

## **Summer Project Report 2017**

# **The Role of NGOs in Empowering Women in Bhutan**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Understanding the term “Women Empowerment” is a complex phenomenon. Trying to decipher whether Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has facilitated it is even harder. This study is an attempt to assess NGOs and their role in empowering women in Bhutan and provide some policy recommendations based on findings of the study. A cross-sectional research on 150 individuals in Thimphu and Punakha districts in Bhutan was conducted through a well-structured questionnaire by face-to-face interview and the population of the study are individuals who are directly or indirectly associated with six different NGOs (namely, BAOWE, RTA, SABAH, RENEW, READ and Tarayana Foundation) in Bhutan. The findings of this study reveal that NGOs play an important role in the empowerment of women for its all indicators like economic decision-making, social security, family decision-making ability, and legal awareness in Bhutan. However, only involvement in different NGOs does not lead to increase in women empowerment but when it is coupled with participation in trainings and different awareness programs then it helps women in enhancing their empowerment. These training programs not only provide self-employment training but also facilitate good decision-making. Nevertheless, there are also stereotypes that limit them from getting more employment opportunities and participation in politics. There is a need for mass awareness campaigns and advocacy about the NGOs all over the country to ensure the accessibility of the services provided by the NGOs. Also, it would be more effective if there were NGOs’ centers in every district of Bhutan to ensure that all women are empowered.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The gender inequality has existed in most parts of the world and it is no secret that women face barriers, from electoral rights to public participation and equal representation at decision-making level. Across income levels and opportunities, disparities between men and women persist in the form of pay gaps, uneven opportunities and unbalanced representation.

The importance of gender equality and women's empowerment has been at the center of discussion for decades all around the world to promote gender equity. One possible way to equalize the gender gap in the society is women empowerment. From the global level to within the national level, the international organizations are collaborating with the country level organizations, governments and other related institutions to bring balance in the society. Women empowerment is one of the best ways to equalize gender in the society and it includes the lives of the women at all levels. According to the World Bank's article "Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development," Bennett (2002) defines empowerment as "the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable for the institutions that affect them." Women empowerment is the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowering the women in social, political, economic and legal aspects are necessary to convert the idle society into self-sustainable society. Empowering women can facilitate sustainable development and uplift the economy of a nation.

Bhutan is undergoing a state of transition, from monarchy to constitutional democracy and culture and tradition to social modernization, the status of the women is challenged with adverse situations in terms of social oppression and socio-economic inequalities. Women in Bhutan constitute nearly half of the population. Women Empowerment has been the central agenda for government, NGOs and International organizations to focus on empowering women and providing opportunities to enhance their economic status. Efforts have been made by these bodies to improve women's literacy, nutritional and health levels and enhance their income earning capacity. Seeing these positive changes, we are motivated to do the study on "The Role of NGOs in Empowering Women in Bhutan" and to the base of our knowledge, it is the first study done on the roles played by NGOs in empowering women in Bhutan. There is hardly any research done to identify the importance of the roles of NGOs playing in empowering women.

## **1.1 Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of this study are:

- To evaluate the role of NGOs in empowering women in Bhutan.
- To provide policy recommendations to the concerned NGOs based on findings of the study.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are numerous studies done on the role of NGOs in women empowerment. The following Theoretical and Empirical studies have been done to review the role of NGOs in empowering women.

### **2.1 Theoretical Studies**

According to Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC), the empowerment of women is based on how women can empower themselves in overcoming the ‘forces’ that has been obstructing them for so long. Empowering women is also the ability of the women to make ‘autonomous decisions’ or choices, to increase their self-reliance, and to bring changes in the gender relations (Ibid). Women’s empowerment is not only related with the social, cultural, economic, health and education, and political relations, but also an important part of development in poverty reduction and increases the economic growth (Ibid).

In his book, Panday says that the role of NGOs is significant as it ensures the participation of women in the ‘development processes’ especially in the developing countries, such as in Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. The local institutions and NGOs emerged in order to address the needs of communities as well as assist them in basic education, public health and alleviation of poverty (Ibid). Some NGOs exist for addressing the issues related to disempowerment of women and acknowledging those women who have been disadvantaged or powerless (Kilby, 2010). For example, women’s NGOs, such as Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and Annapurna Mahila Mandalin India have existed for the rural women who face disparities (Ibid). So the Women Empowerment NGOs bring general public, communities, religious groups,



governments, and businesses together to solve the problems faced by the disadvantaged people, especially young girls and women (Kumaran, 2014). The missions of many Women Empowerment NGOs vary, for example, women's rights advocacy NGOs, women's economic development NGOs, and so on (Ibid).

A Case Study of Akhuwat, Pakistan carried out by Rehman et al (2015) say that some NGOs provide microfinance services to unprivileged women and this helps to bring changes in women's lives, like good household condition, family well-being, and improve their social status. According to Oxaal and Baden, empowerment is basically a "bottom-up process rather than something that can be formulated as a top-down strategy." Therefore, they both believe that women must empower themselves and NGOs can provide the opportunity for the expression of women's interest as well as further promote their participation in politics and decision-making positions in political power, thus women would be empowered (Ibid).

## **2.2 Empirical Studies**

Empowering women has been given importance by many NGOs around the world and researches are done on the role of NGOs in empowering women to check the effectiveness of these NGOs. One such study was carried out by Ankita R. Brahmbhatt & Dr. PinakinShrth (2013) titled "The Role of NGOs in Empowering Women –An Empirical Study of the Selected NGOs in India" where they have selected five NGOs from different states. In their report, they have reflected the importance of women empowerment in the development of the country and also that NGOs make significant difference in the lives of many women. They said that NGOs help in making women independent and self-motivated. They have also given the drawback as

no improvement in the situation at the paramount level even after lots of effort put by NGOs in empowering women. In general, NGOs play a significant role in women empowerment in India. Another research of its kind is by done by Hira Anum (2010) titled “Role of NGOs in Empowering Women in Pakistan.” The study mainly focused on education being the primary factor of women empowerment and NGOs work on this purpose. It reflects the difficulties and criticism NGOs face for working on women empowerment in a conservative country like Pakistan. The study found the further need to support in educating women by the NGOs, government, and other organizations so that women gain economic independence, decrease male domination, and participation in politics.

P.S. Slathia, M.S. Nain, et al. (2014) has done a case study on “NGO in Socioeconomic Development of Rural Women” in India. It was found that although there are various programmes carried out towards the socio-economic empowerment of women at the levels of central and state government, there is need to do more. They found out that rural women are deprived because of their poverty, illiteracy, and health issues. Thus, they said that for rural development it is very important that women are empowered.

Another study titled “Role of NGOs in Women Empowerment: With Special Reference to Uttar Pradesh” was done by Tauffiqu Ahamad, Hemlata, et al. (2015). They write that women empowerment can be achieved by providing education, political support, and through effective legislative system and employment opportunities. The study found that NGOs have helped in making women independent and self-motivated in Uttar Pradesh. However, the situation needs to be improved at a paramount level as only a small percentage of backward classes were found to be actively participating in meetings and decision-making process. These are some of the researches done on the role of NGOs in empowering women in different places, and different

studies give different findings and different recommendations while the central theme is to empower women all around the world.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Sampling Frame:**

A stratified multi-stage sampling technique is used for the purpose of the study. The primary data is collected from 150 individuals (85% of them are women and 15% of them are men) in Thimphu and Punakha, Bhutan through a well-structured questionnaire by face-to-face interview. Where 100 of them are the direct beneficiaries and 50 of them are non-beneficiaries of the different NGOs. Survey instruments were administered personally and 200 women were contacted. Out of these 200 questionnaires, 50 were rejected because of missing data or high response bias leaving an overall sample size of 150.

#### **3.2 Selection of NGOs:**

In our research we focus on NGOs, which work for women empowerment. For the purpose of our study we have selected the following six NGOs based on the above rational.

- 1) Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE)
- 2) Royal Textile Academy (RTA)
- 3) The SAARC Business Association of Home Based Workers (SABAH Bhutan)
- 4) Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women (RENEW)
- 5) Rural Education and Development (READ Bhutan).
- 6) Tarayana Foundation.

### **3.3 Data Analysis Tools:**

After data collection and cleaning we used MS EXCEL™ and statistical software package SPSS Version 19.0 to perform data analysis and find the required results.

### **3.4 Pilot Study**

In order to perfect the structured interview schedule and to gain enough confidence to conduct interaction and observation session with the participants, pilot study was conducted among the researchers with the guidance and feedbacks from the project supervisor. This pilot study proved to be vital for the researcher's understanding of the NGOs and have helped to prepare a well-organized interview schedules hence, the overall study was smooth and informative partly because of this pilot study.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

Data collection by the actual fieldwork lasted for the duration of a month (June 28<sup>th</sup> till Aug 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2017) in the two districts of Bhutan namely Punakha and Thimphu. The interview lasted for approximately 15 minutes for each participant. The other modes of data collection were by the use of video making and photography while having the interviews, which enhances the research and gives more credibility. This also helped to avoid mistakes while entering the data.

### **3.6 Ethical Approvals**

The study was thoroughly reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Asian University for Women, Chittagong, Bangladesh. It was then approved and supported by

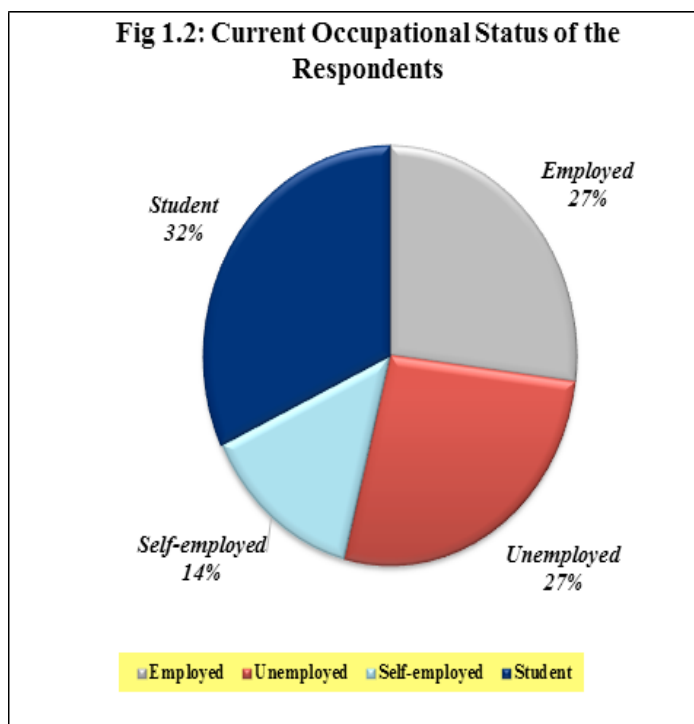
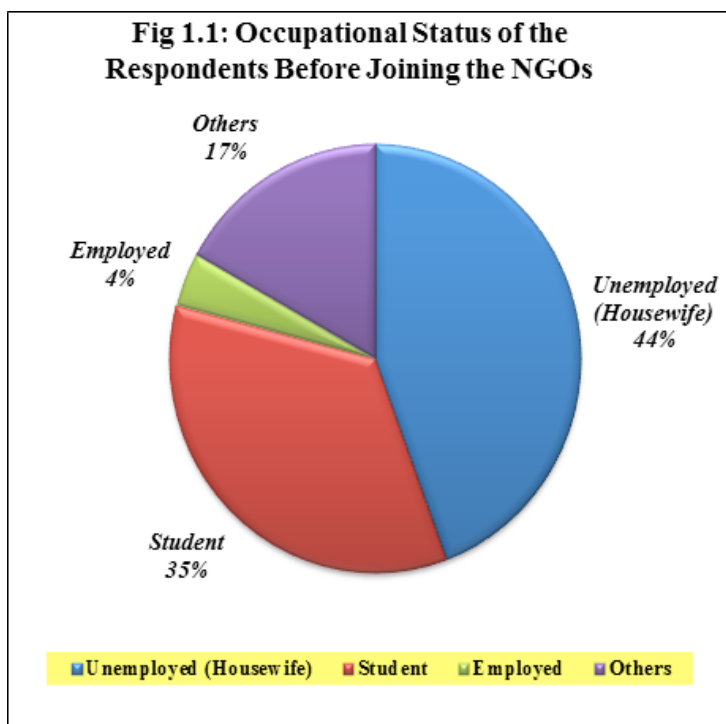
the study NGOs. Before interviewing, a written consent form was obtained from all the participating respondents.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are analyzed and discussed below into four dimensions of empowerment: Economic Empowerment, Social Empowerment, Political Empowerment, and Educational Empowerment.

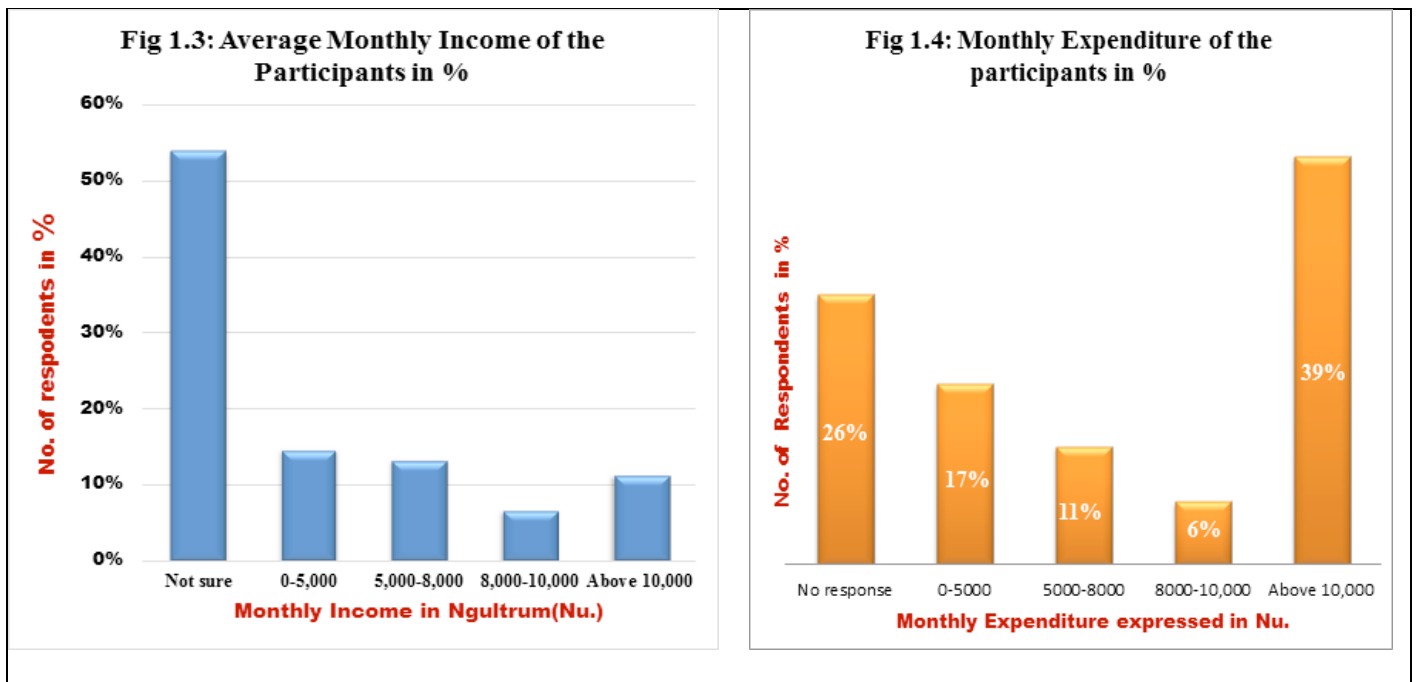
### 4.1 Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment is the ability of women and men to partake in, contributions to the society, and become self-reliance. Empowering women economically helps in gender equality, poverty eradication, as well as beneficial to the country’s economic growth because women economic development increases women’s access to available economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, and market information.



Source: Author’s own estimation based on survey data.

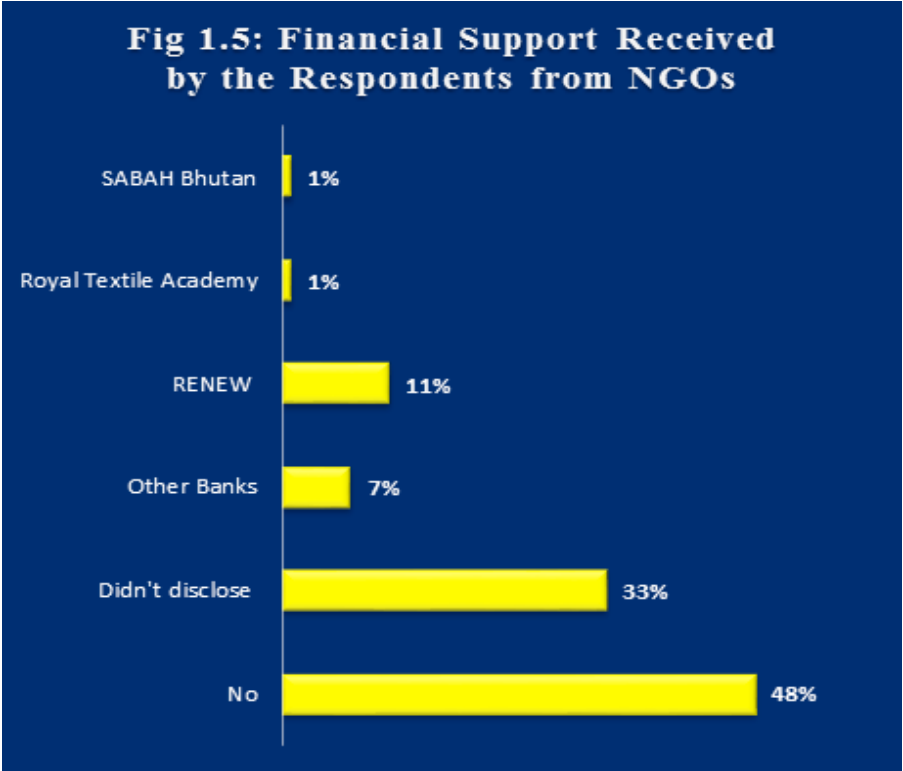
The figures show the occupational status of the respondents before joining the sample NGOs and their current occupational status, which tells how these NGOs help in achieving economic empowerment in Bhutan. From figure 1.1 and 1.2, it can be seen that percentage of unemployed has decreased by 17% and number of people employed has increased significantly around 23%. This is mainly because these NGOs provide different trainings and support to the housewives (those who were unemployed), which enhances their skills and confidence to get new employment and to become self-employed. The data shows that there is improvement in entrepreneurship led by women signifying the change in women’s role in society and level of participation in different fields. These entrepreneurs could provide more employment opportunities thereby, decreasing the unemployment rate in the country.



**Source:** Author’s own estimation based on survey data.

The figures compare the monthly income of the participants to their monthly expenditure. More than 50% of the participants did not share their monthly income due to reasons like

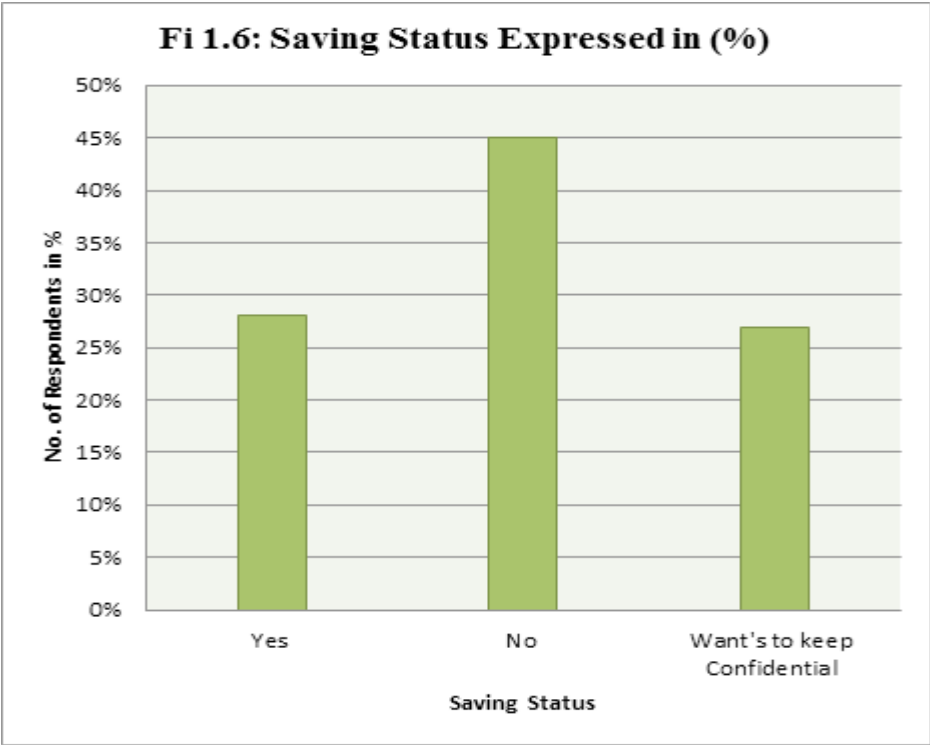
confidentiality, varying amount of income earned based on the market, uncomfortable to disclose their income. While there are only above 10% who earn above Nu.10,000 there is a high percentage of participants whose monthly expenditure is above Nu.10,000 showing the mismatch between monthly income and monthly expenditures. It shows that the individual's earning was not enough for their family's expenses. Thus, it shows that most of the participants are not financially independent. Majority of participants whose income is more than Nu.10,000 are entrepreneurs supported by the NGOs: BAOWE, RENEW, SABAH Bhutan and rest were from general public.



**Source:** Author's own estimation based on Survey data.

From those six NGOs, we came to know that RENEW is a major financial supporter to its beneficiaries. RENEW's Micro-Finance Project, strives to improve the living status of women and their families in extreme circumstances. The Micro-Finance Project gives microloans, saving

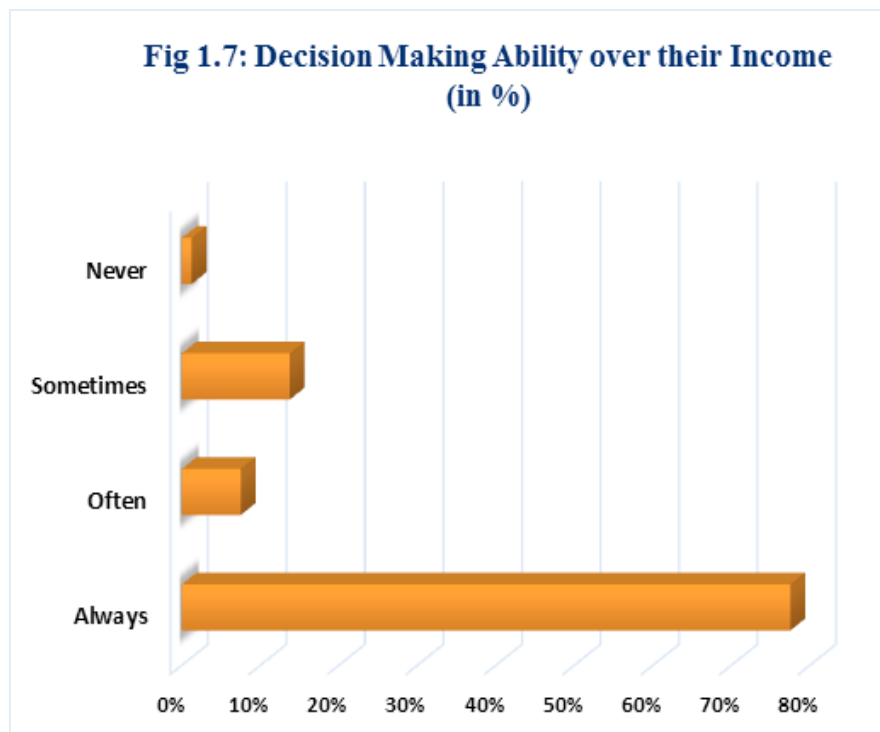
opportunities, credit facilities, and insurance services to the beneficiaries to help them become economically sustainable and independent. 11% of the respondents got financial supports every month from RENEW and it ensures the longevity of the service. RENEW is helping women to lend money at low interest rate and provides an opportunity for them to become independent. The interest rates range from 1.5% to 2% depending on the types of loans, such as individual, business, agriculture, emergency, and multipurpose loans. RENEW’s Micro-Finance Project provides loans to its beneficiaries in three cycles where the minimum amount of loan is Nu. 5000 and the maximum is Nu. 120,000. The repayment period is from 6 to 18 months according to loan amount taken by them. The other NGOs such as SABAH Bhutan and Royal Textile Academy also provide financial support to the beneficiaries in small scale. We found out that 7% of both beneficiaries and the general public borrowed money from other banks and 48% mentioned they did not get financial support from any of the NGOs.



Source: Author’s own estimation based on Survey data.



The graph shows the saving status of the respondents, which includes both the NGOs' beneficiaries and the general public. Out of the 150 total respondents, 45% of them responded that they don't have savings. This could be mainly because for most of them, the income they had earned could only meet their monthly expenditure. Moreover, most of the beneficiaries were housewives and students who hardly earn enough to save. However, 25% of the respondents said that they have some savings yet their saving details are kept confidential due to ethical reasons. RENEW's Micro Finance Project (MFP) also gives them saving opportunities whereby, they can save money ranging from Nu.100-Nu.3000 per month. This has huge benefit, as they are able to save at least a little amount every month and withdraw it when it reaches a certain amount. For instance, they spend those saving for their children education. We also found that almost an equal percentage of respondents wanted to keep their saving status confidential.

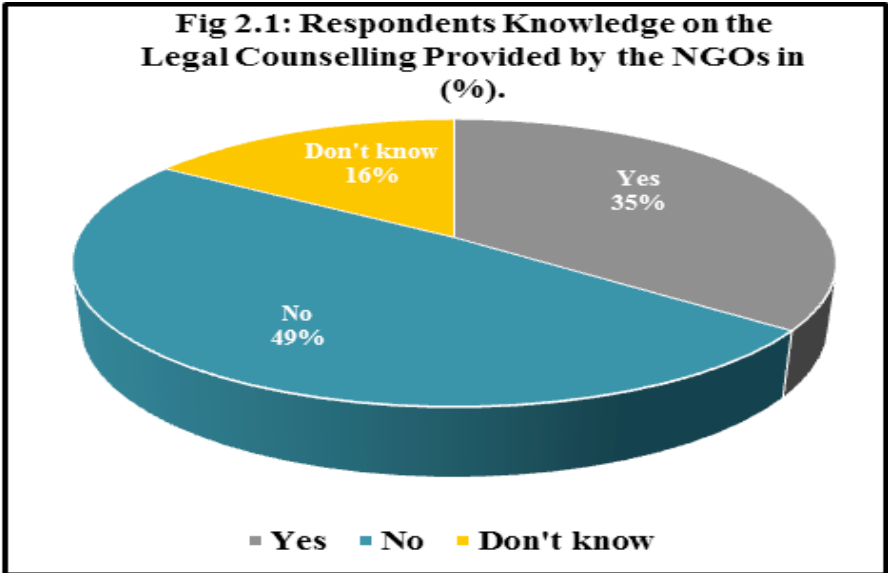


**Source:** Author's own estimation based on Survey data.

Regarding decision-making ability over their income, most of the participants (around 75% of them) responded that they have the decision-making ability over their income earned. This shows that they have their own rights to utilize their money. They can have the chance in how, whom, and where to spend their earned money. However, approximately 13% respondents mentioned that they have decision-making ability only sometimes and roughly 6% responded that they have only often and only 2% answered that they have no decision-making ability over their income and this lack of decision-making could be due to their husband being a family head. Nonetheless, the data shows that the most women in Bhutan have the ownership over their income earned and freedom to use in their income in necessary expenses without any interruption from partners or family.

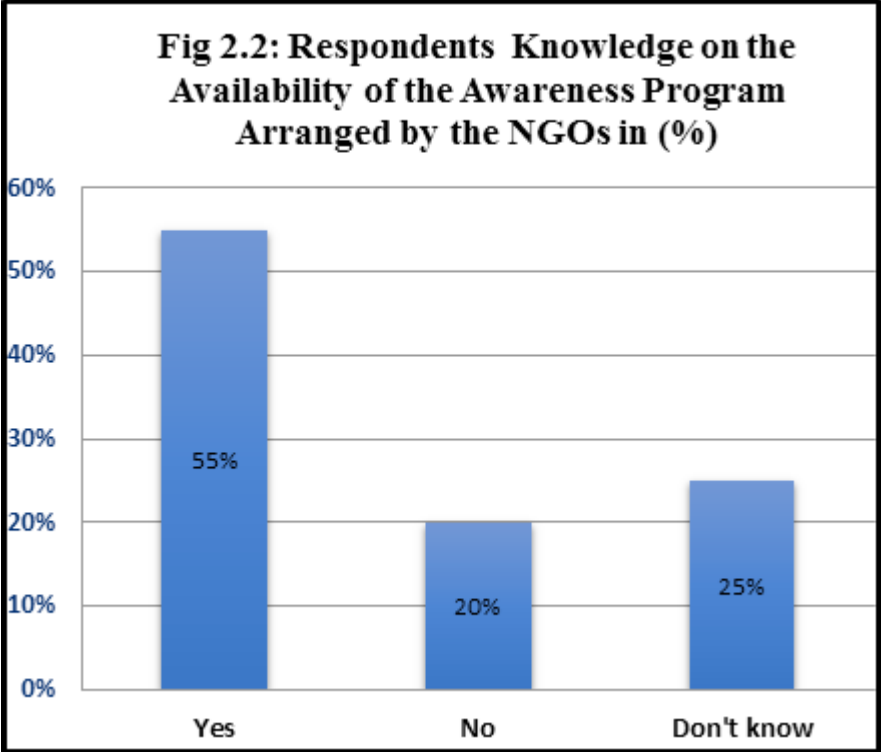
### 4.2 Social Empowerment

Social empowerment is the development of autonomy and self-confidence, and act individually and collectively to bring changes in social relationships and the institutions. Social empowerment has positive impact on the local and national level actions to promote social equity and inclusion of all people.



Source: Author’s own estimation based on Survey data.

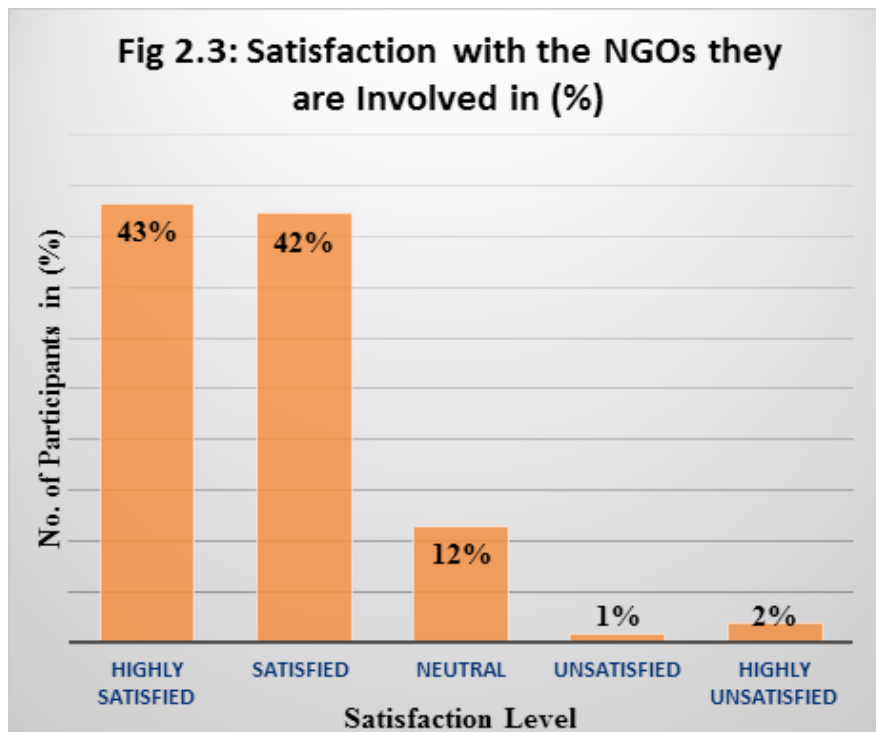
The pie chart (Figure 2.1) shows the respondents knowledge on the legal counseling provided by the NGOs in percentage. It depicts that 49% of the participants were unaware of the legal counseling provided by the NGOs, 35% of the respondents knew about the legal services provided by the respective NGOs, and 16% of the participants responded that they have no idea about those services provided by the NGOs. Analyzing the chart, we can say that most of the participants do not have the knowledge of different services given by respective NGOs in Bhutan.



Source: Author’s own estimation based on Survey data.

When both beneficiaries and the general public were asked whether those 6 NGOs arrange any kinds of awareness programs about encouraging women in Bhutan, we found that 55% of the participants have knowledge of awareness activities given by the NGOs. Most of the

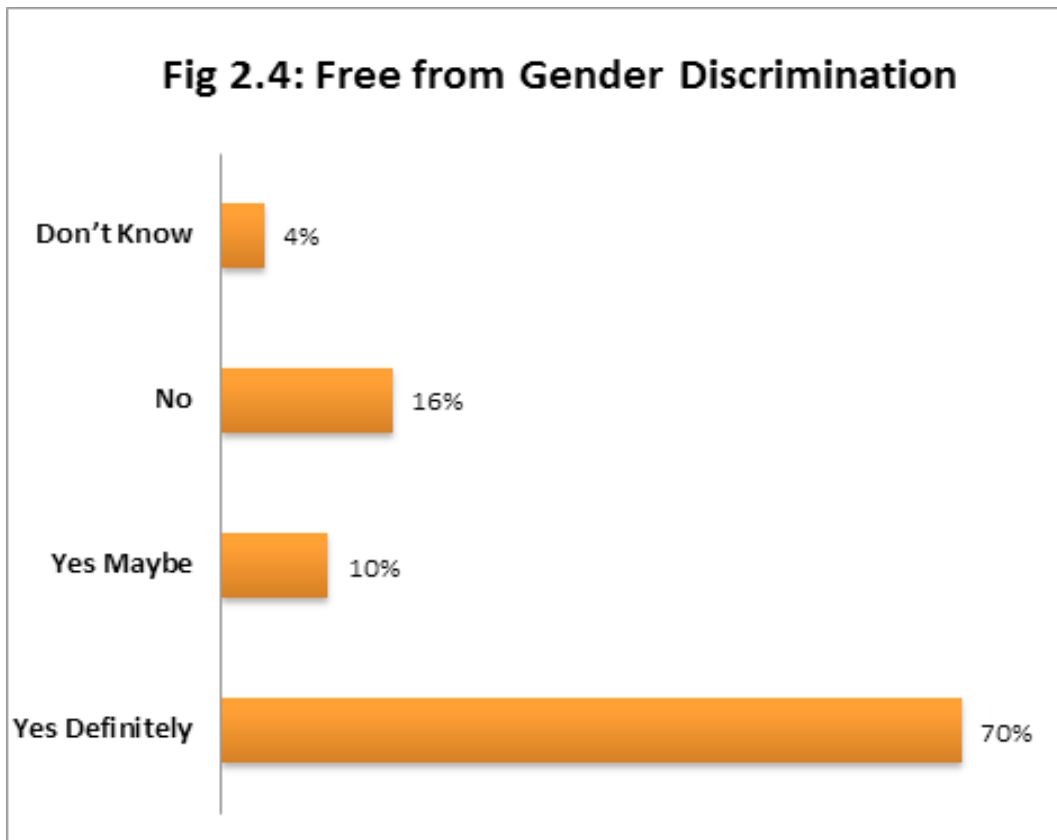
beneficiaries have knowledge about the accessibility of awareness programs as they knew while receiving legal help or legal counseling, financial assistance, and training from the NGOs. For instance, RENEW provides legal help and loan services to disadvantaged women and young girls. About 25% don't know the services given by the NGOs, this may be due to lack of campaigns to promote the existing NGOs. Most of the general public does not have the idea of the roles played by the NGOs and how they operate in the country.



Source: Author's own estimation based on Survey data.

From the figure 2.3, it is evident that 43% and 42% of beneficiaries involved in the NGOs were highly satisfied and satisfied respectively. Some of them said that they are happy receiving training in tailoring and weaving, legal counseling, and loans to start their own small businesses. Majority of them are satisfied with the NGOs because they were employed and could earn in order to support her family. The good example could be BAOWE as it built shelters in few district for selling vegetables and homemade food. This helped most of our women to run small

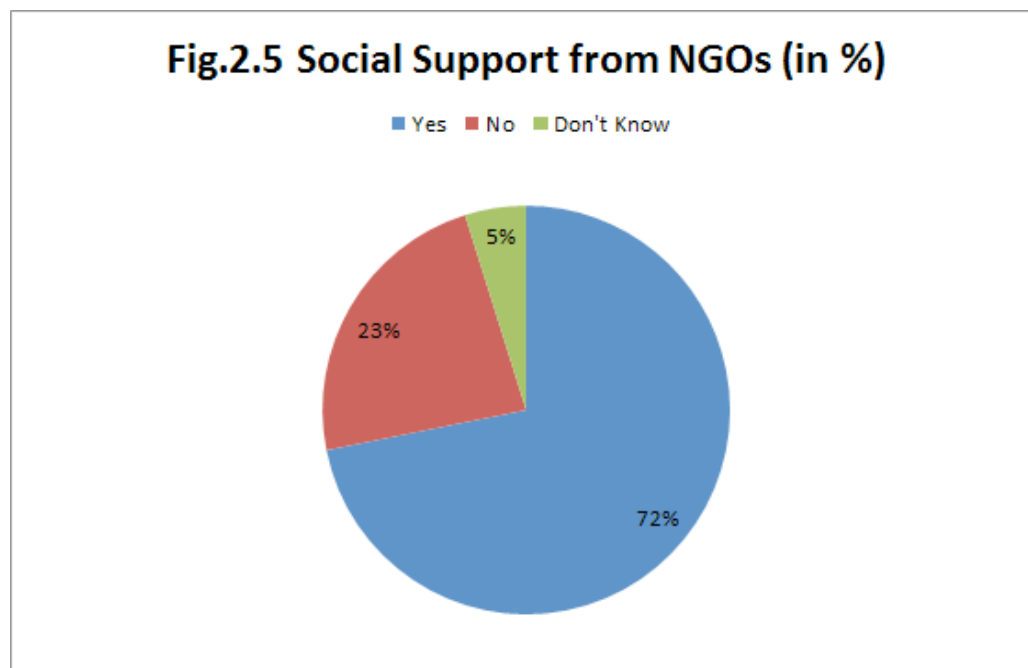
businesses and become financially independent. In this survey, we found that 1% to 2% were unsatisfied.



Source: Author's own estimation based on Survey data.

Figure 2.4 reveals the statistics of respondents whether they are free from gender discrimination. The graph shows that 70% of the respondents responded saying that they are free from gender discrimination while 16% of the respondents believe that they are not free and faces gender inequalities. Most of our participants expressed the prevalence of gender discrimination in the past. Some recalled that in the past, their own family members and relatives differentiated between siblings and their first preferences were given to the boys. One of the participants said that her parents did not send her to the school because they thought that women were useless even if they get education. Nevertheless, now that both girls and boys have equal access to education and other opportunities, there is lesser gender discrimination. Also, they pointed out

that women becoming financially independent help in closing the gender gap. In general, it is a positive note that women in Bhutan less likely faces gender discrimination as compared to other countries.

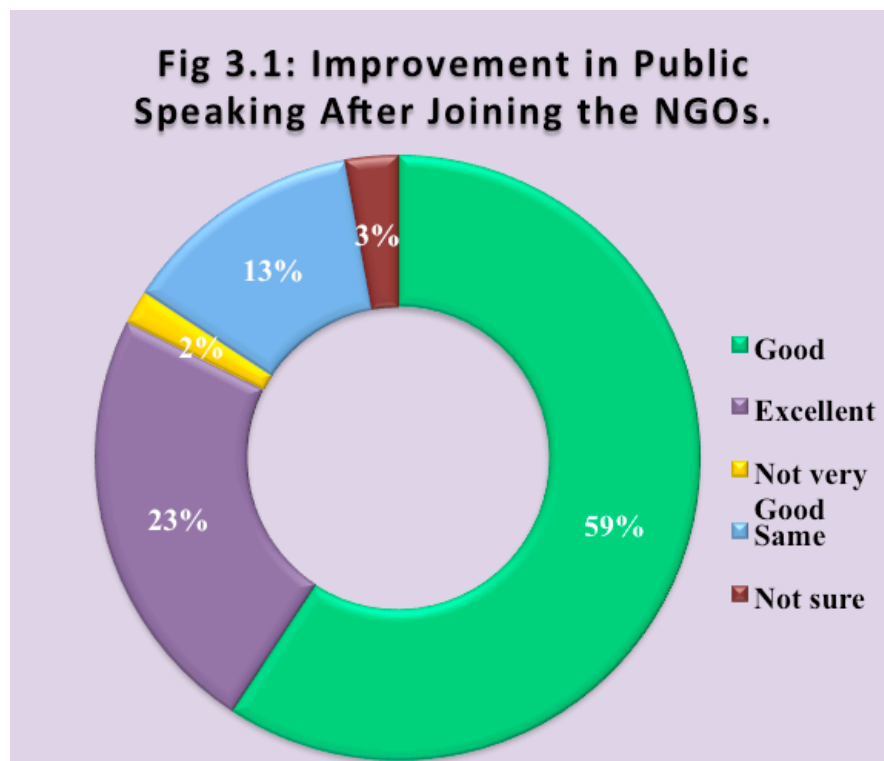


**Source:** Author's own estimation based on Survey data.

From the above chart, 72% of the respondents received social support from the NGOs, such as in decision-making, self-respect, entertainment, social gathering, children's education, and freedom of movement. For example, READ Bhutan in Changjiji, Thimphu helps young girls and women to read books in their library. Similarly, most of the beneficiaries of READ Bhutan in Punakha are students who come here to read. So this helps them to gather together and even assist each other for further improvement. 23% don't know whether the NGOs give social support, as most of them were new beneficiaries.

### 4.3 Political Empowerment

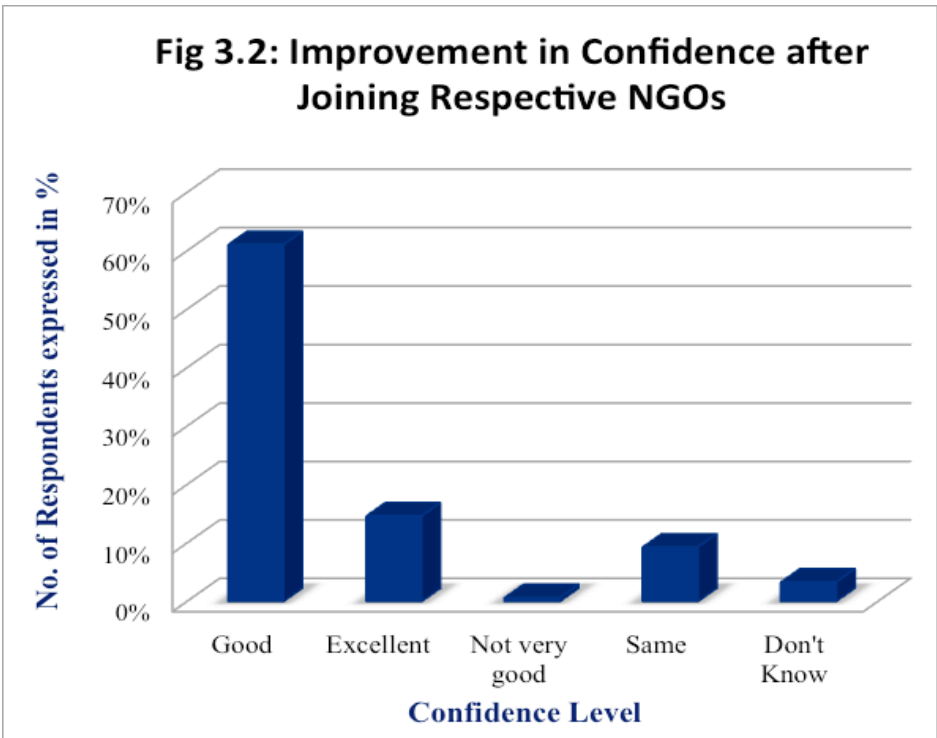
Political empowerment is having access to education, skill trainings, employment opportunities, and engagement in the policy-making process, participate in decision-making, and political participation.



**Source:** Author's own estimation based on Survey data.

Public Speaking is an essential component of effective communication. It enables us to express ourselves, build networking, influence decisions, and motivate change. Without communication skills, the ability to progress in the working world and in life, itself, would be nearly impossible. So knowing the importance of public speaking, the beneficiaries were asked about their speaking skills after joining the NGOs in the research survey. 59% of the beneficiaries responded that their speaking skill became good after working with NGOs showing improvement in the majority and

23% of them responded that their public speaking improved and rated themselves excellent showing effectiveness of the NGOs in bringing political empowerment in women and playing positive roles in their lives. While 13% of the respondents didn't find a significant change in their public speaking skills. Additionally, 3% of the beneficiaries responded that they are not very sure of their speaking skills and 2% expressed that they are not very good at public speaking. Looking at this data, we can conclude that NGOs in Bhutan have played an important role in improving public speaking among women and has achieved commendable results. With more programs and services targeting to women, they can bring the remaining women in the upper level of public speaking.



Source: Author's own estimation based on Survey data.

Confidence is one of the vital indicators of good public speaking and it's very important to be confident while communicating. So in the survey questionnaire, the participants were asked about their improvement in confidence after joining the respective NGOs or after receiving



training from NGOs and participating in the programs provided by different NGOs relating with women empowerment. The data in the graph shows that the majority (about 60%) of the participants rated themselves moderate in confidence after joining the respective NGOs and attending the programs. 13% of the respondents rated themselves excellent, 9% responded same, 3% responded saying that they don't know about their confidence level in the public, and 1% of the respondents rated themselves not very good. Overlooking minority, the overall result is good, as more than 70% of the respondents' confidence level has improved after joining the respective NGOs and availing their training programs.

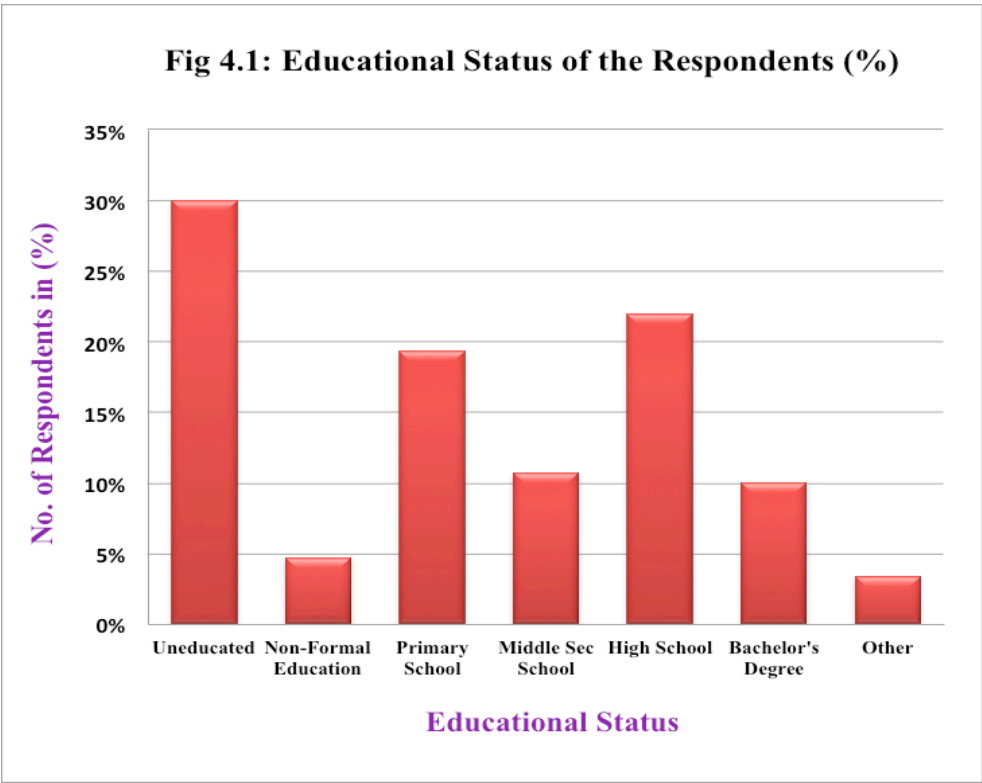
#### 4.4 Educational Empowerment

Every individual is ensured to have access to basic education, future economic opportunities to empower women and children living in poverty through literacy and education.

**Table 1.1: Knowledge about Empowerment**

<b>Knowledge About Empowerment</b>	<b>No. of Participants in %</b>
Being Economically Independent	18%
Being able to give financial support to the family	31%
Being able to make decision about the family	7%
Being able to work for the society	13%
All of the above	8%
Not sure	2%
Other	21%

Table 1.1 shows the knowledge about empowerment among the participants. 18% of the participants responded that being economically independent is empowerment to them, 31% said that being able to give financial support to the family is empowerment, 7% answered that being able to make decision about the family, and 13% responded that being able to work for the society is empowerment to them. 8% of the participants responded that they believed empowerment means being economically independently, being able to give financial support to the family, being able to make a decision about the family, and being able to work for the society. Only 2% responded that they are not sure about what is an empowerment to them. Among the participants, 21% responded that they have other meanings of empowerment. The table shows that the population has the knowledge about empowerment.



**Source:** Author’s own estimation based on Survey data.

The graph represents the educational status of the respondents in the research. The graph shows that 30% of the respondents were uneducated, 5% has studied under non-formal education, 19% of them studied till primary school, 11% of them studied till middle secondary school, 22% of them had completed high school and 10% has bachelor's degree and only 3% responded others. Going through the data, we can get a clear picture that the NGOs have greatly helped Bhutanese women by providing them with the opportunities to earn their own living and open more employment for those who could not continue their studies. The employment opportunities provided to those women made difference in their lives and in the society. Some of them became entrepreneurs, skilled weavers, tailors and most of them are employed in different NGOs. Despite the lower education level, they could live an independent life and support their family with the support from NGOs.

## **5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:**

Our study has following limitations:

- i. Due to time and budget constraint, researchers could not collect large sample size.
- ii. Due to massive road-widening works and the incessant Monsoon rain, the East-West Highway was risky to travel. Thus, we could not go to Bumthang district instead covered READ Bhutan center in Punakha.
- iii. Some of the participants were shy and were reluctant to respond.
- iv. UNDP Bhutan does not have direct beneficiaries rather supports CSOs like Tarayana. Thus, we included Tarayana Foundation instead of UNDP.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was carried out to assess the role of NGOs in empowering women in Bhutan and provide policy recommendations. It was found that NGOs have effectively empowered women in economic, social, political, and educational fields. Most of the participants expressed being satisfied with the NGOs they are involved in firstly because they are given employment opportunity and secondly they could financially support their family. It is very appreciable that the NGOs have helped decreased unemployment rate. The participants also pointed out that being financially independent actually helps in closing the gender gap. Not just that, the study also provides evidence that women become more confident about life and in public speaking after getting involved in those NGOs. However, the main limitations of our study were less sample size due to time, budget constraint and unfavorable weather conditions that affected traveling to another district. As this is one of the fields where less research is done and our research could not include all the required parameters, there is still scope for further research in this area.

Based on the findings, we have recommended the following alternatives to enhance their organizations.

- It would be more effective if there were NGOs' centers in every district of Bhutan to ensure that all women are empowered equally.
- It would be beneficial if the branch centers were provided with the same facilities as the main centers.
- There is need of mass awareness campaigns and advocacy about the NGOs all over the country to ensure the accessibility of the services provided by the NGOs.
- The NGOs should focus on specific services rather than providing similar services.
- It would be better if future researchers could conduct follow-up research in different districts in Bhutan.

## WORKS CITED

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## Final Budget

SL No.	Date	Description	Quantity	Unit Price	Duration	Total (Nu.)	Total (BDT)
1	6/6/2017	Stationeries	Lump sum			825	990
2	25/6/2017	Printing of questionnaires & consent form	1200 pages	2		2400	2880
3	28/6/17-2/8/17	Total Transportation cost (Thimphu and Punakha): Taxi	4 person	lump sum	16 days	12,000	14,400
4	28/6/17-2/8/17	Food cost	4 person	lump sum	16 days	4,375	5,250
5	23/7/17 to 24/7/17	Lodging expenses (Punakha)	4 person	750	2 nights	6,000	7,200
6		Miscellaneous expense (loss in money exchange)				1,216	1,596
<b>Total</b>						<b>26816</b>	<b>32,316</b>

# Research Proposal

On

## The Role of NGOs in Empowering Women in Bhutan

**Participants:** Dawa Zam (AUW ID: 150053), Kinley Zam (AUW ID: 150062), Passang Dema (AUW ID: 150057), Sonam Deki (AUW ID: 150060).

**Faculty Advisor:** Mr. Iftexhar Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury.

**Total No. Of Participants:** 4

### Introduction

The empowerment of women is a necessary prerequisite for the eradication of world poverty and the upholding of human rights (DFID, 2000: 8), in particular at the individual level, it helps to construct a base for social change. In Bhutan, women constitute nearly half of the total population (*National Statistics Bureau, 2016*). Although they are an important part of the society, they are facing an adverse situation in terms of social oppression and socio-economic inequalities. There are stereotypes that limit them from getting more employment opportunities and participation in politics. It is widely felt among women that they are not taken seriously and that they themselves consider men as superior decision makers (“*Convention of the Elimination*”, UN, 2011). Hence, it is crucial to empower women in Bhutan. Woman’s participation in the modern economy yields better performance and numerous studies have shown that greater female participation in the labor force has been an important driver of economic growth in the last decade (“*The Case for Gender Equality*”).



However, with the increase in number of NGOs and other organizations focusing on empowering women and providing opportunities to enhance their economic status, there is rise in women employment. In 1990, 36.2% of the Bhutanese women were working and by 2014, 41.5% of women were employed (*World Bank*). This depicts the effectiveness of social NGOs and other organizations that fostered the increase in female employment. In this research, we have selected six representative NGOs related with empowerment of women in Bhutan namely, Royal Textile Academy (RTA), SAARC Business Association of Home Based Workers (SABAH) Bhutan, Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE), Rural Education and Action Development (READ) Bhutan, Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women (RENEW), United Nation Development Program (UNDP). The projects taken by these NGOs are primarily focused on developing skills, setting up home based business, giving opportunity to learn to read for women who didn't receive education, and support victims of domestic violence to become independent and socially productive citizens.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Taking the current depiction of women's situation into account, this study will be undertaken to address the following two objectives:

- a) To analyze and determine the role of NGOs in empowering women in Bhutan.
- b) To provide some policy recommendations to concerned NGOs for further improvement of women's empowerment level based on our findings of the study

## **Research Methodology:**

### *Sources of Data and Sample Size:*

A quantitatively designed survey questionnaire will be used to interview beneficiaries of six NGOs from Capital City Thimphu, Bhutan and two branch centers from Central Bhutan (Bumthang).

Our research will focus on NGOs related to empowering of women. Some of these NGOs are located in Thimphu are Royal Textile Academy (RTA) in Chubachu, Bhutan Association Of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE) in Nazhoen Pelri, The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Kawajangsa, Rural Education And Development (READ) Bhutan in Changangkha, Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women (RENEW) in Thori Lam, and The SAARC Business Association of Home based workers (SABAH Bhutan) in Upper Yangchenphug. Our research will also include Yathra Weaving Centre and READ sub-centre in Bumthang to know how these centers benefit people living there.

We will conduct an in depth personal interview of 200 individuals using a planned questionnaire along with compilation of interview videos. Out of which 120 individuals will be the direct beneficiaries from six NGOs, who were given skill training and provided self-employment opportunities by these NGOs (using cluster sampling of 20 sizes from each NGOs). Thereafter, using the snowball method we will further interview of around 80 other individuals who are not beneficiaries of that six NGOs (i.e., from general public) living in Bhutan. We will have our questions on their knowledge, skills and attitude changes before and after the project. We will also verify the findings by interviewing key representative for the relevant NGOs to provide a rigorous research analysis.

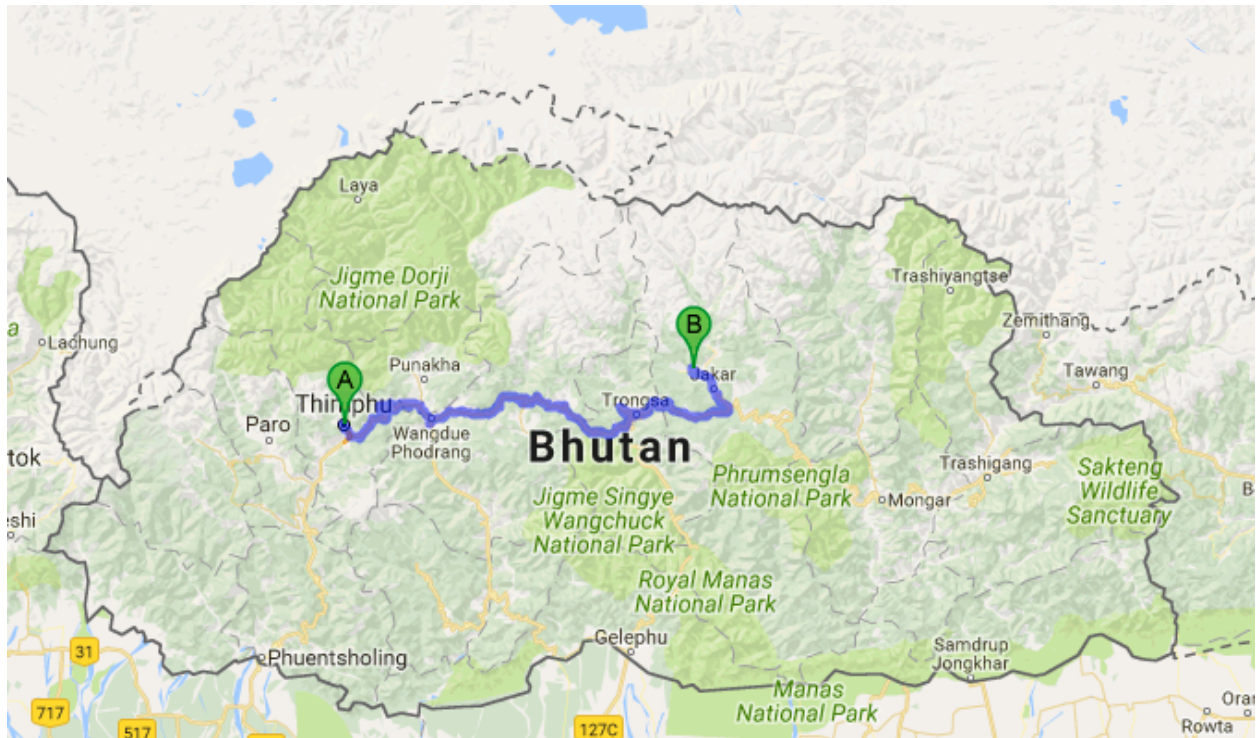
Later, the collected data will be analyzed using statistical software SPSS and multivariate regression analysis along with other statistical analysis will be carried out. Based on the findings, recommendations will be provided and findings will be shared with other NGOs.

The methodology to be used for the project would be based on:

- a) Secondary and desk research; literature review.
- b) Field visits for Primary data collection by survey/ interview conducted using the snowball method
- c) Few Focus Group Discussions (FGD)
- d) Analysis of the data
- e) Report writing

***Secondary Research/Desk Review:***

The secondary research includes discussions, literature review of similar studies and compares the findings of those studies and preparing questionnaire for conducting survey. The study will solely use a quantitative approach using survey questionnaire at individual level and focused group discussions.



*A (Thimphu) and B(Bumthang) are the field work areas.*

### ***Analysis of the data***

After data upload and cleaning, we will perform the data analysis using econometric methods.

### ***Preparing Report***

We will produce a detailed report on the findings and will disseminate it among the academic groups and other research agencies. We also intend to present the findings of the project in AUW seminar and also outside seminars.

### ***Other Activities***

- Weekly meeting with advisor to share our ideas and plans and seek suggestions from the advisor.

- Develop knowledge, attitude, and practice survey questionnaire with the advisor.
- Pilot survey and interview sessions with different organizations on a timely basis.
- In depth interview with women workers using questionnaire on the basis of above mentioned aims.
- Make a documentary.

### **Contributions of the Study**

(Gender, empowerment, resilience, changing nature of families, gender research in South Asia etc.).

1. It will provide Bhutan's data on the impact of changes in employment and empowering women by NGOs.
2. It will be a comparative study among different countries.
3. Come up with recommendations for advancement for NGOs.
4. NGOs/ government can use data to enhance their female empowerment programs in effective ways.

### **Expected project output(s)**

1. Final Research Report.
2. Recommendations for the NGOs interested.
3. Compiled Videos and documentary.

**Proposed Timeline (03.07.17-06.08.17)**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<b>Week 1</b>	Preparation of questionnaire  Seek information and get approval from relevant NGOs.
<b>Week 2</b>	Conduct survey in United Nation Development Program (UNDP), Rural Education and Action Development (READ) Bhutan, and Respect Educate Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW) in Thimphu.
<b>Week 3</b>	Conduct survey in Royal Textile Academy and SAARC Business Association of Home Based Workers (SABAH Bhutan), and BAOWE (Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs) in Thimphu.
<b>Week 4</b>	Travel from Thimphu to Bumthang.  Conduct survey Yathra Weaving Centre in Chumey village and READ Bhutan centre in Ura village in Bumthang.  Journey back to Thimphu.
<b>Week 5</b>	Compile videos and make a documentary.  Data entry.  Report writing.

### Budget (in BTN and USD)

<b>Description of the items</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Unit Price BTN</b>	<b>Duration in days</b>	<b>Total BTN</b>	<b>Total USD</b>
Transportation Costs Within Thimphu (cab fare)	4 students	150	20	12,000	176
Transportation Cost Thimphu-Bumthang-Thimphu	4 students	2400		9,600	141
Within Bumthang	4 students	250	7	7,000	102
Stationery and printing questionnaires	Lump sum			4,000	59
Printing and Binding of Report	Lump sum			1,000	15
Food Cost in Thimphu (lunch only)	4 students	150	20	12,000	176
Food Cost in Bumthang	4 students	450	7	12,600	185
Lodging in Bumthang	4 students	500	7	14,000	206
<b>Total Expense =</b>				<b>72,200</b>	<b>1,060</b>

#### Notes:

- ✓ The travel, food, and lodging expenditure, are based on minimum estimates. Since, four weeks of our research time is based in Thimphu (where all of us live), we are not including the food and lodging expenses except for lunch. The travel expenses have to be included while traveling from one office to another.
- ✓ Food (Breakfast + lunch + dinner) and lodging in Bumthang district has to be included as we don't have any relatives there.
- ✓ We calculated dollar rate 68 of Bhutanese currency (ngultrum). (\$ rates may fluctuate).

## **REFLECTION**

**Kinley Zam**

**AUW ID 150062**

### **Reflection on Summer Project 2017**

The journey of carrying out summer project has been a fun and an educative one. It all started from forming a group, selecting a topic to work on, and finding an advisor. Studying in a women university and having learnt about gender issues, we decided to focus on “The Role of NGOs in Empowering Women in Bhutan” to understand how women are supported and empowered by NGOs and also to provide policy recommendation based on our findings. After hours and hours of working on the project proposal and IRB approval with constant guidance from our advisor, it was finally been paid off when we received the budget. This funding allowed us to make all the plans in the proposal to come into reality.

With lots of enthusiasms, excitement, and determination we started our project from 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017. The following week included getting approval from the directors of respective NGOs to carry out the survey. They were very supportive of our objectives and granted us the permission. However, when we went to UNDP Bhutan, we were informed that they don't have direct beneficiaries rather supports NGOs like Tarayana. Thus, we added Tarayana Foundation to our list instead of UNDP and the Program Coordinator of Tarayana Foundation has also been generous in giving permission and support to carry our project. Thus, we had a good start.

Over a period of one month, we met Bhutanese women from all walks of life. While most stories started with difficulties they faced in earning a living, the position they have reached now



where they are financially independent are inspirational. We have learnt that being financially independent plays a significant role in empowering women. We have also come to know that different programs initiated by different NGOs to empower women have benefitted women in taking fields of their interest and capabilities. For example, women interested in weaving and tailoring are supported by NGOs like Royal Textile Academy, SABAH Bhutan, and READ Bhutan. Likewise, BAOWE has helped in building permanent stall so that vendors now have a stall of their own. Thus, NGOs empower women by supporting them to be financially independent.

While interviewing the beneficiaries we have learnt that NGOs have improved the lives of many housewives. Those who were illiterate can now do basic reading and writings, understands health issues, and are given leadership workshops. For examples, many housewives in Changjiji joined the READ center and takes weekly classes. Basic calculation training by BAOWE have helped illiterate shopkeepers in their business. Besides education, NGOs provide training like tailoring, weaving, basket making, and designing that has helped in learning and enhancing their skills. With these experiences, some of them are now employed and some work at their home and sell. Thus, NGOs empower women through giving education and skills.

Listening to the beneficiaries we found NGOs help in filling the gender gap. Beneficiaries have shared that being financially independent have a correlation in the decision making within the family. Because they have earned, they have the right to use the money depending on their choice. Small decisions like this play a vital role in the harmony of the family. Most women said they have become confident after being supported by their respective NGOs. These achievements are all because of the support rendered by NGOs and they play a major role in

empowering women. While there are still rooms for improvement in every NGO, beneficiaries are grateful for the support that they have received.

Having heard their stories of difficulties, success, and happiness we are proud of all the independent and skilled women that we have met. Besides the beneficiaries, we also interviewed the general public to get views on the role of NGOs in empowering women. In short, meeting with directors, beneficiaries, and general public has been an enriching journey that I will cherish throughout my life. And not to forget the amazing teammates and our advisor who has always been supportive. Finally, this project would not have happened had it not been for the financial and other guidance by the university. Thus, I am thankful to all for the wonderful experience I have got.



## **REFLECTION**

**Passang Dema**

**AUW ID 150057**

### Reflection on Summer Project 2017

With so much excitement for the most awaited moment, I along with my friends carried out our summer project in the summer break. Realizing the importance of gender equity and importance of NGOs in empowering women in Bhutan, six NGOs were selected who are striving for women empowerment and enhancing their skills and making them economically independent. We have been planning for almost four months theoretically and finally the fieldwork came with much excitement and expectations along with responsibilities.

It was the time to explore the real world and learn new ways through practical work. We went to different head offices and met with different level of officials. Talked with many heads and their simplicity and humble manner drew lot of admiration for them. It gave me immense joy and learning experience to learn new things everyday. Developed interpersonal skills through interviewing many participants and listening to many heart touching stories made me feel I grew a lot within few weeks. I learnt through their stories and it inspired me to work harder. It made me realize how fortunate I am to be able to go for higher studies while there are many talented young women but lack platform and opportunities.

There are some challenges like weather set back and we had to change our predestined place and changed to new place and sometimes language barrier. Lucky, we have friends in the team who can speak more than one language and switched interviewees to give clear and right information.

These experiences made us to be feasible and adaptable to necessary changes. We learnt to make back up plans. We had to face harsh weather conditions yet we enjoyed along because we had an awesome teamwork and were always joyful and determined. This short span of time brought us closer to our hearts. With this successful project with the undying support from our advisor and excellent teamwork of the members, I am encouraged to do more research in future.



## **REFLECTION**

**Dawa Zam**

**AUW ID 150053**

### Reflection on Summer Project 2017

After completion of summer project titled “The Role of NGOs Empowering Women in Bhutan” I came to realize that one of the greatest achievements in life is gaining new experiences through working with people from diverse background. A month long journey was a wonderful exploration and better understanding the efforts of our Bhutanese women who are beneficiaries of the given NGOs. Our hard work was priceless because learning from each other and from experienced people helped me to think and view in a broader perspective. When we went to get approval from the higher authorities full of hopes, NGOs such as such SABAH Bhutan and RENEW executive directors explained about their organization’s mission, objectives, and vision. It was good to know that these six NGOs are the starting point to empower our Bhutanese women.

During the data collection, I realized that what we plan sometimes does not happen in the way we want. For example, we our main plans were to conduct survey in Thimphu and Bumthang districts but we could not go to Bumthang due to bad road conditions. So finding an alternative to go to Punakha district was also a challenge we overcame. One thing I have observed is that being an entrepreneur is one way to empower women because they become financially independent and could able to support her family, especially in her child’s education. For example, majority of beneficiaries in BAOWE are economically independent and support her family.

Among six NGOs, five of them provide trainings in weaving different patterns of Bhutanese dresses. There were young school girls who came to learn weaving from veteran instructors during their summer break. The idea of spending their holidays to weave was interesting because they could earn little amount to buy their necessities. Indirectly, these trainings initiated by the NGOs help promoting and preserving Bhutanese traditional weavings as well as help young girls and women in family income generation.

Similarly, one important lesson to be learned was keeping confidentiality of the beneficiaries/employees by their employers. Even though RENEW mostly deals with survivors of the domestic violence cases, director Dr. Meenakshi Rai said that the employers are not allowed to disclose the privacy of the survivors in RENEW. Thus, they gave us the permission to do interview of those women who are doing trainings in tailoring and weavings. As a researcher one should keep the confidentiality of his/her participants unless they gave us the consent to disclose their information.



## **REFLECTION**

**Sonam Deki**

**AUW ID150060**

### *My Research Reflection.*

This research was my first of a kind and it came with so much of surprises. I and three of my co-researchers along with our project advisor Mr. Iftekhar Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury conducted series of meeting discussing and planning our summer project. My team was very well coordinated and the most commendable thing is that we never procrastinated our work, in fact we were always doing works ahead of time which gave us ample time to correct and recheck our works.

I was personally worried that things may not turn out the way we expected but to my surprise all of the NGOs were very welcoming and each gave me a special take away for life. SABAHA Bhutan, to me is an ideal NGO not only because of its beautiful interior design but also with the amount of dedication put forth by each and every worker towards achieving his or her goals starting from the Executive Director Mr. Karma Dorji himself. One commendable thing I noticed in SABAHA is that the workers are given their dignity of work by entitling them as "Master weaver," and etc. Not just that, all the employers has a same uniform regardless of their position. That's how a workplace should be where the employers are respected for the type of work they do. "What's feminism? Is being feminist really bad?" was the most knowledgeable question that Dawa Zam and I were asked by Dr. Meenakshi Rai from RENEW and I swear it teaches me to grow till date.

Most of the women in Bhutan are talented weavers and their skills are unbeatable. One will get to see this for real during our annual festivals like "Tshechu" and other celebrations where men and women wear their best hand woven dresses. I thought that younger generations this days are not interested in upholding this tradition but I was thrilled seeing those talented young girls in Royal Textile Academy supporting their education financially plus gaining skills to weave beautiful brocade kiras and shawls.

Since I'm more close to READ Bhutan and I have seen those women change over the years, it is admirable that they have become more confident about themselves after being able to learn how

to read and write. Moreover, they now have a circle of friends with whom they share their daily life stories starting from movie serials to their hardships in life. It's amazing to see them share a strong bond and teaches me the importance of being connected with the people around me. Similarly, Tarayana Foundation empowers women by providing them trainings and helping them to learn how to weave baskets, bags and other useful materials by the use of plastic wastes. I am glad that my country is doing a great job in reducing and maintaining waste materials. No wonder we are the only country in the world that is “Carbon Negative.” This research experience helped me learn more about my country, I got an opportunity to learn from different experienced and skilled individuals, learned to work as a team, boosted up my confidence and most of all I now get the importance of conducting researches. This experience has prepared me enough to successfully carry out any other researches in future.





## **Questionnaire used for Conducting the Survey**

**Title: The Role of NGOs in Empowering Women in Bhutan.**

### **Demographic Information**

Name of the Interviewer:

Date:

Name of the Interviewee:

Age:

Sex: Male/Female

Marital Status:

Place Name:

District:

Designation:

Organization:

### **Q1. Which NGO do you work in?**

- a. Royal Textile Academy (RTA)
- b. SABAH Bhutan
- c. READ Bhutan
- d. UNDP
- e. RENEW
- f. BAOWE
- g. Other

**Q2. What is the highest educational level you have attended?**

- a. Uneducated
- b. Non Formal education
- c. Primary School
- d. High School.
- e. Bachelor's Degree
- f. Other

**Q3. How many family members do you have?**

**Q4. What are the roles that the NGOs play for your education or family's education?**

**Q5. Are they providing you any training?**

Yes/No

**Q6. How long have you been supported/trained etc by the NGO?**

- a. Less than 1 year
- b. 2 years
- c. 3 years
- d. others

**Q7. What is the best skill you have developed since you have joined this training/program with NGO?**

**Q8. What were you doing before this?**

- a. Unemployed
- b. House wife
- c. Student
- d. Others

**Q9. What is your current status?**

- a. Employed
- b. Unemployed
- c. Self-employed

**Q10. If employed, what is the approximate income you earn on average per month in Nu.?**

- a. 0-5000
- b. 5000-8000
- c. 8000-10,000
- d. Above 10,000

**Q11. Do you receive any financial help/loans from any NGOs/ Banks?**

- a. Royal Textile Academy (RTA)
- b. SABAH Bhutan
- c. READ Bhutan
- d. UNDP
- e. RENEW
- f. BAOWE
- g. Other

**Q12. If so, how much you took as loan in Nu.?**

- a. 0-50,000
- b. 50,000-1,00,000
- c. 1,00,000-2,00,000
- d. Above 2,00,000

**Q13. Do you have any savings?**

Yes/No

**Q14. What is your average monthly expenditure?**

- a. 0-5000
- b. 5000-8000
- c. 8000-10,000
- d. Above 10,000

**Q15. Do you live in your own house or rented house?**

**Q16. Are you satisfied with the NGOs you are involved in?**

- A. Highly satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Unsatisfied
- e. Highly unsatisfied

**Q17. Do you receive any legal help (e.g. Marriage, divorce and its registration, remarriage, adoption and some miscellaneous purposes from this NGO?**

Yes/No

**Q18. Do this NGO arrange any awareness program to motivate about women empowerment?**

**Q19. Do this NGO provide any legal counseling/help in case of domestic violence or help women for their rehabilitation?**

Yes/No

**Q20. Do you think those awareness programs have impact on your personal life or social life (such as change of lifestyle, decision making process, etc.)?**

**Q21. Do they provide any social support (such as decision making, self-respect, freedom of movement, entertainment, social gathering, children's education, etc.) to you?**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Others (Specify)

**Q22. Where do you usually spend your saving?**

- a. Children's education
- b. To do rituals
- c. For entertainment
- d. Household activities
- e. Future planning
- f. Others

**Q23. How much decision-making ability do you have over the income you earn?**

- a. Always
- b. Often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Never

**Q24. How would you rate yourself in public speaking after joining this program?**

- a. Good
- b. Excellent
- c. Not very good
- d. Same.
- e. Don't know

**Q25. How would you rate yourself in confidence after joining this program?**

- a. Good
- b. Excellent
- c. Not very good
- d. Same.
- e. Don't know

**Q26. Are you free from gender discrimination?**

- a. Yes definitely
- b. Yes may be
- c. No
- d. Don't know

If no, why?

**Q27. Do you think your current work help in promoting gender equality?**

- a. Yes definitely
- b. Yes may be
- c. No
- d. Don't know

**Q28. In which field do you think you need more support in?**

- a. Financial support for family
- b. Amendment of some policy and laws. Specify.
- c. Educational support
- d. Others

**Q29. Do you want to continue your connection with the same NGO in future?**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe

**Q30. Do you think NGOs are effective in empowering women? Why? or Why not?**

**Q31. Do you have any suggestions to improve the efficiency of NGOs?**

**Q32. What is empowerment to you?**

- a. Being economically independent
- b. Being able to give financial support to the family
- c. Being able to make decision for the family
- d. Being able to work for the society
- e. Others

**\*Documentary on this project is available in the library**