

Reproductive and Sexual Autonomy: Learning from Neighbors in Asia

Background and Objectives

The project will bring together groups and individuals from across Asia to share knowledge and experiences of legal and policy barriers to the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to develop common strategies for law and policy reform. Through this project, the Center for Reproductive Rights will engage with its own networks as well as groups in sub-regions in Asia where it has had limited or no previous engagement.

Why this project is important

Asia is the largest continent in the world and is home to more than half of the world's population. There is huge diversity within the continent and therefore the sexual and reproductive health landscapes vary considerably. In some of the largest countries in Asia - for example India, Pakistan and Bangladesh - quality maternal health services are denied to many women. In some countries, for example the Philippines and Indonesia, laws severely restrict access to abortion. Across the continent, conservative and hardline religious forces are actively undermining efforts to improve legal and policy frameworks to protect and promote reproductive rights. Throughout Asia, women and girls face intersectional discrimination and their vulnerability to human rights violations is compounded by their race, ethnicity, class and religion.

The Center has been a driving force behind strategic litigation in Nepal, India and Pakistan that has led to the recognition of reproductive rights and the implementation of laws and policies for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health. The Center has also provided technical support to advocacy strategies for crucial law reform that has strengthened guarantees for reproductive rights and health. In addition, the Center's Asia program has developed a strong network of reproductive rights advocates in South Asia including lawyers, academics and policy experts. The Asia program also works in the South-east Asia region to advocate for law reform on abortion and surrogacy. However, there are some countries within each subregion¹ that remain untapped and areas within the continent where the Center does not have a footprint, specifically Central Asia and the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region.

One goal of this project is to identify legal barriers and partners and legal innovations in countries within sub-regions in Asia where the Center has had no significant engagement, to begin to expand the Center's understanding, contribution, and impact in the continent. We aim to identify areas of law and policy reform and advocacy while recognizing the

¹ For purposes of this project, we have defined the following sub-regions: South-east Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and Southwest and Northern Africa (SWANA).

CONCEPT NOTE

intersectionality of human rights violations that prevent the full realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The project will enable the Center to move closer to its ambitious goal of ensuring stronger legal protections for reproductive rights for half of the world's population by 2030, as it will identify, create, and tap opportunities to build, enforce and defend laws for protection of SRHR in more countries within Asia.

Activities

Publication

The Center will invite experts to submit articles on the impact of specific legal and policy frameworks on sexual and reproductive rights in countries in Asia. The overall theme of the publication is "Reproductive and Sexual Autonomy." The articles may cover legal frameworks related to abortion, contraception, surrogacy, adolescents or obstetric care services. We will ask experts to write on gaps and weaknesses in laws in their areas of work or share examples of advocacy efforts that led to positive law and policy reform. The required length of each article will be 5000-7000 words. The publication will create a rich knowledge base of priority areas for law and policy reform in Asia that will be crucial to spur progressive developments and liberalize restrictive legal frameworks on reproductive and sexual autonomy in the region.

Webinars

After finalizing the authors for the publication, the Center will hold two webinars for the authors to present their article outlines and to solicit feedback from each other and other experts in our networks.

Convening

The Center will hold an in-person convening for which we will invite the authors and other experts to present, comment on and analyze the papers to collate knowledge and chart an action plan for law reform in their countries or regions. This convening will help the Center, as well as other relevant SRHR justice actors, to determine where and how the law can have the most significant impact to advance SRHR justice in Asia.