

**Royal Government of Bhutan**  
**Ministry of Works and Human Settlement**



**National Human Settlement Policy of Bhutan**  
**2019**



## Contents

1.	Introduction .....	1
2.	Vision .....	2
3.	Mission .....	3
4.	Objectives.....	3
5.	Guiding principles .....	3
6.	Policy Statements .....	4
6.1.	Settlement System.....	4
6.1.1.	Types of Settlements .....	5
6.1.2.	Patterns and Forms of Settlements .....	5
6.1.3.	Local Factors of Settlement Planning .....	6
6.1.4.	Level of Settlement Planning and Development ....	7
6.1.5.	Housing .....	8
6.2.	Human Settlement Planning .....	9
6.2.1.	Planning System .....	9
6.2.2.	Land Use Zoning .....	10
6.2.3.	Planning Units .....	11
6.2.4.	Population Growth and Distribution .....	12
6.2.5.	Planning Techniques .....	13
6.2.6.	Appropriate Technology.....	13
6.2.7.	Development Control .....	14
6.3.	Environment, Climate Change and Disaster.....	15
6.3.1.	Environmental Protection.....	15
6.3.2.	Water Resource Management .....	16
6.3.3.	Waste Management .....	16
6.3.4.	Climate Change, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management .....	17
6.4.	Infrastructure Services .....	18
6.4.1.	Physical and Social Infrastructure Services .....	18
6.5.	Institutional and Legal Framework.....	19
6.5.1.	Institutional Framework .....	20
6.5.2.	Legal Framework .....	20
7.	Implementation framework.....	21



## 1. Introduction

Bhutan continues to undergo rapid socio-economic change and progress. While these changes manifest in the enhanced welfare of people, they also lead to challenges including adverse impacts of development on the environment and cultural landscape, climate change induced risks, rural-urban migration, housing shortage and exposure to disaster risks. All of these have implications for human settlements, defined as:

*... a geographic area comprising of a single or group of houses, clustered or scattered, whether in a rural, urban or semi-urban area, together with its associated surrounding environment, natural or man-made.*

Given Bhutan's rich bio-diversity, strong preservation ethics and focus on agriculture, only a limited land area is available for human settlements. Further, Bhutan is located on a geologically sensitive area and it is vulnerable to multiple natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods and landslides. These, together with the increasing development programmes and projects, result in competing demand for land and infrastructure services.

Climate change could impact the country's fragile eco-system, and thereby the resources and human settlement spaces. Many rivers originate from glacial lakes, which put the settlements downstream to risks of floods. Parts of the country may be subject to heat stress, tropical diseases and loss or depletion of food due to incremental temperature rise and extreme weather patterns while other parts would face migratory shifts of human settlement, biodiversity, pests and diseases induced by climate change.

Traditionally, housing was not a critical issue. However, with modernization and change in economy, most urban centres face housing shortage. Buildings and land marked for residential development are often changed to other uses creating mismatch

between demand, provision and uses. Rental costs, consequently, are high leading to over-crowding and occupancy of sub-standard dwelling units. On the other hand, many rural houses are vacant.

Patterns of settlements are elements of culture and tradition and give a unique cultural landscape. However, the rapid pace of development has risks of adverse impacts. New designs, often, are not compatible with the function and character of existing settlements. Further, development of settlements is also influenced by development interventions such as the construction of roads, water supply schemes and establishment of public institutions.

Bhutan is also a rapidly urbanizing country. Bhutan 2020 projects that 50% of the population would be living in urban areas by 2020. Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2005 found that 31% of the population was living in urban. Emerging trends show there is huge movement of people from rural to urban centres. Such skewed congregation of population in one or two regions will have adverse impacts on the sustainability of the receiving centres.

Human settlement planning, generally, is possible only with legal backing. In the absence of a specific legislation, planning in Bhutan is carried out with support of incidental provisions in other laws. But now with greater diversity and intensity of development, planning processes risk further complications. Lack of a holistic human settlements policy add to the challenges. Therefore, adoption of the National Human Settlements Policy of Bhutan which aims to promote a comprehensive and an integrated approach to settlements planning and development has become imperative.

## **2. Vision**

The vision of the National Human Settlements Policy is:

*Development of live-able human settlements.*

### **3. Mission**

The mission of the National Human Settlement Policy is:

*To provide a framework for planning and development of environmentally sustainable, culturally and economically vibrant and disaster resilient human settlements.*

### **4. Objectives**

The objectives of the National Human Settlements Policy are to:

- a. Promote different types of settlements and an integrated approach to their planning and development.
- b. Ensure preservation of environment and conservation of the ecology.
- c. Ensure preservation of tradition, culture, historic structures and sacred sites and promotion of vernacular architecture and building systems.
- d. Ensure that human settlements are safe and resilient to disasters.
- e. Promote equitable access and rational use of resources.
- f. Enable access to housing for all.
- g. Facilitate coordination among agencies responsible for provision of infrastructure and public services.
- h. Enable adoption of legislation and strategies for promotion of liveable human settlements.
- i. Strengthen the institutional and legal framework for promotion of an inclusive and participatory system for planning and development of human settlements.

### **5. Guiding principles**

Human settlement encompasses many sectors such as land, environment, infrastructure services, housing, employment, economy, climate change, disasters, culture and heritage. It is

important to recognize these linkages and ensure that they are adequately addressed. Therefore, a number of policies, strategies, good practices and emerging issues and trends form the basis of this policy document:

- a. The **principles of GNH** that seek a balanced approach to enhancing economic development, environmental conservation, cultural preservation and good governance.
- b. The concept of **regionally balanced and equitable development** and development policies especially with regard to population growth and movement.
- c. **Disaster risk reduction and management** as the country is prone to multiple natural disasters such as GLOFs, floods, landslides and seismic hazards.
- d. Mainstreaming cross-cutting issues namely, **gender, special needs, poverty, environment and climate change**.
- e. Prevailing and emerging **development trends and issues**.

## 6. Policy Statements

### 6.1. Settlement System

Traditionally, settlement system consisted of villages and settlements around administrative centres and monastery complexes. Patterns and forms of settlements were mostly shaped by the availability and layout of the land, availability of resources, safety and security of settlements, etc. However, with the start of modern development, new forms of settlements based on trade and commerce developed. Consequently, some historical factors have become less relevant. However, given their significance, as living spaces and as essential elements of the cultural landscape, human settlements must be developed as an integrated system.



### **6.1.1. Types of Settlements**

Settlement system in Bhutan comprises of villages and Thromdes interconnected by a network of footpaths, mule tracks, roads and airports. New developments, within and outside traditional settlements, tend either not to follow or disrupt the patterns of settlements. Increasingly, new towns and settlements come up outside the existing urban centres. These developments often have adverse impacts on the traditional settlements. Different types of settlements and of different sizes, both as dwelling places and as important features of the cultural landscape of Bhutan, must be promoted.

#### **Policy Objective: Promote Different Types of Settlements**

**Policy Statement 6.1.1.1:** MoWHS shall provide a framework for different types of human settlements, both villages and Thromdes, based on population size and density, services offered and the revenue generation potential.

**Policy Statement 6.1.1.2:** Development of medium and smaller sized settlements, including villages and remote settlements, shall be promoted as they are more harmonious with the country's topography and environment.

### **6.1.2. Patterns and Forms of Settlements**

Traditional settlements generally follow a typical form. First there is the forest which in most cases is the watershed too. Then there is the village temple below which are the settlements with farm houses and the farms. In settlement areas, houses are generally located on the least productive land. Houses could be either clustered or scattered depending on the topography. Size of population, patterns of development and their response to the local conditions give each settlement a unique character. However, with modern development and urbanization came new forms of settlements which often do not

follow the traditional principles. Rapid, unplanned developments also take place outside urban areas, especially in peri-urban and semi-urban areas. Such trends of development are detrimental in many aspects - with adverse impacts for land use and services, environmental sustainability, future development, preservation of cultural identity, etc.

### **Policy Objective: Preserve the Essence and Concepts of Traditional Settlements**

**Policy Statement 6.1.2.1:** System of approval and review for all developmental projects shall be improved and strengthened to ensure they adhere to planning principles and development standards.

**Policy Statement 6.1.2.2:** Development plans shall be prepared for Thromdes with provisions for management and administration of peri-urban and semi-urban areas while development guidelines shall be provided for smaller settlements and villages.

### **6.1.3. Local Factors of Settlement Planning**

Traditional villages are home to Bhutan's tradition, culture and architecture. Local building materials and indigenous knowledge and skills in construction passed down through generations of carpenters, masons and craftsmen provide unique characteristics to the built environment. Factors such as local farming practices have significant influences on the types of settlements. Further, forms and patterns of settlements are also derivatives of and response to topography, geographic location, vegetation, environment and climatic conditions. Development interventions may have rendered some local factors of construction less relevant. However, given Bhutan's strong focus on promotion of culture, it is imperative to promote settlements and architecture that are not only responsive to the local conditions but also reflect the local tradition and culture and regional identities.

## **Policy Objective: Promote Settlements as a Physical Form of Bhutan's Culture**

**Policy Statement 6.1.3.1:** Traditional village settlements including monuments, heritage structures, cultural sites and significant views and sightlines shall be preserved.

**Policy Statement 6.1.3.2:** In planning human settlements, patterns of settlements that reflect regional identities and respond to local climatic conditions shall be promoted.

**Policy Statement 6.1.3.3:** MoWHS shall institute a fast track approval system and incentivize building proposals that use local materials and/ or traditional materials and methods of constructions.

**Policy Statement 6.1.3.4:** Public institutions and corporate offices shall promote site specific designs and drawings for their establishments around the country.

### **6.1.4. Level of Settlement Planning and Development**

Because of the difficult terrain and scattered geographic locations, settlements in Bhutan often have different access to infrastructure services and amenities. This difference, in turn, leads to different levels of development which are observed not only between urban and rural settlements but also amongst urban centres and rural settlements and their peripheral areas. Such variations in development and socio-economic opportunities could be one of the factors leading to rural-urban migration. While the levels of development between any two settlements cannot be exactly equal or same, efforts must be made to ensure that they are equitable and of comparable value.

## **Policy Objective: Ensure Balanced and Equitable Development of Settlements**

**Policy Statement 6.1.4.1:** MoWHS shall develop a national human settlements strategy that identifies different settlements of various categories to promote regionally balanced development.

**Policy Statement 6.1.4.2:** Development of settlements in proximity of one another shall be harmonized to enhance accessibility and connectivity between adjacent settlements and to facilitate efficient transportation, communication and sharing of infrastructure and facilities.

### **6.1.5. Housing**

Traditionally, accessibility to housing was not an issue. Every family owned farm houses. However, with the start of modernization, people moved to off-farm activities, mainly in towns. This movement of population created shortage of housing in urban centres while there are vacant houses in rural areas. The shortage is more severe for lower income groups. Despite initiatives aimed at public housing and release of land for housing in urban centres, access to affordable housing is still a challenge. Policy interventions in terms of creating enabling environment need to be firmed up. Housing stock also has direct relation to accessibility. It is a concern that an increasing number of residential buildings are converted to institutional and commercial uses reducing housing stock and causing incompatible uses.

## **Policy Objective: Enhance Accessibility to Affordable Housing**

**Policy Statement 6.1.5.1:** All development projects and urban development schemes shall allocate land for housing including public housing.

**Policy Statement 6.1.5.2:** MoWHS shall monitor allocation of land for housing and regulate its usage and/or conversion to other uses.

**Policy Statement 6.1.5.3:** In mega projects, such as hydro-power projects, housing and other service requirements shall be integrated with the local settlement plans.

## **6.2. Human Settlement Planning**

Planning for any purpose sets direction and priorities. In the human settlement sector, planning is necessary to identify the most suitable locations for human settlements. It designates land uses for various purposes including preservation and conservation and promotes a balanced and sustainable approach to development. Further, it is important to establish a consistent and a transparent planning system. This would provide an overall framework and help monitor and address issues of speculative development, un-planned and illegal settlements and constructions in disaster prone areas and restricted sites.

### **6.2.1. Planning System**

Currently, planning processes are driven mostly by individual initiatives and practices. This often leads to different planning approaches in different areas which point to an urgent need for a planning system. A hierarchical planning system, comprising of national, regional and local level plans, is appropriate. The national level plan will necessarily have to be prepared at the central level while the others would be prepared by respective Local Governments (LG) with assistance, review or monitoring by the Ministry, depending on the capacity of the respective LGs.

## **Policy Objective: Institute a Comprehensive Planning System**

**Policy Statement 6.2.1.1:** A 3-tier planning system comprising of the following, where a lower level plan gives due consideration to higher level plans, shall be constituted:

- a. National level plan.
- b. Regional level plan, covering two or more Dzongkhags.
- c. Local level plans, which could be either one or a combination of valley development plan, a structure plan, LAPs, etc.

**Policy Statement 6.2.1.2:** Ministry, a local government, a community or a combination of such entities may initiate the plan preparation process for a village, specific area, a Thromde, a Dzongkhag or a region, as the case may be.

**Policy Statement 6.2.1.3:** Ministry shall establish clear procedures for:

- a. Identification, designation and release of land, including conversion of land uses, for human settlement planning and development in consultation with relevant stakeholders.
- b. Plan preparation, endorsement and approval, including conduct of public hearing.

### **6.2.2. Land Use Zoning**

The total land area of Bhutan is 38,394 square kilometres of which most are under forest cover, sensitive environment areas or steep terrain. Records with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests show that only around 8% of the total land is used for cultivation and human settlements occupy only 1% of the land. The Constitution requires that at least 60% of the total land be maintained as forest. Bhutan also places strong emphasis on protection of the

environment, conservation of cultural and heritage sites and food self-sufficiency. On the other hand, a number of development projects are planned to promote socio-economic development which would require new settlement areas. Therefore, it is necessary to zone the total land area for different land uses to make optimal use of the physical spaces and natural resources.

**Policy Objective: Ensure Optimal and Sustainable Use of Physical Space and Natural Resources**

**Policy Statement 6.2.2.1:** MoWHS shall prepare a national human settlement plan that capitalizes on the potential and comparative advantages of different areas, locations and regions.

**Policy Statement 6.2.2.2:** Not all land within a settlement area shall be open for development and there shall be areas zoned for no or limited construction.

**6.2.3. Planning Units**

Zoning of the country into settlement and non-settlement areas and the national land use plan provide clear picture of the broad land use types and the location of these land uses. However, dedicated planning interventions are required for specific planning areas. For the purpose of planning and management, especially for phasing of development and systematic release of land, a planning area needs to be divided into planning units.

**Policy Objective: Establish Clear Delineation of Various Settlement Areas**

**Policy Statement 6.2.3.1:** Human settlement areas shall be developed in a phased manner depending on the population size, growth and need or demand.

**Policy Statement 6.2.3.2:** MoWHS shall identify and establish planning boundary for various types of settlements in coordination with relevant stakeholder agencies.

#### **6.2.4. Population Growth and Distribution**

Population Perspective Plan of Bhutan 2010 estimates that despite fall in population growth rate, total population of Bhutan would double by 2045, taking 2005 as the base year. Current trends show that population would be concentrated mostly in larger urban centres and predominantly in western regions of the country. Location of public, corporate and private offices have immense impact on the congregation of population. There are also concerns over population boom in settlements because of mega-projects which often displace local people but the population drops drastically immediately after completion of the projects.

#### **Policy Objective: Develop Settlements Appropriate for Expected Population Growth**

**Policy Statement 6.2.4.1:** Human settlements shall be planned strategically considering the location of growth centres and economic hubs.

**Policy Statement 6.2.4.2:** RGoB shall pursue location of institutes and new public and corporate offices or NGOs outside the existing larger towns to minimize congestion and stress on infrastructure and natural environment.

**Policy Statement 6.2.4.3:** RGoB shall ensure that mega-projects have minimal impacts on the established settlements and that appropriate rehabilitation programs are developed as a part of detailed project report for livelihood and properties of the households affected.



### **6.2.5. Planning Techniques**

In the past, land for urban development was mobilized through acquisition, serviced with infrastructure and allotted to business license holders. This method was seen as unfair as the original owners, who usually happened to be farmers, were displaced from their lands. Then in the 1990s the concept of 'land pooling or land readjustment' was introduced wherein the landowners contribute a certain percentage of their land for provision of infrastructure and services and retain the remaining portions. The basic principle of this technique is that while the plot areas are reduced, the overall value remains equal or is increased because of the provision of services and amenities. This technique, though more acceptable to the land owners, is not applicable in every planning situation.

#### **Policy Objective: Adopt Planning Techniques Best Suited to Specific Planning Areas**

**Policy Statement 6.2.5.1:** Techniques for human settlement planning shall be selected based on a multi-criteria analysis factoring in, amongst others, topography, plot sizes, number of landowners and the proportion of developed and vacant plots.

**Policy Statement 6.2.5.2:** Wherever possible, land pooling or land readjustment schemes shall be preferred over land acquisition for mobilization of land for urban development.

### **6.2.6. Appropriate Technology**

Bhutan has a fragile mountain eco-system and it is also vulnerable to numerous natural disasters such as earthquakes, GLOFs, floods, landslides, etc. Careful planning of settlements and design of structures can reduce risks of disasters to a large extent. Use of appropriate technology can also promote cost and energy efficiency. This in turn will lead to environmental sustainability, a major focus area of Bhutan's development initiatives.

## **Policy Objective: Enable Adoption of Appropriate Technology in Development of Settlements**

**Policy Statement 6.2.6.1:** Incorporate technologies and designs in planning and development of settlements that:

- a. Reduce vulnerability to risks such as earthquakes, landslides, floods, fires and windstorms.
- b. Ensure sustainability of infrastructure services.
- c. Improve performance of infrastructure services and structures with regard to environmental sustainability.

### **6.2.7. Development Control**

Success of a plan depends not just on the plan itself but also on the efficiency of its implementation. A spatial development plan designates different land uses which allow developments in some areas and restricts in others. A plan cannot be implemented without a clearly defined development control mechanism. Other planning instruments such as fiscal and tax measures, preferential provision of infrastructure services, development subsidies and incentives must be also employed.

## **Policy Objective: Ensure Proper Implementation of Development Plans**

**Policy Statement 6.2.7.1:** Every development plan shall contain a development control mechanism. However, broad development guidelines may be issued for areas falling outside planned areas.

**Policy Statement 6.2.7.2:** Respective local governments shall be responsible to ensure compliance to approved plans.

**Policy Statement 6.2.7.3:** Issues of limited development rights or promotion of desired developments shall be addressed through

enactment of relevant legislation and adoption of other appropriate implementation mechanisms.

### **6.3. Environment, Climate Change and Disaster**

Bhutan has a rich but ecologically fragile environment. Therefore, protection of environment is important for conservation of biodiversity, livelihood of the farming population and national economy that depends largely on hydro-power generation. Proper land use planning and management can contribute significantly to reducing environmental pollution, directly linked to climate change. Climate change could, in turn, impact Bhutan's environment in many ways leading to increased vulnerabilities and exposure to disaster risks.

#### **6.3.1. Environmental Protection**

Bhutan has always placed environmental conservation at the centre of its developmental strategy. It is important to not only protect the natural environment but also to ensure that development interventions are carried out in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable manner. All major development projects are subject to Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) or Environment Impact Assessment (EIA). In certain instances, it is possible to plan and implement projects around sensitive areas with appropriate impact mitigation measures.

#### **Policy Objective: Ensure Environmental Sustainability and Ecological Diversity**

**Policy Statement 6.3.1.1:** Environmentally sensitive areas, including bio-diversity hot-spot areas identified in national land use plan and in settlement areas shall be protected.

**Policy Statement 6.3.1.2:** Human settlement planning shall endeavour to reclaim rivers, streams and other sensitive

environmental elements that have been lost to or are encroached upon by developments to the extent possible.

### **6.3.2. Water Resource Management**

Traditionally, watershed areas were protected because of people's respect for nature. This is complemented by Bhutan's strong environmental ethics. But increased levels of development, like commercial logging and construction of roads, could disturb watershed or divert ground water flow. Excessive water tapping also poses threat to water resources. While Bhutan has a high per capita water share, there are localized and seasonal water shortages both for drinking and agricultural purposes. Therefore, there is a need to improve the efficiency of water usage in human settlements by promoting concepts such as water sensitive urban design.

#### **Policy Objective: Preserve Watershed and Promote Efficient Use of Water Resources**

**Policy Statement 6.3.2.1:** Watershed areas and water resources shall be protected and managed for consumption, farming and conservation of eco-systems.

**Policy Statement 6.3.2.2:** Appropriate buffer areas shall be maintained for rivers and major streams and channelization shall be avoided to allow historic flow speeds.

**Policy Statement 6.3.2.3:** Water sensitive urban design concepts and eco-efficient water infrastructure shall be promoted.

### **6.3.3. Waste Management**

Traditionally, waste was not a major issue because of its organic nature and its low volume. In settlement areas too, except for the building footprint, there was no practice of impervious paving. With the change in consumption habits and the nature of wastes, its

management has become a serious issue. Further, change in house construction practices has led to more surface runoff resulting in soil erosion, siltation of rivers and reduced ground water re-charging.

**Policy Objective: Ensure Proper Management of Wastes to Reduce Environmental Impact**

**Policy Statement 6.3.3.1:** Appropriate solid waste disposal system or treatment mechanism with appropriate site shall be identified as part of site selection for human settlements.

**Policy Statement 6.3.3.2:** Direct discharge of waste water and sewage into natural streams and rivers shall be avoided.

**6.3.4. Climate Change, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management**

Bhutan is vulnerable to impacts of climate change and prone to multiple natural hazards. Firstly, it is located on a geologically sensitive area and is vulnerable to seismic hazards. Secondly, Bhutan has many rivers that originate from glacial lakes in the high Himalayas and most settlements located within these river basins are vulnerable to GLOFs. Thirdly, the country's fragile mountain ecosystem together with increasingly erratic weather patterns often results in flash floods and landslides. There are also increasing incidences of heat stress, outbreak of tropical diseases, loss/depletion of food and water resources and fire accidents and windstorms. Such changes will have immense implications for environment, human lives and settlements. Further, inadequacies in design and sub-standard construction practices could greatly increase vulnerability to disasters which in turn could lead to loss of lives, properties and damages to infrastructures.

## **Policy Objective: Mitigate Factors Leading to Climate Change**

**Policy Statement 6.3.4.1:** Low-emission, carbon-resilient development shall be promoted through green design and energy efficient infrastructures.

**Policy Statement 6.3.4.2:** Public transport system and eco-friendly modes of transport shall be promoted.

## **Policy Objective: Reduce Vulnerability and Increase Resilience to Disaster**

**Policy Statement 6.3.4.3:** MoWHS shall carry out geo-technical studies for settlement sites, prepare geo-hazard maps and demarcate no construction zones.

**Policy Statement 6.3.4.4:** MoWHS shall develop building codes, design standards and guidelines for disaster resilient designs and development of human settlements.

## **6.4. Infrastructure Services**

Land becomes suitable for any form of settlement only through provision of infrastructure. It is also through provision of infrastructure services that the value of land appreciates. Further, existence or provision of social services and amenities enhances the value of land and property nearby.

### **6.4.1. Physical and Social Infrastructure Services**

Provision of infrastructure services not only makes a site appropriate for development but some services are a basic necessity for human settlements. Therefore, any proposal for settlement or development should first establish existence of or possibility of future provision of water, accessibility, electricity and waste management. Further, social infrastructure services like educational, health, public services

and recreational centres are important aspects of development and the government's efforts in this sector should be sustained. Though cost-benefit analysis is an important consideration, sometimes it becomes necessary to provide these social infrastructure services despite the less than optimal population served because of Bhutan's difficult terrain and scattered nature of settlements.

**Policy Objective: Ensure Provision of Integrated Basic Infrastructure Services and Adequate Social Infrastructure Services**

**Policy Statement 6.4.1.1:** MoWHS shall establish a schedule of basic infrastructure services and other amenities including community spaces and recreational areas for each type of settlement.

**Policy Statement 6.4.1.2:** All agencies responsible for of public services shall ensure provision of integrated and shared infrastructure for all settlements that can technically be serviced by a common line.

**Policy Statement 6.4.1.3:** MoWHS shall develop national planning standard to guide provision of infrastructure services and public amenities commensurate with the population density and level of development.

## **6.5. Institutional and Legal Framework**

Many agencies are responsible for different activities related to planning, development and management of human settlements. Well-intentioned but isolated efforts by different sectors lead to not only wasteful utilization of resources but public inconvenience. Often there are uncertainties amongst agencies at different levels due to unclear division of roles and responsibilities. Many issues could be attributed to the lack of appropriate legislation.

### **6.5.1. Institutional Framework**

The complex nature of the human settlement sector indicates a need for an independent agency dedicated to reviewing matters related to the sector. This agency shall be responsible for directions on human settlements, especially for prioritization of programmes and allocation of resources. There is also need for an expert committee to deliberate on the technical aspects of planning issues. Further, increase in the number of development related disputes reflect the need for an alternate dispute resolution mechanism.

#### **Policy Objective: Institute an Appropriate Mechanism to Review Human Settlement Issues**

**Policy Statement 6.5.1.1:** MoWHS shall designate an appropriate institution to:

- a. Review and approve human settlement development plans.
- b. Carry out periodic review of the National Human Settlements Policy.
- c. Deliberate on issues related to human settlements.

**Policy Statement 6.5.1.2:** MoWHS shall establish a clear definition of roles amongst various agencies and decentralization of authority at different levels.

**Policy Statement 6.5.1.3:** Alternate Dispute Resolution Centre shall constitute a tribunal to consider, negotiate and resolve disputes related to settlements planning and development.

### **6.5.2. Legal Framework**

Absence of legislation specific to spatial and human settlement planning constrains many of the development initiatives and interventions. Currently, legal support for planning is drawn from the



related clauses and provisions of the Land Act and the Local Government Act. However, these legislations fail to serve purposes specific to settlement planning since the Land Act was drafted with focus on land while the LG Act mainly pertains to administration and management of local governments. Conflicting provisions amongst acts also create confusion among stakeholders and lead to delay in the human settlement planning process.

### **Policy Objective: Establish and Strengthen the Spatial Planning System**

**Policy Statement 6.5.2.1:** Ministry shall draft a Spatial Planning Bill which shall:

- a. Regulate all plan preparation, implementation and administration.
- b. Prescribe the levels and categories of plans to be prepared.
- c. Recommend planning techniques to be adopted, as appropriate.

**Policy Statement 6.5.2.2:** Ministry shall adopt regulations, guidelines and standards to ensure harmonization of provisions of various legislations, policies, strategies and publications related to human settlement planning and development.

## **7. Implementation framework**

This policy outlines directives for settlement development. These directives are intentionally expressed in general terms so that the policy remains valid for a considerable time.

The principal agencies involved in the implementation of the policy are the Ministry in charge of Human Settlement (Ministry), Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, National Land Commission, National Environment Commission and

the Local Governments. The **Ministry** shall be the principal **implementing agency** and the Cabinet shall issue policy coordination directives where and when necessary.

It is imperative that **institutional arrangements** are made with clear delineation of roles and designation of responsibilities for different agencies both at the national and local levels. Participation of the **private sector agencies and individuals**, especially in functions that are complementary to the public agencies, should be facilitated.

**Regulatory frameworks and strategic plans** need to be developed to support the policy implementation. Further, **operational guidelines** need to be framed to facilitate realization of the policy objectives. It would be important to issue **manuals for practitioners** to guide settlement planning and development.

For effective implementation, capacity needs assessments followed by capacity development programmes at different levels are to be carried out. It is important to ensure that the required capacities are developed at the respective agencies before authorities and responsibilities are delegated.

An important aspect of the policy is **land use zoning and mapping** of protected zones and settlement/ development areas. The main objective of such plans and maps is to bring the protected zones and development areas identified by different sectors on a common platform and propose a harmonized approach to the use of land and land-based resources. The Ministry shall develop human settlements in line with the afore-mentioned land use plans and zoning maps.

Given the unprecedented socio-economic progress and change that Bhutan is witnessing, there would be immense pressure on the human settlement sector. Therefore, there is urgent need for a coherent policy supported by adequate and appropriate legislations, strategies and guidelines. All human settlements should be developed strictly as per the framework provided by this policy, though it must

also be recognized that **reviews** would be necessary if some of the conditions and assumptions change.

\*\*\*