



YOUTH CALL TO ACTION BHUTAN

Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for a sustainable future for young people in all their diversity.

Situational Analysis

Bhutan, a small landlocked Himalayan nation of nearly 750,000 people, has pursued a distinctive development path rooted in cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, and holistic wellbeing, guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness. Through the 13th Five Year Plan and the 21st Century Economic Roadmap, the country has aligned national priorities with the Sustainable Development Goals, achieving notable progress across sectors. However, Bhutan faces mounting challenges including civil service attrition, brain drain, youth exodus, and increasing climate-related disasters, making sustained, inclusive, and resilient development more critical than ever.

Bhutan has made significant progress in the health sector with life expectancy rising from 37 years in the 1960s to over 73 years in the recent years, reflecting the decades of investments in universal free health care. Additionally, maternal mortality has declined and the country has also successfully eliminated

goitre, polio and measles, with malaria being on the verge of elimination. However, non communicable diseases are increasing among the population and rising alcohol and drug dependency, mental health issues and suicide rates among young people require urgent attention.

Bhutan's progress towards SDG 5 remains mixed and deeply complex. Women's labour force participation dropped from 65.33% in 2021 to 53.1% in 2024, and women hold only 23% of managerial positions in the civil service. There is a clear underrepresentation of women in politics, with only 20.4% of females in decision making positions, and women carry 71% of unpaid care work. At the same time, the number of reported sexual violence cases decreased from 140 in 2023 to 87 in 2024, underreporting persists and outdated legal provisions against women signal the need for reform.

Bhutan has made strong progress towards achieving

Co-convended by



In collaboration



In partnership



SDG 6, with 99.9% access to improved drinking water, 99.1% sanitation coverage and 100% open defecation free status. Yet climate induced water shortages, glacial melt and flash floods threaten sustainability. While rural-urban disparities in sanitation access have narrowed, remote households still face gaps in toilet facilities.

Bhutan has ensured that 100% of its population has access to electricity and 91.6% with access to clean fuels for cooking, with energy generation almost entirely renewable and driven primarily by hydropower. The country is now looking into solar energy to diversify its energy production. As of 2024, clean energy accounts for 82.5% of the total energy consumption. However, winter hydropower generation drops to below 20% of summer capacity, requiring electricity imports. Despite all the progress, key challenges remain in fossil fuel dependence for transport, climate risks to hydropower, and financing constraints.

Bhutan has made gradual but uneven progress towards SDG 9, with expanded road connectivity linking most villages and strengthening rural market access. The manufacturing value added increased from 7.12% of GDP in 2020 to 8.05% in 2023, yet employment in the sector declined from 7.9% to 7.2%, indicating labour market challenges. Digital connectivity has also expanded with 98% mobile access and 95% smartphone ownership, supporting innovation and service delivery. However, industrial growth remains constrained by a small, public sector dependent private sector, limited access to finance,

outdated technologies and weak value addition.

Bhutan has made steady progress towards SDG 11, with continued improvements in urban housing quality and city infrastructure. The proportion of urban households living in permanent structures increased from 95% in 2017 to 96.7% in 2022. The country continues to invest in public transport, waste management and affordable housing under the 13th Five Year Plan, particularly in urban areas. At the same time, updated low emission and climate resilient development strategies aim to align urban growth with the 10X National Economic Vision 2050. However, rapid urbanisation has intensified congestion, accessibility gaps for persons with disabilities, vulnerability to natural disaster and urban heat has highlighted limited technical capacity for sustainable and resilient city planning in the country.

Bhutan continues to strengthen global and regional partnerships to advance sustainable development, working closely with UN agencies, international financial institutions, civil society, and the private sector to implement the 13th Five Year Plan. Its presentation of the Voluntary National Review in 2025 underscored its commitment to transparency and global cooperation. While diplomatic engagement and partnerships in climate action, sustainable finance, digitalisation, and innovation are expanding, continued efforts are needed to mobilize financing, improve data systems, and deepen multi-stakeholder collaboration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SDG 3: GOOD HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- » Expand national medical education capacity by establishing additional medical schools and training institutions to address health workforce shortages
- » Improve health workforce retention. through better working conditions, career progression opportunities and incentives for services in rural areas.

- » Strengthen nationwide advocacy and awareness programs on mental health, non-communicable diseases and healthy, balanced diets to promote preventive health care.
- » Establish platforms for self-help and a space where healthy discussion on any and all social topics can be done.
- » Encourage and facilitate annual health checkups for all citizens through the NDI app.
- » Invest in state-of-the-art medical equipment to

enhance diagnostic capabilities and treatment, possibly in the primary health care centers as well.

- » Provide training to educators, specifically counsellors, to incorporate mindfulness practices into daily routines to support the mental well-being of students.
- » Expand and upgrade Government-to-Citizen (G2C) services, incorporating chatbots, enhancing accessibility for PWDs and making it easier for illiterate individuals.
- » Establish a strong telemedicine and digital health services in Bhutan to improve access.
- » Ensure inclusive healthcare access and services for PWDs, elderly and other vulnerable groups through accessible facilities, trained health workers and inclusive service delivery.

SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY

- » Invest and strengthen partnerships with youth groups working in the field of gender equality.
- » Encourage media outlets to portray diverse gender roles and challenge stereotypes while advocating gender equality.
- » Adopt and implement gender-inclusive and non-discriminatory policies in all organisations including government and private sector.
- » Integration of age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education in the school by consulting with young people.
- » Enhance access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights services and information for women and girls, in both urban and rural services.
- » Implementation of programs and workshops for economically active individuals on PSEA and SRHR to reduce workplace sexual abuse and harassment.
- » Promote and implement zero tolerance to sexual harassment in all programs, workshops, conference and training to promote inclusive and discrimination free environment.
- » Improve data collection and disaggregation by sex, age, disability and location for better informed

gender responsive policies.

- » Revisit and revise any and all policies, law, and acts that are discriminatory towards any and all genders.

SDG 6: CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

- » Ensure meaningful inclusion of youth perspectives in community level decision making processes related to water governance, planning and management.
- » Strengthen and regularly maintain water infrastructure, including irrigation channels, water storage facilities and water pumps, to ensure reliable and efficient water supply.
- » Decentralise water governance to communities while strengthening water quality monitoring systems by the community
- » Prioritise uninterrupted access to clean water in schools especially during periods of water scarcity.
- » Enhance sanitation and hygiene services by upgrading toilets, sewage systems and fecal sludge management in densely populated areas.
- » Protect and maintain water sources and watersheds through community-based conservation and sustainable land use practices.
- » Improve wastewater treatment and pollution control to prevent contamination of rivers and downstream ecosystems.

SDG 7: AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

- » Promotion of electric vehicles, with government agencies leading by example and replacing all fuel using vehicles with electric vehicles.
- » Ensure that wildlife protection and ecological integrity are prioritised during the planning, construction and operation of hydropower projects.
- » Diversify Bhutan's energy mix by expanding solar energy deployment to complement hydropower and enhance energy security.
- » Expand access to high-quality solar technologies for highlanders and herding communities to

improve energy access, livelihoods, and overall well-being.

- » Establish systems for the recycling and safe disposal of solar panels to ensure long-term environmental sustainability.
- » Expand skills development and green jobs training to prepare young people for employment in the renewable energy and energy efficiency sectors.
- » Invest in energy storage and smart grid technologies to improve grid stability and better manage renewable energy generation.

SDG 9: INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- » Increase investment in sustainable infrastructure to support resilient, eco-friendly and inclusive development.
- » Support startups and SMEs through interest free loans, grants and targeted capacity building programs to promote entrepreneurship and economic diversification.
- » Strengthen industry-academia collaboration to foster innovation, research and technology development.
- » Modernise existing industries with green technologies to enhance sustainability, efficiency, and environmental responsibility of the industrial sector.
- » Improve transport and digital connectivity to ensure equitable access to markets, services, and digital opportunities for all communities.
- » Strengthen vocational and technical education to equip youth with skills for emerging industries, digital economy, and sustainable technologies.
- » Promote research and development (R&D) and innovation hubs in Bhutan

SDG 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

- » Promote climate resilient urban planning by integrating disaster risk management into town and city development plans.
- » Enhance affordable and inclusive housing through

government colonies for low and middle-income families.

- » Improve public transport systems by expanding eco-friendly options, increasing coverage and promoting cycling through cycle lanes.
- » Develop and maintain green spaces such as parks, community gardens and children parks.
- » Promote heritage and cultural conservation by protecting historic buildings, sacred sites, and traditional architecture within urban planning.
- » Integrate smart city and digital solutions for urban management, traffic control, public services, and real-time monitoring of environmental indicators.

SDG 17: PARTNERSHIP FOR THE GOALS

- » Strengthen data sharing and transparency through timely and up to date data publicly accessible for all.
- » Meaningfully engage and empower youth by institutionalising youth representative and leadership in decision making forums.
- » Improve governance efficiency by streamlining government approval processes and expanding digital governance and e-services.
- » Explore opportunities to diversify revenue sources, including the development of eco-tourism, technology services, and niche industries aligned with sustainable development principles.
- » Foster a decentralised approach to development, ensuring diverse regions benefit from sustainable practices.
- » Ensure inclusive and accessible partnership that actively engages marginalised youth including persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+, rural youth and young monks and nuns.
- » Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the impact of sustainable development projects.

The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum in Bangkok on 18-20 February 2026. The Bhutan drafting team

consisted of Palden Wangchuk Dorji, Bhawana Pradhan, Dechen Wangmo, Choki Om and participants from the 3rd National APFSD Youth Forum. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call to Action team.