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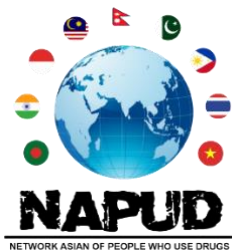
**NATIONAL CONSULTATION OF  
WOMEN WHO USE DRUGS IN NEPAL**

10-11 OCTOBER  
KATHMANDU, NEPAL

SUBMITTED BY  
**RECOVERING NEPAL (RN) WOMEN**

SUBMITTED TO  
**NETWORK OF ASIAN PEOPLE WHO USE  
DRUGS (NAPUD)**

16 OCTOBER 2023



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## Background

Recovering Nepal (RN) Women, the national network of women who use drugs in Nepal organized a 2-day national consultation on 10-11 October 2023 in Kathmandu. The consultation brought together 48 participants, including 38 women who use drugs and representatives of women-led drug service organizations from all seven provinces of Nepal.

As per government estimates, there are 8,732 women who use drugs in Nepal. Over 90% of them are below 29 years of age and around 79% inject drugs. The HIV prevalence among women who inject drugs is 2%. About 45% of women who use drugs have been arrested by police at some point. There is currently no gender-specific harm reduction services in the country. The coverage of needle-syringe program (NSP) and opioid substitution therapy (OST) remains very low at 32% and 4.3% respectively.



## Objectives

The main objectives of the consultation were to:

1. Validate the draft guidelines on comprehensive harm reduction services for women
2. Develop an advocacy roadmap for establishing women-centric services
3. Build capacity on viral hepatitis B and C
4. Strengthen the RN Women network through the Annual General Meeting

## Day 1 Proceedings

### Inaugural session



The 2-day consultation began with a formal inauguration on the morning of 10 October 2023. The inaugural session started with participants introducing themselves to each other. Ms. Hema Shrestha, President of RN Women, welcomed all the participants and emphasized the importance of this national consultation. RN team leader outlined the objectives of the 2-day program.

This was followed by opening remarks from Mr. Giten Khwairakpam, Program Manager of TREAT Asia, who provided an overview of TREAT Asia's work and support for this

consultation. Mr. Ujjwal Karmacharya, General Secretary of Recovering Nepal, also gave opening remarks highlighting the significance of bringing together women from across Nepal to discuss issues faced by women who use drugs.

Other speakers included Mr. Francis Joseph, the NAPUD Regional Coordinator, who talked about building strong networks of women in the Asia Pacific region. After the opening speeches, the participants were oriented on the objectives and expectations from the 2-day national consultation. The inaugural session set the stage for the discussions to be held over the next two days.

### Technical session on Viral Hepatitis

Mr. Giten Khwairakpam from TREAT Asia conducted an interactive 2-hour technical session on viral hepatitis B and C. He started with an introduction to hepatitis viruses and the different modes of transmission such as infected blood, unsafe injection drug use, unprotected sex, etc.



He explained the natural progression of acute hepatitis infection to chronic infection in case of HBV and HCV which can lead to liver cirrhosis and cancer. The presentation highlighted the global disease burden and mortality caused by viral hepatitis.

The facilitator discussed specific risk factors and prevalence among people who inject drugs. Around 2.8 million people who inject drugs globally are living with HCV infection. In Nepal, HBV and HCV prevalence among women who inject drugs is 3.5% and 8% respectively.

The session covered various aspects like chronic infection, types of diagnostic tests, available vaccines, and treatment drugs like Interferon and Direct Acting Antivirals (DAAs). The key advocacy priorities

highlighted were - increasing awareness through targeted IEC, integration of hepatitis services into existing harm reduction programs, vaccination, increasing access to diagnosis and treatment, and developing a national viral hepatitis strategy. The session was interactive with participants raising queries which were comprehensively addressed by the facilitator.

### **Introduction to NAPUD**

The NAPUD Regional Coordinator, Mr. Francis Joseph, conducted an interactive session to introduce the Network of Asian People who Use Drugs (NAPUD). Formed in 2021, NAPUD represents 8 countries currently. Its mission is to promote health, human rights and harm reduction for people who use drugs while working to end their criminalization and marginalization.



NAPUD's strategic focus areas include representation of people who use drugs, gender, LGBTQI issues, governance, mental health, and drug policy. Mr. Francis gave examples of challenges faced by women who use drugs in accessing healthcare and facing violence. He emphasized the need for an inclusive national response to identify key issues affecting women who use drugs. At the regional level, NAPUD can support by sharing best practices, building capacity of women-led networks, collaborative advocacy and facilitating exchange of information. The

session highlighted that NAPUD provides a unifying platform to advocate for the rights of women who use drugs in the Asia Pacific region.

### **Review and closing**

Key discussion points and recommendations were summarized at the end of day 1. Participants provided feedback and the session was closed.

## Day 2 Proceedings

### Draft guidelines on harm reduction services

Mr. Bikash Gurung presented draft guidelines by RN Women on comprehensive harm reduction services for women who use drugs. The guidelines defined minimum, optimum, and ideal packages based on available resources.

Some of the key points highlighted:

- The minimum package includes outreach, NSP, HIV testing, STI management, condoms, naloxone distribution, and an enabling environment.
- The optimum package additionally covers OAT, drug dependence treatment and hepatitis services.
- The ideal package further includes TB services, community distribution of naloxone, linkages to livelihood programs etc.
- Guiding principles - human rights, community empowerment, integrated services, women-focused issues etc.

The presentation was followed by a discussion on service delivery models, human resource requirements, and standards for ensuring effective and gender-sensitive services.



### Visit and remarks from the Honorable Secretary of MoHP



During this session of the comprehensive guideline for women who use drugs, there was a surprise visit from the honorable Secretary of the MoHP Dr. Roshan Pokharel. He acknowledged the organizers on behalf of himself and the Nepal government for organizing this event and allowing him to share his remarks.

He stated that he had worked for more than two decades as a psychiatrist and understands the needs of drug users, especially access to Viral Hepatitis C treatment and vaccination. In the end, he reiterated his commitment and open suggestions as a friend and colleague who understands the community well.

### Advocacy Roadmap (Group discussion)

During group discussions, participants identified stigma, barriers in accessing harm reduction services, lack of women-specific services, high violence rates, unsafe sex, and policy barriers as key issues faced by women who use drugs.

Some of the key issues highlighted were:

- High levels of stigma, discrimination, and violence.
- Barriers to accessing harm reduction services like NSP, OST, HIV testing, etc.
- Lack of tailored and women-only services.
- Lack of women-friendly and women-specific harm reduction services.
- Lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services.
- Need for capacity building of women-led organizations.
- Restrictive policies related to marital status, age, etc.
- Issues related to viral hepatitis, OAT coverage, law enforcement, etc.



The results of the group work are attached to this report as *Annexure 2*. Based on the recommendations from the group discussions, a short-term advocacy roadmap has been developed (separate document).

### **Annual General Meeting (AGM)**

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of RN Women was conducted on the second day. The key discussion points were:

- Review of programmatic progress and financial performance for the previous fiscal year.
- Challenges in internal governance and communication.
  - The General Secretary expressed that she was unaware of some recent organizational decisions and all her queries were responded by other Board members and staff to her satisfaction.
  - The Treasurer admitted to having caused inconvenience to the operations of RN Women with her unavailability for cheque signing and expressed her commitment to become responsible in the coming days.
  - All Board members and general members agreed that most of the issues were a result of either a lack of proper communication or miscommunications. Therefore, the Board decided to have bi-monthly (every two months) Zoom meetings from now onwards.
- Two vacant positions in the RN Women executive board were filled with new representatives from provinces 1 and 5 (one each).
- The AGM also decided that the auditor for the next fiscal year would be Mr. Satish Chandra Lal, CA of LSP Associates. The audit fees will be NPR 35,000.

### **Closing**

The consultation achieved its objectives related to the validation of harm reduction guidelines, advocacy roadmap development and capacity building on relevant areas. Ms. Hema Shrestha, the president of RN Women highlighted these key achievements and closed the consultation.

## Annexure

### Annexure 1: Results of the Group work

#### Key Issues

- High levels of stigma, discrimination, and violence against women who use drugs.
- Barriers faced by women who use drugs in accessing harm reduction services like the Needle Syringe Program (NSP), Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST), HIV testing, etc.
- Lack of women-friendly and women-specific harm reduction services.
- Lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services for women who use drugs.
- Need for capacity building of women-led community organizations working on harm reduction.
- Restrictive policies related to eligibility criteria based on marital status, age, etc. for accessing services.
- Issues related to viral hepatitis, low OST coverage, punitive law enforcement, lack of overdose prevention services, etc.

#### Advocacy Priorities

- Decriminalization of drug use.
- Improving access to comprehensive harm reduction services.
- Increasing access to health services including sexual and reproductive health.
- Establishing women-friendly and tailored harm reduction services.
- Capacity building of women-led community organizations.
- Addressing policy barriers to accessing services.
- Increasing investments in harm reduction, especially for women.
- Promoting and advocating for HIV and viral hepatitis treatment literacy and access to testing, vaccination, and treatment among women who use drugs, including service providers.

#### Key Strategies

- Evidence generation on issues and needs of women who use drugs.
- Sensitization of policymakers, service providers, law enforcement agencies etc.
- Community mobilization and empowerment of women who use drugs.
- Capacity building of women-led community organizations.
- Partnerships and engagement with networks like NAPUD, UN agencies, donors etc.
- Leveraging global commitments like UNAIDS targets, SDGs etc.
- Strategic advocacy with Health Ministry, Home Ministry, relevant government agencies etc.
- Awareness generation and enlisting support of the public, media etc.

#### Key Stakeholders

- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Home Affairs



- National AIDS Control Center
- Provincial Health Directorates
- Local government
- Provincial Government
- Women commissions/committees
- Law enforcement agencies
- Legal aid organizations
- Media
- Funding agencies/donors
- Regional/global networks like NAPUD

### **Resource Planning**

- Funding for research, sensitization events, capacity building
- Technical support for evidence generation
- Consultants for drafting policy briefs, reform proposals
- Meeting costs for advocacy at national and sub-national levels
- Travel costs for participation in consultations
- Information, education, and communication materials
- Costs for community mobilization and empowerment activities

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Tracking progress on advocacy priorities and key milestones
- Process documentation of activities, stakeholders engaged etc.
- Assessing improvement in services, policy changes achieved through advocacy
- Periodic review meetings to monitor progress and incorporate learnings

## Annexure 2: Program Attendance Sheet

### Recovering Nepal Women

National Network of Women Who Use Drug and Service Organization in Nepal

Program : National Consultation of Women who Use Drugs in Nepal

Date : 10 & 11 October 2023

Venue : Baugamvillia Event, Kathmandu

S.N.	Name	Organization Name	Address	Email	Cell No	Gender			Signature	
						M	F	Other	Day 1	Day 2
1	Pobita Pun	Asaka Foundation	Butwal-11	soyarpun@gmail.com	9807569248		✓		Pobita Pun	Pobita Pun
2	Simran Rajbhandari	Nawa chrishti female rehab	Nepalgunj -13 Barke	rajbhandariSimran09@gmail.com	9862532004		✓		Simran	Simran
3	Rubi Nepali	Nawa chishti female rehab	Nepalgunj -13 Barke	Rubisunaw60@gmail.com	9703405982		✓		Rubi Nepali	Rubi Nepali
4	Shanta Ghale	EKTA Nepal	Chitwan	shantaghale371@gmail.com	9858072923		✓		Shanta Ghale	Shanta Ghale
5	Santa Quary	Trishti Nepal	Ktm	info@trishti.nepal.org.np	9861275395 9869251148		✓		Santa Quary	Santa Quary
6	Sarita Tamang	Subhacantha	Lalitpur	Subhacantha@gmail.com	9840619405		✓		Sarita Tamang	Sarita Tamang
7	Amika Thapa	Sarabi Nepal	Balesu	SSU.sarabinepal@gmail.com	9817871045		✓		Amika Thapa	Amika Thapa
8	Sizana Thakar (Shay)	Neeta foundation	Hetauda	Aidy.Hetauda@neetafoundation.org.np	9819232003		✓		Sizana Thakar	Sizana Thakar
9	Sabina Pandey	Jagaran Arogya Samuha Nepal	Itahazi	SabeenaPandey@gmail.com	9840582003		✓		Sabina Pandey	Sabina Pandey
10	Meeyah Magar	Sobes Recovering Rehab center	Siwalthi				✓		Meeyah Magar	Meeyah Magar
11	Aisha Lama	Sobes Recovering	Pepsicoa		9809078930		✓		Aisha Lama	Aisha Lama
12	Prachin Chaudhary (Pai)	sobes women's DIC	Boudha Sopari	Prachin@sobes.org.np	9818480471		✓		Prachin Chaudhary	Prachin Chaudhary
13	Pandey Binetha	EKTA Nepal member	Chitwan	pandeybinetha@gmail.com	9861526256		✓		Pandey Binetha	Pandey Binetha

S.N.	Name	Organization Name	Address	Email	Cell No	Gender			Signature	
						M	F	Other	Day 1	Day 2
14	Sarmila Baidhya	women's support group	Laganthok	wsgkathmandu@gmail.com	9808776070		✓		Sarmila Baidhya	Sarmila Baidhya
15	Yamkala Rai	RN Women's		sobesfemalae066@gmail.com	982321743		✓		Yamkala Rai	Yamkala Rai
16	Binita Sunar (Bx)	Nawo Ghumthok	Pokhara	bsunar2649@gmail.com	981695427		✓		Binita Sunar	Binita Sunar
17	cha kosh Sunar	RN bookman	Fokhara	chandrakhosha@gmail.com	9816631695		✓		cha kosh Sunar	cha kosh Sunar
18	Rina Thebe	Aarsh Saubh	Laganthok	rinettan.vt@gmail.com	980362599		✓		Rina Thebe	Rina Thebe
19	Hema Shrestha	RN Women	Nardevi	hemashrestha@gmail.com	9841709329		✓		Hema Shrestha	Hema Shrestha
20	Bhawana Khatri	Neeta foundation	Sankhu	khatri.bhawana409@gmail.com	9808726806		✓		Bhawana Khatri	Bhawana Khatri
21	RITU BHUJEL	Neeta foundation	Sankhu	rbhujelritu2@gmail.com	9845061606		✓		RITU BHUJEL	RITU BHUJEL
22	Poonam Dhawalathi	RN	kumairipati	Poonam.dhawalathi@recoverynepal.org.np	9810187760		✓		Poonam Dhawalathi	Poonam Dhawalathi
23	Tanaki shrestha	RN women	Chitwan	Tanakis18@gmail.com	9765932683		✓		Tanaki shrestha	Tanaki shrestha
24	Roni Balam	Hamro Mittrata	BudaniKanta	Hamromittrata@gmail.com	9817206709		✓		Roni Balam	Roni Balam
25	Dolma lama	Hamro Mittrata	BudaniKanta	11	9808807401		✓		Dolma lama	Dolma lama
26	Rajee Singh	Spascho Nepal	Sanepa	RajeeSingh46@gmail.com	9848063912		✓		Rajee Singh	Rajee Singh
27	Sarala Tamang	Aina Women's Rehab	Dharan	AinaNepal6698@gmail.com	9823322176		✓		Sarala Tamang	Sarala Tamang
28	GITEN .UH.	TREAT Asia	Bangkok	giten.kehpr@treat.org	+6621633923	M			GITEN .UH.	GITEN .UH.
29	Bhishu Bhandari	Space Foundation	Lalitpur	BhishuBhandari@gmail.com	015132144		✓		Bhishu Bhandari	Bhishu Bhandari
30	Annie Kumar	Sohara Nepal			9818954569		✓		Annie Kumar	Annie Kumar
31	Bishu F. Shrestha	RN	Lalitpur	bishu@recoverynepal.org.np	985101946		✓		Bishu F. Shrestha	Bishu F. Shrestha

S.N.	Name	Organization Name	Address	Email	Cell No	Gender			Signature	
						M	F	Other	Day 1	Day 2
32	Bikas G. G.	EN	PKR	blag36@gmail.com	2808976786	✓				
33	Ujwal Kumari	R.N.	Lalitpur		9851088976	✓				
34	Francis Joseph	NAPUD	Bangkok	francisj@nepud.org	9717456195	✓				
35	Shanta Karki	R.N.	Lalitpur		9801955998	✓				
36	Sudil Khatri	sparscha Nepal	"	"	9851118619	✓				
37	Raju Karki	R.N.	Lalitpur	raju.karki@gmail.com	9802002555	✓				
38	Sabir Jha.					✓				
39	Suman C. Shrestha	R.N. wama	"	suman.cshrestha.wama.com	9823466744	✓				
40	Tanaki Shrestha	R.N. women		Tanaki@819@gmail.com	9765932683	✓				
41	Rubi Nepali	Nowa drish female bank	Nepal 13, Bank	Rubisunor00@gmail.com	9703005982	✓				
42	Sanjana Thapa									
42	Shawana Khatri	Neeta foundation	Santoku	khatrishawana48@gmail.com						
43	Santa Guraj	Ekata Nepal	B.N.P	EkataNepal2061@gmail.com	9355072323	✓				
44	Dama Sherpa	R.N. women	Lalitpur		9823578919	✓				
45	Nanila Dahal	R.N.	Lalitpur		9860304683	✓				
46	Kama Shrestha	R.N.	"		9821161401	✓				
47	Anisha Nagar	WSG	Lagankhel	Anishanagar085@gmail.com	9840019866	✓				
48	Yangi Sherpa	Shakara female	Bhaktapur			✓				