

**Wisdom tree and Panel Discussion**  
**Celebrating International Women's Day,**

March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Sherubtse College

D-YISA, ASAP

Theme: "Balance for Better"- Better the Balance, Better the World. Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change.



With support from DYISA (ASAP), Sherubtse College (the oldest college in Bhutan) organized two programs in the morning and evening to celebrate the International Women's Day. A lecturer by the name Yeshey Zangmo from the college is a follower of our Instagram page "Feminism in Bhutan" and we exchanged few messages and she expressed that she would like to support us in any way she could. So, we requested if she could conduct a small program in the

college to mark the IWD. Then, Yeshey along with another lecturer called Tshering Dorji and few more lecturers gathered interested students and planned to observe the IWD in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. The morning program was called “messages on the wisdom tree”. The college has a very old tree in the middle of the campus and this tradition of writing messages and handing on the branches of the tree was initiated by Wangchuk Dema when she was studying in the same college almost 5 years ago. So, the students wrote messages for women and to express the significance of such a day and they read each other’s messages.



Later in the evening, a panel discussion was organized the lecturers visa a college club called Sherubtse Initiative for Gender Learning and Research (SIGLR) . The Total of 40 students and 6 lecturers from the department of Social Science and Arts and Humanities forum participated in the program. The discussion was carried out by Mr. Tshering Dorji a teaching Faculty in the department of social science and the discussion session was moderated by Miss Sangay Tshechu, a faculty a member and coordinator to team SIGLR.

The discussion started on the topic “Equality”. The panelists pointed out that equality is treating everyone same irrespective of religion, race, sex and age. Some also pointed out that it is giving equal opportunities to voice their own choice in an unbiased manner and promoting zero

discrimination. However, it was noted that there is difference between equality and equity. In the process of discussion on equality, a panelist also pointed out that there was no equality between men and women in the past; were given different soil to cultivate one kind of fruit (philosophical perspective).



As the talk of gender equality emerged, the panelist tried discussing a little deeper into the topic. The panelists pointed out that in the past, men were treated superior to women. Woman had to stay back at home and raise their child and cook when her man would go out for work. A woman could not avail education and there was existence of patriarchal society. This was in past, so why is this cultural system still carried out? Why women are still treated the same? Why certain positions are always occupied by men? To such arising questions, panelists argued with certain points. Some argued that women are given equal chances now, be it in political or social life, it's just that women are not participating and they themselves are assuming the roles. A mindset has been created that women cannot work like a man and be equally competitive to men.



Later in the period, the panelists discussed some issues that the women are facing in Bhutan or worldwide. Some of the key issues discussed were:

1. Access to education and job opportunities: it has always been a issue that girls are restricted to avail education. Even though they complete graduation with good marks, they get invisible in job market. Only few opt for a job. What happens to the rest others? They land up accepting the orthodox dogmas of how and what should a women be.
2. Gender inequality
3. Gender- based violence: women experience physical or sexual abuse. They experience abuses such domestic abuse, rape, sexual trafficking, sexual objectification in media and other gender-based violence. This kind of violence to hampers healthy development of women/girls psychologically and physical.
4. Maternal health: women procreate. When they do so some lose their lives.
5. Reproductive health and rights: women are the victims of unplanned pregnancies where their sexual health rights are unnoticed. They land up in having unsafe abortion and even maternal deaths. Young girls seek for unsafe abortion when their partners refuse to accept them because of social or financial problems of the partner. The girls hence suffers social

stigma and that hampers their both physically and mentally. Women bleeds and it is hard to maintain proper sanitation especially for those who are economically disadvantaged.



The panelists finally discussed some solutions to the problems faced by women. First and foremost is educating and advocating people. In that way people can bring about self consciousness, give them sex education, access of enough information of family planning and SRHR. It will help people understand and accept individual differences. Other suggested solution is to provide pads free for those women who cannot afford to buy. Another solution is to treat a boy child or girl child equally on all the aspects and teach them to value differences.