

VNR 2025: Main Message of the Kingdom of Bhutan

Bhutan's development strategy is rooted in the philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), which shares deep synergies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since the adoption of Agenda 2030, Bhutan has systematically integrated SDGs into its Five-Year Plans (FYPs), culminating in the current 13th FYP (2024–2029).

Bhutan's graduation from LDC status in 2023 marks a major national milestone. The 13th FYP serves as a critical mechanism to ensure a smooth and sustainable post-LDC transition. Its strategic objectives—including achieving high-income status by 2034, promoting social equity, and fostering resilient governance—are carefully aligned with both national priorities and international commitments under the 2030 Agenda.

Bhutan underscores the imperative of simultaneously securing a sustainable post-LDC transition and accelerating progress towards the SDGs. With only five years remaining to realize the 2030 Agenda, this dual endeavour demands immediate and coordinated action. While Bhutan is committed to undertaking sustained investments and enacting fit-for-purpose policy reforms, these efforts alone will not suffice. Strong, continued, and tailored international support is indispensable to uphold Bhutan's gains in health, environment, and inclusive development, and to ensure that LDC transition status leads to resilient progress.

Bhutan recently formulated its long-term national economic strategy titled the “Bhutan 21st Century Economic Roadmap”, highlighting priority sectors and key enablers for economic transformation. A central objective of the roadmap is to increase Bhutan's real GDP tenfold by 2050, while upholding the country's commitment to carbon neutrality, in alignment with GNH values.

Although Bhutan's economy expanded by 4.9 percent in 2023, several socio-economic indicators have yet to recover to their pre-pandemic levels. The overall unemployment rate declined to 3.5 percent in 2024, while youth unemployment dropped to 19 percent from 28.6 percent in 2022. Despite this improvement, youth unemployment and large-scale overseas out-migration remain key concerns. As of 2022, 12.4 percent of the population was below the national poverty line. Several economic diversification measures are being pursued to address these challenges.

Notable progressive steps toward gender equality include the decriminalization of same-sex relations through the Penal Code (Amendment) Act 2021, marking a major milestone in protecting LGBTQ+ rights. Bhutan continues to address gender-based violence (GBV) through a multi-sectoral approach. In 2025, Bhutan launched its first National Strategy and Framework of Action on Elimination of GBV- a roadmap for coordinated and sustained actions to combat GBV. In 2023, Bhutan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime.

Bhutan has significantly improved maternal and child health outcomes, achieving SDG targets for maternal, under-five, and neonatal mortality. Mental health and substance abuse, including alcohol abuse, remain key concerns, prompting further focused interventions. Bhutan continues its fight against non-communicable diseases (NCDs) through nationwide screenings and health promotion campaigns. Bhutan reported zero indigenous malaria cases in 2024 and improved Tuberculosis outcomes.

Bhutan maintains its carbon-negative status, although rising emissions pose future risks. The country has enhanced its climate resilience through the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), Nationally Determined Contributions, and integrated climate policies across sectors. Recent strategic initiatives include the formulation of Bhutan's Long Term Low Greenhouse Gas Emission and Climate Resilient Development Strategy (LTS), establishment of the Bhutan Climate Fund, and launch of the G-Zero Forum. Institutional challenges remain, including technical capacity gaps, coordination inefficiencies, and climate data limitations.

The VNR process has been fully inclusive, engaging government, civil society, youth, the international community, and the private sector in a whole-of-society approach. Despite challenges, Bhutan remains strongly committed to advancing sustainable development, leveraging its GNH framework and institutional reforms to drive impactful progress toward Agenda 2030.