Initiatives undertaken to combat Drug and Substance Abuse issues in Bhutan

The Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Substance Abuse (NDPSSA) Act 2005:

The concern and issue of narcotic drugs and substance abuse in the country was raised as far back as 1988. The government issued a notification in 1988 known as the Narcotic Drugs and Substance Abuse notification. The mandate for implementation of the notification was given to the Royal Bhutan Police.

The national concern over the narcotic drug and psychotropic substance abuse was raised for the first time in the highest legislative body in the country by the public in the National Assembly in the year 2002.

Since 1989 police have made 817 arrests from 1989 till 2005. Of these 603 arrests were made in Thimphu alone. However drug related arrests were made even in far away remote areas like Sakteng. The Royal Bhutan Police have also seized a large quantity of drugs from peddlers and traffickers. The Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Substance Abuse (NDPSSA) Act 2005Act was endorsed by the 84th National Assembly on 30th November 2005.

Narcotic Control Board (NCB):

According to the NDPSSA Act 2005, Section 59, the Royal Government formally commissioned the “Narcotic Control Board (NCB)” on the 15 June 2006 by His Excellency the Lyonchen and the first meeting too was convened on the same day. The NCB has 11 board members consisting of representatives from MoH, MoE, MoHCA, MTI, RBP, Department of Revenue and Customs, NGO and 3 Civil Society Representatives.

Bhutan Narcotic Control Agency (BNCA):

The “Bhutan Narcotic Control Agency (BNCA)” came into being from Nov 2006. The office of the BNCA is fully functional with Executive Director, two Chief Programme Officers to head Demand Reduction Division and Supply Reduction Division, personal assistant, office messenger and a senior accountant.

Challenges Ahead:

Since 1988 following the issue of notification on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, there is evidence of consistent and concerted effort being undertaken by the Royal Government to address the issue of drugs and substance abuse in the country. The Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Substance Abuse (NDPSSA) Act 2005Act in place and the agency being established, appropriate strategies are now being drawn up to combat the rising trend in the abuse of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the country. However, following are some of the challenges which require support from everyone:

1. Bhutan has a large youth population and a majority of the abusers are the youths. There is a need to develop comprehensive drug awareness prevention program both within and outside the education system.
2. Due to the porous border, there is significant movement of people and goods through the India-Bhutan border check posts. This makes the country vulnerable to movement of Drug trafficking lure by easy money.
3. Pharmaceutical medicine trade and licensing needs to be strictly regulated and controlled as the abuse of medicines and hardware materials like dendrite form a major drug abuse problem.
4. There is no drug dependent treatment and rehabilitation facilities established to address the problems of the abusers.
5. The law enforcement capacity at the RBP HQ and Customs ,Trade and Drug Regulatory officers at all transit point(land /Air) needs to be strengthened.
6. All implementing agencies needs support in capacity building and in formulating appropriate strategies to combat narcotic drugs and substance abuse in the country.
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NARCOTIC CONTROL BOARD
LYONPO DR. JIGMI SINGAY

The Drug abuse destroys lives and communities, affect all sectors of society in all countries, undermine sustainable human development and generate crime and in particular, drug affects the freedom and development of young people, the nation’s most valuable asset.

Further with changing patterns of drug abuse, supply and distributions escalated the problem, resulting increase in social and economic factors that make people especially the youth more vulnerable and likely to engage in drug use and drug related risk taking behaviour. The rising trend of HIV/AIDS and substance abuse has been a serious concern for us. The nexus between substance abuse and spread of HIV/AIDS is now well established. Substance abuse with its mood altering impact leads to deviant behaviour and lifestyles with greater possibilities of relations with multiple sex partners. Substance abuse leads to loss of self-control and un-safe sex. Injecting drug use through needle and sharing of injection paraphernalia leads to spread of HIV/AIDS. With target groups convergence in high-risk areas, interventions for prevention and management of HIV amongst substance abusing population and rehabilitation of the affected is a matter of great concern.

Enhancement of prevention skills is equally more important than just providing knowledge and creating awareness related to drugs as we need to be more concerned about shaping the behaviours and attitudes that promote healthy lifestyles.

Substance abuse prevention programme must also begin in the homes of children for parents to realize that it is not only to provide love to their children but also to nurture them from birth to adulthood. There is, therefore, a need to intensify efforts to reduce demand for illicit drugs, and to provide adequate resources to do so. This message, I hope will be well received by all section of our society especially the parents and provide support to the Government to groom our youth to become responsible adult citizens.

TASHI DELEK