



Youth Advocacy Institute for Youth Champions

Asia Safe Abortion Partnership (ASAP)

Youth Advocacy Network Sri Lanka (YANSL)

12th, 13th, 14th and 15th of August 2016

Global Towers, Colombo, Sri Lanka



Introduction

The Youth Advocacy Network Sri Lanka (YANSL) organized the Youth Advocacy Institute in Sri Lanka as a collaborative program along with Asia Safe Abortion Partnership's (ASAP) guidance, support, resources and financial assistance. YANSL and ASAP came together in organizing this training to train and sensitize youth champions who have a basic understanding about access to safe abortion as an essential component of ensuring gender equality and as a sexual and reproductive right, as well as human rights issue. It was our goal to improve their rights based education as well as to give them an understanding of the importance of advocacy and the social changes it could bring which is an area they rarely get to think about.

The training provided the knowledge on how to use social media and other platforms effectively to convey accurate and strong messages to public and important stakeholders. This was also an opportunity for the selected and trained young people to work along with ASAP and YANSL in their future programs and campaigns and we also wanted to groom them with continuous guidance and support to become activists in the field of safe abortion rights. YANSL called for applications from young people in Sri Lanka who were interested on this topic and also from those who have worked in the field of sexual and reproductive rights of women and young girls and safe abortion rights. The application form contained basic questions to learn their background and a little bit about their passion towards the topics. Nearly thirty young people applied from different parts of the country and out of that fifteen young people were selected accordingly by the YANSL team.

The training covered many interesting and exciting topics related to sexual and reproductive health and rights with discussions, group work, activities, movie screening etc. The sessions were conducted by Facilitators from ASAP and facilitators from Sri Lanka who are attached to YANSL or closely working with the Network as partners.

1. DAY 01

1.1 Session 01 - Understanding Gender and Patriarchy and its linkages with safe abortion issues

Manisha Gupte conducted the first session on understanding gender and patriarchy and its linkages with safe abortion issues. She is a leading spokesperson at national level women's rights and health issues in India. With a PhD in Sociology, she is also a founder trustee of MASUM, a grassroots-level women centered development organization based in Pune. The session was conducted to give the participants the understanding of the difference between sex and gender, to let them understand the social construct of gender and the role of patriarchy in perpetuating the gender inequalities and to understand the cascade effects this has on the differential control over resources and decision-making powers.



First Manisha Gupte discussed with the participants the basics and the terms of gender and patriarchy which would be helpful for them to understand this broad topic. She used basic examples of how the society and social norms construct gender roles, responsibilities, characteristics etc of human beings. These things can vary from how from birth baby girls would be wearing pink color and boys wearing blue. The society has identified colors accordingly and makes them labeled as colors for a girl or a boy. The participants also analyzed and discussed how the society judged characteristics of a woman and a man and make them believe that each individual should maintain such characteristics if not they would be seen as different and inappropriate in a certain culture, society and religion. The participants identified that it is sad to see that society and certain individuals point at their cultures, religions, values and norms and try to discipline each individual and try to take control of them over certain acts. Their characteristics and roles are disciplined through religious leaders, parents, teachers etc.

The participants discussed how 'sex' the word itself is tabooed in Sri Lanka and the fact that they cannot talk openly about these matters with their parents, teachers, peers, spouses and partners. It is tangled with shame, embarrassment, stigma and some secrecy that no one wants to openly talk or even claim their rights towards sexual or reproductive health. The facilitator showed examples and shared stories on how society tame and keep a young girl under control by not sending her to play outside, let her go out in dark, let her go and play in a far away playground, make her think that she needs to bear children and take care of them and that is her first priority. These things are taught from a very young age as this is the system that they needed to follow and grow up in and also tell them to teach the same to their children. And in that system men are superior in every way and the women are repressed at all times. So this society in which the women grow up doesn't give them the liberty to make decisions on themselves, as per their education, career and family.

The facilitator showed that the women cannot decide when to have sex, how many children they could have, and space children or to have an abortion or not. As women and girls were grown up in a society where they cannot think independently unable to claim for their reproductive rights and are clueless to how to demand for these rights. Some important facts

and incidents were discussed at this session which is obviously visible in our society and what all the participants and facilitators face and hear in their day today lives. This was a very important topic that some participants felt a little hard to grab but Manisha using day today examples made it easy for the participants to understand. They were encouraged to ask questions and raise their opinions and that made it much easier to build the discussion.

1.2 Session 02 - Gender stereotyping in mass media

The second session for the day was gender stereotyping in mass media and the session was done by **Dakshitha Wickramaratne** who is a Youth Champion from Sri Lanka. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and currently pursuing a Master's degree in Development Studies. He is a commissioner on the Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Well Being and serves as an Adviser to UN Women's Global Civil Society Advisory Group. He has worked as a Regional Master Trainer for Y-PEER International and also the Co-Founder of Youth Advocacy Network (YANSL). This session was done to show the participants to not approve but to understand how society stereotypes certain things, certain roles and characteristics. Mass media is such a powerful space where certain messages can be thrown at people and make the society believes that it is the correct way to behave and think.



Dakshitha explained this by showing some advertisements in print and mass media and discussed with the participants on how these are stereotyped and how they specifically target women for various reasons. The participants engaged in the discussions by pointing out on advertisements they have seen, and they also discussed some advertisements that bring positive energy and messages to the society.



1.3 Session 03 - Human rights, sexual and reproductive rights

Manisha Gupte conducted the third session for the day on human rights and sexual and reproductive rights. Even reproductive rights embrace certain human rights which are already identified in national and international human rights documents it was important to highlight it. Sexual and reproductive rights are recognized as basic rights of all individuals because they have the right to decide freely the number of children, spacing and timing of their

children, marriage etc. SRHR give people also the right to make decisions free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

Participants discussed about the importance of the reproductive justice and identifying it as a human right and bringing it to the human rights discourse. Safe abortion right is one of the most important issues that all important stake holders have to identify as a human right. It was clear that some participants had issues in identifying the right of the unborn or the fetus and the discussion went towards showing the importance of the woman who is alive and giving the priority for her right than the unborn fetus. This was not a largely expected discussion to come to this training but in every training we find one or two participants with such beliefs in the beginning.



1.4 Session 04 - Values Clarification and Case Studies



Next session was on value clarification and case studies which was facilitated by **Suchitra Dalvie and Manisha Gupte**. The participants were asked to list down some of the values that they have heard of and they listed out a few ie: homosexuality is not acceptable, it is not appropriate have sex before marriage, talking about sexual and reproductive health and rights is violating the value system, one cannot have babies before marriage, masturbation is wrong, babies are gifts of Gods and couples need to have babies after marriage, living together isn't appropriate, watching porn is wrong etc.

Next the participants were lined up in a neutral space where they were given statements and asked to go to corners of the hall giving two ground agreement and disagreement. They were given interesting and thought provoking statements such as woman

who is living with HIV has the right to give birth to a child; a woman has the right to access safe abortion, should a woman be with her husband when he is hitting her yet he loves her, etc and asked to move to agree or disagree zone. There were very controversial statements which were debatable even for the participants to take a stand point. Some were not quite sure to select a comfortable zone as the statements were so sensitive.



The arguments among the participants were very interesting and brought out many angles to the main discussion. A very interesting point was brought out by Chanthru one of the participants about the safety of a woman who lives with HIV giving birth to a child plus the realities in the grassroot level for accessing health care and other services. In this session the facilitators and the organizers understood that they needed to give much more effort to sensitize them towards the safe abortion discourse. Mainly in every statement the argument was twisted around the importance of the women and her right to take decisions for herself. This was also a practice for the participants on how to word their opinion in replying and bringing out arguments on the safe abortion rights discourse and activism that they will be engaged in future.

1.5 Session 05 - Power walk and intersectionalities



The final session for the days which was power walk and intersectionalities conducted by **Dakshitha Wickramarathne** and **Priskila Arulpragasam**. It was a very interesting session and a practical way to let the participants understand where the society places each individual depending on their race, religion, age, gender etc. The participants were given certain descriptive characters where some were powerful figures of the society like ministers, teachers, doctors and some were migrants, young people with disabilities, young girls etc. So some of the characters depending on their identities brought them to powerless conditions and some to powerful statuses.

The facilitators then read out statements and the participants had to come forward if they have the ability and capacity to follow those statements as per the characters they were assigned. Some of the participants were able to come forward and some were able to take only a couple of steps forward. The many that were at the back were vulnerable characters like migrant workers, disable person, young girl and the people who came forward were people who had some sort of power and recognition in the society. The female participants who came forward and passed all the other while walking forward mentioned that they was able to do so as she was assigned a male figure and the gender itself gave her some sort of power. They also mentioned that if it was a female figure they couldn't have come this forward as some of the decisions cannot be taken by herself as a female character.

This showed that gender plays a huge role and has given a superior status for men over women in our context. The activity gave them an understanding that if they pay attention for certain identities of themselves it just makes them vulnerable in certain issues. So the importance of equality, equal access for health care services and information which is affordable for all was a highlight at the session and it was a great activity to round up for the day as it gave the participants something to think of.

2. DAY 02

The second day started with the youth champion Mehala giving a recap of the first day. She brought out the important facts that were discussed on the first day and spoke about what she learned.

2.1 Session 01- Basic updates on reproduction, contraception, safe abortion

The second day first session was by **Suchitra Dalvie** MD, MRCOGplus she is also a practicing Gynaecologist who has been working in the development field for over 10 years. She has been a programme leader and trainer in issues of safe abortion, adolescent health, integrating HIV with sexual and reproductive health. She conducted the first session a brief

update and awareness on contraception, reproduction and safe abortion. The participants were taught about different contraceptive methods and how effective and useful they are. They discussed about condoms, injections, IUDs, ECPs etc and how to take them and how it functions in your body and prevents a pregnancy. Most importantly they compared and understood the advantages and disadvantages of using different methods. It was a very interactive session plus was a well descriptive session as some participants were totally new for the sexual and reproductive health field.

They also did the papaya workshop to understand on how a surgical abortion is done through MVA. The information on medical abortion was not discussed much but the names of the pills that are in local pharmacies and how they function was discussed. Next session was conducted to make sure that the information and different methods of contraceptives was understood by the youth champions, **Dulitha Jayasekara and Priskila Arulpragasam** two of the ASAP Youth Champions did a game called the fertility dance. This was a fun way to understand the reproductive system and how each method would work in your body. A sketch of the female reproductive system was drawn in the ground and each participant was playing different roles as the egg and different method of contraceptives. They had to show how each contraceptive work when it enters to the body. The participants had a good time plus this was a very practical way to understand how contraception and our bodies really work.



2.2 Session 02 - Abortion laws in Asia

Dulitha Jayasekara conducted the next session on abortion laws in Asia. Dulitha is also a part of YANSL and also a youth Champion from Sri Lanka. He is a YPEER trainer and is specifically interested in working in the field of reproductive health of disable people. He gave a brief description on the law of Sri Lanka and how restrictive it is in terms of access to a safe abortion. Some participants raised the point that in Sri Lanka a woman who is raped or in a status where they are not stable psychologically can go for a safe abortion after requesting it in a court and with legal system help. This was then corrected as there was one such incident where a woman underage requested for an abortion but was not granted by the court. So it was then clearly explained that in the existing law a woman can only go for an abortion if it is a threat for her life.



Suchitra Dalvie discussed how laws differ in certain Asian countries but would still be restrictive for the women who go for safe abortions, and they could be stigmatized or discriminated. The isolation and the social stigma plus the access for the comprehensive information, affordable services and the lack of awareness about their own rights has also let women think twice before accessing services. The unsafe and illegal places would not at all be hygienic or safe space for women. So it was brought out to the attention the participants how important it is to have safe abortion services without any exceptions. Not only for certain conditions as rape, incest etc but a woman should have access to safe abortion under any circumstances. Every woman who claims for the need, needs to be identified and respected as their body belongs to them and the law cannot restrict her right towards making decisions for herself.

2.3 Session 03 -What does it mean to be prochoice?

After the lunch break a session was conducted by **Suchitra Dalvie** on prochoice arguments and discourses that various activists raised in demanding access to safe abortion rights. The sessions wasn't that deeply discussed as some participants were really new for the key concept but various ideas were shared by sharing stories, clips and memes that have been

used in social media. This session was conducted to generate a discussion and to show them the direction of where the safe abortion discourse is heading towards and to identify points that could be used to challenge the common arguments that are used by different activists.

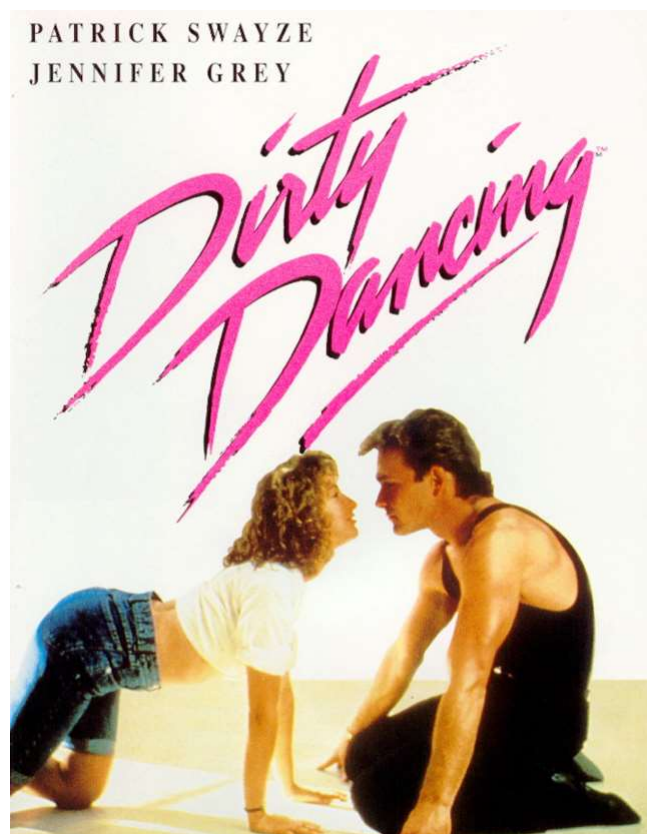


2.4 Session 04 - Film screening

To wrap up for the day, the movie *Dirty Dancing* was screened and almost all the participants enjoyed the movie. The movie was followed by a discussion on the important messages that the movie conveyed. The session was facilitated by **Sarah Soysa and Priskila Arulpragasam**. The story runs around a girl who comes to a hotel for a holiday with her family, whose father is a Doctor. She then helps out the main female dancer of the hotel who is having an unwanted pregnancy. She asks for money from her father and gives it to perform an unsafe

abortion and she covers up for lead dancers dancing shift. Here she falls in love with the male dancer during the countless rehearsals sessions.

After going through the unsafe abortion the dancer has to go through some complications. Finally the main female character calls her father for help. The discussions brought important aspects that the film talked on the access to safe abortion. The woman who faced the unwanted pregnancy didn't have enough money to get an abortion. She was not in a place to afford it and needed financial assistance but she couldn't talk about her situation or ask for help from anyone else apart from her two closest friends because of the social stigma around abortion.



Even if she did there would be very few people who would support women in such situations. One of the participants also pointed out that the complications that an unsafe abortion could cause and it would obviously be a threat for the woman's life. If this girl wouldn't have helped her she would have faced many more issues like taking leave or finding a

person to cover up her shift and to do the performances. Because it had to be done secretly she couldn't have inform anyone why she needed leave, her employer would have said that she is lying might not have granted her leave. It was an effective method used to help the youth champions understand the real consequences and economic and social pressure in instances where these issues happen and how women have to struggle to access quality health care which sometimes is restricted at all levels putting them in such a vulnerable situations. Movies can be very effective as they are very expressive and emotional and let us think beyond the limits of the plot on various issues that are raised. So this was an effective method in letting youth champions to think out of the box.

3. DAY 03

The third day kicked to a start with Sinduja giving a recap on the previous day's sessions. She shared her leanings and highlighted the key concepts that were covered within the day.

3.1 Session 01 - Interpersonal communication



The first session for the day was conducted by **Dakshitha** on interpersonal communication. This was mainly conducted to give the participants the understanding of the communication loop, the importance and the effectiveness of it. Dakshitha paid attention and showed the importance of sending or putting out messages in the correct way for the audience, which will help them to understand and grasp the correct essence of the messages. The participants also felt the importance of using proper words and wordings in the appropriate places without missing appropriate key concepts and this will indeed help them to send out an effective message the society. This is very helpful for activism as this will support them to demand for the rights by backing up their arguments with solid facts, logic, statistics and key concepts. The facilitator further highlighted the importance of paying attention to the body language while you put out a message or at the times when you receive messages.



The youth champions realized the importance of obtaining a feedback which would show the message giver whether the message was effective and whether the audience has understood what he or she really wanted to convey. The session was followed by an activity facilitated by Dakshitha where he grouped the youth champions into two groups and read a statement to the first person and he/she had to pass that statement to the next person. It was fun to hear what the last person said as the original statement was changed and contained very

different meanings form the original statement. But this let the participants understand the importance of paying attention to the statement and understanding the real statement, especially in circumstances where they have just one chance to listen or even to tell or talk what they really needed to tell.

3.2 Session 02 -Using Social Media effectively

The next session was on using social network platforms which was conducted by **Sarah Soysa**. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and completed her Master's degree in Gender and Development Studies at the University of Melbourne in 2015. She is an advisor for FRIDA Young Feminist Fund and a founding member and coordinator of the Commonwealth Gender Equality Network. She also is the Founder of Youth Advocacy Network Sri Lanka (YANSL). She been part of the safe abortion right field for years and has conducted many advocacy campaigns and used social media as a platform to generate effective discussion on safe abortion rights and demand for reproductive justice. She described different social media platforms that are famous and could be used effectively for activism and advocacy such as twitter, facebook, blogs, instgram. She described how to use them and shared some tips to use them effectively and to get more likes, visibility and comments and reach more people. Also the video made by Sarah and Dakshitha 'To Mr. President' was screened which was containing with real stories of women who have gone through unsafe abortions.

ABORTIONS DON'T HAPPEN IN SRI LANKA ? !
MORE THAN 750 UNSAFE ABORTIONS HAPPEN EVERY DAY.
Ask Us Hotline
+94 (0) 715903414
+94 (0) 715903417
Source: Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka

"Even in this time & age
'choice' is still a luxury
limited to men"
- Shana Azeem -
#May28
#WomensHealth
#FutureWeWant

QUESTION 1
What can condoms protect you from?
- Pregnancy
- STIs
- HIV
- All of the above
#May28 #18thDec #YANSL #Aishu

She also shared a few examples of online campaigns that were run by YANSL, Ask Us hotline and ASAP she showed how social media can be used as a productive space to talk about certain issues. Especially when print media or mass media does not tend to talk or voice for issues like safe abortion social media would become a very productive tool. Participants got an understanding on different advocacy campaigns that were hosted online like photo campaigns, quizzes, tweetathons which becomes very trending and gets the attention of the individuals. She explained how they produced videos related to safe abortion issues, did online photo campaigns targeting international days and post card campaign etc to get the people involved in the discussion. She also told that the participants need to expect positive and negative feedbacks from individuals, some may support and some might even send threatening messages. Sarah further explained the participants of the importance of how to reply to such comments in a neutral manner respecting their opinions and asking them to respect your opinion. She also stressed out the importance of not keep on arguing on certain social media rants, comments bullies but to look at those negative and aggressive comments as a feedback in a positive way, because you have already challenged people to think and have brought them out of their comfort zones. This was a great experience sharing plus a motivational session where the participants were encouraged to talk and generate discussion on safe abortion rights.

3.3 Session 03 - Content writing

Follow up session was on content creating where Sarah showed some video clips that were made in different styles. Also examples of tweets using hash tags and Facebook posts with photos, quotes, statistics etc was shown as effective methods of communication. Then the participants worked individually and with groups and tweeted through their personal twitter accounts and posted on the YANSL and ASAP Facebook pages. They also created short videos with effective messages demanding for safe abortion rights. YANSL members helped them in wording and gave support to polish up their final products. The day came to an end with the anticipation to watch the final clips on the next day.



4. DAY 04

4.1 Session 01 - Advocacy

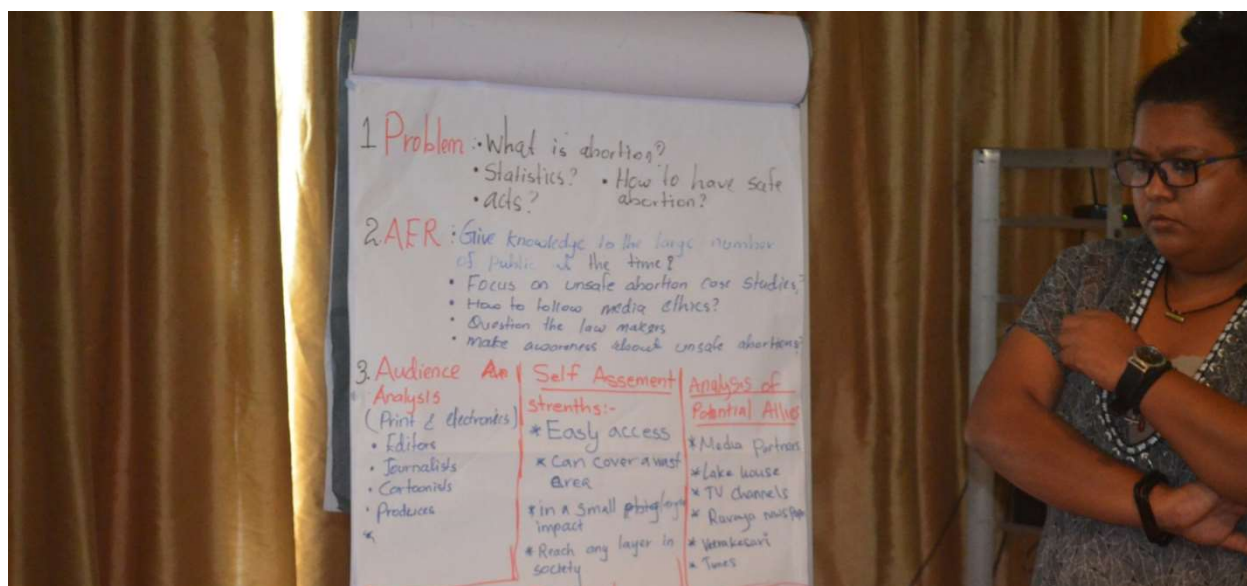
The next day started with the advocacy session conducted by **Madhu Dissanayake** who is the HIV and Advocacy Director of the Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka. This session was conducted to understand how to use advocacy in an effective way and how to use it as a tool to demand safe abortion rights. Many have already attended sessions with her so it was very easy to generate discussions but yet it was a bit challenging to make the session interesting. She first showed the importance of having effective messages which would be easy for the public to grasp. The participants got a chance to show their videos and then they discussed what could be done to make them more effective. They were effective and creative video clips which were example of how to create quality videos with low technology and financial support.

She then talked on why it is important to work on voices and accountability and what advocates need to strive for. The importance of bringing social change was highlighted. Importantly then she talked about the comprehensive advocacy model which would also be helpful for the youth champions in writing proposals and planning to fine tune their documents which would give more value for it. They were asked to strengthen their institutions and look into other allies and important stake holders to partner with and also taught how to analysis and plan accordingly. The importance of transparency and budget monitoring, strategies that they could implement for social and political change was brought to their attention. Then the participants worked in groups and planned different advocacy campaigns to be conducted and Madhu gave feedback to improve each project. Importantly she asked the participants to focus on their objectives, target groups and action plans where they need to use SWOT analysis method. The session was the first step for many to understand advocacy and to create an advocacy campaign. Many participants were interested on awareness sessions and researches working with public to gather their opinions and challenges to change their perspectives.



4.2 Session 02 - Setting up a youth forum

The finals session was on setting up a youth forum which was facilitated by Sarah. She shared the work that YANSL and Ask Us have done and what youth champions have done for so long. Then they were encouraged to give back something from their four day learning where they were asked to work individually or in pairs and make an action plan for a program or a project to be implemented with some sort of financial assistance from ASAP. Chanthru came up with conducting a series of awareness sessions and Nouman is expecting to conduct discussions within the medical students to gather their perspective on abortion rights. Keiyshine and Kawshalya are looking forward to write some blog posts. Ruhanshi and Shalindi are expecting to conduct a research to understand the perception of lawyers on abortion rights. Suhanya showed her interest to conduct awareness sessions for youth parliamentarians and her interest to write blog posts. Shifan and Ratheesh wanted to conduct awareness sessions and Shashika and Kosala showed interest to organize some plays to show in public places with messages of safe abortion rights. Each of their plans were fine tuned with the suggestions from Suchithra and Sarah and also encouraged them to interact issues like violence against women and domestic violence and talked on abortion rights when they are looking for sponsorships for their proposals. They were also encouraged to look into other sponsorship opportunities like cooperate and private sector.



As the training came to an end the participants who attend the full training were given youth champions certificates. Throughout the session what the organizers and facilitators felt was that the participants needed more knowledge and continuous support to be passionate and knowledgeable on the issues and to be more sensitive and passionate on the subject. Some individuals struggled because of the language barriers but the sessions were translated then and there but yet it is questionable whether some of the key concepts and broad topics were understood effectively. The organizers also looked into ways to keep in touch with them to work along with the projects of YANSL and their interest grew day by day and by the final day they have grasped some sort of understanding and were sensitive towards safe abortion rights. Almost all engaged actively in discussions and it was a safe and respectable place to share their opinions.

