

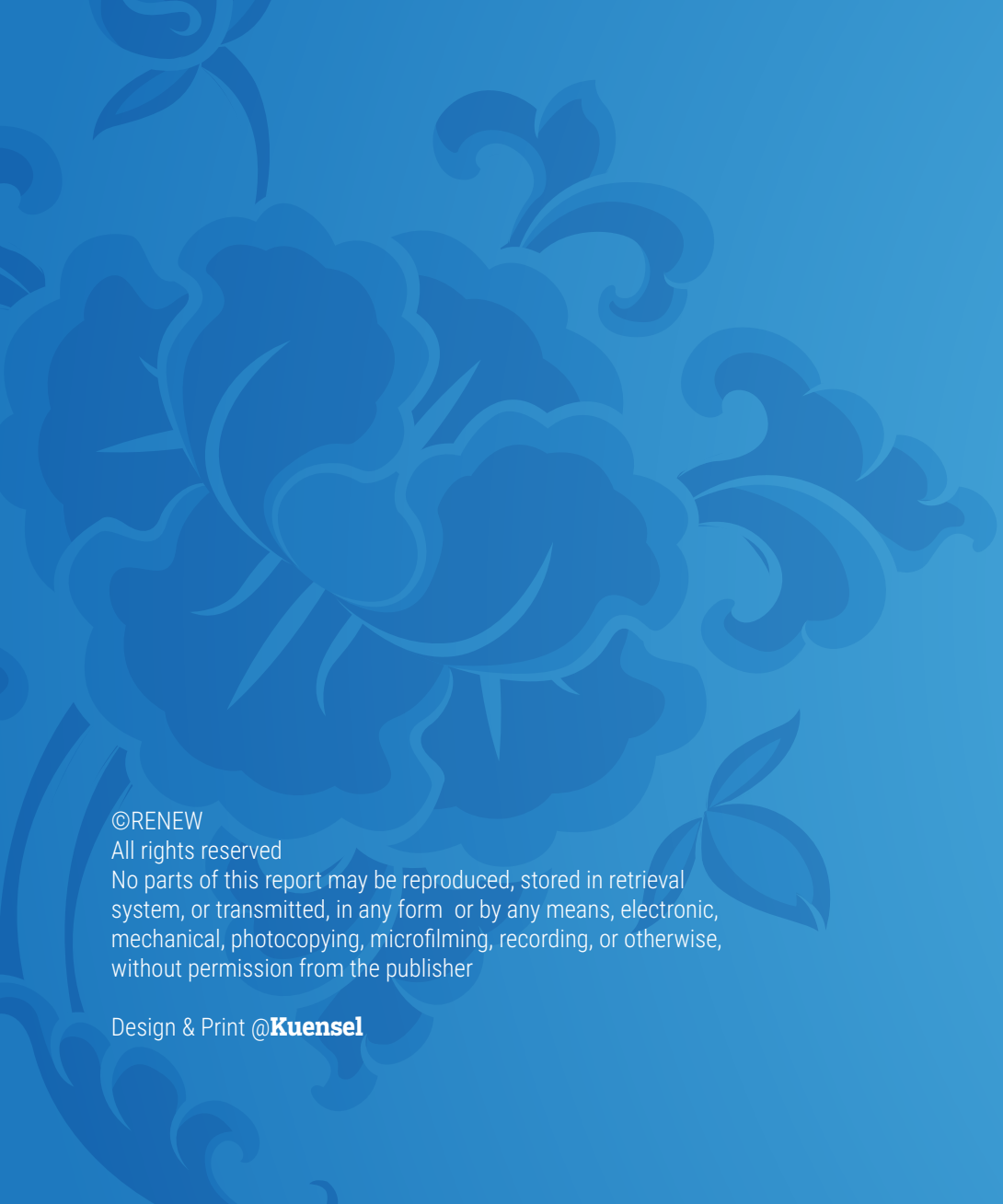


The Community Queen

Celebrating 25 Years of Empowering Women and Transforming Lives

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025





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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025

RENEW



Foreword

On this International Women's Day, March 8, 2025, we are honored to present this special publication celebrating Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck's 25-year journey as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Goodwill Ambassador. Her Majesty's unparalleled contributions to the welfare of Bhutanese women and girls and her unwavering advocacy for gender equality, health, and education have transformed countless lives.

Since Her Majesty's appointment as UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador in 1999, she has led a movement of hope and change. Her Majesty's pioneering vision brought critical issues such as reproductive health, gender equality, and the prevention of domestic and sexual violence to the forefront of national discourse. Through tireless advocacy, often in the remotest corners of Bhutan, Her Majesty has broken cultural barriers and created safe spaces for women and girls to share their stories and access support.

Her Majesty's legacy of compassion and leadership is exemplified through the founding of RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture, Empower Women) in 2004. Under Her Majesty's guidance, RENEW has become a beacon of support for survivors of gender-based violence, offering not only refuge but also pathways to healing, empowerment, and economic independence. The Gawailing Happy Home, the establishment of Bhutan's first counseling profession, and the

creation of Bhutan's first microfinance institution are just a few of Her Majesty's groundbreaking achievements.

Her Majesty's influence extends beyond the borders of Bhutan. Her work with UNFPA and other international organizations has brought global best practices to the country while sharing Bhutan's unique perspective on holistic development and Gross National Happiness with the world. Her Majesty's numerous accolades, including the United Nations Population Award, are a testament to her enduring impact.

As we celebrate this milestone, we also honor Her Majesty's forward-looking vision. Her Majesty's focus on enhancing economic opportunities, expanding mental health services, and promoting gender equality remains as strong as ever. The roadmap she has set forth ensures that RENEW and Bhutan continue to build a just, compassionate, and resilient society.

On behalf of RENEW and the countless lives touched by Her Majesty's work, we extend our deepest gratitude for her selfless dedication. Her Majesty's compassion, leadership, and enduring commitment to creating a better Bhutan inspire us all. With heartfelt respect and admiration,

Tshering Dolkar
Executive Director, RENEW

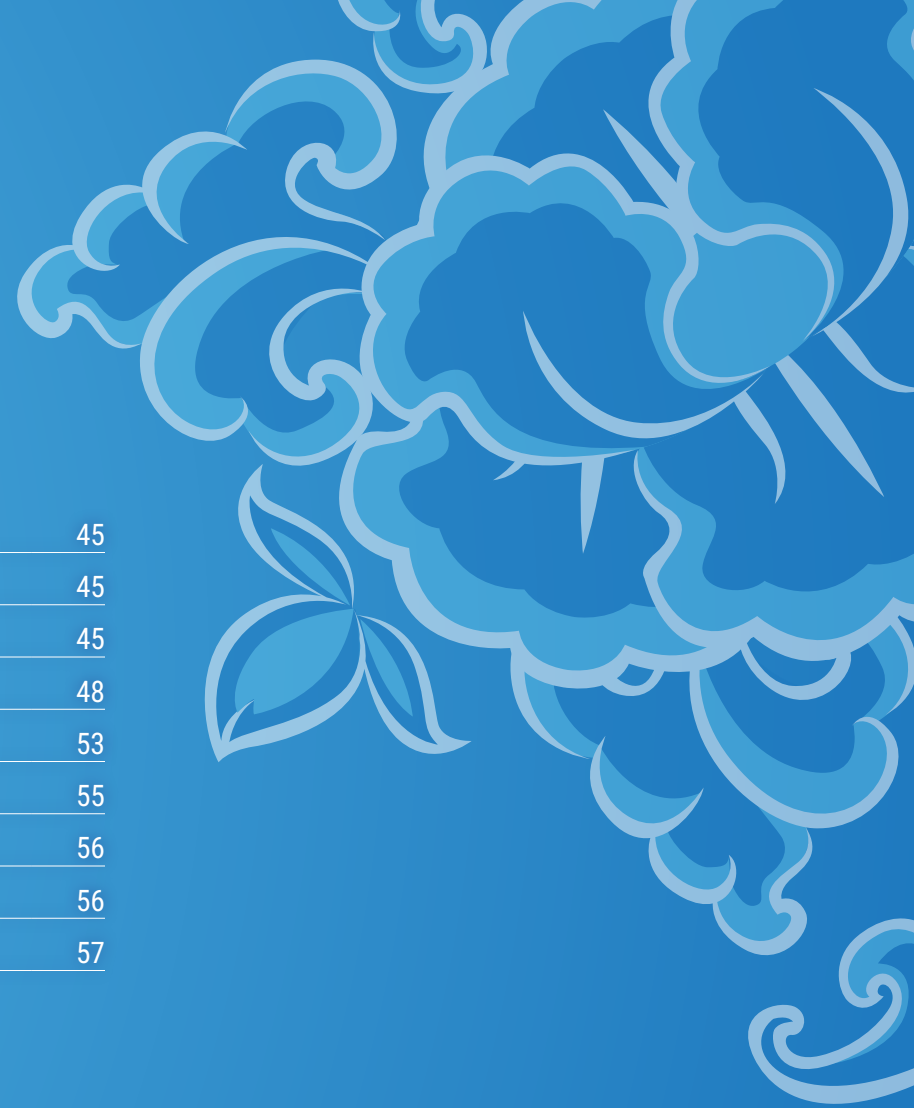




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A Royal Legacy of Compassion

For over 25 years, Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck has been a beacon of hope, compassion, and strength for women and girls in Bhutan. Her Majesty's unwavering commitment to uplifting vulnerable communities and advocating for gender equality, public health, and women's empowerment has transformed countless lives.

Her Majesty The Gyalyum's vision is deeply rooted in a profound sense of duty towards her people. From her early days, her Majesty displayed a natural inclination towards service, demonstrating that compassion and leadership go hand in hand. It is this unique blend of empathy and action that has made her a formidable force in championing the rights of women and girls across the nation.

Her appointment as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Goodwill Ambassador in 1999 marked a pivotal moment for Bhutan. It provided Her Majesty with an

international platform to amplify the voices of Bhutanese women and advocate for critical issues such as reproductive health, gender equality, and the prevention of domestic and sexual violence, among others.

Her Majesty's advocacy led to groundbreaking initiatives, including the founding of RENEW in 2004, which has since become a cornerstone of support for survivors of gender-based violence and a champion of women's rights in the country.

Through tireless advocacy tours, often to the remotest corners of the country, Her Majesty addressed taboo topics such as reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, and gender-based violence. Her Majesty broke cultural barriers by promoting open dialogue on these sensitive issues, creating an environment where women and girls felt safe and supported.

Her Majesty's leadership in health and education initiatives, including comprehensive sexuality education in schools and scholarship programs for vulnerable youth, has equipped generations of Bhutanese with the tools needed to lead healthier and more empowered lives.

Her Majesty's legacy is not just about the past; it is about building a future where equality, compassion, and opportunity are at the heart of Bhutanese society. Her Majesty's work with RENEW, her influence on national policies and legislations, and personal engagement with communities across the country have laid a strong foundation for women's rights, safety, security, and economic independence.

As Bhutan celebrates Her Majesty's 25 years of service as UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, this is a humble tribute to Her Majesty's lifelong commitment to making Bhutan a more just, inclusive, and vibrant nation for all.







The Community Queen

A Royal Profile

Her Majesty Gyalum Sangay Choden Wangchuck's journey from a young Queen to a revered humanitarian has been nothing short of extraordinary. Born on 11th May 1963, Her Majesty's early years were steeped in traditional values, yet marked by an exceptional sense of curiosity and compassion. These formative experiences would later propel her to redefine the role of a Queen in Bhutan, turning it into a powerful platform for advocacy, compassion, and community service.

Her Majesty's upbringing was rich with lessons of humility, responsibility, and service. Surrounded by the country's serene landscapes and the profound teachings of Buddhism, Her Majesty developed a deep sense of empathy and a duty to uplift the lives of those around her. Her Majesty's family, known for their commitment to the nation and its people, set a living example of leadership through

service. These early influences instilled in her a lifelong commitment to humanitarian work and a vision for a more equitable Bhutan.

Her Majesty's education balanced traditional Bhutanese values with modern learning, equipping her to navigate a rapidly changing world. She recognized early on the challenges faced by Bhutanese women and girls, particularly in terms of health, education, and gender equality. This awareness laid the foundation for her future advocacy and her role as a transformative leader.

What sets Her Majesty apart is her personal connection to the causes she champions. She does not merely advocate from a distance but engages directly with the communities she serves. Whether in remote villages or bustling urban centers, Her Majesty is often seen interacting with individuals, listening to their stories, and understanding

their struggles. Dr. Alvaro Bermejo, Director General of International Planned Parenthood Federation endearingly calls her “Community Queen”.

Her passion for social causes is not just professional but deeply personal. Her experiences and observations of disparities within communities ignited a desire to bring about real, tangible change. Her Majesty has been particularly focused on improving the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of Bhutanese women and girls, advocating for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, and promoting adolescent health and well-being, among others.

Her Majesty’s is a pioneer in using her Royal influence as a powerful vehicle for advocacy and social transformation. Her initiatives, including the founding of RENEW, exemplify Her Majesty’s proactive, hands-on leadership approach. Under her leadership, RENEW has grown into a beacon of hope for survivors of domestic violence, offering shelter, psycho socio support, and the promise of a new beginning.

Her Majesty also established the Gyalyum Scholarship to

support education, the Royal Textile Academy to preserve the country’s rich cultural heritage, and the Dharma Initiatives to promote spiritual well-being.

Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck’s genuine love for her people is what truly sets her apart. She has walked alongside communities, not as a distant Royal figure but as a compassionate leader who cares deeply about the well-being of every Bhutanese citizen. Her hands-on involvement, whether advocating for health services in remote areas or supporting skill development programs for women, showcases her deep-rooted commitment to community upliftment.

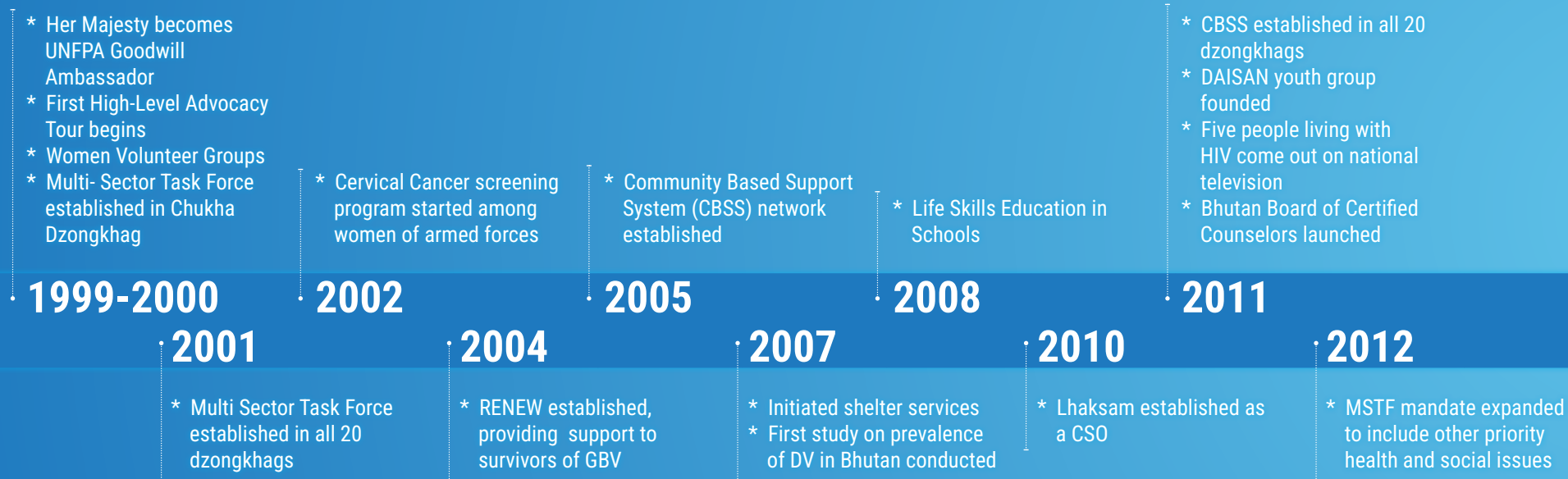
The title “Community Queen” is not merely honorary but a reflection of her lifelong dedication to being present, engaged, and proactive in addressing societal issues. Her Majesty has proven that true leadership is about service and compassion. And her legacy will continue to inspire future generations to prioritize empathy, inclusivity, and shared progress for all.



Her Majesty with community people in
Lunana during high-level advocacy



Timeline of Major Events & Milestones



- * Gawailing Happy Home inaugurated
- * Domestic Violence Prevention Act enacted

2013

- * Bhutan Board for certified counsellors established

2015

2014

- * MSTF-CBSS network partnership- Reaching Out Together
- * Comprehensive Sexuality Education institutionalized at Teacher Training Colleges
- * Life Skills in Monastic Institutions

2016-2017

- * Second High Level Advocacy begins
- * RENEW receives National Order of Merit (First Class)

2019

- * Nairobi Summit
- * Her Majesty receives Award of Appreciation for 20 years as GWA
- * United Nations Population Award

2020

- * Her Majesty received individual laureate for the UN 2020 Population Award

2021

- * CSE integrated into primary and secondary curriculum

2022

- * Initiated community service centers in dzongkhags

2023

- * Expanded Community Service Centers to 4 dzongkhags

2024

- * Expanded Community Service Centers to 3 more Dzongkhags
- * Established RENEW Rainbow helpdesk.





A Royal Advocate

Becoming the UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador

The appointment of Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Goodwill Ambassador in 1999 was a defining moment not only for Bhutan but also for the international community. Her Majesty's selection for this prestigious role was a testament to her unwavering dedication to social causes, particularly in advocating for the health, well-being, and rights of women and girls. It was also a profound recognition of Bhutan's growing engagement on the global stage, highlighting the nation's commitment to upholding human rights, gender equality, and sustainable development.

For a small Himalayan nation like Bhutan, this appointment carried immense significance. It was a proud moment that underscored Bhutan's ability to contribute meaningfully to global discourses on health, education, and gender equality. Her Majesty's appointment brought a fresh perspective to UNFPA's initiatives, offering insights

from a country that prioritizes Gross National Happiness (GNH) over Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Bhutan's unique approach to development, rooted in holistic well-being and sustainability, complemented UNFPA's vision of creating a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

Her Majesty's role as a Goodwill Ambassador provided a powerful platform to share Bhutan's experiences and learnings while advocating for global best practices to be implemented at home. Her appointment helped bridge the gap between local and global efforts in promoting sexual and reproductive health, women's empowerment, and the prevention of gender-based violence. It also enabled Bhutan to draw from international expertise and resources to enhance national programs and policies, particularly those targeting marginalized and vulnerable communities.

One of Her Majesty's greatest strengths as a Goodwill Ambassador was her ability to connect with people on a

personal level. She traveled extensively across Bhutan, often to remote and hard-to-reach communities, to listen to the experiences of women, girls, and young people. Her deep empathy and genuine concern for their well-being allowed her to advocate effectively on their behalf, both within Bhutan and on international platforms.

Her Majesty's advocacy was not limited to speeches and conferences. She led by example, engaging in community dialogues, conducting awareness programs, and promoting services related to reproductive health and rights. Her focus on creating safe spaces for women and girls to voice their concerns helped break cultural barriers and address issues that were often shrouded in silence. She championed topics such as menstrual hygiene, sexual health education, and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections—subjects that were previously considered taboo.

Through her work, Her Majesty provided a voice to those who were often unheard. She highlighted stories of resilience and strength, demonstrating how access to education, healthcare, and support systems could transform lives. Her advocacy efforts contributed to a shift in societal attitudes, encouraging more open discussions on gender equality and women's rights.

Her Majesty's influence as a Goodwill Ambassador went beyond awareness-raising. She played a crucial role in mobilizing resources and forging partnerships that strengthened Bhutan's healthcare and educational frameworks. The initiatives she led helped enhance the

capacity of local institutions to deliver vital services, particularly in underserved areas. Her Majesty's leadership in promoting the RENEW initiative is a prime example of how she translated advocacy into action. RENEW's programs have provided crucial support to survivors of domestic violence, offering shelter, counseling, and pathways to economic independence.

Internationally, Her Majesty brought Bhutan's perspective to global forums, advocating for policies that align with Bhutan's cultural values and the GNH philosophy. She worked closely with UNFPA and other international organizations to develop programs that supported adolescent health, family planning, and maternal care. Her efforts were recognized in 2020 when she was honored as the Individual Laureate for the United Nations Population Award—an acknowledgment of her immense contributions to improving the lives of women and girls in Bhutan and beyond.

As the UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador for over two and half decades now, Her Majesty's work has created a lasting impact. She has inspired a new generation of Bhutanese leaders to prioritize health, education, and equality. Her Majesty's approach to advocacy, grounded in compassion and respect, has set a benchmark for effective leadership. Her Majesty's legacy as a global advocate will continue to guide efforts towards creating a more equitable and just society, ensuring that the voices of Bhutanese women and girls are always heard on the world stage.



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Nu 6

THE WEEK

Power restored

Mongar's power supply, which was disrupted for about a month because of the sinking water channel at Khalangzee hydel station, was restored on January 5.

Khalangzee is now generating 250 KW and supplying power to Mongar town, Gyepshing, and Lingmithang, but regular load shedding will continue, said a Power spokesman.

Computer course

About 20 students in Class VIII and above from Kanglung and Khaling are attending a two-week computer orientation course at Sherubtse College.

The first course of its kind, offered by the college's computer department, the students will learn the basics of computer operation and will also be introduced to MS-DOS, Microsoft and Windows applications.

A music course was shelved for lack of candidates.

Small family

Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck becomes UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador



Her Majesty Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck accepts the official UNFPA request from Mr. Wasim Zaman

HER MAJESTY the Queen Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck accepted a request by the United Nations Population Fund to be the Goodwill Ambassador for the organisation in Bhutan at a formal ceremony on January 6.

"I am happy to accept this honour as a tribute to His Majesty the

King and the royal government of Bhutan for their deep commitment to improving family health, implementing sound population policies and activities, and ensuring sustainable socio-economic development," Her Majesty told a gathering of Bhutanese and international dignitaries in Thimphu.

Her Majesty said that she would work closely with the concerned government agencies to accomplish the goals of the UNFPA through its many activities in Bhutan. "I believe that one of the most important of these goals is raising the awareness and capacity of our

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

New Indian ambassador presents credentials

BHUTAN and India do not face any major hurdles or problems in their bilateral relations but have a very amicable dialogue with close personal relationships between the leaders, according to the new India ambassador, Mr. Pradeep Kumar Singh, who presented his credentials to His Majesty the King on January 4.

"It is a privilege and an honour for any professional foreign service officer of India to be appointed to this post because of its tremendous importance to our country," Mr. Singh told Kuensel. "It is important because of the uniqueness of our relationship. I don't think there are many countries in the world which have as wide a variety of contacts and deep a friendship as India and Bhutan."

The main challenge facing an Indian ambassador was to improve on the existing relationship, said Mr. Singh. The broader responsibility





In the Footsteps of a Champion

Health

When Her Majesty started her journey as the UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador to Bhutan in 1999, she launched a nationwide advocacy program to advocate on priority health issues including sexual and reproductive health, family planning, maternal and child health, education, substance abuse, health and hygiene, and prevention of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

Her Majesty traveled the length and breadth of the country to meet with people of the 20 dzongkhags (districts). Her travels took her from urban centers to rural areas, over high mountain passes to sub-tropical forests and lowland valleys. There were no motorable roads to many remote

places and her journey often involved travel on foot, horses, and even yaks as she navigated the difficult and harsh terrain.

In each dzongkhag, Her Majesty visited schools, hospitals, health centers, and government institutions. She met and spoke at great length with local government leaders, civil servants, students, teachers, village health workers, doctors, patients, judiciary members, religious communities, armed forces, private sector, and the general public.

During the initial campaign it was apparent that while Bhutan was largely an open society, issues concerning sexual and reproductive health were considered too intimate to discuss openly within households and in communities. Most people were reluctant and shy to participate in discussions related to sexual and reproductive

health and sexually transmitted infections. There was also stigma and discrimination associated with these issues.

The foremost challenge was to de-stigmatize issues relating to sexual and reproductive health, and to create an enabling environment to encourage open dialogue and social acceptance to learn about these issues.

During the visits to schools, Her Majesty met with students and teachers and spoke about sexual and reproductive health and rights, prevention of HIV/AIDS, and other adolescent and youth related issues. She shared her concerns about substance abuse, teenage pregnancy and violence, and emphasized the importance of education and of being aware of one's rights and taking informed decisions.

In the beginning, there was a reluctance in schools to talk openly about sexuality education, and teachers were uncomfortable with teaching the subject. Young people were also very shy and hesitant to talk about the issues. During Her Majesty's visits, students were encouraged to write down their questions on paper and submit them anonymously. This strategy was effective, as it revealed that young people had many unanswered questions about sexual and reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections, and other issues.

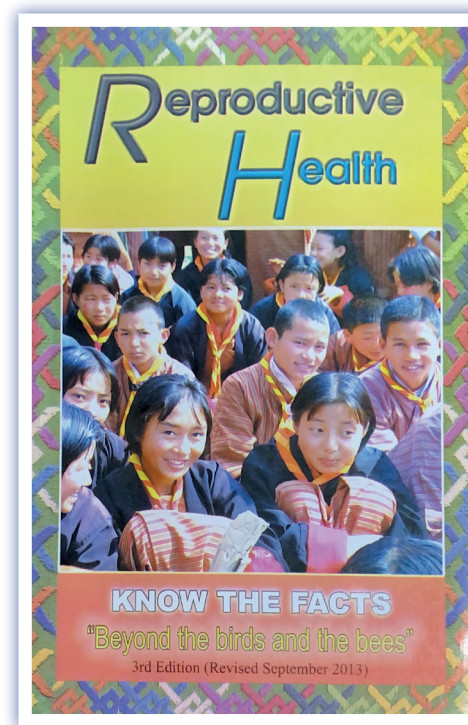
Drawing inspiration from Her Majesty's interaction with young people, the Ministry of Health developed a publication in 2000 titled "Know the Facts: Beyond the Birds and the Bees". The book covered the questions asked by young people, and responses from health professionals on issues relating to HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, substance abuse, sexuality issues, social relationships, and adolescents' issues. Widely distributed in schools, the book helped provide reliable information to enable young people to make informed decisions.

Reproductive Health & Maternal Care

The Reproductive Health Programme started as the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Programme in the 1970s. Following the International Conference of Population and Development in 1994, Bhutan adopted the concept of 'Reproductive Health' to address broader aspects of health. The major components of reproductive health in Bhutan include safe motherhood, newborn care, family planning, screening and prevention of cervical and breast cancer, and sexual and reproductive health.

Over the years, reproductive health has seen good progress especially in the areas of maternal and child health. There was a significant improvement in maternal mortality rate from 380 to 53 per 100,000 live births, in 1994 and 2023 respectively. The infant mortality and under-five mortality rates had also improved significantly.

The proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel has increased from 10.9 in 1994 to 98.8 in 2021, and the number of women



availing antenatal care and post-natal care has also improved significantly. Efforts have also been made to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment, including through screening for breast and cervical cancer. Bhutan is committed to the elimination of cervical cancer by 2030.

Her Majesty has been the strongest advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Bhutan. She has traveled extensively around the country to create awareness on institutional delivery, teenage pregnancy, nutrition, and screening for cervical cancer. She continues to urge women and girls to utilize the many services that are available for better health outcomes for them and their family.

Educating for Life

Recognizing the importance of timely access to sexual and reproductive health-related information and services, a comprehensive school health programme was introduced in 1999. The Ministry of Education adopted the Life

Skills Education programme in 2008 to help both teachers and students adapt to, and build positive behaviors to enable them to deal with the demands and challenges of everyday living, as well as SRHR.

Recognizing comprehensive sexuality education as an important way of addressing gender-based violence, abuse and discrimination, modules on comprehensive sexuality education were institutionalized at the Colleges of Education in Paro and Samtse in 2014. In 2019, comprehensive sexuality education was integrated into identified subjects. By 2021 comprehensive sexuality education was integrated into the seven subjects of the national school curriculum framework and embedded in the instructional guide for teachers.

The National Strategic Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education was launched in 2022 to guide comprehensive sexuality education implementation in schools, and it is now being taught nationwide.

These initiatives aim to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes,

and values that will empower them to realize their health, well-being and dignity, and also enable them to make informed and appropriate choices in life.

Prevention of HIV/AIDS

The National HIV/AIDS & STIs Control Program was established in 1988, five years before the detection of the first HIV case in the country in 1993. The program worked to create awareness on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, to educate people on transmission and prevention, encourage behavior change, sensitize people on stigma and discrimination, and provide support and solidarity to people living with the disease. It also advocated blood screening to ensure safety and prevention of mother to child transmission, integrating management of STIs into primary health care, to improve treatment, and setting up voluntary counseling and testing facilities.

A Royal Decree on HIV Prevention by His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye

Wangchuck in 2004 called for all citizens to participate in HIV/AIDS prevention while respecting the rights of those living with the disease. This was followed by another Royal Edict the same year to help prevent HIV/AIDS and to provide care and compassion to those infected.

His Majesty The King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has also urged people to show compassion to those living with the disease.

Despite prevention efforts, the number of HIV/AIDS cases continued to rise. One of the biggest challenges in dealing with HIV/AIDS, unlike other diseases, has been the discrimination and stigma attached to it. There was social stigma as well as self-stigma that often led to feelings of shame, isolation, despair, and fear of disclosure.

Over the years, Her Majesty has strongly advocated prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, and encouraged people to break the stigma against people living with these diseases. Upon her Command, the Multi Sector Task Force (MSTF) was created in each dzongkhag. The MSTF collaborated extensively

with a network of volunteers in the community to create awareness on HIV/AIDS and other public health and social issues.

Her Majesty's continuous and persistent advocacy and engagement with people living with HIV/AIDS led to the creation of a civil society organization called Lhak-sam in 2010. Five people living with HIV/AIDS appeared voluntarily on national television in 2011 to talk about HIV/AIDS in Bhutan. This was an important step that helped change public perception of people living with the disease and contributed to greater social acceptance.

Today there are 874 reported HIV/AIDS cases in the country. While the number of reported cases is small compared to that of other countries, it is a major public health concern given the country's small population. The political will and commitment towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 remain strong, but there is much to be done in order to halt or reverse the spread of the epidemic.

Education

Empowering Vulnerable Children

Her Majesty Gyalum Sangay Choden Wangchuck's unwavering commitment to education is embodied through the RENEW scholarship program, which has been providing educational support to vulnerable children since 2005. The program specifically assists survivors of domestic violence, sexual and gender-based violence, and children who have been abandoned or neglected. Her Majesty's vision is clear—to create a brighter future for Bhutan's youth, regardless of their circumstances.

The RENEW scholarship program offers financial support to students from the pre-primary level through to the 12th grade. After completing the 12th grade, RENEW works tirelessly to secure other forms of support, including college scholarships and sponsorships, to help students continue their education or take



Delivering a world
• Where EVERY person
• EVERY childbirth
• EVERY young person
fulfilled

Her Majesty with health workers



up vocational training. This holistic approach ensures that no child is left behind, and each has the opportunity to build a sustainable and independent future.

Initially, the scholarships were funded by Friends of RENEW, a network of compassionate supporters. However, in 2011, the program evolved into a full-fledged initiative with the long-term backing of the Australian Himalayan Foundation. This partnership strengthened the program's reach and impact, allowing RENEW to support an increasing number of children year after year.

The RENEW scholarship program is driven by a set of strong and impactful objectives aimed at supporting vulnerable children and promoting education. At its core, the program seeks to create a supportive learning environment by providing financial assistance to ensure students have the resources they need to thrive academically.

This initiative is particularly crucial in preventing school dropouts, as financial hardships often hinder children's ability to continue their

education. By offering targeted support, RENEW helps secure students' academic journeys and keeps them in school.

An essential aspect of the program is its focus on providing immediate aid to children affected by domestic and gender-based violence. By acting swiftly, the scholarship offers these children stability and a sense of normalcy in their education, helping them navigate challenging circumstances. Additionally, RENEW is deeply committed to upholding children's rights, ensuring every child has access to a safe, healthy, and equitable life. The program also aims to expand educational opportunities, increasing the chances for students to pursue higher education and fostering their long-term growth and success.

The program's approach is both thorough and compassionate, involving multiple stakeholders in identifying children who need support. Referrals for the scholarship come from a broad network, including parents, guardians, schools, local leaders, and CBSS volunteers. Once applications are received, they are registered at the RENEW

Service Unit, where a dedicated team of counsellors carefully assesses each case. The final selection of beneficiaries is made by the scholarship committee, ensuring a fair and thoughtful process. Once chosen, the children receive financial aid and any other necessary support to help them continue their education and improve their quality of life.

Overall, the RENEW scholarship program not only provides critical financial assistance but also offers hope and opportunity to children in need, contributing to a brighter and more equitable future.

Since its inception in 2005, the RENEW scholarship program has helped hundreds of children access education. From 2019 to 2023 alone, 928 children across Bhutan benefitted from the program. In 2023, there were 197 students receiving scholarship support, with 27 of them residing permanently at the Gawailing Happy Home shelter in Thimphu. This safe haven not only offers shelter but also a nurturing environment where children can focus on their studies and personal growth.

Her Majesty Gyalum Sangay Choden Wangchuck's vision for the program is steadfast. RENEW will continue to enhance and expand its support, striving to reach every vulnerable child who needs educational assistance. By empowering these young individuals, the program aims to transform lives, enabling them to become socially and economically productive citizens of Bhutan. Her Majesty's work through RENEW exemplifies how education can serve as a powerful tool for change. Her dedication to providing vulnerable children with access to education not only improves individual lives but also strengthens the fabric of Bhutanese society, ensuring a brighter and more equitable future for all.

Gender Equality

Breaking Barriers and Empowering Women in Bhutan

Bhutan's Constitution bestows equal rights and duties upon all citizens, but deeply rooted socio-cultural perceptions about the roles of women have long influenced access to education, employment, and public decision-making. However, in recent decades, Bhutan has witnessed a significant shift in these perceptions, driven by the advocacy efforts led by Her Majesty Gyalum Sangay Choden Wangchuck.

CSOs like RENEW have been pivotal in championing gender equality, advocating for equity, access, and protection from domestic violence and sexual abuse. By participating in dialogues with policymakers and the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), RENEW has significantly influenced legislation, including the Domestic Violence Prevention Act

(DVPA) 2013 and the Child Care and Protection Act.

RENEW's mission aligns with Bhutan's guiding philosophy of GNH, focusing on empowering vulnerable women and promoting their role in society. The organization has helped bring women to the forefront of public discourse, emphasizing the importance of safety, education, and equal opportunities.

Her Majesty The Gyalum has dedicated over two and a half decades to advocating for public health and social issues. Her nationwide advocacy tours and numerous visits to dzongkhags have opened up dialogues on sensitive issues, including reproductive health, menstrual hygiene, and sexuality education.

These high-level advocacy efforts have been instrumental in breaking down social stigmas and discrimination. They have created an enabling environment that encourages women and girls to utilize available health services, contributing to improved health outcomes for themselves and their families. Additionally, Her Majesty's



CBSS volunteers prepared to roll out advocacy tool in their respective schools and communities



initiatives have garnered multi-sectoral support, mobilizing local leaders and communities to address health and social priorities collaboratively.

Legislative Milestones: Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013

A milestone in promoting gender equality was the enactment of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act of Bhutan in 2013. The legislation's journey was not without challenges. Initially tabled in 2012, the draft legislation faced opposition from male parliamentarians who questioned the need for additional institutions and resources. Concerns also arose about the draft's focus on women's protection, seemingly overlooking male victims of domestic violence, and the potential misuse of the law to disrupt families.

Despite these challenges, persistent advocacy from RENEW and women parliamentarians led to the passage of the bill in the spring of 2013. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act gained

the support of the majority of parliamentarians, marking a significant victory for gender equality. The passing of this act was a testament to the power of advocacy and collaboration in policy-making.

Engaging Religious Institutions

An innovative approach to advancing gender equality in Bhutan involves engaging religious institutions. Since 2014, over 350 heads of monastic institutions and 80 nuns have been trained to impart life skills education, including topics on gender inequality, domestic violence, and reproductive health. Additionally, more than 1,500 nuns across 26 nunneries have been sensitized on sexual and reproductive health, contributing to more open discussions on topics like menstruation, contraceptives, and family planning.

This initiative has enabled religious leaders, who hold significant influence in Bhutanese society, to become advocates for gender

equality. Their involvement has been crucial in transforming societal attitudes and promoting health and well-being in communities.

Towards a Gender-Equal Bhutan

The strides made in promoting gender equality in Bhutan highlight the impact of sustained advocacy, robust policies, and inclusive educational programs. Her Majesty's unwavering commitment, RENEW's strategic interventions, and collaborative efforts with community leaders and institutions have created a foundation for a more equitable society.

As Bhutan continues its journey towards gender equality, these efforts serve as a model of how leadership, education, and community engagement can drive lasting change and inspire future generations to uphold the values of equity and dignity for all.



“My husband broke my phone when he got mad. He has broken my phone a few times now. He throws it in anger all the time. So, people nearby didn’t know what to do and took me to the hospital, I found out later when I woke up at the hospital. The hospital had called RENEW counsellor madam and she took me to the happy home.”

Women, 32 years, married, two children

Domestic Violence Prevention

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue that transcends geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries. In Bhutan, the fight against domestic violence has been championed by organizations like RENEW, which has played a pivotal role in providing shelter, support, and advocacy for survivors.

RENEW was founded in 2004 by Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck with the mission to empower vulnerable women, girls, and diverse genders in Bhutan. The organization focuses on rebuilding the lives of survivors of domestic and gender-based violence through advocacy, education, and comprehensive support services.

Her Majesty’s advocacy, including two nationwide tours and numerous dzongkhag visits, has broken down societal barriers, allowing

open dialogues about sensitive issues like domestic violence, sexual abuse, and gender-based violence. RENEW’s efforts have created an enabling environment where women and girls are encouraged to seek help and make informed decisions for their well-being and that of their families.

RENEW’s Intervention Programs

RENEW offers a wide range of intervention programs aimed at addressing the needs of survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. These programs include:

Emergency Shelters

RENEW began providing emergency shelter services in 2005, with the Gawailing Happy Home (GHH) opening in 2013 as the first official shelter for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence.

Children advocating against gender
based violence through stage
performance





Counseling Programs

RENEW provides counseling services for families, couples, and individuals, incorporating healing programs as part of the process. Professional counselors and case managers are available to offer psychosocial care to those in need.

Pro-bono Legal Aid

RENEW employs full-time professional lawyers who offer a range of legal services to survivors, ensuring they have the legal support needed to navigate their circumstances.

Scholarships and Livelihood Support

The organization offers scholarships to vulnerable children and social orphans, alongside livelihood skills training and micro-finance opportunities as part of their social integration initiatives.

Gawailing Center (GHH): The First Shelter for Survivors

The Gawailing Happy Home (GHH) is a safe haven that provides emergency protection and psychosocial care to survivors and their families. Managed by a team of professionals, GHH operates 24/7, offering services such as:

- * Counseling and healing programs
- * Emergency shelter for survivors and their families
- * Educational scholarships
- * Medical aid and recreational facilities for children

Since its establishment, GHH has supported over 1,800 beneficiaries, including more than 1,000 girls and nearly 300 boys. The center's holistic approach not only provides immediate relief but also equips survivors with the tools they need to lead independent and fulfilling lives.



The biggest lesson that I learned is we must seek help in time and never tolerate violence. Another learning is that I also have some rights as human being.”

Women, 33 years, married, no child



I feel more confident and empowered now. I feel the vast difference after I came to RENEW....Knowing about myself and understanding relationship issues. I came to know more about RENEW and their services, which helped me to talk to others who are in needs of the services.”

Women, 30 years, married, two children

RENEW’s plans to expand community service centers across all 20 districts in the country will further solidify its impact, making sure that no survivor is left without support.

Mobilizing Community Engagement: MSTF & CBSS

To create sustainable and community-owned support systems, RENEW established the MSTF and CBSS. These initiatives engage local communities, fostering ownership of services and enhancing the reach of RENEW’s programs across 20 districts in the country. The MSTF and CBSS empower local leaders and volunteers to act as the first point of contact for survivors, bridging gaps in service accessibility.

Establishment of Counseling Professionals

Counseling is a core component of RENEW’s mission to empower women and children. The organization provides both individual and group counseling sessions, addressing a wide range of issues, including trauma, relationship problems, substance abuse, and mental health challenges. RENEW’s counselors are trained to use culturally sensitive approaches, integrating traditional Bhutanese values and practices with modern counseling techniques. This approach ensures that clients feel understood and supported in a way that resonates with their cultural context.

One of RENEW’s most significant contributions to counseling in Bhutan is its Mental Health Facilitation (MHF) training program. This

ཁས་སྐྱེས་བསྐྱབ་བྱ་དང་བརྟན་ཞིབ་ཁང་མིག།
VOLUNTARY COUNSELING AND
TESTING ROOM



POSTNATAL CARE ROOM





If we consider all these types of violence as SGBV, I will say the prevalence is very high, as high as 70% and in some cases, it could be even 100%.”

Teacher, monastic school, Buddhist

program equips community workers, social workers, and counselors with the skills to identify, refer, and provide basic counseling services to individuals in need. The MHF training has been particularly impactful in rural areas, where access to mental health services is limited. Through this program, RENEW has expanded its reach, ensuring that even the most remote communities have access to counseling and support.

Her Majesty has been a strong advocate for the professionalization of counseling in Bhutan. She has emphasized the need for trained and certified counselors to address the growing demand for mental health services. Under her guidance, RENEW has collaborated with international organizations, such as the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) in the United States, to provide advanced training and certification for Bhutanese counselors. These efforts have not only improved the quality of counseling services in Bhutan but have also elevated the status of counseling as a recognized profession.

Her Majesty’s vision for counseling in Bhutan is deeply rooted in the country’s cultural and spiritual traditions. She has consistently advocated for the integration of traditional Bhutanese practices, such as Buddhist teachings and shamanistic rituals, with modern counseling techniques. This holistic approach recognizes the importance of addressing both the psychological and spiritual needs of individuals.

For example, RENEW’s counseling programs often incorporate elements of mindfulness and meditation, drawing on Bhutan’s rich Buddhist heritage. These practices help clients develop resilience, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, which are essential for overcoming trauma and adversity.

Her Majesty’s emphasis on cultural integration has made RENEW’s counseling services more accessible and acceptable to the Bhutanese population, particularly in rural areas where traditional healing practices are still widely used.

RENEW's Community-Based Approach

RENEW's impact extends beyond its counseling centers in the capital city of Thimphu. The organization has established a network of outreach workers across all 20 districts of Bhutan, ensuring that counseling services are available to those in need, regardless of their location. These outreach workers, many of whom are trained as para-professionals in mental health facilitation, play a crucial role in identifying and supporting individuals facing mental health challenges, domestic violence, and substance abuse.

Her Majesty has been a driving force behind RENEW's community-based approach. She has personally visited remote areas to assess the needs of local communities and to ensure that RENEW's services are tailored to their specific challenges. Her hands-on involvement has inspired countless Bhutanese citizens to seek help and has reinforced the importance of mental health and well-being in achieving GNH.

As Bhutan continues to navigate the challenges of modernization and globalization, the need for counseling and mental health services will only grow. Thanks to Her Majesty's leadership, RENEW is well-positioned to meet this demand, providing hope and healing to those in need. Her legacy of empowerment and compassion will undoubtedly continue to inspire future generations of Bhutanese citizens, ensuring that the kingdom remains a beacon of happiness and well-being in the world.



I think women with low education, uneducated and dependent women are at more risk."

Pandit, Hindu, 40 years

Livelihood & Economic Independence

Vocational Training and Skill-Building Initiatives

When RENEW first began its journey, the focus was on advocacy and counseling services for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence (GBV). However, the organization quickly identified a critical gap in supporting survivors' reintegration into society—financial independence. As survivors of violence often found themselves without the means to support themselves and their families, RENEW launched its livelihood skills programs as a part of its broader reintegration strategy.

Since 2008, RENEW has provided 13 diverse livelihood skills training to over 3,000

individuals, including women, men, boys, people with disabilities, and members of the LGBT+ community. These trainings include floriculture, mushroom cultivation, tailoring, knitting, development of recycled products, baking, cooking, artificial flower making, felting, caregiver's training, financial and entrepreneurship.

The training programs aim to build practical skills that enable participants to gain economic independence and create sustainable livelihoods.

One of the most popular vocational programs is the basic tailoring course, which has reached 15 dzongkhags across the country. Trainees learn sewing skills that help them generate income by making clothes and other textiles.

RENEW also offers training in traditional weaving techniques using *Pangtha*, *Thritha*, and Assamese looms, and natural dyeing.

In 2023, RENEW introduced caregiver training to equip individuals with the skills to take care of the elderly and children. The variety of vocational programs ensures that participants can find a niche that matches their interests and market

needs. Many beneficiaries of these programs have gone on to set up their own businesses, achieving financial stability and confidence.

Micro-Financing Opportunities

To support economic independence, RENEW, in collaboration with the Deutsche Sparkassenstiftung für internationale Kooperation (DSIK), established RENEW Microfinance Private Limited (RMF) in 2011. RMF is Bhutan's first and largest microfinance institution, licensed as a Deposit Taking Microfinance Institution and later incorporated under the Companies Act of Bhutan 2016.

With 481 access points spread across 12 dzongkhags and 110 gewogs, RMF provides financial services to vulnerable and low-income women and their families. These include savings accounts, loans, and financial literacy programs.

The microfinance initiative not only facilitates access to essential financial services but also empowers beneficiaries to make informed



Community woman raising a question during high-level advocacy

Spread the word
Knowing the symptoms
of Cervical Cancer can
save your life
Cervical cancer is one of the leading
causes of death among Bhutanese
women. It is an infection caused by
HPV virus.

financial decisions and start or expand their businesses. RMF's financial literacy programs are especially valuable, as they help participants understand the principles of budgeting, saving, and managing debt. This knowledge is crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty and dependency that often traps survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

RENEW Social Enterprise

In 2021, RENEW launched the RENEW Social Enterprise (RSE) with support from the IPPF Social Enterprise Hub based in Sri Lanka. The RSE aims to create sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable women, including survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). It does so by empowering them with livelihood skills and providing a platform to market their products.

All RSE products are handmade and 100% natural, promoting a value chain of locally sourced materials and contemporary designs. The enterprise focuses on high-quality craftsmanship,

offering textiles, home décor, and souvenirs. Profits generated from RSE are reinvested into RENEW's livelihood skilling programs, creating a self-sustaining model that benefits the community.

RENEW aims to further enhance the economic security and well-being of SGBV survivors and vulnerable communities. Over the next five years, the organization plans to diversify its livelihood training opportunities, ensuring a broader reach and more significant impact. By building on its existing programs and exploring new partnerships, RENEW envisions a future where survivors are not only safe but also economically empowered to lead dignified and independent lives. Through vocational training, micro-finance opportunities, and dynamic skill-building initiatives, RENEW continues to transform lives and foster hope, one skill at a time.



Her Majesty with 20 Dzongdags











Awards and Recognitions

Her Majesty Gyalum Sangay Choden Wangchuck has received numerous national and international awards and honors for her unwavering commitment to promoting gender equality, advocating for women's rights, and supporting survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. Her exceptional leadership and tireless efforts have left a profound impact on Bhutan and beyond.

National Honors

Her Majesty has been a powerful advocate for social change, dedicating her life to uplifting marginalized and vulnerable communities. As the founder of RENEW, she has provided crucial safety, support, and empowerment to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. Her contributions to health, education, and social welfare have been celebrated

through some of Bhutan's highest national honors. Among these recognitions are the Commemorative Silver Jubilee Medal of His Majesty the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in 1999 and His Majesty the King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck Investiture Medal in 2008.

Her Majesty also received the National Order of Merit (First Class) in 2016 for her work with RENEW and the Royal Textile Academy.

International Recognitions

Her Majesty's influence extends globally, where her advocacy work has garnered international acclaim. Since 1999, she has served as a Goodwill Ambassador for UNFPA, the first

Bhutanese to receive this honor. In this role, Her Majesty champions reproductive health, women's empowerment, and youth well-being, aligning closely with RENEW's mission. Her Majesty's impact was further recognized in 2019 with the Award of Appreciation for 20 Years as UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador.

Her Majesty was also awarded the NBCC (National Board for Certified Counselors) International Award of Excellence for Mental Health Awareness in 2008.

In 2020, Her Majesty was named the Individual Laureate for the United Nations Population Award, an accolade celebrating her exceptional contributions to improving the lives of women and girls. This prestigious award is given to individuals whose work has significantly advanced gender equality, health, education, and the well-being of youth.

Through her remarkable achievements and honors, Her Majesty Gyalum Sangay Choden Wangchuck continues to inspire and drive positive change, advocating for a more just and equitable society.



Her Majesty The Gyalum was awarded the NBCC International Award for Excellence in Mental Health





Her Majesty's interview

Excerpts of the interview from the book
'A Champion's Journey'

What was Your Majesty's motivation for becoming a Goodwill Ambassador for UNFPA?

During my travels with His Majesty the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, I witnessed the challenges that women and children in the remote areas of Bhutan faced. These experiences compelled me to recognize the importance of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, along with improving access to health services.

In 1999, I accepted the role of the UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador with the aim of increasing awareness and accessibility to reproductive health services, specifically for women and young people. Although Bhutanese women enjoy more rights than our counterparts within the region and beyond, there is still a disparity in the value

placed on the roles of women and men. UNFPA provided an international platform to advocate for issues related to reproductive health, maternal and child health, gender equality, and youth empowerment.

As the UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, I am deeply committed to enhancing the health and well-being of women, young people and children. I remain steadfast in being an advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment which serves as a constant source of inspiration and motivation.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and HIV/AIDS are generally sensitive topics, particularly in the 1990s. What inspired Your Majesty to take on the responsibility of advocating on these issues?

Being a woman and a mother, I understand the significance of addressing issues related to sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, which are associated with stigma and neglected in many societies, including Bhutan in the 1990s. As a conservative society, Bhutanese culture prioritizes respect for elders and avoids open discussions of taboo subjects, particularly those pertaining to sexual and reproductive health.

Despite our geographic isolation, Bhutan was not impervious to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, with the first confirmed case being detected in 1993. Recognizing the potential for an increase in HIV infections due to cross-border migration, international travel, and risky behaviors, taking proactive measures to prevent the spread of HIV in a population of less than 700 thousand was crucial to avoid a catastrophic situation.

I was privileged to wield influence and gain acceptance to address these sensitive issues and drive positive change in society. I believe that it was imperative to raise awareness and provide access to information and family services related to SRHR and HIV/AIDS, to promote the well-being of women and children in Bhutan.

How did Your Majesty navigate the tension between traditional views and a more open approach to SRHR?

I am deeply grateful for the trust and support accorded to me by the highest authority in the country Their Majesties the Kings of Bhutan, as well as the Chief Abbot, and the Royal Government of Bhutan. It was recognized that there was an urgent need to address the SRHR needs of the people, which led to the adoption of a pragmatic approach that combines both traditional values and modern methods.

This was made possible through the concerted efforts of the Ministry of Health, UNFPA, RENEW,

relevant organizations, stakeholders and other development partners who worked together to implement a comprehensive approach that emphasized the importance of education and communication in raising awareness and promoting SRHR.

In my capacity as the UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, I personally led two nation-wide advocacy tours in the twenty districts of Bhutan, including the most remote communities, to educate and raise awareness on SRHR. Working with religious leaders, educational institutions, and communities, we encouraged an open and respectful dialogue about these sensitive issues.

Bhutan is well known for being a 'happy' country. What are some of the challenges this identity presents when talking about complex issues like gender-based violence (GBV) and gender inequality?

Bhutan's identity as a 'happy' country presents challenges when talking about complex issues like

gender-based violence and gender inequality. The emphasis on happiness can create a perception that these issues do not exist or are not as significant in Bhutanese society. Furthermore, traditional cultural norms can perpetuate gender inequality and restrict discussions about sensitive topics like GBV.

I am a firm believer that where there are human beings, invariably problems related to being 'only' human co-exists along with all the good represented by 'being' human. It is important to recognize that these problems exist, and addressing them is crucial for the overall well-being and happiness of the Bhutanese society.

The birth of RENEW, a civil society organization, took place under my patronage to provide holistic services to women from vulnerable and marginalized sections of society, and victims of domestic and gender-based violence.

What are some of the main challenges that were faced on this journey?

Among the challenges, one main challenge has been the difficulty posed by the geographical terrain during the advocacy tours to the remote areas. I recently completed an advocacy tour to Lunana, which is situated in the extreme northwest region of Bhutan at an altitude of 13,675 ft. above sea level, and accessible through a eight-day trek from the nearest motorable road.

Due to Bhutan's mountainous landscape and lack of proper infrastructure, accessibility to remote communities is challenging, requiring travel by foot, ponies and even yaks in the higher altitudes to reach the remote communities.

Harsh weather conditions, such as heavy rainfall and even snow accompanied by landslides often made travel difficult and dangerous. Moreover, some remote areas lacked basic facilities such as electricity and access to clean drinking water which made it very challenging for the team

to conduct awareness programs and deliver messages effectively.

Conservative attitudes towards sex, reproductive health and gender equality posed some level of challenges to raise awareness on sensitive issues. Although, the national language Dzongkha is widely spoken, language barriers still presented a challenge in some communities that required the use of interpreters to ensure the accurate delivery of messages.

Despite the challenges, my role as the UNFPA Ambassador has been a highly rewarding journey.

What are some things Your Majesty feels most happy about in terms of accomplishment?

I am deeply humbled and get a sense of fulfilment to have been able to make a positive impact in various areas that have contributed to the development of Bhutan.

As the Goodwill Ambassador of UNFPA, I feel a great sense of accomplishment knowing that the

advocacies on sexual and reproductive health and rights have raised awareness on gender-based violence and HIVAIDS.

What is Your Majesty's vision for the relationship with UNFPA? What more can be done to expand the reach of your message?

I intend to continue working with UNFPA to further expand the reach of the messages on SRHR and gender equality. Education and awareness raising initiatives are the strongest tools to challenge harmful attitudes and beliefs, and to promote positive change. We should aspire for increased collaboration with other like organizations, relevant stakeholders including governmental agencies, civil society organizations and development partners.

Your Majesty's advocacy and dedicated service has accomplished so much for the Bhutanese people. What next? What would Your Majesty like to see taken forward?

While we acknowledge the laurels of our achievements there is still much more to be done. At this juncture, we cannot risk complacency as it could very easily undermine all the advancements we have made so far. I believe that we must continue to focus on promoting women's empowerment, gender equality, and SRHR in Bhutan and beyond. I fully intend to collaborate with UNFPA and other organizations to expand the reach of our message and advocate for policy changes that improve the lives of women and girls.

Is there any story Your Majesty would like to share or any words of advice?

Amidst many tales of struggles and perseverance, there is one particularly poignant story that deeply resonates with me, and the mission that

holds a special place in my heart. A young girl, who had endured physical and sexual abuse at a tender age, was referred to RENEW as she was deemed vulnerable to further victimization. Upon her arrival at RENEW she had lost all hope including the will to live. Under the dedicated and passionate care of RENEW's service providers, I had the privilege of witnessing her growth and transformation at the Gawailing Happy Home, where she found a home and family among other victims of various atrocities. Her remarkable journey culminated in the attainment of an undergraduate degree and the establishment of a successful business. Her story is a testament to the power of perseverance, hope, and determination in the face of adversity.

I would like to share some of my thoughts and insights. To those who are suffering silently, I urge you to seek help, believe in yourself and trust your instincts. For those who are facing failure, know that it is temporary and embrace it as an opportunity to learn and grow. To those who are struggling, maintain a positive attitude,

for positivity is a prerequisite to overcome challenges to achieve your goals. It is vital to care for your physical, emotional and mental health, and surround yourself with positivity. Above all, be kind to others and treat them with respect and compassion. We must remember that a little kindness can go a long way





The Road Ahead

A Vision for the Future

Her Majesty Gyalum Sangay Choden Wangchuck's unwavering commitment to the welfare of the Bhutanese people has shaped a legacy of compassion, resilience, and hope. As a champion of women's rights, health, and education, Her Majesty has transformed countless lives through pioneering initiatives, particularly through RENEW and other humanitarian efforts. As Bhutan evolves, Her Majesty's vision continues to adapt, focusing on sustainable development, inclusivity, and creating opportunities for future generations.

Her Majesty's initiatives have always been grounded in the principles of compassion and service. RENEW remains a cornerstone of her work, offering critical support to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. The organization's livelihood programs, vocational training, and micro-finance initiatives empower survivors to rebuild their

lives with dignity and economic independence.

The Gawailing Happy Home (GHH), continues to provide a safe haven and rehabilitation services. The shelter, along with community service centers, counseling programs, and skill-building workshops, serves as a model of holistic support for those in need. Her Majesty's vision for expanding these services to reach even the most remote communities in Bhutan is a testament to her dedication to leaving no one behind.

RENEW's micro-finance initiatives and the RENEW Social Enterprise are pivotal in promoting financial independence among vulnerable women. By providing access to savings, loans, and financial literacy training, these programs lay the groundwork for economic empowerment. Her Majesty envisions broadening the reach of these programs, ensuring that economic opportunities are accessible to all, particularly

in rural and underserved areas.

Her Majesty's vision for the future encompasses both continuity and innovation. Strengthening existing programs while exploring new avenues to address emerging challenges remains a priority. A significant focus is on enhancing economic opportunities for women and youth through expanded vocational training, advanced skill-building workshops, and support for entrepreneurship. RENEW aims to diversify its training programs, incorporating modern skills and technologies that align with Bhutan's evolving economy.

Another critical area of focus is mental health and well-being. Her Majesty plans to introduce comprehensive counseling and mental health support programs, particularly for survivors of violence and marginalized communities. These initiatives will complement RENEW's existing counseling services, offering holistic care that addresses both physical and psychological needs.

Her Majesty also envisions a greater emphasis on education and advocacy. By working closely with schools, communities, and policymakers, RENEW will amplify awareness on issues such as domestic violence, reproductive health, and gender equality. Educational campaigns, workshops, and community dialogues will continue to challenge stigmas and promote a culture of respect and inclusion.

Environmental sustainability is another emerging priority. With Bhutan's commitment to remaining carbon negative, Her Majesty supports initiatives that integrate environmental education with livelihood programs. This includes promoting eco-friendly practices in agriculture, handicrafts, and social enterprises, ensuring that economic growth does not come at the expense of Bhutan's natural heritage.

Carrying Forward the Legacy

Her Majesty's work is a profound example of how compassion, coupled with action, can transform societies. As Bhutan steps into the future, there is a compelling need for the next generation to carry forward her legacy. This is not only a call to uphold the values of kindness, empathy, and service but also to innovate and adapt these principles to new challenges.

Young people, in particular, have a crucial role to play. By participating in community service, advocating for the vulnerable, and contributing to initiatives that promote equality and justice, they can become torchbearers of Her Majesty's vision. Educational institutions, youth organizations, and civil society must collaborate to cultivate leadership and volunteerism among young Bhutanese.

Moreover, professionals from all walks of life can contribute by offering their skills, time, and resources to support RENEW and similar organizations. Whether through mentorship, training, or financial support, every effort helps build a more inclusive and supportive society.

The international community also has a role to play. By continuing to support Bhutan's humanitarian initiatives through partnerships, funding, and knowledge sharing, global stakeholders can reinforce Her Majesty's mission to uplift the vulnerable and create sustainable livelihoods.

Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck's vision is not just a roadmap for addressing immediate needs but a strategic plan for fostering long-term resilience and prosperity. Her initiatives have laid a strong foundation, but the road ahead requires collective effort and renewed commitment. By embracing this vision, Bhutanese citizens and the global community alike can contribute to a legacy of compassion, equality, and sustainable development. The future is bright, and with Her Majesty's enduring guidance, Bhutan is well-positioned to continue its journey as a beacon of hope and harmony in the world.



Stories of Hope

From Despair to Empowerment

A Survivor's Journey of Healing

A 32-year-old married woman's story reveals the harrowing reality of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) within her marital relationship. After seven years of marriage and with two children, her nightmare began during pregnancy when her husband's behavior took a sudden, distressing turn. She endured relentless harassment, infidelity, and a spectrum of abuse—physical, verbal, and psychological.

Her husband's cruelty extended to demeaning her worth, labeling her as "landless, useless, and worthless," despite her employment at a bakery and her financial contributions to the household. Though she earned an income, she had no control over her finances or household decisions, as her husband maintained strict control over every aspect of their lives. This oppressive environment led her into a deep depression, with thoughts of suicide becoming a constant struggle.

Isolated from her relatives and neighbors, she found solace in a trusted friend who encouraged her to seek assistance from RENEW. Through multiple counseling sessions and facilitated communication with her husband, RENEW played a pivotal role in catalyzing a positive transformation in their relationship dynamics. The compassionate guidance provided by RENEW's counselors offered a safe space for her to voice her concerns and provided invaluable legal support.

As a result of RENEW's intervention, her husband underwent a significant behavioral shift, refraining from further verbal and physical abuse. The respondent expressed profound gratitude for the assistance provided by RENEW, emphasizing the newfound sense of empowerment, regained financial control, and improved overall well-being that she now enjoys.

How RENEW Helped a Young Woman Achieve Her Dreams

The story of a 24-year-old woman shines a light on the resilience and strength required to overcome adversity and the life-changing support offered by RENEW in helping survivors of abuse reclaim their lives and achieve their dreams.

Having lost her parents, the young woman found herself living with her step-grandparents, where she endured physical, mental, and financial abuse from her grandmother. Despite her desire for education, she was denied the opportunity and instead forced to work in her grandparents' restaurant, perpetuating her cycle of exploitation and deprivation of her rights.

Recognizing the injustice of her situation, she made the courageous decision to escape from her abusive home environment and sought guidance from her school counselor, who connected her with RENEW. Through RENEW's counseling and support services, she was provided a home in shelter home, where she found the encouragement and resources to pursue her educational aspirations.

RENEW not only met her basic needs for food and clothing but also facilitated her participation in a tailoring training program during school vacations, while also providing education on gender-based violence, women's rights, and SRHR. Despite the initial challenges she faced, RENEW's unwavering

support enabled her to complete her secondary education and secure a scholarship for higher studies in India.

Today, she works as a teacher, a testament to her resilience and determination to overcome adversity. She attributes her success and independence to the empowering assistance provided by RENEW, which equipped her with the skills and confidence to advocate for herself and others who have experienced similar hardships.

Her advocacy for the expansion of programs like RENEW to rural areas underscores the critical need to address the heightened vulnerability of women to gender-based violence in those regions and ensure that survivors have access to the support and resources they need to rebuild their lives and pursue their aspirations. Her story serves as an inspiration and a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of empowerment programs in breaking the cycle of abuse and fostering resilience and self-sufficiency among survivors of gender-based violence.

Policies and initiatives to support and protect women workers at Gedu College of Business Studies Royal University of Bhutan

Non-Discrimination Policy

Equal Opportunities: The policy ensures equal recruitment, promotion, and salary opportunities, prohibiting gender-based discrimination.

Inclusiveness: The institution promotes qualified and competent women in leadership and faculty roles, ensuring their participation in professional development and decision-making without bias.

Bullying and Harassment Measures

Clear Guidelines: The Human Resource Rules & Regulations 2017 define harassment, reporting procedures, and disciplinary actions.

Reporting and Confidentiality: Harassment can be reported confidentially to authorities or through grievance forums.

Safety Measures: The campus, especially women's hostels, are well-lit for safety, and dedicated female student service officers support students during emergencies.

Zero Tolerance: There are strict policies against gender-based discrimination and harassment.

Family/Women Support

Maternity Leave: Provides six months of paid maternity leave for every child born.

Childcare Facilities: An Early Childcare Center is available for women faculty to drop off their children.

Flexible Schedules: Schedules accommodate breastfeeding and offer work-from-home options.

Counseling Services: Professional counseling is available to support female students' mental well-being.

Policy in Place

Royal University of Bhutan HR Rules:

The RUBHRRR2017 is prepared without gender bias, providing equal opportunities and support to all employees.

The policies and initiatives of GCBS/RUB aim to ensure equity, safety, and professional growth for women workers, creating an inclusive and empowering workplace.

Testimonials

“At GCBS, we don’t just talk about empowering women, we live it. As a mother, a leader, and a professional, I have felt firsthand the unwavering support this institution provides. Here, strength is not something women have to prove; it is recognized, respected, and nurtured. GCBS understands that for women, success is often a delicate balance between ambition and responsibility. That’s why we are given the flexibility and trust to thrive in both our careers and our families. Gender has never been a factor in our growth, only talent, dedication, and passion.”

Manhu Shree Pradhan (PhD), Faculty of HRM,
Head of Department, Human Capital Management



“At GCBS , women are actively empowered despite being fewer in numbers as compared to men. Women also hold key leadership positions and play a vital role in shaping colleges strategic direction. Women are equally empowered to contribute to policies and initiatives that foster inclusivity and growth. This commitment to gender inclusivity ensures women at GCBS have a strong voice and opportunities to lead”

Kinley Yangdon, Faculty of Entrepreneurship,
Head, Department of Business Management, and Entrepreneurship & Training Centre







Phenday Oudpel Lam Phenday Gatshel Lower Motithang
P.O.Box No. 1404,
Thimphu, Bhutan.
Phone: +975-2-332159/334751/975-2-332411
E-mail: renewbht@gmail.com
Website: renew.org.bt