

BARRIERS ON THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN AS LEADERS IN BHUTAN

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DECLARATION

I declare that this project (ART6401) is my own account of my own research. It contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any university. Signature: Date:28/06/2015

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Abstract

Women leadership is not heard or seen much, because we view the picture of leadership through patriarchal lenses. From the history of Bhutan, it can be perceived that the concept of a woman as a leader was unfamiliar until recent years. Rulers and top executives of the country were all male. However, in recent years the nation witnessed the emergence of the few women leaders. The paper examines current patterns of leadership in Bhutan in few key areas and organizations. The obstacles and challenges confronted by Bhutanese women are analyzed and found that there are social, political, cultural and religious barriers that impede women's career advancement. The career expansion and acquiring leadership position of women is still a problem in Bhutan. The paper also uses case study of the first two national parliamentary elections of Bhutan to demonstrate the kind of women participation and range of challenges that hinders their participation.

Introduction

It has not been easy for many women to attain executive positions in many sections of society. Even today due to many prevailing culture and traditions, females are given the secondary place (Kiamba 2008). Women are considered as the inferior of the species in most patriarchic societies (Hora 2014) and have been regarded as lacking in leadership potentials, because female has been stereotyped as dependent, submissive and conforming (Singh and Prasad 2014). The representation of women in higher positions is under represented in many public and private offices. According to United Nations (2007), men are overwhelmingly in the top executive positions as decision makers. There is a notion in many communities that men make better leaders than women. Most companies often cite the unavailability of women with required skills and experience whenever a leadership position opens up (Ibarra, Ely and Kolb 2013). In India, it is claimed that women are less effective in holding public offices or making decisions (Internal Center for Research on Women 2012). On the contrary, it is argued that women leaders are less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and more oriented to enhancing others (Eagly 2013). Further,

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Sachedina (2003) argues that women can be the leaders of the world leaders in the development of humanitarian ethics. However, women are often considered as possessing poor leadership skills by many companies around the world, which attributes to the problem of fewer women in leadership positions (CEDA 2013).

Nearly women constitute half of the world's population, and as such they should be equally represented all levels so as to have equal voices. Therefore, it is vital that men and women occupy the positions equally, especially at high levels to have a gender-equal society. Sandberg (2010) presents that in 2010 only 13% of the Member of Parliament around the world represents women and in corporate executive level it was just 16%. The statistics clearly signify that there are challenges and obstacles for women to emerge as leaders. This challenge is not an exception to the small Kingdom of Bhutan where the participation of women in executive positions is few also compared to their counterpart men.

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small landlocked country sandwiched between two giant nations, India and China. It has an area of 32,394 sq. km with a population 0.76 million as of date (National Statistical Bureau 2015). The country is divided into 20 Dzongkhags (districts), which are further divided into 205 Gewogs (blocks). At both district and block levels there is a respective development council constituted of elected representatives. Buddhism is the main religion of the nation, however Hinduism is widely practiced by the populace in the southern part of the country.

During the past decades, Bhutan has made significant progress in socioeconomic development. With these developments, conditions in Bhutan have significantly changed as compared to few decades ago. However, there still exist historical, traditional and cultural barriers that stop women from becoming leaders. Keeping in mind the importance of women's presence in executive levels, it is essential to understand why not many women hold leadership positions. Bhutan, which famously measures Gross National Happiness in addition to Gross Domestic Product, has some way to go to becoming a place where there is gender quality. As such, this paper will explore the obstacles and challenges that restrict women from taking up leadership positions in specific reference to the women of the Kingdom of Bhutan by studying the current situation of women leadership and reviewing related papers from the neighboring countries. A section of the paper will analyze through case study the

participation of women in the national parliament. Therefore, the overall objective of this paper is to identify the barriers on the emergence of women as leaders in the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Women Leadership in Bhutan and its Current Status

In the Southeast Asian region, Bhutan compares well with its neighboring countries on gender equality. In 2012, Bhutan scored 0.464 in gender inequality index that was relatively low compared to Nepal, Bangladesh and India, which scored 0.485, 0.518 and 0.610 respectively (Asian Development Bank 2014). The ‘Gender Inequality Index’ as per ADB’s definition measures the gender disparity and is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievements between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market. Gender Inequality Index gives an insight to women empowerment by measuring women participation in parliament and attainment of higher education by women. The lowest value is the least unequal. It shows how women are discriminated against health, education, political representation, employment, etc. which has negative impacts on the expansion of their capabilities and freedom of choice. However, the same study has shown that there exist gender gaps in education sector, employment sector and in executive levels. For example, participation of girls in secondary and tertiary education is much less, and female unemployment rate is higher than that of male. Many studies have shown that there is low representation of women in high public offices including cabinet positions and in parliament (Asian Development Bank 2014, Dhlerup 2014). Despite the government’s efforts to ensure that representation of women is attained at all levels of positions, they still are under represented in many public and private institutions mostly in positions of authority and leadership. The following sections of the paper will discuss the extent of women leadership in various sections of society. Further, a detailed case study on the participation of women in the parliament of Bhutan will also be analyzed.

Central Government

Secular rulers called Desis ruled Bhutan during pre-monarchy period, and it is to be noted here that all fifty-four Desis who ruled Bhutan from 1650 till 1907 were male. On 17th December 1907, Bhutan elected its first hereditary monarch to rule the nation

(Gallenkamp 2010). Since then, male monarchs have ruled Bhutan for the past one-century, and His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck is the fifth hereditary king of Bhutan. In 2008, Bhutan transitioned into democracy and had its first parliamentary election. The result of the first two parliamentary elections sadly saw a very low number of female candidates getting elected. In both first and second elections, democratically elected Prime Ministers were also male. From here it can be perceived that the stereotype of leader to rule a nation till now is man. However, 2013 parliamentary poll witnessed the election of the first female minister in the history of Bhutan.

Civil Service

Currently, the Royal Government of Bhutan has ten different ministries. Apart from the democratically elected ministers the government secretaries head and lead the respective ministry. Government Secretary is the highest position that one can achieve in civil service. All secretaries to the government are male, except for the Ministry of Education, which is headed by Aum Sangay Zam, a female secretary to the government. In 2012, women accounted for 36% of all civil servants out of which only 6% of civil servants were female in the executive category (Royal Civil Service Commission 2012). This indicates that, the participation of women in public institution is comparatively low.

District Government

Bhutan is divided into twenty districts and each district is under the administrative power of the Dzongdag (Mayor). In 2012, His Majesty appointed the first and the only women Dzongdag in one of the districts (Bhutan Broadcasting Service 2012).

Local Government

The Local Government Act of Bhutan, 2007 provides a platform to facilitate participation of grass root people in decision-making and management of socio-economic development of their respective community (National Assembly of Bhutan 2009). In each of twenty districts there are many delimited blocks or communities called Gewogs. In total, there are 205 Gewogs in Bhutan. The leader of the Gewog administrative unit is called the Gup (Community Leader). Since Bhutan introduced

democracy in 2008, the country had its first local election in 2011 and at present there is only one female Gup out of 205. On average, the number of women being elected in elective offices namely the National Assembly (Lower House), the National Council (Upper House) and the Local Governments are less than eight percent (Election Commission of Bhutan 2014).

Other lists of current executive positions are given in Table 1. Therefore, it can be said that men occupy more than 90% of the top executive position in government and civil service.

Table 1: List of Leaders in Top Executive Levels

Position	Male	Female
Minister	9	1 (Ministry of Works and Human Settlements)
Secretary	12	1
Head of Commission	4	1 (Head of Anticorruption Commission)
Dzongdag (Mayor)	19	1
Supreme Court Judge	3	1
High Court Judge	4	0
Government corporations, CEO	17	0
Gup (Block Leader)	204	1

Source: (Bhutan Portal 2015)

Therefore, these statistics and history are the reasons that make Bhutanese people carry the notion of leadership as masculine and believe that men make better leaders than women. Statistics and history also clearly indicate that there are barriers and challenges in women becoming leaders in Bhutan. The representation of women in leadership positions in elected office, civil service and corporate offices are low compared to men.

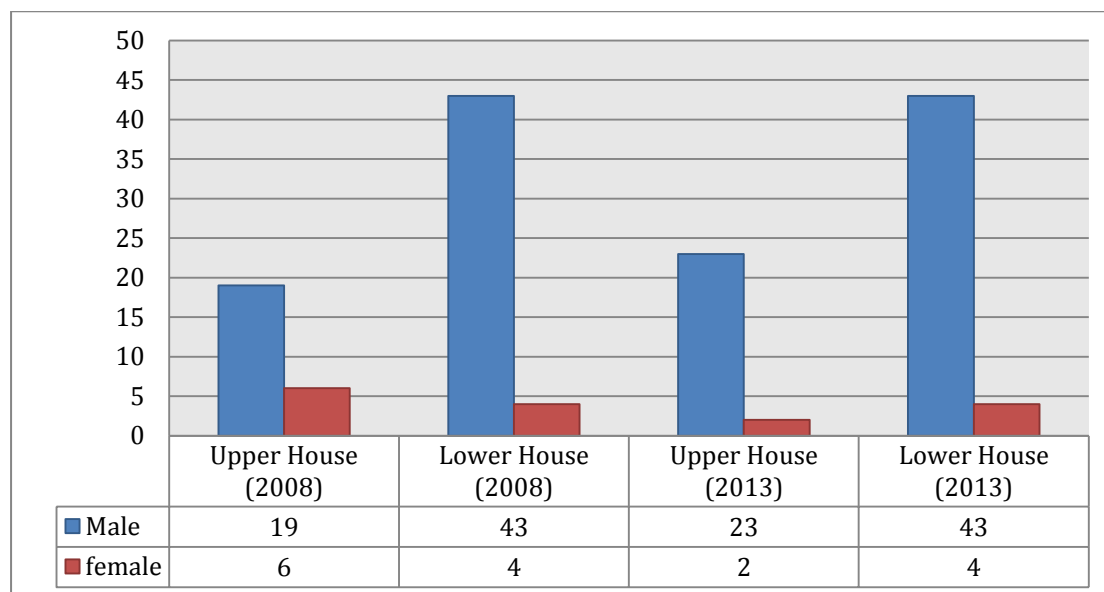
Case Study- Women's Representation in the National Parliament

There is an increasing initiative among governments and communities to promote and ensure women's participation and leadership in the political world. Women's political representation is essential to guarantee that the concerns and issues of women are reached to the highest decision making body. It is also important step to ensure vibrant and sustaining democracy for a young democratic nation like Bhutan. This case study will analyze the result of first two national parliamentary elections of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

With the introduction of democracy and subsequent establishment of democratically elected parliament, 2008 has been a historic year for Bhutan. Since then the Bhutanese voters had exercised their voting rights twice to elect their Member of Parliament for the National Parliament. The parliament of Bhutan consists of His Majesty the King (Head of the State), the National Council (Upper House) and the National Assembly (Lower House). The National Council of Bhutan comprises of 25 members, one elected from each of the 20 districts and five eminent members appointed by His Majesty the King. The National Assembly of Bhutan has 47 members elected from each constituency taking the total members of the Parliament to 72 excluding His Majesty the King. The elected government consists of the Council of Ministers (the Cabinet) headed by the Prime Minister.

The Constitution of Bhutan and the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008 gives equal civil and political rights to all interested Bhutanese citizen to participate in any elections. However, women candidates contesting in parliamentary elections and being elected are comparatively low as compared to men. Since parliament is the highest decision making level of a nation, the low representation of women in it is a great concern. The number of women participating and getting elected in the first two parliamentary elections were not encouraging. Women getting elected to the parliament were 13.89% and 8.33% in 2008 and 2013 respectively as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Women's representation in the past two parliamentary elections



Sources: (Election Commission of Bhutan 2014)

During 2008 parliamentary election only 10 women members made to the parliament with four in the National Assembly and six in the National Council, out of which 2 were appointed by the King as an eminent member of the National Council as per the Article 11 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan. In 2013 election, no women were elected for the upper house apart from two women nominated by the King, and women representation in the lower house remained four like the previous election. Furthermore, it can be seen from Table 2 that there is also not much participation from women in electoral process. However, the present government registered the appointment of the first woman as the member of the cabinet. Aum Dorji Choden was appointed as the minister for the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement.

The women's representation actually fell from the first parliamentary election in 2008 to the next in 2013. The number of women in the National Assembly remained the same at 8.5%, but the number of elected women in the National Council dropped to zero. However, the King appointed two women as eminent members and saved the house from all members being male. 2013 election also witnessed the entry of two new political parties headed by female presidents. Sadly, both the parties were unsuccessful in the preliminary election and didn't qualify for the final general election. There was a huge debate among public whether the failure of the parties

were due to having a female leader.

Table 2: Summary of the First Two Elections

	Men	Women	Total	% Women
2008 Parliament				
National Council				
Candidates Participated	46	6	52	11.50%
Elected	16	4	20	20.00%
Nominated by the King	3	2	5	40.00%
National Assembly				
Candidates Participated	84	10	94	10.60%
Elected	43	4	47	8.50%
Cabinet	10	0	10	0.00%
2013 Parliament				
National Council				
Candidates Participated	62	5	67	7.50%
Elected	20	0	20	0.00%
Nominated by the King	3	2	5	40.00%
National Assembly				
Candidates Participated	83	11	94	11.70%
Elected	43	4	47	8.50%
Cabinet	9	1	10	10.00%

Source: (Election Commission of Bhutan 2014)

From Table 3, it is clear that the representation of women in the parliament in Bhutan is comparatively low compared to other neighboring states. However, it is to note that the high number of women in parliament in other states were mainly due to quota system or reserved seats for women. Further, Kamal (2010) describes that it is remarkable four neighboring SAARC countries namely Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to have had women heads of government despite its patriarchal society.

Table 3: Women's Representation in the Parliament in South Asian Nations

Nations	Women Percentage	Total Number
Nepal	29.4%	176/598
Afghanistan	24.8%	87/351
Pakistan	20.1%	85/423
Bangladesh	20.0%	70/350
Bhutan	8.3%	6/72
India	8.2%	96/786
Maldives	5.9%	5/85
Sri Lanka	5.8%	13/255

Source: (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015)

Can we blame voter for electing few women to the parliament? It was found that the problem for low number of women in parliament in Bhutan was not that people do not vote for women, but the problem was too few women were nominated for the political elections (Dhlerup 2014). Some of the contributing factors that contributed to the small number of women candidates for Member of Parliament were high minimum required qualification (university degree), the small pool of women in the senior civil service that provided the major talent pool for electoral candidates, and the common opinion that the politics is a male activity and lack of confidence among women to take a public role (Asian Development Bank 2014). Women's family responsibilities, gender stereotype and entrenched and prejudiced perception of women leadership also

attributed to low number of women's participation in electoral process (Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia 2014).

It is therefore evident from these data that the number of women participating and getting elected are very low, and women are underrepresented in the national parliament, which is entitled to be the highest policy making body of the country. The world's average women's representation in parliament is 22.1% and for Asia it is 18.4% (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015). Even when compared globally and regionally, Bhutan still has minimal representation of women in the parliament. For example Rwanda has 57.5% (combining both upper and lower houses) women in the parliament, which is the highest in the world. On the other hand, Bhutan is ranked number 162 out of 190 listed country on the world rank order in terms of women in parliament by Intra-Parliamentary Union. The case study depicts that there exists glass ceiling, a metaphor for an invisible barrier that prevents women from climbing the highest positions.

Barriers

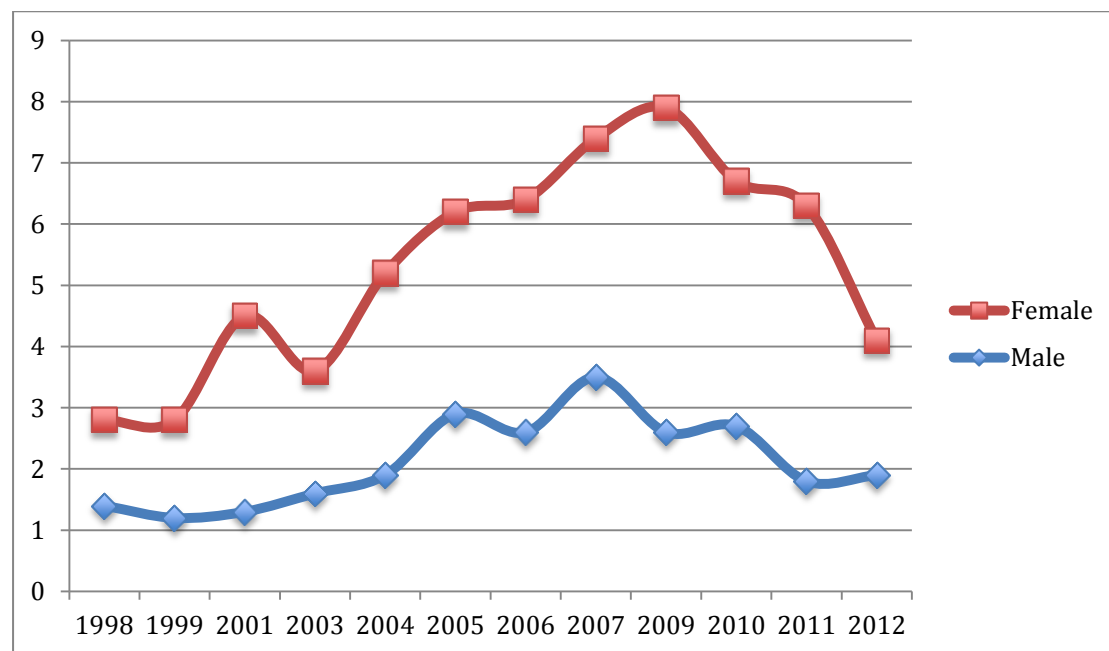
One of the Millennium Development Goal is to achieve women's equal participation with men in power and decision-making, but throughout the world women are underrepresented and far removed from leadership roles and such exclusion of women discourages the attainment of gender equality (Election Commission of Bhutan 2014). There are many barriers that obstruct women to emerge as leaders, and these barriers are usually invisible and are engrained in society's consciousness (Jakobsh 2004). These barriers and challenges of social norms, organizational cultures, and structures that restrict women's access to leadership position and authority in organizations and society are called Glass Ceilings (Ngunjiri and Baker 2012). It is termed as glass ceiling, because these invisible forces restrict women to move to the next upper executive floor. The existence of a so-called 'glass ceiling' has hindered women from attaining the highest level of management positions in many organizations (Moran 1992). According to a survey, globally 45% women feel that there do exist barriers that prevent them from getting leadership positions and cause lower advancement rates (Elmuti, Jia and Davis 2009). Since the culture of women is unique, women leadership is considered different from traditional forms of leadership (Batiwala and

Rao 2002). Women are stereotyped as dependent, submissive and confronting and are considered as lacking in leadership qualities. However, it is claimed that compared to male leaders, female leaders are less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and more oriented to improving welfare of others (Eagly 2013). Even McKinsy & Company (2008) has proved that leadership behaviors applied by women leaders are more effective in enhancing corporate performance. For example, the study demonstrates that companies with more females in their management teams score more highly on their organizational performance than companies that have fewer women in managerial positions. This is mainly because women leaders focus more on leadership behaviors such as 'people development', 'expectation and rewarding' and 'role model' styles, which reinforce company's values and working environment, accountability and team work (McKinsy & Company 2008).

Women are under represented in higher positions in various areas of workplace around the world (Grove and Paula 1999). Few women have managed to achieve executive position in Southeast Asia, however a study shows that majority of them continue to confront substantial magnitude of social and economic barriers to assuming the executive positions (United Nations 2007). In Bhutan it has been found that there is no direct discrimination on women leadership, but many other structural barriers make it difficult for women to reach the same positions as men (Dhlerup 2014). The same study also shows that there are patriarchal norms especially in the rural areas of Bhutan.

For instance, the unemployment rate for women in Bhutan has always been higher compared to male till now, and further the opportunities are also fewer for women especially in urban areas (Ministry of Labour and Human Resources 2012). The unemployment rate for women is higher because, people particularly men tend to doubt the potential of women for work and leadership (Asian Development Bank 2014). The lack of employment equity clearly indicates that there are barriers for women to even enter into workforce.

Figure 2: Unemployment Trend



Source: (Ministry of Labour and Human Resources 2012)

Because of low employability of women, the scarcity of women in talent pool has become more. Thousands of young women facing unemployment problem is a grave concern not only about the participation of women in leadership positions, but also about the future of Bhutanese women. As such, some of the barriers and challenges after studying the current scenario of women leadership in Bhutan are discussed below.

Occupational segregation

In many of the workplaces, there is gendered division of labour leading to occupational segregation. Under the constitution of Bhutan, women are given equal work opportunities, and equal pay for equal work is also a constitutional and legal right. Further, the laws and regulations are gender neutral pertaining to remuneration, promotion and benefits in both public and private sectors (Gross National Happiness Commission 2011). Majority of the labour force in Bhutan is in agriculture sector and in civil service. As can be observed from the current status of women leadership in Bhutan, women form around 36% of the total civil service strength, and only 6 percent constitutes women in executive positions. Also, the case study shows that total representation of women in the National Parliament has decrease from 13.9%

from first election to 8.3% in the recent one. This reveals that women are more concentrated in the lower rung of the occupation levels.

The proportion of female working in agriculture sector according to the labour force survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (2012) is 62.25%. Furthermore, women are generally associated with jobs that seldom lead to top executive positions. Most of the working women are at the operative and lower management levels (Tarayana Foundation 2009). It can also be seen from Table 4 that more women are in occupations where the possibility of them getting to the higher rung of executive position in a society is less. It has been found that majority of the Bhutanese women are employed in jobs with low remuneration and also more of them work as unpaid family members (Gross National Happiness Commission 2011). There is also a slower movement of women from the rural agriculture sector to other occupations than men. In such cases, women are mostly occupied with occupations in agriculture farming held back from hopping to other vocations that might lead to higher-level positions.

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Employed Persons by Major Occupation

Major Occupations	Male	Female
Legislators, senior officials & managers	1.6	0.3
Professionals	7	3.5
Technicians & associate professionals	2.9	1.2
Armed Forces	3	0.2
Clerks	1.4	1.2
Service workers & shop & market sales workers	3.2	4.6
Agriculture and fishery workers	26.3	30
Craft and related workers	1.9	3.5
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	4.6	0.2
Elementary occupations	2.3	1

Source: (National Statistical Bureau 2014)

Even in electoral process, more women are elected in the lower ranks. For example, in 2011 during local government election the number of Gups (Chair for local government) was 1 (0.5%) and Mangmis (Vice Chair for local government) was 12 (5.9%), but representation of women for the post of Tshogpas (Councillors) was 80 (8.9%) (Dhlerup 2014). This indicates that representation of women decreases as the position goes up.

Even in other parts of Asia, women are found concentrated in low-pay and low productivity sector, while men dominate better-paid and executive positions (True, et al. 2012). Bush and Holst (2011) describe that women holding such jobs would have lower chances of promotion and career enhancement. Even in Bhutan, women are typically associated with occupation sectors other than professional and management positions that lead slow career expansion. For example, it can be seen from Table 4 that representation of men are more in occupations like managers, senior officials and professionals. On the other hand, agriculture farming, market sales and shops are concentrated with women and those occupations usually don't lead to higher positions.

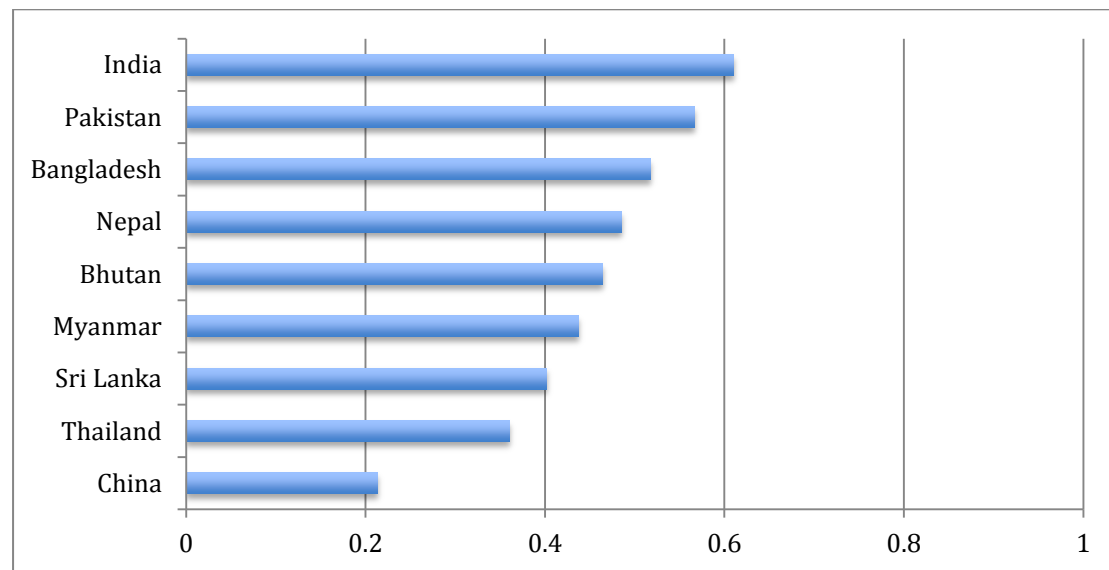
Sex Discrimination

Gender discrimination in any form is a clear violation of fundamental human rights. However, according to Hora (2014), women continue to suffer from all kinds of discrimination even though they contribute to two third of world's working hours, produce half of world's food and bear and rear children. One reason for females to suffer difficulty of attaining high positions through sex discrimination is their leadership styles. Leaders are usually associated with maleness and labeled with adjectives such as competitive, aggressive or dominant. In the past, Moran (1992) claims that women who became leaders did so by adopting the masculine behavior of leadership. For example in Britain Margaret Thatcher was often referred as the 'Best Man' even if she was a woman. However, women now are beginning to make their own different style of leadership. As described earlier, women leaders are found to be more democratic, more participative and less aggressive.

Many researches have shown that difficulty in achieving leadership roles for women is related to the differences in the leadership style between men and women (Moran

1992). The accommodation of different leadership styles in many of the organizations is an issue today. Moran also argues that there is a generalization of masculinity as the quality of leader, and this rationalization of leadership quality excludes women from attaining executive positions. Therefore, even if a woman is competent enough to assume the role of a leader, the gender disparity rules her out.

Figure 3: Gender Inequality Index, 2012



Source: (Asian Development Bank 2014)

Figure 3 indicates that Bhutan is doing comparatively well in gender equality among its neighboring states, however it also reflects that there exist gender discrimination in the country. A study by Asian Development Bank (2014) shows that there is high incidence and tolerance of domestic violence against women and their tolerance suggest that they are either afraid and embarrass to report or consider and accept themselves as inferior to men. Jakobsh (2004) argues that due to discrimination based on sex women are considered weak, not having self-confidence and not ambitious, which affects women and their performance in workplace. Other than sex, discrimination may also be based on other social difference, however many distinctions are made in workplace between male and female on the basis of sex. There is a common notion that women are ineffective leaders, but Duflo and Topalova (2004) argues that women in first place do not appear to be ineffective leaders for their communities, but they are also found to be less corrupt.

Bhutan's approach to development is guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness. The government positions gender equality under one of the pillars of Gross National Happiness, Good Governance and Democracy (Royal University of Bhutan 2014). Gender equality and empowering women has been an integral part of government's development agendas (Gross National Happiness Commission 2011). However, study carried out by the United Nations Bhutan (2014) discloses that there are gender inequalities deeply rooted in families, communities, and individual minds that are largely invisible and underestimated. It also reveals that nearly half of the Bhutanese agree that Bhutanese culture considers women inferior to men. Such gender stereotyping restricts Bhutanese women from participating in leadership roles.

Low Literacy Levels Among Adult Women

Bhutan fares extremely well with regard to enhancing educational attainment for children, however adult literacy rate is low. Literacy rate among adults remains low and further there is a vast gender gap in literacy. According to the Population and Housing Census, 2005 Bhutan the literacy rate for men was 65% compared to 38.7% for women (National Statistical Bureau 2005), which is low even by regional standards. As such, number of women participating and competing for leadership positions where there is a minimum academic qualification criterion is less. However, optimistic aspect is that literacy rates among youth including females are significantly high, and adult literacy levels will climb rapidly soon. Sadly, another study shows that girls perform poorly in math and science subjects in nine and tenth standards and reduces their chances of getting admitted in government funded higher secondary schools, and likewise, the participation of girls also drops in tertiary education (Asian Development Bank 2014). For instance, the same research also indicated that the percentage of girls in tertiary institutions under the Royal University of Bhutan was 40.4% in 2012. The percentage was much lower at 24% in technical colleges. So without equitable access to quality education and higher education, women will not have the means to knowledge, skills, values and capacity to access to formal job sector and attain leadership positions. Therefore, educational attainment is the primary requirement for empowering women in all sections of society and lack of higher education remains one of the barriers for women to attain higher positions.

Table 5: Literacy Rates by Sex

	Percentage literate, age 15+		Gender Gap (male–female)
	Men	Women	
Urban	80.4	59.6	20.8
Rural	57.5	29.2	28.3
All	65.0	38.7	26.4

Source: *Population and Housing Census of Bhutan, 2005*.

For example, one of the requirements for a candidate to contest for national elections is to possess a university degree from a recognized university or college. Literacy requirement is considered relevant for the candidates for their ability to function as qualified and capable politicians (Dhlerup 2014). This is a structural gender barrier as the adult literacy rate for women referring to Table 5 is almost half of that of men in the country. As such, aspiring women may not have the level of education requirement to participate for the position of leadership position.

Women with Family Responsibilities/ Motherhood Myth

“If women don’t care enough for their children, they know their children risk neglect. If men don’t care enough, they know their wives will” (Toynbee 1988). For many Bhutanese women, this statement holds true. Raising children, taking care of family, performing domestic household works are assumed to be the responsibilities of women. As such, women having children are not entertained and discriminated often in job hiring, training and promotions. For instance, women are not considered appropriate for certain roles, as they are not available for the night shift due to family duties. Many women around the world still reconsider their personal lives while planning their lifetime profession (Singh and Prasad 2014). One of the most obvious barriers for women to emerge as leaders is that they have to disproportionately bear the responsibility of household management and bringing up children (Messick and Kramer 2005).

Many societies still believe that that a good mother stays home with her children and a serious worker or a father is available all the time without apparent family commitments. Hence, it is not surprising that some women sacrifice their success in order to care for their families. Some women often choose types of works, which are of low-level responsibility to balance their work and family obligations (United Nations 2007). The household responsibilities and their low relative literacy rate as discussed above have hindered women's prospect of getting employed outside the home (National Statistical Bureau 2014). Even the Marriage Act of Bhutan 2009 states that children under the age of nine shall remain with mother in case of divorce unless the court finds compelling reasons to order otherwise (Parliament of Bhutan 2009). Further, in organizations women managers besides having their professional role are overloaded with parental role (Singh and Prasad 2014).

Therefore, one of the reasons that restrict women from achieving higher positions is this motherhood myth where women are associated with family obligations. The struggle between job and household chores has restrained women from expanding their professional careers to higher levels. Sociologists called this barrier the 'Maternal Wall' or the 'Motherhood Penalty', and mothers are often ranked as less competitive and less committed workers compared to childless women (FINSIA 2010). East Asia is considered as place where women's domestic and reproductive roles as wives and mothers predominate over other public roles (True, et al. 2012). Most of the women who achieved leadership positions were either divorced or never married (Kaminski and Pauly 2010). There is a substantial relationship between women with family responsibilities and women's advancement to leadership positions. The inflexibility of working hours from nine to five for many public and private offices is also seen as a barrier for working mothers to attend to both household and office works. Many organizations prefer employees with capability to endure long working hours and unbroken carriers (FINSIA 2010). Moving out of fulltime job for maternity reasons is generally considered as career suicide for those in professional and managerial ranks (CEDA 2013). However, mothers are the true leaders who ensure healthy functioning of families and managing all the necessities required for development.

Cultural and Traditional Beliefs

The perception of women as leaders is new to our nation as there were not many women holding powerful positions in the past. The ignorance is further reinforced by the cultural and traditional norms that are firmly entrenched in societies. In Bhutan, leaders have always been males and even today Table 1 points out that almost all the leaders in different government and corporation institutions in Bhutan are male. Traditionally, women worked on the farms and shouldered the responsibilities of family chores and making household level decisions in Bhutan (Tarayana Foundation 2009).

In many cases culture is used to justify the belief that women are passive, submissive, patient, and tolerant of monotonous work and violence (Hora 2014). On top of this, religions tend to cement these cultural norms. Women's under representation in leadership roles is associated with traditional beliefs that women's lack of physical strength and sexual vulnerability make them less capable than men. A traditional Buddhist belief that men are superior by nine lives than women further reinforces the view that women are inferior. For example, a friend of mine still refuses to share food with his wife from a same plate citing these traditional beliefs. It is a Buddhist belief that a woman has to live nine lives to reborn as man.

In Bhutanese socio-cultural perceptions, men are seen as more capable and confident than man, particularly in public sector where women are seen as physically weak and unsuitable (Choden 2012). It is also a cultural, traditional and religious reasoning that are usually used to justify that rightful place of women is not in politics (True, et al. 2012).

Men and women are equal in the eyes of the law in Bhutan. However, in reality it is surprising to note that Bhutanese women traditionally enjoy greater privileges in property inheritance, treatment and work than man (Tarayana Foundation 2009). The study also claims that these traditional privileges are now being considered as bottlenecks for women to attain leadership positions. It is because when women inherit the family properties, they are often compelled to take care of the properties and missed out higher education and formal job.

In Bhutanese community settings, traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes are still prevailing pertaining to the role and status of females. These culture and traditions reflect women as inferior to men, which makes it difficult for them and community as a whole to accept woman as leaders. Choden (2012) finds that women in Bhutan themselves often tend to agree with the prevailing cultural views which affects their access to education, employment and participation. Another research also shows that Bhutanese culture usually assume women as inferior to men and their work less significant, and because of this cultural attitude even today girls in schools consider themselves as less important than boys and do not expect to attain equal achievement (Black and Stalker 2006). Some women who were able to break these cultural and traditional barriers and ascent to leadership position, at most times had to juggle between cultural expectation and leadership roles (Kiamba 2008).

Religious Beliefs

The leaders in many religions are traditionally and historically male. For instance, Christianity till now had no female Pope and so it is in Buddhism where thousand Buddhas predicted be born are all males. It is not so different in Islam or Hindu. Women have never attained the highest position of authority in the religious world. Even the Priests in Christianity, Lamas in Buddhism, Mullahs in Islam, Pandits in Hindu, which are the senior ranks in these religious sphere were men and still are men. There is a peculiar inferiority attached to women all over the world based on religious bias (Dhammananda 1980) and Buddhism, which is the state religion of Bhutan, has a similar standing. For instance looking at the monastic body in Bhutan, the religious administration and governance exclusively belong to men. However, it is encouraging to note woman Bishops and other few influential religious women making change in the world.

There has not been even a single female leader till now in the Bhutanese monastic body. It is a tradition in majority of the Buddhist Asian countries to not accept women to apply for and the high rank levels of authority, and most of the countries believe that women are inferior, weak and obstacles in the path of enlightenment (Goodwin 2012). In Buddhist histories, it is found that only men's achievements are told, and even in today's Buddhist institutions women have a very less voice (Tshomo 2004). She also claims that most Buddhist institutions are patriarchal in nature and express

greater respect to men than women. Negative views of women are common in Buddhist cultures, and some of the associated views are women are evil, weak, less intelligent and less capable (Goodwin 2012). Such negative views of women prevent women from participating in social and public engagements.

The history of Bhutan is closely linked with the development of Buddhist culture in the Himalayan region, and it is one of the last places on Earth where the Vajrayana form of Mahayana Buddhism is practiced (Scott 2009). Bhutan is a deeply spiritual country, where religious customs strongly influence people's values. Bhutan's cultural identity is deeply rooted in Buddhism.

All temples in Bhutan do not allow women to enter into their sacred shrine because women are considered as religiously unclean due to their menstrual periods. Infact, this custom cannot find any support in the actual Buddhist teachings, but commonly passed as customs (Kabilsingh 1998). She also claims that according to Hindu texts women are seen as a weaker and dependent sex who cannot make their own decision. Most Buddhist considers men superior by nine lifetimes as described earlier. Such religious beliefs that consider women as weaker and inferior make them less capable and less confident than men. In addition, the ideal woman in Buddhist culture is a faithful spouse and dedicated mother rather than working member of a community (Tshomo 2004). For example, the present Dalia Lama (one of the highly respected Buddhist leaders) is the 14th political and spiritual leader of Tibet recognized through reincarnation. Why has there not been any female reincarnation of the Dalia Lama till now? It is these Buddhist cultures and beliefs about leadership that women are not considered even to be reincarnated or born as leaders. Such religious obstacles that hold females from getting executive levels are sometimes referred to as 'stained glass ceiling' (Ngunjiri and Baker 2012), and Bhutanese women are often hindered by 'stained glass ceiling' while progressing to leadership positions. On the contrary, it is the traditional values and religious beliefs that keeps our unique culture flourishing and safeguards our national sovereignty.

Early Marriage and Childbirth

The Marriage Act of Bhutan 2009 states that the minimum age for marriage is 18 years (Parliament of Bhutan 2009), however a study in 2006 found that around 5% of boys and 14% of girls under the age of 18 were married and teenage marriage is still common (Black and Stalker 2006). Early marriage has left many girls stuck with children at home even before they are adequately matured. Generally, young women are deprived of opportunities of schooling and employment because of early childbirth besides posing higher risk for both mother and child (World Economic Forum 2013). Staying out of employment to raise children means lost of opportunities for knowledge, skills and values that are required for the senior jobs. Even in Buddhist cultures, girls are seen as vulnerable to pregnancy and marriage and do not get equal education as other boys (Tshomo 2004).

Absence of Gender Quotas and Reservations

There is a significant improvement in women's political representation in Asian countries at both national and local level because of gender quotas and reservations (True, et al. 2012). From Table 2 in the Case Study, it can be seen that most of the neighboring South Asian countries have high representation of women in the parliament. However, the increase in percentage of women participation in politics is mainly due to application of women quotas or reserved seats for women in the parliament. For example, Afghanistan guarantees 2 reserved seats for women per province, Pakistan has 33%, and Bangladesh has 13% while India and Nepal both have 33% each (True, et al. 2012). A women quota has been the main tool in facilitating women's access to executives, especially the parliament. Meanwhile, Bhutan does not have legislated quotas and reserved seats for women for executive positions like other countries. The absence of such measures has been often cited as a reason for low number of women in decision-making positions. However, draft legislation has been prepared to ensure women participation in elected offices, which will be presented to the parliament for endorsement (Asian Development Bank 2014).

Therefore, such policy support is needed for women to assist them in persuasion of leadership roles even outside political sphere. However, by looking at India and

Bangladesh in Table 3, success of women representation in leadership position is not secured by quotas. In this countries traditional and patriarchal values prevail even gender quotas and reserved seats are provided towards advancement of women leadership (Norris and Inglechart 2008).

Inclusion of women in executive positions through quotas and other fast-track policies are vital to increase the opportunities, but it can be also argued that this kind of fast-track policies to achieve equal representation further discriminate the women's potential. The introduction of fast-track policy system has increased the representation of women in higher positions in many nations, however such measures further increase the conception of women's inability to emerge as leaders. Will women never be able to attain the men's horizon of success if such measures are not adopted? Women should prove their equableness to men by exhibiting their capabilities and leadership without adhering to measures such as quota. Women are given the positions to fill the reserved numbers and not because of their capability, violating the principle of merit. For example in companies, it forces them to recruit women who may not have the capacity for the sake of gaining the number in statistics and would later hamper the companies' success (CEDA 2013). While it is important to encourage women to participate in leadership positions through quotas and reserved seats, it is more critical to invest same support to women's education and employment. Such system also place women in compromising position and makes them give up their indigenous and cultural values just to get the numbers of women in key positions elevated.

Lack of Mentoring and Networking

Lack of mentoring and networking in a work culture is another barrier that hinders the career development of women, and also argues that it is men's association and interaction with their male colleagues that play a vital role in their rise to power and prestige, hence giving less opportunities for women to progress to executives (Dworkin, Ramaswami and Schipani 2013). It can be seen from Table 1 and earlier sections that in most of the organizations, it is men who hold majority of the executive positions. Therefore, there is the shortage of critical mass of senior and visibly successful female role models and mentors, which undermines women's motivation for gender parity and progression into higher levels. It also limits the exposure of

public, especially youths to women in leadership roles. According to CEDA (2013), people making appointment for leadership roles are likely to recruit candidates who resemble them in character.

Women are also excluded from informal social gatherings, which limits women's opportunity to develop connections with their male leaders. Jakobsh (2004) for instance cites the game of golf as an example for informal social gatherings where women are usually excluded. She says that most deals are advanced on the golf course and sealed in the boardroom. The same can be said with regard to the game of archery, the national game of Bhutan where only men participate in the games. Mentoring and networking is effective in fostering awareness of women's limitations and empower them to manage their career advancement in male-centric organization (McKinsy & Company 2008). Further, mentoring and networking gives more professional exposure and is also successful in retaining and expanding female talent pool within organizations. Singh and Prasad (2014) claim that majority of the working women credited the inability to advance their career to inadequate access to networking with influential associates.

The Confidence Gap

A research done by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) shows that out of many girls and boys aspiring to be the President of United States in their early age, only 15% of the girls sticks to their ambition compared to boys (CEDA 2013). The research also claims that out of five selection criteria, men apply for job when they meet two of those while women wait for four criteria to be fulfilled. The research was done to examine why women continue to be under represented in leadership positions. This shows that lack of self-confidence and determination to pursue their ambitions is often reflected during women's entrance to workforce. Multiple studies describe that women generally underestimate their capacities and fear that they will do worst when compared with male counterparts during promotions (Kay and Shipman 2014, FINSIA 2014). They say that when men and women rate themselves on their ability, women on average rate 6.5 out of 10 whereas men rate 7.6. Confidence and determination are as equally important as competence to accomplish success and prosper to higher ranks, and because of such self-doubt women often turn down the opportunities. It has also been argued that women

themselves are often reluctant to take up leadership positions owing to some cultural prohibitions (Kiamba 2008). A study by FINSIA (2010) shows that when asked whether was it possible for women to reach leadership positions in male dominated company, 61% of women disagreed while 85% men agreed. These studies indicate that women lack self-confidence and determination to progress to executive levels.

One of the contributing factors for low representation of women in the national parliament of Bhutan during its two general elections was lack of confidence among women to take a public role (Asian Development Bank 2014). It is also reflected in the same paper that the low number of women entrepreneurs is often due to the limited confidence women had on their own capabilities and ideas. When asked if there were any perceived challenges that prevent women from registering themselves as candidates for electoral process, the majority of the voters referred lack of self confidence and fears of incompetence in decision making as obstacles in women standing as candidates for election (Election Commission of Bhutan 2014). As such, the lack of self-confidence or the presence of self-doubt is one of the reasons for having a less number of women in executives.

Initiatives and Policies for Women Empowerment

Since there are many barriers that hinder women to emerge as leaders, Bhutan is taking many initiatives to promote and encourage equal representation of women in all spheres of society. Some of the initiatives and policies for women empowerment are given in Table 6.

Table 6: Initiatives and Policies for Women Empowerment

<p>Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Article 7, Clause 15: All persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal and effective protection of the law and shall not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, sex, language, religion, politics or other status. 2. Article 8, Clause 5: A person shall not tolerate or participate in acts of injury, torture or killing of another person, terrorism, abuse of women, children or any other person and shall take necessary steps to prevent such acts. 3. Article 9, Clause 3: The State shall endeavour to create a civil society free of oppression, discrimination and violence, based on the rule of law, protection of human rights and dignity, and to ensure the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people. 4. Article 9, Clause 17: The State shall endeavour to take appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination and exploitation against women including trafficking, prostitution, abuse, violence, harassment and intimidation at work in both public and private spheres.
<p>The Eleventh Five-Year Plan Targets</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Draft legislation to ensure quota for women in elected offices including the Parliament and local government bodies. 2. Ratio of females to males in tertiary education—ensure at least 90% female to male ratio in tertiary education. 3. Female youth unemployment—reduce female unemployment from 7.2% to less than 5%. 4. Agencies with gender sensitive policies and/or gender mainstreaming strategies—at least 20 agencies implementing gender sensitive policies and/or gender mainstreaming strategies.
<p>As one of the initiatives to remove gender stereotyping, all school textbooks are now being reviewed for any content that is gender sensitivity (Tarayana Foundation 2009).</p>
<p>Establishment of Bhutan Network for Empowering Women in 2012 to strengthen the skills, network and confidence of women in politics and encourage more women to partake in politics.</p>
<p>Establishment of RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women in 2004</p>

to empower disadvantaged women and girls in Bhutan.

Conclusion

Women leadership is critical to ensure inclusive communal decision-making. Human development is sustainable only if there is equal participation of both men and women in economic, political and social activities of a community (Mongella 2003). With the introduction of democracy in recent years, it is important for women to participate in politics so that Bhutan establishes a vibrant democracy. There are many programs emphasizing the empowerment of women in Bhutan, but there are also many factors and barriers that keep women from achieving power and success equal to that of men. One should take into account the form of governance, its political culture, population, socioeconomic and cultural factors that shape the gender roles to understand the barriers of women leadership of a community (True, et al. 2012). The statistics show that the women at top level are rare and the numbers are hardly increasing.

Current scenario in Bhutan seems like majority of the population support the notion that it is better for the family if the father is employed and the mother takes care of the majority of parental responsibilities and activities. In many key organizations and institutions, executive positions remain populated by men. Lack of confidence and trust in women reinforced by cultural and religious belief that male are superior than female is one of the main schemas instigating publics and societies to impede women from achieving leadership roles. As noted in the case study, political representation of women in the national parliament is low compared to regional and global averages. However, it is also important to track the participation of women in leadership positions outside the political world.

It is evident from the above findings that women still face numerous obstacles in advancing their career enhancement. Some of the identified barriers are occupational segregation, sex discrimination, low literacy and high unemployment rate for female, family responsibilities, early marriage, cultural and religious beliefs and absence of female quotas for executive positions. There are significant relationships between the barriers described above and women's progression to leadership roles. A study also supports that most women are not ambitious for executive positions and do not

aggressively pursue their profession (Messick and Kramer 2005), and this could also be another reason for less number of women representation in leadership roles. These barriers must be eliminated to ensure that women are able to climb the ladder of career to the highest rung.

It is clear that Bhutan has a long way to achieve gender equality in leadership positions. Although, there have been many barriers that restricted women from entering leadership roles, many measures were taken to improve the conditions of women. For example, National Women's Association of Bhutan was established in 1981 as non-governmental organization to look into the socio-economic welfare of women in the country (Gopalan 2012). Despite many international and national commitments to promoting gender equality in leadership positions, the traditional stereotypes still remain.

Kiamba (2008) puts forward that there is no country around the globe that has achieved true gender-equality. As such, it is important our country develop successful strategies, policies and regulatory mechanism to address gender inequality so that women also have the same opportunity and equal access to achieve the highest positions.

“Until women and girls are liberated from poverty and injustice, all our goals – peace, security, sustainable development – stand in jeopardy.” Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon, United Nations.

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Photos of Current Women Leaders of Bhutan



*Lyonpo Dorji Choden,
First Female Minister*



*Namgay Zam, Freelance
Reporter/Activist*



*Dasho Gaki, the first
female red scarf recipient*



*Namgay Pelden, the first
female Gup*



*Nawang Pem, the first
female Dzongda*



*Tashi Chenzom, the first
female supreme court judge*



*Chimi Wangmo, ED of
RENEW Organisation &
Phintsho Choden, ED,
NCWC*



*Dasho Neten Zangmo,
the first female Chief,
Anti-corruption
commission*



*Aum Pema Choden, the
female ambassador*



*Sangay Zam, Secretary of
Education Ministry*



*Lily Wangchuk,
President of Political
Party*



*Kesang C Namgyel, the
first ambassador*

TRASHI DELEK