



COPASAH GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM 2019
Citizenship Governance and Accountability in Health

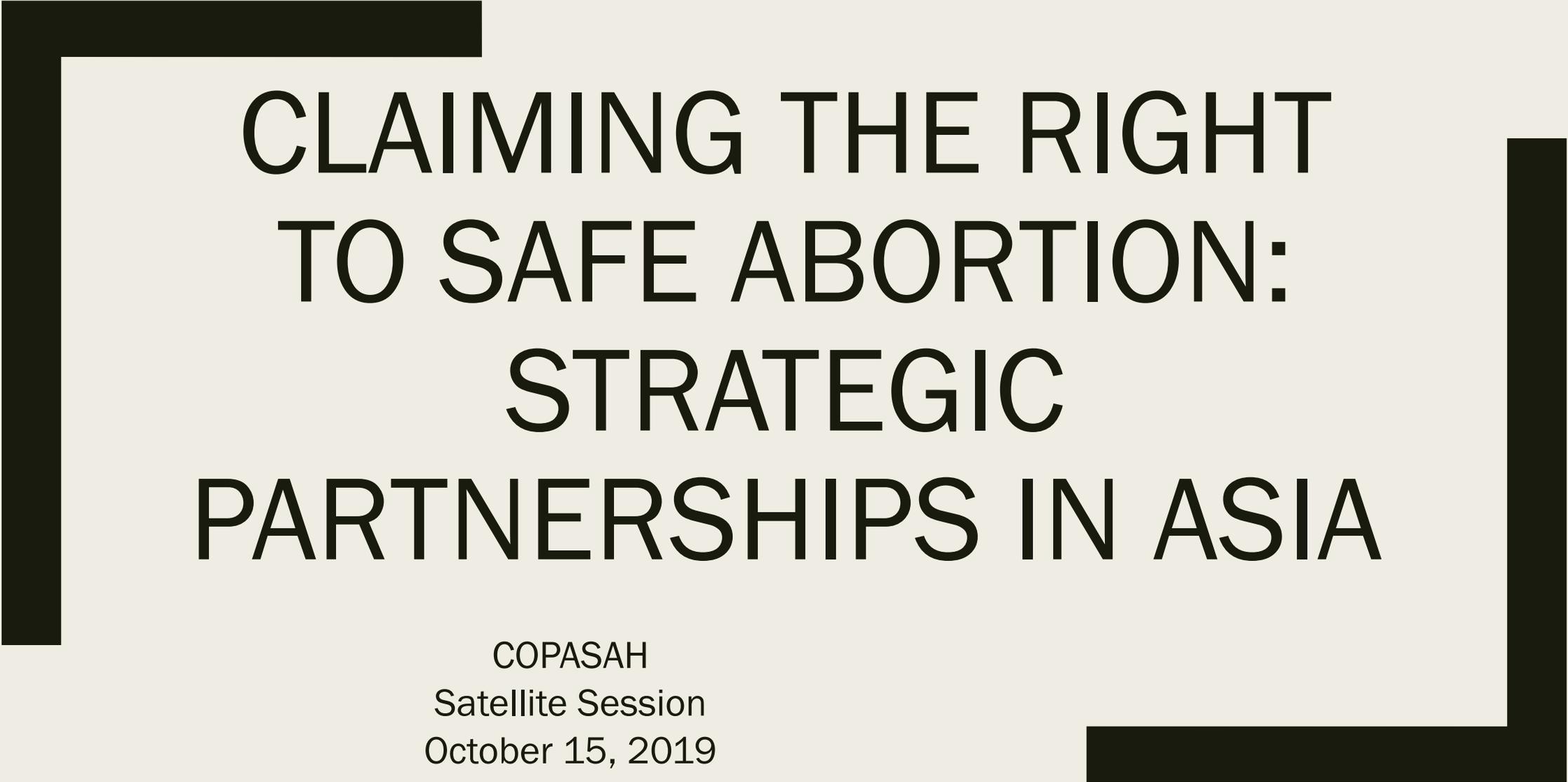
SATELLITE SESSION

**The Right to Safe Abortion: Recognising its Importance, Building
Solidarity and Mobilising for Change**

Organiser: Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)

**Co-organiser: Naripokkho, Bangladesh; CommonHealth, India; Women's Global Network for
Reproductive Rights, Philippines**

15 OCTOBER 2019



CLAIMING THE RIGHT TO SAFE ABORTION: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS IN ASIA

COPASAH
Satellite Session
October 15, 2019

Why focus on abortion?

- Abortion, safe or unsafe, takes place as a response to unintended pregnancies – undeniable part of many women’s lived realities
- Globally, 44% of the 227 million pregnancies that took place each year between 2010 and 2014 were unintended and 56% of unintended pregnancies ended in abortion
- Drivers range from socio-economic reasons, non-readiness, partnership situation, low age, threat to pregnant person’s life, failed or lack of contraception, birth spacing, the desire to stop having children, rape and incest.
- Despite complexity, abortion discourse is often distilled to how women should be allowed to do it, when she should be allowed to do it, where should the abortion be allowed to occur or if it should be allowed at all

Why focus on abortion?

* Unwillingness of Global South governments to approach abortion holistically through an integrated health and rights approach leave women in their countries vulnerable to unsafe abortion

- We know unsafe abortions occur overwhelmingly in developing regions where countries that highly restrict abortion is concentrated

*- Even where abortion is broadly legal, inadequate provision of **affordable services** often limit access*

*- Persistent **stigma** at all levels can also affect willingness of providers and create social pressures that lead women to prioritise secrecy over safety*

* The path toward safer abortion is clear – expand access and create an enabling environment for safe abortion so women and girls won't have to risk their health and lives by resorting to unsafe methods.

Claiming the Right to Safe Abortion

- Project implemented in collaboration with six partners across South- and South-East Asia (CommonHealth, Beyond Beijing Committee, Naripokkho, BAPSA, WGNRR, and RHAC)
- The initiative spans 5 countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal and the Philippines
- GOAL:
Incremental gains in safe abortion legislation implementation and access to safe abortion services in five countries in South- and South-East Asia, with varying degrees on which abortion is permitted.

Claiming the Right to Safe Abortion

Key barriers across countries:

- a) Lack of awareness among women and service providers around the legal grounds on which abortion is permitted
- b) Social stigma and norms that prevent women from exercising their agency
- c) Conscientious objection by service providers and consequent lack of referrals
- d) Poor quality of abortion services

Key Strategies

- **Evidence generation** on the situation, gaps and challenges towards fulfilling the right to safe abortion
- **Capacity strengthening** on values clarification, advocacy and accountability from a rights-based approach for safe and legal abortion
- **Advocacy at local and national levels** through community mobilisation. Advocacy will include addressing accountability of duty bearers
- **Sharing knowledge**, linking and learning across countries and partner organisations to strengthen advocacy

SAIGE – Safe Abortion Advocacy Initiative – a Global South Engagement

- SAIGE was first established in March 2019 within the Claiming the Right to Safe Abortion Project.
- Abortion high on political agenda, but many Governments in Global South are hostile to many dimensions of SRHR, especially abortion.
- Push back requires strong solidarity among Global South advocates to advance access to safe abortion in their respective countries
 - *SAIGE provides platform to mobilise support for members, and also provides a network where members can share knowledge and expertise towards advancing access to safe abortion in their own contexts*

AIM OF SAIGE

- SAIGE aims to build a community of Global South Advocates, academics, services providers and individuals committed towards:
- Building a strong Global South Movement that can resist and push through the complex and often hostile cultural and religious context abortion sits within our countries
- Improving awareness on the legality of abortion and availability of services in order to address the barriers that prevent access to some women over others
- Developing evidence on the drivers of unsafe abortion to inform regional and local advocacy toward safer access to abortion
- Advancing the right to abortion by addressing factors that cause and perpetuate stigma and prevent access to safe services while ensuring autonomy to claim these rights
- Addressing barriers to access caused by refusal of care by service providers based on conscience and/or religion



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