

# SECTOR MINISTERS' MEETING 2019

San José — Costa Rica — 4-5 April



## The Bhutan COUNTRY BRIEF

*The Country Briefs were prepared by governments ahead of the SWA 2019 Sector Ministers' Meeting. They are a snap-shot of the country's current state in terms of water, sanitation and hygiene, and future targets.*

### 1. Background

Bhutan is a landlocked country bordered by China in the north and India in the east, west and south in the eastern Himalayan region. The climate varies between sub-tropical to tropical in the southern foothills, cool winters to hot summers in the central valleys and severe winters to cool summers in the high Himalayas. The country has over 71% of its land under forest cover which includes 42.7% protected areas, thereby maintaining its rich biodiversity and water resource availability of 100,000 cubic meters per capita per annum. Bhutan's key demographic figure; population of 735,553 (PHCB 2017), an area of 38,394 square km, Bhutan being a young democratic constitutional monarchy established in 2008, and it is the only carbon negative **country in the world**.

In 1971, Bhutan began to develop its foreign relations by joining the United Nations and in 1974 with the coming in of UNICEF the WASH program formally started. Bhutan is also an active member of SAARC and is currently a member of 45 international organizations. In 2017, three-member delegation from Bhutan led by the Minister for the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement (MoWHS), attended the SWA Sector Ministers and Finance Ministers meeting as an observer in Washington DC, USA. Their participation was supported by UNICEF (HQ and CO).

A formal application was sent to SWA by MoWHS in consultation with Ministry of Foreign Affairs in May 2017 for accession to the membership and was granted in October 2017. Bhutan is now the 7th country to join SWA from amongst the eight SAARC countries.

### 2. Status of WASH sector in Bhutan

Bhutan has made good strides in achieving improved sanitation at 85.3% as per the Bhutan Living Standard Survey (BLSS 2017). However, current SDGs basic service levels is 63% according to JMP 2017 report and according to Annual Health Bulletin 2017, Bhutan still faces 4.1% open defecation. A rapid survey done in 2017, on the assessment of baseline data for safely managed sanitation services in urban areas which showed that 53.6% of the population has access to safely managed sanitation services. Similarly, a baseline

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survey has been carried out for rural areas on safely managed sanitation services for which the data entry and analysis is being carried out.

Improved water sources in Bhutan stands at 99.5% with 45.5% of households having piped water in the dwellings and 50.4% with piped water in compound according to BLSS 2017. Bhutan has 34% of its population having access to safely managed drinking water with 100% piped connection nationally according to JMP 2017.

Disparities in access to WASH facilities and services are prevalent in Bhutan. These inequalities are related to income, gender, disability and geographic factors, and are often interrelated. Rural households are remote and scattered, often located on mountainous terrain with limited access and challenging supply chains.

Table 1: Status of WASH sector in Bhutan, JMP 2017 Report

Bhutan	Drinking Water			Sanitation			Hygiene		
	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban
	2015	2015	2015	2015	2015	2015	2014	2014	2014
<b>Safely managed</b>	34	28	45	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Basic service</b>	98	98	97	63	57	72	80	75	87
<b>Limited service</b>	2	2	2	8	4	15	9	12	4
<b>Unimproved</b>	0	0	1	29	39	13	-	-	-
<b>No service</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	12	9

### 3. Country Priorities

It is evident from the message granted by His Majesty the king Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck “Where we live must be clean, safe, organised, and beautiful, for national integrity, national pride, and for our bright future. This too is nation building” that the WASH sector is top priority.

Also, in the 12th FYP there is emphasis on the WASH components;

- Sustainable water-ensured water for all (DRINKING and IRRIGATION) by 2021.
- Manage wastes more efficiently.

Bhutan follows a five-year socio-economic development planning cycle starting with the 1st Five Year Plan (FYP) in 1961. The FYPs articulate the socio-economic development priorities and programmes to be implemented over a five-year period.

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The planning process for the 12th FYP covering the period 1st July 2018 to 30th June 2023 began in January 2016 with series of extensive consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including individuals, government agencies, local governments, private sectors, Civil Society Organizations, political parties etc.

Assessment/mapping of the 12th FYP National Key Result Areas (NKRAs) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) was carried out with the SDGs by Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC). Previously, there were 16 NKRAs which were closely related with 16 of the 17 SDGs and close to 100 Targets and indicators of SDGs are integrated into the NKRAs and KPIs. With the coming in of new government the water sector is given more importance with the creation of a dedicated NKRA 17-themed “Sustainable Water Ensured”.

The two lead ministries (Ministry of Health and Ministry of Works and Human Settlement) in consultation with other relevant sectors have harmonized the SDG 6.1 and 6.2 indicators with the National Key Result Areas (NKRA 8 and 15) of the 12th Five Year Plan (2018-2023). Bhutan’s planning process is based on inclusive bottom up planning where local governments prioritise developmental activities according to the local needs aligned with NKRAs.

1. Macroeconomic Stability Ensured	4. Culture and Tradition Preserved and Promoted	7. Quality of Education and skills Improved	10. Gender Equality Promoted, Women and Girls Empowered	13. Democracy and Decentralization Strengthened	16. Justice services and Institutions Strengthened
2. Economic Diversity and Productivity Enhanced	5. Health Ecosystem Services Maintained	8. Water, Food and Nutrition Security Enhanced	11. Productive and Gainful Employment Created	14. Health and Caring Society Enhanced	17. Sustainable Water Ensured
3. Poverty Eradicated and Inequality Reduced	6. Carbon Neutral and Disaster Resilient Development Enhanced	9. Infrastructure, Communication and Public Service Delivery Improved	12. Corruption Reduced	15. Livability, Safety and Sustainability of Human Settlements	



In addition to the 12 FYP activities, the present government has prioritized water security and therefore, a flagship program with the objective to provide 24x7 safe drinking water is underway to address issue of low accessibility despite the high-water availability. This is mainly due to issues in source management, inadequate infrastructure development and issues in governance and sector-based management systems.

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The first phase of the Flagship Program covers ten Dzongkhags(districts) and four Thromdes(municipalities). The total cost of the interventions for the watershed management, infrastructure development and water quality improvement has been estimated as Ngultrum.2,751.6 million (USD 39 Million), benefitting 74,241households, living in the selected regions in the 1st phase. With the hopes of ensuring access to 24x7 safe drinking water, the Flagship Program implementation will begin alongside the 12th Five Year plan.

## 4. Institutional Arrangements

The Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) leads the development of five-year plans (FYPs) which includes setting national targets and budget allocation for Sanitation and Hygiene Programs. The National Environment Commission is responsible for establishing and ensuring compliance with standards, codes of practice and regulations on effluent discharge, septic tanks and water quality.

The WASH sector in Bhutan comprises of the following;

- ✓ The Ministry of Works and Human Settlement (MoWHS) is responsible for urban WASH at the national level. Within the MoWHS, the Water and Sanitation Division of the Department of Engineering Services (DES) is responsible for developing policies, strategies and guidelines.
- ✓ The Ministry of Health (MoH) is responsible for rural WASH at the national level. Public Health Engineering Division (PHED) under MoH is responsible for developing policies, strategies and guidelines.
- ✓ The School Health and Nutrition Division of Ministry of Education is the lead coordinating agency for WASH in Schools in the country.
- ✓ The Religion and Health Project of the Council for Religious Affairs is the lead coordinating agency for WASH in monastic institutions including nunneries.
- ✓ The Local Government is responsible for preparing annual targets, work plans and budgets for WASH within their respective jurisdiction.

A coordination mechanism (B-WASH Cluster) at the central level is in place to provide platform for inclusive and participatory collaboration and coordination amongst the sectors/agencies (Tourism Council of Bhutan, the CSOs- Ability Bhutan Society, Royal Society for Protection of Nature, Bhutan Nuns Foundation, Tarayana Foundation, Bhutan Toilet Organization, UNICEF, Swiss Red Cross, SNV, media and private sectors) to address the WASH issues. It also facilitates harmonization of policies, standards, guidelines, data management, advocacy and awareness towards achieving the national, regional and international (SDG) commitments. It also takes the initiative of building capacity and pre-positioning of essential materials for humanitarian preparedness and response for WASH in emergency.

## 5. Challenges

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Amongst many challenges faced in the WASH sector, following are some of the key challenges that needs to be addressed;

**WASH Sector Financing:** planning & budgeting for WASH are prepared by respective sectors based on the approved five-year plan. There has been steady increase in the resource allocation for WASH sector in the last 3 years notably in the urban sectors through development partners and international financial institutions like UNICEF, SNV, World Bank and ADB. Some of the key challenges faced in the budgetary allocations are low priority for WASH sector, poor coordination during budget preparation between the centre and the local governments and absence of dedicated operation and maintenance budget for WASH facilities. A greater proportion of budget for sanitation and hygiene related activities in rural Bhutan are still supported by the development partners (UNICEF, SNV, WHO and Swiss Red Cross). Apart from the challenges in resourcing the WASH sector, there is also the issue of sustainability of the services due to the lack of effective resource recovery mechanism like standardized tariff regulation at national level. There is a need to come up with a costed WASH plan to achieve national and SDG targets.

**Capacities Development:** human resource capacity at all levels is a challenge in order to effectively plan, implement and monitor WASH initiatives. With the government now allocating 50% of the national budget to the local government in the 12th Five Year Plan, human resource capacity including availability of skilled personnel is a key constraint for the sector. Thus, local governments need to set aside dedicated budget for building capacities in WASH. Currently, there is no collaboration with technical training institutions leading to a mismatch of skills and market demand in development of certain critical WASH services. However, there is an opportunity to collaborate with the research institutions and universities. In addition to the government's effort, development partner's role will continue to remain crucial in capacity building & innovative approaches to help country achieve 2030 agenda.

**Coordination Mechanism:** currently there are number of agencies involved in water and sanitation sector. Often these agencies work in isolation with limited coordination. Having this important mandate divided across many agencies and most prominently between the MoWHS and MoH, along the lines of urban and rural areas. MoWHS oversees the urban water and sanitation while the MoH is responsible for the rural water, sanitation and hygiene. With two agencies involved, it weakens holistic approach to planning and management of service provision in the WASH sector. A draft National Sanitation and Hygiene Policy has been developed in October 2017, and is awaiting endorsement by the Cabinet wherein there is clear delineation of mandates for concerned agencies like the MoWHS and MoH. The current government also believes in the establishment of a dedicated water agency to ensure water for all by 2021.

**Climate Change:** despite the Bhutan's carbon negative status, the country is experiencing impacts of global warming especially on glaciers and glacial lakes, which constitute a major source of water in Bhutan. The Bhutan Himalayas is known to have some 677 glaciers and 2,647 glacial lakes, these glaciers are reported to be retreating by about 20-30 meters each year (Bhutan Environment Outlook, NEC, 2008) and inconsistent rainfall reported in recent years may adversely impact the WASH services.

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## 6. Commitments

- Establish baseline for SDG 6.2
- 100% basic sanitation coverage in > 50% of the Gewogs (Blocks) of the country.
- Develop an inclusive national road map for sanitation and hygiene.
- Ensure appropriate technology and infrastructure for safely managed sanitation and safe emptying practices.
- Strengthen the existing national coordination mechanism- the B-WASH cluster group.
- Explore proper cost recovery mechanism to meet out operational expenditure for urban WASH infrastructure.
- Review and harmonize the existing monitoring information systems and indicators in line with the JMP definitions.
- Establish partnerships with local research institutes, colleges and training institutes for improved skills and researches in the sanitation and hygiene sector.

## 7. Contacts

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