MATERNAL HEALTH AND ACCESS TO SAFE ABORTION PROGRAM

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT
Medical students and future health care professionals lack the information about maternal health and access to safe abortion both as part of the curricula and in terms of provision of safe services in medical centres. There are lots of barriers to access to safe abortion services and these include legal and policy barriers (very strict abortion laws and policies), Social and cultural barriers (gender discrimination, poverty, religious restrictions, abortion related stigma and lack of social support) as well as health system barriers (lack of facilities, lack of trained personnel and cost of services). On the other hand, evident inequities in the provision of health services as they relate to maternal health are important to tackle the issue and are needed to properly address the problem.

There is a lack of sensitization and a lot of stigma on abortion related issues all over the world. Some medical professionals as well have very questionable values and attitude about abortion. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, medical students and future health care professionals usually do not have enough skills and knowledge to approach patients, offer comprehensive abortion care (CAC) as well as educate the public on the dire consequences of unsafe abortion and the need to safe services within their communities. There is a paucity of advocacy efforts towards governments and international organizations and this has contributed immensely to the sustained maternal mortality rates since unsafe abortions contribute significantly to maternal mortality.

TARGET GROUP AND BENEFICIARIES
This program will target medical students, other health care professionals, youth groups, women groups, national and international organizations, governments, opinion leaders and the general public.

- Medical students: To build comfort and capacity on safe abortion
- Other healthcare students: To build comfort and capacity on safe abortion advocacy and service delivery
- Youth groups: To create awareness on safe abortion and promote advocacy
- Women groups: To provide improved access to comprehensive abortion care as well as promotion of reproductive rights
- National and International Organizations: To promote safe abortion advocacy, reproductive health and rights
- Governments and Opinion leaders: To sensitize on the need to revise laws regarding abortion as a direct indicator to reducing abortion related deaths
LOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF INTERVENTIONS

End-goal and assumptions
The ultimate goal of this program is to improve maternal health by building comfort and capacity among medical students and Medical Students Associations on maternal health and peer outreach through our Ipas workshops and curricula. To ensure that medical students worldwide get values clarification and attitude transformation when it comes to handling abortion related issues and equitable access to maternal health services. Building capacity on safe abortion within the medical community will lead to effective healthcare delivery and stimulate increased advocacy on abortion related issues.

Objectives
● To provide training through capacity building workshops to current and future health professionals on maternal health
● To outline through the training, the current barriers to access to maternal health, including safe abortion services within local communities.
● To educate future health care professionals on the current barriers to access, roles medical students can play and the current situation of unsafe abortion worldwide, and locally
● To equip future healthcare professionals with the tools to address inequities in the provision of health services as they relate to maternal health, and to also provide these future healthcare professionals the needed knowledge to carry out the appropriate clinical work in these fields
● To enable participants to learn the skills to facilitate peer education training on maternal health and safe abortion in their home country
● To provide participants with the tools and follow-up available to work on advocacy towards more equitable and efficient maternal health care.

Presumptions and backwards mapping
Improved maternal health has two main components; Women getting access to comprehensive abortion care and improved health outcomes and maternal health services. To achieve the first part healthcare professionals should have more knowledge and skills on safe abortion advocacy and provision of comprehensive abortion care services. This can be achieved by organizing trainings and workshops for future healthcare professionals using the curriculum developed by Ipas. Also women need to be aware of the health services available to them and feel empowered to access them. To make health services as accessible as possible, there is the need to reduce stigma and gender discrimination in healthcare delivery. To do this, awareness campaigns among future and current health care professionals are needed. This can be boosted by advocacy initiatives to remove identified barriers to effective healthcare delivery.
To improve health outcomes and maternal health services, there is the need to decrease stigma and discrimination within the society. Awareness campaigns on the issue could be a major contributor. Additionally advocacy by IFMSA representatives directed to governments, opinion leaders and international organizations could lead to the abolishing of restrictive and discriminatory laws that limit access to maternal health services.
Both the first and the second component would be strengthened by increasing the amount of data available on maternal health and the burden of unsafe abortion. An in-depth knowledge on maternal health and safe abortion advocacy would enable medical professionals to provide better health care and would also build a strong foundation for advocacy efforts. In order to give trainings and workshops, launch awareness campaigns, stimulate research, and successfully advocate, IFMSA needs to disseminate the program among its NMOs, so that members are aware of the issues and become motivated to participate in these activities.

Milestones and Indicators

**Outcome 1:** International 3-day training for medical students and future healthcare professionals on human, sexual and reproductive rights; abortion laws and policies; barriers to access care, including stigma; safe abortion methods; and identification and referral of women with abortion-related complications, information and activities on values clarification for abortion attitude transformation, as well as youth participation and leadership all contained within the Ipas curriculum.

Indicator: comfort and capacity of medical students to talk on maternal health and safe abortion

Target group: Medical students

Threshold: Number of training sessions at national and regional meetings and general assemblies

**Outcome 2:** Change in attitude and values of medical students towards safe abortion advocacy

Indicator: Medical students as safe abortion advocates

Target group: Medical students

Threshold: Completion of pre and post workshop surveys and follow up

**Outcome 3:** Research and publications on the burden of unsafe abortion in relation to maternal morbidity and mortality as well as the social determinants of maternal health.

Indicator: A compendium of data on current knowledge of medical students on maternal health and safe abortion and the need for safe abortion training among medical students

Target group: Medical students, civil society organizations, WHO

Threshold: Medical students and MSAs sharing data with relevant stakeholders as well as medical students working as interns doing research on maternal health and safe abortion with relevant organizations.

**Outcome 4:** Clinical and community health exchanges with curricula on maternal health and safe abortion for medical students

Indicator: Medical students gaining practical knowledge and experiences to become better healthcare providers

Target group: Medical students

Threshold: Number of completed exchanges organized through IFMSA, reports of the exchange experience

**Outcome 5:** Advocacy on maternal health and safe abortion at national, regional and international levels in collaboration with other youth groups and international organizations
Indicator: collaboration between medical students and other organizations at national, regional and international levels on safe abortion advocacy campaigns
Target group: Medical students, youth groups, women groups, opinion leaders, civil society organizations, government
Threshold: Number of successful partnerships and number of successful campaigns leading to policy changes at national, regional and international levels.

**Interventions**

**Trainings:**
- International and regional training of trainers to utilize the curriculum at training sessions
- Training workshops at regional meetings and general assemblies

**Advocacy campaigns:**
- Advocacy Mapping: IFMSA and Ipas to work together to create a mapping tool of current global, regional and national level advocacy being undertaken on safe abortion and the main organizations and groups that are facilitating this work.
- Develop a structure advocacy plan for medical students to work in collaboration with other Civil Society Organizations.
- Advocacy efforts for improvement of Maternal health and safe abortion care services in the national, regional and global level.

**Exchanges**
- Advertising exchange opportunities for students to work with service providers
- Ipas Webinars with Abortion Care Providers
- Develop specific SCORA Exchanges on safe abortion. SCORA Exchanges are 3 week exchanges in which students go to a country and work in the field of reproductive and sexual health there. Usually programs consist of working in peer education areas as well as in sexual health clinics and this can be adapted towards possibly working in a safe abortion clinic where those are available.

**Research**
- Working with other standing committees (SCOME) to initiate research programs in hospitals.
- A research project to assess the current knowledge of medical students on safe abortion and gauging their interest in learning more about safe abortion.
- There is the potential to submit a formal research proposal from IFMSA to the Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP).
- The advertisement of potential internships at the HRP in Geneva, and with affiliate country and regional offices for medical students to undertake research on safe abortion.

**Narrative**

Unsafe abortion contributes significantly to the burden of maternal morbidity and mortality especially in countries where abortion laws are very strict hence restricting all forms of access to safe services. The maternal health and access to safe abortion program aims to first of all build comfort and capacity among medical students and other healthcare providers on issues
pertaining to safe abortion via training workshops using a module curricula (Youth Act for Safe Abortion) developed by Ipas, IFMSA and other partners. Following these workshops, participants having undergone values clarification exercises will be well poised to develop safe abortion advocacy initiatives at all levels whilst at the same time partnering with relevant stakeholders to influence policies and abolish all restrictive laws impeding access to safe abortion. Research and data collection on unsafe abortion and maternal mortality will further consolidate our efforts and support evidence based strategies. The clinical exchanges will give students an opportunity to learn hands on from service providers, how to offer comprehensive abortion care services.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT AND NEEDED RESOURCES

The effectiveness of this program will depend on the availability of resources needed to implement all the planned activities and to effectively monitor and evaluate our outcomes.

Human resource

- Trainers: International Training of Trainers at general assemblies and regional meetings
- Students: The regional meetings and IFMSA GAs provide a cohort of students from various countries to be trained and to facilitate outlined activities at country level.
- Funding: Based on the Memorandum of Understanding that we have with Ipas, funds have been provided to facilitate most of the activities outlined.
- Collaboration: There is the need for collaboration with other youth groups, institutions and civil society organizations working on safe abortion advocacy.

Annex

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jzbZhwYBD9v0gROnWbInld8X8Zxf65VeDraLNak8BmM/edit?usp=sharing