



2nd Regional Youth Think Tank

**Organized by
The Asia Safe Abortion Partnership**

Mon 25th and Tues 26th January 2016
Asia Hotel
Bangkok, Thailand.

A Brief Report



Introduction:

After some years of working on capacity building of young people in Asia to advocate for safe abortion as a gender and rights issue, we had conducted the 1st Regional Youth Think Tank in January 2015 to bring together participants from other youth led and youth focussed networks in Asia who are working on issues of sexual and reproductive health. The aim was to encourage them to explore how safe abortion as a gender and rights based issue can be integrated within other agendas and how we, as a network, can facilitate that for other groups.

The 2nd ASAP Regional Youth Think Tank was held in January 2016 in Bangkok, Thailand and was attended by **28 participants from 17 countries** across South and South East Asia, as well as the Middle East.

We were fortunate to also be joined by our partners and supporters Jessie Clyde from the International Women's Health Coalition, Kinga Jelinska from Women Help Women and Jessica Morris from FIGO HQ. Ellen Israel of Pathfinder International also joined us for a few session.

Special thanks to the **Youth Champions** who helped facilitate the sessions: Sarah Jane, Smriti Thapa, Dulitha Harsha, San Minh Hoang, Rola Yasmine and Sarah Soysa

We started with a welcome by Smriti Thapa and Sarah Jane who shared the objectives of the meeting. Dr S.P. Choong, former Chair and founder member of ASAP gave a brief introduction to our work.



Son then facilitated a round of introduction using key words and two circles. This was a bit chaotic and led to much laughter but worked as a good ice breaker!

Session 1:

Gender, Power and Patriarchy

Rola Yasmine facilitated this session and covered key points highlighting the difference between sex and gender and need to recognize the impact of gender due to the power dynamics. She also explained patriarchy as a structure and the gender stereotyping which results in discrimination against girls and women.



She then conducted a fun exercise where the participants had to imagine that a pair of aliens had landed on Earth and wanted advice for taking up gender roles. This helped the participants realize that we need to move beyond gender binaries and recognize it more as a continuum.

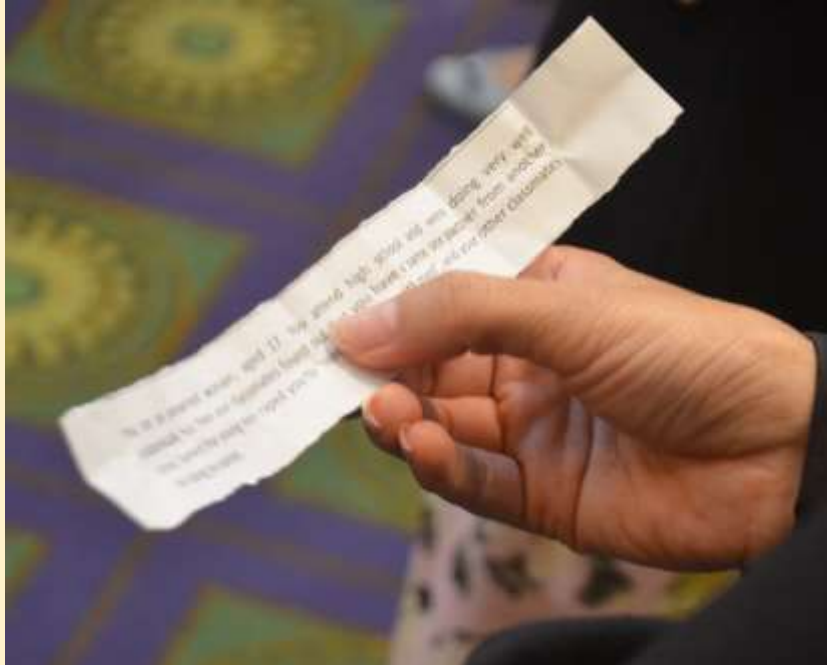
Suchitra added a diagram to show how patriarchy is the trunk of a tree and discrimination are the branches. But gender is at the root of it and unless we attack there, we can never hope to be able to dismantle the patriarchy.



Session 2:

Understanding safe abortion as a human right

Sarah Jane and Smriti Thapa facilitated this session using a Power Walk.



All the participants were given a short history of the role they were expected to inhabit. This included a wide range from a migrant domestic laborer to the daughter of a local politician. They were then asked to stand in one line and move one step forward or backward depending on what their role was able to access in terms of information and services for contraception and safe abortion.

It was interesting to see how some of the participants ended up with their back to the wall while a few privileged ones were able to move forward. The reactions from the participants ranged from sadness to anger and despair as they realized how the circumstances of an individual can be so disempowering.



At the debrief we discussed not only the capacities of individuals to access their rights but more importantly the duty of the State to respect, protect and fulfill these rights.



Sarah Jane and Smriti then facilitated a very interesting group work where they were given 5 case stories of women/ girls who needed an abortion and asked to rank them in order of priority.

It was only after many arguments and discussion and debate that they did the ranking only to discover that it was a trick exercise.

The aim was to understand how easily we can fall into the trap of needing to justify any women's abortion whereas we just discussed about every woman having the right to control her own body!

It was amazing to see the 'aha' moment showing on so many faces at the end of this session!



Session 3: Film Screening

After lunch we screened some of the short films developed by ASAP and the Youth Champions. The discussion was facilitated by **Dulitha Harsha and Sarah Jane**.

1. “From unplanned pregnancies to safe abortion”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24cm-p670hc>



This film has been produced by ASAP and is an animated film that talk about the reasons why women and girls are forced into seeking unsafe abortions. This denial of access to safe abortion can jeopardize the health, life and wellbeing of women and girls. A case of Miss A with unwanted pregnancy and her decision to terminate the pregnancy is shown to elaborate the various reasons, issues and the barriers women face while accessing the services of safe abortion. The audience then shared their reflections.

Jessie Clyde (IWHC) said that the film brought of the fact that regardless of the law, it is knowledge, family, and the attitude of the healthcare provider that also plays a crucial role in ensuring access to safe abortion. Kinga Jelinska (Women Help Women) shared how the concepts of the human right treaties are actually important in addressing the issue and can be practically transmitted into ground realities and not just treated as ideological.

The participants were encouraged to use the movie in their future advocacy works.

2. Tainted

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRMhoZPZOEU>

This film was produced by **Sarah Jane** as a part of her small grant project, depicting the ground realities of the women of seeking the post abortion care which is legal in Philippines. The stigma and shame women faces even to seek a legal service are mainly due to the attitude of the providers and the result of contentious objection.

The various responses that came from the participants were similar to what the movie was trying to depict. The entire concept of healthcare providers' obligations to the client seems to be thrown overboard when it comes to access to safe abortion. One of the young participants who is a medical student was upset and surprised that some women don't get any form of anaesthesia especially if they're young and unmarried. She said that it is like punishing them and found it unethical. She stated that health care provider should provide service in a way that the client should feel safe and emphasized on the need to change the attitude of the providers.

3. It's Her Right

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrFA3ZuE8ig>

This film was made by **Sarah Soysa** as part of their small grant project. The movie depicts the stories of women who have suffered and been forced to seek unsafe abortions. As the editor of the film, **Dulitha** said that in the process of editing this movie the agony and the pain of these women kept repeating in his head.

Some participants felt that all the stories were so tragic and not empowering but Suchitra explained that these were the realities faced by woe nans girls every day and we need to use these to advocate strongly for at least compassionate and timely quality post abortion care and harm reduction even in settings where safe abortion is legally restricted.

Session 4: Young people's access to safe abortion

Following the screening of short films and discussion, we had a session facilitated by Youth champions **San Minh Hoang** and **Dulitha Harsha**.

The session started with the group work where all the participants were given two questions:

- What are the biggest challenges or barriers young people in your country face while accessing safe abortion?
- What are the challenges of network that you work with while addressing these issues?



The responses were collected and categorized even within the groups. The major categories where these responses mainly filled into were:

1. **Lack of access to information and support**
2. **Lack of access to services.**
3. **Family members and society**
4. **Religion and stigma**
5. **Distance and mobility**
6. **Controls over women**
7. **Special cases:** The challenge to work with the diverse sector of differently abled youth, poor, marginalized, young people with different gender identities and sexual orientation.
8. **Gender and Patriarchy:** The root cause and the main challenge was identified as the hegemonic and patriarchal structures that deny women their basic right to bodily autonomy.



The facilitators themselves stated their challenges and the ways they have figured out to create a youth friendly space in addressing the issues of young people's access to abortion back in their own country in working amidst the challenges.

Session 5: Power and influence mapping tool

This was facilitated by Rola Yasmine, Jessie Clyde and Sarah Jane

The groups were asked to work on the identified barriers and chart out their own networks if they were to advocate for the right to safe abortion.



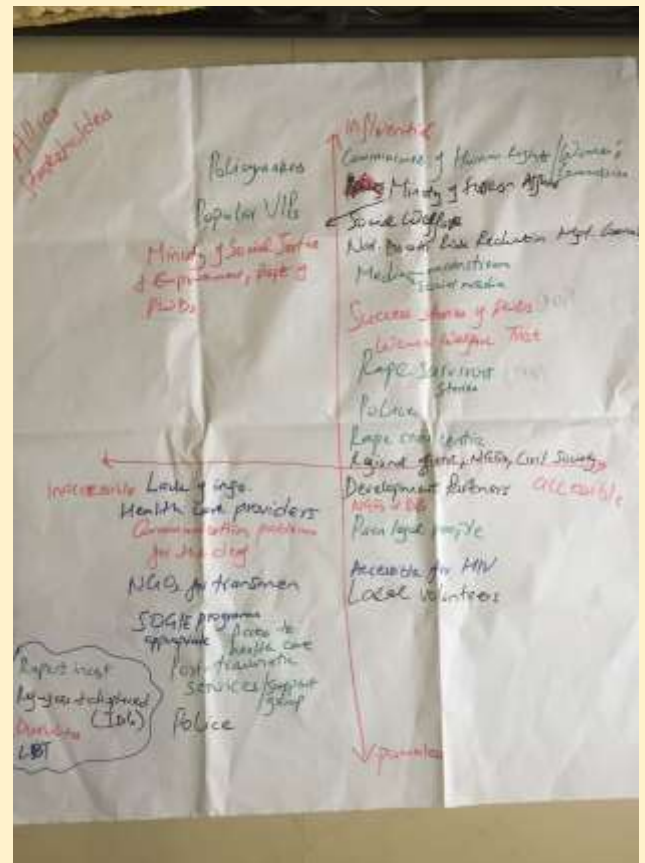
How can we ensure that young people's right to information is fulfilled by the governments of our countries?

We need to overcome the stigma that prevents any open discussion around sexuality and abortion.



Lack of services and negative attitudes of service providers force women and girls to seek out unsafe abortions.





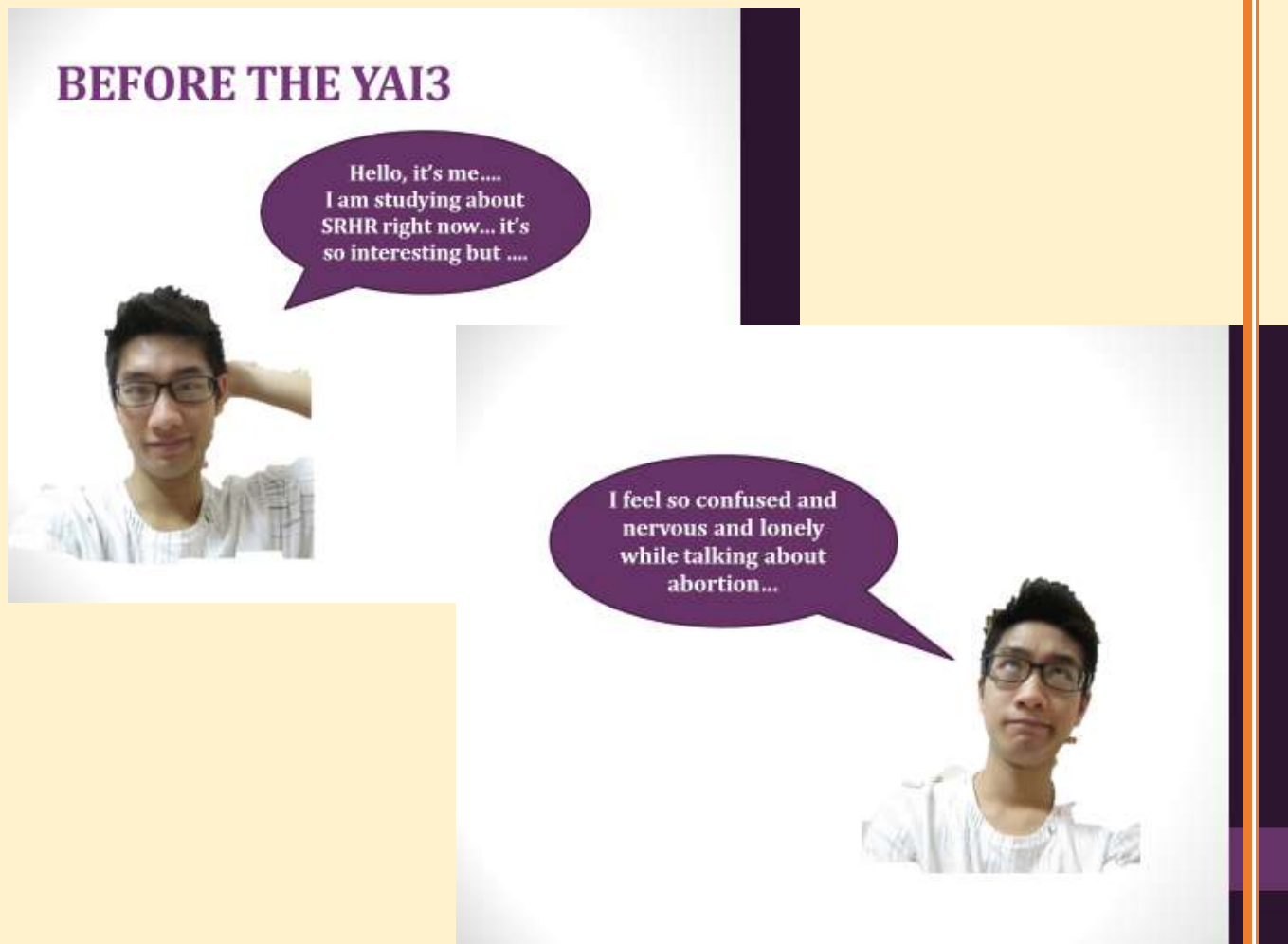
Day Two:

Session 7: What have the ASAP Youth Champions achieved ?

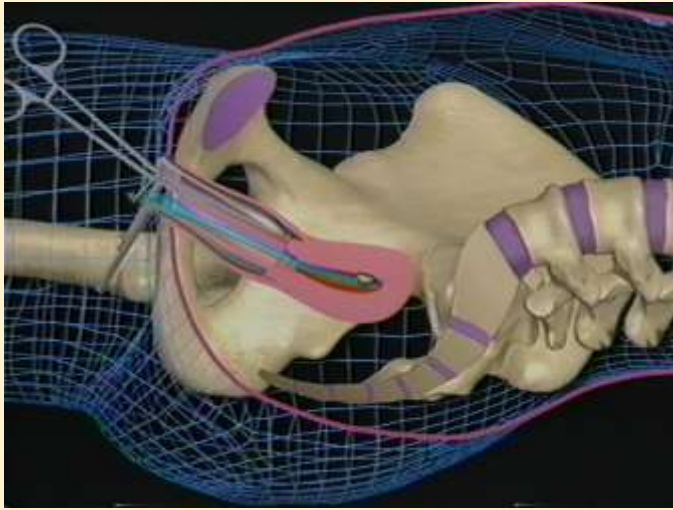


Sarah Soysa facilitated this session and shared her journey as a Youth Champion, along with Rola Yasmine, Smriti Thapa and Son.

Son had a creative and fun presentation, as always !



Session 8: What is Medical Abortion?



Suchitra facilitated a short session on understanding the significance of unsafe abortion in maternal mortality and also gave technical updates on methods of safe abortion.

She explained that Medical Abortion Pills is a revolutionary method since it is non-invasive and mimics the process of miscarriage. Her presentation also clarified the use of Manual Vacuum Aspiration and how perforations can occur if performed by untrained persons.

Session 9: Hotlines: The what, how, who and why

Shilpa Shroff facilitated this panel discussion and asked Rola, Sarah Soysa, Kinga and Sarah Jane to talk about their experiences with setting up the hotlines, the challenges faced and lessons learnt.



Session 11:

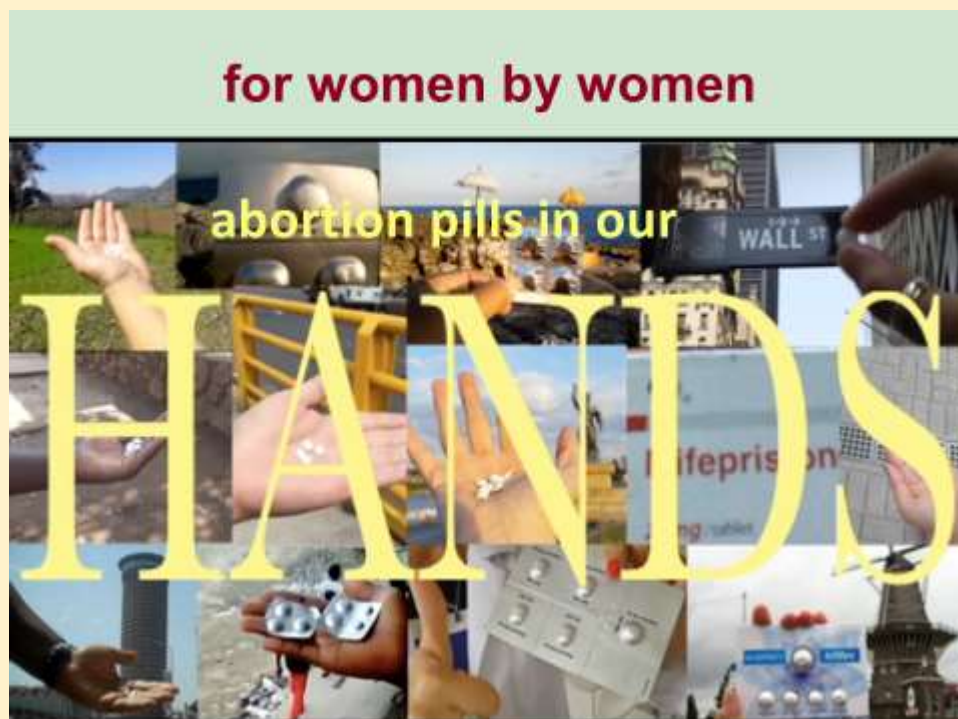
Global Advocacy Efforts:

Kinga gave an introduction to the International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion.



The main aim is to build and International Campaign to promote universal access safe, legal abortion as a women's health and rights issue. It also aims to support women's autonomy to make their own decisions whether and when to have children and have access to the means of acting on those decisions without risk to their health and lives. The activities include networking, solidarity actions, raising visibility, updates and newsletters and sharing resources.

She further spoke about the initiative taken up by Women Help Women of helping women's easy access to Medical Abortion Pills.



Sarah Jane and Sarah Soysa shared the contribution made by ASAP to the Campaign and their role in leading the Bust the Myths photoshoot and the Global Tweet-a-Thon respectively.



Jessica Morris spoke about the FIGO initiative with Youth.

About FIGO



- The only global organisation representing national societies of obstetricians and gynecologists.
- Currently, FIGO has Member Societies in 130 countries or territories. Its Secretariat is based in London, the United Kingdom.
- FIGO has a vision that women of the world achieve the highest possible standards of physical, mental, reproductive and sexual health and wellbeing throughout their lives.

- ASRH Initiative 2008-2011 to strengthen the capacity of FIGO country offices to support ASRH interventions.
- Regional Workshops
- Prevention of Unsafe Abortion Working Group 2008-ongoing
- Advocacy workshop in South Asia 2015
- Issuing guiding statements, recommendations, literature

Next steps:

Each participant was asked to think about what their own organization could do to take forward these agendas, and how they are going to take back these ideas.

Dechen: Will share with family and peers about safe abortion as a human right and MA pill is safe. Keep in touch with the group and ASAP.

Ishita: Inform family and friends about MA pill and its use. Continue to engage with the larger movement on safe abortion advocacy. Lawyers organization does intersectional work around SRHR and will share experience and emphasize.



Katayon: Will continue providing services. Will inform all providers to always remember that abortion is restricted in Afghanistan, not illegal.

Dulitha: Will talk with friends about safe abortion and give a positive attitude. Will work with the Sri Lanka Disability Joint Front to sensitize them on this issue.

Atiqua: Will find out more about the situation of safe abortion in my own country. Volunteer with hotline. Use social media to give out views which are positive. Work with the organizations networks and start a series of talks.

Amna: Will ensure sharing the learnings with the 'women with disability' group.

Deepa: I will talk to my mother. Read more on feminist interventions. Link different groups working on SRHR and engage with each other.

Cathy: Would like to attend YAI, write thoughts on abortion and feminism for blog. Plans to initiate a research in Lebanon on attitudes to safe abortion.

Jessica: Plans to get involved in UK with safe abortion issues. Try for a FIGO statement on abortion with a focus on young people.

Ministry of Public Health Thailand: Provide training for medical providers in the country. Choice of methods. Counselling, database, provide information for women to understand benefits.

Sabina: The topic is considered a taboo, but I want to change their perceptions. It is not just a women's issue. Women need to learn about their rights and to decide for themselves. Will try to organize events like YTT and find ways to procure MA pills. Lobby for affordable contraception so we can avoid unwanted pregnancies.

Kiran: Will plan to organize many such meetings in Maharashtra.

Zang Dan Dan: The context in china is different and we are more worried about the abuse of safe abortion access. It is very important to engage with other movements and bring LGBT movements into this advocacy.

Japleen: Will tell women about MA pills. Read up more on sex selection and safe abortion issue in India. Would like to attend YAI and other trainings.

Sopheha: Would like to plan research on unsafe abortion in Cambodia and find out why women get unsafe abortions.



Thuy: Provide support to Son to set up a youth network in Vietnam. Am involved in updating national standards and guidelines. Will try to encourage them to accept WHO guidance. ObGyn leadership is very conservative and wants to stay in comfort zone.

Son: Plan to write my own blog and social media. Start a new project with young people and hope to plan the next YAI in Vietnam!

Sarah S: Be more creative and involved in YANSL work. Work to revisit ObGyn curriculum in Sri Lanka.

Sarah Jane: Strengthen the work through PINSAN

Jessie: Want to learn more about the technical details of safe abortion. Fight harder to show the big donors that involving the women's movement is really critical.

Kinga: Plans to stay more connected with all the people here and cherish them. Talk about the politics of abortion to those we serve since they are our allies. This will finally lead to change.

On behalf of ASAP we offered:

- Include everyone in our listserve and social media forums
- Involve everyone in future meetings and country programmes
- Make introductions to others we work with in their countries and on these issues.
- Provide technical support for any related project the participants want to be involved in.
- We will share the hotline numbers with all of them to be able to refer women.
- We will share relevant reading material and stay connected.



Closing session:

The participants were asked to sit in groups and come up with a list of 5 key words they want to take home as a result of these two days interactions.

Once that was done, we asked them to make a poem using those words and perform the poem. This led to a lot of laughter and we closed the workshop on a fun note!





Annexe 1: Participants list

Sr No	Name	Country	Organization/Position	Email ID
1	Anam Khan /Anam Shahid	Pakistan	PRO Officer, Milestone, working with disabled	anamkhanlifecenter@gmail.com
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13	Kinga Jelinska	Netherlands	Women Help Women	kinga@womenhelp.org
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20	Rola Yasmine	Lebanon	The A project	rola.yasmine@gmail.com
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The Asia Safe Abortion Partnership

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