This country profile on Bhutan was developed as part of the regional mapping study on disability-inclusive education commissioned by the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia. It aims to provide a snapshot of the key policies, practices and strategies implemented from 2010 to 2020 to ensure children with disabilities learn in inclusive settings in Bhutan. This profile focuses on the country’s progress in four domains of an inclusive education system: (1) Enabling Environment, (2) Demand, (3) Service Delivery, and (4) Monitoring and Measuring Quality. Cross-cutting issues such as gender and humanitarian situations are also addressed in this document, although not in great depth. More information on the methodology and theoretical framework underpinning the mapping study can be found in the full report, *Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in South Asia*. 

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Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Bhutan
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Adapted Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AES</td>
<td>Annual Education Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMIS</td>
<td>Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSL</td>
<td>Bhutanese Sign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4D</td>
<td>Communication for Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCD</td>
<td>Care for Child Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFM</td>
<td>Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRPD</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>civil society organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECCD</td>
<td>early childhood care and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECR</td>
<td>Extended Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMIS</td>
<td>Education Management Information System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GC4</td>
<td>General Comment No. 4 [Article 24, CRPD]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>gross domestic product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>information and communication technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCH</td>
<td>mother and child health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEAF</td>
<td>National Education Assessment Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-governmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPD</td>
<td>Organization of Persons with Disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Prioritized Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHCB</td>
<td>Population Housing Census of Bhutan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RGoB</td>
<td>Royal Government of Bhutan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLM</td>
<td>teaching and learning materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDL</td>
<td>Universal Design for Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF ROSA</td>
<td>UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WG</td>
<td>Washington Group on Disability Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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</table>
Inclusion is anchored on the fundamental human right to education for all promulgated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
Inclusion is anchored on the fundamental human right to education for all promulgated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.\(^1\) The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), specifically Article 24, strengthened the global shift towards inclusion by mandating States parties to improve education systems and undertake measures to fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities to quality inclusive education.\(^2\)

Despite overall progress in education attainment globally, children with disabilities remain one of the most marginalized groups. They are less likely to participate in and complete their education compared to their peers without disabilities.\(^3\)

In South Asia, an estimated 29 million children – 12.5 million at primary level and 16.5 million at lower secondary level – were out of school in 2018.\(^4\) Of these, a considerable proportion was estimated to be children with disabilities. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it is not possible to generate statistics that are regionally or globally representative of the status of persons with disabilities with regard to education because of the scarcity of national data.\(^5\) This is true for the South Asia region as well.

The lack of disaggregated education data poses a significant challenge for policy and programme development and implementation. In this regard, the United Nations Children’s Fund Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF ROSA) commissioned a study to:

- map inclusive education policies, strategies and practices implemented at all levels of the education system in the South Asia region that are effective, or promise to be effective, in increasing access and/or learning outcomes of children with disabilities in education and have the potential for scaling up; and
- inform the development and strengthening of regional and country-level advocacy and programming for advancing disability-inclusive education across South Asia.

---

The mapping covered interventions towards establishing disability-inclusive education initiated at all levels of the education system in eight countries in the region: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

A theoretical framework was developed to guide the mapping exercise. The framework conceptualized inclusive education through four main domains: (1) Enabling Environment, (2) Demand, (3) Service Delivery, and (4) Measuring and Monitoring Quality. Cross-cutting issues, albeit brief, were included in the review to provide an overview of the intersectionality between disability and gender, and disability and humanitarian issues.

This country profile on Bhutan was developed as part of this regional mapping study on disability-inclusive education. It aims to provide a snapshot of the key policies, practices and strategies implemented from 2010 to 2020 to ensure children with disabilities learn in inclusive settings in Bhutan. More information on the methodology and theoretical framework underpinning the mapping survey can be found in the full report, *Mapping of Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in South Asia.*

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Key reforms have been put in place to support Bhutan’s vision of an inclusive education system that enables full participation and supports every child to meet their potential within the Gross National Happiness paradigm.
For centuries, Bhutan’s primary form of education was monastic education that was tightly woven into the tapestry of the Buddhist faith. With the introduction of modern education in the 1960s, the education system was envisioned to “produce citizens with skills and abilities that are an ideal blend of modern and traditional values reflecting the unique Bhutanese identity”.

To this end, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan has mandated the state to commit to the improvement of knowledge, values and skills of its population through the provision of free primary education for all children, availability of technical and professional education and accessibility of higher education for all.

Participation of children with disabilities in education remains a significant challenge owing to the limited number of schools and available facilities to cater to them and the limited capacity of educators to effectively teach in inclusive settings.

Despite these challenges, Bhutan has made substantial achievements in establishing systemic and institutional changes that enable equitable and inclusive education. Over the years, key reforms have been put in place to support its vision of “an inclusive education system that enables full participation and supports every child to meet their potential” within the Gross National Happiness paradigm.

---

8 Ibid.
Milestones in disability-inclusive education

1973
Established first special school for children with visual impairment (Muenselling Institute).

1990
Ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

1999
Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness affirmed education as an inalienable right for all.

2000
Special Educational Needs unit established in Ministry of Education; child-friendly school practices emerging in schools.

2002
Piloted an integrated school at Changangka Lower Secondary School.

2003
Established school for learners with hearing impairments (now known as Wangsel Institute).

2010

2012
Adopted National Policy on Special Educational Needs.

2014
Adopted the Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014–2024.

2017
Established Standards for Inclusive Education. Initiated development of Bhutanese Sign Language.

2018
Put in place 10-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education. Developed Guidelines on Assessment, Examination, Promotion and Transition of Students with Disabilities in Bhutan.

2019

2020
Developed ‘Education in Emergency: Adapted Curriculum for Special and Inclusive Education’.
Ten-year strategic plans on disability and inclusive education aim to systematically address gaps in disability-inclusive education.
The enabling environment includes interrelated conditions that enable or facilitate the development of a disability-inclusive education system, including policies, disability data, plans, leadership, coordination, and financing.

### 3.1 POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Recent policy reforms are building momentum for disability-inclusive education.

The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) is committed to creating an inclusive education system for all children. Bhutan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and signed CRPD in 2010. Although the concept of inclusive education is relatively new\(^\text{10}\) and the government has yet to ratify CRPD and establish a national education law, significant strides in policy reforms have been made in recent years towards providing equitable learning opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities.

Although there is no explicit mention of disability, the 2008 Constitution ensures “free education for all children up to tenth grade” (Article 9), prohibits all forms of discrimination “on the grounds of race, sex, language, religion, politics or other status” (Articles 7.15 and 9.18).\(^\text{11}\) The “inalienable right to education of all Bhutanese” was reaffirmed in the Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness\(^\text{12}\) and the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2018–2023), which pledges that “no child is left behind irrespective of circumstances such as disabilities, remoteness and economic disadvantage.”\(^\text{13}\)

Disability inclusion in education is consistently reinforced in the main domestic policies on disability and education:

1. **The 2003 Education Sector Strategy: Realizing Vision 2020** promotes education for children with disabilities in their “local
Table 1. Main laws, policies and plans on disability and education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government’s action on international policies</th>
<th>Ratification</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic laws, policies and plans related to disability-inclusive education</th>
<th>Adoption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Policy on Special Educational Needs</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan Education Blueprint</td>
<td>2014–2024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards for Inclusive Education</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education in Bhutan</td>
<td>2018–2028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Education Policy</td>
<td>2019 (to be finalized)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Policy for Persons with Disabilities</td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Plan for the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities</td>
<td>2020 (to be finalized)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...school (...) alongside their non-disabled peers”.

(2) The National Policy on Special Educational Needs 2012 advocates the right of children with disabilities to education on an equal basis with others, from early childhood to vocational/technical and tertiary education without any form of discrimination. It demands the "mainstreaming or integration of children with mild to moderate disabilities in regular schools with appropriate facilities and support services”.

(3) The Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014–2024 considers inclusion, equity and access to education as integral to quality education. It includes strategies for identifying and integrating students with mild to moderate disabilities into mainstream schools and increasing the number of Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools to accommodate more children with special needs.

(4) The Standards for Inclusive Education 2017 is a significant step in operationalizing the inclusion agenda, especially at the school level. The standards recognize inclusive education as encompassing all learners and define it as a “process valuing, accepting and supporting diversity in schools and ensuring that every child has equal opportunity to learn” (see Table 2).

Designed after the Index for Inclusion, the standards adopted a self-reflective and whole school approach to analysing...
policies, cultures and practices, and identifying barriers to access, participation and achievement in education to create inclusive schools. Although initially intended for schools with SEN programmes, the standards can be used in all schools in Bhutan.

(5) The Ministry of Education (MoE) is implementing the Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education in Bhutan 2018–2028, a comprehensive strategic plan aimed at improving access to and quality of education and addressing necessary system reforms to support all learners with disabilities in reaching their full potential.¹⁹

(6) The Guidelines on Assessment, Examination, Promotion and Transition for Children with Disabilities 2018 provide strategies for improved inclusive pedagogy and learner-centred assessment in the classroom.²⁰

(7) The Draft National Education Policy 2019 commits the government to provide free quality and inclusive basic education (policy statement 7.1) and institute measures to facilitate equitable access and participation in school for all children, including those with disabilities. This includes “specialized support, appropriate educational services and facilities, including trained personnel” (policy statement 7.13).²¹

(8) Disability is defined based on the social model of disability in the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2019 (see Table 2). The policy is anchored on five main principles: non-discrimination, inclusiveness, disability mainstreaming in all aspects of development, participation and gross national happiness. It reinforces the country’s promise to provide education for all including children with disabilities and seeks to eliminate environmental, attitudinal and institutional barriers to education.

The policy has adequate provisions to enable accessibility of infrastructure and the learning environment; reasonable accommodations to increase access to all levels of education from early childhood to vocational and tertiary education through inclusive admission policies; strengthen early identification and intervention; and adapt curriculum, learning approaches, assessment and examinations.²²

It is operationalized by a detailed multisectoral action plan (Action Plan for National Disability Policy),²³ outlining specific action steps to address gaps in various intervention areas specified in the policy. These include education, health, protection, data collection and awareness-raising, among others.²⁴

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²³ The action plan was in the finalization stage at the time this report was prepared.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terminology</th>
<th>Definition based on national laws and policies</th>
<th>International definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Disability                  | ‘Persons with Disabilities’ include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society. The definition will also be based on the World Health Organization (WHO), which describes disabilities broadly covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual's involvement in life situations.  
  – National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2019, p.4 | “Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”  
| Inclusive education         | The process of valuing, accepting and supporting diversity in schools and ensuring that every child has equal opportunity to learn.  
  – Standards for Inclusive Education 2017                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | “Inclusive education is the result of a process of continuing and proactive commitment to eliminate barriers impeding the right to education, together with changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate and effectively include all students.”  
  – General Comment No. 4 (2016) to Article 24, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities                                                                                   |
| Special educational needs   | Special educational needs refer to learners who need additional supportive services due to the difficulty in performing any activities compared to their peers, because of the barrier that prevents or hinders them from making use of education facilities, and/or because they are gifted.  
  – National Policy on Special Educational Needs 2012                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | “Broad group of persons for whom schools need to adapt their curriculum, teaching method and organization, in addition to providing additional human or material resources to stimulate efficient and effective learning.”  
  – UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data for the Sustainable Development Goals Glossary                                                                                                                                  |
3.2 DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE SECTOR PLAN

The Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014–2024 addresses education for children with disabilities, although the emphasis is on expanding special education. Although inclusive education is not expressly defined in the Blueprint, establishing an inclusive and equitable education system is the overall aspiration of the sector plan. It addresses the inclusion of children with disabilities under the SEN programme. Currently, there are 22 schools (including two private institutes) providing learning opportunities for more than 800 children with disabilities in the country. (See also section 5.1 Approaches to educating children with disabilities)

The Blueprint was developed based on a thorough review of the education sector. It articulates the gaps in the provision of learning opportunities for children with disabilities and identifies interventions in response. Priority interventions give particular focus on integrating children with mild to moderate disabilities in mainstream schools with SEN programmes and opening new special schools.

The Blueprint also aims to equip SEN schools with accessible facilities, learning materials and equipment, strengthen teacher capacity and increase engagement with parents and the community to facilitate the provision of appropriate support services. These initiatives are outlined in a progressive implementation approach following a three-phase plan of action.25

The Blueprint could be strengthened by shifting the focus from expanding special education to augmenting support afforded general schools to accommodate diverse learners, which has been made more apparent in the Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education.

Ten-year strategic plans on disability and inclusive education aim to systematically address gaps in disability-inclusive education.

The Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education 2018–2028 is a dedicated action plan that sets out the long-term direction for inclusive and special education in Bhutan. Consisting of 30 broad goals, the roadmap is designed to address multiple dimensions affecting access to, quality and efficiency of disability-inclusive education programmes.

Similarly, the Action Plan for the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities is in its final stage of development and anticipated to be implemented beginning 2021. The steering committees for both action plans should ensure that initiatives complement each other, are not duplicated and are well-coordinated to maximize limited resources and increase effectiveness.

Response to the COVID-19 pandemic includes measures for learning continuity for children with disabilities.

The guideline released by MoE, the Royal Education Council and Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment, ‘Education in Emergency: Adapted Curriculum for Special and Inclusive Education’, includes a programme for reaching children with disabilities during school closures during the pandemic. (See also section 7.2 Humanitarian issues). It outlines curriculum adaptations and alternative modes of education delivery to mitigate learning loss.26 (See also section 5.4 Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment).

3.3 DATA ON CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

National disability data collection initiatives have adopted the Washington Group Short Set of Questions.

Bhutan is well advanced in aligning methodologies for disability identification and

---

data collection with internationally accepted tools and standards. First in the world, Bhutan conducted a two-stage disability study following the Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey (BMIS) 2010. Results of the first stage of the survey indicated that 30 per cent of 11,370 children aged 2–9 years were living with a disability.

Through the Rapid Neurodevelopmental Assessment tool, the second stage survey revealed a lower disability prevalence of 21 per cent, wherein 19 per cent, 2 per cent and 1 per cent of children had mild, moderate and severe disabilities, respectively.27 Intended to validate BMIS, results from the second stage were considered more reliable.

More recently, the Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability was integrated into the Population and Housing Census of Bhutan (PHCB) 2017, the first census in the country to have done so. PHCB reported a disability prevalence rate of 2.1 per cent, corresponding to 15,567 persons. Results are significantly lower than global estimates, which indicate that about 15 per cent of a population live with a disability.28

However, the country is moving in the right direction in confronting the lack of reliable and comparable data on children with disabilities. The National Statistics Bureau has integrated the Washington Group Questions (Short Set) in all censuses and surveys to be conducted in the future. Disability data collection, analysis and reporting of the bureau were aligned with the monitoring requirements of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Table 3. Main sources of data on children with disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method/data type</th>
<th>Data collection activity/system</th>
<th>Responsible agency</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Latest report available</th>
<th>Includes data on children with disabilities</th>
<th>Adopted WG Questions/CFM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative data</td>
<td>Education Information Management System</td>
<td>Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Education</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Annual Education Statistics 2020</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census</td>
<td>Population Housing Census of Bhutan</td>
<td>National Statistics Bureau</td>
<td>No information availableb</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey</td>
<td>National Statistics Bureau; UNICEF</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CFM: WG/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning; WG: Washington Group on Disability Statistics

* A module based on the Washington Group of Questions was integrated in the Education Management Information System in 2018, but its use is not apparent in the Annual Education Statistics 2020.

b The first census was conducted in 2005.

27 Dorji, R., Disability and Inclusion in Bhutan in the Context of Education: Recent initiatives and development, Samtse College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan, 2019.

28 World Report on Disability.
A new module on special educational needs is integrated into the Education Management Information System (EMIS).

With support from development partners, MoE developed a special educational needs module based on the Washington Group of Questions to enable more accurate monitoring and evaluation of disability-inclusive education. The module was integrated into EMIS in 2018 and is expected to function beyond collecting data on enrolment to provide information on students’ learning outcomes, transition, access to infrastructure and facilities, support services from professionals, parents and the community. The extent to which this has been realized needs further review.

The Annual Education Statistics (AES) 2018, 2019, and 2020 reports only include enrolment data on children with disabilities, without any disaggregation. AES 2020 confirm an increase (from 797 in 2019 to 997 in 2020) on the number of children with disabilities able to participate in schools with SEN programmes and the special

Table 4. Disability data in the Education Management Information System (EMIS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria*</th>
<th>Included in EMIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contains data on students with disabilities</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach to identifying disability</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Washington Group set of questions to identify disability</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified only by ‘disability’ or ‘special needs’</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of data collection</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
<td>No information available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>No information available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>No information available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data collected</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation (enrolment, dropout, completion)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of disability/functional difficulty</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of disability/functional difficulty</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to education at the school level</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with disabilities who are not in school</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disaggregation available</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By definition of disability/functional difficulty</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of institution (government/private)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


institutes.\textsuperscript{31} (See also section 5.1 Approaches to educating children with disabilities)

There is very little known about the quality of education children with disabilities receive in schools with SEN programmes and special institutes and the barriers they face. The National Education Assessment Framework (NEAF) 2020 was recently launched by the Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment.

The document provides a set of guidelines for assessing learning outcomes, outlining accommodations in assessment processes for children with disabilities. (See also section 5.4 Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment). NEAF is expected to be implemented in March 2021 and is anticipated to generate information on learning progress.

### 3.4 FUNDING AND FINANCING

Policies aim to increase investments in disability-inclusive education.

Historically, the education sector has been receiving the highest national budget\textsuperscript{32} despite the downward trend in education spending as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) and percentage of total government expenditure in previous years, as reported in the Education Blueprint 2014–2024.

In 2002–2007, the budget for education was largely dependent on support from development partners. In the same strategic plan, however, the government pledged to develop funding mechanisms to mobilize resources, increase expenditure to meet the

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\textsuperscript{32} Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014–2024, p. 16.
international benchmark in education spending (4.1 per cent of GDP and/or 15–20 per cent of government expenditure), promote cost-sharing with the private sector and improve delivery mechanisms to address financial constraints. In 2018, monitoring data on the SDGs revealed Bhutan’s spending on education exceeded recommended allocations: 6.6 per cent of GDP and 22.8 per cent of total government expenditure (see Figure 1).

Policies create a supportive environment for increasing investments in inclusive education:

(1) The National Policy on Special Needs Education 2012 ensures adequate budget support for schools and institutions catering to children with special educational needs.

(2) The Education Blueprint 2014–2024 seeks to increase funding for children with disabilities. Although referred to as ‘special education’, a separate budget line is dedicated to the education of children with disabilities, projected to increase by 5.3 per cent annually, as per the GDP annual growth rate.

(3) The Standards for Inclusive Education 2017 require schools to put in place a policy on planning and budgeting for inclusion that addresses the individual needs of students.

Addressing issues of equity through formula-based funding.

Formula-based funding was identified as a strategy to address issues of equity. The MoE Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and SEN Division will develop a guideline for funding inclusive and special education services in a Dzongkhag (district) and Thromde (urban municipality), based on the number of schools, average distance between schools and number of children with disabilities. Funding for schools on the other hand will be computed based on child count, severity of disabilities and educational needs. Application processes and systems for accessing the funding will also be developed. The status of implementation and effectiveness of the funding scheme is yet to be established.

3.5 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The Standards for Inclusive Education 2017 provide a framework for school leaders to implement disability-inclusive education in schools.

The standards have the potential to foster inclusive leadership at the school level as they support a reflective process for planning and action towards more inclusive school systems. They are presented as a set of guidelines and inclusive indicators are presented in a progression, providing school leaders with a framework to engage in a continuous process of development towards inclusion.

The Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers can guide instructional leadership efforts.

The Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers were developed for the first time in 2017. Launched in 2019, the standards define teacher quality across career stages (beginning, proficient, accomplished and distinguished). The standards serve as a framework for school leaders to guide and strengthen professional development efforts at the school level.

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34 Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014–2024.
36 Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education, p.10.
Table 5. Government units responsible for disability-inclusive education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Government unit/organization and responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Disability (across sectors) | Gross National Happiness Commission  
- Leads the development of the policy for persons with disabilities.  
- Coordinates all disability-related policies, plans and programmes until a dedicated agency for such roles can be established.  
- Coordinates the formulation and implementation of an action plan to fulfil the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities. |
| | Key civil society organizations supporting the government in disability inclusion:  
- Ability Bhutan Society  
- Disabled Persons’ Organization of Bhutan (formerly known as Disabled Persons’ Association of Bhutan)  
- Dratsho  
- Phensem |
| Education | Early Childhood Care and Development and Special Education Needs Division, Department of School Education, Ministry of Education  
Ensures that special education services are provided to children with disabilities. |
| Monastic institutions | A small percentage (2 per cent) of children in monastic schools and nunneries had disabilities. |
| Bhutan Council for Examinations and Assessment | Responsible for learning assessment through various types of national assessments and public examinations at different key stages of student learning.  
- Leads the development of the National Education Assessment Framework that sets out a disability-inclusive approach to learning assessments by making appropriate accommodations and adaptations in assessment tools and procedures. |
| Teacher Professional Support Division | Responsible for the professional development of teachers through policymaking, oversight and coordination of professional development programmes for teachers and school leaders, and monitoring and evaluation of professional development programmes.  
- Responsible for the quality assurance of in-service professional development programmes, ensuring teachers have equitable access to continuous professional development programmes.  
- Coordinates professional development programmes from national to school level. |
<p>| Dzongkhag Education Office / Thromde Education Office | Coordinates programmes at the Dzongkhag and Thromde level. |
| Colleges of Education | Pre-service teacher training institutes under the Royal University of Bhutan. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Government unit/organization and responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Royal Education Council**| • Reviews, innovates and develops relevant curriculum and teaching and learning materials for school education.  
• Develops and provides teacher professional development programmes for efficient implementation of the school curriculum.
• Innovates and strengthens educational technology to support design and delivery of curriculum, professional development and educational research.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| **Health**                 | **Ministry of Health**  
• Ensures health coverage and services are available for persons with disabilities.  
• Ensures children with disabilities access the health care support they need through early identification and intervention and community-based rehabilitation.  
• Ensures access to assistive technologies (e.g., audiology, physiotherapy, prosthetics and orthotic services are provided at three referral hospitals and some district-level hospitals under the ministry).                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| **Child protection**       | **National Commission for Women and Children**  
Implements training and awareness-raising activities on the rights of persons with disabilities and social protection.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

The increasing enrolment of children with disabilities in educational institutions that offer inclusive education can be attributed to the growing awareness of their right to education through continuous advocacy activities on inclusion.
4 DEMAND

This domain focuses on initiatives supporting children with disabilities and their families to improve knowledge on their rights, demand for inclusive services, encourage changes in attitudes and behaviour, and increase participation in education. It includes involving the wider community, forging partnerships and putting in place systems and structures to facilitate meaningful engagement.

4.1 FAMILY, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Policies and plans facilitate the participation of and collaboration among education stakeholders.

Current policies and plans create a policy environment facilitative of children with disabilities, family and community participation.

- The Education Blueprint 2014–2024 encourages collaboration with parents and the general public in bringing the requisite support that children with disabilities need to live a full life.
- The Standards for Inclusive Education 2017 present an iterative process for working towards inclusion in schools involving the active participation of students and the community. The reflection component emphasizes the role of schools and key stakeholders – leaders, staff, students and community – in reflecting on and examining current practices. The planning component also requires the input and participation of the whole school community in creating development plans that are responsive to learners’ diverse needs. The inclusive culture component includes an indicator on the active participation of students, family members, community and education staff.
- More recently, the draft National Education Policy 2019 requires the Zhung Dratshang (Central Monastic Body), MoE and other relevant government agencies to work together in facilitating enhanced inclusive education. It mandates all teacher education institutions/schools/ECCD centres/non-formal
education centres/lobdras (monastic schools) and shedras (monastic colleges) to engage the whole school community in education policy development, consultation and feedback, decision-making and implementation and governance to help strengthen the delivery of educational services. ECCD centres/schools are also expected to engage the community through their management board, meetings with parents’ associations, awareness programmes, alumni associations and community services.

**Partnerships are key in driving disability-inclusive education forward.**

In 2010, the Disabled People’s Organization of Bhutan, formerly called Disabled Persons’ Association of Bhutan, was established to help fill the government’s gaps in providing disability-related services to children and youth with disabilities. Prominent civil society organizations (CSOs) working with persons with disabilities include the Draktsho Vocational Training Centre (Draktsho), Ability Bhutan Society and Phensem. While these organizations are based in Thimphu, their programmes benefit children and youth with disabilities and their families from various parts of the country.

UNICEF actively collaborates with various CSOs and ministries in making education more accessible to all children. UNICEF partnered with MoE and local organizations in the development and rehabilitation of various community-based ECCD centres around Bhutan. Particular focus was given to supporting those in hard-to-reach rural areas.

Around 400 monastic schools and 28 nunneries across the country are continuously supported by UNICEF through its partnership with the Central Monastic Body. The main focus of this collaboration is the conversion of monastic schools into child-friendly centres suitable for whole-child learning and development. The United Nations Partnership for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mobilized resources for its work in strengthening the policy environment for persons with disabilities in Bhutan.

The Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education 2018–2028 includes an action point on creating a cross-sectoral ‘inclusive and special education coordination committee’ with the ECCD and SEN Division of the Department of School Education as the organizing agency. The committee includes senior-level officials from MoE and other relevant ministries, representatives from the Disabled People’s Organization of Bhutan and CSOs working with children with disabilities and their families, Bhutanese Sign Language (BSL) interpreters and persons with disabilities. This step provides an opportunity for meaningful participation of relevant organizations, children with disabilities and their families in high-level planning and decision-making.

### 4.2 AWARENESS, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

A growing knowledge base of disability informs communication strategies to change attitudes and behaviour.

A few studies have been conducted to gather evidence on prevailing attitudes towards children with disabilities, knowledge on disability, rights and services, and existing practices related to disability. UNICEF commissioned a knowledge, attitudes and practices study in 2017 in partnership with the UK University of Northampton. Key findings of the study were:

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Knowledge

- There is limited knowledge on disability among parents and children. They rely on professionals who are deemed knowledgeable and are responsible for the development and implementation of disability-related policies and programmes. Knowledge on causes and impact of disabilities are associated with physical disabilities, suggesting a largely medical view of disability.

- There is a lack of knowledge and awareness on the needs of children with disabilities among general professional groups providing disability-related services (education, health, child care). The lack of awareness stems from the lack of access to and provision of ‘credible, authoritative and audience-friendly information’.

Attitudes

- Younger and ‘highly educated’ respondents tend to have more positive attitudes towards children with disabilities and their families.

- Children with disabilities are becoming more visible in school as the public gradually shifts to a more positive attitude towards disability and inclusion.

- Non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives regard negative attitudes towards disability as well as environmental factors as significant factors to labelling and exclusion of children with disabilities in school and the community.

Practices

- Segregation of children with disabilities persists, integration is rare and inclusion is more of an exception rather than the rule.

However, enabling policies are in place and suggest a government with a strong commitment to inclusion.

Similar qualitative research was conducted in 2018 that involved teachers and other professionals who were experienced in working with children with disabilities or in the field of inclusion and disability. The study reported the following findings:

- Disability was previously determined by a person’s ability to carry out physical and domestic work. As such, a mild learning disability was not seen as a disability and was more accepted by the community. People who were not able to carry out physical work due to ‘severe intellectual and developmental disabilities’ were often marginalized in their community.

- Most participants considered disability as either a genetic or medical condition, or a result of an accident or karma. Not all of the participants were aware of inclusion as a human right.

- The medical view of disability was prevalent among the general population.

These findings contributed to an evidence base that informed UNICEF’s equity-focused communication strategy, addressing issues on early childhood care and education, girls’ education, inclusion of children with disabilities in education and accessibility of social services.

Initiatives to raise awareness of children with disabilities are present.

The National Policy on Special Educational Needs 2012 includes a medium-term strategy on undertaking advocacy campaigns on ‘Special

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45 Prior to modernization and introduction of principles of inclusion and rights-based education.

Education Needs’ to raise awareness and gather support from citizens.\footnote{Ministry of Education, National Policy on Special Educational Needs, Thimphu, 2012.} UNICEF supported MoE in developing a Communication for Development (C4D) strategy and action plan to address gaps in knowledge and negative social norms surrounding disability.\footnote{Country Office Annual Report 2019.} The cross-sectoral C4D strategy focuses on children’s rights with an emphasis on child protection and well-being.\footnote{UNICEF Annual Report 2017.}

UNICEF partnered with the Bhutan Centre For Media and Democracy to build the capacity of a young group of diverse people on policy review and focus group facilitation to contribute to policy revisions. The group composed of representatives from the “rural areas, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning (LGBTIQ) community, special needs, out-of-school youth and those in conflict with the law”.\footnote{Country Office Annual Report 2019.}

Among UNICEF’s initiatives on raising awareness and advocating for the rights of children with disabilities is its continued support for the annual International Day for Persons with Disabilities.\footnote{Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices.} To complement this, UNICEF conducted a regional seminar on inclusive education to help enhance awareness amongst key stakeholders to work towards a more responsive education system in Bhutan.\footnote{Ibid.}

The increasing enrolment of children with disabilities in the Wangsel Institute and Changangkha Middle Secondary School, which offer inclusive education, can be attributed to the growing awareness of the right to education of children with disabilities\footnote{Ibid.} through continuous advocacy activities on inclusion.

Expanding awareness on disability-related services, early identification, intervention and education of children with disabilities are among the goals articulated in the Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education 2018–2028. It further outlines actions points to achieve this, including targeted awareness and advocacy of disability and child rights, systematic information dissemination on inclusive and special education services, family education and building a support network of CSOs and OPDs.

As the country gradually shifts its attitudes and practices towards children with disabilities, clear and strong advocacy on the inclusion of all kinds of learners in education and a strong government commitment to move from specialized provisions can bring the country further towards a more equitable and inclusive education system.
Civil society organizations and development partners create a strong family support network and help empower parents/caregivers of children with disabilities.
This domain deals with the availability of and access to various services for children with disabilities and initiatives to strengthen different aspects of the education system.

5.1 APPROACHES TO EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

While placement in SEN programmes is still conditional on the degree of disability, MoE is supporting all schools towards becoming inclusive learning environments.

At present, the country provides a SEN programme within a regular classroom, education in specialized institutes, monastic education and vocational training for children and youth with disabilities (see Table 6). The mainstreaming of children with disabilities in regular schools, as mandated by policies, is implemented through the SEN programme. In 2020, a total of 997 children were enrolled in schools offering SEN programmes, including the two institutes.

The SEN programme is intended for students with special educational needs who require additional support services, such as specially trained teachers, specialized teaching strategy, equipment and care. The government continues to provide technical and financial support to general schools with SEN programmes with the help of CSOs and other development partners.

The Bhutan Youth Development Fund supported selected schools, like Changangkha Lower Secondary School, Drugyel Lower Secondary School and NID Khaling, in mainstreaming children with disabilities into these regular schools. It worked with the Non-Formal Education Division to revise their curriculum and consider the needs of children with learning difficulties to improve retention and completion rates.

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54 National Policy on Special Educational Needs 2012.
56 Dukpa and Kamenopoulou, ‘Conceptualisation of Inclusion and Disability in Bhutan’.
58 Standards for Inclusive Education 2017.
Table 6. Approaches to educating children with disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach to educating children with disabilities</th>
<th>Description and examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mainstreaming through Special Educational Needs (SEN) programme</strong></td>
<td>General schools are capacitated and supported to cater to children with mild to moderate disabilities. These schools are called general schools with SEN programmes. There are 24 general schools with SEN programmes in the country as of 2020.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Institutes** | Institutes cater to children with specific disabilities, such as visual and hearing impairments. There are 2 institutes in the country as of 2020:  
• Wangsel Institute, Drukgyel Central School, a school for the deaf with 134 students with disabilities.  
• Muenselling Institute, Jigme Sherubling Central School, a school for the blind and students with low vision with 39 students. |
| **Monastic institutions** | Monastic institutions are the oldest form of education in Bhutan. An assessment conducted in 2010 found that more than 2% of children in monastic institutions and nunneries had disabilities. As of 2020, there are 184 government monastic schools in the country. There are also private monastic schools, but data are unavailable. The Annual Education Statistics (AES) in 2018 noted that there was a total of 10,565 students (boys: 9,118; girls: 1,447) in combined government and private monastic schools. Data cited in AES 2020 show 7,390 novitiates in government monastic schools. |
| **Vocational training** | There are 2 vocational training centres managed by the NGO Draktsho with 256 youth with disabilities as of 2020. They provide basic education and vocational skills training to children and youth with special needs. |
| **Inclusive education** | Defined as a process of “valuing, accepting and supporting diversity in schools and ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to learn” (Standards for Inclusive Education, p.7). As such, there are no inclusive schools in Bhutan, but instead, all schools work towards inclusion in education. |

The country has two specialized institutes: Wangsel Institute, Drukgyel Central School, a school for the deaf, and Muenselling Institute, Jigme Sherubling Central School, a school for the blind and students with low vision. These institutes are being developed as resource centres for early intervention and support to children with visual/hearing impairments and their families, as well as a technical resource for schools with SEN programmes. The Wangsel Institute is already a resource on BSL as it houses the research and BSL interpretation teams.

Faithful to the promise of equal access to education, the long-term goal of the SEN programme is to provide children with disabilities access to general education in regular schools. While the government has outlined comprehensive strategies in supporting all schools towards inclusive systems, continued work on improving equity and inclusion in SEN programmes and institutes is needed. For instance, the institutes are to create a guideline to facilitate placement decisions on a child with hearing/visual impairment in either an institute, regular school or regular school with a SEN programme. Participation of children with disabilities and their families in this decision-making process must be ensured to facilitate the development of self-agency on the matter of their education.

Admission to schools with SEN programmes is still conditional on a child’s degree of disability and institutes only cater to children with specific disabilities. Efforts should be made to transform specialized provisions into fully inclusive settings where children with any kind of disability learn alongside their peers without disabilities while receiving appropriate support.

The capacity of monastic institutions to provide child-friendly and inclusive learning and living environments is being developed through the partnership of government and development partners.

Monastic education is the oldest form of education in the country and has been serving a significant number of children including those with disabilities. Data in 2018 record 10,565 children enrolled in both government and private monastic schools. AES 2020 records 7,390 students in government monastic schools, however, data are available only on boys.

A 2010 assessment study noted that more than 2 per cent of children in monastic schools had a disability. UNICEF Bhutan is among the few development partners that work with the Central Monastic Body in supporting the 400 monastic schools and 28 nunneries across the country. Its focus is capacitating monastic schools and nunneries to become child-friendly learning and living environments, especially for children with disabilities.

The Ten-Year Roadmap includes action points on building the capacity of monastic schools to provide appropriate support for children with disabilities. This includes data collection and sharing systems, teacher training, equitable and accessible education programmes, accessible teaching and learning materials, and partnerships with institutes and general schools with SEN programmes.

MoE is explicit in supporting disability inclusion in vocational education and training.

The NGO Draktsho founded two vocational training centres that cater to youth with

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60 Standards for Inclusive Education 2017.
61 Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education.
62 Dukpa and Kamenopoulou, ‘Conceptualisation of Inclusion and Disability in Bhutan’.
63 Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education.
64 Study on Enrolment & Retention Strategies in Bhutan.
65 Annual Education Statistics 2018.
disabilities. The Wangsel Institute also provides vocational education for youth with hearing impairments, while accessible vocational programmes are being developed in the Muenselling Institute with assistance from the Technical and Vocation Education and Training (TVET) Division of the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources.

MoE is explicit about disability inclusion in vocational training and has articulated steps towards improving accessibility in the TVET sector. This includes gathering data on disability in the TVET sector, research on accessible technologies, review of current practices, provision of appropriate tools and facilities, developing inclusive guidelines and training programmes, capacity building of instructors and establishing disability support services in TVET centres.

5.2 EDUCATION WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER TRAINING

Policies provide directives to build the capacity of teachers, principals, support staff and MoE on inclusive education.

Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education in Bhutan 2018–2028

- Provides for training for the Dzongkhag Education Offices and Thromde Education Offices to build the capacity of school principals and schools for inclusive education.
- Includes a plan for the development and implementation of a long-term strategy for capacity building for SEN teachers in the system and support staff.

Education Blueprint 2014–2024

- Indicates the need for training teachers on teaching children with disabilities.
- Provides recommendations for training teachers to teach diverse classes, improving training programmes on disability-inclusive education and building partnerships to deliver a strengthened response to the professional development needs of teachers.

Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers are designed to be built into teacher recruitment, remuneration and performance management systems.

The standards define teacher quality in Bhutan across career stages (beginning, proficient, accomplished and distinguished). Key features facilitative of building teacher capacity for disability-inclusive education include:

- Founded on Bhutanese values as well as the philosophies of child-centredness, inclusion and lifelong learning.
- Emphasis is given to responding to learner diversity. The standard for the diversity of learners sets clear guidelines on developing learning environments, demonstrating teaching strategies, understanding child development, and awareness of learning needs of learners coming from varied economic, ethnolinguistic, religious, gender and disability contexts.

Management structures to develop better teacher quality and provide teacher support are being established.

The National Teacher Council will be established as part of the Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014–2024 to respond to the need

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69 Annual Education Statistics 2018.
70 Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education.
71 Ibid.
72 Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers.
for continual professional development and support for teachers, better working conditions, improved instructional leadership and an incentive system for rewarding performance. The council will be mandated to develop and strengthen structures and policies that can improve teacher performance and provide better support to teachers.\textsuperscript{73}

\textbf{Education colleges offer pre-service and in-service programmes to build teacher capacity for disability-inclusive pedagogies.}

Samste College of Education offers an optional introductory module to inclusive education, which pre-service secondary teachers with a Bachelor of Education can enrol in. Both Samste and Paro Colleges of Education offer a compulsory module on teaching children with 'special needs' as part of the Bachelor of Education programme for both in-service and pre-service teachers.

MoE organizes professional development programmes on teaching children with disabilities, which are available for in-service teachers. However, the extent to which disability-inclusive education is incorporated into the training would need to be further researched.

\section*{5.3 SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE}

The draft National Education Policy 2019 calls for the accessibility and safety of standard physical facilities in schools that enhance learning, including for students with disabilities.

\textbf{Resolutions were made to improve facilities for effective curriculum implementation.}

At the National School Curriculum Conference in 2016, the gap in the availability of resources and basic facilities was discussed. It was identified that many schools lack the facilities and resources required for the effective implementation of the curriculum. The resolutions that were endorsed included:\textsuperscript{74}

1. Schools to upscale information technology facilities for exploratory teaching and learning.
2. Dzongkhag/Thromde/schools to create professional learning communities for sharing ideas, knowledge and best practices.
3. Adequate resources to be made available to schools to facilitate effective implementation of the curriculum.
4. Schools to ensure that adequate and appropriate teaching-learning resources (e.g., good libraries, laboratories, internet, textbooks, references) are in place.
5. Review, redesign and refurbish classroom furniture to suit the teaching-learning paradigm of transformative pedagogy.

The ICT [information and communication technology] Masterplan\textsuperscript{75} looks into improvements in technology as teaching and learning materials that will facilitate the learning of children with disabilities. Interventions such as the provision of digital texts and other varied digital resources, such as videos, flipbooks, presentations and animation, are presented as an alternative to print materials to provide a variety of ways to present information to diverse learners.

\textsuperscript{73} Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014–2024.
The masterplan also notes how ICT can improve the accessibility of learning resources for children with visual/hearing impairments through text-to-speech software, high contrast displays, font enlarging, among others.

A project on adapting content to convert into accessible formats for children with visual/hearing impairments was presented in the masterplan. It includes consultation with teachers from Muenselling and Wangsel Institutes, however, it does not mention the participation of children with hearing or visual impairments in the consultation process. Children with disabilities must be actively involved in all levels of programme development and implementation to ensure that interventions are responsive to their needs.

**Creating inclusive learning environments and infrastructure is mandated by policies.**

(1) Article 7 of the draft National Education Policy 2019 provides directives for schools:

a. Schools shall have standard physical facilities, including classrooms, libraries, counselling rooms, functioning water and sanitation facilities, sporting facilities and administrative facilities. Such facilities shall be accessible, safe, enhance effective teaching and learning, enhance the growth and development of students and consider age, gender, disability and climatic conditions.

b. Schools shall have an eco-friendly infrastructure with Bhutanese architectural designs.

c. Schools shall have inclusive disaster management and preparedness plan.

(2) The Standards for Inclusive Education 2017 state that schools must create the most accessible environment for every child, including access to the school from home, school infrastructure and classroom environment as well as consider the diverse safety and evacuation needs of all students.

(3) The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2019 has provided clear directions for supporting persons with disabilities, including provisions for accessible infrastructure.

a. RGoB shall progressively remove environmental and informational barriers to education through the provision of home to learning place accessibility, accessible infrastructure, accessible learning spaces and accessible safety and evacuation systems (Article 7.1.1).

b. RGoB shall develop strategies to make reasonable accommodation within existing educational infrastructure and incorporate universal designs in new educational infrastructure (Article 7.1.2).

(4) The Guidelines for Differently-Abled Friendly Construction was released by the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement. The guidelines serve as a reference document for construction firms, engineers, architects, urban planners and other infrastructure developers. It emphasizes the application of universal design principles in all public spaces and infrastructures to improve accessibility, especially for persons with disabilities. The document, meant as a reference, does not include incentives for compliance or sanctions for non-compliance. A policy document that outlines regulatory processes can further strengthen the implementation of construction accessible to persons with disabilities.

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Extended Classrooms (ECRs) were established to support the schooling of hard-to-reach children.

Schools in Bhutan are categorized on their access and geographical location as follows: difficult, very remote, remote, semi-remote, semi-urban and urban. Remote villages that are far from schools have ECRs that were initiated as an intervention to improve access to education, especially in remote, rural and scattered villages where students have to walk long distances to school.

ECRs are generally housed in temples, community learning centres, non-formal education centres, outreach clinics, village houses and temporary classrooms. ECRs are available in multigrade settings with a minimum of 20 children under the supervision of one or two teachers who have been trained in multigrade teaching. As of 2019, 74 ECRs are supported by the parent-school, which provides teachers and learning resources.

The government and UNICEF work towards creating child-friendly learning environments.

A study on violence experienced by children in Bhutan reported incidents in education settings, such as monastic schools. The practice of corporal punishment is generally accepted. Many organizations, such as UNICEF, work to raise awareness of children’s rights and protection, as well as alternative forms of discipline. The government has banned the use of corporal punishment and awareness programmes continue to promote children’s rights and child-friendly schools. UNICEF Bhutan worked with the Central Monastic Body to convert over 400 monastic schools and nunneries into child-friendly learning and living centres.

The draft National Education Policy 2019 ensures the provision of a safe and learner-friendly environment free from abuse, harassment and violence in all education facilities. Schools are mandated to review policies and develop procedures to minimize and prevent abuse, harassment and violence against students, especially those with disabilities. Policies and guidelines to be developed should emphasize preventing school-related gender-related violence, especially against girls with disabilities.

5.4 CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT

A review of the curriculum and assessment system was undertaken in a move to a more learner-centred curriculum.

An unprecedented nationwide curriculum review took place in 2016 with the sole purpose of rethinking the curriculum to make it more relevant to the national and global contexts. Among the issues tackled and discussed was the need for the curriculum to be diversified, differentiated and inclusive. Included in the recommendations were:

Curriculum

(1) Diversify the curriculum to provide greater subject choice for students as per their learning needs.

(2) Differentiated curriculum for specialized schools, such as a school for science, performing arts, humanities, to be developed as required.

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77 Parent-school is the term used for the nearest school (or main school) that supports ECRs, which are extensions of the parent-school.
79 UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, Violence against Children in Education Settings in South Asia, United Nations Children’s Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2016.
81 Ibid.
82 Dukpa and Royal Education Council, National School Curriculum Conference 2016 Report.
(3) Promote a culture of research-based teaching and learning in schools.

(4) Change the curriculum from content-based to process-based to enable teachers to teach how to learn than what to learn.

Assessment

(1) Review the existing assessment system (internal and external) in need/purpose, practice and relevance.

(2) Develop a uniform assessment guideline for all levels.

(3) Provide teacher professional development on formative assessment theory and practices.

Inclusive curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment approaches are set out in the Standards for Inclusive Education 2017.

The standards guide schools in reflection, planning and actions towards inclusion as a means to improve access and quality of education for all children with disabilities. The overall aspiration of the standards is to institutionalize learner-centred learning wherein curriculum and assessment help improve learning for all students and, when necessary, accommodations and modifications are made to eliminate barriers to student learning.

Curriculum modifications are encouraged, but should be planned into the lesson and reflected in the Individual Education Plan (IEP). Lesson planning and teaching approaches should take into account diverse learning styles, strengths and interests. Rote learning can be used when it is deemed the best method to achieve learning goals. Adaptation of learning materials and provision of assistive technology must be done when needed to overcome barriers. A participative approach is embedded in the standards, recognizing the value in collaborating with health services and families in all decision-making regarding children with disabilities.

Partnerships were built to develop the Inclusive Curriculum Framework 2018.

A three-day workshop facilitated by the Bhutan Foundation in partnership with Perkins International and the Royal Education Council was held to develop an inclusive curriculum framework for public schools, which aims to provide an appropriate curriculum that ensures inclusion of students with multiple disabilities and align it with the country’s national curriculum. Representatives from the Paro College of Education, ECCD and SEN schools and parent support group members participated in the event.

Curriculum adaptations were made for continued learning during emergencies, but multiple versions of the curriculum may risk exclusion of children with disabilities.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, an Adapted Curriculum (AC) for inclusive and special education was developed by the Royal

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Education Council to ensure the continuity of education even in emergencies. The curriculum is based on literacy, numeracy and identified themes per key stages and class levels. Emphasis is placed on learning essential concepts, achieving fundamental academic and social competencies, sustaining student learning through psychosocial support and providing appropriate learning materials.

AC is delivered through online platforms and self-instructional materials and covers around 35–40 per cent of the regular syllabus. Its flexibility gives children with disabilities better chances for continued learning even during school shutdown.

The Prioritized Curriculum (PC) on the other hand is a revision of the old curriculum and follows the same thematic approach of AC. PC is delivered face-to-face when children are allowed back in school, following health and safety protocols and covers around 65 per cent of the regular syllabus. While the coverage seems low, it tackles key content and essential learning outcomes for each grade level, shifting towards a more experiential and competency-based approach to learning. It was reported that the PC will be in use as the new normal curriculum when schools reopen.

The guidance document on AC and PC has a section on flexible assessment delivered online and face to face. It promotes the use of continuous formative assessment to record learning progress and improve teaching processes. Summative assessment will also be used for promotion to the next grade level.

Further curriculum adaptations for children in SEN programmes were discussed in the document. Children with mild to moderate disabilities who can follow the regular curriculum can use either AC or PC, while those with severe disabilities can use a specially adapted curriculum developed by the two institutes.

While there is good intention in providing a flexible and responsive curriculum for children with disabilities, especially in emergencies, developers and implementers must be careful not to run the risk of lowering standards and expectations of children with disabilities.

In the design and implementation of the adapted curriculum, children with disabilities must be regarded with the same high standards and expectations as their peers without disabilities and provided the necessary accommodations and support to achieve the same standard learning goals. This means that all learners including children with disabilities learn under a single competency-based curriculum, but delivered through flexible and learner-centred pedagogy so that a child with a disability is enabled to learn the same set of skills and knowledge as one without disability, albeit through different approaches.

**Bhutan puts a high value on inclusive approaches to learning assessment.**

The Guidelines on Assessment, Examination, Promotion and Transition for Students with Disabilities 2018 adopted the standards for curriculum and assessment articulated in the Standards for Inclusive Education 2017, stating that formative assessment is the

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85 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Education in Emergency: Adapted curriculum.
89 Drukpa, ‘Prioritized curriculum to be used as new normal curriculum henceforth’.
90 Education in Emergency: Adapted curriculum.
91 Ibid.
The initiative to replace the conventional way of assessing students in primary schools recognizes that classwork, participation in schools and other formative assessments will support children in developing cognitive, social, emotional, cultural and physical skills to the best of their abilities and prepare them for further learning.93

**Accommodations and alternative forms of assessment ensure the participation of children with disabilities in the assessment processes.**

NEAF 2020 was developed in parallel to the changing curriculum and, on a larger scale, the education system of Bhutan. Among the key features of NEAF is the inclusion of 21st-century competencies that shifts the focus away from rote learning and emphasizes inclusion of children with disabilities through a flexible and learner-centred assessment system.

The framework ensures that children from diverse backgrounds, including children with disabilities, can fully participate in the assessment process by receiving the right support through accessible and equitable tools and processes. While assessment criteria are standard for all learners, accommodations and flexible assessment shall be provided for children with disabilities. This will enable teachers to obtain data on student learning and make necessary improvements in the teaching process to address learning needs.

Some principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), such as flexibility and adaptation, are core features of the new curriculum and assessment processes. This can be further strengthened through building awareness and technical knowledge among education stakeholders on UDL strategies and ways to embed its features in curriculum, instruction and classroom assessments.

### 5.5 LEARNING MATERIALS

**Commitments to improve the quality and relevance of teaching and learning materials are evident in policies.**

As in any new curriculum, the availability of relevant teaching-learning materials is critical and essential. Discussions in the National School Curriculum Conference included the need for quality teaching and learning materials (TLMs) to support the new curriculum. These resolutions were endorsed to address the identified gaps in TLMs:94

1. Improve the quality of TLMs to suit the transformative pedagogy.
2. Integrate ICT as a tool for learning in all subjects and for all levels.
3. Create digital TLMs, such as graphics, audio, animations, videos and cartoons, to supplement the teaching-learning process

Policy statement 7.10 in the Draft National Education Policy 2019 states that ICT shall be promoted in schools through the provision of ICT-based resources to leverage its power in teaching and learning. This is similarly stated in the Bhutan Education Blueprint aiming to strengthen special education services with appropriate support services and facilities, including TLMs and assistive devices.

**Implementation of the iSherig-2 Education ICT Master Plan facilitates the use of ICT to create and curate accessible digital learning resources for secondary school students with special needs.**

In 2019, the iSherig-2 Education ICT Master Plan 2019–2023 was released with an expected outcome of using ICT for effective teaching and learning, among others. The Master Plan aims

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92 Standards for Inclusive Education 2017.
93 Guidelines on Assessment, Examination, Promotion and Transition for Students with Disabilities.
to provide learners with personalized and active learning experiences. Some of the projects that benefit students with special needs include:

(1) Project 2.1.1 Digital interactive textbooks: Digitization of traditional textbooks for select subjects.

(2) Project 2.1.2 Content adaptation for children with special needs: Curating accessible digital learning resources for secondary school students with visual and hearing impairments.

(3) Project 2.1.3 Digital educational resources for schools: Building a repository of curated digital resources for schools – videos, animations, presentations, flipbooks.

The continuing development of the Bhutanese Sign Language has facilitated learning opportunities for many children with hearing impairments.

The BSL Research and Documentation team was established under the Wangsel Institute, then called Deaf Education Unit. The team was tasked to record signs that are being used in teaching children with hearing impairments as well as those used in everyday living. They also developed resource materials for use in training teachers in the Wangsel Institute.

BSL is now being used by more than 100 learners with hearing impairments and teachers in Wangsel Institute across all levels from pre-primary to Grade 10. With the support of UNICEF Bhutan, an external sign language specialist provided international technical assistance on further BSL research and development.

The Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education 2018–2028 includes goals on strengthening the capacity of Wangsel Institute as a resource centre for deaf education and BSL development. At present, grammatical conventions are being added to BSL and a dictionary is underway. As efforts to mainstream BSL are ongoing through the help of development partners, more children with hearing impairments are expected to have better access to education.

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Table 7. Standards for inclusive teaching and learning materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum standards</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Excellence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students with physical, sensory, intellectual, social or language barriers have their teaching and learning materials changed or adapted as necessary to overcome barriers to learning.</td>
<td>Adapted teaching and learning material needs are recorded in Individual Education Plans where relevant. The use and quality are reviewed and monitored by the Special Educational Needs (SEN) team or leadership if there is no SEN programme.</td>
<td>Materials are changed or adapted as necessary to overcome barriers to learning. These changes and adaptations are planned, recorded and reviewed with the SEN team or leadership to ensure they are the most appropriate options. Support is provided to ensure access to learning. Additional planning time and budget are allocated to teachers and SEN team to ensure that the changes are of the highest quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are responsible for these adaptations for teaching and learning in their lessons, where possible, or are expected to coordinate with school leadership.</td>
<td>School leadership coordinates with the Ministry of Education to ensure appropriate materials are sought from the national level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
5.6 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Policies support the establishment of support services to enable disability-inclusive education

The National Policy on Special Educational Needs 2012 requires the collaboration of all stakeholders to provide equitable and responsive support to all children with special educational needs. Transportation, accommodation, nutrition and specialized support will be provided to every child to ensure participation in school.\(^99\)

RGoB mandates relevant ministries and agencies to work together to create policies that facilitate the full participation of persons with disabilities in the country’s socio-economic development. This requires access to education and training, livelihood opportunities, health care and social protection, information and transportation, among others.\(^100\) The policy also clearly stipulates that basic child care facilities, such as ECCD centres, are responsive and inclusive of the needs of all children including those with disabilities, giving them a better chance at a more productive future.\(^101\)

The Standards for Inclusive Education 2017 also assure support services for children with disabilities. Under the section on ‘Inclusive Practice’, schools are required to coordinate appropriate and well-planned external support for children with disabilities. This may include collaborative work with physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech therapists.

The National Health Policy 2011 aims to provide comprehensive and integrated maternal and child health (MCH) services.\(^102\) An integrated management of neonatal and childhood diseases in MCH programmes help monitor and provide early intervention to young children at risk of disabilities. Mothers and families are given support through free health care, training and a MCH handbook that provides information on childbirth, nutrition, caring for mother’s and baby’s health and welfare.\(^103\) The MCH handbook is linked to a tracking system that allows monitoring and follow-up, especially for babies who need additional medical support or those at risk of disabilities.

The Bhutan Every Newborn Action Plan outlines a comprehensive health support system packaged at different levels from the family, community, district hospital care to regional and national referral hospital.\(^104\) Developmental and newborn screenings help detect early signs of disabilities and provide early intervention. Counselling and support for children with disabilities and their families are among the support ensured by the action plan.

Development partners advocate for the Care for Child Development (CCD) programme and early learning.

MoE and the Ministry of Health (MoH) in partnership with Save the Children initiated the CCD pilot programme to capacitate parents and caregivers of children aged 3–5 years on early literacy, responsive care, nutrition, wellness and holistic development.\(^105\)

Parents and caregivers participated in a workshop conducted by health assistants and village health workers. The non-centre-based ECCD programme proved to be an effective alternative in providing early care and stimulation to children in hard-to-reach areas and low-income communities with

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\(^{100}\) Ibid.
\(^{101}\) Ibid.
\(^{103}\) Ibid.
Table 8. Support services for students, parents and teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support service</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability/child functioning screening, multidisciplinary assessment services, including children with disabilities who are out of school</td>
<td>UNICEF provided support for the design of the Bhutan Child Development Screening Tool. The tool screens for developmental delays and disabilities in children aged 10 weeks to 60 months. The tool is institutionalized in the Mother and Child Health Handbook (2019). A child will be screened 11 times within the age of five years. Rapid Neurodevelopmental Assessment is an assessment tool designed to detect the functional status of a child across a number of neurodevelopmental domains. It is administered in schools to obtain a better understanding of a child’s difficulties and inform strategies and interventions in education and health. The Comprehensive School Health Programme has a mechanism for screening students twice a year for health problems including disabilities. If a child is detected with health problems including disability, then the child is referred to a higher centre for further evaluation and management or treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early identification and intervention</td>
<td>The Ministry of Health (MoH) provides comprehensive and integrated maternal and child health services. Teachers use an identification and referral system to identify children with possible disabilities and link them to appropriate service/intervention centres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood care and development (ECCD)</td>
<td>MoH, Ministry of Education (MoE) and Save the Children Care for Child Development initiative is a non-centre-based ECCD programme. ECCD coverage was expanded from 165 centres in 2013 to 307 centres in 2017. MoE targets the enrolment of half of children aged 3 to 5 years in ECCD centres by 2024.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition services from early childhood care and education to primary to secondary education</td>
<td>The Standards for Inclusive Education 2017 mandate the promotion of students along with their age group to ensure that learners stay at the same developmental level. For children having difficulties in school, especially those with disabilities, the pedagogy is modified and appropriate support provided to prevent repetition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapy interventions and family support</td>
<td>The MoH integrated maternal and child health services include awareness workshops for parents and provision of a Mother and Child Health Handbook on maternal and child care and nutrition. Civil society organizations and development partners, such as Ability Bhutan Society and UNICEF, provide therapy and psychosocial support services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral systems</td>
<td>Existing community-based rehabilitation centres serve as points of identification and are linked to related services. ECCD centres serve as entry points for early identification and referral to support and intervention services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support</td>
<td>Social insurance such as disability benefits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

learning gains of children found comparable to those who attended ECCD centre programmes.\textsuperscript{106}

Other development partners, such as UNICEF, also pushed forward the ECCD agenda. UNICEF Bhutan engaged in high-level advocacy to influence policies on ECCD through an investment case study, resulting in raised awareness and increased support from policymakers.\textsuperscript{107}

The investment case study recommends the institutionalization of the already existing partnership of MoH and MoE for CCD. A formal partnership would bring the infrastructure and human resources of health facilities into ECCD programmes. Health facility-based ECCD programmes would widen the reach of ECCD services and enable immediate intervention at the first sign of disability or risk for disability.\textsuperscript{108}

ECCD centres are crucial in providing a continuum of support services for children with disabilities.

Various community-based ECCD centres were supported by UNICEF’s partnership with MoE and local organizations. Particular focus was given to supporting those in hard-to-reach rural areas\textsuperscript{109} as there is evidence of disparities in access to early education for children with disabilities from rural and low-income families.\textsuperscript{110}

Dropout and repetition rates were reported high in these areas as children with disabilities have poor engagement in early learning.\textsuperscript{111} To address this, provision for ECCD centres was increased to widen its reach from 165 ECCD centres with 3,835 children in 2013 to 307 ECCD centres with 7,250 children in 2017.\textsuperscript{112}

The initiative to strengthen ECCD programmes included the capacity development of new ECCD facilitators to improve care and child development skills.\textsuperscript{113}

Despite infrastructural and personnel insufficiencies, ECCD centres serve as entry points for identifying and detecting those at risk and those who have disabilities.\textsuperscript{114} Collaborating with village health facilities, the centres are usually linked to other rehabilitation and intervention services, creating an organic referral system. Without structural support, however, existing referral processes will continue to be an ad hoc feature of ECCD centres and remain unsustainable.

Further developments in increasing accessibility of services for children with disabilities are underway.

The Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education 2018–2028 identifies action points to address gaps in the delivery of support services to children with disabilities and their families. While there are existing mechanisms of health, intervention, early care and education, and social support, the government recognizes the issues in access and delivery. Among the action points identified were:\textsuperscript{115}

- the collaboration of MoE and MoH on a medical support system for schools that includes a funding agreement for the regular provision of medical services in schools with SEN programmes;
- capacity building of school staff including health staff, SEN programmes team, parents and families of children with disabilities on childcare, therapy and intervention;

\textsuperscript{106} Care for Child Development (C4CD) Plus.  
\textsuperscript{107} UNICEF Annual Report 2017.  
\textsuperscript{110} Early Childhood Care and Development in Bhutan.  
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{113} UNICEF Annual Report 2017.  
\textsuperscript{114} Early Childhood Care and Development in Bhutan.  
\textsuperscript{115} Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education.
improving the technical capacity of mobile health services in identifying disabilities and referral to appropriate educational services; and

• establishing the institutes as resource centres to develop the capacity for early identification and intervention services for children with visual and hearing impairments.

CSOs and development partners create a strong family support network and help empower parents/caregivers of children with disabilities.

Ability Bhutan Society provides a range of support services for parents and caregivers of children with disabilities.116 The organization provides awareness workshops on the rights of children with disabilities and on policies that support these rights, as well as on available intervention and support services. Regular family support sessions bring together parents of children with disabilities and create a space for sharing experiences, building a network of support and empowerment.

UNICEF Bhutan also supports various initiatives that benefit families of children with disabilities. It provided technical and financial support to CSO-led activities, such as disability-awareness workshops that brought in special education experts, paediatric physiotherapists, social workers and other specialists who shared their knowledge and expertise on early intervention, nutrition, social inclusion and what families can expect in providing care for their child with a disability.117

Together with Ability Bhutan Society, UNICEF Bhutan established a social network forum for the Family Support Group,118 an online support network consisting of parents and caregivers of children with disabilities, health workers, ECCD facilitators, SEN coordinators, school teachers and other relevant stakeholders who strengthen the support system of families of children with disabilities.

Bhutan’s difficult topography hinder the delivery of support services.

Most health and some referral services are free as is basic education for all school-aged children. Social protection measure such as disability insurance and benefits are also available. Owing to a number of complex intersecting barriers, not all children and with disabilities and their families can access these benefits. For instance, the country’s rugged terrain adds to the difficulty of bringing proper health care and education facilities to all children with and without disabilities.119

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117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
119 Dolkar, Updating and improving social protection index.
The Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education provides for developing and maintaining data collection systems and processes on children with disabilities that can support inclusive education policies and programmes.
6.1 STANDARDS AND INDICATORS FOR INCLUSION

The Standards for Inclusive Education 2017 were developed through a consultative process that involved teachers, school leaders, representatives from relevant government institutions, teacher education institutions and NGOs.

The standards aim to guide schools through a reflective process towards improving access and providing “quality education for all children with disabilities in Bhutan”. Inclusion is viewed broadly and not just concerning disability inclusion as they give attention and emphasis to schools responding to the unique, individual needs of all learners.

The framework reflects a whole systems approach to inclusion.

- It highlights three domains for inclusive schools – inclusive culture, inclusive policy and inclusive practice – and provides guidelines towards strengthening them.
- It encourages the participation of students, staff, leaders and community in promoting inclusion in the school.
- The content is comprehensive and includes guidelines on:

121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
• inclusive language, people-first language;
• inclusive culture and values;
• inclusive school policies;
• student participation;
• parent and community engagement;
• rights-based education;
• transitions and support for transitions;
• teacher support and teacher development; and
• the use of IEP in supporting children in mainstream settings.

6.2 MONITORING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Policies encourage the collection of data for policy development and programme implementation.

The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2019 outlines how data and information will be collected to serve as a way to inform inclusion:

• Agencies are asked to collect qualitative and quantitative disaggregated data. This needs to be reviewed if the medical model is used.
• RGoB sees information sharing within and between agencies and CSOs as a priority in the policy.

• Monitoring and evaluation of the policy implementation through programmes and activities and action plan are given priority.

The Ten-Year Roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education 2018–2028 includes directives and guidelines for developing and maintaining data collection systems and processes on children with disabilities that can support inclusive education policies and programmes.

MoE collects data through the Annual Education Statistics.

Through EMIS, MoE publishes the AES report, including practices of inclusive education in schools. Although the data collected at present are limited, they provide information on the number of schools with SEN programmes and special institutes, and the number of enrollees and number of teachers in schools with SEN programmes and special institutes.123

Planned upgrades to EMIS and the recent adoption of NEAF 2020 will enable the tracking of learning progress and other data on children with disabilities. (See also section 3.3 Data on children with disabilities)

Gender equality is one of the indicators of ‘inclusive culture’, one of three dimensions in the Standards for Inclusive Education, which state that schools are to create an environment that is welcoming and supportive of both boys and girls.
7.1 GENDER

The Standards for Inclusive Education 2017 emphasize the importance of gender equality. Gender equality is one of the indicators of ‘inclusive culture’, one of three dimensions in the standards, which state that schools are to create an environment that is welcoming and supportive of both boys and girls.

The Education Blueprint 2014–2024 also underscores gender equity in education and posts the following strategic actions:

- “Develop a strategic policy to enhance quality learning outcomes in girls, especially in the higher secondary and tertiary levels”; and
- “Provide girl-friendly boarding schools with gender-sensitive policies and facilities.”

Attention, however, should be given to the provision of gender-appropriate and accessible water, sanitation and hygiene facilities to encourage more girls with disabilities to learn in school.

Data on school-related gender-based violence is lacking

The most commonly reported form of violence against children in education settings in Bhutan is corporal punishment, although other forms of violence also happen in schools, such as abuse, harassment, cyberbullying and sexual abuse.124 Girls are more likely to experience sexual abuse and bullying, and other factors such as ethnicity, economic status and disability increase the risk of violence.

Bhutan banned corporal punishment in schools through a resolution in 2008.125 The Child Care and Protection Act 2011 prohibits corporal punishment, albeit conditionally, only of a certain degree of severity. There is also no explicit mention of school-related gender-based violence in legislation and education plans as there are no data on the incidence of violence against girls with disabilities.

7.2 HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

Bhutan’s education response to the COVID-19 pandemic is disability inclusive.126

In April 2020, MoE and the Royal Education Council developed implementation guidelines for the Education in Emergency Curriculum as part of the COVID-19 Response Plan to guide the continuity of education during the outbreak of COVID-19. Among the objectives are providing a platform for students to access and avail

124 Violence against Children in Education Settings.
125 Ibid.
126 COVID-19 Response Plan.
themselves of educational services remotely through the use of mainstream and social media and engaging students at home and minimizing people-people contact to prevent the risk of virus transmission.

To curb the spread of the virus in schools and learning centres, MoE and its partners recorded and produced a total of 440 lessons that were broadcast on television to bridge the learning of students at home. Initiatives to develop print media were also part of the response plan to reach children with no access to television, in which a group of teachers developed self-instructional materials that were aired on radio. These materials were also printed and distributed to ensure every child is reached.

Psychosocial support was also provided through the Sherig Counselling Services. The Education Emergency Operation Centre was set up to coordinate operations and manage emergencies. The guidelines specified learning areas and mode of delivery as well as the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, including parents.

**The curriculum is delivered through different platforms.**

1. Broadcast media (TV and radio)
2. YouTube
3. Google classroom
4. Print media (to reach all students including those without access to the above media)

**Children with disabilities are included in the response plan.**

The SEN Division of MoE aims to:

1. maintain an inventory of children with disabilities using assistive devices/technology and facilitate the provision of resources, such as assistive devices/technology and connectivity to learners;
2. facilitate e-learning through online discussion and other means;
3. implement the Emergency in Education Curriculum and customize it based on the needs of children;
4. develop guidelines and strategies for parents and guardians to support learning at home;
5. develop, share and archive TLMs in audio formats, small video clips, pictures and notes through Google classroom and other social media messaging platforms;
6. facilitate teaching and learning with appropriate strategies, including broadcast through the Bhutan Broadcasting Service and other social media;
7. facilitate interpretation of BSL; and
8. facilitate mapping out the general Emergency in Education Curriculum adapted for deaf children.
Table 9. Curriculum adaptations for children with disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School/institute</th>
<th>Description of learners</th>
<th>Adaptation to the curriculum</th>
<th>Mode of delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General schools</strong>&lt;br/&gt;with Special Educational Needs Programme</td>
<td>Group A: Learners who can cope with the general curriculum</td>
<td>Follow the education package with adaptation and modification</td>
<td>YouTube, Google classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group B: Learners who cannot cope with the general curriculum</td>
<td>Learners will be offered daily living skills</td>
<td>YouTube, Google classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Muenselling Institute</strong></td>
<td>Group A: Children who have a vision problem</td>
<td>The adapted curriculum in accessible formats (e.g., audio materials and high-resolution print materials, with Accessibility Talk Back features (Text to Speech)</td>
<td>YouTube, Google classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group B: Learners who cannot cope with the general curriculum</td>
<td>Learners will be offered daily living skills</td>
<td>YouTube, Google classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wangsel Institute</strong></td>
<td>Deaf and hard of hearing students</td>
<td>Separate curriculum developed specifically for deaf and hard of hearing students delivered through the Bhutanese Sign Language. Key learning areas, instruction and assessment techniques were selected from the curriculum to be delivered during the pandemic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Efforts should be made to transform specialized provisions into fully inclusive settings where children with any kind of disability learn alongside their peers without disabilities while receiving appropriate support.
8.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

(1) Ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and adopt the National Education Policy.

Bhutan’s efforts over the last decade are testament to the government’s dedication to creating a disability-inclusive education system. Many important initiatives have been put in place and the long-term strategic plans being implemented indicate a positive trajectory.

It is recommended, however, for the government to prioritize ratifying CRPD to ensure accountability measures are in place. The draft National Education Policy 2019 strongly endorses inclusive education and should be adopted and replace the National Policy on Special Educational Needs 2012.

(2) Harmonize disability identification systems, data collection and monitoring. Build the capacity of schools to screen children with difficulties in learning and identify educational support needs.

a. The introduction of WG questions in EMIS, the Population and Housing Census and future surveys/censuses is a major accomplishment. Ensure alignment among all identification (including systems followed by other ministries such as MoH) and data collection systems and tools. Collecting disability data through EMIS necessitates that schools are equipped with knowledge on inclusion, disability and WG questions.

b. Ensure that data being collected reflect and measure not just educational outcomes, but also factors that support inclusive education, such as professional development support teachers/assistant teachers and school leaders are receiving and support services for children with disabilities and their families.

(3) Strengthen monitoring and evaluation.

a. Integrate inclusive education standards into the national quality standards for all schools.

b. Establish a system for collecting data on the implementation of inclusive education programmes. Align the monitoring system to the inclusive education standards developed. Develop tools and indicators for monitoring implementation of the Standards for Inclusive Education to ensure that schools and learning centres can comply and achieve the minimum standards set.
c. Conduct case studies or a baseline study on the implementation of inclusive education in schools with SEN programmes and build an evidence base for effective practices that can be scaled up. Review and evaluate existing inclusive education initiatives and approaches to inform strategic planning.

d. Involve the OPD, CSOs and parents and caregivers of children with disabilities in monitoring inclusive education programmes.

(4) Ensure investments are directed towards strengthening the system for disability inclusion.

Commit to increasing financial and human resources allocated to advance inclusive education, rather than expanding specialized provisions.

(5) Strengthen the capacity of teachers and school leaders.

a. Increase awareness and technical capacity of teachers, education administrators and decision-makers on UDL and its application in the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment system. This will help enable teachers to deliver the curriculum in varied ways, responding to the diverse needs of their students. As a result, children with and without disabilities can fully access the curriculum. For education administrators and decision-makers, knowledge of UDL will enable them to provide the necessary support for teachers and the school community.

b. Review the available professional development programmes for school leaders against the competencies they must have to be able to support the development of inclusive learning environments for all learners.

c. Develop a system for in-service teacher training with a focus on school-based support for school leaders and teachers on inclusive education.

d. Review the pre-service teacher education curriculum and in-service teacher training programmes to include competencies key to teaching diverse environments in alignment with the social model of disability and reflect best practices in teacher professional development.

(6) Ensure the curriculum is inclusive.

Children with disabilities learn under different versions of the curriculum depending on the degree of their disability. This includes a simplified set specifically for children with severe disabilities, implying lower standards and expectations and setting a limit on what they can do. This practice further excludes children with disabilities and is contrary to the principles of inclusion where children with disabilities are regarded with the same high standards and expectations as their peers without disabilities.

(7) Strengthen legal provisions against violence towards all children, especially girls and those with disabilities.

While corporal punishment has been banned in schools through a resolution, it is still not considered unlawful. The prohibition of corporal punishment in the Child Care and Protection Act 2011 is conditional on the severity of the act. There is also no explicit mention of school-related gender-based violence in legislation and education plans. There is no policy emphasis on preventing school-related gender-based violence, especially violence against girls with disabilities. Moreover, there are no data on the incidence of violence against girls with disabilities.

(8) Strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration.

Improve collaboration among relevant ministries. Unify action plans related to children with disabilities.
(9) **Strengthen the legal basis for accessible facilities and infrastructure.**

Strengthen guidelines on accessible infrastructure development through formal legislation that clearly articulates regulation processes, monitoring of policy implementation, assessment based on a set of standards, as well as incentives for compliance and sanctions for non-compliance.

(10) **Increase agency among children with disabilities and their families.**

Parents and children with disabilities, especially those with hearing and visual impairments, have little agency in school placement. In the decision process for their placement, specialists from either of the specialized institutes assess and determine whether a child with a visual or hearing disability should be placed in a regular school, a SEN programme or institute. Moreover, admission to schools with SEN programmes is still conditional on the child’s degree of disability.

(11) **Articulate plans to transition from specialized provisions to inclusive learning provisions.**

There are no plans for institutes to shift to more inclusive education settings. Additionally, there are no plans to transition children studying in institutes to general schools with SEN programmes. Efforts should be made to transform specialized provisions into fully inclusive settings where children with any kind of disability learn alongside their peers without disabilities while receiving appropriate support.

### 8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

(1) **Lobby for ratification of CRPD.**

Development partners can lobby the government to ratify CRPD to ensure full commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities, especially in education.

(2) **Expand understanding of disability and inclusive education.**

a. There are gaps between the definition and implementation of inclusive education. A clear and unified definition of inclusive education based on CRPD and General Comment 4 (GC4) to Article 24 should be made explicit in advocacy and awareness campaigns to emphasize inclusion in education and promote a shift away from specialized curriculum and education provisions.

b. A deeper understanding of disability inclusion founded on CRPD and GC4, knowledge of UDL and awareness of international best practices in disability inclusion can help expand the vision of CSOs for full inclusion of children with specific disabilities, such as those with hearing and visual impairments.

### 8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

(1) **Assess the implementation of policies in place related to disability-inclusion.**

(2) **Assess gaps in inclusive leadership competencies and skills in departments and agencies.**

Assess gaps in departments and agencies responsible for inclusive education and develop a plan to address them for sustainable implementation of inclusive education programmes. Examine vertical coordination systems put in place to support inclusive education in schools, determine gaps and develop recommendations for improvement.

(3) **Conduct a further review of the financing of programmes for children with disabilities.**
(4) **Improve research and data on violence against children with disabilities.**

Carry out research on violence against children with disabilities within and outside school, disaggregated by gender, age and socio-economic status to inform policies and programmes. Comprehensive socio-anthropological research can be conducted to explore the underlying and influencing factors of corporal punishment and inform targeted advocacy and behaviour change communication efforts.

(5) **Monitor and assess support services and programmes.**

Monitoring and assessing support services and programmes as well as proper use of these data can help identify gaps and plan for improvement. Strengthening community-based health and rehabilitation programmes can help improve the access of children with disabilities and their families, especially those living in remote villages, to basic and essential health and education services.

(6) **Assess gaps in skills and competencies in teacher education institutions.**

Assess gaps in teacher education institutions concerning embedding inclusive education across all subjects and develop a strategic plan to address the skills gaps identified.

(7) **Assess the way inclusive education standards are used.**

Assess how the inclusive education standards developed are being used in schools, the extent of their integration into school processes and their impact on improving access to high-quality education for all learners, including children with disabilities.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Bhutan

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