

Country Paper

Bhutan

2026

Poverty, Vulnerability and Social Justice: Land, Livelihoods and Economic Justice in Bhutan

Prepared by

Hem Gurga



P.O Box 8130, 288 Gairidhara Marg, Gairidhara, Kathmandu, Nepal

Phone: +977-1-4004976, 4004985

Fax: +977 -1- 4004508, 4443494

saape.network@gmail.com

Executive summary

Bhutan's economy retains its rural characteristics despite the government's emphasis on capital investment. Agriculture is the main occupation of the rural people. With 69% of the total land area covered by forests, land available for agriculture is limited.

According to the National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan (NSB), 62.2% of the total population lived in rural areas in 2017. However, rural livelihoods, mainly agriculture, are vulnerable given the government's deprioritization of agriculture. In FY 2025-26, 51% of the budget was allocated to capital investment, whereas agriculture received only 5%.

The country's GDP growth rate stood at 8.76% in 2025, supported by hydropower revenues. Given the government's prioritisation of the hydropower sector at the expense of agriculture, there remains a debt-crisis concern, though Bhutan is maintaining debt sustainability. Hydropower-related debt accounts for the largest share of public debt, at 61.4% of external debt.

Despite excellent economic growth, youth unemployment, rural-urban migration and emigration are in rising trend. The vulnerability of rural livelihoods and the lack of decent jobs and career growth opportunities are the causes of unemployment and migration. Youth unemployment rate stands at 18 %.

Bhutan's development approach is technocratic rather than rights-based. As a result, land rights, local food systems, and food sovereignty are undermined. The state has ultimate authority over land. Pursuant to the existing legal provisions, the government sometimes undermines people's land rights and tenure security. The government has initiated the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) project by occupying inhabited private lands and houses without people's consent. Further, this project uses the land of the evicted refugees who are awaiting repatriation from the camps in Nepal.

Dispossessed people, who are stripped of their citizenship and property, remain chronically deprived. Landless, small landholders and rural poor are deprived of economic benefits. The benefits are concentrated in the urban areas.

To sum up, Bhutan's economy is growing and is expected to grow. Yet youth unemployment, agricultural and rural livelihood vulnerability, emigration and rural-urban migration are increasing, creating a wider gap between the rich and poor.

Bhutan needs to rebalance public spending towards social and agricultural sectors so as to ensure overall sustainable development and economic justice.

Table of Contents

1. Background	1
2. Land Rights and Food Sovereignty.....	2
2.1 Current Situation.....	2
2.2 Impact on People (Small Farmers, Women and Rural Poor): What Matters for Rural People?	3
2.3 Policy Framework: Agriculture and Land policies.....	4
2.4 Policy Gaps	5
2.5 People's Experiences.....	6
2.6 Civil Society Demands	7
3. Economic Justice (Debt, Public Spending, Jobs).....	8
3.1 Current Situation: Hydropower-Led Economy	8
3.2 Debt Trends	9
3.3 Impact on People	10
3.5 Policy Framework: Economic and Fiscal Policies	11
3.5 Policy Gaps	11
3.6 People's Experiences (Youth and Informal Workers)	12
3.7 Civil Society Concerns on Economic Justice	14
4. Budget and Economic Analysis	14
4.1 Government Spending Trends: Agriculture.....	14
4.2 Debt vs. Social Spending.....	16
4.3 Who Benefits from Public Investment?	17
5. Intersection of Vulnerabilities.....	18
6. People's Alternatives	19
7. Policy Recommendations.....	20

1. Background

Bhutan is widely recognised for its development model based on "Gross National Happiness" and strong environmental protection. It is also known for its claim of carbon-negative status, which means the vegetation absorbs more carbon gases than the country emits. It has achieved significant progress in poverty reduction, human development and access to basic services. Multidimensional poverty reduced from 5.8% in 2017 to 2.1% in 2022 (National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan (NSB) & Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), 2023, p. x). This level of poverty reduction is considered a significant achievement towards achieving sustainable development goal (SDG). However, important structural challenges remain. Despite the vehement scale of poverty reduction, rural poverty poses a great challenge. Poverty remains concentrated in rural areas and varies significantly across regions.

Based on the Poverty Analysis Report 2022, 17.5 per cent of rural people were poor, while only 4.2 per cent of the urban population lived in poverty. The report states that only 0.4 per cent of the total population was subsistence poor, which means an insignificant minority of people could not meet minimum food and non-food requirements. In aggregate, an estimated 12.4 per cent of the total population was considered poor (NSB, 2022, Executive Summary, p. viii).

Bhutan is predominantly an agrarian country. Unfortunately, only about 7 per cent of the total land area is arable (National Land Commission Secretariat (NLCS), 2023, p. iii). Similarly, the *Land Use Land Cover Assessment of Bhutan 2020, Technical Report* shows that the agricultural land of Bhutan is only 2.96 per cent. According to the report, forest covers 69 per cent of the total land area (NLCS, 2020, section 13, Results and Analysis, p. 17).

It is noteworthy that Bhutan has the constitutional policy mandate to maintain at least 60 per cent forest cover. Bhutan retains conventional farming and animal rearing due to technological backwardness and unfavourable terrain. Besides, Bhutan's agriculture is vulnerable due to its subsistence nature and climate sensitivity.

Bhutan is prone to climate risks, including floods, landslides and glacial lake outburst floods. Furthermore, climate change significantly triggers these calamities. Drought, erratic rainfall, floods, and landslides adversely affect agricultural productivity.

Agriculture is obviously neglected, and the farmers are on the margins of the national economy. The economy is rather vehemently dependent on hydropower and public investment. This, in turn, has raised concerns about sustainability and debt.

In other words, contradiction lies in the fact that the majority of the population is engaged in agriculture, while the economy is based on public investment. Consequently, agriculture is

incapable of yielding enough revenue. The recent NSB data cites that agriculture, forestry and fisheries jointly contribute about 15 per cent of Bhutan's GDP (NSB, 2020, Table 3, p. 39).

Moreover, educated, skilled and semi-skilled youths are increasingly becoming reluctant to work on agricultural farms. They are rather attracted towards services. So the village youths tend to migrate to urban areas. This rural-urban migration trend has contributed to the vulnerability of the village-centred agriculture.

Nevertheless, not all those who abstain from agriculture are employed. This indeed is a deteriorating employment situation in the country. Bhutan's overall unemployment rate was 3.4% in 2025. Youth unemployment was estimated at 18.0% (NSB, 2025, Executive Summary, p. xiv).

On the one hand, the conventional-feudal characteristics of agriculture constrain agricultural output, resulting in insufficient food supply. On the other hand, economic benefits are unevenly distributed. Job opportunities are mostly centred in urban areas, leaving the country folks dependent on subsistence and semi-commercial farming. According to NSB (2018, p. 140), about 62.2 per cent of the population lived in rural areas, and 37.8 per cent lived in urban areas in 2017. This shows a few facts. First, Bhutan's urbanisation is increasing. Second, the rural population is still higher than the urban population. Third, the majority of the Bhutanese live in disadvantaged areas of the country.

Bhutan's economy is dependent mainly on India. The country's major export is electricity, which goes to India. Bhutan, on the other hand, depends heavily on Indian imports for vehicles, fuel, food, medicines, machinery and other consumer goods. This creates economic vulnerability because the economic stability and growth depend heavily on electricity prices and India's favours.

2. Land Rights and Food Sovereignty

Land rights in Bhutan are shaped both by the traditional land tenure system and legal provisions. Bhutan considers land as a national resource, but regulated private land ownership also exists. The Constitution of Bhutan (2008), the Land Act of Bhutan (2007), and regulations issued by the National Land Commission govern land rights in Bhutan.

With 69% of total land area covered by forest, 4.11% by shrubs, 8.89% by Alpine scrubs and 4.52% by rocky outcrops, only 2.96% of the land is available for agriculture (NLCS, 2020, p. 7). This fact serves as a limitation and vulnerability of Bhutan in land use, productivity and food sovereignty. Further, the constitutional provision mandating at least 60% forest cover has overemphasised environmental protection at the expense of agricultural productivity.

2.1 Current Situation

The rural population of Bhutan depends on agricultural yields. Unfortunately, rural agriculture is subsistence and semi-commercial. Moreover, job opportunities and industries are centred in urban areas. This has contributed to widening rural-urban disparity.

Living standards in rural areas are much lower than in urban areas. According to *the Bhutan Multidimensional Poverty Index 2022*, the urban and rural poverty rates were 8.2% and 23.9%, respectively, and 61.4% of the poor lived in rural areas (NSB & OPHI, 2023, p. viii). The rural-urban disparity remains a challenge in 2025. *Annual Macroeconomic Performance and Outlook Report 2025* projects rural poverty to remain more than 12 percentage points higher than urban poverty throughout the projection period from 2024-2028 (Ministry of Finance, 2025, p. 68).

Food production in Bhutan follows a gradual structural shift rather than a comprehensive transformation. Recent productivity shows mixed performance in cereals, vegetables, fruits and livestock. Principal staples, rice and maize, production has declined in the cropped areas, although yields remain all but stable. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Bhutan's overall cereal production in 2025 was estimated at 73,000 tonnes. This was slightly below the long-term average of 6-7% (FAO, 2025). FAO notes that reduced cultivated area, farmers' choice of cash crops as better options, and infrastructure expansion are the main causes of the decline. This trend of slow decline in staple grain self-reliance also means growing reliance on food imports.

According to a press release from the Department of Agriculture, *the Integrated Agriculture and Livestock Census (IALC) of Bhutan 2025* found that vegetable production had increased. Fruit and niche-crop production was also on the rise, and the entire horticulture sector was shifting towards cash crops and export-oriented cultivation. The DoA press release (2025), drawing on the *IALC* report, notes that the livestock production trend showed steady growth in dairy output and increases in honey, fish, eggs, and wool production. Likewise, the poultry and pig populations increased, while the cattle and goat populations decreased in 2024. To sum up, livestock production witnessed “modest growth” in 2024, with some exceptions (Department of Agriculture {DoA}, 2025).

2.2 Impact on People (Small Farmers, Women and Rural Poor): What Matters for Rural People?

Small farmers are those with very small landholdings and/or without any. They are subsistence farmers. Landless farmers work on landlords' land, retaining feudal remnants such as half-sharecropping, farm labour, and herding labour systems, and so on.

Confiscation of assets of the alleged agitators in the aftermath of the 1990 peaceful movement turned thousands of farmers into landless and homeless farm workers, herding labourers, sharecroppers and refugees. This is true especially in Southern Bhutan.

Obviously, subsistence farmers endure hardships to meet basic needs, including minimum food requirements. To make matters worse, the landless households who have been stripped of land, housing and citizenship live in extreme poverty. This chronic deprivation has resulted in severe food insecurity among affected households.

Although Bhutan has initiated the restoration of citizenship in recent times, the procedure is not without constraints and conditions. Virtual interview respondents, on condition of anonymity, reported that the dispossessed households are being pressured to enrol in 'Desuung', a militia-like national volunteer force, as a condition to regain their citizenship. Compounding this issue, the respondents reported that the citizenship restoration procedure is lingering, the remuneration provided to the 'Desuup' corps is nominal, and the restoration of the asset rights and the compensation of the chronic deprivation remains excluded from the policy framework.

In a practical structural sense, women are at the margin of land rights and food sovereignty questions. Land ownership or land rights in Bhutan are not strictly based on gender roles. But then, women, mostly confined to the domestic four walls, do not enjoy full rights in a practical sense. Rural women play a vital role in agriculture. It is indeed male dominance, especially in decisive roles in southern and eastern Bhutan, that pushes women to the margins. Men have control over loans, income utilization, and marketing of the products.

Citing the findings of the *Gender Study in Bhutan* (Gross National Happiness Commission {GNHC}, 2011), Moktan et al. (2024) reported that sons and daughters in Bhutan inherit equal land rights under statutory laws, but under customary laws, land rights are often governed by lineage-based rules and traditions (p. 64). Drawing on the same GNHC (2011) findings, Moktan et. al. (2024) noted that despite equal access to land, women have little and/or no control over it (p. 64). This finding suggests that de jure equality in land access does not necessarily result in de facto control over it, as social norms, household power dynamics and decision-making practices can limit their authority over its use, management and benefits. As a result, women's limited control over land constrains their ability to make decisions on production, invest in agriculture and contribute fully to household food security and food sovereignty.

2.3 Policy Framework: Agriculture and Land policies

Bhutan has a state-controlled land system. Citizens can own and inherit land, but ultimate regulatory authority remains with the state. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan allows citizens to own land. Article 7 (9) of the Constitution protects citizens' property rights while restricting the ownership and transfer of land to non-citizens, thereby linking citizenship status to eligibility for land ownership. While Article 7(14) safeguards property rights, it also provides a constitutional basis for the state to acquire private land for public purposes (Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008, Art. 7(9), (14)). The restriction on land ownership by non-citizens, under Article 7 (9), has significant implications for individuals and households whose citizenship status remains unresolved for a prolonged period, potentially limiting their eligibility to own property, including land.

Bhutan's legal framework and institutional practices grant the state extensive authority over land administration, registration, acquisition, and classification. Within these legal and institutional arrangements, concerns have emerged regarding land lost by farmers through processes such as omission from registration, failure to regularize claims, state acquisition, and historical land related

actions during periods of political unrest. Under the Land Act of Bhutan 2007, omitted land may be reclaimed through registration within five years; failure to register such land within the prescribed period results in its classification as government land or government reserved forest land (Land Act of Bhutan 2007, 2007, ss. 107, 223).

Pursuant to the aforementioned provision, extensive tracts of land in Southern and Eastern Bhutan, vacated following evictions during early and mid-1990s, legally came under state control. Nevertheless, the vacant stretches of land were practically under state control prior to the Land Act. Further, historical processes of land administration, including No Objection Certificate (NOC) requirements and other administrative and legal mechanisms, affected land registration and transfer. Consequently, thousands of farmers, including the evicted citizens and those who remain landless within the country, lost ownership rights over land. Given the prolonged registration limbo and unresolved refugee situation, the five year reclaiming provision has had limited practical and political relevance for thousands of affected farmers.

Consistent with the aforementioned legal provisions, the government resettled people from Eastern and Northern Bhutan on the lands previously owned by the refugees, but some of the arable lands and other stretches of peripheral land remain barren and/or overgrown by vegetation.

With Limited land available for agriculture, Bhutan lags behind in agricultural productivity, partly due to budget constraints. The reduced prioritisation of agriculture is reflected in budget allocations over the years. Overall, the preceding discussion points to the marginalisation of agriculture in Bhutan.

2.4 Policy Gaps

Bhutan emphasises organic and sustainable food production. However, it lacks a rights-based land governance framework.

Bhutan doesn't officially acknowledge the gap. However, independent studies indicate a gap in tenure security, land rights and food system governance. A study titled *"How property rights influence equity, efficiency and sustainability of high altitude rangeland management in Bhutan"* analyses inequitable land use rights, tenure insecurity, implementation delays of the Land Act 2007, and a lack of management rights and incomplete property rights for range land users (Tenzing et al., 2021).

Bhutan emphasises land and food policies, but the gap lies in insufficient market-access infrastructure. Poor road connectivity, limited storage facilities and backwardness in commercialisation are major shortcomings in the Bhutanese land and food policy framework.

Second National Stocktake Report on Food Systems in Bhutan 2025 notes multiple structural challenges that "limit a full transition to a resilient food system." The report further states, "38% of land remains fallow due to labour shortages, wildlife pressure, weak irrigation and limited mechanisation in challenging terrain." The report notes similar structural constraints like

insufficient vaccines, inadequate farm-level biosecurity, rising feed costs, etc. in livestock farming (United Nations Food System Hub, p. 14, 2025). The structural challenges identified by the report align with the aforementioned constitutional, legal and institutional constraints, collectively contributing to underutilization of limited agricultural land. These constraints undermine food sovereignty and increase reliance on food imports.

Mere access to land ownership can't ensure food sovereignty in Bhutan. People can ensure food security when they can fully participate in production, distribution and economic exchange. Infrastructural and policy constraints in economic activities reduce the purchasing power and bargaining power of people. This, in turn, results in vulnerability of food sovereignty.

The climate adaptation policy gap in Bhutan lies in the weak integration of climate resilience, secure land rights, and food sovereignty. Bhutan is ambitious in climate resilience and environmental policy framework. With supportive legal arrangements for forest and environment conservation, Bhutan is recognised for its strong environmental protection. But then, the implementation aspect is often viewed as inadequate. Wangdi et al. (2013, p. 16) noted that several government institutions and non-government organisations address biodiversity and climate change issues separately, resulting in weak coordination among stakeholders. This indicates a gap in integration and coordination of climate adaptation policy. Besides, Bhutan undermines community participation and local knowledge integration in climate adaptation policies. Mazal (2017, abstract) observed that Bhutan's climate-related policies require stronger translation into coordinated local adaptation actions, with greater emphasis on participatory planning and community knowledge. Despite a very strong legal and policy framework in environmental protection, the collective efforts of Bhutanese people remain compromised.

Taken together, studies have identified persistent shortcomings in Bhutan's land tenure framework, while climate policy analyses have highlighted implementation challenges and the need for stronger local participation in adaptation planning.

2.5 People's Experiences

This report presents findings from a case study on policy gaps on land rights and food sovereignty in Bhutan. The findings reveal that individual and community land rights and cultural food systems are disregarded in Bhutan.

Multiple interlocutors, on condition of anonymity, expressed dissatisfaction over the state-controlled approach to land. At the same time, they were concerned about poor road connectivity, a lack of storage facilities, and technological backwardness in agriculture. Some women raised concerns about land rights and practical structural barriers that prevent them from realising the maximum possible economic benefits. Women, being actively involved in rural agriculture production, are burdened with kitchen chores and household affairs. Further, they are undermined in terms of utilisation of income.

This case study shows that in Bhutan, the state has absolute authority over land. Many respondents responded with agony about the ongoing "Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) project" of the Government of Bhutan.

The GMC occupies 2,600 sq km in southern Bhutan, along the Indian border. In the name of weaving nature, technology and economic development together, the government has initiated the project in the inhabited area without considering people's consent. The respondents have grievances about how the farmlands are cleared, betel nut, coconut and mango trees are cut down, and how the residents of the Gelephu area are accommodated in hotels due to uncertainty. People's ancestral mandarin and lemon orchards, paddy fields and dry lands, and their houses are confiscated without compensation. People seem to be in anxiety of displacement and frustration of losing their ancestral lands.

While the citizens of GMC are accommodated in the hotels, the stateless households, who were stripped of citizenship in the 1990s, are displaced from their original homesteads. The displaced households have moved northward from the GMC area.

Further, human-wildlife conflict has escalated following the decline in human activity in fields near jungles. Many respondents complained about Elephant attacks and crop damage caused by Monkeys, Golden langurs and wild boars in and around GMC.

The GMC project's land acquisition approach reflects a state-controlled, technocratic model of development that prioritises state-led planning over the consent of affected landowners.

Multiple farmers from other parts of the country raised serious concerns about the subsistence nature of agriculture. Many were concerned about vegetables and staple imports. They seem to feel that their products are devalued.

Some farmers, both men and women, of Chirang (Tsirang) district were worried about the reluctant young generation who shun agriculture and livestock farming. They reported that vegetables produced in Chirang are in high demand in major cities like Thimphu, but productivity is very low to meet that demand. Some farmers perceive youth migration to urban areas and the preference for wage labour and service-sector employment among younger generations as contributing factors to low agricultural productivity.

Landless farmers live below the subsistence level. Land ownership is their principal concern. Multiple respondents, whose lands were confiscated by the government during the early and mid-1990s, lamented their chronic deprivation.

2.6 Civil Society Demands

Unlike rural farmers, most of the civil society actors were reluctant to respond, seemingly indifferent to the need for change. However, some of them advocated for subsidies, soft loans,

equipment, market access and storage facilities for small farmers. Stakeholders raised concerns about food import and advocated that the local food system should be promoted.

Some respondents demanded that the stateless and landless farmers should be accorded citizenship and land ownership rights without constraints.

Respondents also highlighted demands that the government should promote climate-resilient agriculture by training and empowering the rural farmers.

3. Economic Justice (Debt, Public Spending, Jobs)

Bhutan is well known for its free education and healthcare. Despite such a welfare approach in public health and education, economic justice still remains a challenge facing the country. Fair distribution of resources, equal opportunities, decent jobs and living wages remain deprioritised in the Bhutanese policy framework.

3.1 Current Situation: Hydropower-Led Economy

Bhutan's emphasis on infrastructure development seems to be strong with the allocation of 51% of total expenditure to capital investment in the financial year 2025-26. (Ministry of Finance {MoF}, 2025, p. v). This capital investment rate is comparatively high by international standards. Such a strong development and infrastructure-oriented strategy shows Bhutan's continued reliance on large-scale infrastructure investment, especially in the hydropower sector. Official sources do not publish a fixed percentage and/or amount of the national budget allocated exclusively to the hydropower. Nonetheless, hydropower constitutes a major part of public spending within capital investment. Hydropower related debt constitutes the largest share of public debt, accounting for 61.4% of Bhutan's external debt, while non-hydropower debt accounts for 38.6% (MoF, 2025, Public debt situation, p. viii). The high share of hydropower related debt reflects Bhutan's development model centered on hydropower led growth. Although the sector provides export revenue and ensures economic growth, such a concentration creates vulnerability by linking debt sustainability to the performance of a single sector. Further, this results in increased debt servicing obligations thereby limiting public resources for other productive sectors such as agriculture.

As of 31st march 2025, public debt stock of Bhutan was Nu. 298,183.3 million or 99.1% of the FY 2024-25 GDP estimate. External debt was Nu. 277,085.2 million or 92.1% of the GDP, and domestic debt was Nu. 21,098.1 million or 7% of the GDP. Central government debt accounted for 35.8% of total public debt and 35.5% of the estimated GDP, which is regarded to be within threshold as per the debt management policy 2023. (MoF, 2025, Public debt situation, p. viii)

Bhutan's official sources do not publish figures on the contribution of hydropower in GDP and government revenue, but economists assume hydropower to be the main driver of economic growth. With the [commissioning](#) of new mega projects like Punasangtchhu-ii, hydropower is expected to boost GDP, government revenue and export revenue. The World Bank projects Bhutan's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth at 7.1%, expected to be driven by

commissioning of Punatshangchhu II hydropower project and ongoing construction of Dorjilung and Khorlochhu hydropower plants. (World Bank, 2026, Executive Summary). This projection indicates the expectation of increased electricity generation and export earnings from hydropower projects. However, such growth remains highly dependent on a single sector, and vulnerabilities are likely to persist, given the limited economic diversification across other productive sectors. For example, agriculture, which continues to support a significant proportion of the country's population and rural livelihoods, has persistently received limited public investment over the years, resulting in vulnerabilities in rural food security.

3.2 Debt Trends

IMF assessed Bhutan's risk of overall and external debt distress in 2025 as moderate, remaining consistent with the 2024 debt sustainability assessment. At the same time IMF points towards high risk of overall and external debt distress with reference to "mechanical results". IMF asserts that Bhutan doesn't have enough space to absorb additional shocks, particularly export shocks with most of the outstanding public debt linked to hydropower project loans from Government of India (IMF, 2026). It means Bhutan can still service debt under current situation, but even a relatively adverse event can push the country into debt distress. Further, this analysis means that the country relies heavily on export earnings from electricity export, and those earnings are used to repay debt. In other words, any disruption to export revenues, caused by unfavourabilities like reduced demand, decline in electricity export, lower rainfall and delays in hydropower generation or project completion can significantly weaken the country's ability to service its debt.

According to IMF the public debt to GDP ratio was seen increased in the aftermath of Covid-19 pandemic and has declined since FY 2020-21. Public debt increased from 74.8% of GDP in FY 2011-12 to 134.3% of GDP in FY 2020-21. Then after the public debt to GDP ratio has declined. The domestic debt rose from 4.5% of GDP in FY 2011-12 to over 10.3% of GDP in FY 2024-25 (IMF, 2026, background). As reported by IMF public and publicly guaranteed debt stood at 118% of GDP at the end of FY 2024-25. External debt accounted for 91% of total debt. Hydropower debt was the largest part of external debt, comprising 55% of the external debt stock at the end of FY 2024-25 (IMF, 2026, background). The foregoing findings indicate that Bhutan's public debt is reduced in relation to GDP. This reflects a greater debt sustainability or improved ability to repay debt. Bhutan has addressed the debt crisis risk to some extent, backed principally by hydropower sector income. Nonetheless, public and publicly guaranteed debt accounting for 118% of GDP and external debt accounting for 91% of total debt are very high by international standard, requiring careful monitoring. The predominance of external debt highlights Bhutan's reliance on external financing and exposes the economy to foreign exchange and external sector vulnerabilities. Although Ngultrum's peg to Indian rupee mitigates exchange rate volatility with its major economic partner, Bhutan's high reliance on external debt leaves it vulnerable to external shocks, particularly fluctuations in foreign exchange earnings and adverse changes in global financing conditions.

Bhutan's GDP and economic growth is expected to rise in future with its ambitious Hydropower projects, some commissioned, some under construction and some proposed. With this Bhutan is expected to maintain long term debt sustainability, risk remaining equally pertinent.

3.3 Impact on People

Bhutan's economy is undoubtedly growing. Economic indicators are positive. GDP is high. An official update by the National Statistics Bureau summarising the *4th quarter 2025 Report on quarterly Gross Domestic Product* notes that Bhutan's GDP growth rate stood at 8.76%, driving provisional annual growth to 8.01% in 2025, which is the highest among South Asian countries (NSB, 2026). The overall unemployment rate is very low. Nevertheless, who is benefiting, who is struggling, and how fair the system feels in real-life situations are the principal questions as far as economic justice is concerned.

Economic benefits aren't equally distributed. This in turn has contributed to unemployment and youth migration. Youth unemployment, often considered the proxy factor causing youth migration, remains a concern in Bhutan.

First Quarter Labour Force Survey Report 2026 shows that the youth unemployment rate stands at 16.5%, while overall unemployment is just 3.4% (NSB, 2026). This critically high youth unemployment rate hints towards the unavailability of decent jobs that could address the youth unemployment problem.

Persistent youth unemployment and lack of decent jobs have contributed to increased emigration, raising concerns about potential brain drain and the loss of skilled human resources in Bhutan. The World Bank notes that the Royal Government of Bhutan is concerned about the potential for brain drain, as out-migration is largely composed of skilled civil servants from key sectors, which could adversely affect country's development prospects. Drawing on the exit data from Paro International Airport, the World Bank states a sharp increase of monthly departures from fewer than 500 emigrants, on average, before the COVID-19 pandemic to more than 5000 a month in early 2023 (Alaref et al., 2025, p. vii). The large scale out-migration of skilled workforce, including civil servants, indicates a lack of decent and gainful employment opportunities in the country.

Studies have found that Bhutanese youths are increasingly opting overseas migration, mainly to Australia, for better career opportunities. World Bank reports, citing the data from economic and social affairs of United Nations, that the stock of Bhutanese migrants in Australia more than doubled from 12424 in 2020 to 25363 in 2024. Further, citing the findings of the report of Australian Bureau of Statistics, the World Bank reports that 10% of NEET (neither in employment, education nor training) youths in Bhutan aspire to migrate abroad (Alaref et al., 2025, p. vii). These data manifest the lived experiences of Bhutanese youths. This indicates that young men are increasingly seeking better opportunities abroad. Youth emigration is obviously driven by wage

differentials and limited job opportunities in the country, and perceived career growth prospects abroad.

Male out-migration has resulted in feminization of agriculture, placing a disproportionate burden on women, who must balance unpaid care and household responsibilities alongside agricultural labour.

3.5 Policy Framework: Economic and Fiscal Policies

Hydropower plays a pivotal role in the Bhutanese economy. Bhutan's economic growth is mainly driven by hydropower. Though revised a bit downward from the 2025 growth projection of 8.71%, Bhutan achieved economic growth of 8.01% in the third quarter of 2026 (MoF, May 2026, p. 1). The projection was based on Bhutan's expectations for hydropower projects, which means the growth achieved is largely driven by them.

Bhutan's economic policy is strongly centred on hydropower, supported by ambitious investment in the sector. The entire hydropower sector is financed through external loans, primarily from India.

Bhutan's ambitious economic growth strategy relies mainly on electricity export revenues. Government of Bhutan utilises public debt, especially from the Government of India, in public spending, especially in hydropower projects.

Beside the export of cash crops, electricity export is the major part of Bhutan's trade, especially with India. Moreover, Bhutan has policies to promote small scale and cottage industries in rural areas, create jobs to tackle unemployment and youth emigration. Policy sets out a strategy for the agricultural advancement for the empowerment of farmers, while taxation policy outlines strategies to reduce inflation. Even tourism is included in the policy framework which seems challenging in the status quo.

3.5 Policy Gaps

Lack of domestic-structural and international trade diversification are two aspects of Bhutanese economic and fiscal policy gaps. On one hand, government revenue is mainly dependent on hydropower projects, and on the other hand, international trade, especially electricity export is exclusively confined to India.

Bhutan has promising prospects in tourism, agro based industries, forestry, polytechnic education, medical universities etc. Increased public spending, for instance in hydropower sector, will certainly boost economic growth. But then, it alone won't ensure decent jobs to the unemployed youth. It alone won't empower the vulnerable farmers either. Bhutan's economy is growing, and contrarily, youth emigration is increasing. This shows that Bhutan seriously lacks policies to address youth unemployment through job creation and fair wage determination mechanism.

Besides, Bhutan aspires to thrive through tourism, but Bhutanese tourism is largely access constrained. Tourism has substantial growth potential, but it is selectively accessible by virtue of institutional constraints. For instance, exiled Bhutanese, resettled in Europe, America and Australia, face systemic restrictions on entry into the country. With expensive costs, Bhutan adopts profit maximization policy in tourism, but obviously it is not fully open to international tourists. Poor road connectivity, lack of domestic tourism promotion and tourism awareness campaigns are some of the issues hindering domestic tourism in Bhutan.

Agriculture is equally promising in Bhutan. The only need is to transform it from conventional to modern mode of farming. Agriculture doesn't exist independently. It must be interwoven with industry. So the policies should link agriculture to industry. Agro based industries can empower farmers, attract educated youths towards agriculture and agro based industries thereby alleviating unemployment, increase per capita income or uplift living standard of people, increase government revenue, reduce over dependence on few sectors, ensure diversification, discourage import and encourage export thereby ensuring trade balance and can foster economic growth.

3.6 People's Experiences (Youth and Informal Workers)

This study included virtual interviews with multiple respondents. A set of questions was asked to a group of Bhutanese youth in Australia. Similarly, three distinct sets of questionnaires were administered to the Bhutanese living in Bhutan. One set was designed for a young individual, and the other two sets were administered to informal workers. All interviews were semi-structured, and every respondent responded on conditions of anonymity.

The Bhutanese respondents in Australia are named as respondent 'A', 'B' and 'C'. Likewise, a youth in Bhutan is named respondent 'A1', and informal workers are named as respondent 'A2' and 'A3'.

Respondent 'A' is an agriculture professional working in Australia. He went to Australia on skilled worker visa. When asked why he chose to migrate, he responded that lack of decent job opportunities and inadequate income back in Bhutan are the root causes. On a different context he said that he is not happy to be far away from his family and homeland. Answering another question, he seemed pessimistic towards the possibilities of reform in Bhutanese employment system and wage determination mechanism. He responded that he would rather remain in Australia for good.

Respondent 'B', a Bhutanese post graduate student, who migrated to Australia on scholarship program, responded that she was attracted to Australia because of better career growth opportunities. She said that she always wanted to be in Bhutan, but she also wanted greater exposure to the world. Answering another question, she responded that she must return back to Bhutan up on expiry of the visa. She however said that she will apply for working visa once she returns. When asked why she wants to re-migrate to Australia after returning to Bhutan, she explained several reasons and highlighted gender wage gap in Bhutan.

This finding is consistent with previous studies. For example, Wangchuk (2025) found that in Bhutan women's median monthly salary is 9.3% lower than their male counterparts, and the pay gap widens to 15.6% when mean salaries are compared. Likewise, Alaref et al. (2025) noted that the gender wage gap is significantly narrower in Australia than in Bhutan. These studies indicate that educated and skilled women are facing wage discrimination in Bhutan, contributing to their out-migration.

Respondent 'C' went to Australia on student visa. He responded that every aspect, ranging from education and employment to social security system is better in Australia than in Bhutan. He said it was the very reason for him to migrate to Australia. Answering another question, he said that he really wants to stay in Australia for good. He complained about non-availability of unemployment benefits and old age allowance in Bhutan. Responding to another question, he confessed that he is overstaying in Australia by switching faculty after completing a degree.

Comparably, youths in Bhutan reported similar financial difficulties and employment challenges in Bhutan. Respondent 'A1' is a 'Desuup' who volunteers in 'Desuung', a national volunteer corps. He joined 'Desuung' in 2020, following the government circular that said that the dispossessed households would reacquire citizenship upon enrolling the corps. He responded that authorities say that the restoration of his family's citizenship is in process, but he doesn't know how long it will take for him to be a citizen of his country.

He responded that he has to raise his family of seven, including three children, with his incentive of ngultrum nine thousand per month. It is noteworthy that per capita (consumption) food and non food requirement of Bhutan are Nu. 2,852 and Nu. 3,352, respectively per person per month (NSB, 2022, Executive summary, p. viii).

The per capita household income of respondent A1's household is Nu. 9,000 divided by 7 (number of family members) or approximately Nu.1,286 per person per month. This is obviously below minimum requirement level. So his family is subsistence poor although he is a formal sector employee. Responding to a different question, he lamented that he is over burdened with familial responsibilities following his parents' occupational strain because of their old age.

Answering another question, he said that he always wanted to pursue a decent job in foreign country, at least in India, but for host of reasons, including his early school leaving and non citizen status of his entire family, he is "entangled in a low paying job."

Respondent 'A2' is a widow-informal worker of fifty. She works in a poultry farm and earns only Nu. 4000 per month. Her aging mother-in-law and father-in-law work in landlord's field on a sharecropping basis. She is the only income earner in cash in her family of six with two dependent minors. Excluding the subsistence-non-cash income from the sharecropping, her family's per capita household income amounts to Nu. 667 per person per month, which is pitifully below minimum requirement level.

Respondent ‘A3’ is a literate informal worker of 43, whose access to formal education was denied due to restrictive government policies, particularly No Objection Certificate (NOC) policy. He was denied an NOC on the pretext that his uncle had been exiled as an “anti national”, and the same designation was extended to his relatives.

He is a casual farm worker. His employment is obviously irregular, with periods of work alternating with periods of unemployment. Responding to a question, he said that he earns Nu 500 per working day and supports his family of six, including his elderly parents and two dependent minors. Responding to another question, he lamented his educational disadvantage.

Per capita household income of his family is obviously below minimum requirement level. Further, intermittent nature of his employment worsens his family’s financial situation.

3.7 Civil Society Concerns on Economic Justice

Unlike youth and informal workers, civil society actors were reluctant to respond, seemingly complacent about the need for change. Nevertheless, some of them advocated for a greater economic justice through creation of decent jobs, fair wage determination mechanism and social welfare programs like unemployment benefits and old age allowance.

Stakeholders raised concerns on persistent economic disparities and demanded for inclusive and participatory economic policies.

Respondents highlighted demands for fair public spending, responsible debt management and equitable distribution of economic benefits.

4. Budget and Economic Analysis

4.1 Government Spending Trends: Agriculture

Budget report for FY 2025-26 states, "to boost the primary sector GDP from Nu. 31 billion in 2023 to Nu. 50 billion by 2029, the ministry of agriculture and livestock is prioritizing high value agriculture and livestock production, processing and marketing with a total capital outlay of Nu. 15 billion." (MoF, 2025, Key Sector Milestones, p. vi).

With capital expenditure estimate of Nu. 60,730.1 million, which accounts for 51% of the total expenditure, the FY 2025-26 budget continues the conventional pattern of prioritizing capital investment at the expense of agriculture sector.

Government’s expenditure trend manifested in the annual national budgets over the last five financial years is shown in the following table:

Table 1: Government spending trend: Social, Agriculture and Infrastructure.

S.No.	FY	Sector	Allocated share of budget (%)
1	2021-22	Social Agriculture Infrastructure	30 11 17
2	2022-23	Social Agriculture Infrastructure	29.2 8.6 24.6
3	2023-24	Social Agriculture Infrastructure	28.8 8 18.7
4	2024-25	Social Agriculture Infrastructure	34 10 17
5	2025-26	Social Agriculture Infrastructure	30 5 20

Note: Data from Ministry of Finance (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025)

(Government spending in infrastructure remain consistently high, highest in the post pandemic period (FY 2022-23), whereas, spending in agriculture, livestock and forestry decreased substantially reaching its lowest i.e. 5% in FY 2025-26).

The above table shows that government's spending remains consistently high in infrastructure sectors, reaching highest (24.6%) in the post pandemic period i.e. FY 2022-23. This shows Bhutan's ambitious strategic capital spending aimed at boosting economic growth.

Contrarily, government's spending in agriculture, livestock and forestry remains low and diminishing over the last five financial years. The allocated share of budget to agriculture sector was 11% in FY 2021-22. It then diminished almost every year and fell to 5% in FY 2025-26 budget. This trend of low budget allocation to agriculture sector reflects a policy gap given the agrarian structure of rural livelihoods and rural nature of Bhutanese economy. This mismatch between government priorities and rural agro based nature of economy appears to be the principal contradiction of Bhutanese economy.

A five per cent share of the budget allocated to agriculture in an agricultural country appears low. It should be assessed in relation to the sector's contribution to GDP, employment and rural livelihoods. In a country like Bhutan where food import is a persistent practice, such a limited share of the budget allocated to agriculture is not likely to ensure food self sufficiency and food sovereignty.

Likewise, government spending in social sectors, according to budget projections over the last five financial years, remains steadily high. The data in the table above indicates that the allocated mean

share of budget to social sectors, comprising of health and education, over the five financial years, stands at 30.4%. This shows Bhutan's continued commitment to social sector development. The substantial size of the budget allocated, every financial year, to social sectors is reasonable given the country's welfare approach to education and public health.

4.2 Debt vs. Social Spending

It is worth repeating that Bhutan has a welfare approach to social sectors, especially to education and public health. However, it also has ambitious and strategic development policy based on public spending. Bhutan finances public spending, especially hydropower funds, through external and domestic debt. Therefore, the country remains vulnerable to growing debt burden.

At the end of March 2025, total public debt of Bhutan was Nu. 298183.3 million, which accounted for 99.1% of the GDP estimate of the FY 2024-25. With external debt stock of Nu. 277085.2 million and domestic debt stock of Nu.21098.1 million, hydropower debt constituted 61.4% of the total external debt and 56.5% of the estimated GDP as of 31st March 2025 (MoF, 2025, Public debt, p. 43). It is crystal clear that the total outstanding debt is almost equal (99.1% of estimated GDP) to the size of the country's estimated annual output. Further, around three-fifths of Bhutan's foreign debt (61.4%) is associated with hydropower projects, which is more than half (56.5% of estimated GDP) of Bhutan's annual economic output. Although hydropower debt is a productive debt borrowed for boosting economic growth through electricity exports, the high concentration of external debt in a single sector exposes the economy to revenue shocks. High public debt burden, with hydropower related liabilities accounting for a large share of external debt, results in greater debt servicing obligations leaving limited fiscal space for social and development spending. Government's capacity to expand social investment worsens during periods of economic stress.

The following table shows debt servicing vs. social spending trend of Bhutan by years:

Table 2: Debt servicing vs. social spending trend by years.

S.No.	FY	Sector	Allocation (Nu. in Million)	% Share
01	2021-22	Social Spending	24524.108	30
		Debt servicing	9002.695	11
02	2022-23	Social Spending	23888.53	29.2
		Debt servicing	9323.117	11.4

03	2023-24	Social Spending	24594.245	28.8
		Debt servicing	14536.770	17
04	2024-25	Social Spending	32753.026	34
		Debt servicing	13329.391	14
05	2025-26	Social Spending	40903.3	30
		D. servicing	28333.148	21

Note: Data from Ministry of Finance (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025).

(Debt servicing vs. social spending trend by years).

The above table (table 2) shows that government spending in social sectors is consistently higher than in debt servicing over the last five financial years. Further, it indicates that the difference between the social spending and debt servicing is narrowing almost every financial year. The table depicts that 19% difference between social spending and debt servicing in FY 2021-22 fluctuates over years and narrows to 9% in the FY 2025-26.

The narrowing gap between debt servicing and social spending suggests that larger share of government resources is being used to repay debt, leaving relatively less room for social programs such as education, public health and social protection. Bhutan's social spending is undoubtedly high, but it is either stagnant or growing slowly in relation to the rising debt servicing. This trend indicates government's priority in meeting debt commitments over social sector investments. This further indicates increasing debt burden and raises concern about the long term sustainability of public finances.

4.3 Who Benefits from Public Investment?

Bhutan prioritizes urban development, large construction projects and energy sector development, especially ambitious hydropower projects while allocating relatively less budget to agriculture. This sort of over emphasized public investment is advantageous to the minority living in urban areas, while majority of the population, living in rural areas, remains disadvantaged.

The rural population's livelihoods are agro based, and Bhutanese agriculture is subsistence and semi commercial. Capital investment based programs and policies and budget allocations cause the agriculture to retain its conventional backwardness. The beneficiaries are urban people, investors and entrepreneurs, construction companies and contractors, export oriented sectors like hydropower projects, business and industries etc.

Areas such as irrigation, extension services, rural road connectivity, storage facilities, agricultural research, subsidies etc. remain under funded. Thus, farmers and rural communities are receiving fewer benefits from government spending.

5. Intersection of Vulnerabilities

Bhutanese agriculture is prone to climate shocks and climate change hazards. Crops are often destroyed by landslides, floods, draught, erratic rain etc. Besides, glacial lake outburst is also a risk in the Himalayan region. These calamities are uncertain and unpredictable. Moreover, farmers and government have almost no plan to mitigate or compensate the loss. Therefore, climate shocks, coupled with agricultural vulnerabilities, exacerbate the problem. Poverty of the farmers is intensified by agricultural loss due to climate shocks.

Similarly, intersection of rural-urban migration and informal economy reinforce multiple disadvantages overlapping each other. Migrants move for better opportunities. Among host of reasons, poverty is the principal cause of rural-urban migration in a country like Bhutan. Landlessness, climate shocks, limited public investment in agriculture and low rural wages are some of the reasons behind rural-urban migration in Bhutan. Due to lack of skill and education, many migrants cannot access formal jobs in the cities and towns. So they enter informal economy. They work as servants or maids, porters, transport workers, construction labourers, street vendors etc. Such jobs are often low paid, irregular and unprotected. Thus, the migrants often experience multiple overlapping vulnerabilities rather than a single disadvantage. Following disadvantages intersect, leaving the migrants vulnerable from every angle:

- i) Economic vulnerability resulting from low income and unstable job.
- ii) Social vulnerability resulting from weak social connection in the city.
- iii) Caste, ethnicity or minority related vulnerability.
- iv) Housing vulnerability resulting from informal settlement and overcrowding.
- v) Health vulnerability resulting from limited access to health care and sanitation.
- vi) Gender vulnerability. (Women migrants face wage discrimination).

Likewise, rising debt burden and increasing debt servicing obligations limits social investment. Social investment constraints create social sector vulnerability. This vulnerability intersects with preexisting vulnerabilities like poverty, gender inequality, rural marginalization, informal employment etc.

In the same vein, narrowing gap between debt servicing and social investment has limited government's spending in sectors like education, health care, child care, social protection and so on. This in turn has resulted in the increased unpaid care burden of women. The care burden overlaps with the preexisting vulnerabilities of women like gender inequality, poverty, backwardness etc.

Male out-migration has left women with greater responsibility for farming leading to feminization of rural agriculture. Ministry of agriculture and livestock (2023, p. 3), drawing on the *Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2017* and the *Commercial Agriculture and Resilient Livelihood Enhancement Programme*, reported that women accounted for 59.3% of agricultural labour force, resulting in feminization of agriculture driven largely by out-migration of young men. However, women often have limited decision making power, access to credit, extension services, technology and markets. Besides, they face unpaid care and household work alongside agricultural labour. Thus, feminization of agriculture has increased women's vulnerability by expanding their agricultural responsibilities while they continue to shoulder unpaid care and household work.

National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) notes that 95% of women were engaged in household maintenance and management activities, and they performed 71% of unpaid work, 2.5 times more time (218 minutes) than men (87 minutes). NCWC concludes that women's contribution to unpaid household and care work was at least twice that of men (NCWC, 2019, p. xii). Feminization of agriculture isn't inherently disempowering, but these findings suggest that women are already facing a disproportionate share of unpaid work, and that additional agricultural responsibilities further intensify their workload. Thus, feminization of agriculture has become an added burden rather than a pathway to women empowerment. Women are doubly vulnerable with the intersection of unpaid household and care work and agricultural responsibilities.

6. People's Alternatives

People's alternatives to rural livelihoods, including agriculture, emerge as responses to livelihood and economic vulnerabilities. Low agricultural yield, land fragmentation, landlessness, indebtedness, climate shocks and low public spending in agriculture have compelled Bhutanese rural farmers to diversify their livelihood strategies.

To reduce dependence in agriculture rural people are increasingly engaged in non-farm activities such as wage labour, informal sector works, foreign employment, seasonal migration, small businesses, rural-urban migration, sustainable natural resource management and foreign employment.

Rural farmers choose wage labour as an alternative to low yielding agriculture and rural livelihoods. However, wage labour is not always accessible in the rural areas. As a result, people migrate to urban areas. Yet, wage labour is unsafe and unstable in most of the cases. Mostly, it creates vulnerability, leaving the workers doubly vulnerable.

Most unskilled rural people migrate to urban areas to work in informal sectors. They are compelled to work for very low income. Some people migrate to urban areas during the agricultural lean season and return home during the peak farming season.

In most of these cases, migrants, especially informal sector workers, are underpaid relative to their workload. On the other hand, their families, especially women back at home, are afflicted by increased care burden and household chores.

Some people install small business or entrepreneurship to escape the risks of rural livelihoods. In some cases people migrate to urban areas for the same. In such cases, people run the risks of business failure, loss or bankruptcy in times of market fluctuations, inflation, recession or economic depression.

People in foreign employment contribute by sending remittances. However, increased domestic burden causes inconvenience back at home. Women suffer the most at home.

Moreover, farmers practice reciprocal labour exchange during planting and harvesting seasons, and share seeds, labour and irrigation system as a response to agricultural, economic and livelihood vulnerabilities. This is a traditional practice, but it is gradually fading following the widespread reluctance towards farming and increasing dependence on alternative sectors like service, wage labour, foreign employment etc.

Some farmers have started livestock raising as a response to conventional livelihoods. Yet, most farmers practice semi-commercial live stock farming. Likewise, niche crops cultivation has become another lucrative option. Livestock farming and niche crops have indeed reduced vulnerabilities of rural livelihoods to some extent.

Further, sustainable natural resource management is one of the people's alternatives to low yielding agriculture and rural livelihoods in Bhutan. Forest resources play vital role in Bhutanese rural livelihoods. People generate income from medicinal herbs, wild nuts, yams, fruits etc. Besides, people collect firewood, fodder and harvest broom grass and bast fiber from forest.

Forest, in Bhutan, is strictly regulated by the state. So there is no question of over-exploitation of forest resources in almost any part of the country. People can cut trees for timber, but rampant cutting of trees is strictly checked. Therefore, utilization of forest resources in Bhutan is perfectly equitable and sustainable. It is one of the best alternatives to reduce the vulnerabilities of rural economy and livelihoods.

7. Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis presented in this report, the following policy-recommendations are proposed to address structural vulnerabilities and strengthen livelihood resilience:

- i. Strengthen land rights and support small farmers
- ii. Invest in food sovereignty and local production
- iii. Ensure responsible burrowing and debt transparency
- iv. Rebalance public spending towards social sectors

- v. Create decent jobs, especially for youth
- vi. Invest in climate-resilient rural development

References

- National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan& Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. (2023). *Bhutan multidimensional poverty index 2022*. <https://www.nsb.gov.bt/publications/poverty-analysis-report/multidimensional-poverty-index/>
- National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan. (2022). *Bhutan poverty analysis report 2022*. Royal Government of Bhutan. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099122324072036453>
- National Land Commission Secretariat. (2023). *National land use zoning: A baseline report 2023*. Royal Government of Bhutan. https://www.nlcs.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/NLUZ_BaselineReport_2023.pdf
- Department of Surveying and Mapping. (2023). *Land use land cover assessment of Bhutan 2020: Technical report*. National Land Commission Secretariat. Royal Government of Bhutan. https://www.nlcs.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/publications/LULC_Technical.pdf
- National Statistics Bureau. (2020). *National accounts statistics 2020*. Royal Government of Bhutan. <https://www.nsb.gov.bt>
- National Statistics Bureau. (2025). *2025 National labour force survey report Bhutan*. Royal Government of Bhutan. <https://wangduephodrang.gov.bt/.../NLFSR-2025.pdf>
- National Statistics Bureau. (2018). *2017 Population and housing census of Bhutan: National report*. NSB. Royal Government of Bhutan. <https://www.nsb.gov.bt/publications/census-report/>
- Department of Surveying and Mapping. (2023). *Bhutan land use land cover 2020: Maps and statistics*. National Land Commission Secretariat. Royal Government of Bhutan https://www.nlcs.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/publications/LULC_Maps_Statistics_Report.pdf
- Ministry of Finance. (2025). *Annual macroeconomic performance and outlook report 2025: Unlocking growth potential*. Royal Government of Bhutan. <https://www.mof.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Annual-Macroeconomic-Performance-and-Outlook-Report-2025.pdf>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations. (2026). *GIEWS country brief: The Kingdom of Bhutan*. <https://cb.apps.fao.org/country/BTN/pdf/BTN.pdf>
- Department of Agriculture. (2025). *Press release: Integrated agriculture and livestock census of Bhutan 2025*. Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. Royal Government of Bhutan. https://doa.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/PRESS-RELEASE_-IALC2025.pdf
- Moktan, M., Sunuwar, J., Choden, Y., & Rinzin, P. (2024). Shared task but unequal burdens: Gender, agriculture and empowerment in Bhutan. *New Angle: Nepal Journal of Social Science and Public Policy*, 9 (1), 61-80. <https://doi.org/10.53037/na.v9i1.120>
- Constitution of Kingdom of Bhutan. (2008). *The Constitution of Kingdom of Bhutan*. Royal Government of Bhutan. https://oag.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Constitution_of_Bhutan.pdf
- National Assembly of Kingdom of Bhutan. (2007). *Land Act of Bhutan 2007*. National Land Commission Secretariat. https://www.nlcs.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/act/Land_Act.pdf
- Tenzing, K., Millar, J., and Black, R. (2021) How property rights influence equity, efficiency and sustainability of high-altitude rangeland management in Bhutan. *Pastoralism: Research, Policy and Practice*, 11, Article 7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13570-021-00193-6>
- United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. (2025). *Second national stocktake report on food systems in Bhutan*. https://www.fao.org/media/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/country-case-profiles/bhutan/second-national-stocktake-report-on-food-systems-in-bhutan.pdf?sfvrsn=29d05575_1

- Wangdi, T., Lhendup, P., & Wangdi, N. (2013). An analysis of forestry, acts and rules of Bhutan to mainstream climate change adaptation. Regional Climate Change Adaptation Knowledge Platform for Asia, Partner report Series NO. 13. Stockholm Environment Institute. https://weadapp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/an_analysis_of_forestry_policy_acts_and_rules_of_bhutan_to_mainstream_climate_change_adaptation_2013.pdf
- Mazal, C. (2017). *Adaptation to change: Local development planning in the context of climate change in the Kingdom of Bhutan* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Vienna). <https://doi.org/10.25365/thesis.45958>
- Ministry of Finance . (2025). *Budget report for FY 2025-26*. Royal Government of Bhutan. <https://www.mof.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Budget-English-2025-26.pdf>
- World Bank. (2026). *Bhutan development update spring 2026: special focus transforming Bhutan's agrifood for more and better jobs*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bhutan>
- International Monetary Fund. (2026). *Bhutan: Staff report for 2025 Article iv consultation-debt sustainability analysis*. <https://doi.org/10.5089/9798229035552.002>
- National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan. (2026, March 6). GDP growth rate of 8.76% in Q4 2025 {Status update}. Facebook. <https://facebook.com/nationalstatisticsbureau>
- National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan. (2026). Quarter 1 Labour Force Survey Report, 2026. (Statistics Bulletin No. Q1LFS2026-1)
- Alaref, J., Etang Ndip, A., Dorji, C., & Martinoty, L. (2025). *Migration Dynamics in Bhutan: Recent Trends, Drivers and Implications*. World Bank. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/09907102522089550>
- Ministry of Finance. (2026). *Quarterly Macroeconomic Situation and Outlook: 3rd quarter update, FY 2025-26*. Royal Government of Bhutan. <https://mof.gov.bt/pages/macroeconomic-situation-report/>
- Wangchuk, U. (2025). *Gender inequality in Bhutan's private sector: An analysis of structural barriers from the Bhutan labour market information system (BLMIS)*. Department of Employment and Entrepreneurship. Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment. https://www.moic.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Structural-Barriers-to-Gender-Equity-in-Bhutan's-Private-Sector_Final_Printing.pdf
- National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan.(2022).*Poverty analysis report 2022*. Royal Government of Bhutan. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099122324072036453>
- Ministry of Finance. (2021). *National budget FY 2021-22*. Royal Government of Bhutan. https://www.mof.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/BUDGET-REPORT-FY-2021-22_English.pdf
- Ministry of Finance. (2022). *Budget report for FY 2022-23*. Royal Government of Bhutan. <https://www.mof.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/BUDGET-REPORT-for-FY-2022-23-in-English.pdf>
- Ministry of Finance. (2023). *Budget report for FY 2023-24*. Royal Government of Bhutan. <https://www.mof.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/BUDGET-REPORT-English2023-24.pdf>
- Ministry of Finance. (2024). *Budget report for FY 2024-25*. Royal Government of Bhutan. https://www.mof.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/BUDGET_REPORT-2024-25-English.pdf
- Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. (2023). *Food and nutrition security policy of Bhutan 2023*. Royal Government of Bhutan. <https://bfda.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/FNS-Policy-English-2023.pdf>
- National Commission for Women and Children. (2019). *Accounting for unpaid care work in Bhutan*. Royal Government of Bhutan. <https://docslib.org/doc/10850354/accounting-for-unpaid-care-work-in-bhutan-2019>