

52.8 percent farm roads constructed without complying to standards: RAA

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The Royal Audit Authority's (RAA) recent findings on farm road development and management revealed several cases of overspending, wastage, abandonment, and unplanned activities.

The authority concluded that it resulted from inadequate assessment of farm road needs.

It was reported that both dzongkhags and gewog administrations spent most of the capital expenditure on construction and maintenance of farm roads. "From 2010 to 2021, a total of Nu 18,659.52 million was spent on development of farm roads."

Farm road consists of 61.63 percent of the total road network in the country.

However, according to the report, a total of 19 farm roads in 13 dzongkhags, constructed at cost of about Nu 41 million, have remained abandoned due to non-functionality, alternate access, change of priorities and lack of funds to complete it.

The report stated that most of the farm roads were not pliable during monsoon due to landslides, steep slopes, and lack of bridges. "A total of 16 farm roads in 12 gewogs did not have bridge connection."

Of the 10 significant findings, majority of the lapses were a result of non-enforcement of the Road Act of Bhutan 2013.

There were collaboration issues, diffusion of responsibility, strategic alignments, implementation modalities and structures, planning and budgeting resulted in uncoordinated approach to farm road development.

Although the Road Act of Bhutan 2013 mandates the basic frameworks and responsibilities of relevant central agencies and local government (LG) for planning, implementation, operation and maintenance of farm roads in the country, there are issues in the enforcement of the Act.

The LGs also did not comply with the Act and properly follow the criteria specified in the guidelines for farm road development 2019 while constructing farm roads.

Of the 29 farm roads reviewed during the audit, 121 farm roads (52.8 percent) did not comply with standards in at least one area, mostly deviating from the standard design, particularly providing drainage and the standard formation width of 5.1 metres.

Budgeting issues were also reported, whereby, gewogs proposed unrealistic budgets and the drawings were not strictly reviewed during the proposal phase. This, according to the RAA, had undermined the quality and efficiency of the farm roads in the country.

The RAA report stated the lack of monitoring and evaluation by authorities that further led to inadequacies in farm road construction and management.

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