



**Regional Youth Think Tank
Organized by The Asia Safe Abortion Partnership
28th January 2015,
Narai Hotel, Bangkok**

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 wanted to reach out to other youth led and youth focus groups from Asia who are working on issues of sexual and reproductive health issues in order 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 ASAP Regional Youth Think Tank was attended by 20

participants from 12 countries Ankit Gupta (India), Audrey Natalia (Indonesia), Dina Pradhan (Nepal), Dakshitha (Sri Lanka), Hye Jin Lee (Korea), Ignatia Alfa Gloria (Indonesia), Megan Yik (Hong Kong), Naureen Lalani (Pakistan), Preetam Manjusha (India), Rola Yasmine (Lebanon), Sarah Jane Biton (Philippines), Sarah Soysa (Sri Lanka), Saba Ismail (Pakistan), Shreejana Bajracharya (Nepal), Shivani Gupta (India), Tanzila Khan (Pakistan), Xiaoting Sun (China), Yadanar Aung (Myanmar), Yu Yang (China)

The Think Tank started with a welcome from the Youth Champions Sarah Soysa and Yu Yang who also shared the objective of the meeting. Dr. Suchitra Dalvie then gave a brief overview of ASAP and our work to the participants.

Sharing:

After this, we shared the achievements of the Youth Champions in order to give the participants an understanding of the work they have been doing in their countries with support of the small grants. Following is a snapshot of the sharing:



Sarah Soysa (Sri Lanka) spoke about her photo Campaign and post card campaign in Sri Lanka; she also told them about their short video documentary '[Its Her Right- to Mr. President](#)' that they have developed to facilitate advocacy in their country.

Rola Yasmine (Lebanon) shared about her project '[theAproject](#)' launched on Nov 05,

2014. The project also includes a hotline that women and girls can call to discuss issues around health and sexuality as well as unwanted pregnancies and abortion.

Preetam Potdar (India) spoke about her journey with ASAP as a Youth Champion. She highlighted how the first small grant helped her conduct a qualitative research with providers in her area and understand their approach to safe abortion. She also shared her future plans of starting a hotline in 2 districts as a pilot project, to give women information on safe abortion services.

Shreejana Bajracharya (Nepal) who is from the first batch of the Youth Champions shared with the participants how her association with ASAP has been instrumental in both her professional as well as personal development. The youth Institute and media mentoring from ASAP motivated her to work actively on building social media advocacy and she has even started her own blog [Kumari: the feminist](#). Shreejana has also been participating and actively contributing to the international campaign along with other Youth Champions from Nepal.

Sarah Jane Biton (Philippines) Abortion is legally restricted in the Philippines. Sarah has worked on creating a short film and a video blog which is all about questioning and talking about abortion, humane post abortion care and abortion stigma. A total of seven interviews and five video blogs were completed during the project duration along with the write-ups to support the videos. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juPFcSR0XXY>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2jI0C_wz3s&feature=youtu.be

Yu Yang (China) shared about their social media advocacy plans and the support from ASAP in building it. He also spoke about their future plan to conduct research on mapping the feminist movement in his country and increasing the visible discourse on safe abortion as a right.

Saba Ismail (Pakistan) has been managing the hotline in Pakistan through her organization Aware Girls for 5 years and shared her experience with the participants. The Suhailee hotline which was launched with support from ASAP and [Women on Web](#) was initially launched as a pilot and has now extended to Baluchistan and Bangladesh. Through the hotlines they have been working to reduce stigma and build capacity of other organizations working on related issues. Over the period they have developed a referral directory to help women in need of services. Saba talked about the challenges they faced from religious and fundamentalist groups after activities they conducted to promote and build awareness. Through their efforts they are now getting over 200 calls a month, which includes calls from UK and Dubai also.

Challenges:

This session was facilitated by Sarah Soysa, Shreejana and Sarah Jane. In this session we wanted the participants to think through the key challenges that young people face in their respective countries in accessing safe abortion. We also wanted them to reflect on the specific challenge they face in their own field of work. These challenges were grouped into three broad categories -- Lack of knowledge, Lack of access/providers/ services, Stigma.

The specific challenges they face in the field of work they do also fell within three broad groups—Access to Services, Lack of Information, Social Stigma



Identifying key concerns

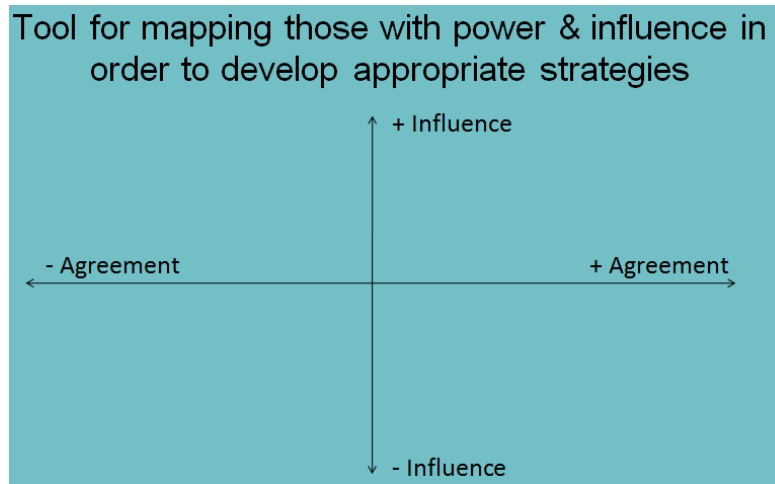
Shreejana read out the issues that each group had listed the participants were then asked to individually vote in terms of priority, participants were then grouped according their priority area of concern. they were then asked to think how their group needs to work and needs most support from ASAP. This exercise helped identify the key areas where ASAP could intervene and provide support.

Barbara Klugman, an expert strategy and evaluation consultant also joined us at the Youth Think Tank. In her session on identifying strategies to address priority concerns & the role of ASAP she helped participants to identify the institutions/ people who can help overcome the problems/ challenges that were identified in the previous session. She asked them to think of individuals/ institutions/ factors that make these challenges worse and also to spell out who influences your work and how?

The participants were divided into three groups-
 Group A- Access (identify help and barriers)
 Group S- Stigma (identify help and barriers)

Group I- Information (identify help and barriers)

Each group was asked to map the challenges and influences using the following mapping tool



Barbara then went to explain the need for identifying opportunities for intervention and why it is important to focus our attention on moderates and not waste our resources on the extremists. She said that it is an important part of any advocacy strategy to identify the actors that can be moved and influenced first and then allocate our energy and resources in working on them. Barbara then explained how one can lower the influence of the extremists who are in disagreement and how to raise the influence of those in agreement. She also explained how you can bring those in 'soft-disagreement' to the agreement side.

According to Barbara it's important to evaluate how much we care about this group of people who are in serious dis-agreement and cannot be influenced. Once you have thought about all these people you then need to position yourselves and remember that people listen to you if you are reasonable. There are benefits of highlighting many positions and adopting a moderate one- it is about messaging, who are you targeting with your social media and what are the messaging and actions that allow you to move people.

She then asked the participants to choose one of the opposition groups and think about action/ strategy that will help reduce/ take away their power/ influence. This exercise helped participants to think through what can be done to increase the influence of favorable factors and then think what contribution we can make as ASAP. The idea was to help ASAP identify priority areas of intervention and strategies to address priority concerns in the region. .

Analysis from the Groups

Group 1: Stigma

Identified Mass media as a group that can be moved and influenced

Strategy:

- By creating and using alternative media, write ups, trainings-media sensitization (have been less effective since trainings are done only with journalists who don't have much influence- therefore will engage with editors)
- To increase influence can engage academics/ activists to work together

Role of ASAP:

1. ASAP is already a network and we need to maintain and strengthen it.
2. Help in engaging with more Youth coalitions/ Groups in the region.
3. Help in writing grant proposals and funding
4. Information sharing and dissemination of advocacy tools
5. Updated country profiles and translate into different languages.
6. Information and resource base on SRHR
7. Share information on trainings/ meetings and seminar and facilitate participation, help engage at a regional level.

Group 2: Access

Identified Religious group as having strong influence therefore need to reduce their power and move them to moderate position.

Strategy:

- To engage with religious leaders, work on interpretation of religious texts and initiate discussions within a rights based framework.
- To increase influence can involve providers- create pressure group of health care providers for safe abortion advocacy and connect them with civil society and academicians.

Role of ASAP:

- Creating a pressure group of Health Care Providers (HCP) to help improve access
- HCP can connect with civil societies and policy makers
- The community can also monitor what HCP are practicing and how they are treating women
- Technical and capacity building of the HCP and youth.
- Facilitate local forums for lobbying and networking to help identify pro-choice groups.
- Help in engaging with disability groups to bring in abortion component in their ongoing work.
- Enables members to work in the country while it works as network

Group 3: Information

Identified teachers as a target group since they play a greater role in school system and can play a major role in safe abortion advocacy

Strategy-

- Deal with two sectors- public school teachers and private school teachers, Reach out to teachers in Private sector- conduct trainings.

- Create module that can be used in teacher training- Information bag- good practices, evidence study, research to facilitate trainings
- Parent teacher association where parents can be involved in the curriculum since even they play major role and also at times gate keeper
- Create/ provide regional/ international platforms for these teachers so they get motivated.
- Sports and entertainment to be used as methods for reaching out to students
- Positive- information bank for youth group- evidence and case study to help move from negative to positive
- Capacity building of the youth group

Role of ASAP-

Teachers -

Training, development of curriculum

Online resource tool/ module available on website

Information bank- accessible on website

Regional platform for presenting good practices- network building

Young people-

Funding for Projects

Mentoring for youth so more can be involved

SRHR activists network- regional platform- training module

Updated information system so they can use for advocacy

Create Youth Dialogue/ Think Tank- safe space to discuss their activities

Country Level Advocacy Plans:

After presentations from the groups we moved on to discussing the next steps - what does this mean for ASAP and what could we do to support this? This session was facilitated by Dr. Suchitra Dalvie, she started by identifying how these discussions can feed into the existing work of ASAP-

1. All of us need to engage and be a partner
2. Youth Champions are the critical mass that can be built up and made stronger as more people to support the work and grow further.
3. Translate the material that is already out there
4. More information can always be generated
5. Join the list serve and publish the list serve and feed back
6. Youths need to help us feed things back from their countries
7. We need to be vocal and create visibility

Dr. Dalvie then asked the participants to share plans about country level advocacy and tell us two specific things that they will do as part of their current work which will help them to integrate safe abortion as an issue; this exercise intended to help participants translate their ideas into doable short/ long term plans. Barbara helped them to think this through by using the matrix to facilitate the planning and strategizing.



Following are the plans shared by the participants:

Shivani (India) works with FAT-NET on Gender and Sexuality curriculum and said she will integrate safe abortion topic in this curriculum. This will be done at 2 levels- one with adolescent girls and other with the mothers.

Audrey (Indonesia) is a medical student and a member of the Medical Students for Choice, Asia. She plans to work on Pro-choice advocacy in her Medical School

Sarah Soysa (Sri Lanka) is working on Beijing Platform for Action trainings at country level through which she will be collaborating with women and media collectives. She is also planning to launch a hotline for giving women information to help with managing an unwanted pregnancy.

Tanzila (Pakistan) represents National Forum for Women with disabilities, Pakistan; she plans to start a training program for disabled women on SRHR. She will also try to work on establishing personalized hotline and include abortion within it.

Saad (Bangladesh) is a researcher and works on environmental change and impact on body politics. He plans to contribute in terms of research, status of abortion in refugee

population- through conducting a primary interactive research with refugee colonies in Nepal and Bangladesh.

Naureen (Pakistan) is a nurse and works with Aahung. She plans to spread awareness about the hotlines through her ongoing trainings and capacity building workshops. She would also be working on building advocacy for establishing service delivery through her organization. Naureen along with other two participants from Pakistan plan to conduct joint trainings especially with disabled women.

Dakshita (Sri Lanka) plans to introduce a component on safe abortion during knowledge sharing events. He wants to work on analyzing why men are working on safe abortion and coming forward as feminists- the idea is to do a documentary/ video- can be used as an advocacy video for engaging men.

Shreejana (Nepal) works with Bhaktapur Youth Information Forum (BYIF) and is planning to do peer education training through a youth network. By using mapping tool facilitated by Barbara they will try to identify potential partners and allies and think through about the outcomes and create a network of youth friendly providers etc.

Megan (Hong Kong) plans to use this mapping tool to identify volunteers and analyze the situation of safe abortion in Hong Kong. For this she will start a research and also try to get volunteers to promote access to safe abortion services in Hong Kong.

Yadanar (Myanmar) is working on an SRHR project and will incorporate safe abortion as a component in it. She also intends to do mapping of other organizations who work on safe abortion in her country to help in network building and figure how to spread this information to service providers.

Dina (Nepal) works with GirlsNotBrides Campaign, she said that safe abortion is already part of national strategy of Nepal. Their organization is working on preparing a policy brief on ending child marriages; it includes abortion, SRHR, strengthening youth friendly health services.

Ankit Gupta (India)- plans to study the Economic rights and SRHR connect – he would do this through modules that are art based and sexuality based. He will try to work out how art based abortion modules can be created.

Ignatia (Indonesia) is a volunteer at IPPF Jakarta where they are already talking about SRHR and Abortion. From March she will be starting her own project through the small grants on comprehensive sexual rights information. Initially it will make information available in English. Ignatia also plans to set up an Indonesian website and conduct Gender and Sexuality class for one and a half month with youth volunteers.

Xiaoting (China) aims to move forward the agenda of safe abortion in public domain. She also plans to map feminist networks in China and Initiate dialogue among different feminist NGO's and academics. She will also work to translate ASAP documents into local languages.

Yu Yang (China) will join Xiaoting's project and work together. There is a huge gap now between the government and voices from the grass roots so they want to do some research to identify and understand this gap.

Hye Jin (Korea) intends to initiate a dialogue on abortion as a women's right. She plans to mainstream the issue with help from her co-workers by jointly organizing seminars/ talks and workshops on the issue. She primarily wants to focus on teenage abortions.

Sarah Jane (Philippines) will be establishing a hotline and initiate a PAC network. She will also undertake mapping of the government perspective on the issue. She also plans to work on messaging we need to use with people from different perspectives and different stake holders.

Rola (Lebanon) will continue her current work. She will also start writing about her experiences in refugee camps and the need for access to safe abortion. She also plans to create a youth network which branches out and includes people working on diverse issue.

Preet (India) is initiating a hotline in two districts; this will be pilot for the next 6 months to provide information on safe abortion services. Her organization is also working on a campaign to separate sex selection from safe abortion.

Saba (Pakistan) wants to start youth institutes in Pakistan to help build capacity of the youth in her country. She would also try to develop some graphic material for information dissemination and contribute regularly on social media and also start giving information on email like Inna and Chompoo.

Thuy (Vietnam) has been working closely with Ministry of Health, they will now be pushing for mifepristone registration.

Ninuk (Indonesia) will work on a draft for counselling on Medical Abortion for the government

Inna (Indonesia) is working on home based medical abortion module and a mobile application (using regular as well as smart phones). These will be in English and can be translated for those who want to use it.

Concluding the discussion Dr. Choong (Malaysia) said the main challenge that we see is how we can empower the young people. Beyond giving information we also need to speak about reproductive rights and stigma and think of the key message we can give that will help them move forward. Through these exercises we hope that we find ways of achieving this through social media that changes power structures so people at the higher levels have to listen to those lower in the power structures.

Dr. Dalvie closed the session by asking the participants to share detailed proposals of their plans, she told the participants that ASAP will be able to support some of these plans and

projects through providing support small grants. She also listed what ASAP as already doing in terms of network building and requested all participants to actively contribute in the process:

- List Serve- Social media- join invite friends
- Don't just share our info/ posts also contribute
- International Campaign- Sign up (share link)
- WHO manual- help translate some key parts in local language
- Get hold of chapter related to abortion in medical text book of your country so we can analyze how abortion is addressed; whether it is in rights based framework and are there issues that we can raise bring to attention.
- Editorial Calendar- send profile of one woman advocate/activist
- Can contribute as guest editors for a particular month to the ASAP blog
- International Days of importance- contribute and push your messages on safe abortion

We ended the day with a very interesting exercise by Dakshita and Sarah where participants were asked to think of certain key words and then come up with a poem. They were then asked to enact the poems. This led to a lot of laughter and fun and we closed the day in a very positive way.



Overall the Youth Think Tank was highly appreciated. Some of the participants were attending a workshop on abortion for the first time and were quite enthused by the issues

and discussions. They expressed need for more such platforms and promised to work on the ideas shared during the day.