

TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

Bhutan is a unitary monarchy and is divided into 20 districts (*dzongkhags*), 38 municipalities (*thromde*) and 205 groups of villages (*gewogs*). Local assemblies are elected, but executive bodies are appointed.¹



Unless otherwise indicated, all the information in this profile is taken from the previously published Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).²

1. NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

With its holistic approach to development based on the principles of **Gross National Happiness (GNH)**, Bhutan's development framework as executed through its Five-Year Plans presents high levels of synergy with the SDGs and a strong foundation for their integration and implementation. The SDGs have been mainstreamed into **Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan (FYP) for 2018-2023** whose objective is a "Just, Harmonious and Sustainable Society through enhanced Decentralisation". The plan focuses development on National Key Result Areas (NKRAs). Improved efficiency and sustainable use of natural resources will be reinforced by the recently developed Sustainable Consumption and Production Strategy. A national climate change policy, REDD+ strategy, and updated environment strategy, among others, have also been adopted as part of efforts to manage climate change impacts.

Meanwhile, **Bhutan's 21st Century Economic Roadmap** is under formulation. As a long-term strategy, it is expected to contribute to a transformation of the Bhutanese economy, while ensuring that the principles of GNH and the SDGs are upheld.

1.1 NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS

The **Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC)** is also the **High Level SDG Committee**, and is chaired by the Prime Minister. Other members are the Finance Minister as the Vice-Chair, Cabinet Secretary, Secretaries of all ten Ministries and the Secretary of the National Environment Commission. The **GNHC Secretariat (GNHCS)** is the Lead Coordinating Agency, and has the responsibility to coordinate, advise, monitor, evaluate and report progress on the implementation of the SDGs. Within the GNHC Secretariat, there is a dedicated **SDG Working Committee** with the mandate to oversee, facilitate and guide integration and implementation, and to report on progress of SDGs. The SDG Working Committee members are appointed based on relevance. Since 2019, SDG focal persons have been nominated across all ministries and agencies at the central level. Overall, the 2021 VNR recognizes the significance of the role of partnership with multiple stakeholders including the international community, private sector, civil society and the local governments in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

1.2 VNR ELABORATION PROCESS

For the 2018 VNR, the **GNHCS** (through its SDG Working Committee) organized several meetings and consultations of the **SDG Review Committee** and the **Task Force for VNR**. The committee comprised representatives of agencies such as the GNHCS, National Statistics Bureau (NSB), the Cabinet Secretariat, the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the National Environment Commission (NEC), the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement (MoWHS) and other government agencies. The taskforce comprised senior government officials from the Cabinet Secretariat, the National Statistics Bureau, and other sectors. In spite of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 VNR process has adopted a participatory and inclusive approach by engaging stakeholders from across key government agencies including line ministries, constitutional bodies and autonomous agencies, as well as local governments, parliamentarians, political parties, development partners, civil society organisations including women and youth groups, private sector, academia, and the media. The strategic objectives of stakeholder engagement were to: gather contributions, collect updated data and inputs towards the VNR report; and to deepen awareness and strengthen ownership of the SDGs. A **multi-sectoral VNR Task Force** was formed to provide technical input and guidance.

1. UCLG, 2021, Towards the Localization of the SDGs, https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/hlpf_2021.pdf

2. See: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19369Bhutan_NSDGR_Bhutan_2018.pdf (2018); https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279552021_VNR_Report_Bhutan.pdf (2021)

3. The 17 National Key Result Areas (NKRA) are closely aligned to the SDGs, with their targets and indicators integrated into the 12th FYP.

1.3 MONITORING

- ▶ The 16 National Key Result Areas and Key Performance Indicators of the 12th FYP are aligned to the 17 SDGs, their targets and indicators.
- ▶ With the SDGs well-integrated into national plans and programmes, their implementation is monitored annually and through mid-term reviews of the FYPs, as per the existing national monitoring system.
- ▶ The NSB's Strategic Plan to Improve Statistics in Bhutan (July 2020-June 2023) seeks to address these issues by improving data governance and enabling factors. Among others, Big Data will be explored, administrative data will be strengthened, and a local level data architecture will be established.
- ▶ The **Dewa Platform**, an integrated dashboard to monitor GNH, SDGs and FYP progress, has also been developed. It will enable more up to date analysis of SDG indicator status as well as current state of data gaps and availability. The dashboard aims to bring together into a consolidated platform data across a wide spectrum in Bhutan, and thus also includes updated data for indicators in the 12th FYP NKRAs and GNH. Among other features, it will provide a common geographic information system (GIS) interface platform for **geo-spatial analysis and district-, block- and sub-block data visualisation**.

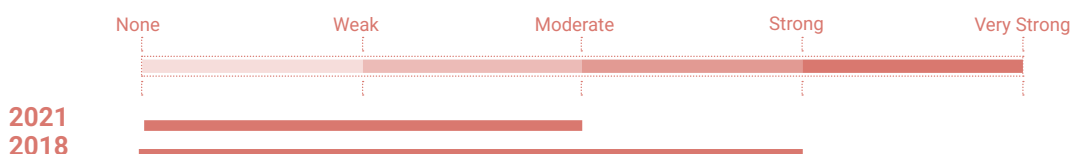
2. LRGs INVOLVEMENT IN SDG LOCALIZATION

With the FYPs formulated at the **central, sectoral, district (dzongkhag), block (gewog) and municipal (thromde) levels**, and further translated into annual performance agreement and budgets, the prospects for SDG integration at all levels is high. However, although SDGs are known, detailed knowledge is still inadequate. A possible contributing factor is the limited use of the "SDG language" in the detailed process of adopting the FYP planning framework or result matrix; and in the guidelines on plan formulation, which are issued by the sectors to respective departments and local government agencies. As LRGs identify activities in line with this framework—which includes all national visions and international commitments including SDGs—implementation of the activities contributes to SDG implementation. The 2021 VNR acknowledges that LRGs "in particular require more support, given the decentralised set-up and relatively limited opportunities for SDG-specific workshops targeting [LRG] functionaries" and that "local government representatives expressed the need for clearer guidelines and support, for example in aligning local plans and programmes to SDG targets and indicators".

LRGs (some districts and municipalities) were involved in the 2021 VNR process, as well as many other stakeholders (consultations).

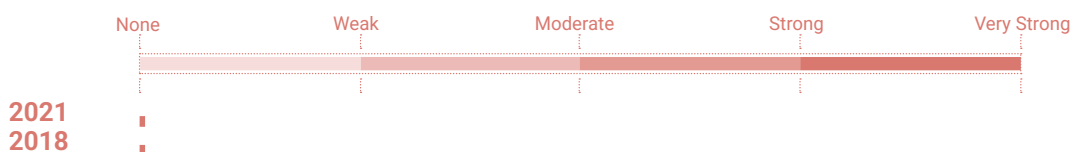
2.1 LRGs PARTICIPATION

▶ In the VNR process



Comments: Some districts and municipalities were consulted as part of the 2021 VNR process.

▶ In national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation



Comments: No mention of any LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms.

This assessment is based on the information collected in the VNRs and in the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments' annual survey on the localization of the SDGs.

2.2 VNR REFERENCES

There is only very little mention of LRGs throughout the 2018 report. The 2021 VNR mentions the LRGs, but without much reference to specific locally-led initiatives for SDG implementation.

2.3 SPECIFIC PROJECTS AND CASES

There are only a very few examples in the 2018 VNR, in addition to a dedicated box on the Bajo Water Supply System. In the 2021 VNR, there is an example of the national programme: the Strategic Pilot Project for Climate Resilience (SPCR) is being piloted in **Samdrup Jongkhar** Thromde to promote climate-resilient urban services and infrastructure. See other national programmes for SDG 11 in the VNR, 2021, p. 21-22.

2.4 VOLUNTARY SUBNATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL REVIEWS (VSRs / VLRs)

Not applicable.

2.5 MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

According to the 2018 VNR, the GNHCS allocates resources to priority programs at central and local government levels. Overall, upon approval of the performance objectives and budget, annual performance agreements are signed between the Prime Minister and respective heads of agencies including the local governments.

3. RELEVANT INFORMATION

General comments: Bhutan remains highly vulnerable to climate change impacts and natural disasters, which pose serious threats to its nature-dependent livelihoods and hydropower - and agriculture-based economy. As it maintains its carbon neutral status in the face of mounting pressure to accelerate economic growth, the additional burden of adaptation and mitigation entail huge costs. It is expected that current gaps in implementing the Disaster Management Plan and Contingency Plan (DMCP) at national and district levels will be addressed and that the mechanisms will be strengthened. Although DMCPs had been developed for all 20 districts (dzongkhags), four municipalities (thromdes), and several agencies as reported in the 2018 VNR, recent stakeholder consultations point to a “central-local disconnect” that hampers implementation.

3.1 WOMEN PARTICIPATION

Women participation in decision-making is 11.6% in local governments.

3.2 COVID 19

An Economic Contingency Plan of Nu. 4.492 billion provides priority support to the tourism and construction sectors, agriculture and livestock production, and towards stocking essential food and non-food items. The Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu—an important social protection prerogative of His Majesty the King—has helped sustain livelihoods of about 52,644 individuals, besides supporting interest payment of more than 139,096 loan account holders. Several monetary and fiscal measures are also in place. While working to “build back better”, Bhutan remains committed to accelerating the SDGs so that progress towards an inclusive, low-carbon and resilient development pathway—as envisioned by its GNH approach—is sustained. Regarding public service provision, based on the experience of the first lockdown, concerted efforts continue to be made to improve logistical arrangements and coordination among essential service providers. A **zoning system of districts and cities** was initiated and refined over time, to minimise disruptions and improve the management of subsequent lockdowns and other containment measures.

4. SDG INDICATORS⁴

5.5.1. (b) Proportion of seats held by women (%) in local governments		10.6 (2018)
6.1.1. Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services (%)	Urban	49 (2020)
	Rural	28 (2020)
6.2.1. (a) Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services (%)	Urban	63 (2020)
	Rural	67 (2020)
11.1.1. Proportion of population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (%)		-
11.6.1. Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed (%)		72.3 (2012, Thimphu)
11.6.2. Air pollution – annual means of particulate matter in cities (population weighted)		37.6 (2016)
11.b.2. Proportion of local governments that have adopted local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national strategies (%)		51.3 (2018)

⁴ The data used for this table come from the UN SDG Indicators Database. See: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/UNSDG/IndDatabasePage>. More information on the country's progress towards the SDGs here: <https://country-profiles.unstatshub.org/btn>