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Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:

Does Rehabilitation Have a Role?



REGIONAL BRIEFING PAPER:

**Lessons Learnt
in Africa**



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Introduction

The Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) received funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the ‘Stepping Up, Stepping Out Project’ by Aids Fonds to support the development of advocacy tools around rights-based economic empowerment for sex workers. The first year of this three year project focused on documenting the work undertaken by sex worker-led groups in Asia Pacific, the final two years of the programme focused on building capacity and documenting sex worker-led responses in Africa.

For this briefing paper, case studies focusing on economic empowerment programmes for sex workers with rehabilitation elements were documented across 4 African countries: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda. This briefing paper focusses on economic empowerment programmes that have a rehabilitation element requiring that sex workers exit sex work and be “re-integrated into the community”. This briefing paper summarises four case studies of such economic empowerment programmes.

This briefing paper asks whether rehabilitation has a role in economic empowerment programmes. The four case studies highlight factors that negatively affect sex workers’ participation in economic empowerment programmes and looks at some of the key lessons that have been learnt when implementing economic empowerment programmes for sex workers. The paper concludes with key recommendations that should be considered if economic empowerment programmes for sex workers are to be successful.



Background

The Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) received funding to support the development of advocacy tools around rights-based economic empowerment for sex workers. The first year of this three year project focused on documenting the work undertaken by sex worker-led groups in Asia Pacific, the final two years of the programme focused on building capacity and documenting sex worker-led responses in Africa. NSWP recruited a regional consultant to undertake the following work in 2014 with ASWA/ NSWP members, aiming to develop economic empowerment advocacy tools that can be used at national, regional, and global, levels. This project is part of the Dutch collaboration ‘Stepping Up, Stepping Out’ 2 (SUSO II) funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, administered by AIDS Fonds, until 31 December 2015.

The project required recognising and responding to the different needs of regional sex worker groups and members through effective multi-lingual electronic communication, networking, and consensus building. To plan and deliver this, the regional consultant identified and coordinated teams of local consultants, working closely with the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) and the Global Network of Sex Work Projects’ (NSWP) communications and policy team to ensure the tools are developed with member organisations’ active participation at all levels, and that the processes and tools developed assist to build members’ capacity to respond at national and international levels.

The Regional Consultant developed advocacy tools and messages around rights-based economic empowerment for sex workers. It is hoped that the advocacy tools will strengthen regional sex worker networks and member organisations to work in campaigning for the rights of female, male, and transgender sex workers and amplifying the voices of sex workers through:

- ▶ Documenting good practice examples of sex worker-led economic empowerment projects to inform the development of advocacy tools that will enhance sex worker-led groups’ ability to engage effectively with policy makers and programmes.
- ▶ Documenting the lived experiences of sex workers.
- ▶ Documenting the impact of programmes that focus on “rehabilitation” and require sex workers to stop sex work.

**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:
DOES REHABILITATION HAVE A ROLE?**

CASE STUDY

1

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



Management of Young for Rural Development Center (CEJEDER)

Introduction and background of CEJEDER

This case study on economic empowerment for sex workers was conducted in Kivu Region-DRC. The case study documented an economic empowerment project in DRC for sex workers which aimed to rehabilitate sex workers and exit sex work.

Management of Young for Rural Development Center (CEJEDER) is a non sex worker-led organisation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, (DRC), in Uvira, South Kivu. It is a non-governmental organisation with a Board of Trustees and it operates health, protection, education, human rights, and agro-breeding activities.

The vision of the organisation is to promote a society that respects and promotes the right to health, human rights, and the right to self-determination for women in general and for female sex workers in particular. The organisation recognises female sex workers' right to self-determination in their own right as sex workers. Its mission is the protection and defence of human and health rights of female sex workers, and the general objective of the organisation is to fight for the right to health and protection and to commit to global and local development that meets the needs of the people and their interests. The specific objectives are to ensure the rights of access to equipment, goods, and services, without discrimination, in particular for sex workers and key populations of vulnerable or marginalised groups; to fight against the HIV/AIDS as well as rape and sexual violence against women; to support the creation and development of micro and small enterprise for women with low income; to ensure access to minimum food sufficiency and agro pastoral production to combat hunger and ensure food security for the local community.

The organisation is funded by membership fees and specific contributions of non-partisan individuals and legal entities, as well as from grants by external partners. It is affiliated to the Africa French-speaking network of sex work organisations.

Economic empowerment intervention for sex workers

The programme's initiative was the sale of second-hand clothing, whereby the sales generated would reduce the poverty of 200 female sex workers in the town of Bukavu, South Kivu. The programme was also funded by the Scottish Catholic Aid Fund (SCIAF). The main goal of the SCIAF was to rehabilitate 200 female sex workers in the community through the sale of the second-hand clothing. The objectives were that 70% of female sex workers would be able to support their families through the sale of second-hand clothing, and that 90% of female sex workers would be reintegrated into the society. Another aim was that the initiative would benefit 200 female sex workers directly and reach 350 female sex workers indirectly. SCIAF, as the funder of this initiative, strictly imposed conditions for the empowerment programme: the requirements ultimately aimed at sex workers to exit sex work.

CEJEDER decided to implement this initiative despite the fact that the conditions of the initiative contradicted with their own mission and beliefs. CEJEDER “respects and promotes the right to health, human rights and the right to self-determination of women in general and that of female sex workers in particular”, and seeks the “protection and defence of human and health rights of female sex workers”. Their partnership with SCIAF was due to a lack of funding because of negative attitudes towards sex work. There were not – and are not – many organisations willing to fund programmes that work with sex workers.

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The following activities were implemented as part of the initiative:

- ▶ Identifying female sex workers to take part in the programme.
- ▶ Identifying suitable locations where the second-hand clothing could be sold.
- ▶ Organising the female sex workers into small groups to enable them to support each other.
- ▶ Purchasing and distributing second-hand clothing to 200 female sex workers.
- ▶ CEJEDAR staff and SCIAF staff conducted follow-up visits with the sex workers. Rather than being an opportunity to provide meaningful support to the sex workers, these visits tended to evaluate the sex workers' performance when selling the second-hand clothes.

Results

The work undertaken through this initiative did not achieve the expected outcome. For instance, the majority of the female sex workers had no savings and could not make profit because they were unable to determine the right selling prices. This was not considered during the implementation of the project.

Almost all the female sex workers ended up using some of the second-hand clothes themselves instead of selling them. Due to this, they ended up having very little income and, as a result, the economic status of sex workers did not improve. The sex workers used what little money they received from sales of the second-hand clothing for family needs, as they were not allowed to work as sex workers while taking part in the project.

Less than 1% of the female sex workers involved in the project were able to support their families. Almost all of the sex workers continued with sex work during the programme and none stopped sex work as a result of this initiative. This contrasts with to project's aim: to rehabilitate the sex workers and have them exit sex work entirely.

Factors that caused the initiative to be unsuccessful

This initiative was based on stigmatised and stereotypical views of sex work which aimed to rehabilitate sex workers. The initiative was not needed by the sex workers themselves, but was instead imposed by the project staff. No component in the programme focused on improving the selling skills of the sex workers and no pre-market study was conducted to identify the practicality of the initiative.

This initiative was based on discrimination and stigmatisation of sex workers, and aimed to rehabilitate them. The initiative was not needed by the sex workers themselves, but was instead imposed by the project staff.

Conclusion

This initiative failed because it implemented a rehabilitation approach in which the ultimate goal was for the sex workers to stop sex work and be reintegrated into the community. Furthermore, during the initiative, sex workers' ability to undertake sex work was restricted. This led to loss of income to the extent that the sex workers faced difficulties paying for the basics for their families and so did not see the value in continuing with the initiative.

Lessons learnt

The failure of programmes such as this demonstrates the need to involve sex workers in the whole process, from problem identification, conception, and implementation. Sex workers must also be involved in the monitoring of the initiative in order for it to be successful. However, above all, there is need to take a rights-based approach where economic empowerment initiatives support sex work rather than substitute it.

CASE STUDY

2

MALAWI



The National Female Sex Workers Alliance of Malawi (NFSWAM)

Introduction and background to NFSWAM

This case study on economic empowerment for sex workers was conducted in Lilongwe District, Malawi, as part of the regional efforts at developing advocacy tools around rights-based economic empowerment for sex workers.

The National Female Sex Workers Alliance of Malawi (NFSWAM) was formed on 7 November 2012 with the aim of advocating sex workers' rights, encouraging health awareness through practices such as HIV testing and counselling among sex workers, and protecting underage children from entering sex work. The Alliance's leadership comprises 10 sex workers from different parts of the country. It has just applied for membership to the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) and the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP). The Alliance implements different activities as follows:

- 1** Stakeholder meetings with the police to address human rights abuses among sex workers.
- 2** Stakeholder meetings with health workers to promote accessible and friendly services for female sex workers.
- 3** Condom distribution in hotspots and among female sex workers.
- 4** Peer education training for sex workers.
- 5** Peer discussion sessions on HIV prevention and STI management.
- 6** Working with community chiefs and bar owners to protect underage children from entering bars.
- 7** Dealing with violence that is perpetrated by clients of sex workers.
- 8** Economic empowerment programmes through village savings and loans.
- 9** Psychosocial support amongst sex workers.

However, the National Female Sex Workers Alliance of Malawi is currently underdeveloped. It has no clearly defined membership and no office to operate from. It also lacks systems and procedures and does not have its own bank accounts. As a result, the Alliance does not decide on its own programmes; instead, it waits for partner organisations to involve them in undertaking their programmes.

Intervention on economic empowerment for sex workers

The Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM) embarked on the Economic Empowerment Project for sex workers. The aim of the programme was to rehabilitate sex workers through training 40 sex workers in tailoring, salon management, mushroom production, and restaurant management, to give them an alternative job to sex work: 10 sex workers were trained in tailoring, 10 in salon management, 10 in mushroom production and 10 in running a restaurant. FPAM managed the whole programme without meaningful engagement of the National Female Sex Workers Alliance.

After the training, a group of 10 was given MK45,000.00, equivalent to US\$100, to start a group business.

Results or impact of the initiative on economic empowerment for sex workers

All the groups started the group business programme but within 3 months everything had collapsed. All the sex workers continued with sex work because no one benefited from the economic empowerment initiative.

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Factors that caused the initiative to be unsuccessful

- ▶ Failure to meaningfully engage sex workers and NFSWAM in designing the economic empowerment initiative.
- ▶ Rehabilitating the sex workers in order to stop them undertaking sex work was what the managers of the programme (FPAM) wanted. However, this view was not shared by the sex workers themselves.
- ▶ The sex workers were coerced into taking part in this programme: it was not what each of the sex workers wanted to do or what they had a passion for. Sex workers often accept to be coerced into the programmes fearing that, if they refuse, they may be left behind in future programmes that might be beneficial to them.
- ▶ The funds that the project provided (MK45,000.00) were not enough to start any tangible type of business.

Conclusion

The three main factors contributing to this economic empowerment initiative failing was the failure of the FPAM management to meaningfully engage sex workers, coercing them to take part in the initiative and the strong focus on ‘rehabilitation’. During the planning process FPAM did not listen to, or consult with sex workers to establish which training opportunities they were interested in. Another factor that contributed to the failure of this initiative include; unsustainability of the economic empowerment initiatives due to grants being insufficient to sustain small businesses for long enough to turn over a profit combined with the challenge facing stigma and discrimination dynamics within communities.

Lessons learnt

- ▶ Economic empowerment programmes should be produced from the views and ideas of sex workers, and be managed by the sex workers themselves. Other partner and stakeholder roles should work with sex workers in order for them to gain the necessary skills to implement these programmes.
- ▶ Sex workers’ agency should not be undermined in programmes that sex workers willfully take part in. Sex workers should not be forced to exit sex work as part of economic empowerment programmes. Many of these programmes fail, and therefore it is unreasonable to expect sex workers to forego their work as part of economic empowerment programmes. Sex workers themselves will exit sex work when they are able to. Therefore, economic empowerment programmes should not disempower sex workers: sex workers must be able to exercise their own agency and autonomy with respect to the work they undertake.

Economic empowerment programmes should be produced from the views and ideas of sex workers, and be managed by the sex workers themselves.

**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:
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CASE STUDY

3

NIGERIA



Education as a Vaccine (EVA)

Introduction and background to EVA

This case study on economic empowerment for sex workers was conducted in Lagos and Cross River State Nigeria as part of regional efforts to develop advocacy tools around rights-based economic empowerment for sex workers. The case study documents an example of non sex worker-led economic empowerment projects in Nigeria; specifically the case study shows that the project has been unsuccessful.

Education as a Vaccine (EVA) is a non-profit organisation created in 2000 to improve the health and development of children and young people. EVA's goal is for children and young people to reach their full potential in Nigeria, where they work to build and implement innovative and sustainable practices to improve the quality of life for vulnerable children and young people. EVA is a non sex worker-led organisation which targeted sex workers in one of their programmes.

Intervention on economic empowerment for sex workers

EVA embarked on a project called 'Alternative means of livelihood for female sex workers' in Ikom, Cross River State. The goal of this project was to reduce the prevalence of HIV and AIDS amongst female sex workers and to provide alternative livelihoods for sex workers, so that they leave sex work to undertake other income-generating activities.

The objectives of the initiative were as follows:

- ▶ Help female sex workers choose a trade that is less risky and harmful to their health.
- ▶ Improve the knowledge of sex workers to identify viable and profitable income-generating opportunities.
- ▶ Increase the knowledge of sex workers so that they can support starting, and continuing, profitable income-generating activities.
- ▶ Train sex workers to develop skills for participating in marketing activities.

The Activities that were carried out were as follows:

1 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

These were small semi-formal group discussions used to gather information about perceptions, attitudes, and practices regarding HIV/AIDS. Data was collected, analysed, and used to design behavioral change communication strategies which included Peer Education and Essential Life Skill (ELS) training.

2 PEER EDUCATION

Peer education is the practice of sharing information through dramas, folk tales, and discussing the experience of role models over a period of time. This was aimed at developing the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of sex workers, to enable them to protect their own health for positive effect. This peer education element was undertaken by the sex workers.

3 ESSENTIAL LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

This aimed to develop a set of life skills through teaching or sharing human experience. This could then be used for adaptive and positive behavior to enable individuals to deal effectively with the problems and questions commonly encountered in their daily lives. It helped them to make informed decisions, communicate effectively with others, and deal with stress and emotions. This training was facilitated by EVA staff.

4 INCOME-GENERATING ACTIVITIES

Sex workers were trained in basic skills on how to generate business ideas and how to run a small business. However, the project did not provide any resources to enable the sex workers to start up their own small businesses but assumed that the sex workers would find their own resources for this.

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Results

Most of the sex workers did not start a business. Some started running hairdressing salons but did not register any profits from the initiatives, and therefore, they did not stop sex work. Less than 10% of the participating sex workers registered profits and later decided to stop sex work.

Factors that caused the initiative to be unsuccessful

- ▶ The sex workers were only trained in how to run small businesses without being provided with a grant to start the businesses.
- ▶ The project was interested in the number of sex workers who were trained in business skills without considering the means for the actual businesses.
- ▶ There was no proper monitoring of the sex workers who were trained in business skills. Because brothels were closed, the authorities contributed to the difficulty that programme staff had in attempting to monitor sex workers who could not be traced easily.
- ▶ The programme's design was based on stigmatising concepts due to common misconceptions about sex workers. For example, EVA believes that sex work is inherently risky and harmful; when such a rehabilitation approach is put forward, it requires sex workers to stop sex work.

Conclusion

The main failure of this programme can be attributed to three key elements: a lack of grants, a lack of support for sex workers once they were running their small businesses, and the rehabilitation approach which requires sex workers to exit sex work.

Economic empowerment programmes for sex workers must ensure that sex workers can sustain the new income-generating activities that they are trained to undertake. One way in which economic empowerment programmes can be made more sustainable is through the provision of small grants: these grants can be used, firstly, to help set up the business, and secondly, to provide sex workers with enough income until their small businesses start generating enough income and profit to be self-sufficient.

Providing adequate follow-up support is also essential as this ensures that sex workers do not feel out of their depth undertaking their new income-generating activities. Sex workers are more likely to continue their new business ventures if they feel confident that the right support is available to them when needed.

Programmes that focus on the “rehabilitation of sex workers” by requiring them to exit sex work as a condition of participating, while not providing the necessary means for sex workers to sustain their new income-generating activities, set sex workers up to fail. Because sex workers have exited sex work which allowed them to generate a relatively stable income, sex workers quickly become dependent on sex work again once their new business ventures are not as successful as they were told they would be. This view is not helped by programme staff, who often fails to properly manage the expectations of both the wider programme, and the participants themselves.

Lessons learnt

- ▶ Female sex workers only exit their trade when they are ready and willing, not when organisations force them to undertake exit programmes. Only a small number of the sex workers that participated in this programme went on to stop sex work: the majority continued with sex work.
- ▶ To ensure economic empowerment programmes are successful, grants must be provided along with suitable support following the initial training.

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CASE STUDY

4

UGANDA



Empowered at Dusk Women's Association (EADWA)

Introduction and background to EADWA

The economic empowerment case study was conducted in Uganda from July to August 2014 and the key informant interviews were held with Empowered at Dusk Women's Association (EADWA), a sex worker-led organisation. Guiding questions were used in the economic empowerment case studies' organisational interview, and a desktop literature review was conducted. This review considered the following issues: the background of HIV, sex workers' violations, and economic empowerment in Uganda. Organisational visits were also performed, aiming to gather evidence-based information to ensure credibility and effectiveness of the economic empowerment results.

The case study documented an example of a sex worker-led economic empowerment project in Uganda. In this documentation, the case study shows that the project was unsuccessful.

EADWA is a female sex worker-led organisation established in 2011. EADWA advocates for health rights and human rights of sex workers. EADWA is located in the Kampala suburbs. EADWA is registered as a Community Based Organisation in Uganda. EADWA is a member of Uganda Harmonised Rights Alliance at national level and a member of African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) and the Global Network of Sex Work projects (NSWP). It has grown into a membership of 55 female sex workers. It provides information and education to its members to empower them through knowledge on human rights, legal procedures, and HIV/AIDS.

Empowered at Dusk Women's Association's mission statement is to promote awareness of human rights, economic issues, health, and the social development of sex workers. Their vision is to ensure that the rights of all persons, including marginalised groups and especially female sex workers, are central to social, health, and economic development.

EADWA values non-discrimination, equal opportunity, justice, and fairness. They also value practical methodology and team work. Their slogan is 'together we can'. The organisation has the following objectives:

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- ▶ Promote interest in human rights through presentations and sharing experiences amongst sex workers.
- ▶ Promote a non-violent culture in the community through networking, dialogue with policy makers, and working with the media. EADWA also undertake sensitisation workshops on violence, HIV/AIDS, and substance abuse awareness and prevention.
- ▶ Offer psychosocial support to stigmatised and other marginalised groups.
- ▶ Promote self-esteem, self-respect, and the value of human life.
- ▶ Promote empowerment schemes amongst sex workers to improve their standards of living.
- ▶ Offer basic education to females, young people, and orphaned children, especially those who are affected by HIV/AIDS.

Intervention on economic empowerment for sex workers

EADWA embarked on an intervention called 'Provision of entrepreneurship skills in hairdressing, salon management and art/crafts'. The goal of this project was to empower EADWA members with entrepreneurial skills.

The following activities were undertaken:

- ▶ Training in hairdressing
- ▶ Entrepreneurial skills training
- ▶ Salon management training
- ▶ Arts and crafts training
- ▶ Regular breaks were used to discuss other issues affecting EADWA members.

27 members were intended to benefit from this project which aimed to help sex workers look after their health and to avoid violence, including clients demanding unprotected sex, rape, and police arrest. Economic empowerment also suggested that EADWA members could be good role models, by being heads of their families with availability of adequate money to support the families.

Results

A lack of attention on important elements such as saving skills, marketing, and branding was found. This was due to different issues affecting members individually. When it came to sex workers' products, marketing was very competitive because members had no marketing skills and there was frequent stigma and discrimination. There was no demand for sex workers' products because of social discrimination, and culturally the community believed that sex workers' products were bad omens. Moreover, members were not used to these somewhat out-dated types of jobs and they were inexperienced.

The sex workers had to work long hours, and they were subjected to sexual abuse by the customers: one member stated that "once they knew that we were sex workers they wanted free sex in order to buy our goods".

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Due to the surrounding communities' negative attitudes towards sex workers, members who worked in the salon earned very little money. Even with this stigmatisation of sex work, and the higher risks that sex workers face as a result of such stigma and discrimination, sex workers felt they were better off continuing to work in brothels and/or outdoors.

Factors that caused the initiative to be unsuccessful

"We realised that there was a gap in economic empowerment policy-making because there was no consultation between the project officers and the members (sex workers) on what exactly the sex workers had wanted to carry out".

Other factors that contributed to the failure of this programme include: lack of training for sex workers in the trades that they were encouraged to take up as part of this economic empowerment programme; stigmatising attitudes of the programme's organisers, especially in relation to the objectives of the programme which called for sex workers to become 'good role models' in their communities (wording which implies that sex workers are bad people); lack of sensitisation training with the community in order for sex workers to not be subjected to stigma and discrimination.

Conclusion

Meaningful engagement and consultation with sex workers during the planning stages of economic empowerment programmes are critical. EADWA's programme staff trained sex workers without consulting sex workers about their preferred area of work. Furthermore, the programme staff did not conduct an analysis of the services there is a demand for in the community. If this analysis had been undertaken, it would have helped programme staff match the sex workers to the vocational trainings they preferred, whilst while also training the sex workers in vocations with skills for which there is a demand in the community.

Other factors also need to be considered, especially those specific to particular communities, to determine how they impacted on sex workers in that community. For example, in EADWA's programme, the management did not consider the stigmatising views the wider community held with regard to goods and services provided by sex workers. This placed the sex workers who participated in the programme in a very vulnerable position. The sex workers were outed as sex workers, subjected to stigma and discrimination, and had their ability to earn an additional income severely disadvantaged. Programme staff need to ensure that the initiatives they put forward, and that they encourage sex workers to take part in, are informed by the experiences of the sex workers themselves. Sex workers are best-placed to discuss their needs and expectations of economic empowerment programmes.

Sex work is highly stigmatised and sex workers are discriminated against in their communities, as this case study has shown. Sex workers often feel they have little choice but to continue generating their income by working in brothels or outdoors at the expense of having the respect of their community. It is therefore reasonable to expect that economic empowerment programmes that do not demonstrate awareness of, and implement strategies for, the issue of stigma and discrimination within communities are destined to fail. Worse still, this approach fundamentally fails sex workers and increases their vulnerability in communities.

It is therefore reasonable to expect that economic empowerment programmes that do not demonstrate awareness of, and implement strategies for, the issue of stigma and discrimination within communities are destined to fail.

Why Did These Programmes Fail?



Economic empowerment programmes aimed at sex workers often fail because they do not meaningfully engage and consult with sex workers to establish the right goals and objectives. The case studies in this briefing paper have highlighted four examples of failed economic empowerment programmes. One of the main failures of economic programmes highlighted in this paper is that these programmes do not have built-in strategies that support the sustainment of the alternative income-generating activities that the programmes encourage sex workers to undertake. For example, not enough funding is made available at the start of these initiatives to enable sex workers to set up the small businesses they have received training for. There is also very little training that can be provided indefinitely because costs become unaffordable. These factors combined with the rehabilitation approach create a situation where sex workers can find themselves worse off. Programmes that focus on the “rehabilitation of sex workers” by requiring them to exit sex work as a condition of participating, while not providing the necessary means for sex workers to sustain their new income-generating activities, set sex workers up to fail. Because sex workers have exited sex work which allowed them to generate a relatively stable income, sex workers quickly become dependent on sex work again once their new business ventures are not as successful as they were told they would be. This view is not helped by programme staff who often fail to properly manage the outcome expectations of both the wider programme, and the participants themselves.

The impact of these failures can be very negative, which does not help to improve the social and economic empowerment of sex workers.

Moreover, the communities which sex workers are “reintegrated” into also frequently discriminate against sex workers due to the stigmatising attitudes they hold. In one case study the participants ended up being more marginalised in their communities because the programme did not properly take into account how stigma and discrimination affected the other income-generating activities that sex workers undertook. Indeed, the case study of the Empowerment at Dusk Women’s Association highlights how stigma against sex workers in the communities in which they work has a very negative impact, and this therefore reduces the chances of the programme being successful.

Other factors that contribute to the failure of these programmes include:

- 1** Initiatives based on discriminatory and stigmatising concepts and ideas around sex work. For example, EVA in Nigeria believe all sex work is inherently risky and harmful without considering the financial implications of requiring sex workers to exit sex work.
- 2** Initiatives that are not based on the needs of sex workers but imposed on them.
- 3** Initiatives that do not have a capacity-building component to enhance the skills of sex workers.
- 4** Initiatives that do not have pre-market study to identify the viability of the initiative.
- 5** Sex workers are not appropriately engaged in programmes. Their participation is a requirement and is often treated as something they must do “for their own good”. This stigmatisation undermines the agency and autonomy of sex workers.
- 6** Lack of management experience in implementing successful programmes based on the needs identified through meaningful engagement of sex workers.
- 7** Insufficiently funded programmes that are not able to address the structural inequality that sex workers face as a group.
- 8** Programmes can be compulsory and often do not take into account the jobs or skills that the sex workers are interested in being trained in.
- 9** Programmes are often more interested in the number of sex workers reached and “rehabilitated” rather than the quality of both the intervention and training provided.
- 10** Lack of good monitoring and evaluating frameworks to enable learning and improvement for future programmes
- 11** Lack of consultation and inclusion of sex workers in the design and implementation of programmes.

Conclusion



In addition to their participation, sex workers should be part of the planning and implementation of the programmes as well. Strong relationships between the different stakeholders are also required for the success of the project.

Economic empowerment programmes for sex workers need to be enhanced: if these initiatives are to succeed, it is necessary to involve sex workers themselves in identifying economic empowerment programmes. For economic empowerment programmes to be successful, the business ideas should come from the sex workers themselves, so that they can choose the right initiatives for their interests and passions.

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Economic empowerment initiatives for sex workers must adopt a rights-based approach which focuses on giving the sex workers the economic power to make informed choices about their lives, including their sexual health, and should not necessarily be focused on getting them to exit sex work. Economic empowerment programmes for sex workers should be aimed at giving them an alternative source of income to reduce their vulnerability but should not be aimed at enticing them to stop sex work when the alternatives do not provide them with enough income.

Lessons Learnt

- 1** For any initiative to succeed, sex workers must be involved in identifying the real needs and strategies to be employed to address the situation. There is need to involve the sex workers in the whole process, ranging from problem identification, conception, and implementation, as well as during monitoring, evaluation and learning.
- 2** Prior to planning a programme, a detailed needs-assessment should be conducted to increase the impact and achievement of programme's activities.
- 3** Opportunities to support sex workers to come together in a meaningful way, to bond and improve through team work, must be identified.
- 4** Access to health care services is one of the major problems that sex workers face due to economic problems; this puts them at high risk of HIV and other illnesses.
- 5** IEC materials are the major means with which to achieve the project goal by disseminating information for targeted groups. The media, such as radio and TV, are more able to reach large numbers of people and can create impact through creating a platform for discussion.
- 6** Continuous follow-up and training is required as a platform for bonding. The beneficiaries should be allowed to choose who to work with and the number of partners they want to have.
- 7** It is necessary for sex workers themselves to come up with ideas for initiatives that they would benefit from without their rights being violated or harassed.
- 8** Economic empowerment programmes should be managed by the sex workers themselves. The role of other partners and stakeholders should be to enhance the sex workers' skills and capacity.
- 9** Sex workers will only stop sex work when they themselves decide to, and not because it is part of the project's design.
- 10** Sex workers only exit their trade when they are ready and willing and not when organisations force exit programmes on them.
- 11** Sex worker-led economic empowerment programmes can lead to success if they are well managed and if the programmes avoid the rehabilitation approach.

There is need to involve the sex workers in the whole process, ranging from problem identification, conception, and implementation, as well as during monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Recommendations and Advocacy Messages



- 1 Organisations that work with sex workers should adopt rights-based approaches to sex worker programming which center upon the needs of the sex worker (as articulated by sex workers themselves).
- 2 Appropriate strategies for meaningful engagement of sex workers should be identified at the earliest opportunity. Such strategies will help programme planners establish the needs of sex workers in terms of their objectives for taking part, and to manage their expectations once they are participating in the programme. Meaningful engagement can contribute to effective capacity building with sex workers and contribute to the overall success rate of these programmes.
- 3 Programmes should include continued training support for participants for as long as possible, coinciding with regular follow up-visits to participants. These visits should take the format of a friendly, neighbourhood visit, where support is provided and sex workers' progress is recorded. Programmes can also facilitate post-training group support networks enabling participants to share their experiences with others participating in the programme.
- 4 On a national level, communication and collaboration with financial institutions should be explored in order to promote the development of initiatives to improve financial literacy of participants. While this approach contributes to the economic empowerment of sex workers, it will also help increase sex workers' access to financial services. Furthermore, financial institutions should ensure that they do not discriminate against sex workers who want to access financial services.

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- 5 Economic empowerment programmes should build in sensitisation training elements into their programmes in order to facilitate the wider community's acceptance of sex workers – both as current and former sex workers.

- 6 Programmes should have an appropriate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to measure the impact of the economic empowerment intervention. A well-designed M&E framework will help organisations to learn from the design and implementation phases of programmes, to improve and build upon successful strategies, and to avoid less successful approaches in the future.
- 7 Agencies or organisations that fund economic empowerment programmes should support sex worker-led organisations and work with them to establish vocational skills centers. To ensure a holistic approach to addressing the needs of sex workers, vocational skills programmes should also be integrated into reproductive health education and services as part of economic empowerment programmes.

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