up planning, implementation and monitoring moving forward.

¹⁰ Formerly the Royal Education Council

Community engagement, especially, among parents and families of learners with disabilities could be improved. Government and development partners could take advantage of the active presence of Phensem Parents Support Group, Bhutan (PSGB) in the field of inclusion, in harnessing more support from and raising awareness in the community.

- 3.2.3.2 Vertical coordination, on the other hand, appears to be well-established. Most of the 20 school heads implementing the Programme noted they directly coordinate with Dzongkhag and Thromdes and the MoE.

Within and among schools, the role of the SENCOs and SEN team was emphasized as the primary point of contact for Programme implementation. One school noted that coordination for matters concerning children with disabilities is no different than when the issue is about, or the intervention is for children without disabilities.

Four school heads stated there is an ongoing collaboration with neighbouring schools offering the IE/SEN Programme, while the presence of a Professional Learning Community was noted by one school. Providing further support to such school-based and/or cluster-based learning and collaboration mechanisms would be highly important in cultivating a more organic and sustainable development of capacities within the schools.

Most SENCOs interviewed highlighted the significance of having close working relationships with parents/caregivers, the SEN team, other teachers, and the school head. A common finding from the interviews is the correlation between a school leader's knowledge and attitudes towards the IE/SEN programme and the level of commitment and support they provide. Some SENCOs noted that school leaders trained in inclusive education or those who at least have a positive attitude towards children with disabilities tend to provide more support in organizing, implementing, and mobilizing resources for the Programme.

3.3 Effectiveness

3.3.1 Access and participation: To what extent have children with disabilities been able to access and participate in inclusive and special education? Are there significant differences in access between boys and girls?

- 3.3.1.1 Enrolment of children with disabilities in inclusive and special education has increased significantly in a span of ten years since 2010. The Annual Education Statistics report an increasing number of children with disabilities accessing inclusive and special education, with enrolment at 283 in 2010, 564 in 2015, and 997 in 2020.

Respondents reported that school heads and teachers created public awareness on inclusive education and visited homes and communities to help increase the enrolment of children with disabilities in schools with IE/SEN Programme. Teachers also reported implementing various strategies to ensure the participation and learning of children with disabilities in the classroom. On the whole, school personnel considered their initiatives and strategies as *effective*, *very effective*, or *extremely effective* in supporting children with

disabilities to enrol, stay, and learn in school. It should be noted that increased enrolment includes placement in segregated special education settings that are not fully inclusive. This will need to be strategically addressed in the coming years.

When children without disabilities were asked if their school is supporting children with disabilities, almost all respondents said yes, citing equal opportunities for all students and provision of necessary support for children with disabilities, including teachers in IE/SEN schools, hostel and classroom, ramp and railing, and therapy. They affirmed that teachers include children with disabilities in class and provide them with extra care and attention and that most of their classmates are friendly, cooperative, and supportive.

The majority of children with disabilities interviewed confirmed that their parents help them attend school by dropping them off and picking them up from school, providing financial and material support, and giving advice and encouragement. They also shared that school administrators and teachers guide them in school, while friends support them when they feel unwell, deal with negative emotions, have personal problems, or have difficulties with their studies.

However, limited data are available to determine the extent and quality of participation of children with disabilities. As pointed out by a respondent, enrolment does not equate to meaningful participation. Student engagement and learning outcomes, among others, must be monitored to determine whether children with disabilities can participate meaningfully in their education.

- 3.3.1.2 Enrolment data indicate a significant difference in access between boys and girls. While some respondents stated that such is not the case and the programme provides equal opportunities to all children with disabilities irrespective of their gender, historical data suggest otherwise.

In 2010, more girls (59.36 per cent) than boys (40.64 per cent) were enrolled in special institutes. Starting from 2011, boys outnumbered girls, comprising 59.04 to 61.86 per cent of children with disabilities enrolled in general schools implementing the IE/SEN Programme, special institutes, and vocational centres. A school head from one school with IE/SEN Programme shared that gender disparity in enrolment of children with disabilities could contribute to inequalities – ‘when boys’ enrolment is higher, boys get more services.’

Figure 3 shows the enrolment data from 2010 to 2020, disaggregated by sex. Note that relevant data are not available for 2013, 2014, and 2016.

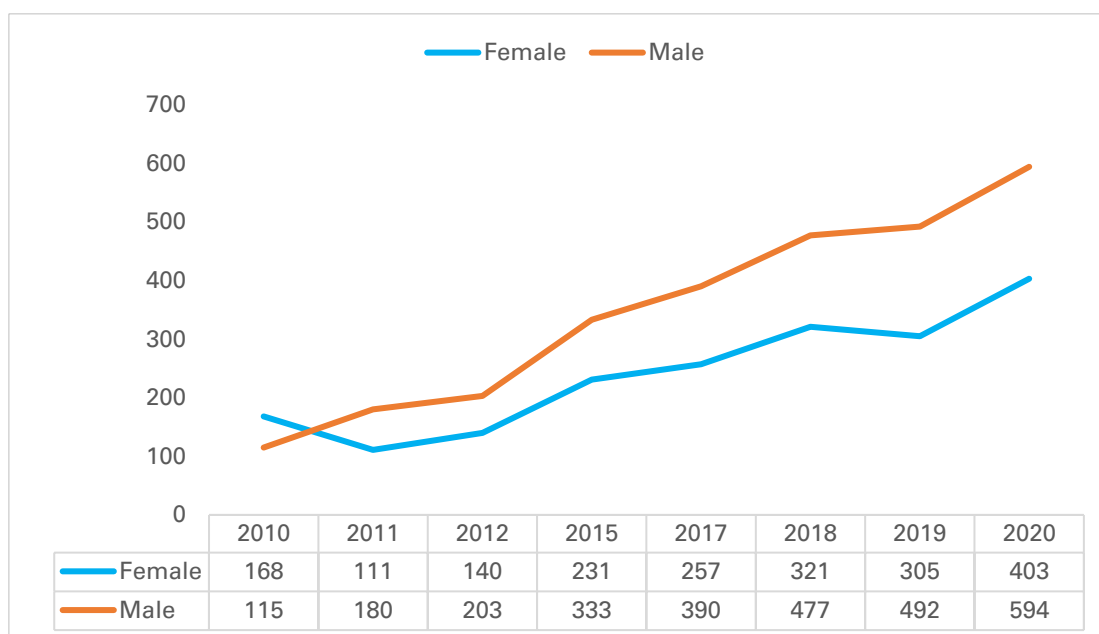


Figure 3. Enrolment of children with disabilities in IE/SEN programme from 2010-2020

Some respondents cited that existing gender norms could be a contributing factor to the difference in access between boys and girls. For example, parents often hesitate to send their daughters to school due to beliefs that they are more vulnerable to harassment or because they do not see the importance of education for girls with disabilities.

“If the girl with a disability is from a remote place and if the parents are not able to bring the child to school, then they might not see the importance of education for their child. We had one or two cases where parents and the community were not so aware of education of children with disabilities and were reluctant to send the girls to school.”

- A representative from a government agency

Some respondents also shared that gender disparity in enrolment could be attributed to the stigma towards children with disabilities. For instance, a respondent from the MoE noted that when teachers conduct surveys or assessments in communities to identify and encourage enrolment of children with disabilities, some parents refuse. The respondent stated, ‘For children with disabilities, parents are worried. I can only assume it is probably even worse when it comes to girls with disabilities.’ Another challenge is some peoples’ perception that disability might be a result of karma, based on Buddhist-Hindu beliefs on cause and consequences.

To address the difference in access between boys and girls with disabilities, a representative from the MoE shared that the ministry encourages girls with disabilities to enrol in schools through awareness-raising activities. Parents are orientated on the importance of enrolling their daughters to the IE/SEN Programme through phone calls, personal meetings, and counselling. Another respondent from a government agency recommended strengthening the role of religious leaders in challenging traditional beliefs that hinder the promotion of the right to education of children with disabilities.

3.3.2 Positive or negative unintended results: Were the results, intended and unintended (outputs and outcomes) achieved? If so, for whom, to what extent and in what circumstances?

3.3.2.1 The programme has achieved significant milestones in its ten years of implementation, particularly in policy formulation, access to education, and advocacy and awareness-raising.

Respondents shared that the Programme was instrumental in the formulation of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2019), the establishment of the Inclusive Education Standards (2017), and the development of the Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education (2018-2028).

Respondents also reported that access to and quality of education for children with disabilities has improved over the years through the Programme's interventions which include:

- increasing the number of inclusive schools,
- constructing accessible infrastructure,
- providing assistive devices and necessary equipment,
- promoting enrolment and participation in school,
- recruiting and capacitating teachers,
- recruiting teacher assistants,
- promoting inclusive teaching strategies, and
- providing appropriate teaching and learning materials.

In addition, colleges of education have introduced the principles of inclusive education into their curriculum, while Paro College of Education provides opportunities for further studies through its two-year master's degree programme on inclusive education.

Through the Programme's advocacy efforts, respondents reported that more people have gained awareness of the issues encountered by children with disabilities and have become more supportive of initiatives to increase their participation and inclusion in schools and communities. Respondents also observed a change in people's mindset and behaviour, thereby reducing discrimination, stigma, and stereotype.

For teachers, the positive impact on the lives of children with disabilities has been the most significant and rewarding aspect of the Programme. Respondents observed that many of their students have gained a more positive outlook in life, developed academic and social skills, and became more confident. They noticed an improvement in the students' ability to express themselves, interact with others, and participate in various activities. Some respondents also shared how former students are now leading more independent lives, working in different sectors, and earning their living.

In focus group discussions with parents or caregivers of children with disabilities, majority reported being *very happy* or *extremely happy* with the education and support that their children are receiving in school, citing the care and attention provided by teachers and the improvement in their children's skills, attitudes, and behaviours. They shared that their children are interested and excited to go to school, have improved learning and socialization, and have become more independent. For some respondents, the experience of sending their children to school also meant having helping hands and feeling less alone.

When children were asked if they like their school, the majority of children with disabilities said yes, sharing that they enjoy being with their friends and doing different activities, including reading, writing, drawing, playing, dancing, and praying, as well as learning how to take care of themselves, be more disciplined, and gain more confidence. Respondents expressed appreciation for their teachers, whom they described as kind, nice, caring, and supportive. Similarly, the majority of children without disabilities said yes, sharing that they enjoy meeting new friends, having kind and supportive teachers, and improving their life skills. Some respondents also appreciated their school for being inclusive of children with disabilities.

Despite significant progress, stakeholders acknowledged that there is still a long way to go.

Respondents commented that more resources are needed to properly implement inclusive and special education and ensure that children with disabilities can access education on an equal basis with others. Relevant data must also be collected, analysed, and reported to inform policy formulation, programme implementation, and service delivery.

3.3.3 Resources and implementation strategies: Were the inputs and strategies identified realistic, appropriate and adequate to achieve the results?

- 3.3.3.1 The majority of schools with IE/SEN Programme were providing adequate inputs to make the physical environment more accessible for children with disabilities. Findings from classroom observations, using the observation tool, indicate that the majority of schools with IE/SEN Programme have accessible facilities that consider the needs of students with disabilities and allow them to move around the school easily and safely and access all parts of the building, including the classroom and play area. While most schools were observed to have separate toilets for boys, girls, and teachers/adults, accessibility is still a concern. Classroom observations also confirm that classroom seating has been organized according to students' individual needs and age, with the correct size of furniture for the age group and adapted chairs and tables where necessary. Table 8 shows the responses of observers per question.

Table 8. Findings from classroom observations: Accessibility of physical environment

Question	Yes	A little	No	No data	Total
1.1 Does the school have facilities for students to access all parts of the school building?	17	-	3	-	20
1.2 Is seating organized according to individual needs and age of students? Is the furniture the correct size for the age group? Do children with physical disabilities have adapted chairs and tables where necessary?	17	3	-	-	20
1.3 Can all girls and boys, including girls and boys with disabilities, move around the school easily and safely?	19	1	-	-	20

1.4 Do students have access to all parts of school building (classroom, toilet, play area) that they need access to?	15	2	3	-	20
1.5 Are the needs of students with partial sight/visual impairment considered in making the buildings accessible?	14	1	5	-	20
1.6 Are the needs of students with partial hearing/hearing impairment considered in making the buildings accessible?	11	6	2	1	20
1.7 Are the needs of students with physical impairments considered in making the buildings accessible?	13	3	4	-	20
1.8 Does the school have separate toilets for girls, boys, and teachers/adults?	18	1	1	-	20

- 3.3.3.2 Contrary to the findings of the classroom observations, many respondents still identified the lack of accessible infrastructure and facilities as a barrier to implementing inclusive and special education. Following further discussions with government representatives and stakeholders' consultations, it is likely that the enumerators who conducted the classroom observations did not have adequate experience, although provided with a basic training by the evaluation team, to make sophisticated judgments about accessibility, as may also be the case with other stakeholders. Therefore, it is recommended that further studies on accessibility are undertaken.

The majority of teacher-respondents from schools with IE/SEN Programme were provided training and other forms of support to implement inclusive and special education. However, these are not adequate to develop the necessary skills and confidence to facilitate learning and address the needs of children with disabilities. The majority of teachers confirmed receiving training on inclusive education, particularly on understanding disability, identifying children with disabilities, addressing their needs, developing an Individual Education Plan for each student, and using different teaching strategies. Other forms of support for classroom teaching include support from peers through co-teaching or team teaching, support from college student-volunteers, guidance from the school administration, and provision of equipment such as laptops and LCD projectors.

Nevertheless, many of the respondents from government agencies, NGOs, and schools, including teachers themselves, identified the lack of capacity of teachers and insufficient training as challenges to implementation, particularly on the quality of teaching and learning. An online survey (n=417) showed that 53.24 per cent of the teacher-respondents found the programme *helpful*, *very helpful*, or *extremely helpful* in increasing their confidence in teaching children with disabilities; however, 28.78 per cent stated that it was only *somewhat helpful* (120 of 417) while 11.27 per cent said that it was *not helpful* at all (47 of 417).

The majority of teachers in schools with IE/SEN Programme show some indications of implementing teaching strategies advocated in the Programme. Teachers reported developing an Individual Education Plan for each student and monitoring progress by

recording their achievements and identifying areas for improvement. They also employ the push-in and pull-out approach, described by a respondent from the MoE as follows:

Box 1. Push-in and pull-in sessions

Push-in sessions: When a teacher is teaching in the class, another support teacher teaches alongside and supports the mainstream teacher. The support teacher helps modify questions, delivery, instructions, among others to make the lesson accessible to children with disabilities.

Pull-out sessions: If a child is observed to have difficulties coping with the lesson, he/she will be scheduled for remedial sessions after class or some other convenient time. A member of the Special Education Team of the school provides one-on-one support.

The push-in and pull-out approaches have some inclusive aspects, such as the in-class support to the teacher, but further research needs to be undertaken to evaluate their overall inclusivity. It should be noted that 'remedial sessions' after class are not always helpful and can cause additional challenges such as increasing stigmatization and affecting individuals' self-esteem. They can also distract attention from the need to improve the overall inclusivity of the classroom teaching and learning environment.

Peer support was also used through a buddy system where children with and without disabilities are paired together. When working with children with hearing disabilities, some teachers reported using Bhutanese Sign Language or visual aids to facilitate communication.

The majority of schools with IE/SEN Programme visited provided some evidence of learner-centered classroom practices where teachers:

- create an attractive learning environment,
- convey a sense of excitement in learning,
- use a variety of techniques and methods to present the lesson,
- provide children with equal opportunities to take part in class activities, and
- use instructional groupings to promote participation, cooperation, and learning.

In addition, the majority of classrooms observed, have enough furniture for all children to sit and work comfortably, with a seating arrangement that allows flexibility for students to move around and work in groups. Table 9 shows the responses of observers per question.

Table 9. Findings from classroom observations: Teaching approaches

Question	Yes	A little	No	No data	Total
2.1 Do teachers create an attractive learning environment?	19	-	1	-	20
2.2 Do lessons convey a sense of excitement in learning?	13	6	1	-	20
2.3 Do teachers use a variety of techniques and methods (auditory,	13	6	1	-	20

visual, kinetic teaching aids, etc.) when presenting the lesson to the class?					
2.4 Do teachers use instructional groupings (e.g., student pairs, cooperative learning, homogeneous groups) to promote participation, cooperation, and learning?	13	3	4	-	20
2.5 Do teachers try to make classrooms attractive to motivate students to learn? (Do they display children's work and learning resources attractively?)	15	4	1	-	20
2.6 Is there enough classroom furniture for all children to sit and work comfortably?	18	2	-	-	20
2.7 Does the seating arrangement allow flexibility for students to go around and work in groups?	16	2	1	1	20
2.8 Do teachers provide all children with equal opportunities to take part in class activities?	18	1	1	-	20

The implementation of inclusive and special education continues to be very challenging, as current resources and strategies have not been able to address long-standing issues and concerns. Respondents reported the following challenges to implementation:

- discrimination against children with disabilities,
- limited understanding of disability issues and inclusive education,
- limited capacity of teachers to facilitate inclusive education,
- lack of accessible infrastructure and facilities,
- lack of appropriate instruction guides and materials,
- lack of assistive devices and health services from experts,
- lack of alignment between planning and implementation;
- lack of financial resources and development partners; and
- lack of EMIS data to aid in decision-making.

3.3.4 Advocacy: To what extent has the programme increased awareness and demand for inclusive education?

- 3.3.4.1 Data indicate that awareness and demand for inclusive education may have increased to some extent, but misconceptions, stereotypes, and discriminatory attitudes continue to be barriers to inclusion.

The majority of school heads and teachers from general schools¹¹ believe that children with disabilities must be treated equally and provided access to education. The majority of these

¹¹ In this evaluation, general schools refer to mainstream schools not implementing the IE/SEN Programme.

same school heads agreed that it is the responsibility of their school to teach children with disabilities, in alignment with the Buddha's philosophy and as part of their moral obligation as educators. Respondents stated that children must be treated equally and provided appropriate education to help them develop the necessary life skills, be prepared for the future, have a meaningful life, and reach their full potential. Many of the teachers also noted that providing education or training will help children with disabilities be a part of the community, be more confident and independent, and increase their opportunities to earn a living and support their parents—or be less of a burden to them.

- 3.3.4.2 Data indicate that there may be a significant misunderstanding about inclusive education among educators in general schools where IE/SEN is not implemented. When school heads and teachers from these schools were asked if they believe that children with disabilities should learn together with children without disabilities, the majority of respondents answered yes, citing the value of respect, inclusion, and acceptance, as well as the importance of children interacting and helping one another. However, when asked if children with disabilities should be taught in separate or special schools, the majority of respondents also said yes. Some respondents noted that it depends on the types of disabilities. Others believe that children with disabilities will feel more comfortable and learn better in special schools arguing that they will be given adequate time, attention, and support and that this will also prevent disturbance in class and extra work for teachers. These perceptions reveal a significant misunderstanding of inclusive education among teachers which could result in the exclusion of children with functional difficulties in the classroom. While the Programme's current focus is on a limited number of schools, future programming must endeavour to integrate the fundamental principles of inclusive education in training programmes for all teachers, whether or not the school is implementing inclusive and special education.
- 3.3.4.3 The majority of parents or caregivers of children with and without disabilities believe that it is best for their children to be educated together. Parents of children with disabilities cited its positive impact on learning and socialization. Likewise, parents of children without disabilities confirmed that their children are learning well in school while also developing an understanding of the difficulties faced by children with disabilities. Some respondents also articulated that all children must be provided quality education and treated equally.
- 3.3.4.4 Some parents or caregivers of children without disabilities believe that having children with and without disabilities in the same classroom would not cause any problems. Instead, children would learn to help and support one another. However, parents also expressed some concerns about this approach. The majority of respondents said that children with disabilities might not be able to learn, complete their tasks on time, and catch up with the rest of the class. Children with disabilities might also feel sad and uncomfortable, experience discrimination and bullying, or not be able to cooperate with others. Miscommunication could occur, resulting in fighting as children with disabilities might become aggressive. On the other hand, respondents were concerned that children without disabilities might change their character, copy the behaviour of children with disabilities, or become slow learners. Respondents also commented that children without disabilities might be disturbed in their studies and not be able to do their tasks or participate actively in class.

In addition, parent-respondents said that teachers might be challenged in their teaching as they will be required to allot extra time and effort to cover the syllabus, plan and implement the lesson, help students understand the lesson, manage the behaviour of students, and prevent disturbance in class. Some respondents also commented that teachers may not have a good understanding of children with disabilities and may not be able to treat all students equally or cater to students' individual needs.

These responses indicate the serious need to address the issue of parental understanding about disability and inclusive education to ensure that future strategic planning for inclusion can be implemented effectively with full parental support.

3.3.5 Gender mainstreaming: Does the program actively contribute to promoting gender equality and addressing gender disparities in education access and learning outcomes? To what extent did the program benefit women, men, or both? Who benefited and who did not?

- 3.3.5.1 The majority of respondents at the national, district, and school levels are convinced that the Programme promotes equal access and opportunities among children with disabilities, regardless of their gender. However, their responses also show that the Programme does not actively address the inequalities brought about by specific gender needs of girls and boys with disabilities. A school head from a general school narrated, 'All children are greatly benefitted because services are not based on gender but the types of disabilities.'

"As all are treated equally, there is no such difference in the implementation of programme strategies when it involves men and women, boys and girls with disabilities."

- A representative from Disabled People's Organisation in Bhutan

However, some respondents expressed that the 'one-size-fits-all' approach could contribute to inequalities because the programme has no targeted interventions to address the gender-specific needs of children with disabilities. To meet the gender needs of their students, schools with IE/SEN programme utilised different measures as follows:

Table 10. Identified gender needs and strategies implemented in schools

Identified gender needs of children with disabilities	Challenges	Strategies implemented in schools
Gender disparity in enrollment	Starting 2011, boys outnumbered girls, comprising 59.04 to 61.86 per cent of children with disabilities enrolled in general schools with IE/SEN Programme,	To encourage children with disabilities to enrol in schools offering IE/SEN Programme, some respondents shared that parents and communities participate in advocacy and awareness-raising activities. However, respondents could not specify if these

	special institutes, and vocational centres. ¹²	approaches specifically targeted the admission of girls with disabilities.
Inclusive and gender-appropriate WASH facilities and infrastructure.	- Promoting disability-inclusive toilets for girls with disabilities - Water shortage in both boys' and girls' hostels	Some schools ensure that girls with disabilities have separate toilets (attached toilets) and are placed on the hostel's ground floor.
Gender and disability-responsive curricula and teaching materials.	Addressing gender inequalities in curriculum, pedagogy, and learning materials	Some respondents mentioned that the use of Individual Educational Plan for each student is being practiced. However, they could not specify the extent of including the gender needs of boys and girls with disabilities in IEPs.
Self-care, hygiene, and sex education of boys and girls with disabilities.	- Addressing health-related issues for girls with disabilities, specifically menstrual hygiene management, sexual harassment, and pregnancy - Some respondents shared that there is a need to assign male teachers to boys with disabilities and female teachers to girls with disabilities (e.g., when providing assistance in using the toilets, taking care of children)	- Some schools conduct awareness-raising for children with disabilities, specifically girls, on health-related issues. - Some schools provide sanitary pads to girls with disabilities. - Because of the lack of teachers who can take care of children with disabilities, schools' SEN teams are supported by teaching assistants from the SEN division. - Some respondents shared that schools have separate trained male and female caregivers; however, the latter are more responsible for care work. - Some respondents highlighted the Inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education in every subject as a strategy to address the health-related issues of girls with disabilities.

Using UNICEF's gender continuum model (UNICEF, 2019), the above findings suggest that Bhutan's IE and SEN programme falls under the gender-aware/sensitive category. While the programme considers the principles of gender equality in its frameworks and implementation strategies and recognizes that the 'one-size-fits-all' approach contributes to the production and reproduction of gender inequalities in education, the findings on the gender needs of girls and boys with disabilities suggest that the programme does not actively challenge and address them.

¹² See Figure 3 for the enrolment data from 2010 to 2020

3.4 Efficiency

3.4.1 Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation: What were the planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting systems in place for improving program effectiveness and efficiency? What were the gaps? To what extent are these systems gender and disability-inclusive?

- 3.4.1.1 Data show that some mechanisms are in place to plan, monitor, and evaluate the IE/SEN Programme, specifically, access, support, and delivery of services. The MoE consolidates and manages relevant data through the Education Management Information System and publishes key education indicators in its Annual Education Statistics reports, including the number of schools implementing inclusive and special education and the number of enrolled children with disabilities disaggregated by sex, but not by functional impairment or level of functional difficulty. Other pertinent data are not adequately tracked and reported, such as: enrolment of children with disabilities in ECCD centres and general schools; overall participation rate or net enrolment rate of children with disabilities.
- 3.4.1.2 In the field, the School Performance Management System provides schools with the necessary tools to manage their performance, with a view to increase access to and quality of education. All school heads from schools with IE/SEN Programme confirmed that the education of children with disabilities is included in the school's improvement planning process, including modifying the school's vision and mission, policies and practices, budget provision and distribution, and academic and co-curricular activities. All SEN programme coordinators and majority of teacher-respondents reported having been involved in some phases of this process, but not the parents and other stakeholders in the school community.
- 3.4.1.3 At the classroom level, teachers reported using the Individual Education Plan to record students' academic achievements and physical, emotional, and social development. **Other tools include lesson plans, assessments, classroom observation rubrics, and academic performance reports.** These mechanisms need to be integrated and enhanced so that data may be used to help inform decisions of policymakers and implementers, improve the design and implementation of interventions, and, ultimately, address the needs of children with disabilities. Respondents recommended the development of standardized tools, training on how to use these tools, and the provision of mandates and guidelines on the manner and timing of documentation and reporting. Some respondents also emphasized the importance of analysing the data and sharing the results with all stakeholders, including DEOS, school leaders, teachers, and parents of children with disabilities.

3.4.2 Financial and Human Resources: To what extent were the resources (financial and human resources) allocated to the program adequate to support the implementation of the work plan to achieve quality and equity-focused results for children with disabilities?

- 3.4.2.1 Substantial resources have been invested in the programme; however, these are not adequate to properly implement inclusive and special education and address the needs of children with disabilities. Respondents from government agencies and NGOs reported investing in human, technical, material, and financial resources to implement inclusive and special education. Respondents from schools with IE/SEN Programme confirmed receiving support including advocacy and awareness-raising; capacity-building and professional development opportunities; teaching and learning materials to implement the prescribed curriculum; infrastructure, facilities, and equipment for the initial set-up; assistive devices for learners with disabilities; and budget allocation and financial assistance.
- 3.4.2.2 However, there was a consensus among the respondents that the current resources are not adequate to address the needs of children with disabilities, citing the lack of trained and capacitated teachers as a significant obstacle to the successful implementation of the Programme. Moreover, respondents highlighted the need for accessible infrastructure, assistive devices, and appropriate learning materials, among others, so children with disabilities can move more freely and independently in school, participate more actively in class, and interact better with their peers.

3.4.3 Implementation strategies: Was the process of achieving results efficient? What strategies (advocacy, policy, technical, and financial, etc.) were most efficient in influencing improvements in access, quality, equity, and sustainability?

- 3.4.3.1 Stakeholders affirmed that policy formulation, technical capacity-building, financial support, and advocacy and awareness-raising have facilitated improvements in the provision of inclusive and special education. Majority of respondents reported that these strategies, working in parallel, have contributed to the successes of the Programme. A few respondents said that advocacy is the most sustainable approach; a respondent identified the training of teachers as the most efficient strategy, while another noted that financial support contributed the most to the Programme. A respondent also asserted that policy is the foremost strategy that led to the provision of resources and implementation of interventions.
- 3.4.3.2 Having a set of standards for inclusive education has also supported efficiency in achieving results, although implementation still varied across schools. Some respondents from government agencies and NGOs confirmed that the same standard is applied across schools offering the IE/SEN Programme, with consistent mandates and financial support. In contrast, others pointed out differences in implementation due to school context, leadership, budget, and capacity and attitude of various stakeholders.
- 3.4.3.3 Parents of children with and without disabilities had limited participation in the implementation of the Programme. Many parents of children with disabilities said that the school had not consulted them in planning lessons, supporting children in the classroom, and monitoring their learning. Those who were consulted shared that teachers provide information regarding children's behaviour, health problems, academic improvements, and necessary support; and have created a group on social media to discuss matters about the

Programme. Some parents of children without disabilities reported participating in school activities that support children with disabilities, such as paralympic events and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. They have been guided or requested support to include children with disabilities.

3.4.4 Cost-effectiveness: To what extent is including children with disabilities in schools with IE/SEN programme cost-effective compared to enrolling them in specialized institutes?

- 3.4.4.1 Some stakeholders believe that including children with disabilities in schools with IE/SEN programme is less cost-effective compared to enrolling them in specialized institutes. When asked which strategy produces the most results for its inputs, some respondents from government agencies and NGOs reported that both mainstreaming and targeted strategies are cost-effective. However, most DEO-respondents (13 of 18) said that providing targeted interventions in special schools works better than including children with disabilities in regular classrooms. Although DEO-respondents acknowledged the benefits of inclusive settings, they articulated that child with disabilities require specific interventions and facilities and would cope better with focused time, attention, and support from teachers in special schools. N.B. this is not the view of the research team and indicates that further work needs to be undertaken to build stakeholder capacity in understanding and applying the principles of inclusive education.

Most schools with IE/SEN Programme experienced advantages and disadvantages in implementing the following approaches: (1) teaching children with disabilities together with learners without disabilities in general classrooms, (2) providing individual support for children with disabilities in general classrooms, and (3) teaching children with disabilities separate from learners without disabilities in separate classrooms. Below is a summary of the advantages and disadvantages identified by school heads, coordinators, and teachers.

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
Teaching children with disabilities together with learners without disabilities in general classrooms	• Promotes understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of children with disabilities • Provides equal opportunities for children with disabilities • Facilitates knowledge and skills sharing, socialisation, and peer learning and support • Allows children to learn and play together, take care of	• Can be difficult to accommodate children with disabilities in general classrooms • Can cause difficulties for children with disabilities to learn equally (cannot cope with the normal flow of lessons) • Can lower the self-esteem of children with disabilities • Does not give the required time and attention to children with disabilities • Can cause distractions in class, chaotic classroom, and behaviour management issues

	each other, and develop friendships • No need for additional classrooms	• Requires more time for teachers and learners to complete the lesson
Providing individual support for children with disabilities in general classrooms	• Allows accommodations and modifications to address the needs of children with disabilities • Facilitates learning of children with disabilities at their own pace and level • Promotes interaction, participation, and socialization • Can increase the self-esteem of children with disabilities • Less burden for general teachers	• Can make children with disabilities feel isolated and excluded • Does not facilitate collaborative learning and socialisation • Can adversely impact the learning of children without disabilities (left unattended during intervention) • Creates additional responsibilities and management issues for teachers • Requires more time for teachers and learners to complete the lesson
Teaching children with disabilities separate from learners without disabilities in separate classrooms	• Facilitates focused teaching and learning and caters to the individual needs of children with disabilities • Provides the necessary time, attention, and support for children with disabilities • Promotes better management of behaviour	• Can make children with disabilities feel isolated, neglected, excluded, and discriminated • Deprives children with disabilities of social interaction and opportunities to learn social skills • Requires more teachers • Requires more classrooms

These responses indicate an acknowledgement amongst this stakeholder group of the complex factors affecting inclusive education. However, these also reinforce the conclusion that there is a need to build further understanding of how inclusive education can be implemented effectively for the benefit of *all* students. With global evidence showing that inclusion is more cost-effective than segregation, the Programme must be more strategic in its future programming and prioritize the strengthening and expansion of inclusive education, following UNCRPD Article 24 and General Comment No.4.

3.4.5 Situation Analysis: What were the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the design and implementation process?

Below is a summary of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the Programme's design and implementation process, based on information reported by the respondents. These aspects of the Programme are discussed throughout the Findings section and therefore do not need further elaboration in this section.

Strengths • Partnership and collaboration with UNICEF, CSOs, DPO, colleges/universities, and other government agencies • Expertise in inclusive education within the MoE and from partner organisations • Employment of a twin-track approach to disability inclusion • Institutionalization of planning and review processes	Weaknesses • Insufficient data on children with disabilities and disability-inclusive education to inform intervention • Absence of a national education law • Lack of a theory of change to frame and direct its interventions • Limited government investment • Limited understanding of inclusive education • Limited capacity to implement inclusive education • Limited understanding of how to organize inclusive classrooms and plan and teach inclusively • Limited understanding of gender inclusion • Lack of consultation and coordination mechanism to engage key education stakeholders
Opportunities • Expansion of the Programme (establishing more schools implementing the IE/SEN Programme) • Increase access to and participation of children with disabilities in education • Greater collaboration with organisations of persons with disabilities and other agencies	Threats • Delay in the ratification of CRPD • Lack of development partners (funding partners) • Limited awareness and understanding of the needs of children with disabilities • Limited awareness and understanding of inclusive education • Inaccessible infrastructure and facilities in communities and public spaces • Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on learning continuity and quality of teaching and learning

3.5 Sustainability

3.5.1 Sustainability: What were the efforts made to establish an enabling environment (necessary and appropriate policies, legislation, budget) for the expansion and improvement of services? What measures were implemented to ensure the services provided were sustainable?

- 3.5.1.1 Different rights-based and disability-inclusive policy frameworks support the programme's sustainability. The RGOB has made significant progress in establishing rights-based and disability-inclusive policy frameworks to support the implementation of the IE/SEN Programme. Some respondents at the national and district levels concurred that policies are aligned with relevant international frameworks on disability and inclusive education, therefore contributing to the programme's sustainability.

Table 5. National policies on disability and education

National policies	Contribution to the sustainability of the Programme
Draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs (2012)	The draft policy mandates key education stakeholders in providing educational services to children with disabilities (Bhutan MoE, 2012). Respondents from Dzongkhag Education Offices and schools with IE/SEN Programme repeatedly cited that the draft policy serves as their guidance in delivering inclusive and special education services to children with disabilities at the school level.
Standards for Inclusive Education (2017)	The Standards for Inclusive Education guides the operationalisation of inclusion at the school level (Bhutan MoE, 2017). During the focus group discussions with respondents from schools implementing the IE/SEN Programme, it was revealed that this document serves as their guide in ensuring that their schools or institutes adhere to the tenets of the inclusion agenda.
Draft National Education Policy (2019)	A national education policy has been drafted. It promotes equitable education for all children and aims to put in place measures to ensure inclusive education implementation.
National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2019)	The policy aims to improve the lives of persons with disabilities in Bhutan (Gross National Happiness Commission Secretariat, 2019). It commits the government to promoting the right to education of persons with disabilities, including children, as reflected in its chapter on inclusive education (Gross National Happiness Commission Secretariat, 2019), which some respondents shared as relevant in the sustainability of the programme implementation.

Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education 2018-2028 (2019)	Endorsed in 2019, the ten-year roadmap is a comprehensive strategic plan developed to provide long-term directions to relevant education stakeholders on implementing the programmes (Bhutan MoE, 2019b). A respondent cited that the goals and strategies stipulated in the roadmap are essential to support the implementation of the IE/SEN Programme in the country.
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Inclusive education is also institutionalised at the school level. Majority of the respondents from schools with IE/SEN Programme reported that they adhere to the above policies and standards by translating them into contextualised school SEN policy that is rights-based, child-friendly, and non-discriminatory. The school SEN policy details the roles and responsibilities of the School Principal/Vice-Principal, SEN Coordinator, SEN Core team, and other stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and medical staff, in delivering SEN services to children with disabilities. Furthermore, it provides guidelines on the admission, referral, identification and screening, examination, and promotion of children with disabilities.

In addition to the school's SEN policy, some respondents also stated that children with disabilities are considered in the school's disaster management and preparedness plan. The National Action Plan for School Earthquake Safety explicitly noted that children with disabilities must be provided with awareness programmes and activities on earthquake safety and disaster preparedness (Bhutan MoE, 2020b).

Despite the established legislative and policy frameworks to strengthen the implementation of the programme, there are remaining challenges that need to be addressed.

- a. One DEO stated the need to finalise and approve the draft National Education Policy where inclusion is considered an overarching principle.
- b. There are gaps in communicating the policies at the school level. Some teacher-respondents from schools with IE/SEN Programme shared that these policies were not adequately communicated to them. Hence, only the school management and SEN committee are familiar with its provisions. When asked about the school policy on SEN, one of them answered, "I am not very sure. Only the management and committee know the policy.'
- c. Respondents from development partners emphasized that urgent attention must be placed on the ratification of the CRPD.

- 3.5.1.2 There is evidence of increased investment in the education system, but respondents shared that inadequate resources are allocated to the IE/SEN Programme. Twenty-six per cent (26 per cent) of DEOs interviewed have attributed the inclusion of the IE/SEN Programme in the education department's annual budget as a contributing factor to the sustainability of its implementation.

At the time of the evaluation, it was noted that there is limited data on the education expenditure dedicated to IE and SEN implementation. However, to examine the RGOB's commitment to increase the investment in education, Figures 4 and 5 below show

Bhutan's historical data on the education expenditure vis-à-vis the percentage of government expenditure and the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), respectively. While there is a downward trend in government expenditures in education from 2015 to 2020, the country still made significant progress in meeting the international benchmarks of 15-20 per cent of public spending on education and 4-6 per cent of GDP, set by the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2017).

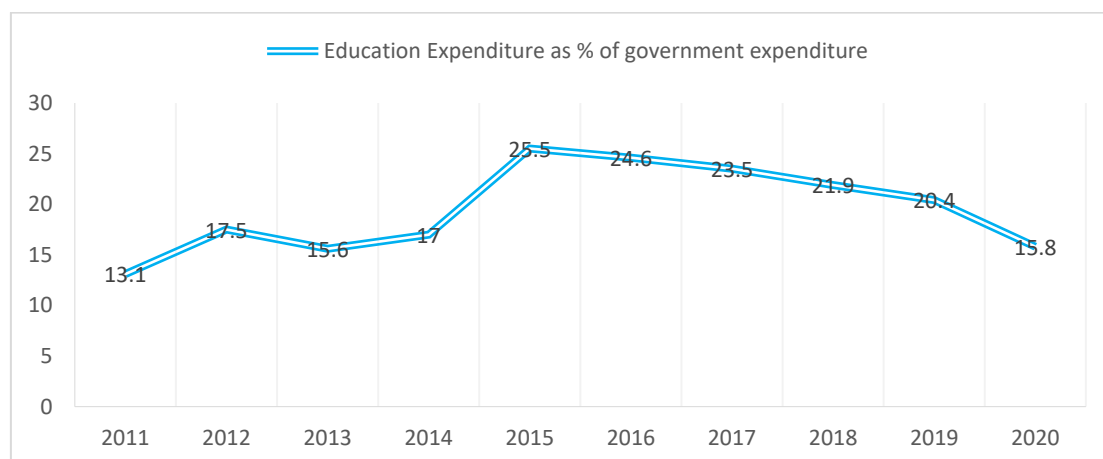


Figure 4. Education expenditure as % of government expenditure (2011-2020)

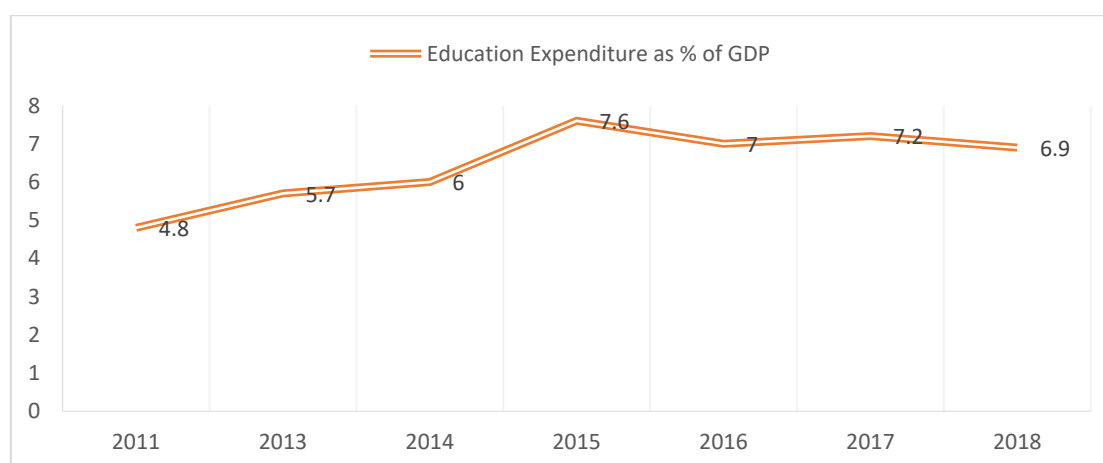


Figure 5. Education expenditure as % of GDP (2011-2020)

No available data for 2012, 2019, and 2020

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (n.d.)

Despite the country's commitment to increase overall financial investment in the education system, some respondents from key government offices and development partners shared that RGOB allocates inadequate financial resources to implement the IE/SEN programme.

Three out of 19 (16 per cent) DEOs noted that establishing SEN as a separate division from ECCD would further improve the delivery of services to children with disabilities, considering that the bifurcation may result in a dedicated budget for the division. It should be noted that a key recommendation from this evaluation would also be that the terminology associated with Special Needs or Special Educational Need should be

removed, as per General Comment 4 to the CRPD and reference should instead be made to inclusive education.

On a similar note, respondents from schools with IE/SEN Programme also cited the same challenges. With a limited budget to financially sustain the programme implementation, schools with IE/SEN Programme have employed various strategies such as (1) utilisation of the general budget to fund teaching and learning materials of children with disabilities, (2) conduct of school-initiated fund generation activities, and (3) strengthening the school's partnership with external organisations and stakeholders such as parents, CSOs, and private donors to mobilize funding.

"External support and funding are needed. Schools cannot sustain without depending on external support."

- School Head from one of the schools with IE/SEN Programme

- 3.5.1.3 The sustainability of the IE/SEN Programme requires commitment from the local government. Another contributing factor to sustainability is the critical role of the local government in implementing the IE/SEN Programme at the Dzongkhags and Thromdes levels. This was highlighted in the response of an MoE official who mentioned that the local government's role in implementing the IE/SEN Programme is critical. The draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs (2012) provides the functions of Dzongkhags and Thromdes in implementing long- and short-term strategies in relation to the education of children with disabilities (Bhutan MoE, 2012). Moreover, the draft National Education Policy details their responsibilities, focusing on supporting MoE in implementing educational plans, programmes, and services (Bhutan MoE, 2019a).
- 3.5.1.4 There are initiatives to build inclusive infrastructure and child-friendly learning environments for children with disabilities; however, challenges remain. A DEO noted that the MoE has included the construction of inclusive infrastructure in schools such as ramps and inclusive toilets in the annual budget. However, some respondents from schools with IE/SEN Programme expressed the need to improve the existing facilities because infrastructure development in the schools is still of poor standards and not friendly to children with disabilities.
- 3.5.1.5 There are existing gaps and challenges in the transition of children with disabilities to vocational, further education, and the workplace that need to be addressed. The draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs states that "children irrespective of abilities shall have equal access and opportunity to education from early childhood to vocational/technical and tertiary without any form of discrimination." (Bhutan MoE, 2012, p. 8). The policy also mandates the MoE to collaborate with other ministries and agencies, including the MoLHR, Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC), and the RUB, to promote admission and employment of persons with disabilities to tertiary and training institutes (Bhutan MoE, 2012). This mandate is also reiterated in the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, which promotes increased access of children with disabilities to vocational, tertiary, and lifelong education (Gross National Happiness Commission Secretariat, 2019)

and in the Ten-Year Roadmap for IE and SEN, which outlines the targets of the government in supporting equitable access of students with disabilities to further education, non-formal education programmes, and transition into workplaces (Bhutan MoE, 2019b).

Draktsho Vocational Training Centres provide basic education and vocational skills training for children with disabilities. In addition, the RGOB is presently collaborating with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) to ensure mainstreaming disability inclusion into the country's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system, policies, and programmes. There are also some evidence of admission of children with disabilities to higher education. For instance, an interview with a representative from RUB revealed that since the enrolment of students is conducted online through the university's website, the university has no mechanisms in determining if the applicants have disabilities and will only be identified during the registration process. Nevertheless, qualified applicants with disabilities will be provided with the necessary accommodations.

Despite these mandates, some respondents from the government, pre-service institutions, teachers, and parents of children with disabilities expressed the need to urgently address the gaps and challenges in supporting children with disabilities to transition to vocational, further education and employment.

"Inclusive schools go up only to a certain level. The Special Institute for the Deaf in Paro goes only until the 10th standard, and from the 11th standard, they have vocational education. For higher-level learning, the government should be able to provide 11th and 12th standards for them. We are still negotiating with the Royal University of Bhutan on having a special admission criterion for students with disabilities who finished high school. The progression is something we have not thought through. Some projects from the Ministry of Education on how many children with disabilities will [be] moving into high school and where they can be accommodated need to be studied and looked at immediately."

- A representative from a key government agency

"There is no continuation of SEN services at higher school level. Children with disabilities do not have the same service in higher levels."

- School Head from one of the schools with IE/SEN Programme

"We want full support from (the) government to help our children in getting employed after class XII."

"Introduce vocational programmes."

- Parents of children with disabilities in schools with IE/SEN Programme

- 3.5.1.6 Initiatives to design and implement inclusive curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and learning materials support the Programme's sustainability. The Standards for Inclusive Education provides guidelines to the school heads, SENCOs and teachers in schools with IE/SEN Programme on designing and implementing accommodations and modifications to remove the barriers to student learning and meet their diverse and individual learning needs (Bhutan MoE, 2017). Some SENCOs confirmed that they make modifications in the

curriculum, assessment methods, and medium of instruction for children with disabilities in their schools. The same strategies were echoed in the responses of some teachers in schools implementing the IE/SEN Programme who, despite the limited funding and inadequate resources, continued to do their best to improve their teaching and learning materials to cater to students' individual needs. An IEP for students requiring additional support is also implemented and monitored, although it should be noted that the use of IEPs needs to be carefully monitored and quality assured to ensure that this approach does not reinforce a medical model approach to inclusion. All children have the right to access the same curriculum and to be educated alongside their peers. In many settings globally, the IEP does not enable this approach but rather encourages an individualized and, at times, segregatory approach which is not fully inclusive.

3.5.2 Scalability: What interventions were adopted for the programme to be scalable?

- 3.5.2.1 The gradual establishment of schools with IE/SEN Programme, including specialised institutes, indicate the programme's expansion. Bhutan's commitment to providing access to education for all children with disabilities has been consistently stated in the country's five-year plans. Since the establishment of the Special Education Unit within the Department of School Education during the 9th Five-Year Plan (2002-2007) (Bhutan Planning Commission, 2002), the RGOB has shown significant progress in expanding the programme to more general schools to provide access to education for children with disabilities. The SEN programme was first introduced in 2002 in Changangkha Middle Secondary School and as of June 2020, the country has established 23 schools with IE/SEN Programme, including two specialised institutes, and two Draktsho Vocational Training Centres (Bhutan MoE, 2020a).

Figure 6 shows the number of schools and institutes catering to the educational needs of children with disabilities from 2010 to 2020. Relevant data are not available for 2013, 2014, and 2016.

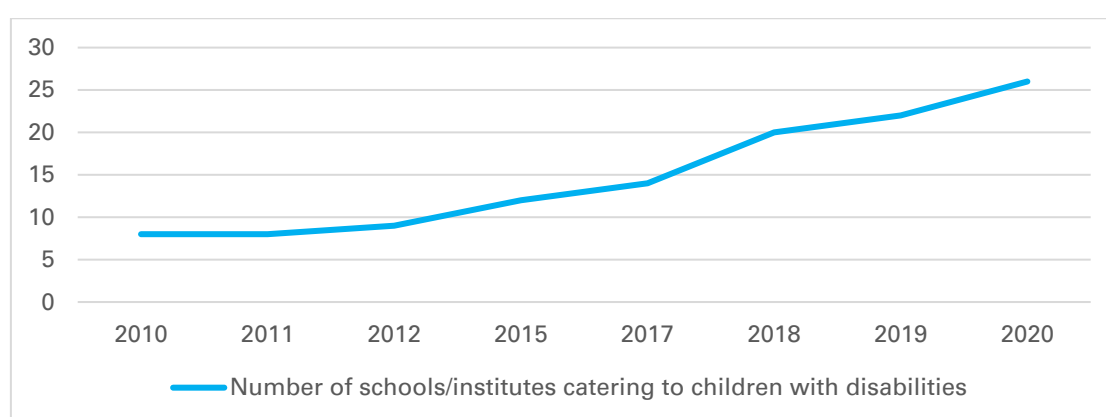


Figure 6. Number of schools and institutes with IE/SEN Programme from 2010-2020

With the increase in the number of general schools catering to children with mild to moderate disabilities, the enrolment of children with disabilities has increased significantly, with enrolment at 283 in 2010 (Bhutan MoE, 2010) to 997 in 2020 (Bhutan MoE, 2020a).

3.5.2.2 However, some respondents at the national, district, and school levels agreed that much work needs to be done to scale up the Programme. Some of the key points they recommended are as follows:

- a. There is a need to urgently introduce the IE/SEN Programme to other general schools, ensure national coverage and reach more children with disabilities. A key official from MoE noted that the selection of general schools to implement the IE/SEN programme undergoes a thorough process and requires collaboration with the local government, particularly with DEOs. Once a school is identified based on the country's 5-year plan, MoE conducts a feasibility study to ensure that the school has the capacity to accommodate mild to moderate children with disabilities within or beyond their district. MoE also provides orientation programmes to parents and teachers on inclusive education. After the consultation process, the school principal facilitates the admission of children with disabilities in school.

However, it is reflected in some of the responses of participants that the size of Dzongkhag and the number of children with disabilities are not considered in the selection process. A school principal from a school implementing the Programme noted, 'The government has just identified one school in each dzongkhag, but according to the data, ours have more children with disabilities. We need to institutionalise the programmes in all schools.' This was echoed in the response of a representative from a DEO who stated, 'Expansion should be based on the size of Dzongkhag and (the) number of children with disabilities.'

- b. As the implementation of the IE/SEN Programme expanded to other general schools, some respondents urged the government to look at the situation of human resources at the district and school levels. This includes engaging specialised professionals (e.g., occupational therapists, speech therapists), and hiring additional SEN teachers, and teacher assistants to accommodate the educational needs of children with disabilities effectively.
- c. **Building strong collaboration with external partners contributes to the expansion of the programme.** Some respondents from the national, district, and school levels acknowledged the roles of external partners in upscaling the implementation of the programme. According to the respondents, support provided by the external partners includes capacity development activities, support to raising awareness on the educational needs of children with disabilities, and additional funding. These include UNICEF Bhutan, Save the Children Bhutan, Bhutan Foundation, and the Australian Volunteers for International Development. They also cited national CSOs such as Ability Bhutan Society, Disabled People's Organisation of Bhutan who also contribute to the upscaling of the programme.
- d. **Data on children with disabilities support the case for investment in IE/SEN Programme.** The two-stage disability study in 2010 revealed that 30 per cent of 11,370 children aged 2-9 years old were living with a disability (Bhutan National Statistics Bureau, 2012), while the Population and Housing Census conducted in 2017 reported a disability prevalence rate of 2.1 per cent (Bhutan National Statistics

Bureau, 2018). Data collected from these national surveys and studies on disability informed the decision makers in the government to expand the programme implementation.

- e. **Raising awareness on the right of children with disabilities to education contributes to the upscaling of the programme.** Majority of respondents in the national government and schools with IE/SEN Programme agreed that increasing the awareness of education stakeholders on disability and inclusive education contributes to the increased in the enrolment of children with disabilities therefore, supporting the expansion of the programme implementation. For instance, some respondents shared that the Disabled People's Organisation in Bhutan advocates for inclusive education. At the same time, UNICEF Bhutan supports the country in raising awareness and delivering services to children with disabilities.

"International organisations like UNICEF play a big role in terms of raising awareness and in terms of support(ing) the education system in Bhutan. They have ensured that we deliver the right service to children with disabilities."

- A representative from a pre-service teacher training institution

Despite the advocacy and awareness-raising activities conducted, respondents agreed that challenges remain, particularly in influencing parents and communities to actively support the education of children with disabilities. Results of the FGDs with parents and caregivers of children with and without disabilities revealed that the majority of them have not provided any support to children with disabilities in schools with IE/SEN programme. This is echoed in the responses of parents and caregivers of children without disabilities from the sample ECCD centres and general schools included in this evaluation study.

"[The] greatest barrier to disability is attitudinal. Creating awareness and increasing the understanding of people on the issues and needs of persons with disabilities is the key to promoting the rights and enabling persons with disabilities to enjoy their lives like any other persons without disabilities."

- A representative from a key government agency

"People of Bhutan still require advocacy on stigmatization and its impact on the enrolment of children with disabilities in SEN schools."

- A representative from Dzongkhag Education Office

- 3.5.2.3 There are plans in place to expand the IE/SEN Programme to reach young children with disabilities through the ECCD programme. A respondent from MoE confirmed that the country is presently working on a multisectoral ECCD strategic action plan, which includes services for children with disabilities such as enhanced early identification, referral and intervention of developmental delays and disabilities (Bhutan MoE, 2021).

3.5.3 Capacity Development: How were capacities strengthened at the individual and organisational level (including contributing factors and constraints)? To what extent has gender equality and equity principles been mainstreamed in capacity development initiatives?

3.5.3.1 Sustainability requires building the capacity of different education stakeholders at the school level (i.e., school heads, SENCOs, teachers, parents, and caregivers) on inclusive and special education. As noted in the findings under the Effectiveness criterion, challenges remain in terms of misconceptions, stereotypes, and discriminatory attitudes towards disabilities and inclusive education, including the need to improve skills and confidence of teachers to facilitate learning and address the educational needs of children with disabilities. To address these challenges, some respondents confirmed that the government continuously conducts capacity development programmes at various institutional levels, particularly for relevant actors in schools. Initiatives related to this include the following:

- a. Education colleges in Bhutan are committed to supporting the government's initiatives in preparing student teachers and building the capacity of school heads and teachers through its pre-service and in-service programmes. Positive signs of capacity development include the commitment of pre-service institutions to incorporate principles of inclusive education into their academic programmes. Respondents from pre-service institutions detailed the role of the colleges in providing pre-service and in-service teacher training.

Table 12. Pre-service institutions in Bhutan

Pre-service institutions	Contributions to pre-service and in-service teacher training
Paro College of Education (PCE)	• PCE offers a Master of Education in Inclusive Education that aims to provide teachers and professionals with a formal training on special and inclusive education (Paro College of Education, 2020). The college also offers a Master of Arts in Leadership and Management for school heads, which includes modules on inclusive education. • PCE offers a special education module for final-year students of Bachelor of Education. • The college also entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MoE to support in-service teacher training of teachers in schools with IE/SEN programme through a scholarship programme.
Samtse College of Education	• SCE offers an introductory module on inclusive education for students of Bachelor of Education. • SCE trains in-service and pre-service secondary teachers on inclusive education through credited and non-credited courses.

Because the pre-service academic programmes are relatively new, more than half of the teacher-respondents in schools with IE/SEN Programme reported that inclusive education and disability are not included in their pre-service teacher training. In the online survey among teachers in schools with

IE/SEN programme, the results found that the majority of teachers teaching in classes with children with disabilities (n=165) and teachers teaching in general classes (n=235) do not have subjects on inclusive education and disability during their pre-service teacher training.

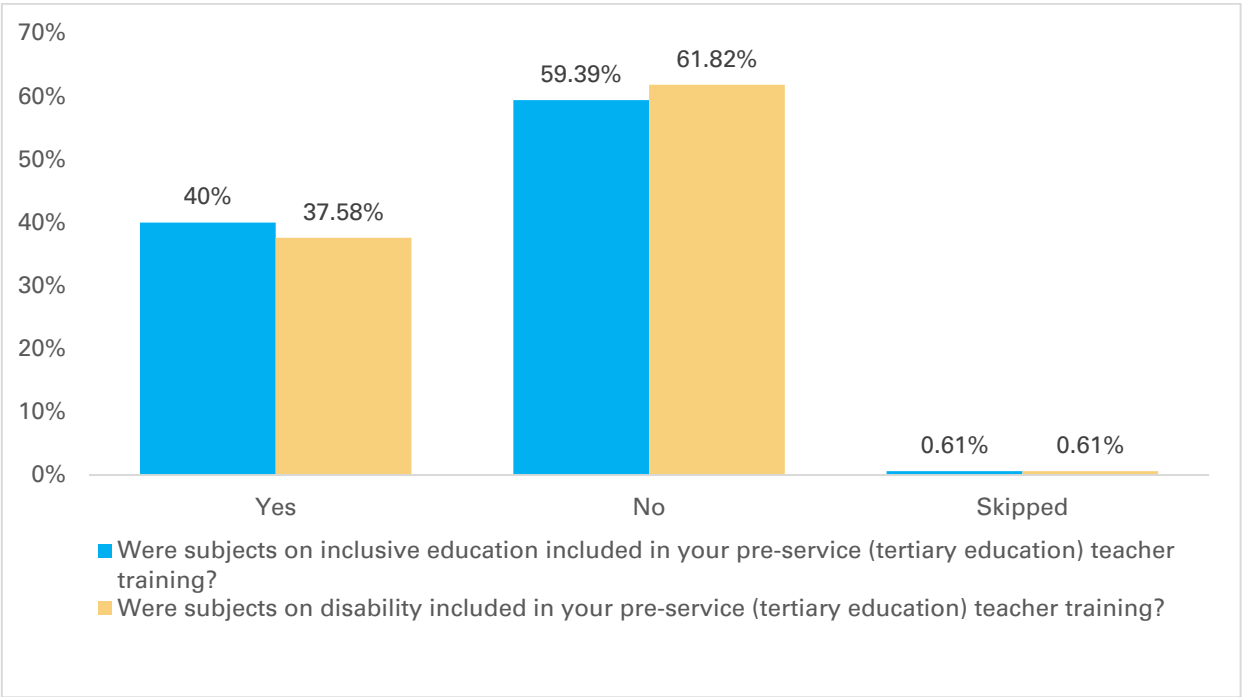


Figure 7. Inclusion of inclusive education and disability subjects in pre-service teacher training of teachers teaching in classes with children with disabilities

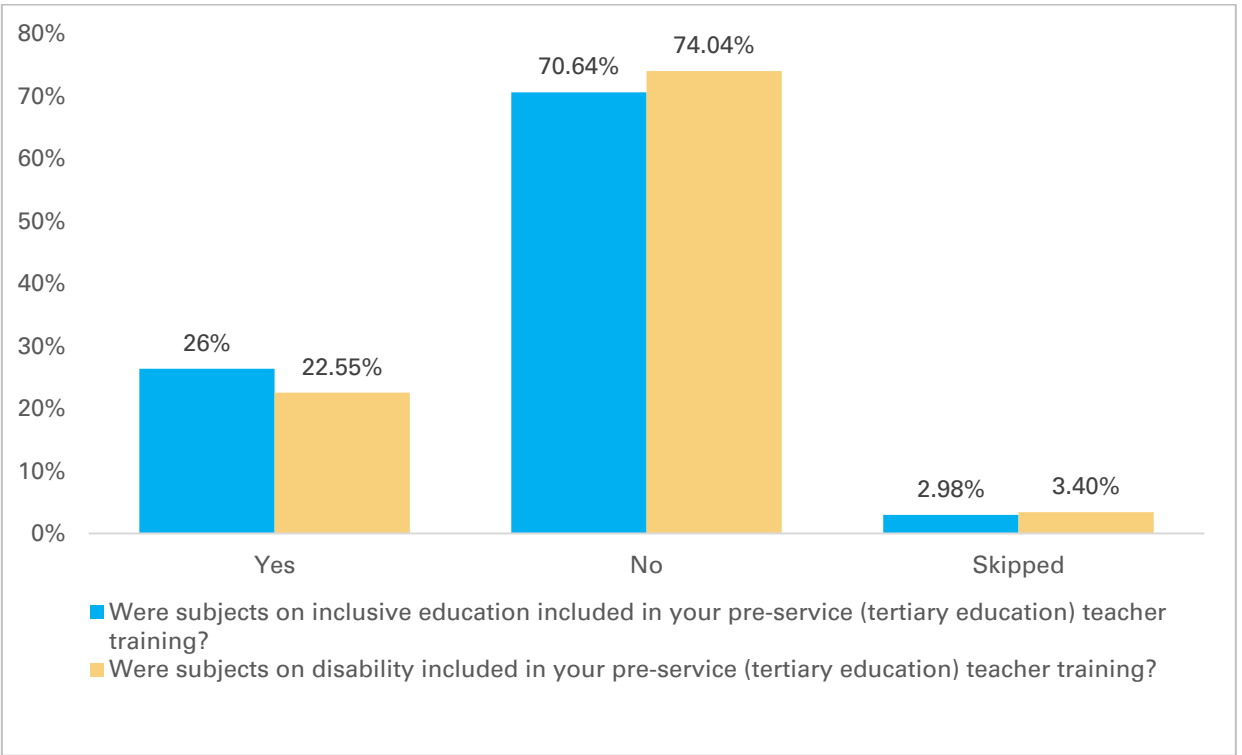


Figure 8. Inclusion of inclusive education and disability subjects in pre-service teacher training of teachers teaching in general classes

The results of the same online survey revealed that 88 or 53 per cent (n=165) of teachers teaching in classes with children with disabilities found that their pre-service training was either *not helpful* or *somewhat helpful* in teaching children with disabilities.

Meanwhile, the online survey for teachers in general schools yielded similar responses. The online survey (n=97) revealed that 81.44 per cent of teachers did not have inclusive education and disability subjects in their pre-service teacher training.

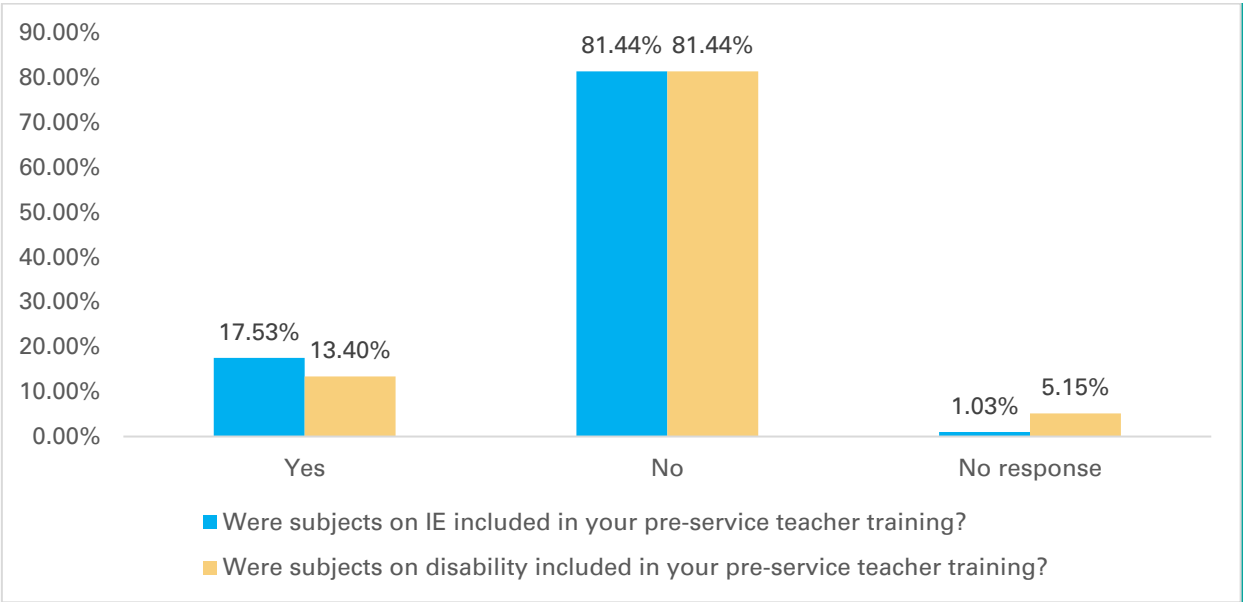


Figure 9. Inclusion of IE and disability in pre-service teacher training of teachers from sample schools/centres/institutes without IE/SEN Programme

3.5.3.2 There are capacity development programmes and activities that target School Heads from schools with IE/SEN Programme. The IE/SEN Programme supports the capacity development of School Heads to advocate the right to education of children with disabilities. Out of the 20 School Heads in schools with IE/SEN Programme, only ten reported receiving training on disability and inclusive and special education which were provided by the Ministry of Education, UNICEF Bhutan, other non-government organisations and civil society organisations. Almost all of them affirmed that they need further support in strengthening their knowledge and skills on disability and inclusive education. Areas identified are (1) IE and SEN concepts and models (2) implementing and managing SEN programmes in schools, (3) early identification and intervention, and (4) disability-inclusive pedagogies, including targeted interventions for children with low vision and hearing impairment.

Limited professional development interventions are provided to school heads in sample general schools. Since the programme implementation is currently at the initial stage and expanding the services to other schools is still ongoing, almost all of the school heads from the sample general schools reported that they had not received any form of training on disability and/or inclusive and special education. While they are not implementing the programme yet, most school heads agreed that they need support in building their capacity

to accommodate the educational needs of children with disabilities and prepare for disability inclusion in the future.

"We need the training to handle children with disabilities. We cannot do trial and error method."

- A school head from a general school

- 3.5.3.3 There are capacity development programmes that target SEN programme coordinators; however, further support is still needed. Out of the 20 SENCOS interviewed, 19 have confirmed that they have received disability and inclusive education training. Together with the school's SEN team, SENCOS are nominated by their respective schools to participate in various ex-country and in-country capacity building activities (e.g., MoE's National-based In-Service Programme (NBIP), exchange programmes). Upon return, the nominated representative/s shall conduct a School-based In-Service Programme (SBIP) to share their learning during trainings or workshops with other teachers.

All SENCOS interviewed highlighted the need to further strengthen their knowledge in inclusive and special education. Areas to be supported include (1) early identification and intervention services, (2) disability-inclusive pedagogy, including modifications in curriculum and improvement of their teaching and learning materials, (3) understanding the IE/SEN Programme and diverse educational needs of children with disabilities; and (4) targeted interventions such as speech therapy, braille, and Bhutanese sign language (BhSL).

- 3.5.3.4 Capacity development programmes for teachers are primarily focused on schools with IE/SEN Programme, more specifically for teachers teaching in classes with children with disabilities. The majority of the teacher-respondents from schools with or implementing the IE/SEN Programme confirmed that they had received various disability and/or inclusive and special education training. They stated that IE and SEN are addressed in regular school professional development activities such as: (1) inclusion of IE and SEN in orientation programmes for newly hired teachers; (2) training of teachers teaching in general classrooms; (3) professional development activities delivered by external professionals and volunteers from other countries, and (4) informal discussions such as in weekly sharing of best practices.

"It [capacity development activities] helped us a lot. We do not have knowledge of the SEN programme before. It helped us change our mindset."

- Teachers from a school with IE/SEN Programme

However, results of the same online survey among teachers from schools with IE/SEN Programme suggest that these capacity development programmes mainly target those who are teaching in SEN classes and not those teaching in general classes. This could be an indication that the former is given more attention in terms of capacity building compared to the latter.

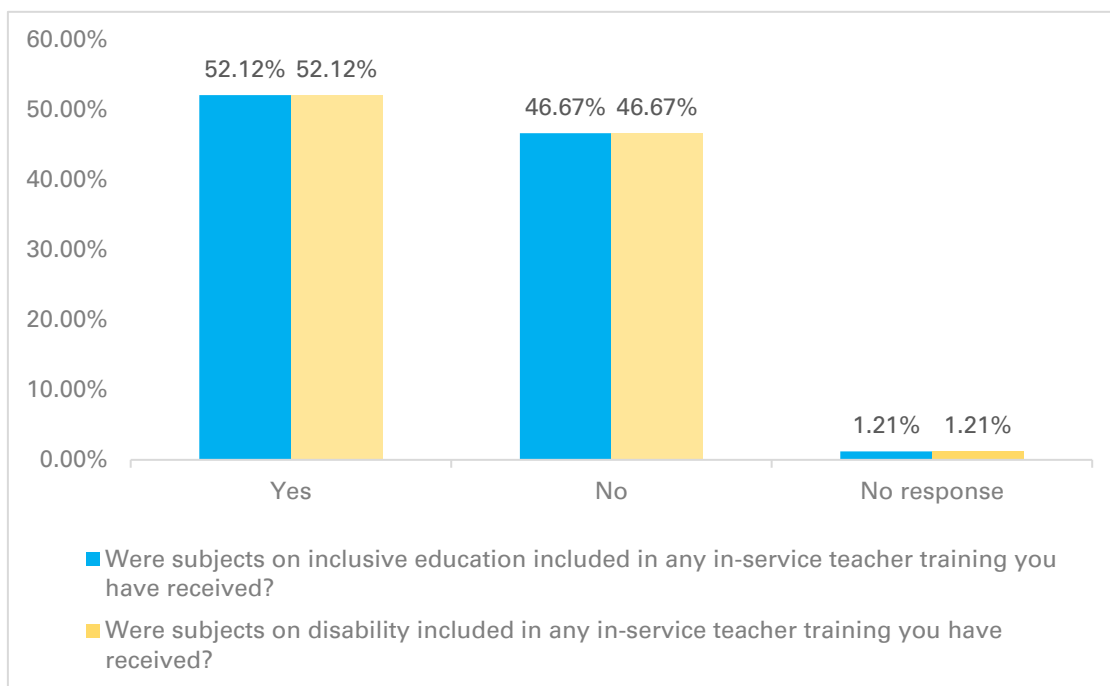


Figure 10. Inclusion of topics on inclusive education and disability in in-service teacher training of teachers teaching classes with children with disabilities (n=165)

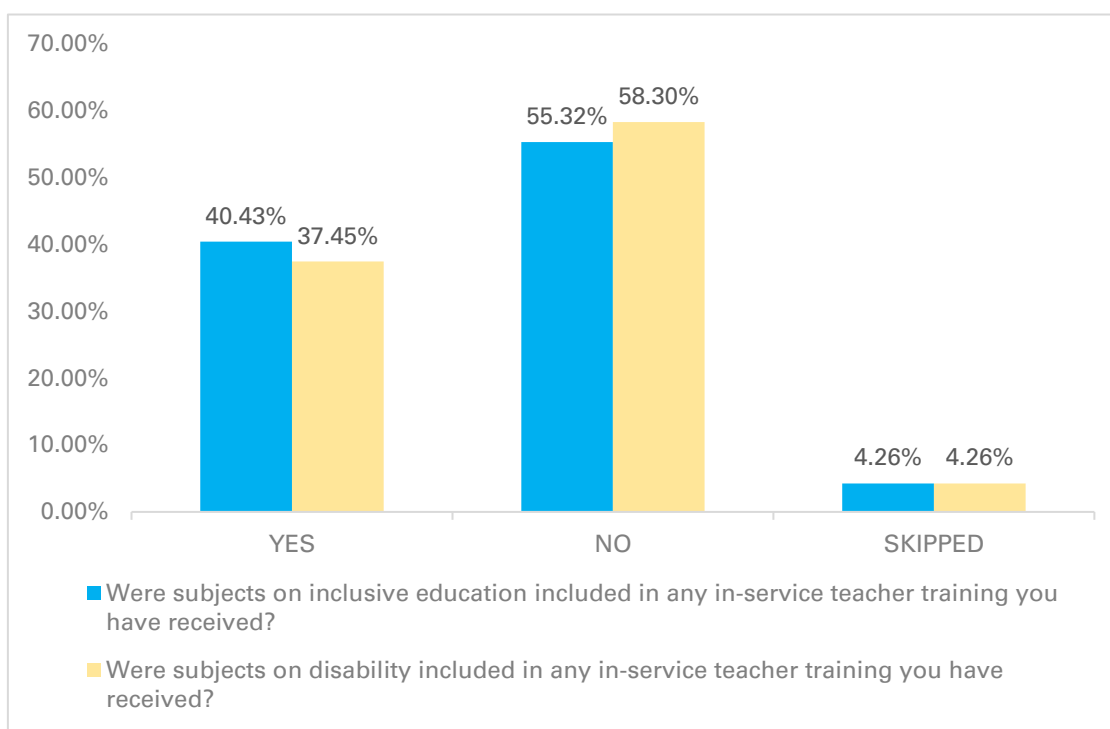


Figure 11. Inclusion of topics on inclusive education and disability in in-service teacher training for general teachers

Inclusion of topics on inclusive education and disability in in-service teacher training for general teachers

Table 6 shows the breakdown per school of the 85 (52.12%, n=165) teachers teaching classes with children with disabilities who confirmed that subjects on disability and IE were included in their in-service teacher training.

Table 6. Distribution of teachers who received in-service training on IE and/or disability

Region	Schools	Number of teachers
Western	Changangkha MSS, Thimphu	3
	Yangchen Gatshel MSS, Thimphu	4
	Drukgyel LSS, Paro	0
	Wangsel Institute Drukgyel, Paro	6
	Gesarling CS, Dagana	2
	Samtengang CS, Wangdue Phodrang	6
	Kamji CS, Chukha	4
	Tendruk CS, Samtse	5
	Phuentsholing MSS, Chukha	5
Central	Damphu MSS, Tsirang	4
	Zhemgang LSS, Zhemgang	3
	Tsangkhla CS, Trongsa	3
	Tang CS, Bumthang	6
	Gelephu LSS, Sarpang	2
Eastern	Mongar MSS, Mongar	15
	Autsho CS, Lhuntse	3
	Tsenkharla CS, Trashigang	3
	Khaling LSS, Trashigang	4
	Muenselling Institute, Trashigang	2
	Gonpasingma LSS, Pema gatshel	4
	No response	1
	Total	85

Because the IE/SEN Programme is not yet implemented in the sample general schools included in the evaluation study, teacher-respondents reported that they had not received any form of training on disability and/or inclusive and special education. However, they expressed interest to be involved in various capacity development programmes related to the educational needs of children with disabilities to be able to effectively include children with mild to moderate disabilities in their schools/centres/institutes.

3.5.3.5 There is a need to include the parents of children and the whole community in capacity development programmes on IE and SEN. It was mentioned in KEQ 4.2 (Scalability) that the majority of parents and caregivers of children with disabilities enrolled in schools with the IE/SEN Programme provide various forms of support to the schools. Despite their critical roles in their children's education, most of them reported that they had not received any formal training on disability and inclusive education except for some informal and short discussions with teachers on targeted interventions such as counselling and simple physiotherapy activities. Most of them agreed that they need to be capacitated to better guide and support their children outside the schools.

"If we get the training, we can be their second teachers. We need to learn how to guide our children, as well as other children. We have the right to get this training.
Parents of children with disabilities in a school with IE/SEN Programme

Parents and caregivers of children without disabilities in schools with the IE/SEN Programme also confirmed that they had not received training on disability and/or inclusive and special education from the schools where their children are enrolled. Some parents and caregivers mentioned that they do not need such training, while some said it could guide them in taking care of their children.

On a similar note, the responses of parents and caregivers of children without disabilities in sample general schools and ECCD centres expressed the same sentiment. Almost all of the respondents shared that they have not received any form of training on inclusive education and disability.

3.6 Equity, Gender Equality and Human Rights-Based Approaches

3.6.1 Equity, gender equality, and human rights-based approach: In what ways and to what extent has the IE/SEN Programme integrated a gender-responsive and overall equity-based approach into its design and implementation? Did the programme promote women and girls' empowerment? To what extent?

- 3.6.1.1 To some extent, the programme has mainstreamed principles of gender equality in its implementation strategies and promoted empowerment among women and girls with disabilities. However, there is still a need to initiate gender-responsive interventions to address challenges. The majority of the respondents from the national, district, and school levels shared that inclusion underpins the implementation of the Programme to ensure that no Bhutanese child is left behind. For instance, RGOB has integrated principles of gender equality in their policies surrounding the implementation of the IE/SEN Programme. Some respondents shared that disability policies, programmes, and plans are gender-inclusive and have a gender component (see Table 4).

Table 7. Inclusion of gender equality principles in education's policy environment.

Policies	Inclusion of principles of gender equality
Draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs (2012)	While the draft policy promotes the inclusion of all children with disabilities, it does not explicitly mention any implementation strategy to address the gender needs of girls and boys with disabilities.
National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2019)	Particularly in its provisions related to the education of persons with disabilities, the policy stated MoE's mandate to ensure access to education of girls with disabilities and the advancement of the rights of children and women with

	disabilities in all education policies, plans, and programmes related to persons with disabilities (Gross National Happiness Commission Secretariat, 2019).
Draft National Education Policy (2019)	Principles of gender equality are included in the policy statements of the draft policy. It mandates the education system to implement strategies that are gender-responsive and disability-inclusive (Bhutan MoE, 2019).
Standards for Inclusive Education (2017)	The Standards for Inclusive Education has specific indicators for gender equality under the 'Inclusive Culture' domain (Bhutan MoE, 2017). Principles of gender equality are also integrated in the 'Inclusive Policy' domain, particularly on school policy on admission (Bhutan MoE, 2017).

In terms of the programme's overall implementation strategies, some respondents cited that it is able to provide equal opportunities for children with disabilities to access education, regardless of their gender. In addition, several respondents from both national and school levels affirmed that the programme promotes the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities as it provides the opportunity for them to learn and be productive in their schools and communities.

"Girls are discriminated, and if you have a disability, it doubles the discrimination. Inclusive and Special Education has empowered girls with disabilities because they are able to receive education, an opportunity to address discrimination. It empowers girls and women with disabilities because they can explore opportunities without having to rely on others."

- A representative from a key government agency

However, as previously mentioned in the KEQ for gender mainstreaming,¹³ the programme falls under the category of gender-aware/sensitive mark using UNICEF's gender continuum model as it does not actively address the gender needs of children with disabilities. Hence, there is a need to provide gender-responsive interventions that target the specific gender needs of boys and girls with disabilities mentioned in the previous criteria.

- 3.6.1.2 The human rights-based approach to programming guides the implementation of the programme. Central to the responses of respondents is the role of the IE/SEN programmes in promoting the inalienable right to education of all children, including children with disabilities. The human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation, and inclusion (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2007) are inherent to the programme implementation.

¹³ See Effectiveness: Gender Mainstreaming.

Box 2. Definition of human rights-based approach (UNICEF Finland, 2015)

A human rights-based approach is focused on conscious and systematic enhancement of human rights in all aspects of project and program development and implementation. The human rights-based approach has a twofold objective: (1) to empower people (rights-holders) to claim and exercise their rights and (2) to strengthen the capacity of the actors (duty-bearers) who have a particular obligation or responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the poorest, weakest, most marginalised, and vulnerable and to comply with these obligations and duties.

Findings of this evaluation study show that the Bhutanese government, as the primary duty-bearers, is committed to ensuring that the rights of children are considered at the policy and programme levels. For instance, a respondent from a pre-service institution noted that the establishment of the National Commission on Women and Children (NCWC) in 2004 was a significant step to ensure the promotion and protection of the rights of Bhutanese women and children. A respondent from NCWC further confirmed that the Commission is always consulted in stakeholder discussions relevant to the rights of women and children, including children with disabilities. In addition, a respondent from a key government agency noted that the RGOB's commitment to ensure that all children can exercise their fundamental right to access and participate in high-quality education is reflected in the concerted and proactive approach of different ministries and agencies relevant to the country's education sector.

However, some challenges remain. For instance, there is limited engagement of parents, including mothers, and caregivers of children with disabilities in the programme implementation. The findings also revealed that government stakeholders have limited initiatives to increase the engagement of parents and caregivers of children with disabilities.

"There should be greater ownership from the government and other duty bearers. Oblige the duty bearers and hold them accountable if services are not delivered."

- A representative from a civil society organisation

In addition, the focus group discussions among children in schools with IE/SEN programme revealed experiences of corporal punishment, particularly involving children without disabilities. Majority of them agreed that they dislike being punished by their teachers which happens in various forms such as being scolded for no reason, being humiliated in front of their classmates, and being beaten inside the school.



4 Conclusion

4.1 Relevance

Two key evaluation questions were investigated in this criterion pertaining to (1) alignment of programme strategies with international and national policies in meeting the needs of children with disabilities and (2) responsiveness of activities and outputs to address national priorities and needs of children with disabilities.

The evaluation concludes that the IE/SEN Programme is relevant to both the national priorities and the educational needs of children with disabilities in Bhutan.

In principle, the programme's objectives and strategies are aligned with international and national policies promoting equity and inclusion. Its main aim of providing equitable access to learning for all children reinforces the goals of the CRC, CRPD, and SDG 4 and priorities articulated in key national policies. However, there is room for improvement in terms of bridging the gap between policy and practice. Limitations in resources and technical capacity prevent the programme from being fully aligned with the ideals set out in policies.

The responsiveness of the programme is mainly made evident by its success in increasing access to education for learners with disabilities, owing to the government's gradual establishment of more inclusive schools in the country. Moreover, promising teaching and learning practices and in-classroom support are emerging and have been reported to result to positive outcomes among learners with disabilities. Although enrolment rates were seen to increase over the years, most children with disabilities in the country remain invisible in the school system. The government needs to accelerate its efforts to expand the programme, not only to significantly increase access but raise the quality of education provisions in the classrooms.

Overall, the situation of children with disabilities in Bhutan, with the majority of them remaining marginalized in terms of access and participation, merits the continued commitment to and implementation of the IE/SEN programme.

4.2 Coherence

In evaluating coherence, the focus of the study was on (1) internal and (2) external policy coherence and (3) cross-sector collaboration for disability-inclusive education.

Broadly speaking, Bhutan's national policies (i.e., Draft National Policy on Special Educational Needs 2012, Draft National Education Policy 2019, and the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2019) are internally and externally coherent in terms of their fundamental aims. Internal policy coherence is evident as the basic principles of inclusion and equity are mutually reinforced in domestic policies. Coherence with external policies such as the SDGs and the CRPD was found to be strong. All national policies are synergized in safeguarding the right of all children to education, without discrimination.

A key finding of the evaluation is the continued reference to language that promotes the notion of a specialized, segregated form of education for children with disabilities. The evaluation concludes and

recommends replacing outdated terminology with more inclusive alternatives. A simple shift in language has the potential to change education practitioners' thinking around disability inclusion. It must be noted that the special educational needs policy was drafted in 2012 and has informed the development of the education policy but will not be adopted.

Policy reform initiatives such as the ongoing development of the education policy present an opportunity to strongly articulate Bhutan's commitment to gradually phasing out specialized provisions and moving towards building more inclusive schools within the general education system.

The programme has provided a platform for cross-sector collaboration, but it could be improved. Horizontal coordination among government units and development partners is present but mechanisms to strengthen coordination are needed. For instance, the committee for inclusive education must be activated; and CSOs, OPDs and local education offices need to be more actively involved in joined-up planning, implementation, and monitoring.

Community engagement could be strengthened by tapping active parent organisations on the ground and nurturing the existing relationships between SENCOS/SEN Team with parents. The evaluation highlighted that foundational to effective collaboration within the schools is inclusive leadership. School leaders who have had training on inclusive education tend to hold more positive attitudes towards inclusive education and are more open to collaboration. The existence of organised professional learning communities is an emerging good practice that needs to be supported further and replicated in other schools.

4.3 Effectiveness

To determine the extent to which the Programme achieved its objectives and intended results, the evaluation study examined five dimensions: access and participation, positive and negative unintended results, resources and implementation strategies, advocacy, and gender mainstreaming.

- Access and participation in inclusive and special education have increased significantly since the Programme commenced in 2010. However, enrolment data show significant gender differences in access, with boys consistently outnumbering girls since 2011. Limited data, particularly on learning outcomes and participation rate, hinder the study from assessing and determining the extent and quality of participation of children with disabilities.
- The Programme achieved positive results and significant milestones in its ten years of implementation. It was instrumental in formulating inclusive education policies, strategies, and standards. Through its technical interventions and advocacy efforts, stakeholders reported increased access to and quality of education and greater awareness of disability and inclusive education in schools and communities. No negative results were reported but a number of clear areas for improvement were noted, see below.
- Although substantial inputs were provided to implement the Programme, these were not adequate to address long-standing issues and concerns, which include: discrimination against children with disabilities, limited understanding of disability issues and inclusive education, limited capacity of teachers to facilitate inclusive education, lack of accessible infrastructure and facilities, lack of appropriate instruction guides and materials, lack of assistive devices and health services from experts, lack of alignment between planning and implementation; lack of

financial resources and development partners; and lack of EMIS data to aid in decision-making. Classroom strategies, such as the Individual Education Plan and push-in and pull-out approaches need to be reviewed further to determine their appropriateness and inclusivity.

- Awareness and demand for inclusive education may have increased to some extent, but misconceptions, stereotypes, and discriminatory attitudes continue to be barriers to inclusion. Responses highlight the serious need to improve understanding about disability and inclusive education to ensure that the Programme can be implemented effectively with the full support of all stakeholders.
- Using UNICEF's gender continuum model, the findings suggest that the Programme falls under the gender-aware/sensitive category. While the Programme considers the principles of gender equality in its frameworks and implementation strategies and recognizes that the 'one-size-fits-all' approach contributes to the production and reproduction of gender inequalities in education, the findings on the gender needs of girls and boys with disabilities suggest that the Programme does not actively challenge and address them.

Overall, the Programme is moving in the right direction and has achieved significant progress in its ten years of implementation. However, the Programme needs to address gender disparity in access and participation, allocate adequate inputs and resources, ensure effectiveness and inclusivity of strategies, improve understanding of disability and inclusive education, and address the different needs of boys and girls to promote equal educational outcomes.

4.4 Efficiency

To determine the extent to which the Programme delivered results in an economical and timely way, the evaluation study examined five dimensions: planning, monitoring, and evaluation; financial and human resources; implementation strategies; cost-effectiveness; and situation analysis.

- Some mechanisms are in place to plan, monitor, and evaluate the Programme: the MoE manages education data using the EMIS and presents relevant indicators through the AES reports, schools track their progress through the School Performance Management System, and teachers use the Individual Education Plan to record and review students' academic achievement and developmental milestones. Though these mechanisms help improve programme efficiency, the lack of standardized tools, lack of training on documentation and reporting, and lack of dissemination of relevant information hinder stakeholders from using data in a strategic and timely manner.
- Substantial resources—human, financial, and technical—have been invested in the Programme. However, these are not adequate to properly implement inclusive and special education and address the needs of children with disabilities. Among others, the lack of teacher training and capacity building has been cited most frequently as an obstacle to the successful implementation of the Programme.
- Working in parallel, the strategies of policy formulation, technical capacity-building, financial support, and advocacy have facilitated improvements in the provision of inclusive and special education. Having a set of standards for inclusive education has also supported efficiency in achieving results, although implementation still varied across schools. On the other hand, the limited participation of parents, caregivers, and the community may have lessened

opportunities for further awareness-raising, better service delivery, and a broader support base for the Programme.

- There is a lack of understanding amongst stakeholders about the principles of inclusive education and how this can be implemented to benefit all students—those with and without disabilities. Though responses acknowledged the complex factors affecting inclusive education, some stakeholders believe that including children with disabilities in schools with IE/SEN programme is less cost-effective compared to enrolling them in specialized institutes. The Programme must dispel the misconception that addressing the needs of children with disabilities will adversely impact the learning and development of children without disabilities and vice versa.
- Within the Programme, its strengths lie in having solid partnerships and close collaboration with other agencies and organizations, expertise in inclusive education amongst stakeholders, employment of a twin-track approach to disability inclusion, and institutionalisation of the planning and review processes. On the other hand, the Programme needs to address its weaknesses which include: insufficient data on children with disabilities and disability-inclusive education to inform intervention, absence of a national education law, limited government investment, limited understanding of inclusive education, limited capacity to implement inclusive education, and limited understanding of how to organize inclusive classrooms and plan and teach inclusively.

As the Programme continues its next phase of implementation, it needs to consider how to maximise existing opportunities, including the possibility of establishing more inclusive schools (with a focus on whole school approaches to inclusion including inclusive cultures environment and practice), improving access and participation of children with disabilities in education, and increasing collaboration with organisations of persons with disabilities and other agencies. The Programme also needs to mitigate the threats posed by external factors including the delay in the ratification of CRPD, lack of development partners (funding partners), limited awareness and understanding of the needs of children with disabilities, limited awareness and understanding of inclusive education, inaccessible infrastructure and facilities in communities and public spaces, and impact of COVID-19 pandemic on learning continuity and quality of teaching and learning.

Overall, the Programme has taken the initial steps—establish mechanisms, allocate resources, and employ strategies—to deliver results efficiently. However, the Programme needs to further integrate the planning, monitoring, evaluation mechanisms; analyse, report, and use data in a more strategic and timely manner; increase investment in inclusive education; increase parental and community engagement; build stakeholder capacity to understand and implement inclusive education; and consider the results of the initial situation analysis in refining its overall design and strategy.

4.5 Sustainability

The three key evaluation questions in this criterion focus on (1) efforts made to establish an enabling environment and measures implemented to sustain the delivery of services, (2) interventions adopted to upscale the programme, and (3) strengthening of capacities of different education stakeholders at the individual and organisational levels.

- There is evidence of significant efforts that have been made to support the sustainability of the programme. The findings of this evaluation study have highlighted the steps that the Bhutanese

government has taken to sustain and upscale the IE/SEN programme in the country. These include establishing an enabling environment through various rights-based and disability-inclusive policy frameworks, increasing the financial investments on the whole education system, and requiring the commitment of the local government to implement the programme. However, these efforts are likely to be hampered by various challenges identified by evaluation study participants. These include limited budget dedicated to the programme, inadequate disability-inclusive infrastructure, gaps in transitional planning, challenges in implementing disability-inclusive curriculum and pedagogy, assessment and learning materials.

- There is also evidence that the RGOB has adopted different interventions to expand the programme implementation. There is significant progress in expanding the programme to reach more general schools to cater for the educational needs of children with mild to moderate disabilities, and eventually, young children with disabilities through the ECCD programme. Nevertheless, some evaluation study participants stressed the need to urgently introduce the programme to other general schools and increase the human resources to reach more children with disabilities. Findings also show that the government collaborates with external partners such as development partners and national civil society organisations to sustain the programme expansion. The government is also utilising disability data through national surveys and studies on disability to support the case for investment in IE/SEN programme. Moreover, findings reveal that increasing the demand for inclusive education through raising awareness on the right to education of children with disabilities contributes to the upscaling of the programme. However, challenges remain particularly in influencing the parents and communities in supporting the education of children with disabilities.
- The findings of the evaluation study provide evidence that relevant education stakeholders, particularly at the school level, were supported through capacity development activities to implement the IE/SEN programme. Respondents shared various approaches in building the capacity of education stakeholders. For instance, different education colleges in Bhutan offer pre-service and in-service teacher training for school heads and teachers. Ministry of Education and other external partners provide in-service teacher training programmes that target school heads, SEN programme coordinators, and teachers in schools with IE/SEN programme. However, evaluation study participants have identified gaps and challenges in this area. First, there is evidence that the focus of capacity development activities in schools with IE/SEN programme is those teaching in classes with children with disabilities. On a similar note, there is also evidence that these capacity development activities have not been extended to general schools/centres/institutes that are not implementing the IE/SEN programme. There is also a need to improve the capacity of parents of children and the whole community in supporting the education of children with disabilities.

A key recommendation from this report would be to focus more on school development activities which build the inclusive understanding and capacity of all teachers, leaders, parents and community in and around the school. Teachers need to be supported through ongoing school development activities to work with each other and other stakeholders to build an inclusive school culture based on inclusive values. This model should be used as the basis for scaling up the IE program.

4.6 Equity, Gender Equality and Human Rights-Based Approaches

The key evaluation question in this criterion concerns the extent of integrating a gender-responsive and overall equity-based approach into the design and implementation of the IE/SEN programme.

- There is evidence that the IE/SEN programme is mainstreaming the principles of gender equality in its implementation strategies. The majority of the respondents noted that inclusion principles underpin the programme's implementation. This is reflected in the disability-inclusive policies and plans that have explicitly included principles of gender equality. Some respondents affirmed that the programme promotes the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities by providing them equal access to education. However, the findings also suggest the need to address specific gender needs of children with disabilities. Gender-responsive interventions are needed to cater to the specific needs of boys and girls with disabilities.
- There is also adequate evidence that the programme implementation adheres to a human-rights-based programming approach. This is reflected in the commitment of the government to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, including women and children, in policy development and programme implementation. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including the limited engagement of parents and caregivers of children with disabilities in the programme implementation and the presence of corporal punishment in schools.



5 Lessons Learned

- 1 Strategic and timely use of data is crucial for effective and efficient decision-making.** In the absence of an integrated mechanism for planning, (i.e., presence of a programme design document with a clear logical framework), review and an active platform for information dissemination, the programme has not been able to optimize the use of data to inform programme implementation, apply corrective measures when needed, and facilitate continuous learning and improvement.
- 2** Future programming must focus on including with disabilities in inclusive schools, rather than strengthening specialized institutes. Although targeted interventions in specialized institutes have contributed to increased access to education, a stronger focus on strengthening inclusive schools, including building the understanding and capacity of stakeholders to implement inclusive education is imperative.
- 3 Technical capacity-building is a continuous process, not a one-off event.** To improve confidence and competence in implementing inclusive education, stakeholders must allocate resources and commit to the continuous and school-based professional development of teachers and school heads. In preparation for expanding the programme to other general schools, the delivery of professional development activities should also extend to general schools/centres/institutes which are not presently accommodating children with mild to moderate disabilities.
- 4** Active engagement of the local government in programme implementation presents an opportunity to ensure ownership on the ground. Education Officers in different Dzongkhags and Thromdes are in a strategic position to support the implementation of the IE/SEN programme. The programme would benefit in investing on the capacity building of local education officials to effectively decentralize some of the functions of the central MoE, e.g., overseeing programme implementation at the local level, periodic monitoring, managing professional development activities, among others.
- 5** Programme scale up must consider the number of children with disabilities residing in the districts to ensure adequate provisions. By design, the government only targeted establishing at least one inclusive school per district. In scaling up the programme implementation, more populous areas must be established in more populous areas to cater to a larger number of children with disabilities.



6 Recommendations

Guided by the key findings of the evaluation, the following are recommended to improve disability-inclusive education in Bhutan. The recommendations are structured around the programme components: (1) enabling environment, (2) service delivery, (3) demand creation, and (4) cross-cutting themes. Principles of gender equality, equity and human rights-based approaches are embedded where relevant. In terms of prioritization, the evaluation team suggested an indicative timeline but MOE and its partners from government and development agencies need to strategically discuss the feasibility, alignment with current plans, and the resources required for implementation.

Guide for prioritization and timeline:

- Immediate: 2022-2023
- Medium-term: 2023-2026
- Long-term: 2026-2030

Programme component	No.	Recommendation	Priority	Suggested responsible agencies
Enabling environment	R1	Activate the Inclusive and Special Education Coordination Committee. Promote cross-sector collaboration with relevant ministries and agencies. Convene the inter-sectoral committee and institutionalize its formation detailing clear objectives and delineation of roles and responsibilities. Ensure the participation of persons of disabilities or their representatives through CSOs, NGOs, and OPDs. Establish concrete and periodic mechanisms for joined-up strategic planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of efforts related to disability-inclusive education. Review the ways in which district education offices are currently involved in consultations and decision-making and harness their contextual knowledge of the local situation in inclusive education for strategic planning. Consider taking out 'special education' in the name of the committee and replacing it with 'Inclusive Education Coordination Committee'.	Immediate	MoE, development partners
	R2	Strengthen accountability mechanisms by ratifying the CRPD and adopting a national education law or policy. Although the government has a strong commitment to implementing the CRPD made evident by ongoing programmes, the ratification of the convention will make the treaty legally binding, and the government obligated to abide by the	Immediate to medium-term	GNHC, MoE, development partners

Programme component	No.	Recommendation	Priority	Suggested responsible agencies
		stipulations of the convention and institute enforcement mechanisms. It is also recommended to review the draft National Education Policy 2019, ensure its full alignment with the CRPD, and prioritise its adoption. Ensure the policy re-enforces inclusive education and not specialised segregated education.		
	R3	Establish a comprehensive baseline for the programme drawing from the findings of this evaluation study and develop a programme design document. The baseline study must clearly outline the current needs of learners with disabilities and the barriers they experience in accessing and participating in school. The evaluation findings should inform the development of a dedicated programme design that clearly sets out a theory of change and logical framework with baseline and targets, implementation and monitoring arrangements, resources needed, among other aspects of programme implementation. Establishing a programme based on results-based management will enable more rigorous monitoring and evaluations in the future.	Immediate	MoE, development partners
	R4	Undertake a more in-depth review of policies related to disability-inclusive education and initiate policy reforms. Replace outdated terminology such as ‘special needs’ and ‘special education’ with more inclusive language in existing policies, especially the draft National Education Policy (2019). For instance, Special Education Needs Coordinators or SENCOs can be called Inclusion Coordinators instead. Changes in terminology signal a change in the discourse and shifts in the roles of special education practitioners. The current developments in the National Education Policy (2019) provide an opportunity to clearly articulate the direction in which the government wants to take inclusive education – which must be fully aligned with the CRPD. In the absence of the CRPD ratification, existing policies can provide a strong enabling policy environment for inclusive approaches to develop. The	Immediate to long-term	MoE, GNHC

Programme component	No.	Recommendation	Priority	Suggested responsible agencies
		policy should then be supported with a concrete road map for the next ten years or alternatively, revisit the Ten-Year Roadmap and make improvements to the strategic plan. - Clearly articulate the twin-track approach to inclusion and concrete implementation strategies. The twin-track approach encourages key actors to take the inclusive education agenda forward by (1) improving the overall inclusivity of the system for all learners and (2) addressing specific needs of individual children. This should be made clear in legislative frameworks and must not be interpreted as a justification to maintaining specialized institutes. - Explicitly state the adoption of child-centred teaching and learning approaches, the application of Universal Design for Learning, provision of reasonable accommodation for children with disabilities in all policies and related plans. Initiate reforms to make basic education compulsory for all children, including those with disabilities. Shift the focus on strengthening specialized institutes and gradually transition into more inclusive provisions within general schools.		
	R5	Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of the IE/SEN Programme. Include a results chain framework in the programme design document (see R3), performance indicators, data source, and reporting mechanism, as well as conditions that may facilitate or hinder progress (assumptions or risks). Revisit the existing EMIS module that includes disability data and add indicators that are currently not being tracked, such as enrolment data disaggregated by functional difficulty, net enrolment rate of children with disabilities, student learning outcomes, barriers in access and participation, and availability and access to support services. Involve key stakeholders in the monitoring and	Immediate to medium term	MoE, development partners

Programme component	No.	Recommendation	Priority	Suggested responsible agencies
		evaluation process, including parents, children, and OPD/CSOs, where appropriate. Ensure that monitoring results are disseminated to stakeholders to inform policy formulation, budget allocation, programme management, and service delivery.		
	R6	Increase financial investment in inclusive education. Allocate a higher government budget to achieve quality and equity-focused results for children with disabilities. Consider separating the SEN and ECCD units into two divisions to enable dedicated budget allocation. Collaborate with more development partners including the private sector, CSOs, and international development agencies. Utilize the Inclusive and Special Education Coordination Committee to mobilize additional resources and support. Investments must be clearly directed towards promoting inclusive teaching approaches, instead of perpetuating special education. • Allocate higher government budget to achieve quality and equity-focused results for children with disabilities. Consider separating the SEN division from the ECCD division to enable dedicated budget allocation. Promote transparency in the resources allocated to implementing IE in financial plans, and where applicable, articulate which line items will benefit children with disabilities. • Investments must be clearly directed towards promoting inclusive teaching approaches instead of perpetuating special education. Collaborate with other government units and development partners including the private sector, CSOs, and international development agencies and clearly define budget sharing. Utilize the Inclusive and Special Education Coordination Committee to mobilize additional resources and support.	Immediate to long-term	MoE, MoF and development partners
	R7	Conduct a more in-depth case study on the imperative for investing in inclusive	Medium to long-term	MoE, MoF

Programme component	No.	Recommendation	Priority	Suggested responsible agencies
		education. Undertake further studies focused on evaluating the investments allocated to inclusive education, including the cost-effectiveness of the IE/SEN Programme, factoring in costs and outcomes, to determine approaches that produce the most results for their inputs.		
Service delivery	R8	Expand the inclusive education programme. - Ensure national coverage and continue the establishment of at least one inclusive school per district, supporting more schools gradually. Start building a network of schools in each district working together as communities of practice, sharing effective practices and collaboratively problem-solving. In parallel, there must be a strong focus on developing leadership and expertise across the education system including actors at the central down to the school level. - In selecting schools, include a focus on strengths in the selection process, looking into, for example, teachers and school leaders demonstrating inclusive values and commitment to fulfilling the right of all learners to education. Consider the size of the Dzongkhag and the population of children with disabilities in determining the number of schools that will initially offer the IE/SEN Programme to ensure adequate provisions. - The strategy must articulate a gradual phasing out of specialized schools. The evaluation is not suggesting closing down such schools at once as that would be problematic. Where possible, the government should aim not to enrol any more children into specialized schools and prioritize including them in general schools and improving inclusive practices and capacity of general schools.	Immediate to long-term	MoE, GNHC, Dzongkhags, development partners
	R9	Increase the capacity and confidence of teachers and school heads in implementing	Immediate to medium-term	MoE, Royal University of

Programme component	No.	Recommendation	Priority	Suggested responsible agencies
		inclusive education in general schools, including those not implementing the IE/SEN programme yet. • Collaborate with pre-service teacher training institutions that are already supporting inclusive education and key government units in developing or strengthening existing teacher training programmes for pre-service teachers. • Conduct an inventory of beliefs and practices and learning needs assessment of in-service educators. Focus on localized development of teachers and school leaders. Facilitate continuous professional development through further education, training courses, mentoring/coaching, and supporting professional learning communities, with a focus on inclusive principles and practices, for all schools. Move away from a cascade approach to teacher professional development and promote ongoing, school-based approaches to training. • General schools that are not offering inclusive or special education included in this study all have learners with functional difficulties in their classrooms. Therefore, they must also be equipped with knowledge, skills and values to implement inclusive education, including facilitators in ECCD centres. Provide opportunities for peer observation, reflection and collaborative learning focusing on promising classroom practices and approaches that support inclusion. Incentivize or at least establish a mechanism for recognizing innovative and low-cost approaches to including children with disabilities in schools. • Strengthen pre-service and in-service training by aligning the professional development activities against relevant frameworks, such as the Standards for Inclusive Education.		Bhutan, Colleges of education, development partners

Programme component	No.	Recommendation	Priority	Suggested responsible agencies
	R10	Strengthen the capacity of local governments, in particular, Dzongkhag and Thromde Education Officers. Provide additional capacity development programmes for Education Officers on programme implementation to support them in their functions related to IE/SEN and to increase ownership in their respective Dzongkhags and Thromdes. Topics could include inclusive leadership, strategies for coaching and mentoring school leaders in inclusive education, monitoring and evaluation.	Immediate	MoE
	R11	Address gaps and challenges in facilitating the transition of children with disabilities to vocational, further education, and the workplace. Establish plans and strategies that will facilitate the successful transition of children with disabilities to vocational, tertiary, and the workplace. Work with pre-service institutions to develop inclusive strategies in supporting children with disabilities in tertiary education. A review of market trends and demands should inform the design and implementation of vocational training programmes to increase the chances of learners to find gainful employment or other livelihood opportunities.	Immediate to medium-term	MoE, MoLHR, pre-service institutions, TTIs, Draktsho vocational training centres, CSOs, OPDs, Royal University of Bhutan
	R12	Undertake an extensive review of the gaps and challenges in early identification and intervention. Based on this, draw up a strategic plan, involving education, health, and social welfare line ministries. Revisit the feasibility of introducing the programme in the ECCD centres in the immediate future and how access to ECCD for children with disabilities could be improved. Finalize the development of the multisectoral ECCD strategic action plan to improve services such as early identification, referral, and intervention of developmental delays and disabilities. Promote cross-sectoral collaboration between different ministries and agencies related to ECCD to ensure accountability of responsibilities. Enhance the capacity of ECCD service providers and facilitators in the screening of children and responding to their needs. Improve the understanding and knowledge of parents and	Immediate to medium-term	MoE, MoH

Programme component	No.	Recommendation	Priority	Suggested responsible agencies
		communities on functional disability to support early screening and referral.		
Demand creation	R13	Strengthen advocacy and awareness-raising among education stakeholders. Understanding of disability-inclusive education needs to be strengthened across all levels of the education system including the school communities. Build on the findings from the 2017 Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice (KAP) study on children with disabilities and strategically address misconceptions and negative attitudes towards inclusive education. Advocacy initiatives must also aim to eliminate the use of outdated terminology such as 'special needs' and 'special education' and promote inclusive language.	Immediate to medium-term	MoE, DEOs, CSOs, OPD, development partners
	R14	Increase engagement of parents and the school community. Strengthen the capacity of parents in supporting the educational needs of children with disabilities. Involve parents and the wider community in the school's planning and review process. Consult with parents in planning lessons, supporting children in the classroom, and monitoring learning. Strengthen links with and the capacity of community and parents in supporting inclusive education through capacity building programmes for parents of children with and without disabilities on the right to education of their children.	Immediate	MoE, school leaders, teachers, DEOs, School Management Board
Cross-cutting themes	R15	Undertake a more in-depth gender analysis of the IE/SEN programme. Further research is recommended to identify and examine the differences in the needs, constraints, and opportunities between girls and boys with disabilities in the programme implementation. Plan and implement strategies to address the gender disparity in access to education. Conduct studies on the learning outcomes of children with disabilities and ensure sex-disaggregated and disability-disaggregated data are collected.	Immediate to medium term	MoE, NCWC, DPO, CSOs
	R16	Promote positive discipline and prohibit physical and non-physical forms of punishment in schools. Improve the understanding and knowledge of relevant education stakeholders, particularly at the school level, on the fundamental rights of children against violence, including corporal punishment.	Immediate to medium term	MoE, NCWC, CSOs

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