

**Development of Local Governments
in Bhutan:
Good Practices in Collaboration
and Capacity Building**

Sonam Penjor, M.P.S.
Head, Women Division
National Commission for Women and Children
Royal Government of Bhutan
Bhutan

Development of Local Governments in Bhutan: Good Practices in Collaboration and Capacity Building

Abstract

“Local Government is not the smallest or lowest form of Government, but the most intimate and closest form of Government for the people”

—His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck
King of the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan

This paper will concretize the above notion by attempting to highlight a few good practices among the local unit of governments in Bhutan. The paper first introduces an overview of local governments in Bhutan, while it tries to weigh both advantages and disadvantages of the current local government framework in the country. It will then discuss bottlenecks that need to be improved, one of the significant being capacity building of local officials. Reference is then made to existing practices in Bhutan, wherein through collaboration between the central and local governments, substantial development has been achieved to institutionalize capacity development approaches. These approaches are highlighted as pivotal to trigger local governments to embrace governance that help attains the development philosophy of Bhutan — the Gross National Happiness. Finally, the paper concludes by highlighting the comparative advantages that enable local governments to govern. Notwithstanding, this paper is majorly based on experiential¹ syllogism supported by evidences where available.

Introduction

A. *Abridge Synopsis of Bhutan*

Progress is measured by happiness. While most countries measure their economic progress using Gross National Product or the amount of products and services produced in one year by labor and property supplied by the their citizens, Bhutan has a more holistic approach on interpreting progress and takes into equal consideration the non-economic aspects of wellbeing.

Landlocked between the extensive borders of China and India, Bhutan is situated in the eastern Himalayas and is one of smallest nations with a land area of 38,394 square kilometers and a population of 671,083 people.² Bhutan is a democratic constitutional monarchy. The Bhutanese economy is predominantly agricultural and literacy rates stand at 59.06%. Majority of the population lives in rural areas and 12% of the population still lives in poverty. The country has a distinct development philosophy dubbed as Gross National Happiness (GNH). The said development philosophy accentuates the need to balance sustainable economic growth with environmental conservation, promotion of cultural heritage, and good governance.

Guided by this goal, the process of development — social, economic, environmental and political — is hinged on the need to create positive conditions that enable and maximize the experience of happiness. Material and spiritual development must transpire side by side and must complement each other. In congruent with this development philosophy of GNH, progress in the country is assessed according to nine domains of beneficial development: psychological well-being, health, education, culture, time use, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards.³

B. Political System

Bhutan's monarchical system of governance dates back to 17th December 1907, when Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck was instituted as the First King of Bhutan. The seeds of decentralized governance and democracy were sown when the prescient visionary leader, His Majesty, the Third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, established the National Assembly (*Tshogdu*) in 1953. The *Tshogdu* had 150 members, of which 105 were elected representatives of the people, 12 from the monk-body, and 33 nominees of the government. During assembly meetings held twice a year, The *Tshogdu* discusses all matters of national importance and enacts laws.⁴ In 1965, His Majesty the King established a nine-member Royal Advisory Council, six of whom were people's representatives, two from the monk-body, and one nominee of the King. The council's responsibility was not only to advise the king but also to verify the implementation of the laws passed by the National Assembly. Furthermore, the King founded a modern system of judiciary in 1968 with codified laws and a highest court of appeal, the High Court, with the king holding the final power of decision.⁵

The benevolent discerning visionary leader, His Majesty the Fourth *Druk Gyalpo*⁶, Jigme Singye Wangchuck continued the task of further democratizing the country at an accelerated pace. His Majesty the King established the *Dzongkhag Yargye Tshogdu* (*Dzongkhag* Development Committee) in 1981 and then the *Gewog Yargye Tshogchung* (Block Development Committee) in 1991.⁷ With the establishment of these two development committees, the central government's power was effectively decentralized into different layers of local governance. These moves were seen by many as a mechanism propelling people's participation in the progress of Bhutan and facilitated greater involvement of the people in decision-making.

In 1998, the cabinet of the old tradition was dissolved and replaced by an Executive Cabinet whose members were elected by the National Assembly. This whole process of democratization culminated into the adoption of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, making Bhutan a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy in 2008 and heralding the first ever democratically elected government in place. Under the dynamic leadership of His Majesty the Fifth King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, Bhutan today has a parliament in place consisting of the *Gyelyong Tshogdu* (the National Assembly) and the *Gyelyong Tshogde* (the National Council). The people of Bhutan experienced two general elections electing two different political parties to govern the country. Following the first general elections in 2008, the people of Bhutan went to the polls on June 27, 2011 to elect their Local Governance

leaders; the *Gups*, *Mangmis*, *Tshogpas* as well as *Thromde Tshogpas* to formally kick start the constitutional mandate of Local Governments in Bhutan.

I. Institutional Setting

A. Local Governance: An Overview

In discussing local government concepts, it is vital to first completely understand the fundamentals of good governance or democratic governance. This understanding is essential in contemplating local governance precepts and interfaces, hence, enabling us to understand the role of local governments. Therefore, in this section, few key factors determining the elements of governance will be highlighted.

Governance is about the processes by which public policy decisions are made and implemented. It is the result of interactions, relationships and networks between the different sectors (government, public sector, private sector and civil society) and involves decisions, negotiation, and different power relations between stakeholders to determine who gets what, when and how.⁸

The evolution of local governance is generally determined by political and social context of a country. The relationships between government and different sectors of society determine how things are done and how services are provided. Governance therefore shapes the way a service or set of services are planned, managed, and regulated within a set of political social and economic systems. Over the decades, efforts to contextualize local governances and its institutions are apparent and evident from numerous scholars, development practitioners, and donors based on experiences of what works and what does not. The trends of increased focus on local governance in efforts to democratize and to mobilize donor support are good indication of the efforts being considered as effective.

In terms of local good governance, the capacity and preparedness of the local government institutions are critical. These can hugely vary based on individuals and there will be situations where one being able to deliver outweighs another not being able to deliver, depending on the cooperation, available support and institutional environment. Such variations can be improved by institutionalizing support mechanisms from partners, mainly the national government. It is only then that the environment for practicing the existing good legal and policy frameworks can be considered enabling.

At this juncture, this paper will refer to UNDP's tools⁹ to measure local governance, as listed in Box 1, to initiate the discussions that will follow in the later chapters:

Box 1 Key Tools in Measuring Local Governance

- The process of decentralization requires concerted efforts in capacity-building and institutional reform and should therefore be associated with the strengthening of local authorities.
- Participation through inclusiveness and empowerment of citizens shall be an underlying principle in decision-making, implementation and follow-up at the local level.
- Local authorities should recognize the different constituencies within civil society and should strive to ensure that all are involved in the progressive development of their communities and neighborhoods.
- The principle of non-discrimination should apply to all partners and to the collaboration between national and regional governments, local authorities and civil society organizations.
- Representation of citizens in the management of local authority affairs should be reinforced by participation at all stages of the policy process, wherever practicable.
- With a view to consolidating civil engagement, local authorities should strive to adopt new forms of participation such as neighborhoods councils, community councils, e-democracy, participatory budgeting, civil initiatives and referendums in as far as they are applicable in their specific context.
- Records and information should be maintained and in principle made publicly available not only to increase the efficiency of local authorities but also to make it possible for citizens to enjoy their full rights and to ensure their participation in local decision-making.
- An increase in the functions allocated to local authorities should be accompanied by measures to build up their capacity to exercise those functions.

B. Local Governments in Bhutan

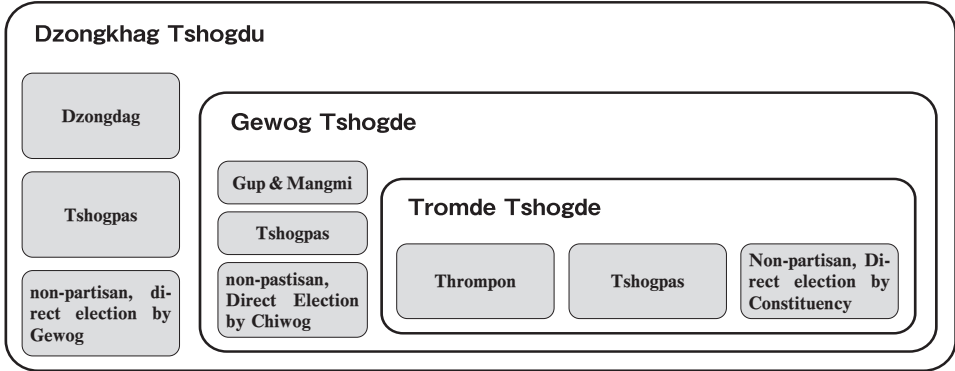
Today, local governments in each district of Bhutan manage socio-economic development in their communities. Local governments are not lawmaking bodies, thus, do not have legislative functions although they may make rules and regulations consistent with law made by the Parliament. Essentially, local governments are supported by the central government in the development of administrative, technical and managerial capacities and structures that must be responsive, transparent and accountable.¹⁰

This is done through the elected offices at three levels: *Dzongkhag Tshogdu* (District Council), *Gewog Tshogde* (Block or Sub-district Council)¹¹ and *Thromde Tshogde* (Municipal Council). The *Dzongkhag Tshogdu* is comprised by a *Gup* (Elected head of a *Gewog* or sub district/block leader) and *Mangmi* (Elected head of a *Chiwog*¹²) from each *Geog Tshogde*, *Thrompon* (representative of a *Thromde*/Municipal Mayor). A *Gewog Tshogde* is comprised by a *Gup*, *Mangmi*, and four to eight *Tshogpas* (Elected Village Representative). At the *Geog* level, the *Gup* and *Mangmi* serve as the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson respectively of the *Tshogde* while for the *Dzongkhag Tshogdu*, the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson are elected from among its members. These institutions are elected representatives of the people; however, they are apolitical, which means none can belong to a political party.

At the *Dzongkhag* level, the Chief Executive is the *Dzongdag*, who is supported by a staff of civil servants. The *Dzongkhag Tshogdu* is district level governance, and

consists of two elected officials, a *Gup* and a *Mangmi*, as well as an elected representative of the *Dzongkhag Thromde* and the *Dzongkhag Yenlag Thromdes*. Each district is divided into subdivisions, or *Gewogs*. *Gewogs* are further subdivided into *Chiwogs*. Figure 1 shows an illustrative level of Bhutan's local governments:

Figure 1 Bhutan Local Government Levels



Source: By the Author

At the *Gewog* level, the *Gewog Tshogde* is comprised of *Tshogpas* who are elected officials of the *Chiwog* level, as well as the *Gup* and *Mangmi* of the district level. The *Thromde Tshogde* is headed by an elected *Thrompon*. *Thrompons* are representatives of constituencies within the *Thromde*. A *Gewog Tshogde* or *Thromde Tshogde* is consisting of 7–10 members. Table 1 represents the total number of *Dzongkhags*,

Table 1 *Dzongkhags, Gewogs and Chiwogs*¹³

<i>Dzongkhags</i>	Number of <i>Gewogs</i>	Number of <i>Chiwogs</i>
Bumthang	4	20
Chukha	11	58
Dagana	14	70
Gasa	4	20
Haa	6	30
Lhuntshe	8	40
Mongar	17	88
Paro	10	50
Pemagatshel	11	56
Punakha	11	55
Samdrupjongkhar	11	58
Samtse	15	77
Sarpang	12	61
Thimphu	8	40
Trashigang	15	78
Trashiyangtse	8	41
Trongsa	5	25
Tsirang	12	60
Wangdiphodrang	15	77
Zhemgang	8	40
Total	205	1044

Gewogs and *Chiwogs* in Bhutan.

In addition to these elected institutions of local government, there is the *Gewog* Administrative Officers (GAO) appointed in each *Gewog*. While the GAOs are civil servants, they are mandated to assist, advice, and guide the elected leaders to function effectively. It is worthwhile to mention here that decision making responsibility is held by the elected leaders only.

C. *Local Governance in Bhutan*

Bhutan Local Government institutions exist through a ‘semi-democratic’¹⁴ political system prevalent since the times of absolute monarchical political system. Therefore, it can be argued that the political will has always been strong to strengthen local governance in Bhutan. The value rendered to good local governance is summarized as stated by His Majesty the King of Bhutan ‘*Local Government is not the smallest or lowest form of Government, but the most intimate and closest form of Government for the people.*’

It was further strengthened when it was mandated and guaranteed under Article 22 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan. Under the said Article, to wit;

“Power and authority shall be decentralized and devolved to elected Local Governments to facilitate the direct participation of the people in the development and management of their own social, economic, and environmental well-being.”¹⁵

The intentions as spelled out are clear and strong. Furthermore, the Constitution specifies the objectives, intentions, scope, and classifies various forms of local governments. The Constitution, to a large extent, prescribes the fundamental procedures for Local Government operations.

The Local Governments Act of 2009 and the Local Governance Rules and Regulations of 2012 further elaborated the mandates of the Constitution. In these, three major forms of Local Governments — *Dzongkhag*, *Gewog* and *Thromde* — are covered and the details of their functions were elaborated. This constitutional framework institutionalizes the important constitutional principle of decentralized governance and mandates the formation of local governments for the development, management, and administration of areas under their jurisdiction. Therefore, the Local Governments Act, along with the Constitution, provides strong statutory framework for its seamless functioning. Moreover, the Local Government Act expands the powers and authorities of local government institutions and elected representatives.

Thus within the legal and institutional framework of the Local Government Act of 2009 and the Local Governance Rules and Regulations of 2012, the Department of Local Governance, under the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, is founded on the Government’s goal and objective of strengthening the country’s pursuit of deepening decentralization and democratic local governance system. The scope and nature of the Department’s responsibilities lie in overseeing all development and governance affairs in the local governments for effective management and delivery

of public services. In this respect, the mandate of the Department ranges from provision of overall coordination and managerial guidance in social, economic and political progress of Local Government affairs.¹⁶

In this context, it is assumed and believed that these institutional frameworks and interfaces will only facilitate direct participation of the people in the development and management of their own social, economic, and environmental well-being through decentralization and devolution of power and authority. In sum, current local governance in Bhutan is thus based on the devolution of power and authority to elected local leaders, with the objective to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities emphasizing on achieving Gross National happiness.

While local government is the essential institutional building block for local governance, the wider governance sphere comprises a set of state and non-state institutions, mechanisms, and processes through which public goods and services are delivered to citizens. In reciprocal manner, citizens can articulate their interests and needs, mediate their differences and exercise their rights and obligations through all of the latter. In this context, the role of institutions like the Department of Local Governance at the central government is significant as a coordinating and facilitating state actor.

The Department of Local Governance, amongst others, has dedicated divisions for system and capacity development, plan support, monitoring and evaluation, and research information and policy support. The department is also reasonably well-resourced to carry out its mandates, besides other several agencies availing their support, to carry out interventions in the local governments.

D. Local Governance Planning

Today, *Gewogs* and *Dzongkhags* receive Annual Grants for Local Governments (LGs) from the central government that provides greater flexibility in priority setting and offers higher predictability in resource availability from the central government. These grants enable them to better plan and implement development activities that are a priority for the local people. To bring greater clarity on the roles of various levels of government in the delivery of effective and efficient public services at the local level and to facilitate distribution of resources between the central and local governments, the Division of Responsibilities Framework was instituted in 2010 and revised in 2012.¹⁷

In 2009, a Local Development Planning Manual (LDPM) was designed to assist the Local Governments in undertaking the process of development planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in a participatory and objective manner. The manual was facilitated and designed by *Dzongkhag* Planning Officers, Sector Officials, and the *Gewog* Administrative Officers. Within the overall existing decentralization policies and framework, the objective is to ensure that development plans reflect accurately the actual ground realities and the true needs and the aspirations of the people. The LDPM was revised in 2013, coinciding with the start of the Eleventh Plan. Existing process steps and tools were streamlined to make it more

relevant to new developments, emerging issues, and sustainability concerns. Up-front and proactive consideration of systemic view, future scenarios, cross-cutting issues of socio-economic and environmental nature; and their linkages to development and with each other; sustainability of development; and the goal of gross national happiness early in the planning stage and processes were emphasized. The improved steps and tools can facilitate consideration of above views and issues as an outcome in the development discussion.¹⁸

In this context, the LDPM was developed with detailed steps and various tools covering the key aspects of development planning. There are six steps as follows: Step 1: Assessment and Identification, Step 2: Prioritization of development activities, Step 3: Differentiation between *Gewog* and *Dzongkhag* Plans, Step 4: Activity planning, Step 5: Implementation, and Step 6: Monitoring and Evaluation. These steps have been carefully formulated mainly to ensure that development includes every individual and, accordingly, address the needs of every individual.

E. The 11th Five Year Plan

Bhutan's approach to development is guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) and, in practice, the five-year development plans. The GNH, as evident of its gaining popularity across the globe, recognizes good governance as a key pillar to achieving its philosophical goals. The guidelines enunciated under the 11th Five-Year Plan (11 FYP) provide impetus to this priority as can be seen from the overall goal of 'Self Reliance and Inclusive, Green Socioeconomic Development'. The plan emphasizes development and economic growth along a GNH-based middle path focused on real-life outcomes but built on strategies that integrate gender, tradition and culture, pro-poor, low carbon, eco-friendly, disaster and climate adaptation and mitigation, energy and cost-efficient modalities and strategies.

The 11th FYP guidelines specifically state that in order to ensure that socio-economic development is aligned with the overall development philosophy of GNH, all sectors and local governments must ensure that conservation and sustainable management and utilization of environment, preservation and promotion of culture and traditions, and strengthening good governance are mainstreamed in the programs and projects.¹⁹ In addition, local governments are required to mainstream key cross-cutting issues, like gender, environment, disaster, climate change and poverty into their plans.

Given these planning requirements, irrespective of autonomy or authority, it will be extremely challenging for them to perform and deliver in line with the targeted national goals and objectives. While the latter may sound attenuating, it is a fact that the capacity constraints are higher as we move deeper into the tiers of local governments. However, it is but rational to postulate that there is adequate participation and collaboration of stakeholders at all levels enabling governments to govern, particularly, in the local governments in Bhutan, considering the rugged terrain and the subsequent scattered geographical endowment of the local governments; and the institutional age of formal local governments vis-à-vis the enormous mandate and governing intentions that they have.

Box 2 Core Business (Mandates) of the Department of Local Governance

1. Administering, coordinating and supporting Local Governments in formulation and implementation of their annual development plans and programmes within the Five-Year Development policy guideline, in line with the LG Act, Local Government Rules and Regulations, and other policy and regulatory frameworks;
2. Monitoring and evaluating planned activities of Local Governments in order to ensure timely interventions;
3. Building/developing capacities of Local Governments in all relevant fields to foster good governance and professionalism in local administration and development management;
4. Support Local Governments in implementing local development plans and programs in collaboration with other line agencies/sectors;
5. Creating awareness of legal instruments and provide support and advisory services to the Local Governments on alternative dispute resolutions on local governance coordination issues;
6. Building awareness and creating effective service delivery culture in order to enhance efficiency, transparency and accountability of Local Governments.
7. Carry out research and analysis in the areas of local economic development; local environmental governance and management; climate-change impacts on local livelihoods and sustainable development; administrative, fiscal and political decentralization; democratic processes of local governance; poverty and rural livelihoods; rural-urban migration; and, other social aspects at the local level.
8. Develop and manage local government database that serves as information repository for policy guidelines and strategies on rural socio-economic development and local governance.
9. Carry out vulnerability assessments; impact assessments; and
10. Build capacity of Local Governments on research design and methodology, etc.

II. Needs and Responses

A. Capacity

The enabling legal and policy framework for local government system in Bhutan provides immense ‘scope’ for the said local governments. However, the latter’s performance will be significantly determined by their institutional ‘strength’. Further, the system’s previous semi-existence during the pre-democracy timeframe only serves to raise the expectations from local governments of the people vis-à-vis their performance in a formal setting. So the big question that lies ahead is that: can they perform and how effectively? To this end, for them to develop their strength, numerous actors have to come in play, namely, the agencies of the central government.

Fukuyama³⁰ asserted that “the most important drawback of decentralization concerns risk. Delegation of authority inevitably means delegation of risk taking (xxx)”. Decentralization as a process of local governance makes this argument very important. Risk taking requires adequate knowledge and skills to challenge and overcome the risks. In this sense, given the Bhutanese context of formal local governance being in the preliminary stages, it is only rational to address the capacity needs that are demanded by the legal and policy framework and also to justify the votes that the people casted in electing a representative.

In few *Dzongkhags*, there are unquestionably capacities and expertise that exist. We have to remember that adequate capacity is a key tool as mention in Box 1 to

measure governance — local governance in this context. However, if the intentions and objectives are to enable local governments to govern, we need to build institutions and mechanisms, within the system and frameworks to address issues and constraints consistently and in a sustainable manner. To this end, the Royal Government of Bhutan through central agencies, *id est*; Local Development Division under the Gross National Happiness Commission and the Department of Local Governments, facilitates necessary support to the Local Government functionaries. One concrete example of this is when the central government initiated the Mainstreaming Reference Group through an Executive Order of the Prime Minister.

B. *The Role of the Central Government*

A recent study²¹ states that ‘Local governments are rated high on the indicators of accountability, trust, importance of services, efficiency and performance on the services rendered by them. Trust ratings of the local elected leaders such as *Gup* and *Mangmi* are higher than that of civil servants employed in the local governments.’ Given the trust that citizens have on their elected local leaders and also given the enabling legal, policy, planning and implementation framework that is provided, significant explicit variables appear to favor local governance in Bhutan.

However, given the fact that Local Governments and Governance are at an early stage with elected leaders with either no experience at all to with limited experience, support of the Central Government is indispensable. Further, the mandate to mainstream cross-cutting issues into their plans simply aggravates the challenging practical situation the elected local leaders are into in delivering the services the people needs and expects.

C. *Mainstreaming Reference Group (MRG)*

To this end, the MRG was instituted by an Executive Order of the Prime Minister in 2012. This body was initially envisioned to “ensure that environment and other cross-cutting issues such as gender, climate change, disaster and poverty are mainstreamed into the planning, policy making and implementation process” in attaining the goal of sustainable development.²² The MRG is purposively composed of the Gross National Happiness Commission to address poverty; National Commission for Women and Children to address gender issues; National Environment Commission to address environment issues; Department of Disaster Management to address disaster risk reduction; Ministry of Agriculture of address climate change; the United Nations Development Program to provide coordinating and subject-specific technical support; and last but not the least, the Department of Local Governance to lead and collaborate the MRG interventions at the local government levels.

The MRG was established with the mandates as mentioned in the preceding Box 3 and, initially, started its activities leading the mainstreaming interventions in the plans of the central agencies. Given the positive response and also the benefit outlook the MRG provided, it was consistently suggested that the MRG be also introduced in local governments. It was believed that it will significantly strengthen the capacities and environment of mainstreaming at the local government levels. The

MRG was provided a functioning support secretariat to enable it to expand its capacities.

In this context, the MRG was launched in the Local Governments as the local MRGs. The Gross National Happiness Commission and the Department of Local Governance, as the plan coordinating agency and facilitator of good governance in local governments respectively, lead the activities of the MRG. The entry points for such interventions were identified through the existing programs of the agencies as regards to the cross-cutting issues. Critical local government functionaries were identified and appointed as the members of the Local MRG and the *Dzongrab* as Chairperson. At this stage, seven districts were identified to carry out this intervention as pilot areas.

The central MRG was made responsible for training the local MRG, and accordingly, the local MRG to roll out the capacity building for the other tiers in the local governance structure. To date, numerous trainings have been conducted for the local MRGs and their roll-out plan and activities were also drawn. However, the impact of this initiative is yet to be experienced. Nevertheless, the focal point here is the institutionalization of local MRGs to counter the changes at the local level, regardless of policy variations at local governments or central government or the people working in the current MRGs. The institutionalization of MRG both at the local and central governments ensured continuity of policy frameworks and the accomplishment of its fundamental purpose by ensuring that the cross-cutting issues are included in the local governments' thematic plans and programs. There are clear vision, specified mandates, and detailed terms of references establishing it as a support mechanism to strengthen capacities in the local governments. While currently the overall program is supported through donor support, it is envisioned that in the course of the next plan, given the institutional framework, it should be able to pull funds from internal resource allocations.

D. Awareness and Sensitization Programs on Women's Participation

Institutional establishments like the MRG will definitely support creation of an enabling environment where issues, of not only political and economic but also social in nature, are included and addressed by the development. However, the enabling legal, institutional and operational framework will not be fully utilized unless the beneficiaries are fully aware on the existence of such mechanisms. Thus, the various agencies of the Royal Government, through the concerned agencies, encourage interventions to create awareness to the general public. In turn, these interventions enable the voters to contribute to governance, especially at the local levels, through meaningful participations.

While numerous agencies have and continue to create awareness interventions in the local governments, a case that will be presented for this purpose will be women's participation. Limited representation of women as elected leaders is a concern for local governance today. Significant studies and research have been carried out in this context to design interventions. An interesting finding that is common in all such studies is the prevalence of gender stereotypes resulting to

various factors constraining women's participation and development. The Constitution guarantees equal fundamental rights to participate in the electoral process and endeavors to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Further, the 11th FYP targets Gender Friendly Environment for Women's participation as a National Key Result Area²³ and endows responsibility to all stakeholders including local government.

Box 3 Mandates of the Mainstreaming Reference Group²⁴

Advocacy and Mainstreaming of Cross-cutting issues:

- a. Sensitize all levels of government on the integration of cross cutting issues in development.
- b. Serve as a technical core working group to assist sectors, agencies, local governments in mainstreaming cross cutting issues into policies, plans and programmes
- c. Facilitate collaboration amongst specialists/researchers on cross-cutting issues and mainstream planners/implementers to form functional linkages, networks and learning to carry out coordinated and better mainstreaming.

Capacity Development:

- a. Build and strengthen systemic capacity to mainstream cross-cutting issues.
- b. Identify opportunities to integrate cross-cutting issues in training programmes, development policies, plans and programmes and assist in the development of training modules.
- c. Promote innovation and strengthen research and development capacities and initiatives.

Advisory role in Mainstreaming Processes and Approach:

- a. Assist sectors, agencies, institutes/colleges and local governments in the development of mainstreaming processes and approaches, curriculum and courses.
- b. Advice on approaches and tools for mainstreaming of cross-cutting concerns.

In light of this mandate and given the current number of total elected local government leaders as shown in Table 1 *vis-à-vis* the dismal 7% women representation, there is a huge task ahead for effective local governance to contribute towards enhancing participation of women. Also, concerned stakeholders/agencies have vital roles to play in supporting the local governments. Table 2 details the total number of women represented in the local governments.

Table 2 Elected Women Candidates in LG Elections²⁵

Sl. No	Post	Women Elected
1	<i>Gup</i>	1
2	<i>Mangmi</i>	12
3	<i>Gewog Tshogpa</i>	96
4	<i>Thrompon</i>	0
5	<i>Thromde Tshogpa</i>	4
6	<i>Thromde Thuemi</i>	0
Total		113

The fact that the population of Bhutan is almost equally divided between male and female demands for at least a reasonable representation of females in elected posts, if not equal. This rational basis supplemented by the findings of the studies conducted in Bhutan has led to several initiatives that will encourage women's participation in local governance. One tool to measure local governance as stated in Box 1 is participation of people, and in this context given the almost equal numbers, it is critical that adequate representation of women should be there at the elected levels.

Only through having a critical mass of women representation, interventions will be responsive to women's needs. It is worthy to mention here that while local governments does not have law-making authority like the parliament, it can surely formulate and implement its own plans and frame rules and regulations to support enforcement of laws within their own jurisdiction. Such rules and regulations should include needs of both men and women. However, this will be possible only through adequate participation. This, therefore, should be seen as a clarion call for women's participation not only as elected leaders but in all activities held at local levels.

To this end, the Department of Local Governance initiated capacity building programs and exposure visits for elected female leaders by integrating it to the overall local governance support program. Further the department is also mindful in including women leaders to participate and voice their concerns at annual conferences of local government leaders and other relevant conferences or seminars. The intention here is to enable them to develop their abilities, which in turn will lead to significant and able service performance. The end goal of all of these is to help break the gender stereotyping that men are better leaders and encourage young females to stand for local government elections.

Supplementing such initiatives, the National Commission for Women and Children, in collaboration with the Department of Local Governance, also conducts general awareness campaigns to educate the general public on how gender stereotypes can cripple societies from realizing their full potential. The awareness programs are also embedded on laws that are equality-driven, policies that dissuade discrimination, and plans that target equal representation. Such program includes not only the general public but also local government functionaries, both elected and civil servants. Other significant interventions include the voter's civic education and networking workshops among elected women leaders and aspiring women leaders.

All these activities have been significant in enhancing awareness, understanding and recognizing the women's contribution to development, and their needs for effective local governance. Increasingly, it has been observed that women's issues are being discussed within both the perimeter and mainstream of governance. A simple fact that elected leaders are starting to play an important role in responding to violence against women issue²⁶ is a good indicator of better and socially inclusive governance. Violence impedes self-esteem, confidence, and belief, which are preconditions for meaningful participations of any human being in any sphere, contextually, participation in local governance.

Conclusion

Bhutan's development, as mandated by the Constitution and in perpetuity, is guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness. Simply put, the state will thrive to create an environment where every entity will have the opportunity to pursue happiness. A logical sum and substance is that every human being, regardless of gender, age or standing in life, has equal opportunity, access, and benefits equally from government services. For this, we need governments that govern in such a manner that the needs of every individual are addressed, a form of governance which is credible by being efficient, transparent and accountable to its people.

A preemptive cursory glance may give one a conclusion full of challenge and difficulty but given the right fundamental ingredients — capacity, collaboration and institutionalization of the earlier two, it will yield large and optimal possibilities. It may also be argued that to measure governance, it will entail time and only over a given period of time can we observe change or reap the impact of local governance. However and as discussed briefly through the specific case of Bhutan MRG and Women's participation, impacts can be felt within a short term given the concerted efforts to build capacities, central-local collaboration, and institutionalization of such efforts.

This article does not comprehensively claim that Bhutan's local governance story resulted to effective democratic governance. Nevertheless, it is this writer's conclusion that consistent and ever-growing political will, political stability, universal development belief in gross national happiness, small size country and government, well capacitated central government, and an enabling legal and policy environment contributes to the space and scope for local governments to effectively govern. However, efforts should be continual as societal needs are ever-changing and growing. This is essential to be able to have institutions that are robust and responsive to the needs and development potentialities of every human being and of every citizen of the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan — regardless of age and gender.

Notes

- 1 Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are solely the author's and in whatsoever manner does not represent any organizations' view.
- 2 National Statistical Bureau. 2013, Statistical Year Book.
- 3 www.bhutanstudies.org.bt
- 4 Pommaret, Françoise, 1997, p. 234
- 5 Ibid, p. 234.
- 6 Bhutan, in the local Dzongkha language, is known as Dryukyul which translates as "The Land of Dragons". Thus, Kings of Bhutan are known as Druk Gyalpo or "Dragon King" in English.
- 7 With the adoption of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, these two committees are now called *Dzongkhag Tshogdu* and *Gewog Tshogde*, whose members are elected. Municipal council is called *Thromde Tshogde* with similar membership as the other two.
- 8 UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, 2008. A Users Guide to Measuring Local Governance

- 9 UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, 2008. A Users Guide to Measuring Local Governance
 10 Improving Women's Participation in Local Governance, Royal University of Bhutan,
 2014.
- 11 Administrative Block comprising of group of villages in a dzongkhag/district.
 12 Chiwog: An administrative unit at the local level (sub-block) in a *Gewog* (sub district/
 block).
- 13 www.election-bhutan.org.bt
- 14 Rose, Leo. 1977. *The Politics of Bhutan*, Cornell University Press.
- 15 Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008.
- 16 www.dlg.gov.bt
- 17 GNHC. 2014. *Local Development Planning Manual*, 2nd Edition.
- 18 GNHC. 2014. *Local Development Planning Manual*, 2nd Edition.
- 19 GNHC. 2011. *Guidelines 11th FYP Preparation of the 11th Five Year Plan (2008–2013)*.
- 20 Fukuyama. Francis, 2004. *State Building, Governance and World Order in Twenty-First
 Century*.
- 21 Department of Local Governance, 2013. *The Citizen's Perception Study on Local Govern-
 ance in Bhutan*.
- 22 www.ecpmainstreaming.gov.bt
- 23 GNHC. 2012. *11th Five Year Plan, Main Document, Volume One*.
- 24 www.ecpmainstreaming.gov.bt
- 25 Data Source: Gender Focal Point, Election Commission of Bhutan, 2013.
- 26 NCWC, 2013. *Violence Against Women — A prevalence study*.

References

- Department of Local Governance, 2013, *The Citizen's Perception Study on Local Governance
 in Bhutan*.
- Fukuyama. Francis, 2004. *State Building, Governance and World Order in Twenty-First
 Century*.
- Pommaret, Francoise, 1997. *The Way to the Throne*. In Christian Schicklgruber & Francoise
 Pommaret, 1997, (Eds). *Bhutan: Mountain Fortress of the Gods*
- National Commission for Women and Children, 2013. *Violence Against Women Prevalence
 study*.
- Rose, Leo. 1977. *The Politics of Bhutan*, Cornell University Press.
- Royal Government of Bhutan, National Statistical Bureau, *Statistical Year Book 2013*.
- Royal Government of Bhutan, Gross National Happiness Commission, 2012. *11th Five Year
 Plan, Main Document, Volume One*.
- Royal Government of Bhutan, Gross National Happiness Commission, 2011. *Guidelines 11th
 FYP Preparation of the 11th Five Year Plan (2008–2013)*.
- Royal Government of Bhutan, Gross National Happiness Commission, 2014, *Local Develop-
 ment Planning Manual*, 2nd Edition.
- Royal Government of Bhutan, 2008. *Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan*.
- Royal University of Bhutan, 2014. *Improving Women's Participation in Local Governance*.
- UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, 2008. *A Users Guide to Measuring Local Governance*.

Websites

- www.dlg.gov.bt
www.ecpmainstreaming.gov.bt
www.election-bhutan.org.bt
www.gnhc.gov.bt

www.ncwc.org.bt

www.nsb.org.bt