

## UNICEF Executive Board first regular session of 2024

### Item 4: UNICEF programme cooperation: Country programme documents

#### Collaboration between the Royal Government of Bhutan and UNICEF Country Office on Disability and Inclusion

Esteemed audience,

Thank you, UNICEF Bhutan, and the Executive Board, for this unique opportunity.

I am Dr. Sanga Dorji, a Physiotherapy Specialist. As a person with visual impairment and founder and Chair of the Board of the Disabled Persons Organization of Bhutan, I am humbled to present the voice of persons with disabilities in Bhutan.

Bhutan has made tremendous progress in advancing disability inclusion. The National Policy on Special Educational Needs, developed with support from UNICEF and partners in 2012, paved the way for inclusive education. Early identification and referral services have helped over 1,000 children with disabilities to study in 37 regular schools and two specialized institutes for Deaf children and children with visual impairments. In-service teacher training and a two-year Masters in Inclusive Education will provide opportunities to thousands of children with disabilities to join regular schools.

In 2019, with support from the UN system and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was endorsed paving way for mainstreaming disability inclusion in government planning. Bhutan ratified the CRPD in October 2023, which is a significant milestone in the disability movement in the country.

However, much remains to be done. The Royal Government of Bhutan, in partnership with UNICEF and partners, will continue to support early detection, timely referral, interventions and response for children with developmental delays and disabilities in schools and monastic institutions. Adherence to inclusive standards for education, ECCD, disability inclusive social protection system and sensitization of social services workforce has been prioritized in the 2024-28 joint country programme of cooperation. This will further support the right to family environment, education, health, and social and economic security.

This year's theme aligns with Bhutan's commitment towards disability inclusion. We, the Disabled Persons Organization of Bhutan, as an umbrella institution shall work closely with UNICEF to mobilize other organizations to advocate for financial and technical support for an inclusive society. I take this opportunity to call for strong international cooperation to advance disability inclusion agenda.

I thank UNICEF for playing a catalytic and convening role to empower children and persons with disabilities for their participation in an inclusive society.

Thank you.