

Sensitization Program on Abortion Laws in the Country

Indigenous girls and women

Ngawang Dramtey village, Tading block, Samtse district, Bhutan

25th January, 2020

Druk Youth Initiative of Sexual Advocacy

Asia Safe Abortion Partnership



Druk Youth Initiative of Sexual Advocacy (D-YISA) has so far conducted offline programs within Thimphu district, precisely within the city only. From henceforth, we are planning to carry out activities and programs outside Thimphu as well.

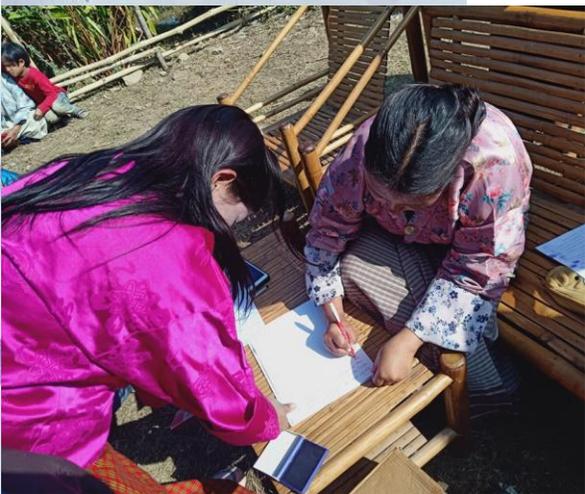
Samtse is one of the 20 districts in Bhutan and is situated in the southern foothills of the country. D-YISA identified an indigenous and poor village of the district called Ngawang Dramtey. The village has more than 160 girls and women. Ugyen Dema organized and arranged a program in this indigenous village. For this, Wangchuk Dema and Ugyen Dema travelled almost 8 hours one way from Thimphu to visit the village on 25th January morning for the program.

89 girls and women turned up for the program as seen below. The registration of the participants (along with their signatures) was done by Tarayana officer of the NGO called Tarayana in the country. She helped us with the mobilization of the participants as she lives in the village.

S/No	Name	Age	CID NO.	Contact No.	Signature	S/No	Name	Age	CID NO.	Contact No.	Signature	Name	Age	CID NO.	Contact No.	Signature
1	Sangay Cham	17	9	77552412	[Signature]	19	Wangmo Doya	28	11215002290		[Signature]	Sanchu Doya	32	11215002428	77347003	[Signature]
2	Uyen Dema	16	9		[Signature]	20	Sepemo Doya	50	11215002395		[Signature]	Sonam Dem Doya	27	11215002159	77420029	[Signature]
3	Sangay Cham	17	7		[Signature]	21	Mag Pheen Doya	33	11215002317		[Signature]	Manay Doya	60	11215002990		[Signature]
4	Sonam Om	16	8		[Signature]	22	Buli Doya	30	11215002397		[Signature]	Dorizam Doya	31	11215002308	17887793	[Signature]
5	Menzam Sangay choden	21	11	17109552	[Signature]	23	Phub Cham Doya	43	11215004762		[Signature]	Puncho Khan Doya	34	11215002287		[Signature]
6	Khandu om	15	5		[Signature]	24	Tigen Pem Doya	15	5		[Signature]	Bay Daylak Doya	50	11215002187		[Signature]
7	Dorji Pem	18	10	77269459	[Signature]	25	Deq Yangzom Doya	17	1121500422	77612457	[Signature]	Kanchop Wangmo Doya	23	11215002161	77357994	[Signature]
8	Rinchesi Wangmo	16	9	77443109	[Signature]	26	Nanzom Doya	39	11215002314		[Signature]	Kinza Dem Doya	32	11215002157	77371832	[Signature]
9	Mendru om	15	8	77088682	[Signature]	27	Zochu om Doya	23	11215002088		[Signature]	Zamru Doya	41	11215002037		[Signature]
10	Penday Zam	30	11215002244		[Signature]	28	Tsivizom Doya	37	11215002264	17934194	[Signature]	Canaga Doya	41	11215002086		[Signature]
11	Mangali Doya	40	11215002936	77493104	[Signature]	29	Zang Pem Doya	24	11215002362	77354000	[Signature]	Isiday Doya	42	11215002088		[Signature]
12	Bulhi Doya	50	11215002131		[Signature]	30	Tandi om Doya	30	11215002326	77327557	[Signature]	Nim Pem Doya	37	11215002039	77227066	[Signature]
13	Pupsho Dema Doya	45	11215002770	17365560	[Signature]	31	Penlhi Zam	27	11215002325	77378721	[Signature]	Laylay Doya	68	11215002087		[Signature]
14	Kasa & Lem Doya	37	11215002220		[Signature]	32	Dity Doya	30	11215002265		[Signature]	Kinzang Wangmo	25	11215002073		[Signature]
15	Tsho Uemo Doya	27	11215002384	77703602	[Signature]	33	Khoulung Doya	45	11215002756		[Signature]	Penjo Zam Doya	31	11215002304	17566752	[Signature]
16	Chenchen Uem Doya	58	11215002985		[Signature]	34	Phubzam Doya	36	11215002197	77451103	[Signature]	Santay Doya	57	11215002200		[Signature]
17	Yetu om	17	11215004476	77387378	[Signature]	35	Kuclu Doya	43	11215002380		[Signature]	Sayna Wangmo Doya	37	11215002451	77296871	[Signature]
18	Tenzin Pem Doya	25	11215002400	17702262	[Signature]	36	Chendo Cham Doya	23	11215002342	17741656	[Signature]	Kuensang Dem Doya	32	11215002341	77312951	[Signature]
						37	Samech om Doya	32	11215002133	17415733	[Signature]	Chencho Pem Doya	11	11215002372	77244431	[Signature]
						38	Chime Zangmo Doya	10	11215004468	77457005	[Signature]	Keli Wangmo Doya	39	11215002976	77327153	[Signature]
											[Signature]	Tsitsu Gyem Doya	30	11215002756	77460918	[Signature]
											[Signature]	Chiba Doya	47	11215002289		[Signature]
											[Signature]	Panti Za Subi Doya	28	11215002269	77244487	[Signature]

S/No	Name	Age	CID NO.	Contact No.	Signature
26	Tshewang Dema Doya	26	11215002044	17526185	[Signature]
27	Sangay Cham Doya	23	11215002996	17576676	[Signature]
28	Zama Doya	35	11215002917	77874335	[Signature]
29	Tuma Doya	41	11215002915		[Signature]
30	Bal Dam Doya	39	11215002446		[Signature]
31	Yangzom Doya	30	11215002430		[Signature]
32	Janchung Doya	39	11215002176		[Signature]
33	Kama Doya	33	11215002918	77898699	[Signature]
34	Deki Doya	44	11215002804		[Signature]
35	Lhakma Doya	27	11215002920	77767139	[Signature]
36	Uyen Dema Doya	31	11215002224	77209040	[Signature]
37	Anima Doya	27	11215002865	17554746	[Signature]
38	Tshering Om Doya	18	11215004463	17847347	[Signature]
39	Lhamu Doya	37	11215002879	77311097	[Signature]
40	Darbu Doya	27	11215002972	77294072	[Signature]
41	Menzam Doya	22	11215002991		[Signature]
42	Bidha Doya	32	11215002071	17820409	[Signature]
43	Miandu Zam Doya	32	11215002978	17809762	[Signature]
44	Mandru Zam Doya	31	11215002964	17624039	[Signature]
45	Menzim Doya	43	11215002113	77378820	[Signature]
46	Choy Zang Doya	45	11215002985		[Signature]

Dorji Dem Doya	22	11215002923	17522151
Kezang Cham Doya	25	11215002259	17308795
Chage Cham Doya	27	11215002254	77225049
Canaga Doya	30	11215002939	77852069
Sonam Doya	38	1121500	
Omchu Doya	40	11215002027	1121500
Rinche Doya	40	11215002913	7770613
B. lang Doya	48		



We had girls from schools to very old women come to the program and few men also represented their households as women from those households could not make it. The sensitization program on abortion laws in the country lasted for an hour because it was not very easy to talk on the issue of abortion to this community because we could sense that they never talked about it and was considered a taboo amongst them.

Before we started sensitizing the mass, we quickly asked the Tarayana officer if she knows of any abortion issue in the community and she made us aware that there are many instances of women/girls buying abortion pills from the border (with India) or asking someone to get it for them. It was not unexpected to recognize disdain when she talked about the issue and we felt the need to speak out on importance of safe abortion and existing abortion laws in the country even more. Tarayana officer informed us that it is definitely a sensitive issue, corroborating the known.

The program was conducted in our national language, Dzongkha. We had difficulty conveying messages in Dzongkha especially the jargons related to abortion and rights. The Tarayana officer introduced the topic to be discussed as ‘taking out the baby and throwing it’ and we had to intervene that we do not refer to it as baby when it is not delivered, and that in English we call it as ‘fetus’. When everyone was asked what could be the appropriate way to refer it in Dzongkha, Tarayana officer asked us in return, ‘is it like a soen (seed)?’ and we thought it would make more sense to the participants to simplify abortion as ‘removing the soen (seed) from a person’s body when they do not want to be pregnant’ and they could follow a bit.



We were not able to touch upon feminism and gender but we did indirectly create awareness that girls and women are people just like boys and men and that we are equal, and no one should say otherwise. Few of them nodded their heads and many of them looked confused but we started feeling hopeful for at least breaking out the truth to them.

When asked if they know anything about abortion laws in the country, they did not say anything but when asked if they thought abortion is bad, they said yes. When further asked if they thought abortion is illegal in the country, they said yes. Then, they were informed that many women are dying because of unsafe abortion especially by crossing the borders to India and getting unsafe abortion services and wrong information on abortion. This is why it is important to ensure that woman have safe abortion which is in fact a woman's right.



The participants were told that while almost every one of us have wrong information that abortion is illegal in the country (just like them), we do have abortion laws reflected in the penal code of Bhutan that allow safe abortion in following four conditions:

1. In the cases of rape
2. Severe mental illness of the mother
3. Mother's life is at risk
4. Fetal deformity

It was shared that these abortion laws are critical to save women's lives and to prevent girls/women from giving birth to their rapists' children (if that is something they do not want at all) and spare them of humiliation from the society. It was not easy to communicate the essence

of each of these abortion laws to the girls and women who attended the program but we tried our best to give them simple and correct information.



Since this was the first time ever that the community had a talk on abortion, we did not want to overwhelm them by delving more into the issue. So, we limited ourselves to the existing legal abortion laws in the country and the simple talk on importance of safe abortion, this is also due to lack of translation of abortion related terminologies from English to Dzongkha. We did not receive any questions from the participants but after the talk ended, we had few participants (women) come to us and ask personally on the four legal conditions again and that whether it was really true. We clarified that these are 100% true and that they could ask anyone who knows about it like lawyers. Also, we had to share about the four conditions properly so they could understand.



The indigenous communities are usually not regarded as a minority in the country and are mostly left out of the sensitization programs such as this. To have been able to reach out to indigenous girls and women for sensitization program on abortion in the country is a first step in include them in the larger discussion and movement on safe abortion and hence, complete legalization of safe abortion in the country.

We were told by the Tarayana officer that she felt very grateful for an eye opening program. She was also unaware about abortion laws in the country and that now she has new and right information. She welcomed us to come to the community again in the future and we said we would love to visit again.

