OTHER FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES

UNITED NATIONS FUND FOR POPULATION ACTIVITIES

PROPOSED PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES

Recommendation by the Executive Director

Assistance to the Royal Government of Bhutan

Improving and Expanding Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning Services

Estimated UNFPA contribution: \$2,070,000

Estimated value of the Government's contribution: \$1,000,000

Duration: Three and one-half years

Estimated starting date: July 1981

Executing Agency: World Health Organization (WHO)

Government Co-operating Agency: Department of Health Services, Ministry of Development

81-06456
I. Summary

1. UNFPA proposes supporting a project in the amount of $2,070,000 for three and one-half years (mid-1981 through 1984) to assist the Royal Government of Bhutan in improving and expanding maternal and child health and family planning (MCH/FP) services in the rural areas. This amount includes $679,483 already allocated for pre-project activities in 1980 and the first half of 1981. UNFPA assistance would support international personnel, salaries of national personnel, training, construction, equipment, and contraceptives.

II. Background

2. Bhutan is a landlocked, mountainous country covering an area of about 47,000 square kilometres. The population, estimated in 1980 by the United Nations at 1.3 million, is primarily rural; only about 3.9 per cent live in urban areas. Average population density per square kilometre is 28 persons, but the population is distributed very unevenly. According to the World Bank, the 1978 per capita gross national product was about $100. The illiteracy rate is over 80 per cent.

3. The annual population growth rate (1975-1980) is estimated at 2.21 per cent. For the period 1975-1980, the crude birth rate has been estimated at 42.7 per thousand and the crude death rate at 20.6 per thousand. Life expectancy for the same period is estimated at 43.3 years. The relatively low rate of population growth is mainly due to infant mortality, for which no reliable data exist but which is generally considered to be very high. No data are available on maternal mortality either, but its incidence is thought to be moderate.

4. The percentages of the population below 15 years and above 65 years of age are estimated at 41.8 and 3.1 respectively; women aged 15-49 account for 46.9 per cent of all women.

5. Bhutan is one of the least developed countries in Asia. Major constraints to development include the lack of data required for social and economic planning, the shortage of both skilled and unskilled manpower, and the absence of a basic infrastructure. The mountainous terrain and other geographical characteristics, the inadequacy of communication facilities, and the widely-scattered population are other factors that limit development efforts.

6. The Royal Government is dedicated to a "people-oriented" approach to development planning as distinct from engaging in sector-based planning. Explicit population policies have yet to emerge, one reason being the severe lack of population data. However, the Government has decided to provide MCH/FP services and gradually to expand these - without setting specific targets, demographic or other - to sectors of the population which have high fertility and mortality rates or live under poor social and economic conditions. The Government will also initiate special educational and motivational approaches and incentives.

7. The Royal Government's total allocation for the health sector, including MCH/FP services, during the years covered by the Government's Fourth Plan (1976-1981) was about $7 million. The amount allocated to the health sector in the Fifth Plan
(1981-1986) is $19 million. During the Fifth Plan, both the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which are assisting the Government's activities related to the health of mothers and children, will continue to provide assistance. UNICEF will continue to provide support, inter alia, for the establishment of 50 Basic Health Units (BHUs) and the training of village health workers as part of its $6.2 million country programme. UNDP is also expected to assist the basic health services and the associated referral hospitals scheme under the IPF of $36.5 million established by UNDP for Bhutan for the period 1982-1986. The World Food Programme (WFP) has also contributed approximately $8 million since 1977 in nutritional projects.

8. The UNFPA-sponsored needs assessment mission that visited Bhutan in 1980 identified several areas requiring special assistance: basic data collection and analysis, population planning and policy formulation, maternal and child health and family planning, and population information, education, and communication. While some activities recommended by the mission can be undertaken by the Government without external assistance, the mission recommended the following areas for priority consideration by external donors:

a) Because Bhutan lacks reliable population and socio-economic data on, for example, the size of the population, population growth, distribution, composition, and other characteristics, it is necessary for the Government to develop a system for collecting and analysing basic data. Availability of such data would strengthen development planning and enable the Government to consider formulation of population policy. It is also important that personnel be trained in such areas as population economics and labour force analysis, population studies and statistical demography, as well as population and development planning.

b) Recognizing that infant mortality plays a major role in the country's high general mortality level, the Government has made provision of health services to mothers and children a high priority. At present, coverage of the population by these services is low, especially in rural areas. The needs assessment mission recommended support for the expansion and improvement of maternal and child health services.

c) Since the Government plans to expand the country's primary and secondary education system, the mission suggested that this expansion would provide an opportunity to introduce population education into the school system, integrating topics into the curricula dealing with the interrelationships between population variables and various aspects of the quality of life such as health, nutrition, environment, availability of resources, etc. The purpose would be to develop in students the ability to make rational decisions about population-related matters in conformity with the country's development goals.

9. UNFPA proposes to assist the Government in those areas in the population sector to which the Government gives highest priority, namely improving and expanding MCH/FP services. For the balance of the activities recommended for external support by the needs assessment mission, UNFPA will attempt to find financial assistance from other donors and will assist the Royal Government in formulating projects.

III. The project

10. UNFPA proposes assisting the Royal Government of Bhutan in improving and expanding MCH/FP activities through a project to last three and one-half years, starting in July...
1981. The project's long-term objectives would be 1) to improve the health of mothers and children by building up MCH/FP services at all levels; 2) to reduce the crude birth rate with a view to lessening the socio-economic burden on the country; and 3) to establish the infrastructure required to provide adequate MCH/FP services.

11. The immediate objectives would be 1) to strengthen the administrative organization responsible for delivering maternal and child health and family planning services at all levels; 2) to construct and equip a Family Welfare Training Centre to train present health personnel in MCH/FP as well as personnel working in other sectors who work with the rural population; 3) to set up a programme to train additional health personnel as well as additional trainers; 4) to improve the quality and coverage of MCH/FP services throughout the country by upgrading existing MCH/FP facilities and constructing new facilities; 5) to introduce appropriate population education in the schools; and 6) to evaluate the national MCH/FP programme and to use the information gathered to improve planning for the future.

12. The health services network consists of 11 hospitals, 41 basic health units (BHUs), and 40 dispensaries. The hospitals support BHUs through a referral system which, at present is weak. To strengthen the system, three maternal and child health units would be established at strategic locations in the country and 19 dispensaries would be upgraded to become BHUs. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are also collaborating in Government efforts to upgrade and strengthen the health services network.

13. In conjunction with the above activities, the Office of the Family Welfare Co-ordinator of the Department of Health Services, which has responsibility for family planning services within the country would be reorganized and strengthened. This Office would provide over-all monitoring of MCH/FP programmes and work to promote these services, which would be delivered as an integral part of basic health services.

14. Other activities of the project would be the strengthening of the national capability for promoting health and family planning education, introduction of contraceptive methods not presently utilized in the country, and organization of an orientation course on vasectomy techniques.

15. UNFPA assistance would amount to $2,070,000 and would cover an international expert and consultancies, local personnel salaries, training, construction and equipment of facilities, and contraceptives. Pending the Governing Council's approval of the project, UNFPA has already allocated $679,483 for preparatory activities in order that construction and equipment of the training facilities could be initiated and other steps could begin.

16. The Department of Health Services in the Ministry of Development would be the Co-ordinating Agency for the project; the World Health Organization (WHO) would be the Executing Agency.
17. The proposed expenditure components for the project, subject to availability of funds, are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International personnel</td>
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<td>National personnel</td>
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<td>Training</td>
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<td>Equipment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contraceptives</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$2,070,000</td>
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IV. Recommendation

18. The Executive Director recommends that the Governing Council:

(a) **Approve** the project in the amount of $2,070,000 (this amount includes $679,483 already allocated for pre-project activities in 1980 and the first half of 1981); and

(b) **Authorize** the Executive Director to make appropriate arrangements with the Royal Government of Bhutan and the Executing Agency.