

Terms of Reference

Development of Bhutan’s Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Policy Brief and National MIL Strategy

1. Background

In today’s digital era, the ability to access, evaluate, and critically engage with media and information has become essential for informed citizenship, democratic participation, lifelong learning, and societal well-being. As Bhutan rapidly adopts digital technologies and expands internet connectivity, there is an increasing need to equip its citizens with MIL skills to navigate a complex and evolving information landscape. Traditional literacy, which focuses primarily on reading and writing, is no longer sufficient. Globally, MIL is now recognized as a core competency for responsible and active citizenship. UNESCO’s *Media Development Indicators: A Framework for Assessing Media Systems* highlights that “MIL empowers individuals to engage critically with media, enhancing democratic participation and resilience against misinformation.”

According to the Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA), Bhutan had 839,506 mobile subscribers as of 2024. The country is currently served by two telecom operators and 23 internet service providers. Notably, Bhutan imported smartphones worth Nu. 2.723 billion in 2024 alone, reflecting the growing penetration of digital devices. Bhutan’s media ecosystem is diverse and expanding: the Bhutan Broadcasting Service runs three television channels and multiple radio programs; there are also three commercial radio stations, seven newspapers, five campus-based and two community radio stations, 34 printing presses, and 89 cable television operators, alongside an increasing number of online platforms.

As access to media grows, Bhutanese citizens are exposed to a wide range of content on a daily basis. A social media study by the Bhutan Media Foundation (BMF) found that Bhutanese users spend an average of 163 minutes per day on social media platforms. This increasing digital engagement has brought with it several concerns, including misinformation, digital addiction, cyberbullying, online scams, indecent content, media bias, cybercrime, and limited awareness of digital ethics and online privacy.

The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to MIL, one that reaches across different segments of society. Key recommendations include integrating MIL into school curricula, implementing nationwide awareness campaigns, developing educational media content, and establishing youth-driven media clubs to encourage critical thinking. These findings echo previous research and policy documents such as the *BMF Human Resource Development Master Plan (2012)*, *Bhutanese Journalism Review (2014)*, and *Media Baseline Study (2012)*.

The importance of media literacy in Bhutan was first emphasized in the *Bhutan Media Impact Study (2008)*, which highlighted the public's growing engagement with media and the need for greater understanding of its influence. In response, the former Department of Information and Media (DoIM) under the Ministry of Information and Communications (MoIC), in collaboration with the Royal Education Council and the Ministry of Education, developed the *Policy Guideline and Strategic Framework for Media Literacy Education in Bhutan* in 2009. This framework served as a guiding document for MIL activities for several years.

As per the *Media Baseline Study (2012)*, the DoIM implemented MIL initiatives targeting schoolteachers, students, non-formal education (NFE) instructors, and the general public. Further, the *Bhutan Information and Media Impact Study (2013)* documented the role of civil society organizations, such as the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD), in advancing media literacy. Since 2019, BMF has played a key role in strengthening MIL efforts across schools, monastic institutions, and rural communities. These efforts include the publication of *Navigating Infodemic, Misinformation, and Disinformation: A Toolkit (2021)*, and the development of Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced MIL training manuals and social media literacy modules.

As documented in the DoIM's *Annual Report 2019–2020*, from 2011 to 2019, the department trained 1,482 graduating pre-service teachers, and sensitized 1,557 teachers and 5,503 students from 39 high schools. Additionally, 1,297 university students, 487 NFE instructors, and 496 civil servants, youth, radio jockeys, and nuns participated in MIL activities. Complementing these efforts, BMF's MIL programs have benefited 137 rural participants, 770 individuals from monastic institutions, 1,832 students and teachers, and 50 professionals including Members of Parliament.

In terms of formal education, MIL has seen some institutional adoption in the past. The DoIM, in collaboration with the Royal Education Council and the Ministry of Education, introduced Media Studies as an optional subject for Classes XI and XII in 2015. However, this curriculum has been phased out under recent education reforms. Sherubtse College began offering Media Studies as a double major in 2012, which later evolved into a BA in Media Studies in 2019. This program is now being phased out with the introduction of a new BA in Digital Communication and Project Management starting Autumn 2023. Royal Thimphu College continues to offer a 4-year BA in Communication Arts and Creative Media (formerly Mass Communication). Other institutions and agencies also incorporate MIL components into their training materials and curricula.

Several national policy documents underscore the need for robust MIL initiatives. His Majesty The King's *Royal Kasho on Education Reform (2020)* calls for MIL for an education system fit for the 21st century—fostering holistic development and critical thinking in the digital age. Bhutan's *National Digital Transformation Strategy* emphasizes the need for digital literacy initiatives that go beyond infrastructure to include competencies in ethical

media engagement and critical analysis. Similarly, the *13th Five-Year Plan (2024–2029)* positions education and ICT as central pillars for civic empowerment and national progress.

Despite these various initiatives and policy references, MIL in Bhutan faces numerous implementation challenges. Common barriers include a lack of trained educators, inadequate resources, a reliance on traditional teaching methods, and fragmented project-based approaches that often depend on external funding. Moreover, the absence of a national MIL strategy and dedicated financing has prevented the systematic and sustainable expansion of MIL efforts across both formal and informal settings. As a result, many Bhutanese remain without the essential competencies needed to participate responsibly in today's media-rich environment.

The BMF, established under a Royal Charter in 2010, is well-positioned to lead national efforts in advancing MIL. With funding support from UNESCO, BMF aims to develop a comprehensive MIL Policy Brief and a National MIL Strategy that responds to Bhutan's evolving media landscape and societal needs. To carry out this assignment, BMF is seeking to engage a competent local consultant firm or research institution for the period May to November 2025. This ToR outlines the objectives, scope of work, methodology, expected deliverables, qualifications and experience requirements, application process, payment schedule, and evaluation criteria for the assignment. The initiative will be developed in close consultation with relevant stakeholders and aligned with national priorities, including Gross National Happiness, as well as global frameworks such as UNESCO's MIL initiatives. Through this effort, BMF seeks to lay the foundation for a coordinated, sustainable, and inclusive approach to MIL in Bhutan.

2. Objectives

The primary objectives of this assignment are:

2.1 Develop a concise and evidence-based MIL Policy Brief that aligns with Bhutan's national development goals and international standards.

2.2 Develop a comprehensive National MIL Strategy that operationalizes the policy directions and provides a roadmap for implementation.

3. Scope of Work and Deliverables

The consultancy firm will undertake the following tasks:

3.1 Submit a Plan for Conducting Online Survey and a Methodology for Literature Review

3.1.1 Design an online survey including questionnaires targeted for 200 respondents to collect quantitative data on MIL awareness and gaps.

3.1.2 Develop a methodology for the literature review.

3.1.3 Submit the Plan and Methodology to BMF by **May 9, 2025**.

3.2 Carryout Online Survey

3.2.1. Conduct an online survey targeting a diverse sample of 200 respondents (students, educators, civil society, policymakers, bureaucrats, marginalized populations, and media) to collect quantitative data on MIL awareness and gaps.

3.2.2. Analyze survey responses and produce a 800–1500-word report, which has to be submitted to BMF by **May 20, 2025**.

3.2.3. Incorporate the findings from the survey into the final Policy Brief and Strategy.

3.3 Conduct Literature Review

3.3.1. Carry out a comprehensive desk review to explore definitions and key components of MIL, along with existing policy gaps, regulatory frameworks, academic shortcomings, and training needs in both formal and informal contexts.

3.3.2. Assess current policies, educational frameworks, and regulations related to media, online platforms, social media, and internet service providers.

3.3.3. Analyze global trends in MIL and review past and ongoing MIL initiatives implemented in Bhutan.

3.3.4. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing measures addressing hate speech, misinformation, and unethical online behavior.

3.3.5. Submit literature review report (5–10 pages) to BMF by **June 15, 2025**.

3.4 Organize Stakeholder Consultations

3.4.1. Coordinate three half-day consultation workshops at the Thimphu Press Club within **June 16 - July 15 2025** with representatives from:

- Government agencies (DoMCIIP, MoICE, RUB, MoESD, MoH)
- Media related CSOs (BMF, JAB, BCMD)
- Media houses (TV, radio, print)
- Telecom operators and internet service providers
- Schools, training institutes, and youth groups
- Marginalized communities including rural population and disabled and vulnerable groups

3.4.2. Facilitate discussions to gather insights and recommendations for the draft Policy Brief and MIL Strategy.

3.4.3. Prepare a 5–10-page report on stakeholder consultations, summarising the discussions, feedback, and recommendations and submit it to BMF by **August 7, 2025**.

3.5 Draft MIL Policy Brief

3.5.1. Draft a concise, 5-page MIL Policy Brief based on an in-depth review of existing literature, analysis of survey data, and outcomes of stakeholder consultations. The brief will serve as a key reference document to guide future policy direction and action on MIL in Bhutan, and will also be used as the basis for stakeholder presentations and validation sessions.

3.5.2. The MIL Policy Brief must comprise the following sections (but not limited to):

- *Executive summary* - Provide a concise overview of the Policy Brief, summarizing the rationale for developing the National MIL Strategy, proposed interventions, and expected impact.
- *Problem analysis* - Identify and analyze core challenges related to MIL in Bhutan.
- *Approach*: Outline the guiding principles and overarching approach for addressing MIL in Bhutan, which must include:
 - A vision for a media- and information-literate society;
 - Alignment with Bhutan's development priorities and global commitments, including UNESCO's MIL framework;
 - A multi-stakeholder and inter-sectoral strategy that engages education, media, civil society, and governance sectors.
- *Policy Interventions/Recommendations* - Propose actionable and context-specific policy directions for enhancing MIL in Bhutan, which should:
 - Be tailored to Bhutan's socio-cultural and institutional context;
 - Reflect global best practices and UNESCO's Global Framework for MIL;
 - Include short-, medium-, and long-term strategies for mainstreaming MIL across sectors;
- *Summary/Conclusion* - Provide a concise summary of the Policy Brief, reaffirming the importance of MIL and the proposed approach and interventions.

3.5.3. Submit the draft Policy Brief to BMF by **July 25, 2025**.

3.6 Develop a National MIL Strategy

3.6.1. Develop a 15–20 page National MIL Strategy by building upon the validated MIL Policy Brief that translates policy approach and recommendations into an actionable, results-oriented implementation plan. The Strategy should support Bhutan's development priorities and align with global standards, particularly UNESCO's Global Framework for MIL.

3.6.2. The MIL Strategy should include (but not limited to):

- *Strategic Vision and Objectives* - Define clear strategic goals and objectives to advance MIL across formal and informal education systems, media and communications sectors, government agencies and public institutions.

- *Key Interventions and Action Areas* - Detail major interventions, including integration of MIL into national curricula (formal and non-formal education), capacity-building, nationwide public awareness and advocacy campaigns, regulatory and policy reforms, and strengthening community-based and youth-led MIL initiatives.
- *Roles and Responsibilities* - Clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, including MoESD, RUB, BICMA, DoMCIP, GovTech Agency, MoH, BMF, BCMD, JAB, educational institutions, and media houses.
- *Implementation Timeline and Milestones* - Present a phased implementation plan with short-, medium-, and long-term actions, with realistic timelines, priority areas, and measurable milestones for tracking progress.
- *Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategies* - Identify potential risks or challenges to implementation and propose mitigation measures to ensure sustainability, relevance, and ownership.

3.6.3. Submit the draft MIL Strategy to BMF by **August 15, 2025**.

3.7 Make a PowerPoint Presentation to BMF

3.7.1. Present on the draft MIL Policy Brief and the National MIL Strategy to BMF on **Aug 18, 2025** for review and further refinement.

3.8 Refine the Draft Documents

3.8.1. Incorporate changes on draft MIL Policy Brief and the National MIL Strategy based on the feedback received from BMF on **Sep 8, 2025**.

3.9 Conduct a National Debate on the Draft National MIL Strategy

3.9.1. Coordinate a national-level debate on the Draft National MIL Strategy to engage thought leaders, media practitioners, academics, and civil society.

3.9.2. Encourage critical reflection and public discourse to validate the Draft National MIL Strategy's relevance and applicability.

3.9.3. Ensure adequate media coverage.

3.9.4. Organize the debate within **September 9 - 15, 2025**.

3.10 Conduct Validation Workshops

3.10.1. Host two Validation Workshops using the draft MIL Policy Brief as the basis to finalize National MIL Strategy based on the plan proposed by BMF within **September 16 - 30, 2025**. Facilitate discussion to promote ownership, understanding, and alignment with institutional goals.

3.10.2. Engage a wide range of stakeholders (15–20 participants) in each workshop to endorse the proposed framework and offer final recommendations for refinement.

3.10.3. First group will include relevant stakeholders from (but not limited to):

- Government agencies - MoESD, RUB, BICMA, DoMCIIP, MoICE, GovTech Agency, and MoH.
 - CSOs - BMF, BCMD, and JAB.
 - Educational institutions - RIM, Royal Academy, and RTC.
 - Media houses - Print, TV and radio.
- 3.10.4. The second group will include 15–20 parliamentarians:
- Emphasize policy relevance, the need for legislative support, aligning with Bhutan’s national development priorities.

3.11 Compile Report for the National Debate and the Validation Workshops

- 3.11.1. Prepare a detailed report summarizing discussions, observations, key concerns, and consensus points from both the National Debate and the Validation Workshops.
- 3.11.2. Highlight refinements made to the policy and strategy based on the participants’ feedback.
- 3.11.3. Submit the report to BMF by **October 10, 2025**.

3.12 Finalise MIL Policy Brief and National MIL Strategy

- 3.12.1. Incorporate all final feedback from BMF, stakeholders, and parliamentary presentations.
- 3.12.2. Submit the finalized and formatted MIL Policy Brief and the National MIL Strategy to BMF by **October 20, 2025** ready for publication and distribution.

4. Methodology

The consultant firm will:

- 4.1. Conduct **desk research** by reviewing relevant literature including UNESCO MIL frameworks, global case studies, academic journals, educational resources, national policies and guidelines, and reports.
- 4.2. Design and distribute an **online survey**, targeting a diverse sample, such as students, educators, policymakers, bureaucrats, and media with at least 200 responses, analyzed using basic statistical tools.
- 4.3. Facilitate three half-day **consultations** by leading focus group discussions by engaging government officials, media, telecoms, ISPs, CSOs, youth, and marginalized groups.
- 4.4. Organize **validation workshops** and **national debate** for feedback and consensus building.

5. Duration and Timeline

The timeline for the consultancy is as shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Timeline for the Consultancy

Sl. No.	Activity	Deadline
1	Submit the plan for Literature review and Online survey	May 9, 2025
2	Carryout Online Survey and submit a 800–1500-word report to BMF	May 20, 2025
3	Conduct Literature Review and submit literature review report (5–10 pages) to BMF	June 15, 2025
4	Organize Stakeholder Consultations and submit a 5–10-page report.	June 16- July 15, 2025
5	Draft MIL Policy Brief	July 25 , 2025
6	Develop a National MIL Strategy	Aug 15, 2025
7	Make a PowerPoint Presentation to BMF on the draft MIL Policy Brief and the National MIL Strategy	Aug 18, 2025
8	Refine the Draft Documents based on the feedback received from BMF	Sep 8, 2025
9	Conduct a National Debate on the Draft National MIL Strategy	Sep 9-15, 2025
10	Conduct Validation Workshops	Sep 16- 30, 2025
11	Compile Report for the National Debate and the Validation Workshops	Oct 10, 2025
12	Finalise MIL Policy Brief and National MIL Strategy	Oct 20, 2025

6. Qualifications and Experience

The **consultancy firm** should have:

- 6.1. The assignment is open only to registered and licensed consultancy firms or research institutions with an established team. Individual consultants are not eligible to apply.
- 6.2. The consultancy firm must have a Team Lead with a minimum of a Master's degree in Media Studies, Mass Communication, Education, Research, Social Sciences, Public Policy, or related fields.

- 6.3. The consultancy firm should possess a minimum of five years of demonstrable experience in media and information literacy, policy development, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning, or have team members with equivalent expertise and professional background in these areas
- 6.4. Demonstrated research and publication experience, with strong analytical, writing, and presentation skills.
- 6.5. Familiarity with Bhutan's media landscape, governance structures, education, and media and digital policies.

7. Management and Logistics

7.1 Supervision

- 7.1.1. BMF will provide overall oversight for the project. The consultant firm will report directly to BMF and will be required to provide regular progress updates throughout the duration of the assignment.
- 7.1.2. All deliverables must be submitted in a timely manner, in accordance with the agreed-upon timeline.

7.2 Venue and Logistics

- 7.2.1. All meetings and workshops related to the project will be hosted at the Thimphu Press Club, a social enterprise under BMF.
- 7.2.2. As in-kind contributions, BMF will provide access to the Press Club's facilities, including the hall, conferencing equipment, and catering, for the following events:
- Three half-day consultations
 - Presentation of draft findings to BMF
 - Validation workshop
 - Policy brief presentation for Parliamentarians
- 7.2.3. All catering and logistical arrangements will be directly handled and paid for by BMF. Kindly note that consultancy payments do not cover logistical costs for these workshops.

7.3 Coordination: BMF's Programme Coordinator will provide the consultant firm with the overall plan for the consultation and validation workshops and assist in making necessary arrangements, including logistical support, catering, and participant invitations. The consultant firm will be responsible for facilitating the workshops and consultations.

8. Application Process

Interested consultancy firms are invited to submit a cover letter addressed to the Executive Director, Bhutan Media Foundation, along with the following documents:

- 8.1. **Curriculum Vitae (CVs)** of the team lead and all key team members, highlighting educational qualifications and relevant professional experience. CVs

should include a summary of projects and assignments completed over the past five years and merit certificates.

8.2. A **technical proposal** (5–10 pages) outlining the proposed approach, methodology, work plan, and timeline for completing the assignment.

8.3. A **financial proposal** detailing the consultancy fees and any other associated costs.

The deadline for submission is **April 23, 2025, 5 pm**. As per the BMF's procurement ToR the applicants are to submit two hard copies of the application to the Bhutan Media Foundation office located in the New Kuensel Building, Changzamtog, Thimphu.

9. Payment Schedule

Payments to the consultant firm for carrying out the assignment will be made in four installments:

- **30%** on contract signing
- **30%** upon presentation to BMF on the draft MIL Policy Brief and the MIL Strategy
- **30%** upon submission of the report for the National Debate and the Validation Workshops.
- **10%** upon submission of the final validated MIL Policy Brief and MIL Strategy.

10. Evaluation Criteria

The selection of the consultancy will be based on a balanced assessment of technical expertise and cost-effectiveness, using a 70:30 ratio for technical and financial proposals, respectively. The following criteria will guide the evaluation:

10.1 Experience and Expertise (30%)

- 10.1.1. Demonstrated experience (minimum 5 years) of the firm or team members in MIL, policy development, or related fields.
- 10.1.2. Evidence of successfully completing at least two similar assignments, supported by references or deliverables.
- 10.1.3. CVs of the team lead and key members (minimum 3 technical resource persons) showing relevant qualifications and experience.

10.2 Understanding of the Assignment (20%)

- 10.2.1. Clarity and depth of understanding of Bhutan's MIL needs.
- 10.2.2. Alignment of the proposed approach and interventions with the objectives of developing a tailored MIL Policy Brief and National MIL Strategy.

10.3 Quality of Technical Proposal (20%)

- 10.3.1. Strength and feasibility of the methodology for conducting the online survey, literature review, stakeholder consultations, validation workshops.
- 10.3.2. Ability of the consultant firm to draft quality deliverables.

10.3.3. Practical timeline and resource allocation for completing tasks within the specified consultancy period.

10.4 Financial Proposal (30%)

10.4.1. Reasonableness and competitiveness of the proposed consultancy fees relative to the scope of work and deliverables.

10.4.2. Clear cost breakdown for key activities.

10.4.3. Value for money, ensuring efficient use of resources without compromising quality.

11. Additional Provisions

11.1 BMF reserves the right to assign additional tasks related to this project as and when required to ensure successful implementation. Such tasks will be mutually agreed upon in writing.

11.2 All data, reports, and materials produced under this consultancy shall remain the property of the Bhutan Media Foundation.

11.3 BMF reserves the right to terminate the contract if deliverables are not met according to the agreed timeline or quality standards.

11.4 The consultant firm is expected to submit photographs documenting the activities conducted and deliverables achieved, to be included as annexures in each report.