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PARLIAMENT OF BHUTAN



Foreward

The Parliament of Bhutan, represented by the National Council and National Assembly Secretariats, is pleased to present the Parliament-CSO Engagement Guideline. This Guideline is designed to support the implementation of the Parliament's Collaboration Strategy with Bhutan's Civil Society Organizations ("CSOs").

It establishes a structured framework for cooperation between the Parliament of Bhutan and CSOs. The framework results from extensive consultations with Parliamentarians, Parliamentary staff, and CSO representatives guided by the Parliament and Civil Society Organizations- A Strategy Document. It reflects a shared commitment to fostering a more informed, transparent, and inclusive democracy.

The guidelines outline principles for effective engagement, a two-tiered coordination mechanism to facilitate activities, and various interaction channels, including committee meetings, consultation meetings, public hearings, and roundtable discussions, Parliament-CSO meetings, and petitions.

Through this collaboration, the Parliament and CSOs can significantly contribute to the Parliament's vision of a more inclusive and representative legislature, and more broadly to Bhutan's development. We believe these guidelines will pave the way for a more institutionalized and effective system of engagement, ultimately benefitting all Bhutanese citizens.

We encourage Parliamentarians, Parliamentary staff, and CSO representatives to familiarize themselves with these guidelines and actively participate in the outlined opportunities for collaboration.

(Duba)

Secretary General
National Assembly of Bhutan

(Tenzin Thinely)

Secretary General
National Council of Bhutan

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1. Introduction

As enshrined in the Bhutanese constitution mandating public participation (Article 10(2)), the Parliament of Bhutan recognizes Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) role in a functioning democracy. This also aligns well with the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s (IPU) core values of fostering a robust and inclusive environment for collaborating with CSOs.

2. Purpose

This Guideline establishes a framework for engagement which followed extensive consultations aimed at moving towards a more formalized and institutionalized form. Through collaboration with CSOs, Parliament aims to achieve its vision of a highly responsive and inclusive legislature. Capacity development is identified as another important area of support. This combined approach will translate the Engagement Guideline into action and pave the way for a more inclusive and institutionalized system of engagement between Parliament and CSOs in Bhutan. The Guidelines elaborate on **the Parliament-CSO Engagement Strategy** and aim to guide parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, and CSO representatives in deciding when and how to engage with each other. It may also interest anyone keen on learning about Parliament-CSO Engagement in Bhutan.

3. Acknowledgments

This Guideline was developed through consultations with Hon’ble Members of Parliament, civil society organizations, and parliamentary staff, with support from the Bhutan Transparency Initiative (BTI). It was financially supported by the European Union under the project “Towards Empowering Bhutanese CSOs for Good Governance & Inclusive Development,” led by Save the Children with BTI and RENEW, and technically assisted by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

4. Principles of Engagement

These principles guide productive collaboration, fostering a more informed, transparent, and inclusive democracy:

- i. **Mutual Respect:** Acknowledge and respect the roles of each party; including common principles of support to Parliaments and autonomy of CSOs.
- ii. **Finding Common Grounds:** Acknowledge the potential for differing viewpoints and work towards finding common ground within the limitations of each institution’s mandate.
- iii. **Trust and Transparency:** Build trust through transparency in communication and decision-making processes.
- iv. **Inclusivity:** Ensure equal participation opportunities for the Parliament and the CSOs.
- v. **Accountability:** Be accountable for commitments made.
- vi. **Continuous Learning:** Promote ongoing learning and capacity building for both the Parliament and the CSOs to enhance their collaboration skills.

5. Implementation Mechanism

To lead and facilitate the effective implementation of the Guideline, a two- tiered coordination mechanism is recommended:

- i. Core Coordination Group – Tier-one
- ii. Thematic Coordination Group – Tier-two

I. Core Coordination Group

The group will have the overall purpose to:

- Oversee the effective implementation of the Parliament-CSO Engagement Guideline.

- Foster collaborative and productive interactions between Parliament and CSOs.

The Core Coordination Group shall consist of:

Agency	Focal
National Assembly	Chief Media & Communications (Engagement) Officer
National Council	Assistant Research Officer in charge of Parliament Engagement
CSO Coordination Group	Two CSO Representatives to the CSOA (interim, until nominated)

The group’s responsibilities include:

- **Planning and Development:**
 - Develop annual plans and strategies for Parliament-CSO engagement activities, aligned with the guidelines.
 - Facilitate the identification of themes and topics for Parliament-CSO discussions, considering national priorities and CSO concerns.
 - Define the format and scope of Parliament-CSO engagement activities (e.g., annual meets, and thematic workshops).
 - Conduct periodic review of the Parliament-CSO Engagement Guideline.
- **Outreach and Communication:**
 - Develop and implement communication strategies to create awareness among Parliamentarians and CSOs about engagement opportunities.
 - Collaborate with Parliament’s communication team to disseminate information on Parliament-CSO activities.
 - Facilitate communication between the Parliament and the CSOs,

- addressing inquiries and concerns.
- o Develop communication materials (e.g., brochures, website content) to guide Parliamentarians and CSOs on engagement procedures.
 - **Coordination and Facilitation:**
 - o Coordinate logistics for Parliament-CSO engagement activities (venue booking, participant registration, etc.).
 - o Facilitate meetings and workshops, ensuring productive discussions and clear outcomes.
 - o Identify and invite relevant resource persons and experts for Parliament-CSO discussions.
 - o Oversee the documentation of Parliament-CSO engagement activities (minutes, reports, etc.).
 - **Monitoring and Evaluation:**
 - o Monitor the implementation of the Parliament-CSO Engagement Guideline.
 - o Evaluate the effectiveness of Parliament-CSO engagement activities, assessing their impact on policy and legislation.
 - o Identify areas for improvement and propose revisions to the guidelines or planning strategies.
 - **Relationship Building:**
 - o Foster positive and trusting relationships between Parliamentarians and CSO representatives.
 - o Encourage open and respectful dialogue between both parties.
 - o Identify opportunities for ongoing collaboration on issues of national significance.

Individual Responsibilities:

- **National Assembly Focal:**

- Represent the National Assembly within the Core Coordination Group.
- Coordinate with relevant National Assembly committees and leadership on Parliament-CSO engagement activities.

- **National Council Focal:**

- Represent the National Council within the Core Coordination Group.
- Coordinate with relevant National Council committees and leadership on Parliament-CSO engagement activities.

- **CSO Coordination Group Focal:**

- Represent the CSO Coordination Group within the Core Coordination Group.
- Facilitate communication and information sharing among CSOs regarding Parliament-CSO engagement opportunities.
- Advocate for the interests of CSOs within the Parliament-CSO engagement framework.

Additional Considerations:

- i. The group should operate transparently, keeping parliamentarians, CSOs, and other stakeholders including CSOA informed about its activities and decisions.
- ii. Regular meetings are crucial to ensure effective coordination and communication within the group.
- iii. The Core Coordination Group can leverage the Thematic Coordination Group and other existing resources within the Parliament and the CSOs to facilitate its work.

I. Thematic Coordination Group

The group will have the overall purpose to:

- Support the Core Coordination Group in the effective implementation of the Parliament-CSO Engagement Guideline.
- Foster collaborative and productive interactions between Parliamentary Committees and Thematic CSO groups.

The Thematic Coordination Group focal persons shall be identified and formalized. Refer to *Annexure A: Parliamentary Committees and Thematic CSO Groups*.

The group’s responsibilities include:

- **Planning and Development:**
 - Develop plans and strategies for Committee and Thematic CSO Group engagement activities, aligned with the guidelines, wherever possible.
 - Facilitate Committee and Thematic CSO Group engagement activities (e.g., outreach, consultations, and thematic workshops).
 - Contribute to periodic review of the Parliament-CSO Engagement Guideline.
- **Outreach and Communication:**
 - Collaborate with Parliament’s communication team to disseminate information on the Committee and Thematic CSO Group activities.
 - Facilitate communication between the Committee and Thematic CSO Group, addressing inquiries and concerns.
 - Develop communication materials (e.g., brochures, website

content) to guide the Committee and Thematic CSO Group on engagement procedures.

- **Coordination and Facilitation:**

- Coordinate logistics for Committee and Thematic CSO Group activities (venue booking, participant registration, etc.).
- Facilitate meetings and workshops, ensuring productive discussions and clear outcomes.
- Oversee the documentation of the Committee and Thematic CSO Group engagement activities (minutes, reports, etc.).

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:**

- Assist the Core Coordination Group in monitoring the implementation of the Parliament-CSO Engagement Guideline.
- Assist in evaluating the effectiveness of Parliament-CSO engagement activities, and assessing their impact on policy and legislation.
- Identify areas for improvement and propose revisions to the guideline or planning strategies.

- **Relationship Building:**

- Foster positive and trusting relationships between the Committee and Thematic CSO Group.
- Encourage open and respectful dialogue between both parties.
- Identify opportunities for ongoing collaboration on issues of national significance.

Individual Responsibilities:

- **Committee Focal, National Assembly:**
 - Represent the National Assembly within the Thematic Coordination Group.
 - Coordinate with relevant National Assembly committees and leadership on the Committee and Thematic CSO Group engagement activities.

- **Committee Focal, National Council:**
 - Represent the National Council within the Thematic Coordination Group.
 - Coordinate with relevant National Council committees and leadership on the Committee and Thematic CSO Group engagement activities.

- **Thematic CSO Group Focal:**
 - Represent the Thematic CSO Group within the Thematic Coordination Group.
 - Facilitate communication and information sharing among CSOs regarding the Committee and Thematic CSO Group engagement opportunities.
 - Advocate for the interests of Thematic CSO Group within the Committee and Thematic CSO Group engagement framework.

Additional Considerations:

- i. The group should operate transparently, keeping the Committees, Thematic CSO Groups, the Core Coordination Group and other stakeholders including the CSOA informed about its activities and decisions.

- ii. Regular meetings are crucial to ensure effective coordination and Communication within the group.
- iii. The Thematic Coordination Group can leverage existing resources within the Parliament and the CSOs to facilitate its work.

6. Legal Framework

Bhutan’s legal framework encourages collaboration between the Parliament and the CSOs, driven by the essential roles CSOs have and could play, and a clear legal mandate for public engagement in parliamentary functions. Key legal provisions include:

Table 1: Legal Framework

Law	Provision
The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, Article 10(2)	Mandates Parliament to ensure the government safeguards national interests and fulfills public aspirations through public review processes.
National Council Act of Bhutan, section 7	Emphasizes the National Council’s role in publicly reviewing policies, legislation, and government functions
National Assembly Act of Bhutan, section 5	Highlights the National Assembly’s responsibility to hold the government accountable in public
Civil Society Act of Bhutan, sections 5(a), (c), (d), (f), and (g)	Establishes the government’s support for a strong civil society that serves the public good, protects national interests, promotes social welfare, and collaborates with the government.

Additionally, provisions flowing down from these Acts of Parliament in the form of Rules of Procedure of the two Houses of Parliament, Committee Rules, Oversight Manual, and Public Hearing Manual contain provisions that envision inclusion and transparency in legislation.

7. Engagement

Effective communication channels are crucial for committees to gather evidence from CSOs. This information helps committees understand the issues at hand and make informed decisions. However, different channels have their strengths, hence, committees and CSOs should choose the most appropriate method based on the specific goals of the engagement. A brief guidance is shared below:

7.1. Deciding on the Channel of Engagement

- **Define the Engagement:** Clearly define the problem statement, objectives, and expected outcomes of the intended engagement.
- **Match Objectives and Channels:** Refer to the Engagement Channel Matrix to identify the channel that best aligns with the engagement objectives (e.g., information sharing, gathering feedback, collaboration).
- **Consider Additional Factors:** Take into account factors like topic complexity, public interest level, and time constraints (refer to the previous section for details).
- **Collaborative Decision-Making:** Parliament and CSO focal points should consult and reach a mutually agreeable decision on the most suitable channel.

Table 1: Engagement Channel Matrix

Information Flow: Parliament to CSOs	Information Flow: CSOs to Parliament	On-going Engagement Channels (useable anytime)
Session Agendas & Background Materials	Petition lodged	
Round Table Discussions Plan & Report	Presentations, Networking	Social Media (Updates, Discussions)
Seminars & Workshops (Capacity Building)	Informal Consultations	Online Platforms (Forums, Surveys)
Committee Meeting Schedules & Reports	Oral Testimonies	Regular Reporting Mechanisms
Public Hearing Notices, Background Documents, Report	Written Submissions, Oral Testimonies	Expert Briefings (Issue-Specific)
Parliament-CSO Meeting Agendas & Outcomes	Agendas, Presentation	
	Meetings with MPs	
Workshops & Training (Joint Learning)	Joint Advocacy Initiatives	Long-Term Partnerships (Joint Projects)
Annual Retreats (Strategic Planning)	Feedback/Session Outcome Reports	Knowledge Exchange Platforms (Shared Resources)
Joint Research Projects	Capacity Building Programs (CSO Training)	Joint Monitoring & Evaluation Initiatives

The table above presents an expanded approach to Parliament-CSO collaboration channels, focusing on the direction of information flow and incorporating channels for ongoing engagement that are usable anytime.

7.2. Channels of Engagement

7.2.1. Committee Meetings

Laws impact our lives significantly and thorough consideration is crucial before their passage. Parliament is constantly dealing with new laws and amendments requiring informed decisions on various societal aspects. To ensure this, committees have become an efficient and vital tool. Committees, with their designated areas of focus, form the backbone of any parliament including Bhutan's. These specialized committees perform three key functions: proposing new laws, revising existing ones, and overseeing government performance.

When a committee receives a Bill or is tasked with reviewing a specific issue, they typically hold meetings. These meetings help the committee members understand the Bill's intent, objectives, resource needs, expected outcomes, and perspectives of stakeholders and experts. Further, committee meetings with external parties can take several forms depending on the decision of the committee which is influenced by the goal as well as the subject matter under consideration. Any committee meeting is almost always preceded by a presentation on the Bill by the sponsoring organization. Having understood the proposed Bill, the committee next turns to different stakeholder engagement approaches in gathering perspectives and evidence including committee meetings. This is called the committee stage and normally follows the adoption of a Bill into the agenda of the parliament and its assignment to a committee by the parliament.

An important point to remember is that committees do not make decisions during these meetings. Decisions are made within the committee later which could take the form of recommendations to parliament including legislative action and are voted on by parliament for an outcome.

While there are different parliamentary practices in gathering evidence from stakeholders and expert opinions, including CSOs, we will limit them to the ones identified in the Parliament-CSO Engagement Strategy which are consultation meetings, round table discussions or public hearings, the choice of use, in turn, depends on the nature of the matter, availability of time and resources and the objective of the meeting.

A. Consultation Meeting: Discussing Proposed Laws with CSOs

Consultation meetings are a crucial and regular feature of Parliament’s work where Committees meet stakeholders and gather information. This part of the legislative process assesses the potential impact of a proposed law **before it is passed** or tries to understand how well it is working in case of an existing law, and if any adjustments are needed **after a law comes into effect**. CSOs in their unique positions may be asked to contribute to consultations where relevant.

a. Planning:

- Identify the exact issue requiring consultation.
- Define the desired outcomes of the consultation (e.g., collect feedback on a proposed or implemented policy, gain expert insights).
- Identify relevant participants with expertise on the topic.
- Schedule the consultation, including date, time, location (in-person or virtual), and any audio-visual equipment needs.
- Prepare a document summarizing the topic, relevant background

information, and any proposals for consideration (Brief for Members of Parliament).

- Ensure inclusivity by addressing the physical or communication needs of participants.

b. Communication:

- Send invitations outlining the meeting purpose, date, time, and location (including a virtual link if applicable). Specify how participants can contribute in advance (e.g., by submitting written materials beforehand).
- Send background materials well in advance if applicable.

c. Engagement:

- Introduce committee members and external stakeholders briefly.
- Review the agenda and highlight key discussion points.
- Facilitate the conversation, ensuring all stakeholders have the opportunity to share their perspectives and ask questions.
- Maintain focus and keep the discussion on track with the schedule.
- Record key points and action items during the discussions
- Summarize the main points and action items identified during the meeting.
- Outline the next steps for processing the feedback received, including communicating potential outcomes to stakeholders.

d. Frequency and Follow-up:

- Finalize and circulate meeting minutes to all participants, summarizing key discussions and action items.
- Hold consultations whenever parliament initiates one or approves a request from a CSO.
- Update stakeholders on the committee’s decisions or progress on the consultation topic.

e. Roles and Responsibilities:

i. Committee Chair:

- Deliver opening remarks welcoming participants.
- Facilitate introductions for committee members and stakeholders.
- Guide the consultation meeting to achieve objectives.
- Conclude the meeting by summarizing key points and next steps.

ii. Committee:

- Engage with stakeholders by actively listening to their concerns and responding thoughtfully.
- Ask questions to clarify points or explore different perspectives.

iii. CSOs:

- Share positions and arguments with clarity and objectivity, ensuring the committee fully understands the CSO's perspective.
- Pose well-considered questions to the committee to seek clarification and gain deeper insights into the issue at hand.
- Provide thoughtful responses to questions from committee members substantiated with information wherever possible.

iv. The Core Coordination Group:

Committee Secretary:

- Coordinate logistics and secure necessary resources (e.g., room bookings, equipment, catering).
- Enhance effective participation by CSOs (e.g., by providing clear instructions, and addressing accessibility needs).
- Disseminate the brief to the Committee members (in advance of the meeting).
- Record and circulate key points and summarize the discussion.

- Follow-up where additional information is to be gathered after the meeting for update to the committee.

Thematic CSO Focal:

- Mobilize CSOs in the theme group to actively participate in the consultation (e.g., by promoting the event, encouraging member participation, and providing guidance on how to contribute).
- Collaborate with the Committee Secretary to facilitate effective participation by CSOs (e.g., by identifying accessibility needs, coordinating pre-consultation briefings, and suggesting helpful resources for CSOs).

B. Public Hearing: Gathering Public Input on Proposed Laws

Public hearings often follow consultation meetings, further solidifying the groundwork laid during those initial discussions. Unlike consultations, public hearings are **open to the public** and happen in a formal setting. It not only allows the committee to gather and confirm information on the intentions and impacts of policies and legislations but importantly, **fosters transparency** by conducting effective oversight and scrutiny of governing functioning in public view. CSOs can play an important role in this process by tapping into their vast network and first-hand experience working with Bhutanese communities. Committees may call upon CSOs to serve as witnesses or experts, injecting diverse perspectives into the discussion and ensuring well-informed decision-making for both legislative as well as oversight public hearings.

a. Planning

- Formulate clear problem statements.
- Brief the committee on the consultation topic and objectives.
- Identify relevant CSOs to participate as witnesses or experts.

- Finalize the agenda, time, venue, and target audience.
- Develop a comprehensive communication plan:
 - o Define the objectives of the communication strategy.
 - o Identify the target audience.
 - o Craft key messages to be communicated.
 - o Select appropriate communication channels (e.g., media releases, social media, website).
 - o Compile an initial briefing book for participants.
- Issue summon notices with the agenda, time, and venue information.
- Implement pre-hearing communication activities to raise awareness and encourage participation.

b. Hearing:

- Deliver opening remarks by the Committee Chair.
- Preside over the hearing, ensuring order and adherence to the agenda.
- Invite witnesses to present their testimony.
- Facilitate introductions for each witness.
- Place the witness’s testimony on the official record.
- Guide the witness through their testimony, ensuring clarity and focus.
- Open the floor for questions from the committee members.
- Moderate the question-and-answer session, ensuring fairness and time management.
- Deliver closing remarks by the Committee Chair, summarizing key points and next steps.

c. Frequency and Follow-up:

- Plan public hearings as decided by the Committee.
- Conduct public hearings as part of a committee inquiry.

- Integrate findings from the public hearings into the committee report to Parliament.
- Facilitate Parliament’s decision-making process based on the committee report and public hearing output.

For quick guidance on the Public Hearing process, refer to *Annexure B: Public Hearing Checklist*

d. Roles and Responsibilities

i. Committee:

- Develop a clear and concise problem statement for the public hearing.
- Finalize the agenda, time, venue, and target audience for the public hearing.
- Identify relevant CSOs to participate as witnesses or experts, ensuring expertise aligns with the public hearing’s focus.
- Gather evidence and information to prepare for the hearing (e.g., background materials, and potential questions for witnesses).
- Issue summons notices with the agenda, time, and venue information.
- Develop and finalize a comprehensive communication plan to raise awareness of the hearing.
- Uphold Conflict of Interest provisions by ensuring committee members with potential conflicts abstain from participation.
- Preside over the public hearing, ensuring order and adherence to the agenda.

ii. CSO:

- Contribute evidence documents and/or records to support their testimony.
- Deliver testimony as a witness or expert, sharing their knowledge and perspective on the issue.

- Engage with committee members by providing clear and concise answers to their questions.

iii. CSOA:

- Facilitate CSO participation in the hearing

iv. News Media:

- Assist in announcing the public hearing, generating public awareness and interest.
- Assist in providing comprehensive coverage of the public hearing, including pre-hearing interviews, live reporting during the event, and post-hearing analysis.
- Assist by reporting on the outcome of the public hearing, including Parliament’s decision and its potential implications.

v. Thematic Coordination Committee:

Committee Secretary:

- Compile, synthesize and secure evidence gathered from witnesses.
- Provide the committee with a comprehensive initial brief containing relevant information.
- Circulate summon notices with the agenda, time, and venue information.
- Coordinate and implement pre-hearing communication activities to raise awareness and encourage participation.
- Act as a liaison for witnesses, providing guidance and addressing any questions or concerns.
- Maintain and secure accurate records of the public hearing proceedings and publish them on time.

Thematic CSO Group Focal:

- Empower CSO participation in the hearing by:
 - o Disseminating information about the hearing and encouraging CSO involvement.
 - o Providing training or resources to prepare CSOs for effective testimony.
 - o Liaising with the Committee Secretary to address accessibility needs and ensure a smooth participation experience for CSOs.

C. Round Table Discussion: Exploring Diverse Perspectives on Issues

The Round Table Discussion format promotes dialogue in a smaller group setting. It will be useful in exploring complex topics by bringing together **Members of Parliament** and **Civil Society Organizations** to share their perspectives.

a. Planning:

- Identify the clear purpose of the discussion, including the specific issues you want to address and the desired outcomes.
- Identify participants who represent a broad range of perspectives and relevant expertise on the topic.
- Identify and onboard a facilitator to guide the discussion effectively.

b. Communication:

- Send invitations and follow up to confirm participation, ensuring a productive discussion.
- Circulate the agenda to all participants in advance.
- Distribute any relevant background information or reading materials to participants to enhance their understanding and facilitate discussion.
- Record key perspectives and discussion outcomes during the session.

- Circulate meeting minutes summarizing key points and action items to all participants.

c. Stakeholder Engagement:

- Start the discussion by introducing the topic, objectives, and ground rules. (facilitator)
- Guide the conversation with thought-provoking questions to stimulate participation. (facilitator)
- Facilitate a balanced discussion by ensuring equal opportunity for all participants to share their perspectives. (facilitator)
- Encourage active participation by asking open-ended questions, seeking clarification, and promoting respectful dialogue. (facilitator)

d. Frequency and Follow-Up:

- Plan roundtable discussions as needed for specific topics where a collaborative exchange of ideas would be beneficial.
- Circulate a follow-up report summarizing action items and next steps to all participants within the timeframe established during the discussion.
- Track progress on identified action items and communicate updates to participants, if applicable.

e. Roles and Responsibilities:

i. Parliamentary Committee:

- Initiate roundtable discussion for specific topics deemed appropriate.
- Finalize the agenda for the roundtable, ensuring it addresses key issues.
- Identify relevant CSOs to participate based on their expertise and perspectives.
- Engage actively in the discussion by contributing insights and

actively listening to other participants' views.

ii. CSOs:

- Attend the roundtable discussion and actively engage in the conversation.
- Share perspectives and any relevant information that contributes to the discussion's objective.
- Collaborate with other participants to develop constructive solutions and action plans.

iii. Facilitator:

- Start the discussion by introducing the topic, purpose, and objectives.
- Guide the conversation to ensure it progresses toward the desired outcomes.
- Facilitate a balanced discussion by ensuring equal opportunity for all participants to share their perspectives.
- Manage time effectively, keeping the discussion on track and within the allocated time frame.
- Summarize key points and conclude the discussion with a clear summary of the main takeaways and next steps.

iv. Thematic Coordination Group:

Committee Secretary:

- Send invitations to selected CSOs.
- Coordinate with participants to finalize the date, time, and format (in-person or virtual) for the discussion.
- Prepare and disseminate the agenda to participants well in advance, allowing them time to prepare.
- Record key points and action items from the discussions.

- Summarize and share the discussion outcomes with participants, including key takeaways and next steps.

CSO Thematic Focal:

- Mobilize CSO participation in the roundtable discussion by:
 - o Liaising with the Committee Secretary to identify relevant CSOs.
 - o Disseminating information about the discussion and encouraging member participation.
 - o Coordinating with CSOs to confirm their attendance and participation.

7.2.2. Parliament-CSO Meet: Building a Long-term Partnership

A Parliament-CSO Meet is a formal gathering between representatives from Bhutan’s Parliament and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to foster **long-term partnerships** for effective collaboration and public participation in the legislative process. These meetings serve as a **strategic platform** to discuss broader issues, plan future engagement activities, and strengthen the relationship between Parliament and CSOs.

a. Planning:

- Define meeting purpose and desired outcomes.
- Develop a draft agenda with key topics and discussions for approval by parliamentary leadership.
- Identify resource needs (venue, equipment, etc.).
- Oversee logistics like room bookings, catering, and participant management.
- Obtain approval from parliamentary leadership and CCG respectively.

b. Communication:

- Send invitations outlining the agenda, date, time, location and background material where applicable (including a virtual link if applicable).
- Record key points, discussion summaries, and action items during all meetings.
- Finalize and distribute resolutions or reports summarizing discussions, key decisions, and action items for all participants.

c. Stakeholder Engagement:

- Open the meeting with an overview of the purpose and agenda.
- Present the annual report of Parliament, highlighting key achievements and areas of focus.
- Outline Parliament’s legislative plans for the upcoming period.
- Deliver a presentation on the CSOA’s plans and programs.
- Present the annual report of the CSO Coordination Group, showcasing their activities and impact.
- Outline the CSO Coordination Group’s plans for the future.
- Facilitate a Q&A session for participants to ask questions and seek clarification on presentations as deemed appropriate.
- Host thematic presentations by experts to provide deeper insights on relevant topics. (Optional)
- Moderate Q&A session following expert presentations where applicable.
- Summarize the main points and action items identified throughout the meeting.

d. Frequency and Follow-up:

- Plan the Parliament-CSO Meet annually (as agreed by Parliament and CSO Coordination Group).

- Maintain communication between Parliament and CSO Coordination Group by providing regular updates on the actions taken in response to the meeting’s discussions and identified needs.

e. Roles and Responsibilities:

i. Parliament:

- Compile and present an annual report summarizing key achievements and legislative activities.
- Outline its annual legislative plans, including upcoming priorities and areas of focus.
- Actively engage with participating CSOs by fostering open communication and networking opportunities.
- Work towards establishing an enabling environment that facilitates constructive collaboration with CSOs.

ii. Head, CSOA:

- Facilitate Parliament-CSO Meet
- Deliver a presentation on the CSOA’s plans and programs, outlining their key objectives and strategies.

iii. CSO Coordination Group:

- Submit proposals for agenda items for consideration by the Core Coordination Group.
- Present the CSO Coordination Group’s annual report, highlighting key achievements and impact.
- Outline the CSO Coordination Group’s annual plans for the upcoming period.
- Proactively engage with Members of Parliament by seeking dialogue and building relationships.

iv. Core Coordination Group:

- Develop and obtain approval of the plan for the Parliament-CSO Meet from parliamentary leadership and the CSO Coordination Group.
- Confirm the agenda for the meeting, ensuring it covers relevant topics and fosters productive discussions.
- Confirm necessary resources (e.g., venue, equipment, logistics) for the successful conduct of the meeting.
- Lead the effective conduct of the Parliament-CSO Meet, ensuring smooth execution and adherence to the agenda.
- Develop and implement action plans to address key takeaways and decisions made during the meeting.

Parliament Focal:

- Issue a notification to all participants requesting agenda items for consideration.
- Send invitations with a finalized agenda to all participants well in advance of the meeting.
- Maintain an accurate record of the proceedings during the Parliament-CSO Meet.
- Collaborate with the CCG to develop effective awareness and outreach strategies to promote the meeting.
- Manage all logistical aspects of the meeting, ensuring smooth execution.
- Act as a liaison between the CSO Coordination Group and the Parliament, facilitating communication and addressing any concerns.

CSO Coordination Group Focal:

- Compile and submit the CSO Coordination Group’s agenda proposals for consideration by the Core Coordination Group.
- Circulate the finalized agenda to all CSO members once approved.
- Coordinate with CSOs to confirm their participation in the Meeting.
- Collaborate with the Parliament Focal to develop effective awareness and outreach strategies to promote the meeting among CSOs.
- Assist with logistical arrangements as needed, working collaboratively with the Parliament Focal.

7.2.3. Petition: Submitting Concerns and Recommendations to Parliament

Petitions empower citizens and CSOs to **sound off** on critical issues and **present** their recommendations directly to Parliament. This process helps **raise awareness**, **demonstrate public backing**, and ultimately **contribute** to policy decisions within the democratic framework.

a. Process

- **Drafting and Signature Collection:** Citizens or CSOs draft a petition outlining the issue and desired outcome. Signatures are gathered on paper.
- **Submission:** The petition is submitted to a committee or a Member of Parliament or the Secretary General, of either House of Parliament, following established procedures.
- **Review and Routing:** After seeking approval of the Speaker or the Chairperson, the Secretary General routes it to the relevant committee. An acknowledgment is shared with the petitioner.
- **Committee Consideration:** The committee reviews the petition and

may invite petitioners for further input.

- Response and Follow-up: The committee prepares a response outlining actions or decisions taken. The Secretary General communicates this response to the petitioners.

b. Roles and Responsibilities:

i. CSOs:

- Write a clear and concise petition outlining the issue of concern and the desired outcome.
- Mobilize supporters to sign the petition, utilizing both electronic and paper formats (if applicable) to maximize reach.
- Submit the petition to any Committee, any Hon’ble Member of Parliament or the Secretary Generals, of either the National Assembly or the National Council.

ii. Secretary General:

- Adopt a user-friendly process for submitting petitions, offering both electronic and paper-based options for accessibility, and a template may be considered.
- Screen petitions to ensure completeness and compliance with established processes.
- Direct petitions to the most relevant committee for their consideration and potential action.
- Confirm receipt of petitions promptly and **communicate** the next steps in the process to the petitioners.
- Maintain a publicly accessible database of petitions submitted to the Parliament, ensuring transparency and public access to information.
- Communicate outcome to petitioners.

iii. Parliamentary Committees:

- Examine petitions referred by the Secretary General to assess their relevance to ongoing legislative work or areas of committee focus.
- Consider the issues raised in petitions into committee deliberations, considering potential contributions to legislation or policy.
- Draft a response to the petition outlining any actions the committee plans to take or decisions reached in response to the petition's requests.

iv. Members of Parliament (MPs):

- Champion petitions that align with the concerns and priorities of constituents.
- Consider relevant issues raised in petitions into parliamentary interventions, such as question hours, debates, or committee discussions, to advocate for the petitioners' cause.

8. Training and Support for Effective Engagement

To achieve the objective of the Operational Guidelines, capacity-building exercises must continue for the parliament and the CSOs. These could be built on previous outreach programs where CSOs were sensitized on parliament and parliamentary processes. Similarly, parliamentarians and parliamentary staff could benefit from understanding the work of CSOs and how they operate. Periodic revision of these Guidelines and re-orientation would also add value to continuing and growing engagements.

9. Feedback and Improvement Mechanisms

These guidelines should be updated continually depending on use-case experience. One way to do this would be to use feedback through surveys and meetings (round table discussions, co-design workshops) for gathering input. It is therefore vital that feedback is recorded and informs changes. The Core Coordination Group will be responsible for this.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

This Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework outlines a plan to assess the effectiveness of the Parliament-CSO Engagement Operational Guidelines. It identifies key indicators, data collection methods, and reporting procedures to track progress, measure impact, and inform future improvements to be used by the Core Coordination Group.

- i. Utilize the M&E framework to track progress, assess impact, and inform future planning as described previously (*Annexure C: M&E Framework*)
- ii. Apply the expanded data collection methods (surveys, interviews, focus groups) to gather feedback from participants.

11. Dispute Resolution Mechanism

Disagreements may arise during the engagement process. In case of disagreements, the parties involved will attempt to resolve the issue through open communication and consensus building. The Parliamentary leadership and the CSO Coordination Group leadership shall guide the mechanism to achieve the objective of the Guidelines.

12. Revision of Guidelines

The Guidelines will require periodic revision to remain relevant and useful, to cater to the changing needs as well as use cases in Parliament-CSO Engagement development. The Core Coordination Group will be the custodian and will be responsible for its periodic review and revision supported by the Thematic Coordination Group.

13. Glossary

C

Committee: Committees of the National Assembly and the National Council of Bhutan.

Committee Consultative Meetings: Meetings where Parliament committees discuss proposed laws with relevant CSOs. (Note: This term alphabetically falls between Committee and Core Coordination Group, but it wasn't included in the original list).

Core Coordination Group: Overall coordination group comprising focal points of the National Assembly, the National Council and the CSO Network.

CSOs (Civil Society Organizations): Groups that are not part of the government but work to advance social, political, or environmental causes as defined under the Civil Society Organization Act of Bhutan 2007.

CSO Coordination Group: An informal mechanism for coordination amongst CSOs.

E

Engagement Channels: Methods of communication and collaboration between Parliament and CSOs (e.g., consultative meetings, roundtable discussions, public hearings).

Engagement Strategy: A plan outlining how Parliament will collaborate with CSOs.

L

Legal Framework: Laws and regulations that support collaboration between Parliament and CSOs (e.g., The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan).

M

M&E (Monitoring and Evaluation): A framework for tracking progress, assessing impact, and informing future planning of Parliament-CSO engagement.

P

Petitions: Formal documents submitted by citizens or CSOs to raise concerns and recommendations to Parliament.

Policy Briefs: Concise documents analysing policy issues or proposed legislation, submitted by CSOs to inform Parliamentarians.

Principles of Engagement: Values that guide productive collaboration between Parliament and CSOs (e.g., mutual respect, transparency, inclusivity).

Public Hearings: Meetings where Parliament committees gather public input on proposed laws.

Public Participation: Involvement of the public in decision-making processes (Article 10(2) of the Bhutanese Constitution).

R

Round Table Discussions: Meetings where MPs, CSOs, and may include others like academia, and media representatives discuss relevant themes.

T

Thematic Coordination Group: Committee and thematic CSO group coordination team comprising the parliamentary committee secretaries and focal of the thematic CSO group.

14. References

- The Constitution of Bhutan 2008
- National Assembly Act of Bhutan 2008
- National Council Act of Bhutan 2008
- Civil Society Organizations Act 2007
- Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly 2022
- Rules of Procedure of the National Council 2016
- Committee Manual 2017
- Oversight Manual 2017
- Public Hearing Manual 2016
- Strategy Parliament-CSO Engagement 2023
- IPU Report 2022 & 2023

15. Annexures

Annexure A: Parliamentary Committees and Thematic CSO Groups

Parliamentary Committee

National Assembly	Focal
Legislative Committee	Committee Secretary
Human Rights and Foreign Relations Committee	Committee Secretary
Social & Cultural Affairs Committee	Committee Secretary
Good Governance Committee	Committee Secretary
Environmental & Climate Change Committee	Committee Secretary
Women, Children & Youth Committee	Committee Secretary
Economic & Finance Committee	Committee Secretary
National Council	
Legislative Committee	Committee Secretary
Foreign Relations Committee	Committee Secretary
Social & Cultural Affairs Committee	Committee Secretary
Good Governance Committee	Committee Secretary
Natural Resources & Environment Committee	Committee Secretary
Economic Affairs Committee	Committee Secretary
Public Accounts Committee (Joint Committee)	Committee Secretary

CSO Thematic Groups

Themes	CSOs	Focal (Tick)
Arts & Culture	Royal Textile Academy of Bhutan	•
	Film Association of Bhutan	•
	VAST Bhutan	•
	Ogyen Choling Foundation	•
	Music of Bhutan Research Centre	•
Education & Youth Development	Bhutan Youth Development Fund	•
	Centre for Research on Bhutanese Society	•
	Loden Foundation	•
	Menjong Foundation	•
	Organization for Youth Empowerment	•
	Phuentsholing Sports Association	•
Environment & Climate Change	Clean Bhutan	•
	Royal Society for Protection of Nature	•
	Tarayana Foundation	•
	Bhutan Ecological Society	•
	Bhutan Taxi Association	•

Gender & Vulnerable Group	Ability Bhutan Society	•
	Royal Society for Senior Citizens	•
	Respect Educate Nurture Empower Women	•
	Disabled People's Organization of Bhutan	•
	Draktsho Vocational Training Centre for Special Children	•
	Pel Dukdraling Foundation	•
	Phensem Parents Support Group	•
	Nazhoen Lamtoen	•
Good Governance	Bhutan Media Foundation	•
	Bhutan Centre for Media & Democracy	•
	Bhutan Transparency Initiative	•
	Evaluation Association of Bhutan	•
	Guide Association of Bhutan	•

Health & Sanitation	Bhutan Kidney Foundation	•
	Bhutan Toilet Organization	•
	Bhutan Cancer Society	•
	Bhutan Stroke Foundation	•
	Lhak-sam	•
Socio-economic Development & Livelihood	Gyalyum Charitable Trust	•
	Association of Bhutanese Industries	•
	Association of Bhutanese Tour Operator	•
	Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs	•
	Construction Association of Bhutan	•
	Financial Institutes Association of Bhutan	•
	Handicrafts Association of Bhutan	•
	Hotel & Restaurant Association of Bhutan	•
	Lhomon/Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative	•
	SAARC Business Association of Home Based Workers	•

Wellbeing	Royal Society for Protection & Care of Animals	•
	GNC Centre Bhutan	•
	Jangsa Animal Saving Trust	•
	Banyard Bhutan Animal Rescue & Sanctuary	•
	Bhutan Animal Rescue & Care	•
	Chithuen Phendey Association	•
	Duedrol Rangwang Zhidey Tshogchung	•

Annexure B: Public Hearings Checklist

This checklist is designed to assist MPs and parliamentary staff in designing, arranging, and running a public hearing.

Guidance on each element of the checklist is available in *the Public Hearing Manual*.

Before the hearing

1	Topic of hearing	
2	How was the topic chosen?	
3	Purpose, aims, and scope of the hearing (terms of reference)	
4	Type of hearing	<input type="checkbox"/> Legislative hearing <input type="checkbox"/> Oversight hearing <input type="checkbox"/> Investigative hearing <input type="checkbox"/> Field hearing <input type="checkbox"/> Consultation on priorities Other:
5	Time and location	
6	Public engagement methods	<input type="checkbox"/> Space in room for public audience <input type="checkbox"/> Online livestream <input type="checkbox"/> Live tweets during hearing Other:
7	Media engagement methods	<input type="checkbox"/> Press release <input type="checkbox"/> Space in room for media (including camera equipment, separate room for interviews etc) <input type="checkbox"/> Interviews with chair, MPs, witnesses Other:

8	Will a public consultation (to gather written evidence) be undertaken on this topic?	
9	Interested parties	
10	Witnesses invited to attend (at least a week before the hearing)	
11	Witnesses confirmed to attend	
12	Is there a fair gender balance in the witnesses invited? Do any of the witnesses need disability adaptations or childcare?	
13	Preparation of witnesses	<input type="checkbox"/> Written guidance on public hearings provided <input type="checkbox"/> Suggested questions provided <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion between staff and witnesses about areas that will be covered by MPs <input type="checkbox"/> Overview of parliament and committees provided <input type="checkbox"/> Introduction to committee members before session Other:
14	MPs confirmed to attend, including substitutes	

15	Briefing material provided to MPs	<input type="checkbox"/> Written evidence from witnesses <input type="checkbox"/> Biographical information about witnesses <input type="checkbox"/> Summary of other evidence collected <input type="checkbox"/> In-person briefing <input type="checkbox"/> Suggested questions/areas for discussion Other:
16	Ground rules agreed in advance	
17	Has all relevant information been provided to chairperson, committee members, witnesses, media?	
18	Agenda	

After the hearing

19	Post-hearing outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/> Report produced/shared <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendations/proposals for legislative amendments made <input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence in writing (with witnesses, Ministers, public bodies etc.) to obtain further information sent <input type="checkbox"/> Thanks sent to witnesses <input type="checkbox"/> Press release sent <input type="checkbox"/> Written/oral questions sent to government Ministers <input type="checkbox"/> Transcript published on website <input type="checkbox"/> Video published on website/social media <input type="checkbox"/> Small working group/committee to evaluate success of hearing and plan next one <input type="checkbox"/> Follow up session scheduled Other:
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Annexure C: M&E Framework

Component	Description
Overall Goal	<p>-Strengthen Parliament-CSO collaboration and ensure effective public participation in the Bhutanese legislative process.</p>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the use of various engagement channels by Parliament and CSOs. - Enhance the quality and effectiveness of Parliament-CSO interactions. - Strengthen the capacity of Parliament and CSOs for effective engagement. - Improve the responsiveness of Parliament to CSO input and concerns.
Monitoring Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number and types of engagement activities conducted (e.g., consultative meetings, roundtables, public hearings, annual meets, petitions). - Number of CSOs participating in engagement activities. - Level of satisfaction among Parliamentarians and CSOs with engagement processes. - Timeliness and quality of CSO input incorporated into parliamentary decisions. - Number of policy or legislative changes influenced by CSO engagement. - Public awareness and understanding of Parliament-CSO engagement. - Capacity of Parliament staff and CSO representatives for effective engagement.

<p>Data Collection Methods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activity reports submitted by Parliament and CSO focal points. - Participant surveys conducted before, during, and after engagement activities. - Committee meeting minutes and reports. - Review of legislation to track incorporation of CSO input. - Public opinion surveys and media monitoring to assess public awareness. - Focus group discussions with Parliament staff and CSO representatives to assess capacity.
<p>Reporting Procedures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parliament shall designate an M&E Unit in Parliament. - Parliament and CSO focal points submit annual reports to M&E Unit. - M&E Unit prepares an annual report analysing progress and identifying areas for improvement. - Annual report submitted to parliament and shared with CSOA and CSO Coordination Group.
<p>Evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducted every two and half years to assess overall effectiveness. - Involves review of M&E data, interviews with stakeholders, and analysis of impact on policy outcomes. - Provides recommendations for revising the Protocol.
<p>Data Management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Central repository established to store all M&E data. - Data disaggregated by factors for detailed analysis.

Resources

- Allocation of adequate human and financial resources required.
- Parliament and CSOs collaborate to identify and secure resources.
- Capacity development is vital.