



# Safe Abortion Youth Advocacy Institute

Druk-Youth Initiative of Sexual Advocacy



*Asia Safe Abortion Partnership*



*17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> June, 2018 // Thimphu, Bhutan*

Asia Safe Abortion Partnership (ASAP) supported Druk-Youth Institute of Sexual Advocacy (D-YISA) in conducting the first Youth Advocacy Institute (YAI) in Bhutan for its energetic young people from different backgrounds from 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> June at Migmar Hotel in Thimphu. There were 30 young people in the age group of 17-26 years old from a range of social positions; some of them currently undergoing vocational training in tailoring having dropped out of high school, a few recent graduates, and others who are still college students. We also had participants from the LGBT community as well. There were 19 female participants and 11 male participants from different institutes. A detailed breakdown of the participants can be found in the Appendix.



## DAY 1

Like the other Youth Advocacy Institutes, we started by introducing the participants and the resource persons in an interesting way by using an adjective that starts with the first letter of one's name to describe oneself. The young participants gained some comfort and felt a sense of community as they introduced themselves in a fun way. Sonam Lepcha, a member of the Bhutan CAN welcomed everyone to the first day of the YAI and introduced Dr. Dalvie, Coordinator, Asia Safe Abortion Partnership, and welcomed her to say a few words. Dr. Dalvie thanked all the participants for joining the workshop, and wished them a productive 3 days. She then briefly gave an overview of ASAP and its work. The participants were introduced to ASAP's Youth Advocacy Institute, which aims to create a cohort of Youth Champions which acts as a



community in the region. The cohort works together to ensure access to safe abortion as a Sexual and Reproductive Health Right, as well as a human rights issue, by facilitating the utilization of social media and other levels of community networking and communication by youth champions, within and outside their community.

### **Session 1: Understanding Gender and Patriarchy and its linkages with safe abortion issues**



The first session was an attempt to understand the concepts of gender and patriarchy, and its linkages with the issue of safe abortion. The session was led by Dr. Manisha Gupte, who is the founder of the MASUM, an organization that works for the welfare of women in Maharashtra, India. The densely packed session tackled many concepts, starting with the differences between ‘gender’ and ‘sex’, which are commonly misunderstood as the same, and the positive consequences of understanding and accepting that they stand for different things but are deeply connected. She walked our participants through understanding how gender is a social construct; that man and woman are gender, whereas sex is the biological difference between a male and a female, with a penis and a vagina respectively. Additional participants also were introduced to concepts that fall outside of this binary, such as trans-genders and intersex bodies. Dr. Gupte explained that the human beings are primarily identified by two indicators, i.e., masculinity and femininity, which are the social expectations from or life instructions dictated supposedly to men and women respectively. These markers become the foundation of discrimination between the genders, not knowing there are more than two genders.

Dr. Gupte moved on to the topic of *patriarchy* which she posited is the root cause of gender inequality, and simultaneously draws power from it. Through examples, she illustrated how this complex between gender inequality and patriarchy works; in our society, more men are shamed for being feminine than women being masculine. In fact, when a woman acts “manly” or wears men’s clothes, she appears to be cool. However, if a man wears girly clothes, he is insulted and treated with no respect. This clearly called attention to the differing social value attributed to masculinity and femininity. More than anything, society needs to embrace more of femininity as well but in no way, we should shame either of them. Dr. Gupte also clarified that although patriarchy means the ‘rule of fathers’ it is not always the male privilege that is the top of the pyramid. We have the elite privilege, and white privilege, where even the females belonging to those social positions are far better off than most males/men in the world. Thus, she also introduced participants to the concept of ‘*intersectionality*’.

The participants were also introduced to a new concept called ‘*hegemony*’ which is the ideological dominance or oppression of individuals by the oppressors, through the propagation of a set of ideologies which are considered “right”, and “normal”. From gender perspective, hegemony has come to mean the propagation of the idea men are, and should be the dominant group over women, which was politely rejected by Dr. Gupte as she reminded us that everyone is equal.

## Session 2: Powerwalk and Intersectionality

The second session of the day, led by Sonam Lepcha, further explored the concept of intersectionality through an activity called the Power Walk. The Power Walk calls attention to the power dynamics of the society through which marginalized people are left behind, and all those powerful ones keep on moving forward in life.



### Session 3: Gender and Sexism in Mass Media

The next session was on the role of the media in perpetuating sexism and gender inequality, and was led by Sonam Dema who is a part of D-YISA. The session highlighted how media, including social media, is sexist toward women and contributes to the misrepresentation and stereotyping of women's roles through processes such as objectifying their bodies, and the lack of diversity in representation. While it was acknowledged that men are also subject to stereotypes and gender roles in media portrayals, it was pointed out that the kind of stereotypes are often most harmful for women. For instance, in ads, domestic chores are always done by women who are seen as confined to only issues of home, and by men are often attributed 'intellectual' roles in which they wear a nice suit, drive a nice car and go to office etc. Through an interactive display of common advertisements and media material, participants were encouraged to think through popular representations of gender roles.



### Session 4: Human Rights, Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Dr. Manisha Gupte led the fourth session on human rights, and sexual and reproductive rights and the links between the two. She briefed the participants on the principles of human rights as being; universal, intrinsic, inalienable, indivisible, inter-dependent, inter-related and non-hierarchical. She also clarified the distinction between human rights and rights as the former being guaranteed by virtue of being human, and not created by governments, whereas the latter are formally granted by law.





The discussion then looked at what these concepts mean for an understanding of reproductive rights, and the linkages with other rights in upholding them. The conversation helped participants gain clarity about reproductive and sexual rights, and how they align with human rights. The session was particularly important in conveying the that safe abortion is a reproductive right, which is a human right. The understanding that human rights are essential to lead a life with dignity was a powerful thought to leave with the participants.

## Session 5: Values Clarification and Case Studies



The next session was led by Dr. Suchitra Dalvie, and supported by Dr. Manisha Gupte, in an effort to create awareness amongst the participants that the values that we hold dearly deeply influence the way we behave and make decisions, and interestingly, these decisions may not always be right. This session was backed up by an activity in which the participants were made to stand in a line and when statements were announced, they were asked to

move to either sides of the line indicating whether they agree or disagree. The statements were contentious such as ‘Women who have an abortion are ending a life’, ‘A woman should be able to have an abortion, even if her husband wants her to continue the pregnancy’, ‘Sex workers cannot be raped’, ‘Women with HIV have the right to reproduce’, and so on. All these statements spurred intense discussions amongst the participants and the facilitators clarified the misbeliefs, and thus helped to point out how some of the values that we hold onto can be misinformed or irrational.

The day ended with the screening of the movie called ‘Dirty Dancing’. Participants were asked to engage in order to have a discussion around it the next morning.

## DAY 2

The first day that ended well with the Dirty Dancing movie had all the participants go home and think about the importance of the movie. When we reconvened on the Day 2, we began by reflecting on some of their takeaways from the movie such as the risks associated with unsafe abortion, the loss of blood and the risk to life. The participants were thoroughly affected and agreed that abortion should be done safely in order to save the lives of many women. The participants also quickly recapped what they had learnt the previous day.



### Session 6: Basic Updates on Reproduction, Contraception and Safe Abortion

The first session of the day was titled 'Basic Updates on Reproduction, Contraception and Safe Abortion'. The intended outcome of the session was to create an understanding of how pregnancy occurs and how it can be prevented. At the same time, myths and misconceptions related to these issues were debunked. Dr. Dalvie led the session by asking the participants to sketch reproductive systems of male and female. While half of them had quite a fair knowledge about it as they are from medical/nursing background, other half had only learnt it in their science classes few years back. The discussion was a good revision of the human reproductive systems. In line with that, the menstrual cycle was discussed; how it occurs and why is it important to understand the cycle in order to plan pregnancy, or to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. The stigma attached to menstruation or how girls are shamed for periods was also discussed; participants shared examples from their lives of how sanitary pads are wrapped in



many layers of paper as if it were some illegal good when purchased from shops, boys mocking girls for being on period, and girls are not allowed to enter holy places during menstruation, etc. Next on the agenda was an understanding of contraception and the various types of contraceptives that can be used to prevent pregnancy such as birth control pills, IUDs, I-pills, tubectomy and Copper T. It was emphasized that these methods were solely meant to prevent pregnancy, but do not prevent from Sexually Transmitted Infections/Diseases. Thus, the best contraceptive that plays double role of preventing unwanted pregnancy and STIs is a condom, but it is also not always 100% effective due to many factors.

The next issue addressed was abortion, and particularly the need and significance of safe abortion. Dr. Dalvie went about explaining the procedure of safe abortion, both medical and surgical abortions. She pointed out that in fact, it is not scary, difficult or risky, as opposed to how it is usually made to sound by the anti-choice community.

The concepts that were just discussed, especially around contraception, was strengthened through role plays whereby the participants were made to put up small sketches to convey important messages regarding contraception to their friends. Right after it, they were shown some short clips related to both safe and unsafe abortion which helped bring clarity and further enhance their understanding on the importance of safe abortion. All the participants were made to share their views or lessons learnt from the videos.



## Session 7: Abortion Laws and Policies

The next session by Dr. Dalvie and was intended to raise awareness of abortion laws in Bhutan amongst the participants. Many of the participants stated that they were unfamiliar with national laws; almost 60% of them thought that abortion is illegal in Bhutan. The session helped them understand that abortion is legal in the country, but under 4 conditions only that are 1) in a case of rape, 2) where the pregnancy poses risk to mother's life, 3) where fetal abnormalities can be detected, 4) and risks to the mother's mental health is severe. These clarifications also helped the young participants see the huge gap in existing abortion laws and awareness levels of the citizens of the country. It was also pointed out that such abortion laws do not guarantee that woman can have an access to abortion service anytime she wants, which is the missing puzzle piece in the abortion law picture in the country. It was made clear to the participants that while abortion laws in Bhutan are better than most countries around the world, the government of Bhutan should also acknowledge the right of women or anyone who wants an abortion unconditionally, and not just those who meet the four requirements to have an abortion. The participants grasped the impacts of such laws, especially affecting the lives of women and others trying to avail abortion services.



## Session 8: Group work and literature review – critique of articles and publications

In the next session, the participants were given various articles to read, and then asked to share their views about the articles. Articles such as ‘Abortion causing huge gender imbalance in

Vietnam’ and ‘Abortion is a Crime’ helped participants absorb the issues that had been discussed over the two days, and apply these concepts to place abortion in a more rights-based framework.

### Session 9: Interpersonal Communication

The very last session of the day was on interpersonal communication and was led by Sonam Lepcha. The session was activity based, where participants played ‘Chinese Whispers’. Participants were made to pass on a message started by a person to the very last person in their group in order to check the effectiveness of the communication. It was found that the message from the first person had completely changed when it had reached the last person; it was distorted and sometimes, the messages did not make any sense, and turned out amusing as well.



The exercise illustrated the importance of effective interpersonal communication, and how when communication does not occur properly, the entire effort to convey an important message fails. Sonam Lepcha also explained how to ensure effective communication, and various aspects that influence it.

The day ended with participants thinking about these messages, and how they could incorporate them into their own lives.



## DAY 3

The third and last day began of the Safe Abortion YAI with the recap of the previous day and some key learnings from all the sessions and discussions.

### Session 10: ‘What does it mean to be Prochoice?’

The first session on the third day was an exploration of the question ‘What does it mean to be Prochoice?’, and was led by Dr. Dalvie. She used the session to explain that advocacy is a strong tool, and must use it the right way if we want to portray abortion as a good thing. The distinction between advocating for abortion (more importantly safe abortion) as a choice and a right for women, and not as a moral act was explained to participants – being pro-choice doesn’t mean that all women have to go out and necessarily get abortions, only that it gives women the sole decision making power to decide what to do with her body and pregnancy. Dr. Dalvie also warned participants of the dangers of conflating multiple advocacy issues, such as sex-selective abortions.



Dr. Dalvie also touched upon the roles that young people can take up as agents of change, and how they can take advantage of social media to communicate clear and accurate messages about the pro-choice position and issues surrounding it. Participants were also introduced to a new technique called ‘subversion’ – an art that creates a reverse narrative by subtly contradicting socially constructed values and misbeliefs.

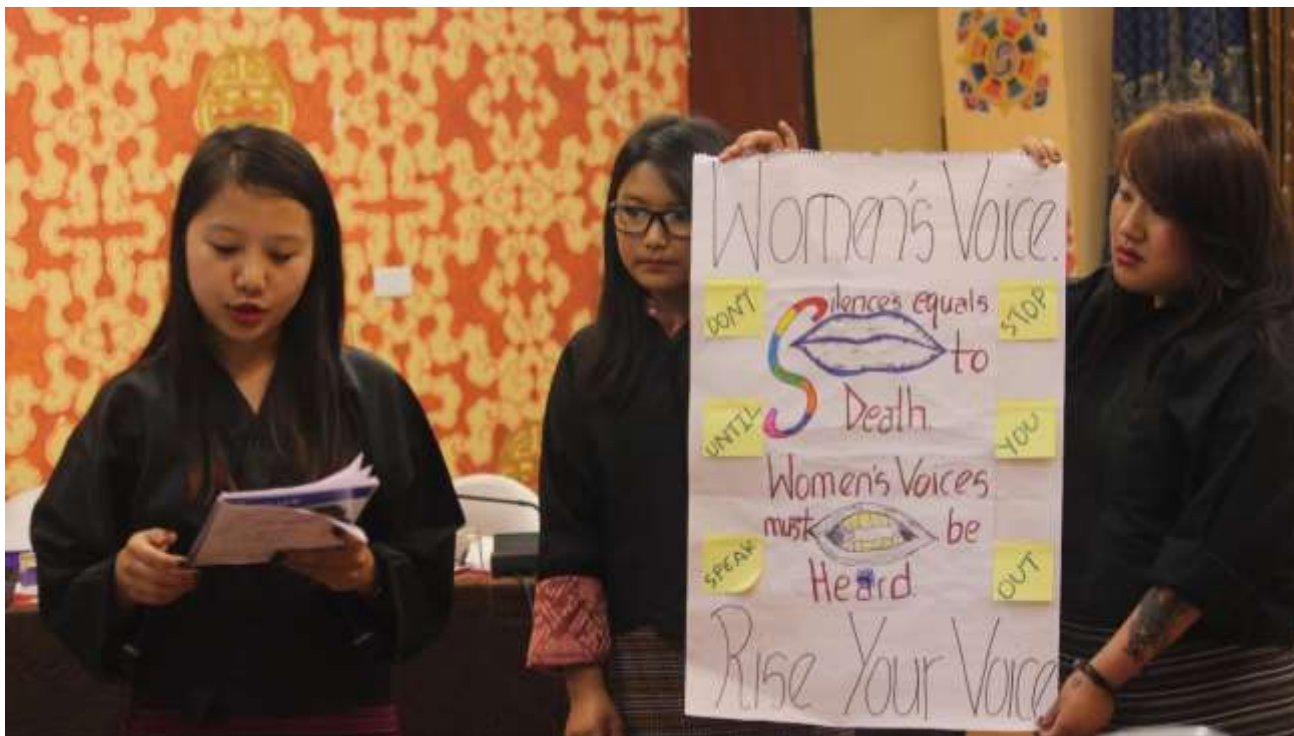
### Session 11: Internet politics

Finally, Dr. Dalvie introduced the concept of ‘internet politics’ – which called attention to the fact that the internet is a reflection of the politics of the real world. She was straightforward in letting the young women and men know that it is critical to identify and analyze good campaigns on the internet. Both the issue of subversion and the politics of the virtual space were new ideas for the participants and they were quite taken by them.



### Session 12: Creating Content

The final session was time given to the participants to create content that reflected the discussions of the previous three days. Participants came up with extremely innovative and creative ways to express themselves and the messages that they had gained in the context of (safe) abortion. The young participants were divided into five groups, and each group came up with one creative output each.



The content created in the picture above is called 'Women's voice'. It pictorially depicted the importance of speaking up, through a closed mouth and an open mouth which says 'silences equals to death' and 'women's voices must be heard', which shows the powerful transition from being submissive to a brave person.



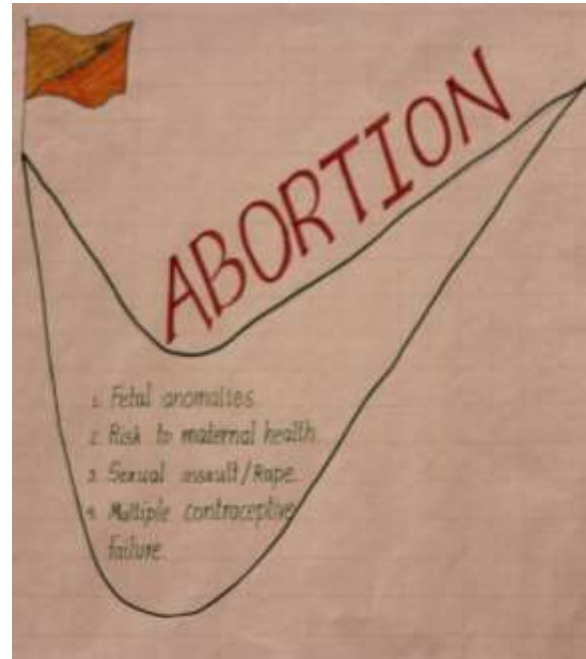
In the second piece, called 'Safe Abortion for Happy Life', participants depicted the story of a young girl who does not want to carry her pregnancy to term, maybe because she was raped, or had contraceptive failure during coitus with her boyfriend. She then

decides to seek abortion but is afraid of the consequences of an unsafe abortion. If she is provided with safe abortion, her life is secure, otherwise, she might even end up dying as depicted by the path that shows a cross sign with bloody future.



The next group visualized all the reasons that entitle a woman to receive an abortion service in the country, as a boat which implied the lives of women saved. It also depicted a woman who wants an abortion but does not meet any of the legal conditions, and thus ends up metaphorically drowning, and has no chance to get on that boat.

Similarly, other groups created content that helped visualize what they had learnt and put into images their advocacy ideas on the issue of safe abortion.



All the groups were well appreciated by each other and Dr. Dalvie, and all the groups received constructive feedback on their content. Through this exercise participants were able to grasp the purpose of creating advocacy content.

The workshop ended with the valedictory session, and the awarding of certificates to all the participants. Dr. Dalvie thanked the entire team of the Bhutan YAI for being active. The participants also gave their warmest appreciation to Dr. Dalvie and ASAP for making YAI happen in their lives for it has made a huge positive difference in all of their lives.



Safe Abortion YAI in Bhutan will ensure that D-YISA grows, and has set a benchmark for activities to create awareness on safe abortion amongst the young people of Bhutan. We are extremely grateful and thankful to Dr. Dalvie, Dr. Shroff, and ASAP for giving D-YISA members to be part of the YAI as Youth Champions.





## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: Breakdown of Participants

Institute	No. of males	No. of females
Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Studies (KGUMS)	7	9
Druk Tshenzo Training Institute (DTTI)	1	6
Samtse College of Studies	2	3
Sherubtse College and College of Language and Cultural Studies	1	1
Total	11	19

### Appendix 2: Participant List

	Name	Sex	Age
1	Chador Wangzom	Female	21
2	Dechen Lhamo	Female	17
3	Dorji Wangmo	Female	19
4	Kelzang Dawa	Male	22
5	Manita Rai	Female	22
6	Pema Norbu	Male	21
7	Probin Yonzon	Male	20
8	Sonam Dema	Female	25
9	Sonam Zangpo	Male	24
10	Tenzin Dema	Female	21
11	Tshering Gyem	Female	21
12	Tshering Dendup	Male	
13	Tshering Tshomo	Female	21
14	Tshering Zangmo	Female	20
15	Choni Yangden	Female	
16	Dechen Phurba	Male	
17	Dorji Wangmo	Female	20
18	Jamyang Dorji	Male	23
19	Kundrup Sonam Tobden	Male	21
20	Pema Tashi	Male	23
21	Sonam Dema	Female	
22	Sonam Zangmo	Female	21
23	Tabita Gurung	Female	20
24	Thinley Zangmo	Female	22
25	Sonam Lepcha	Male	23
26	Tshering Dema	Female	
27	Tshering Zangmo	Female	
28	Tenzin Wangmo	Female	
29	Ngawang Sonam	Male	25
30	Sonam Yangzom	Female	20