

# First ever Bhutan Women Parliamentary Caucus launched



**Pema Seldon/ Thimphu**

Bhutan Women Parliamentary Caucus (BWPC), the first ever joint initiative for gender equality by Bhutan Network for Empowering Women (BNEW) and National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) was launched by the Chairperson of NCWC, Lyonpo (Dr) Tandi Dorji at Tashi Taj, Thimphu on 14 August.

Unlike any other caucuses, BWPC will ensure that it is inclusive, non-partisan, apolitical, multi-stakeholder which will bring onboard the representation and voices of civil society, media, academia, private and corporate so that women Parliamentarians can interact and be informed about a wide range of concerns and issues and represent everyone adequately on a regular basis.

In addition, building capacity to enhance their knowledge, skills, confidence and performance will also be one of the priorities of BWPC, thus influencing and transforming the existing patriarchal mindsets and attitude in society that hesitate to accept, endorse, support and acknowledge women leadership at par with men.

BWPC will also invite male members to enrich the BWPC dialogues, deepen understanding, and strengthen relationships to work together for gender equality as gender issues are societal issues, not

just women's issues.

The Executive Director of BNEW, Phuntshok Choden, said, "Despite various efforts, Bhutan has not been able to address the issue of woman representation and interventions and related investments are just not delivering the outcome at a pace so desired and needed."

She added, "Bhutan has been doing very well in many social indicators, like health and education, but due to the lack of progress in the sphere of political empowerment of women, we have also been in the lowest rank in regional and global ranking."

She stated that although women have made progress in representation in national politics, Bhutan still suffers from very poor women representation at the decision making level. At present, Bhutan has only 15 percent of women representative in the Parliament.

According to BNEW, Bhutan have been at the bottom of the rung for many years in South Asia. Globally too, Bhutan is not doing any better. The Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) has ranked Bhutan at 136 out of 193 countries in 2019, while the latest Global Gender Gap report by the WEF placed Bhutan at 138 out of 149 countries.

She said, "BWPC was formed for advancing the gender agenda with greater vigor given the expiry date of

SDG Goal 5 to achieve Planet 50-50 by 2030 and the NKRA 10 of the 12th Plan to empower women and girls."

For Bhutan, the participants of the 2nd National Conference on Women in Politics in March 2017, took the liberty of contextualizing the SDG goal by tapering it down to Planet 40-60 in the Thimphu Declaration.

It was felt that the tapering was reasonable, looking at the baseline Bhutan has with very low levels of women's participation and representation in every sphere.

"At current pace, it looks doubtful whether even Planet 40-60 is achievable because time is running out and expiry date is nearing. Unless we are realistic, strategic, ambitious and bold enough to dare to plug the gap through suitable Temporary Special Measures or fast-track measure that can expedite the process of enhancing women representation, we will not get there even after 50 years," Phuntshok Choden added.

Lyonpo Tandi said although women representation in the Parliament is very minimal, he said it is only the third election. "If we look at the European Union, they had their first election in 1979 and the number of women in Parliament was close to what we have today. The percentage of women increased consistently thereafter. I feel that we will also follow the

same tract," Lyonpo added.

He further said that there are only three countries in the world where women outnumbered men in the Parliament, which is because of the policies that have been taken and although most of these countries have been developing countries where there is a quota system and reservation for women in Parliament.

In the Nordic countries, there have been many initiatives mainly directed towards the welfare of woman and creating more opportunities, ensuring women are elected in the Parliament. There are many things that we can learn from these countries that have achieved very fascinating and significant numbers, said Lyonpo Tandi Dorji.

Lyonpo said, "Although we have been saying that the role of women is important, women face lots of challenges. They have family responsibilities, people think women are less experienced to take leadership positions, many women have not been tough enough when it comes to politics or the hesitation by the voters and lack of institution supports.

The most important were the fear of physical abuse or violence. So it is really a difficult environment that they should contest, especially in politics."

He said that it is very timely, looking at our scenario, that the caucus is established. The 11 women in the Parliament who are also the member of the caucus are not only the voice and visibility of women in Bhutan, but they will represent the women well and serve as the role model for other women to come forward, he added.

"Members of the caucus will join hands, irrespective of their political affiliation, positions, and raise awareness and advocate for more comprehensive enabling environment to achieve gender equality in Bhutan," Lyonpo said.

The government committed in ensuring that we achieve gender equality within the framework of SDG, particularly the goal number 5 and NKRH 10 in 12th Plan. The government will review and harmonize mainstream gender into the laws, policies, plans and programs across all sectors.

## USD 7 mn for Bhutan for Life

**Staff Reporter/ Thimphu**

Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation (BT FEC) and the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for financial assistance of up to USD 7 million (mn) for program financing of Bhutan for Life (BFL) as a 'Project Finance for Permanence' - implementation of conservation programs in the Protected Areas (PAs) on 13 August.

BT FEC will annually release Nu 32.500 mn in accordance with the annual work plan prepared and submitted to BT FEC by Project Coordination Unit. The executive director of BFLFS thanked BT FEC for their generous donation and stated, "BT FEC has been a sustainable financing partner in the field of nature conservation since its establishment in early 1990s."

BT FEC, a conservation grant-making organization, has supported more than 200 projects as of June 2019. In the recent years, BT FEC collaborated with GEF, Climate investment fund, World Bank and Adaptation Fund. BT FEC supports various climate projects in the country, and at the same time, ensures a steady growth of its endowment fund, which, to date, stands at USD 70 mn. This is an exponential increase from initial endowment of USD 20 mn.