



Terms of Reference for Baseline Assessment of Project Mikhung 2.0
“Capacitating the Local Government and Citizens to strengthen
people-centred planning”
[May – August 2024]



1. Introduction

This document presents Terms of Reference (ToR) for conducting a baseline assessment for the project funded by Bhutan Foundation and implemented by Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD). The proposed 36-month project titled “**Project Mikhung (2.0): Capacitating the Local Government and citizens to strengthen people-centred planning,**” with the project objectives of,

Objective 1: Community meetings (Zomdus) and consultation by Local Government in Tsirang district become participatory and inclusive of diverse members of the community, including vulnerable groups.

Objective 2: Community residents of eleven gewogs, including vulnerable members and youths developed an enhanced sense of ownership and actively participate in community affairs.

Under Project Mikhung 1.0, BCMD translated the philosophy of Gross National Happiness into practical tools for community analyses for the Local Government functionaries. Key government stakeholders like the then Gross National Happiness Commission, the Department of Local Governance, and development partners acknowledged the relevance and usefulness of the resource and the capacity building on GNH-based participatory planning. Noting the potential of Project Mikhung in transforming the planning processes at the LG, for the first time, the GNHC, DLG and BCMD came together for a peer-learning session in 2022. The three stakeholders agreed to work towards the shared goal of strengthening the LGs to be participatory and inclusive.

Results of Project Mikhung show the emergence of more **inclusivity and openness to diverse voices** in the elected leaders and enhanced capacity to conduct **in-depth analysis** of community issues and the recognition of the **importance of data** in planning. In the past, LGs invited only the heads of the family to zomdus (community meetings). Now they understand that the traditional practice is inequitable and excludes vulnerable voices. The LG functionaries are more inclusive now as participants consulted reports reaching out to youth, women, people with disabilities and elders in the communities.

2. Background and Context

Bhutan became a democracy in 2008 at the behest of the monarch. While democratic institutions have been in place to ensure a smooth transition to democratic constitutional monarchy, there is little understanding of democracy and an even lesser understanding of what it means to meaningfully participate in decisions affecting their daily lives and communities. There is heavy reliance on the government to provide, and a weak culture of participatory planning and public involvement in community development. In the fledgling democracy of Bhutan, community consultations and planning processes have largely excluded the voices of vulnerable groups.

Over the last decade, remarkable progress has been made in peacefully and smoothly transitioning the Kingdom of Bhutan from a traditional form of the monarchy to a modern parliamentary democracy. However, as is often the case in countries undertaking major democratic transitions, some essential dimensions of Bhutan’s system of democratic local governance still need to be further strengthened and consolidated. In the traditionally hierarchical Bhutanese society, the central agencies have been the main drivers for policy development, planning and implementation. This approach has prevented Bhutan from sufficiently developing a culture of meaningful citizen participation in planning and decision-making at the local government level and the requisite capacity for its citizens to engage with institutions in a democratic dialogue to influence decisions about local development plans.

While the transition to democracy in Bhutan has brought significant progress in the social and economic conditions amongst its population, the fledgling democracy in Bhutan continues to grapple with a host of challenges, from limited understanding of democratic principles and practices among the elected leaders and public servants to disenfranchised youth and citizens with a recipient mindset expecting the state to plan, decide and provide. In the hierarchical society of Bhutan, the state has traditionally been the main (and at most times, the only) driver for agenda setting, policy-making and implementation in local community





planning and development, and in public service delivery. This top-down approach has not only led to a culture of “spoon-feeding,” creating an impression that the government is there “to do everything” for its citizens, but it has also shaped a passive public with a “recipient mindset.”

Historically, Bhutan has no precedents of civic participation, citizen engagement and dialogue, especially in public matters. Hence, the familiarity in the society with these concepts, especially at the local level, is currently weak. Traditionally, Bhutanese citizens are not used to expressing their opinions, needs, aspirations and concerns; and most of them passively defer decisions on their community development needs and delivery of public services to local governments, their representatives and elected leaders, with minimal dialogue or questioning.

Although the need for bottom-up planning and decision-making was recognised since the 8th Five Year Plan in 1998, a close look at the prevailing community planning, decision-making, and implementation reveals the predominance of the previously described top-down approach even to this day.

With Bhutan’s democracy still in its infancy, these gaps suggest that a culture of citizen participation and democratic accountability are still far from being adequately developed, let alone adopted as a norm. On the citizens’ side, large sections of the Bhutanese population still possess insufficient awareness and understanding of their role, rights and responsibilities as citizens under the newly established democratic system. On the other side, local governments and elected representatives also have limited familiarity with the importance of their open engagement with their constituents in agenda setting, policy-making and implementation of local plans and services. They also do not possess the required knowledge and skills on how to establish and use suitable spaces and mechanisms to ensure active civic engagement of citizens in pursuing growth and development in respective communities, as well as co-creating a culture of accountability with and amongst citizens in its undertaking.

While Bhutanese women enjoy inheritance rights in a largely matriarchal society, gender equality in public affairs is a challenge. The 2015 Gross National Happiness Survey reported that at 58%, male attendance at zomdu was comparatively higher than their female counterparts at 45%. From those who attended, less than one-third (28.2%) reported speaking at the meeting, indicating minimal active participation, while 72% were passive participants. Furthermore, the 2022 GNH Survey report points out that the sufficiency in political participation decreased by 8 percentage points for women, with a decline in women’s participation in elections and zomdus and drop of 15.7% for men in political participation, particularly active participation in zomdus.

Oftentimes local governments meetings are held merely to inform people of decisions rather than consulting them and including citizens in determining their needs and solutions to local concerns.

BCMD’s recent interaction with the LG office bearers through Project Mikhung found that some challenges are culturally rooted while others stem from limited understanding of democracy. For instance, while there is no active oppression and discrimination against women, youth, the elderly and people with disabilities, the voices of these groups remain unheard. While women participation in zomdus isn’t poor, women rarely express their views or partake in decision-making. Young people and people with disabilities, on the other hand, are considered incompetent in matters of public affairs. There is a lack of clarity among the local elected leaders about who they can consult. They believe that unless a resident is a registered voter, they are not eligible to participate in zomdus or consultations.

Studies also report a lack of quality engagement in community meetings, poor meeting facilitation skills, and lack of expertise and skills in Tshogpas (community leaders) to engage community members in local development (Assessment Study, DT, GT 2019). BCMD’s monitoring of citizen participation shows that passive participation in zomdu can be attributed to a lack of a sense of agency in the citizens. This is particularly true with vulnerable groups such as women, young people and PWDs. Consultative meetings indicated that the general trend of attending zomdu is more of a formality ensuring household representation rather than for participation, as households tend to send people to “listen” and convey messages rather than share and partake in making decisions. The default practice of inviting only heads of the families has made



the “zomdus” an exclusive forum where influential members hijack the agenda and silence the voices and the needs of the vulnerable.

3. Scope of the Baseline Assessment

Overall the baseline assessment will delve into the current practice of public consultation and planning at the LG level in Tsirang District, identify best practices and issues to establish a baseline. It will further assess the capacities of LG leaders in community planning, on their readiness to effectively engage with the vulnerable populations in the community. The assessment therefore will help establish a clear understanding of the current situation and practices around planning and public consultation at the LG level. The baseline assessment will also inform the reference points for the targeted outcomes and output indicators in the project logframe.

More Specifically the baseline assessment will:

- 1) Provide a clear understanding of the current practices of public consultation and planning in Tsirang District.
- 2) Understand the representation of people with disabilities, women, elderly, youth and LGBT in community meetings.
- 3) Assess the capacity and readiness of LG leaders in community planning.
- 4) Understand the usage of data at the community level for planning and decision making.

The baseline assessment should also undertake a comprehensive review of secondary literature including the project document, the approved logframe for this action, past study/evaluation. The secondary data analysis will be complemented with primary data collection including both qualitative and quantitative. The analysis should be framed within the context of the specific objectives.

Table1: Proposed study participants and sample size

Sl. No.	Respondent Categories	Data Collection Methods	No. of KII or FGD
1	Tsirang Dzongdag	Key Informant Interview	
2	Planning Officer/ Relevant Officers of Dzongkhag Administration	FGD	
3	LG leaders of eleven gewogs	Key Informant Interview	
4	Community respondents (PWD, Women, Youth, LGBT, Elderly).	FGD	
Total Sample		FGD plus KII	

4. DATA Collection Approaches

The study consultant has to use both secondary and primary sources of data. Primary data will be gathered through surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informants Interviews (KIIs). Secondary data will be collected through a detailed document review.

4.1 Data analysis

All primary data collected during the study must facilitate disaggregation by gender, age, disability, location, or remoteness wherever possible. It will be a requirement of the consultant to source additional external data

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sources to add value to the study, such as government administrative data, secondary literature that closely aligns to the project. A range of project documentation will be made available to the study consultant that provides information about the design, implementation, and operation of the project.

4.2 Ethical Considerations

It is expected that this study will be:

- **Child participatory.** Where appropriate and relevant, children should be supported to participate in the evaluation process beyond simply being respondents.
- **Inclusive.** Ensure that respondents from different backgrounds have the chance to participate, as well as people/children with disabilities, elderly, women.
- **Ethical:** The study must be guided by the following ethical considerations:
 - Safeguarding – demonstrating the highest standards of behaviour towards all respondents.
 - Sensitive – to child rights, gender, inclusion, and cultural contexts.
 - Openness - of information given, to the highest possible degree to all involved parties.
 - Confidentiality and data protection - measures will be put in place to protect the identity of all participants and any other information that may put them or others at risk.
 - Public access - to the results when there are no special considerations against this.
 - Broad participation - Relevant parties/ individuals should be involved where possible.
 - Reliability and independence - the study should be conducted in an unbiased manner so that findings and conclusions are correct and credible.

4.3 EXPECTED DELIVERABLES

The expected consultancy period is for 45 working days spanning from May-July, 2024. The deliverables and tentative timeline (subject to the commencement date of the study) are outlined below. The Lead Consultant and BCMD Team shall discuss and agree on the final milestones and deadlines at the inception phase.

Deliverable / Milestones	Timeline (2024)
The work is contracted and Consultant (Team) commences work (under the conditions specified in this ToR)	Week 3-4 of April
The Consultant (Team) will carry out secondary data review and if need be, meet with the programme team at BCMD.	Week 1-2, May
The consultant will submit an inception report* in line with the provided template, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Study objectives, scope and key study questions. ▪ Description of the methodology, including design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, data sources, and research matrix against the key research questions. ▪ Data collection mechanism. ▪ Data collection instruments. ▪ Data analysis and reporting plan. ▪ Caveats and limitations of study. ▪ Ethical considerations including details on consent. ▪ Stakeholder communication and engagement plan. ▪ Key deliverables, responsibilities, and timelines. ▪ Resource requirements. ▪ The BCMD Management will review the inception report and provide its comments/revision to the Consultant, if any within a minimum of 5 working days from date of receipt of the Report. 	Week 3-4, May



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For any change in strategy/ approach to the approved Inception Report, the Consultant must submit a request to the focal Programme Officer and BCMD management 	
Field Data Collection	Week 1-8, June and July
Data and analyses including all encrypted raw data, databases, and analysis outputs.	Week 1 August
<p>Final Study Report* incorporating feedback from consultation on the Draft Study Report.</p> <p>The Consultant shall prepare the Final Report* outline similar to, but not limited to the following (Draft Version):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Summary Background Description of the Programme and Context relevant to the Study. Scope and Focus of the study. Overview of the study methodology and data collection methods, including a Study matrix. Findings aligned to each of the key research questions. Specific caveats or methodological limitations of the research. Findings/ Learnings from the Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conclusions outlining implications of the findings or learnings. Recommendations on using the findings to improve project deliverables Annexes to include (Project log frame, study ToR, Inception Report, Study schedule, List of People/ Stakeholder interviewed/ consulted). 	Week 3, August

5. STUDY TEAM AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Interested Consulting Firms/ Consultant (s) will be required to submit an Expression of Interest in line with the provided template, which should demonstrate adherence to the following requirements.

5.1 Understanding of Requirements and Experience

To be considered, the Consultant/ Consulting Firm must have demonstrated skills, expertise and experience in:

- Previous experience in conducting assessment, midterm, terminal evaluation of development projects.
- Strong evaluation experience demonstrated through management and coordination of international led evaluations, joint evaluation in the Bhutanese context.
- Previous experience in integrating cross-cutting issues, such as gender, governance, social impact assessments in development projects and programmes.
- Demonstrated experience in results-based management, theory of change, logical framework.
- Experienced in conducting baseline assessment.
- Leading socio-economic research, evaluations or consultancy work in Bhutanese context that is sensitive to the local context and culture.
- Conducting ethical and inclusive studies involving marginalised, deprived and/or vulnerable groups in culturally appropriate and sensitive ways.
- Strong written and verbal skills in communicating technical and/ or complex findings to non-specialist audiences (especially report writing and presentation skills)
- A track record of open, collaborative working with clients



5.2 Financial Proposal

Financial proposal to be attached.

5.3 Schedule of Payments

The payment to the consultant/ Consulting Firm will be made as follows:

- Upon Signing of the Agreement [40%]
- Upon Submission of the first draft of the Main Report [30%]
- Upon Approval of the Final Report: [30%]

5. Payment amount and schedule

- The fee to be paid for work undertaken by the consultant is to be negotiated.
- The consultant shall raise an invoice for the Payment of the fees.
- Interested consultants may submit the following documents latest by 19th April, 2024 to dekiwangmo@bcmd.bt
- Curriculum vitae
- Proof of prior work in research