



Aspiring happiness for every child in Bhutan



“A nation can only think of a bright future when she has invested wisely in her children”

Bhutan's unique development philosophy...

Bhutan is a small, landlocked, mountainous and mystical country, best known for the globally commended development concept of Gross National Happiness conceived in the 1970s; a unique development philosophy that balances material growth with inclusiveness, sustainability and good governance. The recent global Sustainable Development Goals have been the core of Bhutan's development approach for 40 years.

...and strong investment in its children...

The Government stresses that “a nation's future will mirror the quality of her youth – a nation cannot fool herself into thinking of a bright future when she has not invested wisely in her children”. It therefore invests heavily in the social sectors. Of the total budget around 10% goes to health and twice that much in education.

...have led to admirable progress in children's well-being.

Bhutan has made inspiring progress in these areas during the last 30 years. It is one of few countries globally that reached most of the MDGs, with only HIV prevalence (very low but on the rise), sanitation (good progress, but not enough) and gender (very low political representation of women) not achieved.

However, Bhutan is still a Least Developed Country...

Bhutan is now classified as a lower middle income country by the World Bank; however, this designation can be deceptive, as Bhutan is still on the United Nations list of 48 Least Developed Countries and ranks only 136th on the Human Development Index.

...with a number of outstanding issues...

While infant mortality has dropped, newborn death is still high. Two-thirds of all deaths occur in the first 28 days of birth. One-third of children under five are chronically malnourished and only one of ten toddlers attend early learning programmes. More than one-fourth of all children do not have proper sanitation facilities in their schools. This increases to 40% in monastic schools, where 7,000 child monks and nuns live in poor conditions. With high enrolment rates, quality of education requires attention as well as getting the last group in school. Amongst them are many of the 21% of children aged 2-9 years who live with a disability. Of all women, 31% are married before the age of 18 and two-thirds of them accept domestic violence.

...that require focus on reducing disparities with quality service.

Moreover, positive trends in national averages mask great disparities in social service coverage, originating from the fact that 70% of the people live spread out in difficult to access rural areas, where poverty rates are also higher than average. These remote areas require innovative interventions and flexible solutions. However, universal coverage is not enough. The quality and institutionalization of social services is critical for true sustainable development with equity. This is where Bhutan still has work to do.

With UNICEF as a lead development partner...

That is why UNICEF's work in Bhutan focusses on the most vulnerable children who are most in need of protection and social services, such as children with disabilities, girls who are victims of violence, child monks and nuns, and poor children who are more likely to be malnourished and less likely to enjoy pre-primary education. UNICEF has had great value added in all social sectors since its very start in 1974. Working closely with Government, civil society organizations and partners, UNICEF is a highly trusted and lead development partner in children's issues respected for its technical experience and expertise. As a result, it holds a key and critical position in influencing policy and decision making.

...and the catalytic difference made by donors...

You can be part of closing the existing disparities while enhancing quality, bringing the well-being of all children to a higher level. Your contribution will genuinely add to other investments made. When disparities are tackled, quality of services improved and outstanding issues addressed, Bhutan will truly be a success story of social development. One of effective collaboration between a visionary Government and dedicated external development partners that made a real difference in the lives of children in Bhutan.

...we can achieve happiness for ALL children in Bhutan