

Report on International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 2022

General Background

Bhutan's philosophy of Gross National Happiness embodies a strong commitment to realizing the equal rights of all, including people with disabilities. However, in practice, people with disabilities face multiple forms of stigma, discrimination and social exclusion. Bhutan has been a signatory to the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) since 2010 but has not ratified it yet. Given the nascency of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (NPPDS), the adequacy and success in accomplishing the rights and protection of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) will be determined only upon its commencement and implementation.

The prevalence rate of disability in Bhutan, according to the 2017 Population and Housing Census, is 22.1%, out of which female disability stands at a higher rate of 2.3% while male stands at 2%. The two-stage Child Disability Study reports a child disability prevalence rate of one in every five children between the ages of two to nine. A major challenge for PWDs is the pervasive negative attitude towards disability. The study on "Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) on Children with Disabilities" (CwDs) reveals that over 85% of those without formal education believe disability was because of past karma or deeds.

The Bhutan Vulnerability Baseline Assessment 2016, conducted by the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC), identifies PwDs as one of the vulnerable groups, highlighting "stigma, discrimination and exclusion" as some of the critical vulnerabilities. The manifestation of these findings is further substantiated by the 2016 National Needs Assessment conducted by GNHC, where 500 people with disabilities were interviewed across 17 of Bhutan's 20 districts, setting up the need to advance a rights-based model with improved self-determination of people with disabilities. The assessment cited poor participation of PWDs in community decision-making (14.5%) and low awareness of laws or policies related to disability (8.4%). Disaggregated by gender, the empowerment figures show fewer women with disabilities (4.6% to 10.1%) involved in community decision-making processes. Of the PWDs who were victims of sexual violence, 92% are women or girls. This inequality reflects a broader gender gap in Bhutan, as captured by the Global Gender Index 2016, where Bhutan ranks 121 out of 144 countries. The meaningful engagement of PWDs in addressing these challenges in Bhutan is minimal but improved with the

support of Bhutan's UNCRPD project. The number of disability-related civil society organizations or Organizations for PWDs (OPDs) is growing in Bhutan.

Disabled People's Organization of Bhutan

The Disabled People's Organization (DPO), formerly known as the Disabled Persons' Association of Bhutan (DPAB), was founded by a group of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) to recognize the voice of their own. Under the Royal Patronage of His Royal Highness Prince Namgyal Wangchuk – the XXVIth Paro Penlop, the organization was legally registered with the Civil Society Organizations Authority (CSOA) on November 26, 2010.

The organization, which is tax exempted, is governed by a Board of Trustees, whose members are chosen for a certain term of office from among the organization's members. The DPO has a seven-member Board of Directors and a fifteen-member Technical Committee. Twenty focal persons (DT Secretaries in Dzongkhags) provide the DPO with data updates on PWDs in their districts, as well as facilitate coordination and communication at the Dzongkhag level. The management team comprises six staff who oversee the organization's day-to-day functions.

DPO is the only organization in the country with PWDs serving on the Board of Directors, Technical Committee and Management Team. As required by the Civil Society Organization Act 2007, the operations are guided by its Charter and the Articles of Association. Our financial transactions and performance are subject to the Royal Audit Authority (RAA) auditing.

DPO conduct systematic advocacy to improve outcomes for all persons with disabilities in Bhutan by attempting to influence longer-term change to ensure that their rights are respected. To defend these rights and interests, we influence and change systems such as law, rules, and practices, as



well as community attitudes. Raising awareness of issues affecting PWDs and their families is an important component of our work. We make sure that individuals with disabilities are at the center of all discussions and decisions, because they are the greatest persons to advise on matters that affect themselves in the society. We carry out the advocacy and awareness campaigns through Disability Equality Training, an approach that involves PwDs as the main source of information through their lived experiences. We mark significant international days to raise awareness about disability rights in Bhutan.

International Day for Persons with Disabilities

Every 3rd of December is observed as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) around the world. The observance of the Day aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights, and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life. Each year the day focuses on a different issue with the different theme. The theme for this year's International Day was "Transformative solutions for inclusive development: the role of innovation in fueling an accessible and equitable world".



Every year, Disabled People's Organization of Bhutan celebrates the day with relevant agencies in different districts to create more awareness of disability rights and issues within the nation. This year, DPOB has decided to mark the day in Thimphu with a mini concert by persons with disabilities. The following were the objectives for the festival besides marking the International Day for Persons with Disabilities:

- Bringing PwDs together at same platform and create space for interaction so that they know and support each other.
- Empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring their participation as equal members of society in the socio-economic development process.
- Creating platform to show the talents and skills of PwDs so that they are recognized in the community.

- To equip audience with a working knowledge of disability which will enable them to recognize the inequality of PwDs.
- Improving access to opportunities and services for PwDs.
- Supporting and enabling PwDs to maximize independent lifestyles and full inclusion in the community.

Brief description of the festival

The event was graced by chairperson of Bhutan Civil Society Network-BCSN. The board members of DPO and technical team attended the event including some representatives from Organizations working for People with Disabilities-OPDS.



The major performers of the concert were members of Kuenpel Entertainment (PwDs) and Blind Music Training Institute and other PwDs who are popular in singing platform.

The guest performers from Film Industry also performed some songs and three group dances were performed by students of Thimphu Thromde.

More than 150 PwDs guided by their caregivers gathered for the festival that

evening at Kaja Throm. The participants were served refreshment during the program and dinner at the end. The members and beneficiaries of DPO also shared their lived experiences, issues and challenges by interacting among themselves. The event was successfully carried out with financial support from SNV, Bhutan country office.

Images from the Entertainment sessions

