



Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

Sex Workers Demonstrate Economic and Social Empowerment



REGIONAL REPORT:

Asia and the Pacific



Contents

Sex Workers Demonstrate Economic and Social Empowerment – Regional Report: Asia and the Pacific	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
METHODOLOGY	6
Case Study 1: India	
USHA COOPERATIVE, DURBAR MAHILA SAMANWAYA COMMITTEE (DMSC)	7
Case Study 2: Cambodia	
WOMEN'S NETWORK FOR UNITY (WNU)	15
Case Study 3: Myanmar	
AIDS MYANMAR ASSOCIATION (AMA)	27
Case Study 4: India	
VESHYA ANYAY MUKTI PARISHAD (VAMP)	30
Case Study 5: Indonesia	
OPSI	33
Case Study 6: Indonesia	
YAYASAN KERTI PRAJA/MELATI SUPPORT GROUP, BALI	36
Case Study 7: Thailand	
SWING	39
Case Study 8: Thailand	
CAN DO BAR, EMPOWER, CHIANG MAI	42
Case Study 9: Thailand	
ASIA PACIFIC NETWORK OF SEX WORKERS (APNSW), BANGKOK	45
Conclusion: HIV, aid and a sustainable paradigm	53
References	55
Appendix 1	58
Appendix 2	61
Appendix 3	63



Sex Workers Demonstrate Economic and Social Empowerment – Regional Report: Asia and the Pacific



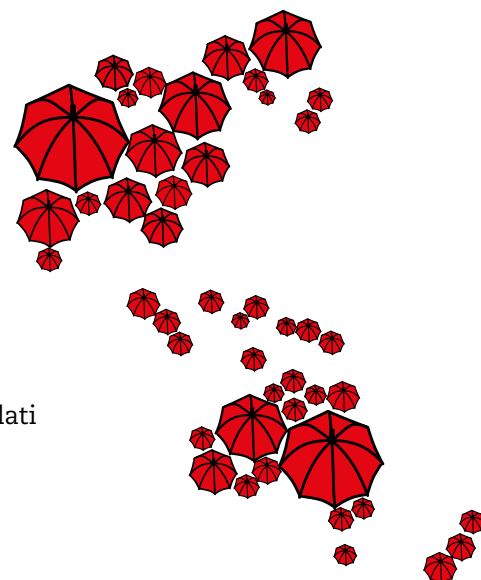
Executive Summary

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 was coordinated by the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), whose office is in Bangkok, Thailand. Over the last 20 years, with the catalyst of HIV decimating our ranks, India and Southeast Asia have been home to some of the most progressive sex worker-led networks in the world. We advocate and struggle for self-determination and equal rights in work and life, as documented here.

For this project, NSWP worked with APNSW members to:

- 1 develop background material for advocacy tools that will strengthen regional networks and member organisations' work; campaign for the rights of sex workers of all genders; and amplify the voices of sex workers globally;
- 2 document good practice examples of sex worker-led economic empowerment projects (described in the case studies) to inform the development of advocacy tools that will help sex worker-led groups' ability to engage effectively with policy makers and programmers;
- 3 document the lived experiences of sex workers and the impact of programmes that focus on 'rehabilitation', that require sex workers to exit sex work (see the accompanying Briefing Paper).

This report focuses in detail on two key good practice studies: the Usha banking cooperative originating in the Sonagachi sex work area of Kolkata, India, and the informal school and community legal services at WNU in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. These are followed by seven other studies (AMA, VAMP, OPSI, Melati Support Group, SWING, Can Do Bar and APNSW) and field research with sex workers and NGOs across the region.



We believe that money is power: when sex workers have secure money they can choose their clients and there are many reasons that they need this choice. If sex workers have money, they can avoid violence, forced sex without a condom, police arrest, and look after their health care. Economic empowerment means that sex workers can be a good role model as heads of their families. When sex workers have money, other members of society are more inclined to respect them and not stigmatise their occupation. Therefore economic empowerment leads to less discrimination

KAY THI WIN, AMA, MYANMAR

Introduction

Economics impact the lives of sex workers on a global, local, household and individual level. Sex workers' marginality as migrants, single mothers, and sexually and gender-diverse people influences their choice of work over formal unskilled occupations. But the main issue is the money. For many, sex work earns more money in less time than other available occupations. The aim of economic empowerment, and the good practice models outlined here, is for sex workers to retain control of our income: the initial and essential step towards sex workers organising together.

Sex workers need to work together for economic and social justice. By forming organisations, sex workers can help one another to earn and keep more money.

CURRENT ECONOMICS OF SEX WORK IN ASIA

Sex work as an industry appears to be going through a bad period in the region. In the late 1980s, sex work generally declined due to the 'AIDS scare', and more recently has been threatened by US policies demonising and criminalising sex work. Other influences, including fundamentalist Islam – particularly in Indonesia – and the global financial crisis, all seem to have hit those engaged in sex work quite hard.

Comparisons show that street, bar and brothel-based sex workers still make substantially more than those in other unskilled occupations. Factory and domestic service jobs average less than \$5, or as little as \$1–2 per day, often with very long hours and strict conditions, such as limited toilet breaks. Domestic servants can find themselves almost permanently on call and subjected to sexual exploitation by their employer.

Contrary to the situation of formal-sector workers who must battle with employers for better wages and conditions, sex workers receive relatively high earnings from their clients but then have to battle with management and other Third parties that may take a higher percentage of earnings from sex workers particularly in contexts where they face criminalisation and security forces demanding fines and bribes¹, to retain as much as they can of their original earnings.

1 Law enforcement authorities often use soliciting, indecency and public order statutes to arrest, detain or threaten sex workers. Hence sex workers report paying bribes to escape arrest or prefer to pay fines on being arrested.

The internet and the ubiquity of smartphones means that a large part of the sex industry is now invisible, and it is hard to estimate the incomes being earned. Based on information from sex workers in various countries, incomes are still much higher than in other available occupations. But, at the same time, a dichotomy has opened up between these net-based workers and those working in traditional locations such as the street, bars and brothels. In these places, negative influences have caused the industry to decline. For instance, in Indonesia where many localities have been closed, options are being reduced for working on the streets and in short-stay venues like cinemas. This has resulted in reduced incomes for sex workers, while at the same time the 'private' side of the industry has been expanding rapidly on the internet.

ECONOMIC DISEMPOWERMENT: THE ANTI-PROSTITUTION AND SEX WORKER REHABILITATION MOVEMENT

Anti-sex work fundamentalist feminists have quite the opposite interpretation of 'economic empowerment': they believe that sex workers are empowered when they exit sex work and are placed in programmes with alternative employment opportunities, regardless of whether the sex worker finds the work empowering or not. However, other occupations are often less appealing than sex work, as many involve long hours, violence, dangerous conditions, and sexual violations². Our research repeatedly indicates that supposed 'alternatives' pay far less and are entirely inadequate if the worker has dependants, as many do.

Sex workers with dependants require a significant income to afford schooling, health care and living costs for themselves and their families. This is the basis of the Women's Network for Unity (WNU) slogan: **'We are proud to feed our families!'** This is why rescue and rehabilitation programmes cannot work, and this becomes clearer once actual figures on income start to be tallied.

SEX WORKER-LED ORGANISATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL NGOS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

International NGOs such as Population Service International (PSI) and Family Health International (FHI 360) continue to work with sex workers in the region and provide technical support and clinical services. Most areas now have independent sex worker groups, but there is still a role for organisations such as Poro Sapot Project in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (the basis for the Friends Frangipani network of sex workers, and funded by Save the Children) and Yayasan Kerthi Praja in Bali, Indonesia (funded by FHI 360), which provides clinical services for sex workers and people living with HIV and also runs a support group for sex workers living with HIV (Melati). In Indonesia, where the anti-trafficking discourse is dominant and well-funded, the situation is not conducive to sex worker-led projects. Therefore, OPSI, based in Jakarta, works on a relatively limited basis and most sex worker support projects are led by Indonesia's family planning network and international NGOs such as FHI 360.

2 See Dendoung & Dendoung, 2013.

However, sex worker programming must continue to be led by sex workers themselves. Numerous non-sex workers and organisations have threatened to take over the discourse on sex work, especially when equating it with trafficking and denying the agency of sex workers. This has contributed to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in the US with its implications for Southeast Asian countries and aid funds^{3, 4}.

At the same time, a range of models in practice across the region also demonstrate a rights-based approach towards sex work. Scarlet Alliance, based in Sydney, Australia, supports Friends Frangipani and Scarlet Timor Leste, through an onsite support model; AVID places an Australian volunteer with a group, such as SWING in Bangkok and YKP in Bali, to provide sex worker-based mentoring and leadership across the region. APNSW has provided mentoring and support for fledgling groups emerging from INGO-based groups, notably AMA in Myanmar, while EMPOWER in Thailand and Scarlet Alliance have run various innovative programmes through their Migration Project. VAMP in Sangli, India, has empowered sex workers to reduce violence through collective strategies and improve the conditions for sex work.

BEST AND WORST PRACTICES IN SEX WORKER PROGRAMMING

Examples of best practices and the issues surrounding sex worker programming have been covered very well elsewhere⁵. These reports demonstrate the broad support for sex workers' health and safety from all the key global agencies. Crucially, this includes the acceptance and inclusion of sex workers, via APNSW and NSWP, as partners in the discussion.

At the same time, sex workers continue to face bad practice, epitomised by the US PEPFAR pledge which forced aid recipients to oppose sex work from 2003–2013. The PEPFAR pledge, which demanded that recipients sign an 'anti-prostitution' pledge⁶, has since been successfully challenged by recipients in the US⁷, as sex workers are more included in the discourse. However, the anti-prostitution pledge continues to impact organisations based outside the US, who work on HIV prevention programmes and receive PEPFAR funding⁸.

3 See Bromfeld & Capous Desyllas' 2012 analysis of the partnership between the hard religious right and the hard feminist left that pushed through the TVPA. They argue that it is through creative and artistic projects that sex workers can most effectively respond.

4 Capous Desyllas, 2013.

5 UNFPA, 2012; UNDP, 2012; NSWP, 2011; WHO et al., 2013.

6 Ditmore, 2005.

7 Provost, C., 2012.

8 "Laws governing foreign assistance – the U.S. *Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act* contained within it an 'Anti-Prostitution Pledge' (APP). The APP requires public health groups that are not based in the US but receiving US funds to pledge their opposition to sex work as a condition of receiving funding for their HIV-prevention work. The APP states that no funds may be used to provide assistance to any group or organisation that does not have a policy explicitly opposing 'prostitution'. In June 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that the APP was unconstitutional on the grounds that it violated the right to freedom of speech for US organisations. However, all other recipients of US government HIV/AIDS funding – including international groups – remain subject to the requirement" (forthcoming NSWP document).

FOCUS ON ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

What makes this study different from all the other ‘good practice’ studies that have been produced over the last 20 years? It focuses specifically on aspects of sex worker-led programmes that can assist with economic empowerment. We look at incomes, outgoings, savings options, and comparisons with other occupations and ‘rehabilitation’ programmes. These economic issues are hugely important to sex workers but are not well understood – by us or by those who study us.

In the last 15 years of the ‘trafficking’ debates and hype, it has gradually become apparent that actual victims of coercive practices are far fewer than thought. EMPOWER, APNSW and others have explained in detail the negative effects of ‘rescue and rehabilitation’ which aims to obliterate the political economy of sex work.

This is the context of ‘economic empowerment’ for sex workers, as opposed to that espoused by NGOs that conflate sex work with trafficking and whose rescue programmes tend to have their basis in morality rather than in human rights.

As the Usha Cooperative (this report’s primary example of ensuring economic empowerment) describes it: *“We, the members of Usha, are very emphatic that the Cooperative is not meant for economic rehabilitation of the sex workers who are in the profession, but is designed to provide a financial support for us to fall back upon in moments of crisis, and to minimise our economic desperation by creating a space for negotiation.”*⁹

WNU in Cambodia is also profiled, with its informal education programme for children of sex workers and its legal aid programme. The third good practice study, from AMA, Myanmar, illustrates a fledgling sex worker-led organisation building on assistance from APNSW and the model of Usha. It was actually hard to find other examples where sex worker-led programmes are able to achieve very much, given the recent climate of trafficking moral panic, and ten years of the US government insisting that recipients of its aid make a commitment to not supporting sex work in any way.

We study the strategies used by the VAMP collective, a rural sex workers’ collective in Sangli, India, to focus on reducing violence and increasing their earnings. We focus on the problems faced by sex workers in Indonesia under a repressive ideological system, presenting OPSI as a good practice example and YKP in Bali as a more typical example of large NGO funding directed towards ‘helping’ sex workers rather than directly funding sex workers. OPSI in Jakarta functions as a network for the widely disparate community of Indonesian sex workers, who have been struck by a ‘double whammy’ of US anti-prostitution policy and local Islamic vendettas. Next, two Thai projects are profiled: SWING, for trans and male sex workers, and the Can Do bar, Empower’s sex worker-run entertainment bar. Finally, we take a look at the region-wide work of APNSW.

9 DMSO, 2011, p.26.

Acknowledgements

NSWP would like to thank Aids Fonds for financial support in producing this report, and Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund for contributing to the publication costs.

The following people are also thanked for their contributions to the development of the project:

Global: Gillian Galbraith, Mitch Cosgrove, Nine, Anelda Grové; **Asia and the Pacific:** AMA: Mo Thandar, Kay Thi Win, Wai Wai Shein; APNSW: Aarthi Pai, Dr Aly Murray, Andrew Hunter, Chutchai Kongmont, Tracey Tully; CAN DO BAR: Wi, Liz Hilton; DMSC: Nirmahla Ghosh, Barathi Dey; OPSI: Ferraldo Saragi; SWING: Surang Janyam, Thi, Nicolette Burrows; VAMP: Kamilbai, Meena Seshu; WNU: Keo Tha, Taree, Ros Sokunthy, Socheata Sim, Pisey Ly, Dahlia; Yayasan Kerti Praja/Melati Support Group: Dr Aly Murray.

Methodology

Original research and fieldwork were conducted from July to December 2013. In early October we attended a Myanmar-wide sex worker consultation in Yangon, organised by Targeted Outreach Project (TOP) and PSI in collaboration with the new national sex worker-led network, AMA. With the APNSW membership we also developed a set of questions related to economic empowerment, income, opinions, experiences of raids and rescues, and so on, that was used throughout the region (Appendix 1).

From 21–25 October, APNSW organised a regional workshop in Phnom Penh, which was attended by an Usha cooperative representative. The workshop also included field visits to WNU, its school and its legal programme, Community Legal Service (CLS). At this workshop, we held discussions on how to establish a) good practice legal and banking services for sex workers in the region, and b) education for children of sex workers. It was a very productive cross-cultural exchange, given the different legal and social situations of sex workers in different countries. We had further opportunities for discussion at the two-yearly regional AIDS conference, ICAAP, and its community programme, held in Bangkok in late November.

At our focus group discussion in Cambodia, it proved quite difficult for sex workers to reach a common understanding of the concept of ‘economic empowerment’ as it was translated through various languages. It was easier to understand in practical terms of saving money in the bank, but the Cambodian workers in particular were struggling even to make their rent.

The accompanying briefing paper on bad practice with sex workers is based initially on interviews with sex workers who have had experience of ‘rehabilitation’ and/or rescue and retraining. These were sex workers in Phnom Penh who had experience of Somaly Mam’s AFESIP, and young men in Thailand. We were rebuffed in many attempts to enter the world of ‘rescue’ programmes in the Urban Light/Love 146 nexus of US, church-funded NGOs, but were very fortunate that the coordinator of Urban Light foundation in Chiang Mai, Thailand was willing to talk extensively to us.

CASE STUDY

1

INDIA



Usha Cooperative, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC)

Background

Sonagachi, Kolkata's largest red-light district, is an area of around one mile radius with congested streets, haphazardly built houses and shops. An estimated 10,000 sex workers work here in a variety of settings, from the street to dingy brothels. A couple of centuries ago the area was used by the Bengali feudal elite for maintaining concubines and mistresses, but now, in the age of capitalist democracy, it is open to all who can pay hard cash. Even today, Sonagachi, translated as Golden Tree, is famous throughout the eastern parts of India and has several hundred multi-storey brothels and some 10,000 sex workers – most of whom come from poor, rural and generally lower-caste families. A large number of them are Muslim women, some from across the border in Bangladesh.

In 1992, an HIV intervention programme was launched in the Sonagachi area by All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health (AIIPH), an institute funded by the Indian government. The objective was to initiate an STI and HIV prevention programme with three principal components: provision of health services including STI treatment; information, education and communication; and condom programming.

The programme was pivoted on the 'peer-based approach'. Sex workers were recruited from the community, trained in health and HIV and then promoted as peers and outreach workers. Their role was to publicise HIV-related messages among their colleagues and friends and also to help sex workers access clinical services and condoms.

However, over a period of time, the peer educators began to feel the limitations of this approach. External factors, such as police raids, extortion by local hooligans and other criminal elements¹⁰ as well as the negative attitudes of certain service providers and researchers served as barriers to sex workers trying to access preventive services.

Sex workers started recognising the need to change the programming approach, from service provision to community empowerment. They felt a strong need to include empowering strategies in order to address various structural issues that the HIV project framework was unable to support in the long run.

In 1995, following several discussions and consultations, a unique body was formed: **Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC)**, India's first organisation of sex workers, with the objective of creating solidarity and collective strength among the sex worker community and other marginalised groups. The Sonagachi intervention is promoted by UNAIDS as a best practice to be emulated around the developing world. The project is credited with keeping the HIV infection rate among the sex workers at five percent, much lower than in other Indian red-light districts.

Structure, mission and activities

DMSC seeks to address the problem of exploitation and social discrimination against sex workers. It promotes their agency and stresses their collective bargaining power both in accessing services related to safe sex as well as improving their working conditions. Moving beyond the moral/immoral framework that dominates the popular discourse, DMSC works to promote a positive image of sex workers.

DMSC has gone far beyond tackling HIV. Today, the Sonagachi project – which has spread its wings to all districts of West Bengal – brings together over 65,000 sex workers and their children. It runs a hospital for sex workers, vocational institutions, schools for children of sex workers and a cooperative bank with a turnover touching 170 million rupees a year that provides microfinance to its members.

Apart from helping organise similar sex worker unions in other parts of India, DMSC has also launched a national organisation of 'Entertainment Workers' (EWs), which includes any professional who, like sex workers, is involved in selling 'pleasure'.

We are questioning the dominant ethos of this country which says that there is something wrong with pleasure. Our social movements are obsessed with the idea of martyrdom – we want to point out that no goals are sustainable without joy.

S JANA

10 Toughs and/or hooligans, also known as 'goondas' or 'mastaans' in local parlance, in their more benign incarnation are mere neighbourhood bullies, who make their living or find avenues of recreation by extracting money or protection fees from local populations under threat of actual potential violence. The more menacing among the 'goondas', from the sex worker perspective, are those embroiled in theft, extortion, drugs and other criminal activities. Sex workers are particularly vulnerable prey to all those 'goondas' who seek to extract money from them, and non-compliance frequently elicits the response of rape and other forms of physical violence, including torture, knifing and arson (Gooptu, 2000)

Future of DMSC

DMSC has demanded abolition of existing laws controlling the sex trade as these laws have historically acted against the interests of sex workers rather than penalising those who exploit them. Instead, DMSC aims to work towards forming a self-regulatory body that will act as the principal arbitrator of disputes and conflicts within the collective of DMSC. It will be constituted solely of sex workers, and will be similar to other professional bodies such as the Indian Medical Council or the Bar Association. This professional body of sex workers would be responsible for ensuring that the industry abides by some minimum guidelines to safeguard the interests of working sex workers and also to prevent the forcible entry of unwilling women and minors into the profession. As in other professions, this body would also stipulate some minimum qualifications for entry into the profession, including age.

DMSC and economic empowerment

The formation and activities of DMSC have greatly impacted the economic situation of sex workers in West Bengal. Here, two examples of successful economic empowerment projects are examined: sex worker-run banking and economic negotiating through collective means.

EXAMPLE #1: Economic empowerment through sex worker-run banking: The Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society

One of the early issues that DMSC addressed was financial problems among sex workers. Economic insecurity, coupled with extortionate moneylending practices in red-light areas, had always been part of the lives of sex workers in India. With few venues for saving money, sex workers often found themselves getting into debt traps. A couple of years after its formation, DMSC took a very significant step by registering a consumer cooperative society called Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Limited, or Usha, run entirely for and by sex workers.

The problem

1 OPENING BANK ACCOUNTS

To open an account, banks require identifying documents such as a rent receipt, electricity bill or phone bill. However, sex workers often did not have these documents because laws prohibited women from hiring rooms in their own names to engage in their occupation. As a result, they couldn't possess any valid rental agreement documents needed to obtain other identity documents, and therefore could not open a bank account. There were additional barriers to opening bank accounts: sex workers were asked to bring their husbands along if they tried to open a bank account and were often ridiculed by the bank employees the moment they were identified as sex workers.

2 FINANCIAL MISMANAGEMENT

Several structural barriers affected the way that sex workers managed their funds. Because they couldn't open bank accounts, most sex workers put their money in unauthorised financial institutions (e.g. chit funds) or kept their money with their 'madams'. A DMSC survey found that 99 percent of the sex workers had been cheated by these agencies at least once. Whatever money they could keep with them was usually taken away by their *babus* (lovers/boyfriends). Additionally, snatching money from sex workers by local hooligans and other criminal elements as well as extortion by police were common phenomena. Due to this fear of losing money, some sex workers stopped saving money altogether and spent everything they earned on the same day.

3 VICTIMS OF MONEYLENDING

Sex workers were particularly vulnerable to unfair moneylending practices. In emergency situations, many sex workers had to depend on a category of moneylenders not linked with any financial institution. These moneylenders used to regularly visit red-light districts looking for borrowers. They offered various kinds of 'lending deals' with a minimum rate of interest at nearly 300 percent per annum.

4 FINANCIAL INSECURITY

Ageing sex workers faced a gradual reduction in income from the sex trade. They often had debts and no sustainable savings. Apart from sex work, many had no other marketable skills to generate income from other sources. Additionally, older sex workers had more financial obligations. With ageing came an increase in health-related expenses and many had to support their children.

The solution: Banking run for and by sex workers

To address the myriad financial issues that sex workers faced, DMSC started Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Limited. Usha operates like a cooperative financial institution and collects deposits regularly from its sex worker members. In addition to basic banking, Usha runs a microcredit programme for sex workers; creates alternative jobs for out-of-work or retired sex workers; and engages in social marketing of condoms and other consumables. Usha business ventures include organic farming, pisciculture (fish farming) to protect biodiversity, and eco-friendly event management services. Usha operates as the principal financial institution for the range of sex workers' organisations affiliated to DMSC and manages grants from external agencies for them.

Today, Usha is the largest sex worker-run financial institution in Asia. As a financial institution, it has one of the best recovery rates in the state of West Bengal (>90%) and has an annual turnover of 2.7 million USD and capital assets valued at more than one million USD. Usha currently has a membership of 16,228 sex workers and around 4 to 5,000 members receive loans every year. It also has the largest condom social marketing reach for any community-managed organisation in the country and sells 3.5 million condoms per year. In recognition of its work, Usha is highlighted as a success story of the cooperative movement in West Bengal by the Department of Cooperatives of the state government.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In establishing Usha, DMSC members came up with guiding principles for the project. After a series of debates and discussions held among the sex workers, it was decided that:

- ▶ The cooperative should be exclusively of and for the sex worker community;
- ▶ Underlying factors that prevent sex workers from accessing financial support should be addressed;
- ▶ Community members should be in the policy-making bodies of the finance management mechanism;
- ▶ Communities' needs and priorities should be respected while creating and managing the financial institution.

STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

Usha is run by a board of nine directors (all sex workers), all of whom are elected through a two-tier electoral process. In the first phase, all members elect 45 representatives by casting their secret ballots. The elected representatives then elect the board members who run the office for a period of three years. No board member can hold office for more than two terms.

IMPACT OF USHA

Direct impact

Savings: First and foremost, the Usha Cooperative has provided sex workers with a safe venue for saving their hard-earned income. As mentioned before, saving money was challenging for several reasons. Now, large numbers of sex workers are able to regularly save significant portions of their income. The rate of deposits has been high due to a unique scheme by Usha, whereby every day it sends its staff directly to the homes and workplaces of sex workers to collect the money. This saves the sex workers the trouble of having to come to the Usha offices for this purpose. Each cooperative member is issued an identity card and account number against which the money is deposited as it comes in. Most of the staff that collects the money also happen to be the children of sex workers themselves, which enhances their credibility and trustworthiness.

SEX WORKERS SPEAK

Most of the rehabilitation programmes that are being offered to sex workers are simply too small in scale to be of any real use. There are organisations offering training to sex workers in stitching, sewing, candle making and so on, with which they can make only around Rs. 2000–3000 per month, but a sex worker today, even without a family, needs a minimum of Rs. 5000 to live in Kolkata.

We have not seen anyone in practice who is able to do proper rehabilitation work. We have no examples anywhere else in the country either. There are many tall claims but no working model that we can say is acceptable.

DMSC's position is that those who need rehabilitation should be given that but those who don't want it should be given dignity. The problem with many rehabilitation NGOs is that they approach sex work as a moral problem and they seem to think that somebody who has been doing sex work should be happy to escape and do almost anything else to make a living. That is simply not true.

BHARATI DE, SECRETARY, DMSC

Loans: Probably the greatest attraction of being a member of the Usha Cooperative for many sex workers is the possibility of obtaining loans at lower interest rates and without any onerous conditions. As mentioned earlier, prior to the launch of the cooperative sex workers were entirely dependent on a number of opportunistic moneylenders. All that is history now with the advent of Usha. According to data provided by Usha, thousands of sex workers have already taken loans of varying sizes for diverse purposes, ranging from purchasing land or other real estate assets to financing the education of their children or for health care.

Asset creation: Usha loans have enabled thousands of its members to purchase long-term assets such as land or houses. This boosts their returns on investment and improves future income security. Prior to the availability of these loans, it was impossible for an average sex worker to even dream of buying land or a house to live in or even rent a decent place to carry out their professional work. In 2010–11 around 4,892 Usha Cooperative members had taken a loan for buying land or building houses, while in 2011–12 around 6,032 members had taken loans for the same purposes.

Indirect impacts

State and social recognition: Usha has afforded sex workers respect and recognition on local and national levels. More than a dozen major financial institutions, including banks and insurance companies, have approached sex workers and offered their support. Other marginalised communities, including other Indian sex worker collectives, have hired Usha to help emulate the same practice, and Usha has become a member of the National Cooperative Union (the policy-making body of the cooperative societies in the country).

Contribution to the community: Usha provides financial support for various activities to enable and empower sex workers and their family members. The cooperative also creates educational opportunities for the children of sex workers and supports women living with HIV by providing ART treatment and food supplements. Moreover, through social marketing of condoms, even in areas where DMSC does not have an organisational base, Usha acquaints more and more sex workers with the aims and objectives of the sex workers' movement.

Improving the viability of sex work: By providing sex workers with the option of freedom from the clutches of moneylenders or exploitation by *babus* and 'madams', Usha has enhanced the economic viability of sex work. Greater income security combined with savings for the future enables the sex workers of West Bengal to pursue their profession without the high risks and poor rewards that characterise the trade in other parts of India.

EXAMPLE #2: Economic negotiating and social justice through collective means

Before the creation of DMSC, a complex system of hierarchies of sex workers and networks of managers and some exploitative individuals existed, which resulted in many sex workers being exposed to violence and getting cheated out of their money. DMSC used collective power to negotiate better financial deals for sex workers and safer working conditions.

Brothels in Sonagachi are run by ‘madams’ who charge sex workers a daily, hourly and/or monthly rent to use the rooms with clients. While the ‘madams’ are often non-sex workers joining forces with local hooligans to run the brothels, in the last decade or so this has changed and now more and more sex workers themselves are operating the brothels. DMSC officials estimate that today over 60 percent of the brothels are run by older or retired sex workers or in some cases even by younger ones who have made sufficient money to pay the monthly rents. Additionally, a network of client procurers provides a steady supply of clients to the sex workers, charging the clients a commission for their work.

The problem

1 ‘MADAMS’ AND CRIPPLING COMMISSION FEES

Around 20 years ago, under a system called *hadiya*, sex workers were forced to give 50 percent of all that they earned to the ‘landlady’. Very often, the sex workers, falling into debt for various reasons, would even be kept as bonded labour and made to work almost for free. There was a lot of exploitation of sex workers at that time, as the ‘madams’ would not keep proper accounts of the total money made and would sometimes keep all the money for themselves.

2 VIOLENCE

‘Madams’, who controlled the entire sex industry in Sonagachi, worked hand in glove with local hooligans and other criminal elements who would use violence to enforce exploitative terms and conditions and intimidate sex workers.

The solution: Collective negotiation and taking on human rights violations

After the formation of DMSC in the mid-1990s, norms of payment to the ‘madams’ were renegotiated and the *mastaans* were chased away or taken out of the equation altogether. The DMSC systematically took up all cases of violence against or cheating of sex workers by the ‘madams’ and currently has a practice of holding weekly meetings between sex workers and ‘madams’ to sort out any contentious issues.

Among the brothels now, there is a variety of systems of payments to ‘madams’:

- ▮ 50 percent of brothels operate on a commission basis (for every client brought in the sex worker has to pay around Rs. 10–15 to the ‘landlady’).
- ▮ Another 30 percent of the brothels operate on a contract basis, whereby the sex worker pays a fixed sum of Rs. 100 per day to the brothel and keeps whatever money she makes above this for herself.
- ▮ The other 20 percent still works on the basis of the old *hadiya* system, whereby sex workers have to give 50 percent of all their earnings to the ‘madam’. This practice persists because the DMSC has not been able to bring about enough pressure to change the way some of the ‘madams’ operate.

SEX WORKERS SPEAK

Prabha Modak, Agartala, Tripura. Has been working in Rambagan for 16 years.

I plan to stay here for another five to six years till I have enough savings to retire. After that I will go back and stay with my son and daughter. On average I earn Rs. 10,000 every month and with the income that I get from lending my premises to other sex workers, I earn Rs. 55,000 every month. Income from sex work is much better than working as a domestic servant or a construction worker. In my village, I would have been an agricultural worker with little cash income.

During festivals, which happen several times a year, the number of clients goes down as they have to spend their money on various other rituals and gifts for family etc. Again, I cannot work now and then due to health problems that may arise. Usually loss of work days due to ill health averages two or three days every month. My expenses include educating my children, their food, clothing, cosmetics and medical expenses. The rest I save in deposits with Usha Multipurpose Cooperative. I was able to save Rs. 6,000 last month.

Economic empowerment is essential for us. I could not dream of buying land or a house with income from any other profession I may have taken up, given my low skills. Sex work has definitely empowered me economically.

The presence of DMSC and its provision of various health services has improved our working conditions over the last decade. We are no longer harassed by goons and police, for example. It is difficult to increase payments from clients, since it depends on the category of sex work you are in depending on your income level. Usha Cooperative has provided us with access to non-discriminatory moneylending services. DMSC also supports us when we need access to legal aid, to challenge arrests, abuse or illegal detention by law enforcement and rescue groups.

Usha Cooperative has given us both a safe place to deposit our money and also provides easy access to credit. Over the years this has helped me escape the clutches of moneylenders. With the money I have saved with Usha Cooperative I bought 2 kathas of land on the outskirts of Kolkata for around Rs. 120,000.

I have also been able to rent a house of my own in Rambagan. I sub-let the house to five other girls who use the premises for their own sex work and share 50 percent of whatever they make with me. This has added considerably to my income. 16 years ago when I started out in this profession I could never have imagined buying land or renting my own house and setting up my own brothel.

PRABHA MODAK

CASE STUDY

2

CAMBODIA



Women's Network for Unity (WNU)

The Women's Network for Unity (WNU) is a sex work collective working to improve the lives of sex workers by empowering them to advocate for social inclusion and freedom from stigma, violence and discrimination. WNU is based in Cambodia, where sex work laws and policies are particularly influenced by the international anti-trafficking movement. To address stigma, WNU started a schooling programme for the children of sex workers to help them enter and remain in the mainstream school system. WNU also runs a programme for sex workers called Community Legal Services (CLS) which helps sex workers with their legal issues.

Background

Sex work in Cambodia has been on the rise since the end of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, when it was punishable by death. Since then, poverty and lack of better employment have led many people to work as sex workers, as the country continues to rank among the poorest in the world (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Decades of state-sponsored persecution have historically stigmatised sex workers and threatened their lives; more recently, national and international policies have continued to perpetuate the stigmatisation and isolation of sex workers. Amidst this environment, WNU works to promote the human rights and civil liberties of all sex workers. WNU was founded in 2002 as a national sex worker collective in Cambodia and registered as a membership-based association in June 2004.

WNU's history has been affected by outside forces at every stage of its evolution. In 2003, US policies forced a number of USAID recipient organisations to withdraw their support for WNU, because of WNU's mission of sex worker empowerment. An official cable stated that, "Organisations advocating prostitution as an employment choice or which advocate or support the legalisation of prostitution are not appropriate partners for USAID anti-trafficking grants and contracts, or sub-grants and sub-contracts"¹¹.

¹¹ Ditmore, 2005.

Commonly referred to as the ‘anti-prostitution pledge’, this policy has led to the isolation of WNU, whose slogan **‘Don’t talk to me about sewing machines, talk to me about workers’ rights’** emphasises the need to address working conditions within the sex industry. Since the fallout from the anti-prostitution pledge, WNU has continued to seek alliances with other grassroots organisations that support the empowerment of marginalised groups.

International pressure has also influenced national laws penalising prostitution. In 2007, under international pressure, Cambodia introduced the Law on the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation, which effectively criminalises sex work. This has led to increased legal troubles and abuse by police and government officials. US policy also strongly influenced UNAIDS and its co-sponsors in the development of the Guidance Note on Sex Work. Instead of addressing sex workers’ vulnerability to HIV, the Guidance Note focused on addressing ‘vulnerability to prostitution’, giving de facto support to Cambodia’s Anti-Trafficking Law, and failing to support sex worker-led, rights-based HIV programmes¹².

Structure, mission and activities

WNU calls for the recognition of sex workers’ rights as workers to earn a livelihood free from exploitation, oppression and violence. WNU also works to build networks capable of promoting dignity and justice for sex workers and combating all forms of violence against sex workers – including coercive work practices, discrimination and HIV. WNU works to promote the human rights and civil liberties of all sex workers by focusing on five programme areas:

- 1 Policy and legal change, particularly in areas that cause adverse impacts on human rights and access to HIV treatment, care and support for sex workers, such as the Law on the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (LSHTSE) which undermines the rights to work and livelihood of sex workers
- 2 Rights-based HIV, sexual health prevention, care, treatment and support programmes, and advocacy for members’ access to free health care services through health equity funds¹³
- 3 Strengthening legitimate representation, leadership and membership
- 4 Human rights and legal assistance for sex workers and LGBT people
- 5 Operation of informal education and assistance for public enrolment of children of sex workers¹⁴.

12 Women’s Network for Unity, 2013b.

13 A Health Equity Fund (HEF) is any mechanism or fund that is used by a third-party payer to purchase health care for poor people from a health care provider. The fund can also be used to pay for other associated costs such as transport and food (Ministry of Health, n.d.). Households that are classified as poor and poorest families (under Ministry of Planning objectives criteria) are entitled to an HEF card.

14 Women’s Network for Unity, 2012.

WNU was founded at the end of 2002 by over 160 sex workers. In its first election, WNU members elected seven representatives to form a secretariat to work on behalf of WNU members with the aim of becoming a union of 5,000 members nationwide. Over several terms, members of the WNU secretariat were elected as a governance body, and team leaders have been elected to implement activities in eight out of 13 provinces and in Phnom Penh municipality. In the latest election in November 2013, WNU's members elected five representatives of sex workers to be on the coordinating committee, which works together with WNU staff members to strengthen membership and ensure programme implementation.

WNU and economic empowerment

WNU has worked tirelessly towards the goal of economic and social empowerment for sex workers and their communities. In 2006, WNU started an informal education programme for the children of sex workers based in Phnom Penh. The programme was designed especially to build self-esteem and ensure that sex workers' children are included in education and reintegrated into the state education programme. Additionally, in its commitment to address the basic needs of members in their pursuit for justice in their profession and daily life, WNU set up the Community Legal Service (CLS) in late 2011. CLS is the first legal aid service for sex workers in the world.

The following two examples highlight sex worker-led programmes and the impacts they have made on the lives of sex workers and their children in Cambodia. The case study illustrates how sex worker-led economic empowerment programmes not only improve sex workers' access to social and legal services, but also impact other marginalised communities, including the urban poor, people living with HIV, and slum communities.

EXAMPLE #1. Informal education programme for children of sex workers

In Cambodia, where the poverty rate in 2011 was 19.8 percent¹⁵, lack of education leads many people to abandon the option to earn a living and support their families. This cycle is repeated for the children of sex workers. This is a major concern for sex workers who wish to see a brighter future for their children and hope that they will not end up abandoning their education, thus ending up with fewer employment options. For many, sex work is the only option, or the least bad one, in the face of discrimination and exploitation.

Every citizen has the right to access qualitative education of at least nine years in public school free of charge.

ARTICLE 31, EDUCATION LAW, 2007

The problem

1 LACK OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Many children of sex workers or from other marginalised communities do not go to school. Others start their education late and face difficulties catching up with other children their own age in the education system.

¹⁵ UNDP, 2013.

2 HIGH COST OF EDUCATION

Generally, students have to pay for annual enrolment in schools and daily fees for teachers. A study on the impact of informal school-fees payment on the family income found that in 2006 rural families spent an average of 6.8 percent of their annual income to send a child to school while urban families spent 23.7 percent. The cost increased by 50 percent for the students to move from grades 1–3 to 4–6 (NEP, 2007, p.25). In many cases, study materials and uniforms constituted the biggest expenditure for families.

BOX I: CLASSES PROVIDED AT WNU'S DICS

- **Khmer literacy (writing, reading, storytelling)**
- **Arts and drawing, social study, singing**
- **Mathematics**
- **English language (writing, reading, speaking)**
- **Breakdancing**

(SOURCE: WNU SIX-MONTHLY NARRATIVE REPORT, 2013)

3 DISCRIMINATION AT SCHOOL

Children of sex workers face increased discrimination and stigmatisation in school due to their mothers' occupation. This inhibits learning, and discourages many from staying in school.

The solution: Informal education for children of sex workers

In 2006, WNU set up the informal education programme for children of sex workers, designed to enhance equal opportunities for children to access basic education. The programme has been operating classes for children aged 5–16 years old. Under this programme, WNU accepts not only children of sex workers, but also children of people living with HIV (PLHIV) and families from slum communities, where the programme operates.

The informal education programme is implemented through WNU's drop-in centres (DICS) which are located in the areas where sex workers live and/or rent rooms. The programme offers English, numeracy, arts and drawing, and breakdancing classes. These classes aim to not only provide education opportunities for children of sex workers but also build self-esteem and enable the children to express themselves, their talents and creativity, all while having fun and developing friendships among their peers in the community. This helps eliminate division, discrimination and stigmatisation imposed upon sex workers' children due to their mothers' occupation.

Over the years, the curriculum has evolved to address the specific needs of children, particularly after they have been reintegrated into the formal state school system. Box I provides details on the subjects taught in classes. The class timetable switches every month to adjust to state formal class in which morning classes run from 7–10am and afternoon class from 2–4:30pm.

Table 1: Coverage of informal education programme of WNU¹⁶

Location of DICs	2010			2011			2012		
	Boy	Girl	Total	Boy	Girl	Total	Boy	Girl	Total
Svay Pak	99		186	98	94	192			
Railway Station	35	28	63						
Tuol Kork	35	26	61						
Phe Thmmor				7	12	19			
Kilometre 6				22	28	50			
Sen Sok				14	9	23			
TOTAL	169	141	310	141	143	284	170	148	318

Table 1 illustrates the students covered by the programme in six DICs between 2010 and 2012. Besides in-class sessions, WNU organises out-of-classroom activities. Students go on study tours, sightseeing and recreation activities and engage with visitors at DICs.

STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

Between 2006 and 2009, WNU engaged Tiny Toones Cambodia¹⁷ to run the breakdancing and English classes for its students at the DICs. Subsequently, the classes have been taken over by the senior talented students who are able to teach breakdancing classes themselves. Presently, three children of sex workers regularly teach breakdancing and four sex workers themselves teach Khmer literacy classes. The remaining classes are run by WNU's contracted teachers.



¹⁶ Women's Network for Unity, 2011; 2012.

¹⁷ Tiny Toones is an organisation set up by a group of Cambodian returnees who were deported back to Cambodia by the United States government due to drug use and the perception that they were trouble makers. It provides a safe environment for children in slum areas in Phnom Penh, with breakdancing, English, Khmer, computer skills, song writing and music for children. See <http://www.tinytoones.org/> for more information.

Talented students from the breakdancing class formed a breakdancing team called Black Star. The group gives public performances at various events to gain publicity and generate income. This money contributes to emergency health care support for other students, covers some study materials, and supports teambuilding activities. Black Star entered a dancing competition on national TV and was recognised and awarded for their talent.



IMPACT OF THE INFORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Direct impacts

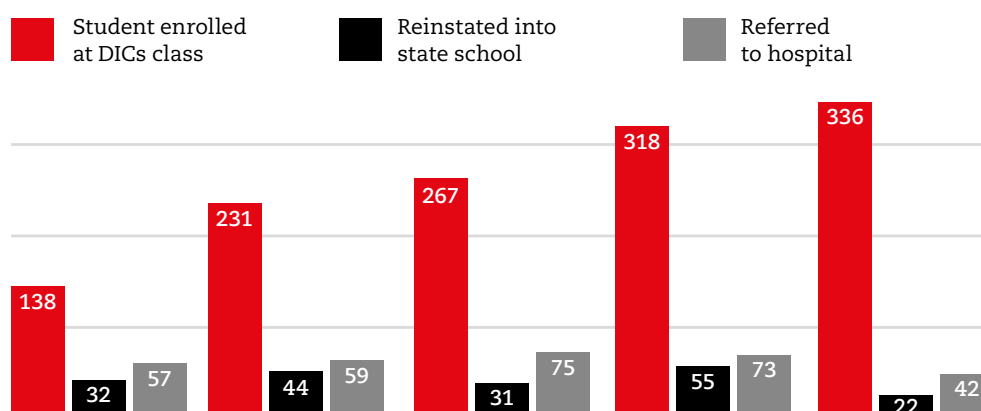
Reintegration: A significant impact of this programme has been the reintegration of children back into the formal state schools. Between 2009 and 2013, WNU reinstated 184 students into different classes in primary schools (such as Chamreoun Roth and Bak Tuk Primary School)¹⁸.

Lessened financial burden for families: WNU's programme helped lift some of the financial burdens for sex workers, PLHIV and poor families by advocating for fee exemptions for children of sex workers and other marginalised groups. WNU also provided school uniforms and study materials (bags, notebooks, pens, and pencils) to students in the programme. This lessening of financial burden was a determining factor for keeping students in school, as expressed by parents during WNU's programme-monitoring visits.

Increased self-esteem and leadership: Children of sex workers demonstrated that they have their own potential that can be brought out if they are provided with opportunity and a nurturing space. The impact of breakdancing extends beyond building the self-esteem of individual students; it has yielded remarkable results for the children and the wider communities. This is clearly demonstrated through the skills and creativity of Black Star. Another example is the students who went on to become the teachers running classes at DICs with and for their peers. Since 2010, four breakdancing teachers (three of whom are sex workers' children) who were formerly students themselves are now running the classes.

¹⁸ Women's Network for Unity, 2013b.

Coverage of WNU non-formal education class, reinstate into state school & hospitalisation



Improved behaviour: Both sex worker and non-sex worker parents have observed that, as a result of engaging with classes in WNU's DICs, their children attend class more regularly, help more with household chores, look after the younger siblings, do homework and practise breakdancing at home.

KEY CHALLENGES

The unstable nature of street-based sex work has presented considerable challenges for the functioning of WNU's programming. Forced evictions in urban slum areas (such as the Beoung Kak Lake), the high cost of room rental and the search for better income opportunities all cause sex workers to frequently change locations. Because WNU's DICs are usually located in areas that best cater to the needs of the children of sex workers, the movement of members often leads to less active DICs and subsequent closures. For example, in 2011, WNU closed three DICs in Tuol Kork, Railway Station and Beoung Kak Lake due to forced evacuation and relocation of the families. Meanwhile, two DICs in Kilometer 6 and Phe Thmar have been re-opened¹⁹.

Since September 2013, WNU has temporarily prolonged the vacation of the non-formal education classes at DICs in an effort to address some challenges faced in the programme. First, classes have to be restructured to be smaller and more age-specific. They had previously consisted of students from different age groups mixed in a large class. Teachers found it difficult to manage these classes and encourage participation. Moving forward, class size will constitute 25 students per class and there will be three separate grades. Second, WNU will improve the quality of its lessons by reviewing the teaching curriculum. While WNU motivates its members who can read and write to teach the classes, challenges remain for them to effectively teach. This has been particularly challenging in building teachers' creativity and the talent needed to work with small children. Thirdly, WNU will engage with NGOs experienced in working with street and urban slum children – such as Friend, Empowering Youth Cambodia (EYC) – in their arts, self-esteem building and involvement in community work. Early engagement with the community will be tailored as a platform for children to start recognising the common issues faced by the community.

¹⁹ Women's Network for Unity, 2012; 2013a.

EXAMPLE #2. Legal support for sex workers: Community Legal Service

Starting in 2002, Cambodia repeatedly ranked highly in the US government's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. After several years of these rankings, the US exerted strong pressure on the government of Cambodia to enact a new anti-trafficking law that was in line with US policies. This contributed to the proposal of the Law on the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (LSHTSE), which effectively criminalises prostitution in Cambodia. The law was enacted in late 2007 and promulgated in February 2008.

Since the implementation of the LSHTSE, sex workers have increasingly faced legal problems. WNU felt that the need for a legal service by and for sex workers was vital to ensure access to legal representation for its members. **The Community Legal Service (CLS)** was set up to provide legal aid to sex workers in their pursuit of justice in civil and criminal cases.

The problem

1 INCREASED POLICE AND GOVERNMENT ABUSES AFTER PASSAGE OF LSHTSE

The enforcement of the new law has led to sex workers facing human rights violations, incarceration, raids and 'rescues', and physical and sexual abuse. Condoms are being used as evidence of providing sexual services or to classify premises as a brothel. Even if sex workers were to open a coffee shop and use the shop to do sex work at night, they could be shut down for investigation. If they are found guilty of 'harbouring sex workers', the police will shut down the shop. Some sex workers who were detained in rehabilitation centres were HIV-positive and could not obtain their ARVs when they were arrested. When sex workers are imprisoned, family members who depend on their income suffer. Children of sex workers are also locked up or forced to cope without protection from their parents – something that can drastically affect their lives. Many brothels were shut down and the sex workers who were raided and detained were sent to rehabilitation centres.

2 LACK OF SUPPORT FROM NON-SEX WORKER GROUPS

Some human rights groups do not assist WNU's members in legal complaints because they receive support from the anti-trafficking groups. Others are more focused on human rights abuses in the areas of housing rights, land rights, or economic land concessions. These human rights NGOs are not sensitised to issues faced by sex workers and therefore are not very helpful.

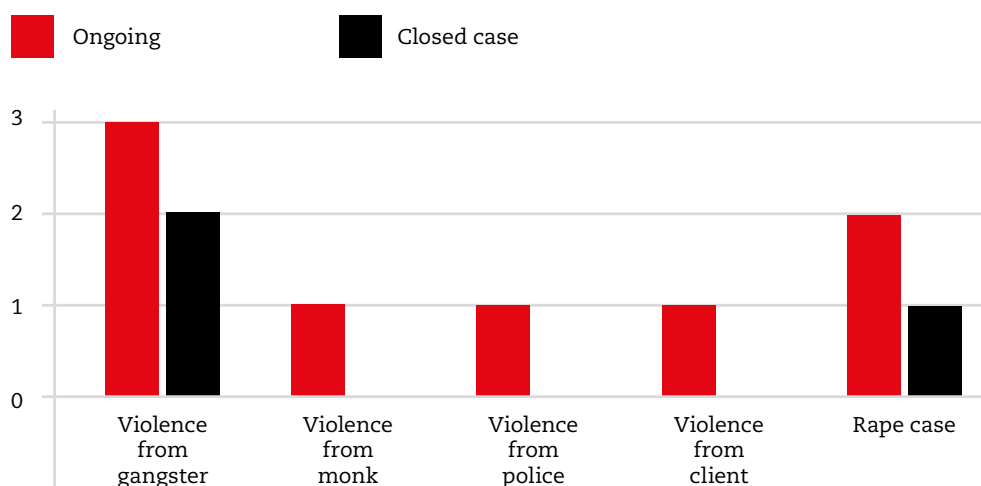
The solution: Legal aid for sex workers

The Community Legal Service assists sex workers to use legal mechanisms to protect their rights as workers; to raise awareness of legal rights, legal systems and procedures, violence and discrimination against sex workers; and to assist them in appropriate legal complaints. The programme also supports efforts by police to respond appropriately to crimes against sex workers, entertainment workers, and men who have sex with men (MSM) – regardless of HIV or migration status. CLS was set up by WNU and registered with the Ministry of Interior at the end of 2011. Since 2013, CLS has been managed directly by WNU on its premises²⁰.

CLS currently has three main programmes:

- ▮ Legal education, representation and legal services for WNU members
- ▮ Outreach programme
- ▮ Counselling and social support services

CLS Legal representation of its clients on case officially lodged at Police station and proceed to court

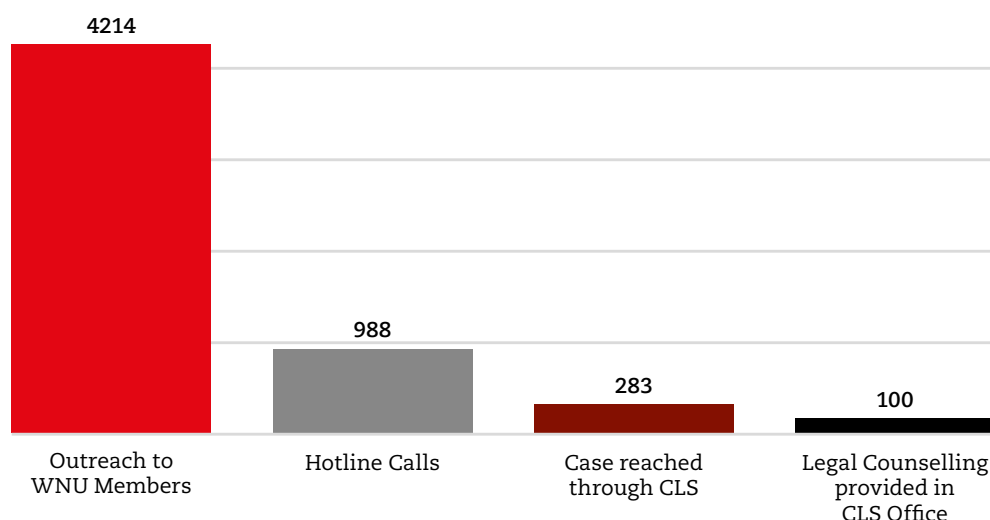


The first programme focuses on providing legal education, representation and legal services for sex workers who are members of WNU. Legal education has included various trainings and awareness-raising workshops. Workshop topics have included the Cambodian legal system; types of violence and its causes and consequences; LSHTSE; crime and sentencing under the Penal Code; debates in local newspapers on sex work and massage parlour issues; case filing; and record keeping and management.

²⁰ CLS, 2013.

Legal representation includes face-to-face and phone consultations with victims, as well as assistance in lodging complaints at the police station and at the court, and referrals to other organisations for specific services which CLS is unable to deal with. CLS lawyers represent victims in cases involving divorce, criminal charges, and violence against sex workers. They also use power of attorney to release workers from wrongful arrest and jail. The graph below provides a picture of the cases CLS has been working on up to October 2013:

CLS Achievements, 2011–2013



(Source: CLS, 2013)

CLS's second programme is an outreach programme aimed at WNU members. The outreach team provides information on CLS legal services and refers people to CLS, WNU and other NGOs. As part of the outreach programme, CLS also operates a 24-hour hotline, managed by CLS's Emergency Response Team (ERT). Sex workers and entertainment workers (EW) can call the hotline for legal advice and services. Common reasons for hotline calls include violence from police, clients and partners; rape; raids; and detention in police stations²¹. In the case of a raid and detention/rehabilitation, the ERT and WNU staff go to the Department of Social Affairs, which manages the rehabilitation centre, to take sex workers out. Once out of the rehab centre, CLS assists the sex workers with whatever they need, including health care, food, and transportation back to their house or rented room.

The third programme of CLS focuses on providing counselling and social support services to sex workers. CLS staff provide counselling to victims of a range of experiences, including sexual assault, trauma, different forms of gender-based violence, procurement and trafficking.

STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

Two technical teams of CLS are in charge of carrying out the programme operation. The legal team consists of principal lawyers and paralegals. CLS is responsible for overseeing legal education, representation and legal services for the victims. The ERT manages the 24-hour emergency hotline, and provides counselling and outreach to members of WNU.

²¹ CLS, 2013.

IMPACT

Direct impacts

Legal justice: The legal representation of sex workers enables them to exercise their human rights to life and employment. It is a new wave of change whereby sex workers who are abused and violated, raped or raided, file legal complaints against the perpetrators (which includes police, clients, and gangsters). These steps have constituted a new testing ground for sex workers themselves to find the courage to lodge the complaints, as well as testing the mechanism to hold the perpetrators accountable for their abuse.

Financial gains: Monetary compensations are sometimes won through CLS's legal representation. As a result, it is expected that more legal sanctions will be brought against perpetrators.

Indirect impacts

Increased respect and collaboration with concerned stakeholders: Through the legal and social services programmes implemented by WNU, there is a general recognition of the organisation's role among concerned stakeholders, including government departments and local authorities. For instance, the raid and rescue operations under LSHTSE cannot be supported by the Department of Social Affairs, which does not have sufficient infrastructure to run the rehabilitation services. Through its work with the Department of Social Affairs, WNU has established a good partnership and it is subsequently contacted by the department to come and take the arrested sex workers to WNU's DICs.

Recognition by other marginalised communities: Building on the education, counselling, health care, and legal services that WNU currently provides to its members and the poorest households in the communities makes WNU known as the association to help poor people, particularly women, in the community. The hotline service of CLS caters to the needs of sex workers, families in slum communities, and beyond. An estimated up to 30 percent of the hotline calls are from community and factory workers seeking CLS's legal advice and counselling on issues of violence, assault, rape, and health. The CLS service is seen as not only assisting sex workers, but also essential for poor communities in urban slum areas.

KEY CHALLENGES

CLS is the first legal service that has been designed to address the legal needs of sex workers in Cambodia. The current judiciary system in Cambodia is corrupt and lacks independence and transparency. The loopholes of the system offer little, if any, justice to sex workers.

The outstanding key challenges lie in the fact that sex workers and EWs do not trust the judiciary system or the law enforcers (particularly the police), who in many cases perpetrated the crimes against them.

An HIV-positive trans sex worker was arrested during a police raid and detained at a Phnom Penh police station. She called the CLS hotline. CLS had her released and also arranged for her ARV medication during the detention period. After release and consultation with the CLS lawyer, she decided to file a complaint against the police for wrongful arrest. The police refused to accept her letter and in fact verbally threatened the sex worker saying she had filed the case against the wrong person who would in turn file a defamation case against her. This scared her and she dropped the case without consulting the CLS lawyer.

(CLS, NOVEMBER 2013)

Filing complaints with the legal authority is often a time-consuming process and requires monetary bribes which they cannot afford. The process of investigation at the police level is very slow and often victims do not know the identity of the suspect, adding to the challenges in the police investigation.

Several challenges arise in representing clients. In a number of cases, sex workers decided to drop the cases by themselves for fear of the consequences or due to threats from the accused persons. Many times the process ends abruptly with CLS not being informed of settlements or decisions to drop the case by the client. It is also common that the settlement of the case happens outside the court system with victims accepting monetary compensation from the perpetrators.

Most victims who have called the CLS hotline number cannot be reached afterwards²² if they do not attend their appointment. This makes the monitoring of ongoing cases very difficult.

Another challenge is the lack of solidarity or support from fellow sex workers – who are also WNU members – in terms of acting as witnesses for any sex worker who is wrongly accused of a crime.

Often, other sex workers who were present on the scene are not willing to be witnesses for fear of threats and possible legal consequences and/or sanctions against themselves. Threats come from the perpetrators and the police.

A massage worker was abused by a client. The following day, the client came to the shop again and began hitting her. The woman grabbed the motor key and also filed a complaint at the police station. Since she did not hear for four days from the police she approached CLS through the hotline. She agreed to a compensation of \$200 and paid the police \$100 for the support and procedures. The case was since closed.

(CLS, NOVEMBER 2013)

22 This is due to sex workers changing their mobile numbers very often, or calling from public payphones.

CASE STUDY

3

MYANMAR



AIDS Myanmar Association (AMA)

AMA, also known as AIDS Myanmar Association, is a membership-based network of sex workers whose aim is to improve access to quality sexual health services for sex workers, and to reach geographical locations not currently covered by HIV programming, especially those in urban areas. AMA, which is Burmese for 'big sister', is the only organisation in Myanmar to focus on sex workers of all genders and with a specific focus on advocacy for sex workers' rights, particularly in relation to health.

Background

AMA was founded as the National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW) in 2007. Created to be an independent sex worker-led network, initial meetings were supported by the Targeted Outreach Programme (TOP), which is a programme by Population Services International (PSI) and the largest sex worker programme in Myanmar. Network meetings were held in 2009 and 2010 with the support of UNFPA and UNAIDS as part of a National Consultation for Female Sex Workers held biennially in Yangon. In 2010, the first board was elected with sex workers present from TOP and other organisations that work with sex workers. APNSW played a key role in the formative years in providing technical support and mentorship to AMA.

AMA was created to give sex workers in Myanmar their own voice for advocacy and rights. Sex workers developed the governance structure with the aim of including a diverse cross-section of their community. This included inviting sex workers from self-help groups, community-based organisations and other NGOs.

Aims and mission

Kay Thi Win, a founding member of AMA, writes, “Our dream is of a sex worker-led organisation: for the community, with the community and done by the community. AMA is a fully sex worker-led organisation and we can make our own decisions based on need. We are standing by our independence from other organisations and we know best the problems and issues of our daily life as sex workers. We don’t want others making decisions about our lives, as we are the ones who know. We can design our own way to prevent HIV and to create a meaningful participatory sex workers’ community.”

Activities

AMA engages in several activities to realise its aim of advocating for the right to health of sex workers. It supports advocacy and advocacy training for sex workers, which includes capacity building among sex worker communities and leadership training. Throughout the country, AMA members distribute condoms and provide information on health, HIV and sex workers’ right to health. They also refer sex workers to health services for HIV testing and counselling, STI testing and treatment, and sexual and reproductive health services.

AMA supports sex workers living with HIV by providing accommodation in Yangon for sex workers from outside the city. ART is not available in the small cities so many sex workers have to come to Yangon to start ART and for follow-up appointments. Often, doctors require people starting ART to stay in Yangon for a few days to stabilise and be monitored for any side effects. AMA provides accommodation for these sex workers, and runs a laundry service for highway bus blankets to financially support this endeavour.

AMA also provides support for sex workers in prison, as many are arrested and imprisoned under prostitution law with a minimum sentence of 1–2 years. AMA helps imprisoned sex workers ensure their nutrition and maintain contact with family and friends.

Economic empowerment initiatives

When asked about economic empowerment, Kay Thi Win says, “We believe that money is power: when sex workers have secure money they can choose their clients and there are many reasons that they need this choice. If sex workers have money they can avoid violence, forced sex without a condom, police arrest, and look after their health care. Economic empowerment means that sex workers can be good role models as heads of their families. When sex workers have money, other members of society are more inclined to respect them and not stigmatise their occupation. Therefore economic empowerment leads to less discrimination.”

In addition to its other activities, AMA provides training for sex workers who want to learn better financial management and start saving money with a bank account. These training sessions provide fundamental information on bank accounts, which were previously considered to be 'unavailable' to sex workers due to perceived lack of status. During the sessions, many participants were interested in the budgeting aspect of the workshops and developed household budgets for themselves. They could see the value in planning ahead and putting something aside in case they got sick, were arrested or wanted to send their children to school. Trainings are run in partnership with bank staff, who provide education on opening a bank account.

One major obstacle to sex workers getting a bank account is that many do not have a National Identity card, which is required to open an account. AMA helps sex workers obtain their National Identity cards, as well as the initial deposit required to open an account. National Identity cards are also important for sex workers' economic empowerment, because sex workers who do not have them must pay money to rent a card from someone else in order to go to a hotel or guest house for work. AMA has organised four financial management trainings with a total of 84 participants. From those workshops a total of 43 sex workers have opened a savings account and 12 of them have gotten their National Identity cards.

For the future, AMA is considering opening a banking cooperative for sex workers, modelled on DMSC's Usha banking cooperative.

CASE STUDY

4

INDIA



Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad (VAMP)

Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad, known as VAMP, is a sex work collective based in the central Indian states of Maharashtra and Karnataka. Established in 1996, VAMP grew out of the peer educator programme of local HIV NGO, SANGRAM. VAMP was set up with the objective of establishing a common identity among women in sex work with the ultimate aim of empowering them to assert their rights. This rights-based approach was established to equip women to protect themselves from HIV, violence, and discrimination.

Background

VAMP originated as an offshoot of a peer educator programme at SANGRAM, a local NGO founded to address the growing HIV epidemic in western India. In 1992, SANGRAM started its work in a small highway crossing town called Sangli, with sex workers in the Gokalnagar area of town who were initially suspicious, having been exposed to several HIV prevention efforts that had treated them as vectors of disease. Eventually, several sex workers began to engage with the programme, working as peer educators within their communities. The peer educator programme was driven by two assumptions: that insiders were more effective at reaching people in their own communities, and that women in sex work can reliably enforce condom use for their own protection. By 1995, the programme had over 150 peer educators. The women began discussing the possibility of creating an independent, volunteer-based collective that would expand the work of the peer educator programme. VAMP was registered as an independent NGO in 1996 with the aim of building solidarity and collective identity among sex workers.

Today, VAMP operates in 62 sex worker community sites across southern Maharashtra and northern Karnataka. VAMP membership is not formalised; the collective serves as a mechanism to build a sense of community and solidarity among sex workers in their own areas. Because of this, there is no official membership number, though there are an estimated 5,500 members of VAMP.

The VAMP staffing structure includes a director, coordinator, peer educators, community workers and field workers. There is an executive board of seven members, with elections held every three years.

Aims and mission

VAMP was established to build collective identity among sex workers, thus enabling them to advocate for their rights and protect themselves from violence and discrimination. VAMP has shown that this rights-based approach minimises the spread of HIV, decreases violence, increases access to health services, and makes sex work safe and therefore more profitable.

Activities

VAMP is committed to making sex work safer and more enjoyable. Their activities largely focus on HIV prevention and treatment, violence, and sex workers' rights. VAMP's HIV work is done mainly through peer education, condom distribution and assistance with access to medical treatment. VAMP also supports sex workers who are living with HIV, helping them with their medical appointments, medication, and serving as de facto caregivers of sick colleagues.

Early on, violence against sex workers was identified as a major barrier to women protecting themselves from HIV. This violence was often perpetrated by police and local officials, or simply ignored by them. Much of VAMP's work addresses the issue of violence and harassment by working or negotiating with police, and educating sex workers on their rights when approached by police officers.

Economic empowerment initiatives

Violence against sex workers not only impacts the spread of HIV among sex workers; it affects women's ability to work in a safe environment, and thus affects their earning potential. VAMP's work to prevent violence against sex workers has been critical in protecting sex workers' ability to be economically active.

Before the formation of VAMP, police harassment and violence against sex workers in Sangli was common. Women were routinely abused and beaten by police and clients; extortion was a regular occurrence and police mostly used the threat of soliciting charges, which is a crime under Indian law. Sex workers could not do anything about these issues as the police provided no protection and often made the situation worse. Additionally, sex workers experienced tremendous violence, intimidation and harassment as part of 'raid and rescue' efforts by police and international and local anti-trafficking groups²³.

Before, we were not aware of our rights. We were treated like slaves. We would cover our faces and suffer in silence. We were thinking that sex work is not a good thing and anything wrong that happened to us we would accept it and cry. We learned that we deserve to be treated not as good or bad but as women who need to know our rights.

MEENAKSHI, VAMP, SANGLI

23 Save Us From Saviours, 2013.

VAMP works to protect women against violence in several ways. First, VAMP has worked to establish relationships with police agencies, so that instead of raiding brothel areas, sex workers can serve as allies to help identify underage sex workers who have been trafficked.

This minimises the massive collateral damage experienced in brothel areas after a typical 'trafficking' raid. VAMP has established *tantamukti* (conflict resolution) committees at every *mohalla* (site) to act as a dispute redress mechanism among sex workers. The *tantamukti* committee meets every week and is an 'open house' mechanism that works to address issues ranging from violent lovers to abusive and/or exploitative brothel owners and loan sharks.

When a new person arrives in a VAMP area to do sex work, she must provide a birth certificate or proof of age, copies of which are maintained by VAMP. VAMP also works with minor girls who have gotten into sex work, to educate them on their rights as children, and counsel them to discourage them from working in the trade. The counselling is essential, since simply turning girls away would only push them further underground. The committee then tries to determine who sent the girls to the community. If it feels that a girl was trafficked, this information is brought to the police. By working with police, VAMP offers a culturally competent, non-violent intervention that confronts the issue of trafficking while still protecting the lives and livelihoods of sex workers in the area. This system is far better than the 'raid and rescue' model which subjects sex workers to harassment and violence, and pits sex workers and police against each other. As such, sex workers are able to work and live in a peaceful environment.

On an individual level, VAMP works to educate sex workers on their rights as sex workers, thus empowering them to advocate for themselves with police and government officials. This has equipped sex workers to negotiate with authority figures and defuse threatening situations.

VAMP acknowledges that in many ways, sex workers are more economically privileged than many women in their patriarchal society. As Meenakshi Kamble of VAMP states:

*We do not allow men to sit on our heads. We are the earning heads of households. Everything to do with the money we earn is decided by us. We have more power within our families compared to other women. We are the ones who run our families, take all the decisions about the money, about the family members. In fact, we have more equal relationships with the men in our lives.*²⁴

VAMP has shown that violence and harassment are the effects of stigma and marginalisation and not inherent to sex work. By building the rights discourse with the police, standing together to oppose violence against sex workers from within and outside the communities, and educating women on their rights, VAMP has helped sex workers to live and work more safely, thereby making more money to support themselves and their families. This model of economic empowerment has shown that additional income generation is not needed if sex work is acknowledged as work and there is full decriminalisation of sex work. Self-organisation and collectivisation helps create safe working conditions for sex workers, which not only increases income but ensures retention of income.

²⁴ VAMP/SANGRAM Team, 2011.

CASE STUDY

5

INDONESIA



OPSI

OPSI, or Organisasi Perubahan Sosial Indonesia (Indonesian Organisation for Social Change), is a national network of sex workers based in Jakarta, Indonesia. OPSI membership includes sex workers of all genders. OPSI advocates for the economic empowerment and social inclusion of sex workers as sex workers. They realise their goals by working alongside other groups, including government agencies, HIV and STI prevention organisations, human rights groups, women's organisations and the gay, transgender and MSM Indonesia Network.

Background

In 2008, Indonesian sex workers formed a small network to address the issues facing their community, including human rights violations, lack of access to health care and other social services, and lack of inclusion of sex workers in HIV programming that affected their lives. This group protested outside the Lokakarya Nasional Penelitian II (Second National Symposium of Research) to highlight these issues, and eventually founded a small committee which advocated for sex workers to have a larger role in HIV policy and programming. In 2009, this committee organised a sex worker meeting in Jakarta, at which OPSI was officially launched as the national voice for sex workers in Indonesia.

OPSI was founded by sex workers and continues to be led by sex workers: seven of the 11 board members are sex workers from various regions of Indonesia and 90 percent of the staff are also sex workers. Under OPSI guidelines, the executive coordinator must also be from the sex worker community. At present there are only two paid positions at OPSI, but the organisation has managed to give Indonesia a regional presence at sex worker forums.

Aims and mission

OPSI opposes criminalisation and other legal oppression of sex work, and supports the recognition of sex work as work. Its mission is to:

- ▶ Establish critical awareness of human rights issues within the minds of Indonesian sex workers.
- ▶ Remind the state of its responsibility to uphold human rights of all sex workers.
- ▶ Ensure the involvement of sex workers in all policy making that affects them.
- ▶ Establish, promote, and strengthen solidarity among sex workers throughout the country.
- ▶ Ensure the active participation of sex workers in the management measures of HIV (personally).

OPSI critiques the trafficking paradigm that conflates representations of sex work, migration, and mobility with concepts of coercion and victimisation. However, OPSI acknowledges that sex workers start from a disadvantaged position and generally have low bargaining power.

Activities

OPSI also advocates for universal access to health services, including primary health care, HIV, and sexual and reproductive health services. It speaks out about violence against sex workers, including violence from police, institutions, clients, and intimate partners, while challenging the myth that sex work inherently encourages gender-based violence. In terms of national policies related to sex work and HIV, OPSI opposes coercive programming, mandatory testing, raids and forced rehabilitation.

To realise its goals, OPSI tries to empower its members through education on the myriad issues affecting sex workers' lives. It believes that through the empowerment strategy, it is easier to develop advocacy actions against discriminative regulations. OPSI works with UN agencies and other civil society organisations in Indonesia to accomplish its mission.

Key challenges

The current socio-political climate of Indonesia has made sex work and sex work advocacy increasingly unsafe and challenging. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia has filtered into Indonesian government laws and policies surrounding sex work. The fundamentalist Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam) in Jakarta and elsewhere in Indonesia has been attacking and destroying sex work areas and threatening outspoken sex worker supporters.

Additionally, traditional brothel complexes have declined in numbers as reformist or Islamic-influenced mayors and religious groups have encouraged their destruction. For instance, Kramat Tunggak, near Jakarta's port area, is now an Islamic studies centre, and the most famous area, Dolly in Surabaya, is reduced and under threat. The number of bars to work from in Indonesia has also declined, with only a few in areas like Mangga Dua surviving. As a result, sex workers have been pushed in two directions: the poor into street work and the better-off into internet-based work.

More recently, Indonesia's HIV prevention efforts have been guided by abstinence policies. In December 2013, the president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, tweeted in support of these policies: "The most important way to prevent HIV is to restrain one's self from doing things that will get them infected."²⁵ Indonesia is one of nine countries that have failed to curb the spread of the virus, with the rate of new infections increasing by 25 percent between 2001 and 2011.

OPSI has also identified its own capacity challenges: "We need training in management skills, funding applications, English language, theoretical background on sex work, feminism and fundamentalism as well as global politics and the politics of aid...especially around HIV!"²⁶

Economics of sex work

In 2013, a focus group was held with OPSI members, who were asked about their perspectives on the economics of sex work.

OPSI members reported a range of financial gains from sex work, ranging from Rp. 300,000 (US\$258) per month for trans workers at a bus terminal, to Rp. 5,000,000 (US\$430) a week for female sex workers with regular high-profile clients. Sex workers report that their expenses vary, but average about Rp. 50,000 (US\$4.50) for themselves.

A range of reasons was reported for getting into sex work. One person had been sold into 'restaurant work' at 14, but then couldn't leave because of the debt she owed. A Malaysian client helped her pay off her debts and escape for 20,000 Ringgit (US\$6,000). Another individual engaged in sex work in exchange for food at a port, but later returned home.

Sex workers reported that they did not lend money to each other, but instead relied on moneylenders, who charged 20 percent interest for a quick loan. This situation is similar to that of sex workers in Kolkata, before the establishment of the Usha collective.

²⁵ Jakarta Globe, 2013.

²⁶ Group discussion with author, 2013.

CASE STUDY

6

INDONESIA

Yayasan Kerti Praja/Melati Support Group, Bali

Melati Support Group (KDS Melati), based in Bali, is a support group for female sex workers living with HIV. The group was founded to facilitate empowerment, communication and learning among sex workers. The group is part of Yayasan Kerti Praja (YKP), a large HIV NGO based in Bali. YKP works primarily with female, non-transgender sex workers; similar work with gay and trans workers is carried out by the partner organisation, Gaya Dewata (part of the Gaya Nusantara network across Indonesia).

Background

The previous case study illustrates the difficulties of functioning as a sex worker-led group in Indonesia. As a result, most sex worker support in Indonesia still occurs under the umbrella of family planning or large NGOs, such as YKP, established by the progressive HIV doctor Dewa Nyoman Wirawan. In 2006, YKP staff and clients started KDS Melati for female sex workers living with HIV, with the goal of providing support and education to participants.

KDS Melati is run by YKP staff and partners with Spirit Paramacita, an organisation that works with PLHIV. The group covers the Badung and Denpasar area and has over 400 members, 100 of whom are active. Each week around 10–15 women attend the group. The women are from all age groups, but are mostly between the ages of 20 and 40. KDS Melati is the largest group of its kind in Indonesia.

The majority of sex workers in Bali work in brothel-like clusters; as such, most KDS Melati participants are brothel-based sex workers. In Bali, most female sex workers come from other regions, predominantly East Java where there are limited work opportunities. As a result, many women in the support group are from East Java.

Support group attendees are often different each week, mostly due to the high number of female sex workers living with HIV using YKP's services (about 455). Because of this large number, KDS Melati prioritises women who: 1) are newly diagnosed as HIV-positive, 2) are pregnant, 3) are just starting ARV therapy, 4) have low ARV adherence, 5) are hesitant to start therapy or 6) have a low CD4 count.

Aims and mission

The aims of KDS Melati are:

- ▶ To promote the civil and human rights of sex workers living with HIV and to work towards ending all forms of discrimination against them;
- ▶ To support the right of sex workers living with HIV to work safely in streets, brothels, and elsewhere as and when they need to;
- ▶ To facilitate and promote safe sexual practices and access to pertinent and accessible health services of female sex workers living with HIV;
- ▶ To foster the empowerment of female sex workers living with HIV.

Many of the 6,000 sex workers in Bali are from other provinces. Many have been brought to Bali as voluntary migrants using agents or with the assistance of a friend and then find that they are cut off from social support and unable to return home if they are unhappy with their situation. It was also the case in Jakarta that many of the sex workers we talked to had entered the industry as adolescents under the influence of another person, and often described themselves as being 'rescued' (usually by a client) from a situation in which they were not making their own money (i.e. not sex work). The fact that they then stayed in the sex industry as independent operators indicates that the circumstances, enabled by illegality and stigma, are what need to be addressed, rather than the sex work itself.

Activities

KDS Melati is one of YKP's most successful ventures. The support group is a space for therapy, as well as sharing and disseminating information on HIV. Group members participate in life skills activities such as yoga, reproductive/sexual health education, aerobic exercises, and film discussions. The group also puts on theatre productions based on their life stories, and has published a collection of stories written by group members as an income-generating activity.

Currently, sex workers are not compensated for attending KDS Melati meetings. The group has reported good outcomes such as high rates of participation and greater adherence to ART.

There has been criticism of KDS Melati and YKP, because the agenda is set by non-sex workers, and sex workers do not receive funding for involvement in the programme and often have to pay transport costs to attend events.

Economics of sex work²⁷

The majority of sex workers in Bali have only an elementary school education. Many have a number of dependants, and have limited options for employment. Sex workers in the area earn much more than labourers and home helps such as babysitters. For example, a housemaid earns AUS\$80 per month and a factory worker AUS\$120 per month. Sex workers can earn up to AUS\$500 per month, with street-based and brothel-based workers earning on average AUS\$150 and AUS\$250 per month respectively.

Some sex workers leave the industry when they get married (often to a client); some never leave the industry. Some try to find other work, but often come back to sex work. Sex workers living with HIV often feel a greater impetus to leave the industry, as the work hours and conditions can be detrimental to their already fragile health. For those who stay in the industry, there is a common pattern: start off in a brothel, and when too 'old', move on to street work. Street-based sex work is often carried out on the edge of town where sex workers are even more vulnerable to violence. Street-based sex workers suffer high levels of stigmatisation and marginalisation with trans sex workers bearing a particularly heavy burden as they face double stigmatisation due to their sex work and trans status. These areas have extremely high rates of HIV. In terms of savings, many KDS Melati members are trying to save some money to open a food stall or small business in their home village, for example, for when they retire.

27 In 2013, the authors of this paper met with a volunteer from the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) programme who was placed at YKP. The information in this section comes from that interview.

CASE STUDY

7

THAILAND



SWING

SWING is a community-based NGO in Thailand that works with male and trans sex workers as well as other MSM to educate and improve the quality of life of sex workers in Thailand. SWING's work includes engaging with highly marginalised sex workers, including sex workers living with HIV, sex workers who lack access to stable accommodation, sex workers who use drugs, and migrant sex workers.

Background

SWING was founded in 2004 in Bangkok by Surang Janyam, who had previously worked at EMPOWER (another Thai sex worker-led organisation, featured in the next case study). The organisation was founded to address the rise of STIs and HIV amongst male and trans sex workers as well as other MSM, by offering testing, treatment and support services for this population.

Since its founding, SWING has expanded its work. It now works in three tourist areas of Thailand. SWING has several thousand members, all of whom identify as current or former sex workers. Eighty percent of SWING staff also identify as current or former sex workers.

Aims and mission

The mission of SWING is to provide education and improve the quality of life of sex workers in Thailand, disseminating accurate and useful information about sex workers and their needs to local and international government agencies and authorities and among the local and global sex work community.

SWING also advocates for universal access to health services, including primary health care, HIV and sexual and reproductive health services. SWING challenges stigma and discrimination against sex workers, their families and partners, and others involved in sex work, and advocates for the economic empowerment and social inclusion of sex workers as sex workers.

Activities

To realise its goal, SWING engages in a number of activities. It carries out peer outreach in sex work venues and offers peer-led educational programmes at its drop-in centres (including English classes and high school certification). SWING also runs support groups for sex workers living with HIV, and offers HIV testing and counselling at two of its sites.

Key challenges

SWING reports several challenges for sex workers trying to get health care. Many state-funded clinics are difficult to access because they are only open in the daytime or are located in hard-to-reach areas. Migrant sex workers also cannot get care under the Thai Universal Health Care Scheme, and therefore cannot afford ARVs.

Economics of sex work

In early 2013, a focus group was held with members of SWING Bangkok about their experiences as sex workers and their perspectives on financial planning and sex work.

A range of types of sex work was reported. Some participants worked as freelance workers, finding clients on the internet or on the street. Others worked as escorts, masseurs, specialised cabaret dancers, and cinema sex workers. A range of gender and sexual identities was reported. One participant identified as heterosexual, but engaged in sex work with both men and women. Another reported that they had formerly attempted to transition from male to female, but then decided to stop the process because life in Thailand was very difficult as a trans person. They now identify as ‘femme gay’.

When asked what would make their work more profitable, several participants mentioned the importance of knowing several languages (French, German, English, Japanese, and Italian) in order to communicate with clients and make more money.

Participants reported that one major challenge for their work was that clients were using internet boards to review sexual services provided by male sex workers. They said that this created a lot of issues within the sex worker community.

Participants reported different experiences with loans. One said that in the trans community, people live communally and share many things with each other, including makeup, clothing, and money, if necessary. Others reported that they never borrowed money from friends because that created an obligation to those friends in the future.

Participants had mixed experiences with savings. One participant said that he spent money as soon as he made it, on various items – motorbikes, watches, clothes, drugs, etc. He felt that if he needed emergency money, he had friends who would help him out. Others reported saving a set amount each month in a bank account.

Many people reported that families played an important role in their personal finances. Several participants said that they sent money home to their families when they could. The same people said that they also expected their families to send them money when they needed it.

Focus group participants reported a range of desires after they got out of sex work. One said they wanted to open a flower shop, noting that another SWING member had opened his own massage studio. One participant simply said they did not know. Another participant said that sex workers should be able to access some type of insurance for two to three months after they finish doing sex work. They also should have access to a larger pool of money to help them start their own business.

Several participants discussed the option of someone else ‘taking care’ of them as a way out of sex work, or as a way to live comfortably as a sex worker. In Thailand the phrase ‘taking care’ in the sex industry context means a customer who will send monthly money, pay for an apartment, pay for further education, pay for the worker to open a business, or take the sex worker overseas – basically whatever the sex worker can negotiate from the customer in the name of ‘taking care’ of them. However, not all participants agreed that this was what they wanted for themselves.

CASE STUDY

8

THAILAND



Can Do BAR, EMPOWER, Chiang Mai

EMPOWER is a sex worker organisation based in Thailand whose work “promotes the human rights of sex workers and provides a space for us to own, belong, organize and assert our rights to education, health, access to justice and political participation.”²⁸ EMPOWER was started in 1984, has since expanded to 11 provinces in Thailand, and has had over 50,000 members since its inception.

Given the broad and impressive scope of EMPOWER’s work in Thailand, this section is focused on one EMPOWER project, ‘Can Do’, a bar collectively owned and run by sex workers in Chiang Mai. The bar was created to provide an alternative workplace for sex workers – a bar that is safe, clean, fair and fun.

Background

Can Do was opened in 2006, when a group of EMPOWER workers got together and decided to open their own space where they would have complete control of the working conditions. Can Do is a collectively owned bar, meaning that any sex worker can contribute to the community fund and become a collective owner of the bar.

Can Do is a model for fair, safe, clean and positive working conditions for sex workers. Serving as an example of fair labour practice, Can Do adheres to Thai labour laws, which include paid overtime, minimum wage, and paid sick leave. The bar is currently only open three nights a week during the slow season. There is a mandatory testing law in Thailand, but the police rarely enforce it.

²⁸ Empower Foundation, 2012.

Key challenges

While Can Do has been running for eight years and has been great for the sex workers' pride, serving as a model business to show funders and government, it in fact has not done well financially, and has only recently started to make a very small profit. Workers at Can Do report that it is a good place for workers to train up, but lacks the hard-nosed drive of people out to make a profit.

The workers at Can Do have struggled with the concept of 'management', which they associate with exploitation. A final challenge for Can Do is the location. It is situated to the east of town and is not in a recognised 'strip' of bars, tourist area or other attractions, and therefore has a harder time generating new business.

Economics of sex work

In 2013, the authors conducted a focus group with workers at Can Do about the economics of sex work in Thailand. Five sex workers from Can Do participated in the focus group.

Economic empowerment was translated as 'making the best of a bad job'.

The workers from Can Do bar come from other provinces, Myanmar, Laos, and China. It costs 356 Baht to come from the border, but without ID it will cost 7,500–10,000 Baht.

Participants reported that sex work earns more money than several other occupations in the area. For example, the lowest brothel rate is 600 Baht/day in Mae Sot, while in Chiang Mai bars there is no limit. A Mae Sot factory worker makes 120–250 Baht/day and a Chiang Mai factory worker makes 300 Baht/day. A 7–11 employee makes 365 Baht/day.

Sex workers may leave the industry if they reach their 'goal' (e.g. house, marriage), but do not feel pressured to do so. Many participants felt that marrying a rich client was a way to achieve security in retirement. Participants mentioned the dream of a sex workers' retirement home, complete with golf course.

Participants reported a complex relationship with government and police. In the daytime, these agencies perpetuated stigma through laws, policies and enforcement; at night, many were also clients. Migrant sex workers can end up paying 25 percent of their income to police. Effectively, the sex workers are also supporting the police and their families. In Thailand, there are 15 laws applied to sex work, including the Prostitution Act 1996; Anti-Trafficking 2008; Money Laundering 2008; Immigration 1979; Alien Worker 2008; drug use law; Entertainment Place 1966; labour law; 100% Condom Use Policy; and zoning laws.

Sex workers reported that several things could impact their personal finances: pregnancy results in instant dismissal (it's also seen as bad luck to have a pregnant woman in the bar); STIs cause loss of income because they are not covered by social security; ART is available for sex workers living with HIV but there is heavy stigma if a person's HIV status is known. Sex workers also pay a high interest rate on debts. Savings are a rarity but many said their goal would be to have money for dependants, emergencies caused by job loss, and retirement funds.

Sex workers are now able to access Thai social security and health insurance; they do not yet have trust in banking but migrants may save their cash with EMPOWER. They also gamble, play pool and invest in magic to try and make extra money, as well as more straightforward techniques like learning English and offering themselves as tour guides to clients.

Some ways to improve incomes were suggested: enforce occupational health and safety, reduce stigma so that clients feel more comfortable, and tighten the laws so that sex workers can demand payment. These workers were not convinced of the advantages of microcredit, accepting instead the existing banks, and possibly being interested in some emergency community funds or scholarships for specific problems. They also preferred to focus on law reform, rather than use legal aid to tackle the current system.

The workers had been at the bar for an average of six months, with plans to move on to another place in the next six months. Earnings began at 15–18,000 Baht per month (this seems low given the information already given, but may reflect the low season and the bar only being open three nights a week).

Workers reported the following priorities for spending their money:

	THAI	FOREIGN
1	Send to family	Police bribe
2	Entertainment	Send to family
3	Clothes, makeup, uniform	Monk, temple
4	Rent, food, transport	Clothes, makeup, uniform
5	Monk, temple	Rent, food, transport
6	Police bribe	

CASE STUDY

9

THAILAND



Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), Bangkok

The Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW) is the regional network of individuals, organisations and groups working to promote the human rights of sex workers of all genders and to reduce vulnerability to HIV, violence and other abuses.

Background

APNSW was founded at the International AIDS Conference (IAC) in Yokohama in 1994 as an informal alliance of sex workers and supporters throughout the region. In time, and with the support of established member groups such as DMSC (India) and Empower Foundation (Thailand), as well as Pink Triangle Foundation (Malaysia), APNSW set up as an independent organisation and was registered in 2007.

APNSW members are united by common core beliefs and values. APNSW is committed to securing human rights and self-determination for sex workers. It believes that stigma, discrimination and criminalisation are the main drivers of sex workers' vulnerability to violence, HIV and other effects of social exclusion. Negative attitudes and moralising judgements by policy makers, health care workers, police officers and community members prevent the development and implementation of programmes and policies focused on the betterment of sex workers' health and wellbeing. APNSW's work is supported by lasting relationships between sex workers and trusted professional technical advisors who are committed to self-determination and justice for sex workers.

Structure and mission

With over 50 member organisations in 23 countries, APNSW members include national sex worker networks, sex worker-led organisations and sex worker projects. All APNSW members share the same core beliefs that sex work is work and that sex workers should lead their organisations and projects. APNSW is governed by a Sex Workers' Forum made up of sex workers who are elected or selected as representatives from each member country. The Forum elects the Management Committee every two years.

APNSW aims to:

- ▮ create solidarity and promote leadership among sex workers of all genders in Asia and the Pacific
- ▮ advocate for sex workers' rights, including demanding rights-based policy and programmes, access to confidential and respectful HIV prevention services, testing treatment, and support services and protection from violence and exploitation
- ▮ build regional mechanisms for the exchange of information and experiences
- ▮ challenge human rights abuses, stigma, discrimination and the negative portrayal of sex workers and their communities.

APNSW's core demands are:

- ▮ an end to violence and discrimination and other human rights abuses of sex workers and their families
- ▮ decriminalisation of sex work and homosexuality
- ▮ policy reform so that people of all genders can sell sex safely and function fully as dignified citizens and family members
- ▮ the inclusion of sex workers in all forums and decisions that affect them
- ▮ access to the same quality of health services available to others, including universal access to services for sexual health, contraception, abortion, HIV, TB, malaria, maternal and primary health care.

Advocacy

APNSW engages in a mixture of pro-active and re-active policy advocacy to support rights and evidence-based approaches to human rights and HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for sex workers of all genders. It has advocated on several high-profile issues in recent years, including bringing about a review and subsequent rethinking of 100% Condom Use programmes. By ensuring the full participation of sex workers at policy forums nationally and internationally, APNSW has been able to highlight human rights concerns with 100% Condom Use initiatives that have led to compulsory testing, deprivation of income and health care, and police harassment of sex workers. As a result, a key recommendation from the Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on HIV and Sex Work was that “a regional approach to condom programming be developed collaboratively that is human rights based, evidence-informed, and includes the lived experience of sex workers.” This recommendation, along with others, emerged from the first ever consultation in the Asia-Pacific on HIV and Sex Work, for which APNSW partnered with the UN²⁹. The consultation brought together over 150 delegates from eight countries in the region to form partnerships and review policies and laws that keep sex workers from accessing HIV services and sexual and reproductive health services.

29 APNSW et al, 2011.

In 2011, APNSW worked with its members to make detailed, evidence-based submissions to UNDP's Global Commission on HIV and the Law, and based on the strength of their submissions³⁰ was then invited to present at the Asia-Pacific Dialogue of the Global Commission³¹. The Global Commission's report, in its recommendations on sex work, HIV and the law, including in its call for decriminalisation and for an end to violence against sex workers, relied on the documentation by APNSW of the experience of sex workers in Cambodia³².

APNSW and its members also partnered with the UN on its report on sex work laws in the Asia-Pacific, which was released in 2012. APNSW was involved in developing the project methodology, and facilitated processes at the national and regional level for feedback on country chapter drafts. A survey requesting feedback on draft country chapters was disseminated to sex work organisations and other stakeholders. Representatives from sex work community organisations and sex workers from 12 countries participated in a regional consultation meeting held in Bangkok on 22–23 November 2011 which was organised by the UN in collaboration with APNSW.

Following the release of the UNAIDS guidance note on HIV and sex work in 2012³³, a consultative process led by NSWP and WHO brought together a large contingent of sex workers from around the world to work with scientists and policy makers on a Sex Workers Implementation Tool (SWIT) based on the guidance note. This included APNSW staff and members. For consultations, sex workers scheduled a pre-meeting to develop well-understood policy positions and to strategise around the purpose of the document as a programming and advocacy tool. The final document, released in November 2013 at ICAAP in Bangkok, cited APNSW's approach to sex workers' treatment literacy. The SWIT is considered to be a revolutionary document as it highlights the importance of collectivisation and politicisation as part of good community mobilisation practice for sex workers' programmes³⁴.

The advocacy of APNSW along with its members and partners has within the last five years brought the voices of sex workers to the heart of international, regional and national law and policy discussions, and their concerns are now reflected at the highest levels of decision making in the international sphere. By ensuring that the work is both community-led and bolstered by the technical work of experts and advisors, APNSW has also been able to shape the regional response to the recent attempts by certain anti-trafficking groups to openly challenge the UN on its position on the decriminalisation of sex work.

Sharing and generating information

There is a lot of information available about the HIV epidemic, human trafficking, sexual and reproductive health and human rights, but it is primarily in English and not accessible. Sex work projects need access to this information to adjust their interventions and approaches and to help them develop effective advocacy, resource mobilisation and services. APNSW summarises relevant information for use at grassroots level.

30 Global Commission on HIV and the Law, 2011.

31 See video of the APNSW presentation at the dialogue at <http://vimeo.com/20822357> (accessed 28 May 2014).

32 APNSW, 2008.

33 NSWP, 2012b.

34 WHO et al, 2013.

For instance, in 2012 APNSW staff organised a two-day meeting on the Global Fund's New Funding Mechanism (NFM), involving representatives from all the regional networks, and drafted a position paper that analysed the new model and made suggestions for improvement. This was sent to the chair and vice-chair of the fund and also formed the basis for the position of the Communities delegation to the board³⁵.

As the Global Fund is currently rolling out the NFM, APNSW developed a briefing paper for its membership. The first Country Dialogue took place in Myanmar in March 2013 and APNSW assisted the new Human Rights Coordinator to make links with community members.

APNSW has social networking platforms that are used to share information within its network and beyond³⁶. The number of friends and followers of these tools continues to increase.

Building capacity

Collaboration, training and skills building among members is a key APNSW strategy. As well as general capacity building APNSW provides training and support on specific topics such as legal analysis, use of information technologies, etc. APNSW workshops and trainings on human rights³⁷ employ arts-based advocacy techniques designed to work across 20 languages so that policy positions are well understood by different sex workers in different contexts across Asia and the Pacific. APNSW has conducted and facilitated numerous national and regional trainings on sex work, trafficking, treatment literacy and advocacy (including the use of technology)³⁸.

While advocating for sex workers to participate in crucial meetings that determine legal and policy approaches to HIV and sex work, APNSW ensures that the capacity of its members is also built to ensure a proper and meaningful engagement. For instance, APNSW now makes it a point to request that funders and international organisations fund a pre-meeting for sex worker representatives before critical meetings, to ensure capacity building, discussion, debate and a consensus position for these meetings.

Building leadership

APNSW works with sex workers at country level on programming and advocacy and also provides support to sex worker representatives who deliver speeches and sessions at regional and international events and conferences. APNSW has actively supported from the beginning the formation and functioning of a regional network of transgender activists (Asia Pacific Transgender Network, or APTN) that will monitor and advocate on transgender health and human rights issues. In 2012, APNSW worked with NSWP and APN+ to launch APNSW+ which is an initiative to address issues for sex workers living with HIV in relation to human rights, treatment, care and support.

³⁵ APN+ et al, 2012.

³⁶ These include email groups, homepage (<http://apnsw.wordpress.com/>), Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/APNSW>), Twitter (<https://twitter.com/apnsw>), Tumblr (<http://apnsw.tumblr.com/>), YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/apnsw>) and Blip (<http://blip.tv/sexworkerspresent>).

³⁷ See APNSW, 2011 and n.d.

³⁸ See APNSW, 2010.

Building solidarity

“Being a part of APNSW – working in solidarity with tens of thousands of sex workers in the region – has allowed us to challenge the way the authorities have applied this [trafficking] law in Cambodia, and to gain strength to bring this issue to international attention.”

KAO THA, WOMEN’S NETWORK FOR UNITY, CAMBODIA

Since 1994, APNSW has represented sex workers in various policy and educational forums, promoting the participation of sex workers in HIV programmes and supporting dialogue between non-governmental organisations, governments, and activists. Throughout Asia, the network has been challenging gender-based violence, promoting access to health care for sex workers, and advocating for the decriminalisation of sex work. APNSW provides the critical platform for tens of thousands of sex workers across the Asia-Pacific region to work in solidarity with each other in an environment that is predominantly one of stigmatisation, social exclusion, and legal marginalisation of sex workers resulting in grave human rights violations, violence and increased risk of HIV infection. APNSW acts as the collective voice of sex workers in the region highlighting the adverse impact of anti-trafficking efforts and laws criminalising transactional sex that have resulted in violence and human rights abuses against sex workers at the hands of law enforcement.

APNSW brings together a variety of sex workers’ rights groups with different backgrounds and organisational histories. Some are sex workers’ groups, some are small NGOs, and some are projects within national government or international NGOs. Almost all work on health issues, and some work on reducing vulnerability to HIV or addressing human rights. Some work with all genders and some with only one of them. Several work with the children of sex workers.

Peer-to-peer engagement and capacity building has been a key strategy used by APNSW to build solidarity as well as capacity among its members and among sex work groups in the region generally. Sex worker-led initiatives have been among the best in addressing the HIV epidemic. As part of its work on creating and sharing information, APNSW has also partnered with UNFPA in documenting case studies of how sex workers and their networks are leading the HIV response³⁹.

APNSW also works on building solidarity across movements.

Impact

APNSW’s recent successes have included its work on the UN policy on sex work, and the 2012 Sex Workers Freedom Festival (SWFF).

Bringing the issue of the impact of anti-trafficking laws and policies to the fore and having it placed on the UN agenda as a critical impediment to sex worker-led HIV programming has been part of the core work of APNSW. Through its determined and tireless efforts to bring the voices of sex workers to policy makers, APNSW is now part of the ‘Interagency Dialogue on Trafficking – Towards a Harmonised UN Position’. APNSW has advocated with UN Women to place violence against sex workers on its priority list, and the regional director of UN Women has now expressed interest in working on this issue. With

³⁹ See UNAIDS, 2012.

APNSW's inclusion in the Asia-Pacific Interagency Task Team on Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV, violence faced by sex workers is increasingly being recognised as an area of concern, including in a discussion paper released by the UN on the links between violence and HIV. Sex worker representatives were also invited to speak at UN International Women's Day functions in Bangkok in 2013.

APNSW was a coorganiser of the SWFF in July 2012. The Festival brought in 140 international sex workers and about 800 sex workers from India at a cost of US\$490,000, and was video-linked with the International AIDS Conference (IAC) in Washington, DC. The coordination and convening of a festival of this size and scope was an ambitious goal. It was an important event, not just historically in that it was the largest gathering of sex workers globally: it also sent an important message about sex worker inclusion in the HIV response and demonstrated their determination in being part of that response. The SWFF was convened in response to US policies and restrictions that effectively kept sex workers out of the IAC being held in Washington. The SWFF was a huge success⁴⁰, constituting the largest ever global gathering of sex workers and also bringing together the largest number of sex workers from the Asia-Pacific. APNSW led on issues for sex workers living with HIV and was able to bring together 20 sex workers living with HIV from the region. APNSW staff worked for four weeks full time in the lead up to SWFF, and its media/web person traveled to Kolkata five weeks before the conference to organise the video link, session rooms, filming and audio visual equipment.

APNSW's work has received international recognition and in 2008, APNSW was the recipient of the 2008 international Award for Action on HIV and Human Rights, an award instituted by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Human Rights Watch. The award recognises outstanding individuals and organisations that protect the rights and dignity of people living with or affected by HIV.

Key challenges

Stigma is the main driver of sex workers' vulnerability and the main obstacle to effective HIV programming for sex workers. Challenging stigma and discrimination is at the centre of APNSW's work and is likely to remain its main long-term challenge. Policy developments such as current US policy and anti-trafficking initiatives and laws based on them impact negatively on sex workers' health and human rights, on the work of individual projects in the region and on APNSW as a network.

People who sell sex and who are living with HIV are key to epidemic dynamics. As the age of large-scale treatment rolls out, access to treatment for sex workers living with HIV is a crucial challenge. The barriers that currently and historically limit sex workers' access to sexual and other health services, prevention technologies, social and economic justice and education for themselves and their children need to be removed to ensure access to treatment.

Despite being the largest group of people most vulnerable to HIV and related human rights abuses, sex workers, unlike members of other networks, have found it almost impossible to secure sustainable funding, partly perhaps as a result of mistaken perceptions and prejudices about their capacity. APNSW and its members are often challenged about the extent to which they 'represent' sex workers, or are accused of promoting or excusing abuse by communicating the

40 See NSWP, 2012a.

consensus view that sex work is work. As the network has strengthened, these challenges have reduced and sub-regional and country-level activities ensure the network is inclusive throughout the region.

However, despite the growth of APNSW and an increasingly inclusive membership, funding remains at crisis point for the organisation. APNSW survived 2013 on the commitment of its staff and membership, with personal contributions of money, time and resources from the staff as well as friends and allies in the region. Convincing donors that sex workers are best placed to address their needs and those of their communities continues to present significant challenges.

APNSW has been working towards a dialogue with feminists and women's groups in the debate on sex work and trafficking. In a highly toxic environment with extreme positions, APNSW has through consistent and evidence-based advocacy forged alliances and understandings with women's groups on the issue of rights of sex workers. A result of this growing dialogue was that the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID) awarded APNSW scholarships to take 20 sex workers to its International Forum, held in Istanbul, Turkey, in April 2012. APNSW chairperson and founder of AMA (National Network of Sex Workers of Myanmar) Kay Thi Win delivered an insightful and emotive plenary to an audience of 2,000 development feminists, receiving a standing ovation. In January 2013, in a historic departure for the largest feminist development organisation in the world, Kay Thi became the first sex worker to be elected to the board of AWID⁴¹.

As noted above, APNSW has also been working to forge links with UN Women to place the issue of sex workers' rights on the agenda of the women's movement. With the UN position increasingly reflecting the voices and experiences of sex workers themselves, a backlash was to be expected. It has come in the form of an Equality Now petition to the UN challenging its rights-based position on sex work. As a community-led initiative which also ensures that its work and positions are based on sound technical and legal grounds, APNSW was able to respond effectively to this petition⁴². The response to Equality Now came not only from sex workers' groups but also from women's groups and anti-trafficking groups that endorsed the UN approach based on health and human rights and collaboration with sex workers⁴³.

Additionally, APNSW has been working to integrate treatment advocacy activism and literacy into its work. At the SWFF, APNSW+ launched a Declaration on the Rights of Sex Workers Living with HIV⁴⁴. This declaration and the work of APNSW+ will focus on sex workers living with HIV, and HIV prevention, treatment, care and support as part of a global initiative to be led by a global sex workers' treatment policy worker who will be based in Bangkok with APNSW. In conjunction with NSWP+, APNSW is currently developing a website to cover treatment literacy and treatment activism in recognition of the urgent need to mobilise the community and reach out to other sectors affected by ongoing free-trade agreement negotiations and the threat of loss of access to affordable treatment. APNSW also works to integrate sex worker-specific issues into treatment literacy and advocacy trainings conducted by groups like the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC). The real-life impact of side-effects of ARVs is examined and the reluctance of sex workers to start ART is discussed. The sessions explore how best to integrate adherence into sex workers' working environment, e.g. for those who work in bars or

41 APNSW, 2013.

42 Tolson, 2013.

43 Misra, 2013; GAATW-IS 2013.

44 APNSW, 2012.

work irregular hours. The sex worker-specific workshops aim to form better relationships among at-risk populations, i.e. between sex worker groups and other groups. APNSW also takes a high profile in treatment activism, especially around threats to access to generic medicines. In 2013, APNSW partnered with APN+ and ITPC in delivering training on intellectual property and access to medicines, and has been incorporating these issues in training for its members. As a result APNSW members have been vocal and active on issues related to access to affordable generic medicines, FTAs, etc⁴⁵.

Social empowerment activities

“At the outset of the epidemic many of us worked in urban centres, often the most tolerant available settings. Since then experience has shown us that as scale increases we increasingly work in more restrictive environments and in settings where sex workers live and work in small communities, often negotiating a delicate balance upon which their survival depends. Working to scale requires large scale mobilisation. Technical support cannot be aimed exclusively at sympathetic NGO workers and sex worker leaders. Training, leadership development, help to set up outreach and drop-in centres must address large numbers, many of whom are new to working on sex work issues, and do so rapidly.”

APNSW

APNSW has recognised and met the challenges of working at regional and sub-regional level with NGO workers and sex workers who do not necessarily share a language and have other issues that limit participation. APNSW has developed a cultural approach based on developing films, posters, literature, artwork and music. Through this method, grassroots-level sex workers have built strong alliances, developed well-understood policy positions and produced high quality IEC materials. Although sex workers lead this process, people who are not sex workers are key. The productive working relationship between sex workers and professionals they trust helps ensure the success and quality of APNSW's work.

APNSW has made excellent use of technology in its work advocating for the rights of sex workers. The use of videos as a tool through which sex workers are trained and empowered to tell their own stories, as opposed to relying on big media or other forms of communication, has been a crucial tool used by APNSW and its members. Thus, APNSW members used digital video to document abusive conditions and human rights violations⁴⁶ reported by sex workers detained in 'rehabilitation' centres in Cambodia that local media and politicians claimed were set up to teach vocational skills. APNSW posted the video on social media and presented it at a day of action for 500 sex workers in Phnom Penh.

APNSW recognises the powerful force of humour, parody and music in mobilising and empowering sex workers as well as in advocacy. APNSW with its members has used the medium of music videos (in a karaoke style, with lyrics of well-known songs altered to convey questions and concerns on harmful laws and policies) to counter the most harmful myths and legal responses promoted by some developed countries and some anti-trafficking groups. APNSW's creative and unique use of videos and karaoke as an advocacy and mobilisation tool is recognised for its unique contribution to advocacy⁴⁷.

45 See, for example, Women's Network for Unity, 2014.

46 APNSW, 2008.

47 See Tactical Technology Collective, n.d.

Conclusion: HIV, aid and a sustainable paradigm



The case studies in this paper exhibit some ways that sex workers can make ‘the best of a bad job’, maximise their income, and achieve economic empowerment. The Usha Cooperative in Kolkata stands out as an inspiration for banking and credit opportunities for sex workers, while WNU’s CLS in Cambodia highlights the necessity and value of sex worker-focused legal aid. WNU also serves as a model for fighting against stigma and discrimination for the next generation, in its informal schooling programmes for children of sex workers. AMA, in Myanmar, serves as an inspirational model of a younger sex worker-led organisation that is growing in size and power as it works to promote sex workers’ economic and social rights. VAMP in Sangli demonstrates a model of self-empowerment to reduce violence and fight criminalisation to make sex work a safer income option. In Indonesia, OPSI and KDS Melati serve as examples of sex work groups working towards economic empowerment and social justice in particularly hostile environments. Finally, in Thailand, SWING serves as a model for social and economic empowerment for male and transgender sex workers, while EMPOWER’s Can Do Bar has created an innovative economic model as an alternative to the status quo, and APNSW brings together sex workers and organisations across the region.

The nature of sex work varies from place to place and not all successful models are directly transferable. However, these case studies serve as models that can be adapted to different contexts.

The current model of development aid has been dominated by ‘saviours’ with the seemingly unintended consequence of returning sex workers to poverty through ‘rehabilitating’ them into lower-wage jobs such as domestic work or garment factory work. This paper has underlined the findings of many sex worker groups, and the common knowledge of sex workers – that most of us are earning far more than we could in other unskilled occupations and are supporting elderly parents, putting kids through school, and planning for our futures.

Our challenge as sex worker advocates is to realise that even with ideal legal and human rights structures in place, sex workers face stigma and discrimination by dint of what we do, and who we are as marginalised people, migrants, sex- and gender-diverse people, drug users, and so on. Therefore our goal should be to be accepted for who we are, rather than asking to be fitted in to a heteronormative and hierarchical structure. We must fight for a new paradigm of a society in which sex workers are recognised as different, and respected for the income we generate and distribute.

If we are to rebuild, we need to be clearer about what our aims are. The evidence produced here demonstrates that sex work remains a marginal activity that requires an essential mental leap beyond current social mores. Decriminalisation of sex workers is the ideal, but progress is slow. In the meantime, we need to accept, even enjoy, our rebel status.

The era of HIV funding for sex worker groups is drawing to a close as the focus shifts to HIV as a chronic illness, with test-and-treat aiming to both lower transmission rates, and raise the income of big pharmaceutical companies. This shift is crucial for many sex worker organisations: reductions in future HIV funding could have a negative impact on sex worker groups (especially those that were established with the help of funding directed towards sex workers as a key affected population in the fight against HIV) establishing themselves as organisations at the forefront of sex worker-led HIV programming. However, while HIV funding is continuing, it is enabling the provision of sex worker-led HIV programming frameworks such as the 2013 Sex Worker Implementation Tool (SWIT). The SWIT has been a very welcome partial paradigm shift within the HIV field, resulting in the channelling of funds directly to sex worker-led groups rather than, or only in addition to, INGOs such as FHI 360.

The PEPFAR pledge in 2003 showed how funding can be affected by the whims of outspoken moralists including anti-sex work fundamentalist feminists. Most sex worker groups started out, to some extent, under the wing of an international NGO, and have had to work with or against the neo-colonialism that comes with it. Even our key example, DMSC, started out of the All-India Institute of Public Health's SHIP project under the guidance of Dr Jana and has since moved to a sustainable system with the Usha Cooperative.

As Pisey Ly of WNU has stated: "NGOs are used as agents to reinforce neoliberalism capitalism. Often they undermine communities' struggle and the people's movement through their strategic framework required and supported by donors. They are owned by the local and foreign middle class, playing roles as experts in almost everything ... Real freedom from oppression from this modern colonisation of neoliberalism capitalism is needed. It takes times but it is worthier than being controlled."

What is 'good practice'? We think that the prism through which sex workers are viewed needs to change – no more victimisation, much more creativity, strength and embrace of difference. In memory of the late Andrew Hunter, "If we work on principles based on the right to health then we can work together instead of having to fight with all the agencies and organisations who should be working with us". The good practice examples of programmes identified in this report enables sex workers to increase their own degree of economic empowerment which ultimately puts the sex worker in control of their own lives.

Without solid principles such as sex workers' right to health or sex workers' right to work and free choice of employment, forming the basis of programming, sex workers' social and economic empowerment will not be realised.

"If we work on principles based on the right to health then we can work together instead of having to fight with all the agencies and organisations who should be working with us"

ANDREW HUNTER

References



APN+, ANPUD, APNSW, Youth Lead & CARAM Asia, 2012, “Letter to Global Fund SIIC on the New Funding Model by Asia Pacific Community Networks”, available online at <https://www.facebook.com/notes/apnsw/letter-to-global-fund-siic-on-the-new-funding-model-by-asia-pacific-community-ne/547589865254790> (accessed 28 May 2014)

APNSW, n.d., “APNSW – Workshops, Meetings and Training” (photoset), available online at <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.220466081300505.70230.220412237972556&type=3> (accessed 28 May 2014)

APNSW, 2008, *Caught Between the Tiger and the Crocodile* (film), available online at <http://blip.tv/sexworkerspresent/caught-between-the-tiger-and-the-crocodile-1165299> (accessed 28 May 2014)

APNSW, 2010, *APNSW Video Work Shop 2010* (film), available online at <http://blip.tv/sexworkerspresent/apnsw-video-work-shop-2010-3672696> (accessed 28 May 2014)

APNSW, 2011, “Together We Can Do It!”, available online at <http://apnsw.wordpress.com/2011/09/09/together-we-can-do-it/> (accessed 28 May 2014)

APNSW, UNFPA & UNAIDS, 2011, *Building Partnerships on HIV and Sex Work: Report and Recommendations from the first Asia and the Pacific Regional Consultation on HIV and Sex Work*, available online at <http://www.hivpolicy.org/Library/HPP001830.pdf> (accessed 28 May 2014)

APNSW, 2012, “APNSW+ and NSWP+ Launched at SWFF”, available online at <http://apnsw.wordpress.com/2012/11/02/apnsw-and-nswp-launched-at-swff/> (accessed 30 May 2014)

APNSW, 2013, “Sex Worker Elected to the International Board of AWID for the First Time Ever”, available online at <http://apnsw.wordpress.com/2013/01/31/sex-worker-elected-to-the-international-board-of-awid-for-the-first-time-ever/> (accessed 30 May 2014)

Bromfield, N., & Capous Desyllas, M., 2012, “Underlying Motives, Moral Agendas and Unlikely Partnerships: The Formulation of the US Trafficking in Victims Protection Act through the Data and Voices of Key Policy Players”, *Advances in Social Work* Vol. 13 No. 2, available online at http://www.academia.edu/1939492/Underlying_Motives_Moral_Agendas_and_Unlikely_Partnerships_The_Formulation_of_the_US_Trafficking_in_Victims_Protection_Act_Through_the_Data_and_Voices_of_Key (accessed 23 May 2014)

CLS, 2013, Presentation on “Structures, Lessons Learned and Challenges of Community Legal Services” at the Regional Workshop of Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Dendoung, N. & Dendoung, S., 2013, *Violence against Women Migrant Workers from Myanmar in Thailand*, Bangkok: Mahidol University

Ditmore, M.H., 2005, “Trafficking in Lives: The Impact of New International Anti-Trafficking Law in Asia”, in Kempadoo, K., Sanghera, J. & Pattanaik, B. (eds.) *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work and Human Rights*, Boulder, Colorado, USA: Paradigm Publishers, pp. 107–26

DMSC, 2011, *Durbar: A Brief Profile*, Kolkata: Durbar Prakashani

Empower Foundation, 2012, *Hit & Run: Sex Worker’s Research on Anti Trafficking in Thailand*, available online at http://www.empowerfoundation.org/sexy_file/Hit%20and%20Run%20%20RATSW%20Eng%20online.pdf (accessed 23 May 2014)

GAATW-IS, 2013, “GAATW-IS Statement on Attack on UN Research Calling for the Decriminalisation of Sex Work”, available online at http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=754:gaatw-is-statement-on-attack-on-un-research-calling-for-the-decriminalisation-of-sex-work&catid=102:briefers&itemid=22 (accessed 30 May 2014)

Global Commission on HIV and the Law, 2011, *Regional Dialogue Submissions: Asia-Pacific Regional Dialogue, Bangkok, Thailand, 16–17 February 2011*, available online at <http://www.hivlawcommission.org/index.php/submissions?task=document.viewdoc&id=75> (accessed 28 May 2014)

Goopta, N, 2000, “Sex Workers in Calcutta and the Dynamics of Collective Action”, UN WIDER, Working Papers No. 185, May 2000, available online at http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/working-papers/previous/en_GB/wp-185/ (accessed June 2014)

Human Rights Watch, 2010, *Off the Streets: Arbitrary Detention and Other Abuses against Sex Workers in Cambodia*

Jakarta Globe, 2013, “SBY Urges Abstinence for HIV Prevention in Wake of Condom Controversy”, available online at <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/news/sby-urges-abstinence-for-hiv-prevention-in-wake-of-condom-controversy/> (accessed 23 May 2014)

Ministry of Health, n.d., *Financial Manual for Health Equity Fund*, Department of Planning and Health Information, Cambodia

Misra, G., 2013, “A Feminist Defence of Sex Workers’ Rights”, available online at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/geetanjali-misra/feminist-defence-of-sex-workers%E2%80%99-rights> (accessed 30 May 2014)

NEP, 2007, *Impact of Informal School Fees on Family Expenditure*, Phnom Penh: NGO Education Partnership

NSWP, 2011, *Making Sex Work Safe*, available online at <http://www.nswp.org/page/making-sex-work-safe> (accessed 23 May 2014)

NSWP, 2012a, *Sex Work Digest 1*, available online at <http://apnsw.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/sw-digest-issue-01-oct-2012-small.pdf> (accessed 28 May 2014)

NSWP, 2012b, “UNAIDS Guidance Note on HIV and Sex Work and Annexes 2012”, available online at <http://www.nswp.org/resource/unaidsguidance-note-hiv-and-sex-work-and-annexes-2012> (accessed 28 May 2014)

Provost, C., 2012, "Anti-Prostitution Pledge in US Aids Funding 'Damaging' HIV Response" at theguardian.com, Tuesday 24 July 2012, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/jul/24/prostitution-us-aids-funding-sex?newsfeed=true> (accessed 23 May 2014)

SANGRAM/VAMP Team, 2011, *The VAMP/SANGRAM Sex Worker's Movement in India's Southwest*, available online at http://www.awid.org/content/download/117347/1335451/file/CTW_VAMP_Movmnt_ENG.pdf (accessed 23 May 2014)

Save Us From Saviours, 2013, "Rights or Rescue?", available online at <http://saveusfromsaviours.net/?p=31> (accessed 11 June 2014)

Tactical Technology Collective, n.d., *Tactic 5 – Provoke a Smile* (film), available online at <http://vimeo.com/8759126> (accessed 30 May 2014)

Tolson, M., 2013, "The Least Bad Option: In Cambodia, Sex Work is the Only Option for Some", in *Megaphone*, available online at <http://www.megaphonemagazine.com/articles/810/the-least-bad-option-in-cambodia-sex-work-is-the-only-option-for-some> (accessed 30 May 2014)

UNAIDS, 2012, "'HIV and Sex Work Collection': Innovative Responses to Sex Work and HIV in Asia and the Pacific", available online at <http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2012/december/20121212sexworkasia/> (accessed 28 May 2014)

UNDP, 2012, *Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific*

UNDP, 2013, *About Cambodia*, available online at <http://www.kh.undp.org/content/cambodia/en/home/countryinfo/> (accessed 9 December 2013)

UNFPA, 2012, *HIV and Sex Work Collection*

WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, World Bank & NSWP, 2013, *Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers: Practical Approaches from Collaborative Interventions*, available online at <http://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/90000> (accessed 23 May 2014)

Women's Network for Unity, 2011, *Annual Report*

Women's Network for Unity, 2012, *Annual Report*

Women's Network for Unity, 2013a, *Bi-Annual Report*

Women's Network for Unity, 2013b, *Six Monthly Progress Report*

Women's Network for Unity, 2014, "WNU Solidarity with Indian People to Oppose EU and India Free Trade Agreement", available online at <http://www.wnu.womynsagenda.org/viewpost.php?id=13#Uuu8RRCsYlg> (accessed 30 May 2014)

Appendix 1



Question set related to ‘Economic empowerment of sex workers’ used during field research, July–November 2013.

Title: Making the Most of Sex Work in Southeast Asia: *Self-determination in economic empowerment and the removal of discrimination* (including political, legal and moral prejudice)

QUESTION SCHEDULE

Sex worker organisation [name of organisation]:

- ▶ We’d like to talk to someone with a good knowledge of this organisation, thanks.

Part 1: Background:

- ▶ Who started the group, and when?
- ▶ What were the aims?
- ▶ If you were funded, who by? Are you still funded, and are you linked to any other organisation?
- ▶ What area do you cover? Approximately how many sex workers are involved, and what are their genders and ages?
- ▶ What type of work is it: street, bar, brothel?
- ▶ [A MAP would be helpful here, if possible]
- ▶ Where do the workers in this area originally come from? Is it hard for them to get here?
- ▶ How does sex work compare with other kinds of weekly incomes in this area, especially for unskilled people, or migrants – such as in the garment industry, or housemaids?
- ▶ When people choose to leave sex work, what age are they usually? What do they do then?

Part 2: Economic disempowerment:

- ▮ Which local laws and attitudes affect sex work?
- ▮ How does law enforcement and discrimination affect sex workers' incomes? For example, is there loss of income due to authorities: through fines, bribes, sweeps, raids ...?
- ▮ Is there loss of income due to people involved in the sex industry: through paying some income to 'pimps', brothel owners, or repaying debts; can you give examples?
- ▮ Is there loss of income due to health issues, such as STIs and HIV: can you be specific [for instance, do you know the rate of HIV among sex workers here?]
- ▮ Do you have experience, or do you know of other groups of sex workers with experience, of organisations trying to stop 'trafficking'? Who are they?

Part 3: 'Rescued sex workers':

- ▮ Can you help us talk to some individuals with experience of raids, rescue, detention and/or 'rehabilitation' ... could we ask two or three people to tell the story of what actually happened to them? [this will be a separate session]

Part 4: Economic empowerment:

[These questions can also be asked with the focus group from Part 5]

- ▮ What do you think economic empowerment means for sex workers, without stopping sex work?
- ▮ What are some things that might help?
 - Improving health? [including HIV prevention and treatment]
 - Improving working conditions
 - Increasing payment from clients – how?
 - Reducing outgoings and expenses – how?
 - Access to a non-discriminatory banking system for savings and credit, and/or a microcredit system?
 - Law reform?
 - Access to legal aid, and challenging arrest, abuse and detention by security forces and/or rescue groups?
 - Education for sex workers and their children?
 - Security in retirement: what would help?
- ▮ Is there anything you'd like to add, from your organisation?

Part 5: Questions for sex workers:

- ▶ Can you help us talk to some current workers about their incomes?
Probably best in a focus group of about five.
 - We'd like to know: where are you from?
 - Where do you work?
 - How long have you been working here?
 - How long do you think you will keep working here?
 - What would you like to do after that?
 - How much did you earn last month?
 - What do you earn in an average month?
 - How do you think your income compares with sex workers in other areas?
 - How does your income compare to other types of work a) in this area; b) in your home area?
 - What things affect your income? [for instance, does income go down after a raid, does it go up after monthly payday, how often are you too sick to work?]
 - What do you do with your money, mainly?
 - Can you list your expenses?
 - What about savings, is that possible?
 - What are you saving for?

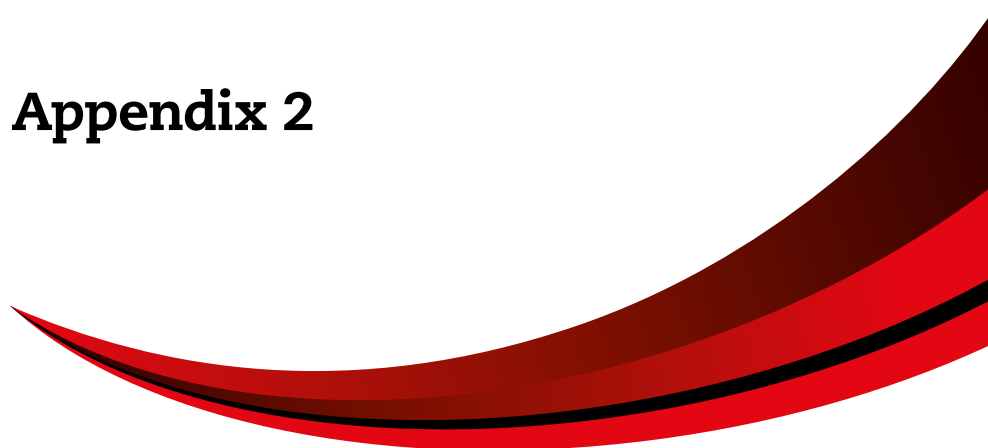
[this focus group can be combined with the ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT questions from PART 4]

- ▶ If time permits, can we get one or more actual (not conjectural) brief stories describing an individual's success in economic self-determination? For instance, buying a house, and the key factors in that success.

In closing – thank you!

- ▶ We will use this information to advocate for sex workers: to be able to organise themselves; to be funded to set up economic empowerment projects; and to refuse inappropriate anti-prostitution programmes.

Appendix 2



Game from EMPOWER Chiang Mai: Where does the money go?

Aim: for sex workers to reflect together on where their income goes and what would improve earnings/savings

NEED

- 10–12 pieces of cardboard or cards cut into roughly 8cm x 12cm pieces
- 10–12 money containers (e.g. large plastic cups, boxes)
- Pictures or drawings of predictable expenses (e.g. rent, food)
- Fake/toy money representing the local currency in different denominations
- Calculator
- Tape and glue
- Flipchart paper blank and also with pre-drawn table e.g. as below

Money taken out of bank at start _____			
Number of participants _____			
Spending on	Amount	% of total money withdrawn	Comment

TIME

1½ to 2 hours

PROCESS

- 1 Intro and warm-ups
- 2 Ask people to say what they spend money on every month. As they do, check with the group whether this is a common cost to most. If it is, draw or paste the picture to symbolise this cost on a card. Make sure everyone knows what this picture stands for (not everyone can read and write).
- 3 Attach the card with the picture to a money container and move on to the next cost doing the same.
- 4 When most items have been named, try to work together to group similar costs so there are no more than 12 expense categories: e.g. makeup and clothes could form one category (work uniforms).
(Remember to leave container – or add it – as the bank/savings.)
- 5 Explain that in a minute people will go get money and start ‘paying’ their monthly expenses. At the same time everyone goes and takes the money they earned last month. Be clear that it is not what they wished they earned or should have earned, but what they really earned. When they have the money they can begin paying according to what they really paid last month (this is often chaotic and fun).
- 6 While they are paying their money out, calculate how much in total was taken from the money supply. Put this total on the top of your chart along with the number of participants.
- 7 When they have finished paying, check no one has any money left in their hand. If they do, check what it is and try to find a useful place for it, e.g. savings. You may have to create a whole new category if many people have money left over for something that didn’t come up at first, e.g. lottery/gambling.
- 8 Now give out each money container, with picture attached, to different people or 2–3 people to add up the money spent on that category.
- 9 Using your table, one by one stick the picture card in the expense column and write down the amount.
- 10 Have a helper begin calculating percentage of total as you go along. Often you may need to give the group a short break while you finish calculating how much of the income is spent on each category.
- 11 Come back together and go through the chart, picking up interesting points e.g. multiplying the bribe amounts paid by the number of sex workers in the area. If you divide the total money by participants, is that about how much they earn really? What would reduce their spending, in what category? What about other workers, would their table look like this one or would it be different? How?

Appendix 3



EMPOWER exercise: Where does the money go?

During the workshop in Phnom Penh, we were able to spend one afternoon with the participants engaged in an exercise developed by EMPOWER, ‘Where does the money go?’ (see Appendix 2). All the participants found this a very interesting and valuable exercise, as many had never considered their monthly budget before, or the possibility of savings, although they had been much inspired by the earlier presentation from Nirmala of the Usha Cooperative.

Participants were divided into groups and interpreted the game as they wished, using butchers’ paper and then presenting back to the group as a whole. It was quite a chaotic experience and didn’t exactly follow the EMPOWER template, but was also very enlightening and interesting. Due to the larger number of Cambodian workers present, they were divided among the groups and this was also interesting for workers from other countries who had not realised how tough the local workers had it.

For example, one sex worker estimated her income at US\$200–300 per month, which seems like a fairly consistent estimate in Cambodia, and not much more than alternative wages in factory or domestic employment which range from around US\$100 to US\$300 across the Southeast Asian region, with state-sanctioned minimum wages also starting at around US\$100 or a little over US\$3 a day (ILO figures). However, most people in alternative jobs are not supporting dependants; they are more likely to be young women living at home, or living with their employers.

This worker pays US\$37.50 per month to rent a room and spends about US\$5 per day on food, or US\$150 per month. Water and electricity cost US\$10 per month so she has already spent what she earns and needs to borrow, usually from ‘friends’ for beauty products, transport etc., before even starting to think about being able to send remittances back to her family. Almost as an afterthought, at the bottom of the page is the cost of a babysitter at US\$2.50 per day and milk for the baby costing US\$1 per day. These figures clearly don’t ‘add up’, and indicate the difficulties that Cambodian workers face in the current political and economic climate. A second worker estimated her monthly income as US\$300, and then added up her expenses to US\$362, comprising US\$82 on rent, US\$150 on food, US\$40 on child expenses, US\$20 on health, US\$20 for makeup and clothes and US\$50 for transport (clearly quite a large expense in Cambodia). She needs to borrow to make up the shortfall, at an interest rate of 20 percent per month. There are always people who are very happy to treat sex workers as cash cows and this is precisely why sex workers standing together can make more of their income.

The next sex worker earns US\$200 per month from sex work, but this is supplemented by US\$470 from her boyfriend and US\$747 from a formal job, totaling US\$1147. Her outgoings are US\$230 on rent, US\$130 on utilities, US\$130 on food, US\$280 on transport, US\$65 to support her mother, US\$47 on health and US\$100 'miscellaneous', coming to US\$982; then there is an EPF contribution of US\$142 (insurance fund?). The maths on this paper have another US\$1000 floating around but it seems likely due to confusion: basically the worker is still barely surviving despite a formal job and minimal payments to a dependant (her mother).

A transgender worker earned some NGO money in addition to sex work, totalling US\$250 per month. She has her own motorbike and pays about US\$12 for petrol; food comes to US\$150. She has her own house, spends US\$7.50 per month on medicine and gives her mother US\$30. With clothes costing about US\$10/month, she is able to save around US\$40. A second transgender worker also earns a US\$200 NGO salary and US\$50 from clients, spending US\$75 on rent and utilities, US\$150 on food, US\$120 on transport and an uncertain amount on medicine – resulting in a shortfall of US\$125 that needs to be borrowed. These two parallel examples, and the others with high transport costs, show how owning a bike, and possibly a home, can make a huge difference to the workers' ongoing situation, and this is something that Usha's loans have started to alleviate for the workers of Kolkata who were previously trapped in vicious cycles of debt repayment.

A worker from Myanmar estimated her monthly expenses at US\$300–400, after which she is able to save around US\$50. Rent is US\$40, family expenses US\$90, school fees US\$20, health US\$20 (which she doesn't always have to pay for, depending on circumstances). Makeup and clothing come to around US\$20 depending on the money available and what she needs; transport US\$50. Police fines or extortion regularly cost US\$30, other emergencies and social expenses may make up another US\$50. So this worker was generally ahead financially and able to support her children quite reasonably.

The representative from Kolkata then described her situation, in which she earns US\$100 per month. This may sound like little but the cost of living is also lower in Kolkata; however, prior to DMSC and Usha, the money would disappear into the pockets of 'boyfriends' (*babus*) and occasional jewellery purchases. She pays US\$5 rent and US\$30 for food and drink. Utilities cost US\$5, clothing US\$5, medicine US\$2. Finally she contributes US\$2 to the DMSC fund; thus she has US\$51, or 51 percent of her income, left for savings. Her children are now grown up so she no longer needs to support them; nevertheless, she is justifiably proud of her achievements.

The final group was very organised and chose to make up a chart comparing incomes and expenses across four countries (three sex workers from Cambodia and one each from Indonesia, Timor Leste and India, including one male and one transgender sex worker). This shows quite starkly how poorly the workers do in Cambodia – operating at a loss – compared with elsewhere. The figures for the male worker from Indonesia are high due to his having a 'sugar daddy' who provides a relatively very high income. A sugar daddy, contract wife, or other long-term relationship with a Westerner or rich local, is a key aspiration for many Southeast Asian sex workers.

	CAMBODIA 1	CAMBODIA 2	CAMBODIA 3	INDONESIA	TIMOR LESTE	INDIA
Earnings	260	200	70	1350	400	250
Food/kitchen	150	112.50	30	300	40	50
Clothes, personal items	80	0	15	100	200	33
Medicine/insurance	20	30.75	10	50	0	15
Family, education	195	0	0	130	50	67
Transport	75	50	0	130	30	33
Smoke, drinks, paan	0	45	0	100	0	16
Rent & utilities	70	18.50	35	150	10	0
Loan (bike/house)	0	0	0	250	0	0
Internet	0	0	0	40	0	0
EXPENSES	590	300.75	90	1250	330	215
SAVE/DEBT	-330	-100.75	-20	100	70	35

The workers were quite surprised by these results and the obvious huge variation in circumstances of sex workers. This needs to be borne in mind when developing any strategies with sex workers: the fact that conditions vary so widely from one group to another, so their needs are therefore also very different.





Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

The Matrix, 62 Newhaven Road
Edinburgh, Scotland, UK, EH6 5QB
+44 131 553 2555
secretariat@nswp.org
www.nswp.org

NSWP is a private not-for-profit limited company.
Company No. SC349355

PROJECT SUPPORTED BY:



SOAIDS