

## Sensitization Program- Introduction to Gender, Feminism & Abortion

For High School Students

10<sup>th</sup> August, 2019

Druk –Youth Initiative of Safe Abortion

Asia Safe Abortion Partnership



One of the members of the network, Ugyen Dema organized a sensitization program for her class mates from high school that she goes to. It was the first time all of these young people attended such a program and it was facilitated by the coordinator Wangchuk Dema. There were 9 of them (two were young men) who currently study in the final year of high school and their names are below:

Sl.no	Name	Phone number
1	Sangay Chuki	17727074
2	Daw Lham	777665411
3	Dema Wangmo	17835332
4	Pema Lhaki	17343915
5	Dawa Zangmo	77308712
6	Karma Eden	17830844
7	Mon Bdr	77476243

8	Geyser Dorji	77456552
9	Ugyen Lham	77685588
10	Ugyen Dema	17737488
11	Wangchuk Dema	17613386

Wangchuk Dema started with the introduction of her to the young high school students and requested them to do the same. Then, she briefed them on the network like when we started and the type of work we do: that we work on sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of young people including LGBT+. The young people were asked if they have heard about gender and all of them said yes and when Wangchuk asked them the difference between gender and sex, most of them were expressing awkwardness and shyness. And the coordinator informed them that spaces like this is meant to break the silence on such tabooed subjects and that as long as they can blend in the environment, they should try to open up otherwise we respect their choice to remain silent. Few of them actually thought that gender and sex are not the same thing but they were not able to pronounce the difference. So, Wangchuk highlighted the difference and they were nodding in agreement.



Wangchuk Dema requested Ugyen Dema to share information on feminism as many of them did not know what it meant and few of them have never heard about it. Ugyen Dema told her friends that most of us confuse the term with female characteristics or that is about women only and she clarified that in simple understanding, it means gender equality between men and women but more than that, the correct definition is equality for all as it is not only about men and women, we have LGBT+ and it is also about equality across many different groups of people coming from different backgrounds. The coordinator supplemented that many people argue why not

equalism or humanism instead of feminism and she also answered that it is not equalism because men and women are not equal, feminism is to bring women up to the level of men and it is not about fight to bring men down to the level of women. Also, it is not humanism because it is not only about humans, feminism is also about the animals, the trees and air we breathe and the earth we live in. Feminism because most studies and researches have shown that women are more concerned about the environment. Feminism, mainly because it the characteristics of women that needs to be embraced by the society.



Wangchuk Dema also elaborated on LGBT+ which was clearly new to the young audience. She stressed on the point that differentiated gender from sexual orientation; man and woman are gender and transgender is the third gender whereas lesbian, gay and bisexuals sexual orientation (who you are sexually attracted to). It was expected that they were quite perplexed and would understand more with more gatherings like this. However, Wangchuk Dema was patient to explain a few times more reiterating the fact that they are normal just like anyone of us and we should never discriminate them.

We also discussed abortion although it felt a bit inappropriate to talk about it with these young high school students. Nevertheless, it is never too early to understand abortion and Wangchuk Dema asked if they have heard about the word before to which all of them answered yes. When asked what they understood by abortion, most of their replies were:

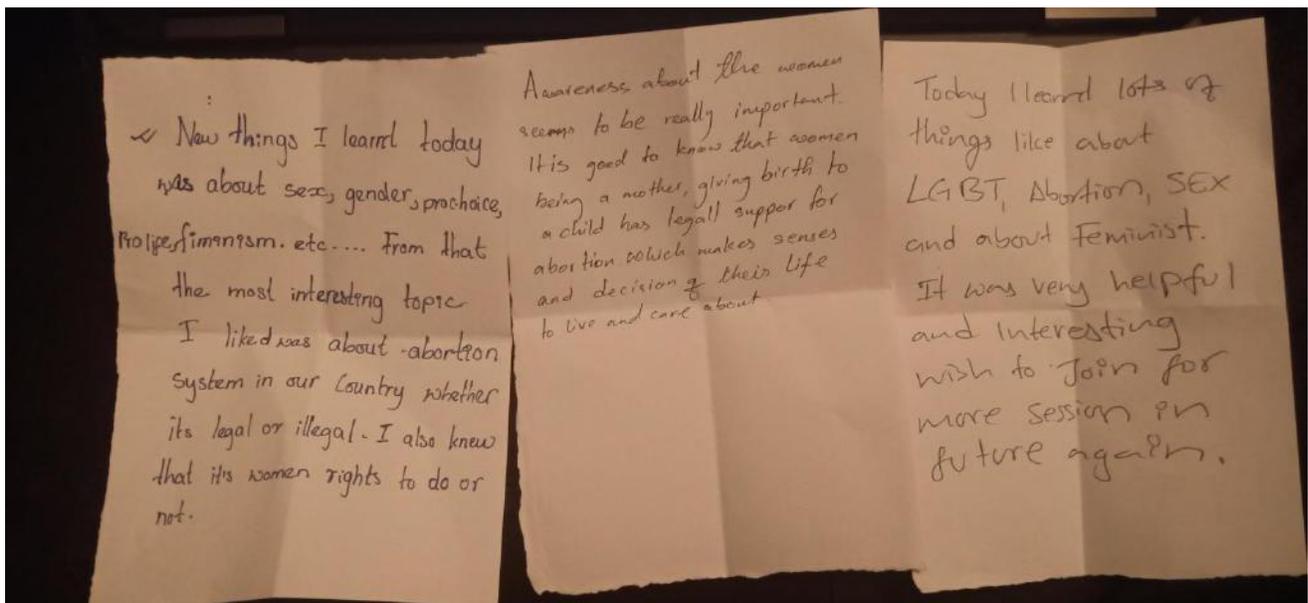
1. Termination of pregnancy
2. Avoiding birth
3. Unwanted birth/pregnancy
4. Taking medicine and killing baby

Also, according to them, abortion happens because there is no father, or the girl/woman is raped, and maybe due to health issues of the woman.



They think abortion is sinful (from religious point of view) and cruel, some of them think it is a sad thing and feel that people are helpless when having an abortion and one of them thought doing an abortion is pathetic or that people who choose to do an abortion must feel pathetic. However, the coordinator informed them that people feel differently towards abortion, mostly negative feelings especially if people are not aware about the reality and significance of abortion.

When Wangchuk Dema asked them if abortion in Bhutan is legal or illegal, 6 of them said it is legal (doubtful if it was just a guess or maybe Ugyen Dema must have already talked to them about it before) including one young man and others 3 including another man said it is illegal. Wangchuk Dema then reported that it is legal in Bhutan, though not completely legal and shared the four conditions in which abortion in Bhutan are legal. One of the young girls asked a question, “what if your husband warns you to leave you if you have an abortion?” which the coordinator thought was not easy to answer. She could not have just said let him if he wants to because that is not the most sensible of answers to provide.



So, she rather chose to make it clear by admitting that abortion as an issue is a complex one and that while as a woman, we would want the husband to understand but in reality he might not and perhaps, end up leaving the wife if she has an abortion. This is why; we need men in the conversation around abortion and create enough sensitization programs aimed at increasing the empathy of men towards women who might want to have an abortion.

Lastly, the young people provided with positive feedback and encouraged to conduct more programs like this as seen in the pictures above and below.

