



nswp

Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

Economic Empowerment Programmes for Sex Workers



REGIONAL REPORT:

Africa



Contents

Good Practice and Lessons Learnt: Economic Empowerment Programmes for Sex Workers in Africa	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
Sex Worker-Led Economic Empowerment Programmes	7
Case Study 1: Ethiopia	
NIKAT	8
Case Study 2: Kenya	
SURVIVORS	14
Case Study 3: Kenya	
HOYMAS	17
Non-Sex Worker-Led Economic Empowerment Programmes	22
Case Study 4: Nigeria	
LIFE LINK ORGANISATION (LLO)	23
Economic Empowerment Programmes That Fail	26
Case Study 5: Uganda	
EMPOWERED AT DUSK WOMEN’S ASSOCIATION (EADWA)	27
Case Study 6: Malawi	
NATIONAL FEMALE SEX WORKERS ALLIANCE IN MALAWI (NFSWAM)	30
Case Study 7: Democratic Republic Of Congo	
MANAGEMENT OF YOUNG FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (CEJEDER) ...	32
Lessons Learnt	35
QUALITY ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES FOLLOWING RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES	35
UNSUCCESSFUL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES	36
Conclusion	38
Recommendations	40

Economic Empowerment Programmes for Sex Workers – Regional Report: Africa



Executive summary

There is a lack of economic empowerment programmes for sex workers in Africa. This situation contrasts significantly when compared to other regions. For example, the first part of the ‘Stepping Up, Stepping Out Project’ by AIDS Fonds documented case studies of economic empowerment programmes in the Asia Pacific region. The output from this part of the SUSO project is documented in the Regional Report¹ ‘Sex Workers Demonstrate Economic and Social Empowerment’ and the Regional Briefing Paper² titled: ‘Sex Workers Demonstrate Economic and Social Empowerment: Overcoming Practices That Limit Sex Worker Agency in the Asia Pacific Region’.

Sex worker-led organisations are more established in the Asia Pacific region. The work undertaken by APNSW in developing a framework for documenting good practice in economic empowerment programmes was shared with the African Sex Worker Alliance (ASWA) to inform them in documenting examples of economic empowerment programmes in Africa. In addition to this, APNSW’s good practice examples were shared with ASWA because they provide useful models that can be adapted for the development of economic empowerment programmes in Africa. The SUSO project’s focus in its final 2 years is twofold: to build and strengthen the capacity of sex worker organisations working to promote the human rights of sex workers and to document sex worker-led responses in Africa.

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. This report outlines the situation of sex work in 6 African countries where case studies were documented, and highlights the factors that cause economic empowerment programmes for sex workers to succeed or fail. This report also offers some recommendations for economic empowerment programmes to succeed.

1 http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/SUSO%20Asia%20Pacific%20Report_Oct2014.pdf.

2 <http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/SUSO%20Asia%20Pacific%20Briefing.pdf>.

The main finding of this report is that there is a significant absence of economic empowerment programmes for sex workers in Africa. This situation is worsened by certain funding Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) which see sex work as morally reprehensible; these organisations are not willing to fund sex work programmes unless sex workers exit sex work. As such, a lot of programmes promote the ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘redemption’ of sex workers. The rehabilitation programmes documented in the regional briefing paper mentioned above demonstrated that these programmes do not listen to sex workers, they do not ask sex workers what they want, they do not involve sex workers in the design and planning of these programmes, and, perhaps most importantly, these programmes fail to grasp the dynamics of stigma and discrimination in the communities that programmes aim to rehabilitate sex workers.

The report concludes that for economic empowerment programmes for sex workers to succeed, sex workers must be involved at all levels to identify the initiatives that meet the needs and demands of sex workers. The report argues that these programmes must be run by sex workers themselves, and programmes must adopt a rights-based approach which focuses on giving sex workers the economic power to make informed choices about their lives, including their sexual health and which does not necessarily focus on getting them to exit sex work. Economic empowerment programmes for sex workers should also aim to provide an alternative source of income to reduce the vulnerability associated with changing jobs and the programmes should not aim to entice them to stop sex work when they are not ready to do so.

Introduction

Sex workers continue to face multiple risks including social marginalisation, violence and poor health. These overlapping and mutually reinforcing factors have been shown to restrict sex workers’ ability to improve their living and working conditions and to achieve economic security. Furthermore, sex workers – like other people working in informal economies – commonly report a lack of access to bank accounts, saving schemes, loans and legal forms of credit, insurance, pensions, and basic other employment benefits. Stigma and discrimination heighten economic disempowerment by restricting sex workers’ access to financial services. This further compromises their ability to manage and plan their finances and futures, including career development.

It is clear that some programmes that aim to empower sex workers fail to do so: this is particularly common in the case of programmes whose primary aim is to rehabilitate sex workers. Actions aimed at ‘rehabilitation’ through training and steering sex workers toward alternative employment or income generation often incorrectly assume that sex workers want to be rehabilitated or want – or are able to – leave sex work immediately. In many countries, rather than encouraging sex workers to build upon their own agency, programmes instead offer income-generating activities and/or training is to rehabilitate sex workers. This is to encourage or pressure sex workers to stop sex work through providing them with increased employment options and reduced risk and vulnerability. However, participation in many of these programmes is conditional upon leaving sex work immediately. Moreover, income generation, training, and credit schemes are not always based on current markets and opportunities; unsuccessful ventures risk disempowering sex workers further because they often incur debt and experience the stigma of failure. As part of this project, NSWP has published an accompanying briefing paper; ‘Economic Empowerment: Does Rehabilitation Have a Role?’³.

3 http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/SUSO%20Africa%20BP_PDF%20version.pdf.

Economic empowerment can however be an important strategy to improve sex workers' living and working conditions. By increasing economic options sex workers can achieve greater financial security which makes it easier for them to make important decisions that shape their lives. These include their choice of work and their capacity to save and plan for the future – both for themselves and their dependents. Improving economic options also helps sex workers to reduce the likelihood of having to accept clients' requests for unprotected sex and it limits the likelihood of sex workers being put in situations that inhibit their ability to negotiate with clients and heighten the risk of violence or abuse.

Sex worker-led organisations are emerging across Africa, primarily in response to HIV. Some are also developing in response to the urgent needs of their communities in relation to rights-based approaches to both economic empowerment and the disproportionate levels of violence experienced by female, male and transgender sex workers. Sharing similarities with the Asia Pacific region, many projects in Africa have focused on rehabilitation programmes that all too often have required sex workers to exit sex work, rather than working with them to identify their own priorities and assisting them to shape their own futures.

SEX WORK IN AFRICA

Violence, stigma, and discrimination against sex workers are commonplace in African countries. Stigma and discrimination towards sex workers in communities create mistrust, which leads to sex workers being dehumanised. The dehumanisation of sex workers underlies the experience of sex workers: complaints of victimisation, violence, and discrimination are seldom considered by the police, judiciary, lawyers, or magistrates. Sex workers are discriminated against in the communities in which they live, and this results in humiliation because sex work is not regarded as legitimate work. Stigmatisation and discrimination by state-run services also furthers rejection by society. For sex workers in Africa, this burden is increased due to the significantly high HIV prevalence among sex workers. According to the World Bank report on 'the global HIV epidemics among sex workers, 2013', HIV prevalence among sex workers varies globally reaches its highest at 36.9%⁴ in sub-Saharan Africa.

Sex workers are also vulnerable to a wide variety of human rights abuses. These include sex workers being victims of violence perpetrated by the police, their clients, and by members of the wider community.⁵ Sex workers face many forms of violence including sexual violence (rape, harassment, emotional abuse, humiliation, public insults, stigma and discrimination, and physical violence such as assault and battery), as well as other violations such as refusal of clients to adhere to the agreed transaction fee or outright refusal to pay sex workers for services provided.

Sex work in Africa, like in other regions of the world, is not accepted as legitimate work by society: it is considered morally reprehensible. Children of sex workers are often insulted in schools because their mothers work as sex workers, and this harmfully affects both mother and child. Discrimination against sex workers in public and governmental service settings such as governmental departments, public and private health facilities, law enforcement, hotel and bar owners etc., are also common occurrences.

4 World Bank. The global HIV epidemics among sex workers. 2013, Washington, WA: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

5 Decker, Michele R et al.; "Human rights violations against sex workers: burden and effect on HIV"; The Lancet, Volume 385, Issue 9963, p. 186–199.

Sex workers are most at risk of violence perpetrated by clients, police and other law enforcement agencies, third parties, and partners.⁶ Sex workers report various instances of violence against them including: physical abuse and/or sexual assault from clients, police officers and/or others, refusal of clients to pay the sex worker for their services. Hotel and bar managers who provide premises for sex workers to work from often also perpetrate violence against sex workers through unfair and unsafe working conditions including expecting – and forcing – sex workers to work without condoms out of fear of arrest (condoms can be used as evidence of sex work) and because some clients often pay significantly more if they think they can have unprotected sex.

Moreover, some landlords introduce rules and regulations that are aimed at barring and evicting sex workers from their premises, some male landlords demand sex from sex workers without payment, while others extort higher rents from sex workers simply because they can.

Adherence to Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ARV) is very low among HIV-positive sex workers due to the nature of their jobs. Indeed, sex workers are highly mobile and often miss taking their anti-retrovirals (ARV) if they have been arrested and put in jail.⁷ In places where sex work is criminalised and highly stigmatised, sex workers are more likely to be stopped, harassed, and arrested/detained by police when they are working outdoors as a result. Stigma and discrimination also affect the uptake of services at general health facilities; this situation is more challenging for sex workers living with HIV due to a lack of sufficient support services which continues to be difficult when implementing prevention, treatment, care, and support programmes for sex workers living with HIV.

In DRC, the Congolese legislation criminalises procuring⁸ in order to take advantage of the sex work of others: the lack of information subjects sex workers to arbitrary arrests and violence of any kind by the authorities who are supposed to know the law. While sex work is considered to be anti-social in the DRC, it is also perceived to be immoral by the general community.

In Ethiopia, sex work is considered an act of deviant behaviour⁹ and immoral, but it is permitted on the basis that it would be impractical to abolish it instantly. Ethiopian law has created a free environment for sex workers to work but it has also created unsafe working environments for sex workers, and because sex work is not legal or illegal in Ethiopia, it is difficult for sex workers' rights to be respected. In relation to accessing HIV-related services, sex workers can get the service from any of the governmental clinics for free which are located at each Woreda (Addis Ababa is divided into ten sub-cities, whereby each sub-city contains ten or more Woredas within it). Sex workers can also access these services from private clinics, but stigma and discrimination towards sex workers from private service providers is a big barrier.

In Kenya, the constitution¹⁰ prohibits sex work, and earnings from undertaking sex work are consequently considered illegal. As such, sex workers are frequently regarded as easy targets for harassment and violence, and are considered immoral and deserving of punishment according to traditional cultures and the Kenyan constitution.

6 Ibid.

7 Focus Group Discussion with female sex workers in Malawi.

8 Congolese Penal Code, in Article 174b, paragraph 3.

9 Penal Code of the Empire of Ethiopia (1957) and the 2005 revised Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE).

10 The Laws of Kenya, Penal Code Chapter 63, Section 154 and 155.

In Malawi it is estimated that there are more than 20,000 sex workers, most of whom remain hidden and marginalised because of social stigma associated with sex work. Sex workers in Malawi face many serious challenges. The HIV prevalence rate among female sex workers is estimated to be at 73%¹¹ with very low condom use and high STI cases. Yet services are not available nor accessible to female sex workers, and many stakeholders including the police, health workers, and sex workers themselves, are not aware of the many laws and provisions that protect sex workers' rights. The Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV programme in Malawi – considered to be one of the best in the world – does not take into consideration the needs of sex workers.¹² The programme demands that every pregnant woman attends her first antenatal visit with her spouse: this is a challenge for pregnant female sex workers because they cannot bring their sexual partners. Consequently, sex workers prefer not attend antenatal services and shun the PMTCT programme altogether.

In Nigeria sex work is illegal.¹³ The offender can be any male or female who is 'aiding and abetting prostitution'. The criminal code stipulates two-year imprisonment for those wholly or partly living on proceeds from prostitution. No law restricts a healthcare provider's ability to provide medical care to sex workers, however, due to stigma and discrimination, female sex workers find it very difficult to disclose their job to healthcare workers. Sex workers prefer to buy medicine anonymously from road-side drug stores rather than from hospitals. Moreover, most of the support for healthcare services comes from NGOs that have developed relationships with the female sex worker community.

Uganda has had an increasing HIV incidence for 30 years and is the only country in East Africa that has recorded increasing HIV prevalence over the last 5 years. Having been closely monitored, the change in incidence coincides with the moralisation of the HIV epidemic that saw a decline in condom promotion and provision to communities most at risk. Sex workers are one of the most at risk populations in Uganda where the HIV prevalence among sex workers is 33%, approximately 5 times the national average of 7.3%.¹⁴ HIV prevalence is also higher among females when compared to their male counterparts. The Ministry of Health is in the process of establishing health units across Uganda that are sex worker and MSM friendly. However, these clinics may not serve their purpose because the new anti-homosexuality legislation drives sex workers away from public services for fear of being arrested.¹⁵

Ugandan laws prohibit sex work and the penal code has laid down penalties for people who engage in sex work and those living on the earnings of sex work.¹⁶

Uganda has become increasingly religious and puritan in relation to many social issues. Indeed, the faith community has spearheaded the discrimination against sex workers and police are constantly harassing and assaulting sex workers as they conduct their business. The APA Walter Reed, a friendly sex worker clinic for HIV-positive male and trans sex workers, was raided and closed by the Ugandan government. It is clear that the security of sex workers – female, male, and transgender – is at stake.

11 The Malawi 2010 Demographic and Health Surveillance Survey (DHS).

12 Focus Group Discussion with Female Sex Workers in Malawi.

13 The Nigerian Criminal Code Section 225A.

14 Uganda AIDS Commission Aide Memoir for the Joint Annual Aids Review (JAR) 2013.

15 Uganda AIDS Commission Aide Memoir for the Joint Annual Aids Review (JAR) 2013.

16 The HIV Prevention and Control Act 2014, the Anti Pornography Act 2013, the Anti Homosexuality Act 2010, the Anti Counterfeit Act 2012, and the Public Order Management act 2013.

With this wave of laws that negate the freedoms and rights of human beings as detailed in Uganda's constitution and the international treaties ratified by the Ugandan Government, it is likely that further marginalisation, dehumanisation, and ostracism of female, male, and transgender sex workers, will occur in Uganda. The passing of these bills by Parliament is tantamount to structural violence because they deny sex workers the right to health and the right to work, and they further marginalise an already very at-risk community.

Criminalisation is also likely to increase the risk of HIV and STIs for sex workers in Uganda because it will fuel stigma towards sex workers in the healthcare setting and foster police abuse and exploitation of sex workers. This situation perpetuates the lack of sex worker involvement in the development of health policy decisions that affect them.

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, Gillian Tasker, Anelda Grové, Paul-Gilbert Colletaz; **Africa Local Consultants:** Democratic Republic of the Congo: Mambo Amisi Modeste (AHUSADEC); Ethiopia: Hanna Hagos (NIKAT Charitable Association); Kenya: Fridah Nguya (Bar Hostess); Erastus Ndunda (HOYMAS); Malawi: Zinenani Majawa (CEDEP); Nigeria: Imaobong Abraham Udoh (Women of Power Initiative); Uganda: Sanyu Hajjara Batte (Lady Mermaids's Bureau); **Regional Consultant:** Safari Mbewe (Malawi); **Support group:** Daughtie Ogutu (ASWA); John Mathenge (ASWA, NSWP, HOYMAS); Phelister Abdallah (KESWA); Peninah Mwangi (ASWA)

Sex Worker-Led Economic Empowerment Programmes



This section considers good practice examples of sex worker-led economic empowerment programmes that have succeeded in having a positive impact on the lives of sex workers.

CASE STUDY

1

ETHIOPIA



NIKAT

Background

This case study was conducted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Nikat Charitable Association is a grassroots community-based local NGO, established by a group of sex workers in April 2010 and registered as an *Ethiopian Residents Charity* under the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Justice Charities and Societies Agency. Originally, NIKAT was established in 2006 as a Community Based Organisation (CBO) called 'Nikat Women's Association', which made NIKAT a pioneer in its field. The association started with 108 sex workers as members; this has now increased to 189 sex workers.

NIKAT was the winner of the '2010 Red Ribbon Award' at the XVII International AIDS Conference, organised by UNAIDS in collaboration with Letiner Center, The Global Fund and Irish Aid, which was held in Vienna, Austria, for their outstanding community leadership and action on HIV/AIDS. NIKAT was also selected as one of the best six Red Ribbon Award winners from the 25 winners and was rewarded \$20, 000 (USD) as part of the award.

NIKAT undertakes the following activities:

- 1 Runs a Drop-In Centre (DIC). The DIC provides a safe place to rest and enables female sex workers to access information, peer-support, condoms, and experience sharing. It also shares information about HIV/AIDS and STIs and offers access to showers, cooking services, and counselling.
- 2 Works closely with governmental bodies including the Ministry of Justice, Women, Children, and Youth Affairs Office, Addis Ababa Finance and Economic Bureau, Addis Ababa Health Bureau, HABCO (HIV/AIDS Control Office), the public, direct and indirect stakeholders including police officers, 'pimps', hotel and bar owners, and traditional local drinking houses called 'Areke'.
- 3 Works closely with targeted sex workers by involving them from the start (including the planning of a project) right up to the project's completion.
- 4 Outreach activities at day and night to create formal and informal linkages with sex workers working in town.
- 5 Works with partner organisations to offer referrals and resource sharing.
- 6 Trains former and current sex workers as Peer Educators to train other sex workers and society. This makes the learning and practice much easier for sex workers. Peer Educators are not paid and work as volunteers.
- 7 Public sensitisation by using broadcast media such as a weekly radio programmes detailing the lives of sex workers, their rights, and the services that NIKAT provides etc.

NIKAT's vision is to empower sex workers in Ethiopia by ensuring their social, political, economic, and psychological rights are improved and respected while their mission is to improve the living and working conditions of sex workers in Ethiopia and to fight against sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS.

Specific objectives of NIKAT include:

- ▶ Reduce the transmission of HIV and STIs by increasing condom-use among sex workers, their clients and other Most-At-Risk Populations (MARPs).
- ▶ Empowering sex workers in such a way that their social, political, and economic rights are realised.

Economic empowerment programme for sex workers: ‘The SUSO Project’

NIKAT works in partnership with the ‘Stepping Up, Stepping Out’ programme funded by Aids Fonds to deliver ‘The SUSO Project’ which implements economic empowerment strategies as a means to improve the health and wellbeing of sex workers.

The objectives and desired outcomes for the initiative are as follows:

OBJECTIVES		OUTCOMES	
1	Improved capability of sex workers to make informed choices related to their own employment and career development.	1.1	The needs of sex workers in relation to their own, career development and economic empowerment are identified.
		1.2	Strategies are in place that effectively responds to these needs, such as improved access to education opportunities.
		1.3	Improved basic living conditions particularly related to improved health and wellbeing of sex workers, through improved, safer working conditions, improved access to health basic services, safe places.
		1.4	Sex workers empowered to make healthy choices with regard to their own health, including HIV/AIDS.
2	Sex workers have acquired skills and opportunities which are leading to a diversification of income sources or new career opportunities.	2.1	Sex workers take the lead in their own economic empowerment through peer support systems (<i>includes peer education, self-help organisation, loan/saving schemes</i>).
		2.2	Sex workers have increased access to more diverse sources of income, including improved access to credit schemes for sex workers based on market value (<i>this includes business model, schemes for career development</i>).
3	Improved social and economic position of sex workers at regional/national/global levels.	3.1	Organisations are capable of analysing the actual situation in relation to sex workers and on the basis of that develop effective lobby and advocacy activities.
		3.2	Increased public attention for the situation and position of sex workers.
		3.3	Increased supportive environment towards human rights issues of sex workers at local, national, regional and global levels.

A total of 1,478 sex workers were intended to benefit from this project.

A more in-depth analysis of the activities of 'The SUSO Project' reveals that 1,716 sex workers benefited from all the activities of the project during 2013.

NIKAT conducted a needs assessment for sex workers, which included identifying healthcare needs of sex workers in Addis Ababa through outreach projects. NIKAT hired Momentum Professional Researchers and Consultants and finished conducting the needs assessment. The needs assessment results were used in the planning for the project.

8 coffee sessions with 200 participants at the drop-in centre were conducted by inviting sex workers from the selected sub-cities to educate them about HIV/AIDS, STIs, proper condom usage with demonstrations, contraceptives, and life experience sharing.

NIKAT provided educational opportunities: English lessons for 5 former sex workers and 3 current sex workers. NIKAT signed an agreement with Hello School of American English to provide private English lessons. NIKAT additionally provided educational opportunities for 3 sex workers to continue to higher education and enrolled them at 3 different colleges based on their choices of study including a BSc Degree in Accounting and Finance at Alpha University College, a BA Degree in Accounting at Admas University College, and a Level III Nursing at Kea-Med University College in Addis Ababa. An allowance for transport and other living expenses was also provided for the 3 sex workers who enrolled at these different colleges.

NIKAT signed a MoU with Loving Shepherd International (LSI), an International NGO which works on different activities related to sex workers as well as providing free healthcare services for sex workers and their children. This is a sex worker-only clinic. LSI provided free healthcare services for beneficiaries of the project as well as for members and their children each time they required healthcare services. A total of 118 sex workers and 47 children of the sex workers under the age of 18 accessed free medical services and free medicine at this sex worker-only clinic.

NIKAT provided 16 Personal Health Trainings with 400 participants at the DIC to discuss safe sex, condom use and demonstrations, HIV/AIDS and STIs, clinical usage, sexual reproductive health, family planning options, customer handling, and risk avoidance during sex work. Advice on how to effectively communicate with other stakeholders like the police, clients, hotel owners and other parts of society were also included.

NIKAT published necessary Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials and Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) materials for the office, as well as introducing the project to different partners (governmental and non-governmental) through letter-heads, business cards, invitation cards, banners, large umbrellas, flags with logos of NIKAT, DKT and SOA AIDS, which all promoted relevant sex work-related messages. NIKAT also purchased training materials required for the hair dressing training centre, and they also selected the targeted beneficiaries and appointed a trainer for the Hair Training Salon. After finishing setting up the Hair Training Centre, NIKAT started to provide training for 30 selected beneficiaries.

NIKAT also enrolled 17 sex workers at two Food and Catering Schools called Lion Ethiopia Catering and Food Preparation School which is owned by the government, as well as Benvenido Catering and Food Preparation School which is privately owned. 8 selected sex workers who had completed high school have been enrolled at Lion Ethiopia Food and Catering School for a Diploma including a 7 month-long training for a Level I qualification, and 9 selected sex workers who did not complete high school have been enrolled at Benvenido Food and Catering School for a Certificate including a 10 month-long training.

NIKAT gave five SSG Trainings for selected beneficiaries of the project with 125 participants. NIKAT managed to establish three SSG's each containing 25 members. They also provided match funding for all SSG members who have been participating in the saving scheme, to help motivate them to continue and strengthen their savings.

NIKAT signed an agreement with Addis Credit and Saving S.C. and selected sex workers that managed to save the 1000.00 birr in 2013 (this amount was required to borrow the money from the financial institution). Training was facilitated by Addis Credit and Saving S.C, and undertaken in offices located in each sub-city and Woreda in Ethiopia. One group managed to establish itself as a CBO by obtaining their work permits with license. The group opened a small food processing and a restaurant service for daily labourers and other workers of Kolfe/Keraniyo sub-city in Addis Ababa. The other 3 groups are still trying to get their license to form a CBO from the government: a license is required to receive a loan and open a business in Ethiopia.

NIKAT managed to sign an agreement with a financial institution called Addis Credit and Saving, one of the top financial institutions in Ethiopia – to manage the interest free loan, additional saving and loan training required and monitor, and most importantly manage, the revolving fund for the project. The financial institution has provided the first loan and it has also organised training for groups taking the loan.

NIKAT conducted seven sensitisation workshops for the stakeholders with 156 participants including police officers, hotel owners, 'pimps', and government officers. Prior to conducting the training, NIKAT conducted an outreach activity at day and night to communicate formally and informally with targeted stakeholders. NIKAT also invited stakeholders to undertake the training.

Conclusion

NIKAT believes that each programme's activity must be based on the needs and demands of sex workers. Sex workers should be part of the planning and implementation of the project at all levels. NIKAT's experience of delivering these activities as part of the SUSO project gives unique insight into how good practice sex worker-led initiatives should be the benchmark for designing economic empowerment programmes. The success of this empowerment programme attracts sex workers but capacity to deliver similar projects is limited. In order for sex workers to become more economically empowered, NIKAT concludes that funding for economic empowerment activities for sex workers in Ethiopia should be scaled up to match the high demand.

Factors contributing to the initiative's success

- 1 Sex worker-led initiative.
- 2 Sex workers were not required to exit sex work while they were developing new skills and learning new trades.
- 3 Initiative is based on the needs and demands of sex workers themselves.
- 4 Sex workers are part of the planning and implementation of the project.
- 5 Continuous monthly review meetings with sex workers on vocational trainings and other economic empowerment activities like micro-scales, savings, and others.
- 6 Tight follow-up, monitoring, evaluation, and learning by the programme department staff.
- 7 Successful sensitisation programmes which created close relationship with the government and other relevant stakeholders including police officers, hotel and bar owners, traditional 'Areke' houses, 'pimps', and others.
- 8 Continuous outreach programme activities created a close relationship between the sex workers and programme staff directly and indirectly.
- 9 Sustained funding of the programme enabled sex workers to benefit for a significant amount of time, which improved the chances of success of the programme.
- 10 The project's success required strong relationships between different stakeholders.

CASE STUDY

2

KENYA



Survivors

Background

Survivors is a community-based organisation that works in Busia county in the larger part of Western Province in Kenya. It was initially founded as 'Muungano' – a network of sex workers – and then later changed its name to Survivors to connote 'member's resilience'. The organisation was formed in the year 2000 by a group from the University of Nairobi and Manitoba because of the high prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS along the Kenya-Uganda border. Later, female sex workers took over the organisation's operations working on HIV and human rights issues affecting sex workers in the county and the wider country. To date the organisation has reached out to over 3,000 male and female sex workers.

Survivors is an organisation led by – and working for – sex workers and is known in Busia County for its involvement with sex workers. The community commends the organisations' work in the HIV/AIDS field through condom distribution and demonstration campaigns, and their HIV/AIDS testing and counselling services.

The organisation's vision is to have a world where all sex workers can enjoy their health and human rights, and confidently undertake their work in a safe environment; the organisation's mission is to support and empower female sex workers to make informed choices regarding their sexuality. In order to achieve this, it carries out capacity-building training, advocacy, legal aid clinics, networking and dialogue with different stakeholders, and economic empowerment initiatives to promote self-sufficiency for sex workers. Survivors also actively participates in sexual and reproductive health and policy forums, to discuss and advocate for issues that affect its members. The organisation exists to serve vulnerable women who are sex workers and sex workers living with HIV. Survivors works in partnership with the National AIDS Control Council and currently is being funded by the Open Society Institute, The Aphia Plus, and the Liverpool VCT for health and human rights programmes. The organisation is a founding member of the Kenya Sex Workers Alliance (KESWA) – a sex worker-led movement in Kenya.

Economic empowerment initiative for sex workers: 'Economic Livelihoods'

Survivors employs various strategies to economically empower sex workers. It particularly promotes self-sufficiency as an alternative source of livelihood, and the organisation's activities include peer education training, condom demonstration and distribution campaigns, advocating for the human rights of sex workers, outreach activities for HIV Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) services (mobile, daytime and night), facilitating support groups for people living with HIV including sex workers, and emergency support schemes for sex workers.

Dubbed as the 'Economic and Livelihoods programme', Survivors seeks to raise the standard of living and improve the quality of life for sex workers in Busia through income-generating activities. These activities also add sustainability for the organisation, meaning that they don't have to be too reliant on donations to fund the organisation. The main objective of this programme is to mobilise members to contribute funds to support their peers especially during specific emergency needs, maintain HIV/AIDS and STI prevention, treatment, care and support activities, as well as to develop mechanisms to ensure sustainability of both the organisation and sex workers.

The organisation currently has 128 registered sex worker members, all of them being part of this scheme. Under this programme, the organisation currently runs a Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO) whereby all sex workers contribute a certain amount of money monthly and receive their shares annually, and they also operate an emergency support scheme (ESS). The ESS is an intervention that responds to the need for a health insurance policy tailored to the needs and financial capabilities of the members. It covers health issues and provides benevolence funds for bereaved members. To raise funds for this initiative, the organisation runs a catering business that provides catering services during functions and events such as weddings, funerals, and parties, among others, around the Busia area. The money earned from catering is then put back into the organisation fund.

Conclusion

These initiatives have not only benefited sex workers in the county of Busia: other sex workers in Kenya have also learnt from the best practice demonstrated by Survivors, and they have been motivated to run empowerment projects in their own organisations. Indeed, the initiatives have triggered a positive impact among sex workers and this has played a major role, especially in harm reduction. Due to the sex worker involvement in these initiatives, the need to earn money quickly from sex work has been reduced. It is also evident that sex workers have become empowered because very few tested positive with STIs: this demonstrates that condom negotiation skills have improved. In addition, with Survivors being located in a rural area where MSMs are considered more immoral than female sex workers, the initiatives have attracted and motivated male sex workers who were previously in hiding and afraid to access services for fear of stigma and discrimination from the community.

The involvement of sex workers in designing and planning this initiative has contributed immensely to its success. Sex workers proposed ideas that they felt they would most benefit from and that they felt suited their circumstances best. Sex workers also felt more inclined to take part in this programme and to tell other sex workers about it because – having been part of the design and planning of the programme – they had a personal stake in it. This in itself is an empowering element and it contributes to the overall goal of economic empowerment programmes. It is consequently clear that input of sex workers is fundamental if economic programmes for sex workers are to succeed.

Factors contributing to the initiative's success

- 1 Sex workers were meaningfully involved in all aspects of the initiative.
- 2 The initiative's planners understood the challenges and needs of sex workers and involved them in all the planning stages.

CASE STUDY

3

KENYA



HOYMAS

Background

This case study on economic empowerment for sex workers was conducted in Nairobi, Kenya. It was conducted and run by a Nairobi-based male sex workers' collective, HOYMAS.

HOYMAS was formed in May 2009 by male sex workers and people living with HIV and is registered as a Community Based Organisation (CBO) by the Ministry of Social Services and Gender. HOYMAS serves male sex workers, young men, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) with practical knowledge on safe sex, preventive materials distribution, general information, and economic empowerment.

HOYMAS has partnered with the National AIDS and STI Control Programme to roll out programmes targeting male sex workers. HOYMAS has been a stakeholder in the KNASP III policy¹⁷ as well as the National MARPS and Sex Workers Policy. It is one of the steering committee members of the Kenya Sex Workers Alliance (KESWA). It is also in the Technical Working Group (TWG) of the National AIDS Coordinating Committee (NACC) and the National Sex Workers Guidelines Committee.

HOYMAS has partnered with NACC in delivering HIV/AIDS programmes aimed at both MSM and male sex workers. HOYMAS has also partnered with organisations such as Mama Lucy Referral Hospital, Casino Special Treatment Centre, Sex Workers Outreach Program (SWOP) clinics, and Liverpool Health, in both service provision and referrals of MSMs and male sex workers.

HOYMAS has many international partners including American Foundation for Aids Research (AMFAR), Stop Aids Netherlands (SANL), University of Manitoba (UOM), VU University in Netherlands, Red Umbrella Fund, Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), Africa Sex Workers Alliance, and UNAIDS among others.

17 Kenya National AIDS Strategic Plan 2009/10 – 2012/2013

HOYMAS has been instrumental to various sex workers' events including the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers on Dec 17th, and the International Sex Workers Rights Day on March 3rd.

HOYMAS activities include:

- ▶ Referrals of MSMs and male sex workers to service providers such as the Kenyatta National Hospital, LVCT, SWOP.
- ▶ Outreach to MSM/MSW communities in various hotspots in Kenya. This helps with documentation and mapping for data.
- ▶ Training of peer educators and healthcare workers in collaboration with MSM Training groups/organisations, e.g. LVCT.
- ▶ Counselling and Testing (CT) services to male sex workers, MSMs and clients during CT drives.
- ▶ Offering condoms and lubricants as well as prevention commodities to MSMs and male sex workers and their clients.
- ▶ Sensitisation by healthcare providers as well as other stakeholders including government, the media, and police officers.
- ▶ Production of safer sex brochures and IEC materials for distribution and creating awareness to MSM/MSW and communities.
- ▶ Providing monthly nutrition programmes with support from government and partners.
- ▶ Conducting economic empowerment training and support for vocational training, micro-finance training, and financial literacy sessions.
- ▶ Documenting and addressing cases of violence with support of HOYMAS' paralegal team and police.

HOYMAS has also managed to intensify the campaign against harassment and violations of sex workers by training more paralegals to offer help to sex workers when they are arrested. The paralegals also educate sex workers on their human rights, and on steps to take in case their rights are violated. As part of the campaign, HOYMAS has been vocal by participating in various protests and organising stakeholder meetings and events purposely planned for sensitisation purposes; for example, the Champions Day saw numerous partners of the organisation participate. The sensitisation efforts have positively impacted the many sex workers who endure victimisation because they can now stand up for themselves and have the unrelenting support of the organisation's partners, including the government. As James says, *“Interacting with law enforcers has opened up my mind and I have realised that the police are just human beings like me and I can go to them with my problems and assist me when my rights are violated as a sex worker.”* This shows a direct benefit that MSW gain from interacting with law enforcement partners.

Economic empowerment programme for male sex workers: ‘HOYMAS Savings and Credit Cooperative’ (SACCO)’

HOYMAS is committed to supporting male sex workers to acquire life skills, education, and vocational skills without telling – or forcing – them to abandon sex work. This approach enables MSWs to make informed choices about their lives. HOYMAS believes that by obtaining income from other activities, sex workers will be able to reduce their number of sexual partners and negotiate safer sex practices, which will also reduce their HIV/AIDS and other STI risk and vulnerability. HOYMAS runs an economic empowerment project called ‘HOYMAS Savings and Credit Cooperative’ (SACCO).

Small micro-enterprise initiatives is one economic empowerment strategy in Kenya and most of these programmes in Kenya specifically target women, youths who are out of school, people living with HIV etc. The programmes have not targeted sex workers because of the stigma and discrimination they face in society and even from providers of such programmes. When sex work is not recognised as legitimate work and not associated with generating a consistent income like other jobs, most financial institutions are reluctant to offer financial services – particularly loans – to sex worker groups and individual sex workers because they are perceived to be high risks.

Due to legal issues it is a huge challenge to register sex worker groups so that they are able to acquire financial support or access loans services; most sex worker groups are not registered as sex worker groups, and consequently, they have to hide their identity in order to access such services. In addition, the majority of male sex workers do not have identification documents such as the National Identification Card, which is required to open a bank account.

HOYMAS has been providing business and micro-finance skills training to male sex workers in conjunction with the Small Micro-Enterprise Programme (SMEP), a micro-finance institution that works with grassroots organisations to address poverty and livelihood support systems alongside the Co-operative Bank of Kenya. In addition HOYMAS has empowered a number of male sex worker peer leaders who are trained as facilitators – or Training of Trainers (ToTs) – in the area of financial literacy.

The training has been focusing on:

- ▶ Financial literacy and management
- ▶ Business development skills
- ▶ Savings and loans acquisition processes

As a direct result of this training, HOYMAS members have since started a group savings and credit scheme (SACCO) whereby some members of the organisation contribute money every month and can access loans and other financial assistance at any time, with agreed-upon conditions. This has shaped a positive change in the living conditions of the sex workers who, before the financial and savings training, had no permanent living structures and could not meet essential basic needs such as food and clothing due to difficulties in managing their earnings from sex work.

In addition, HOYMAS also offers support to male sex workers by advising them on the importance of obtaining a National Identification Card and the importance of a bank account because most male sex workers (MSWs) lose their money through theft by clients or fellow sex workers. Policemen and other law enforcers also take advantage over MSWs by asking for bribes – especially if they are caught on the streets or at their hotspots without their National IDs.

HOYMAS realises that male sex workers – especially those living with HIV – face serious health challenges that can make them want to move elsewhere when they feel they are becoming a burden to their families, or to live in isolation, especially when their health condition deteriorates. For many MSWs, this is because they are yet to accept their HIV status; the majority suffers from mental illnesses which makes it hard for them to engage or participate in any economic activities. Due to a growing need for immediate first aid and medical assistance and psycho-social services, a home-based care (HBC) centre for male sex workers living with HIV/AIDS facility was set up. HOYMAS established a home-based care programme that was meant to support and protect members from self-defeating behaviour as a result of poor health. This is linked with income-generating activity because once patients recover, they need to start providing for themselves once again and living a normal and productive life.

Results and conclusion

Results of the training and support from HOYMAS demonstrate that 53 male sex workers have been able to obtain their National IDs and open personal bank accounts. Most of them are now fully housed, and by offering financial loans with fair interest rates when any HOYMAS members needs it, the savings and credit scheme ensures that this situation remains.

Due to the growing need for a safe space for MSW in need of immediate medical and first-aid assistance, a home-based care service (HBC) for sex workers living with HIV/AIDS has been set up by HOYMAS. To date, the centre has had a total of over 160 patients: patients who have been in the centre and discharged testified to the fact that the HBC centre changed their lives and enabled them to be able to resume sex work – which is their livelihood – sooner than they would have if their needs had not been met by the centre. **“[...] the HBC changed my life, when I went, I was very sick, I had TB, and I wasn’t taking my ARVs [...] but with the help of the nurse and other staff members, they took me in like family, fed me and ensured I took my medication well and went to seek medical help regularly at Liverpool clinic”,** says Fabian, an HIV-positive MSW. Individuals underwent a basic course of HBC under the guidance of National AIDS and STIs Control programme NASCOP, and the District AIDS Coordinator (DASCO), Nairobi County.

The economic wellbeing of sex workers is almost an unreachable goal because they are a criminalised group. Through the project, HOYMAS managed to expand on the possibility of securing financial futures for their members and other sex workers by setting up training on basic income-generating activities: for instance 25 sex workers have been trained on making knitting mats and bead work. They then sell the handicraft that they make to supplement their sex work income. In addition, they have offered micro-finance and savings training to their members with the help of the SMEP (Small Micro Enterprise Programme). As a direct result of the training, HOYMAS members have since started a savings scheme where some members of the organisation contribute to, and can access, loans and other financial assistance at any time with agreed upon conditions. This has seen a positive change in the living conditions of sex workers who, before this financial and savings training, had no permanent living arrangement. Most of them are now fully housed, and SACCO ensures that this lasts by offering financial aid when any of the members need it. Commenting upon this, one male sex worker says:

“I used to live in a brothel but since the training I have been able to plan the little money I earn for rent, food and other needs, I also save and they can finance me if I have a business idea, so it has really empowered me.”

The project has also directly impacted the lives of sex workers by providing capacity-building as well as helping them to establish economic foundations. It has also resulted in financial independence for most of the male sex workers, and sex workers have experienced the project's benefits and view it as a great success. One male sex worker said *“I am empowered, as I gained skills in planning and budgeting my money, I am happy now that I can save part of my income at our group saving account, and I can make a living out of the skills and I have become a good role model among my peers.”*

Addressing the economic needs of male sex workers is key to addressing their health needs. HOYMAS seeks to strengthen its economic activities for male sex workers because they are important factors in HIV response. HOYMAS is, however, strongly persuaded that by supporting income-generating activities for male sex workers, they will continue to live – and sustain – healthy lifestyles. Moreover, by doing so, HOYMAS and its members gain respect from the society and greater credibility to engage in even wider outreach.

Factors contributing to the initiative's success

- 1** The initiative was spearheaded and run by sex workers. Consequently, fellow sex workers were more open to the ideals and objectives of the project because they received these from their peers, which made them more acceptable.
- 2** Unlike most research projects, the benefits of this project are direct and can be clearly seen by sex workers who were part of the project. This in turn encouraged more sex workers to be part of the programme.
- 3** Successful sensitisation and the reduction of victimisation saw the programme receive more attention from other sex workers.
- 4** Community members were involved at all levels of the programme – i.e. design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation – which made the project more responsive to the community's needs.

Non-Sex Worker-Led Economic Empowerment Programmes



This section documents a good practice example of a non-sex worker-led economic empowerment programme that had a positive impact on the lives of sex workers.

CASE STUDY

4

NIGERIA



Life Link Organisation (LLO)

Background

This case study on economic empowerment for sex workers was conducted in Lagos and Cross River State in Nigeria as part of the regional efforts at developing advocacy tools around rights-based economic empowerment for sex workers.

A sample framework was developed, consisting of sex worker-focused organisations in Lagos and Cross River States that had implemented economic empowerment programmes for the female sex worker community. An email was sent to the organisations introducing the case study project and its objectives, while requesting approval to engage the organisations in the study. The email was followed up with telephone communications. Approval was obtained from 2 organisations, enabling documentation of a project that has been successful. Data was collected from the organisations through one-on-one interviews with key officials of the organisations and also through desk reviews of project reports on female sex workers' economic empowerment programmes; the data was collected using the given guiding questions. A number of sex workers who benefited from the projects also documented their experiences, which details the impact of the programmes on their lives as sex workers.

LLO is a non-sex worker-led, non-governmental, and non-profit making organisation founded in May 1994. Registered with corporate affairs commission of Nigeria, its sole aim is to provide health services in the community, focusing on most-at-risk populations, the prison community, and uniformed personnel. It is an indigenous Nigerian NGO that works in various states of the federation including Akwa-Ibom, Lagos, Kano, Abuja, Ogun, Oyo, Kaduna, Enugu, Plateau and Delta states. LLO operates a well-defined organisational structure with a Board of Directors – consisting of five directors – to oversee the organisation's policy and management.

The organisation's goal is to provide services to members of society in health and education-related areas, and to meet socio-economic and psycho-social needs. Their mission is to provide health and psycho-social services through dissemination of information, education, and counselling to members of the community, particularly female sex workers and the prison community, using well-trained personnel. Their vision statement is dedicated to enhancing the following in the community: health, education, psycho-social, and economic wellbeing. LLO is institutionalised with funding support from domestic resources – Lagos State AIDS Control Agency, Civil Society for HIV and AIDS in Nigeria, AIDS Prevention Initiative in Nigeria and Society for Family Health. LLO also has international donors – Family Health International Nigeria/AHNI, The Futures Group International, International Family Health/Femope Foundation. LLO is a member of the following sex work networks in Nigeria and Africa: Civil Society for Health and Rights of Vulnerable Women and Men in Nigeria (CISHRWIN) and African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA).

Economic empowerment intervention for sex workers: The Sex Workers Project

This project was supported by Family Health International. The goal of the project was to reduce the prevalence of HIV and STI infections among most-at-risk women, and the objectives of the project were as follows:

- ▶ To build the capacity of female sex workers to enable them to implement quality condom use and other prevention activities in Lagos state.
- ▶ To build the capacity of female sex workers to enable them to access HIV and STI treatment, care, and support services.
- ▶ To strengthen the capacity of female sex workers who desired to leave sex work through skills action training for 20 sex workers in 5 LGAs Lagos State.

The activities that were carried out were as follows:

- ▶ Monthly meetings of the project management team – the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) that includes the female sex workers, project officers, and the police.
- ▶ Training/capacity-building on HIV/AIDS, condom use and negotiation skills for safe sex, including the training of female sex workers as peer educators reaching out to their peers in various brothels.
- ▶ Dialogue for action activities, condom education, and risk reduction counselling.
- ▶ Skills acquisition/vocational training for female sex workers on tie and dye, cake making, hairdressing, hat making, manicuring and pedicuring. The duration of this skill-building training was between 2 weeks and 6 months. Sex workers were given seed grants to help fund their small business as part of the project.

Organised programmes on financial management that linked sex workers with existing banks enabled them to open a savings account, rather than keep their money with the local thrift and credit facility.

Results and conclusion

The project planned to reach 20 female sex workers but this target was exceeded: 25 female sex workers received various vocational skills-building training. Some of the female sex workers started their own businesses – some went into fashion design, cake making, and hairdressing – and they were able to leave brothels and rent their own apartments.

Following the economic empowerment programme, one of the female sex workers joined the police and today she is a Nigerian Police Officer. The project was also able to support young female sex workers who were interested in going back to school: through this initiative LLO was able to support a female sex worker to enrol and sit the SSCE Examinations, and she secured admission into a higher education institution to complete the National Diploma degree.

Economic empowerment programmes can be very effective in socially empowering female sex workers. Programmes that take into account the needs of sex workers as articulated by sex workers themselves, and which develop their skills, appear to be more successful. Social empowerment also encourages sex workers to negotiate safer sex. Such initiatives will not necessarily force them to exit sex work, but rather, it gives sex workers the economic knowledge and power to make rights-based choices for their lives.

Factors contributing to the initiative's success

The project adopted a rights-based approach to the economic empowerment programme as it did not focus on the sex workers exiting the sex work. Instead it focused on building sex workers' skills to be able to make the right choices for themselves. The female sex workers were empowered to negotiate for safe sex practices with their clients.

Another key factor that facilitated the success of the programme was the integrated approach that addressed sex workers' sexual and reproductive health needs and economic empowerment support. The full empowerment programme – which included seed grants for them to start up their businesses – played a large role in helping them put their newly acquired knowledge and skills into practice. Technical support – in the form of a financial management programme and follow-up for a period of 6 months – facilitated a culture of savings whereby sex workers were able to open bank accounts with the micro-finance banks. Through saving they were also able to rent their own apartments and make informed choices for their lives.

Economic Empowerment Programmes That Fail



This section looks at examples of economic empowerment programmes that failed and negatively impacted on the lives of sex workers.

CASE STUDY

5

UGANDA



Empowered at Dusk Women's Association (EADWA)

Background

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

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

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

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

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

Economic empowerment intervention for sex workers: 'Provision of entrepreneurship skills in hairdressing, salon management and art/crafts'

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

The following activities were undertaken:

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

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

Results and conclusion

A lack of attention on important elements such as saving skills, marketing, and branding was found. This was due to different issues affecting members individually. When it came to sex workers' products, marketing was very competitive because members had no marketing skills and there was frequent stigma and discrimination. There was no demand for sex workers' products because of social discrimination, and culturally, the community believed that sex workers' products were bad omens. Moreover, members were not used to these somewhat outdated types of jobs and they were inexperienced. Sex workers had to work long hours and they were subjected to sexual exploitation by the buyers: one member stated that *"once they knew that we were sex workers they wanted free sex in order to buy our goods"*.

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

Meaningful engagement and consultation with sex workers during the planning stages of economic empowerment programmes are critical. EADWA's programme staff trained sex workers in hairdressing, entrepreneurial skills, hair salon management, and arts and crafts, without consulting sex workers about their preferred area of work. Furthermore, the programme staff did not conduct an analysis of the services that there is demand for in the community; if this analysis had been undertaken, it would have helped programme staff match the sex workers to the vocational trainings they preferred, while also training sex workers to undertake vocations and skills that were needed within the community.

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

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

Factors contributing to the initiative's failure

- 1 “We realised that there was a gap in economic empowerment policy-making because there was no consultation between the project officers and the members (sex workers) on what exactly the sex workers had wanted to carry out”. It can therefore be concluded that the lack of consultation with sex workers was one of the main factors that made the initiative unsuccessful.
- 2 Lack of training for sex workers in the trades that they were encouraged to take up as part of this economic empowerment programme.
- 3 Stigmatising attitudes of the programme's organisers, especially in relation to the objectives of the programme that called for sex workers to become 'good role models' in their communities (wording which implies that sex workers are bad people).
- 4 Lack of sensitisation training with the community, which would assist in reducing sex workers being targets of stigma and discrimination.

CASE STUDY

6

MALAWI



National Female Sex Workers Alliance of Malawi (NFSWAM)

Background

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

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

The Alliance implements different activities as follows:

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

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

Intervention on economic empowerment for sex workers

The Family Planning Association of Malawi (FPAM) embarked on the Economic Empowerment Project for sex workers. The aim of the programme was to rehabilitate sex workers through training 40 sex workers in tailoring, salon management, mushroom production, and restaurant management, to give them an alternative to sex work. 10 sex workers were trained in tailoring, 10 in salon management, 10 in mushroom production and 10 in running a restaurant. FPAM managed the whole programme without meaningful engagement with the NFSWAM. After the training, a group of 10 was given MK45,000, equivalent to \$100 (USD), to start a group business.

Results and conclusion

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

The three main factors that contributed to this economic empowerment initiative being unsuccessful was the failure of the FPAM management: they did not meaningfully engage sex workers. Rather, they coerced them to take part in the initiative and strongly focused on 'rehabilitation'. During the planning process FPAM did not listen to, or consult with, sex workers to establish which training opportunities they were interested in. Another factor that contributed to the initiative's failure was the unsustainability of the economic empowerment initiative. The grants given were insufficient to sustain small businesses for long enough to turn over a profit, and this was combined with the challenge of stigma and discrimination dynamics within communities.

Factors contributing to the initiative's failure

- 1** Failure to meaningfully engage sex workers and NFSWAM in designing the economic empowerment initiative.
- 2** The managers of the programme (FPAM) wanted to rehabilitate the sex workers in order to stop them undertaking sex work. However, the sex workers themselves did not share this view.
- 3** The sex workers were coerced into participating in the programme: it was not what each of the sex workers wanted to do or what they had a passion for. Sex workers often accept to be coerced into the programmes fearing that, if they refuse, they may be left behind in future programmes that might be beneficial to them.
- 4** The funds that the project provided (MK45,000) were not enough to start any tangible type of business.

CASE STUDY

7

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



Management of Young for Rural Development Centre (CEJEDER)

Background

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

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

The vision of the organisation is to promote a society that respects and promotes the right to health, human rights, and the right to self-determination for women in general and for female sex workers in particular.

The organisation's specific objectives are to ensure the rights of access to equipment, goods, and services, without discrimination, in particular for sex workers and key populations of vulnerable or marginalised groups; to fight against HIV/AIDS and STIs as well as rape and sexual violence against women; to support the creation and development of micro and small enterprise for women with low income; to ensure access to minimum food sufficiency and agro pastoral production to combat hunger and ensure food security for the local community.

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

Economic empowerment intervention for sex workers

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

CEJEDER decided to implement this initiative despite the fact that the conditions of the initiative contradicted with their own mission and beliefs. Their partnership with SCIAF was due to funding pressure combined with a lack of funding because, due to negative attitudes towards sex work even among funding organisations, there were not – and are not – many organisations willing to fund programmes that deal with sex workers.

The following activities were implemented as part of the initiative:

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

Results and conclusion

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

Almost all the female sex workers ended up using some of the second-hand clothes themselves instead of selling them. Due to this, they ended up having very little income and, as a result, the economic status of the sex workers in the initiative was very low. The sex workers used what little money they received from sales of the second-hand clothing to satisfy basic family needs. Many of the sex workers had no savings at all for the duration of the initiative as they were not allowed to undertake sex work.

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

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

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

Factors contributing to the initiative's failure

- 1** The initiative was based on discrimination and stigmatisation of sex workers.
- 2** It aimed to rehabilitate sex workers without considering whether sex workers were able to sustain themselves while undergoing training and development.
- 3** The initiative was not needed by sex workers themselves, but was instead imposed by the project's staff.
- 4** No component in the programme focused on improving the selling skills of the sex workers.
- 5** No pre-market study was conducted to identify the practicality of the initiative.

Lessons Learnt

Quality economic empowerment programmes following rights-based approaches

This section looks at the lessons that have been learnt by looking at the factors that led to economic empowerment programmes for sex workers to succeed or fail. It is hoped that these lessons will be fully utilised in order to ensure that future economic empowerment programmes for sex workers have a positive impact on their lives.

A number of factors that positively shape economic empowerment programmes for sex workers have been identified. Programmes that are informed by a thorough needs assessment for sex workers are best-placed to identify the appropriate strategies for implementing economic empowerment programmes. Indeed, it is often the case that programmes run by sex workers have higher success rates than programmes that do not meaningfully engage sex workers. Programmes in which sex workers report a strong sense of belonging and ownership of their own destiny have also been shown to be more successful. The economic empowerment programme that NIKAT runs is an excellent example of how sex worker-led programmes achieve success.

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES FOR SEX WORKERS REPORTED IN CASE STUDIES



One-to-one contact with peers, and employing sensitive and understanding project staff, is also reported to have had a positive impact on sex workers who participate in an initiative. Meaningful interaction with peers in similar situations can also be beneficial: it reduces the sense of isolation that many sex workers have. Moreover, sex workers are more likely to continue to participate in a project if there is a sense of consistency and continuity.

Projects that adopt a rights-based approach to economic empowerment programmes like the HOYMAS and NIKAT projects enhance and build sex workers' skills. This enables and empowers sex workers to make the right choices for themselves. Alongside implementing a more integrated approach that addresses sex workers' sexual and reproductive health needs, these elements clearly contribute to a project's success.

Improved healthcare access as part of economic empowerment programmes has many obvious benefits. Benefits are also derived from improved HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support services for sex workers. Sex workers who are better informed are more empowered to effectively negotiate condom use with clients.

The opportunity for further education also contributes to the likelihood of projects being successful, especially when these opportunities are sufficiently funded. Funding for education eases the overall financial burden that studying can place on sex workers because they have less free time to earn an income. Further education opportunities can also provide specific training for sex workers to strengthen their existing skills.

Unsuccessful economic empowerment programmes

Economic empowerment programmes that are aimed at sex workers but that do not meaningfully engage sex workers in establishing the programme's goals and objectives often fail. The case studies in this briefing paper highlight 4 examples of unsuccessful economic empowerment programmes: the impact of these programmes failing can be very negative and does not help to improve the social and economic empowerment of sex workers. One of the main failures of the economic programmes highlighted in this paper is that these programmes did not have built-in mechanisms to sustain alternative income-generating activities for sex workers. For example, not enough seed money was available for sex workers to set up the small businesses that they trained to start. There is also very little training that can be provided indefinitely as costs become prohibitive. Another factor is that in communities into which sex workers are 're-integrated', sex workers are often discriminated against because of societal stigma: in one case study, participants ended up being more marginalised in their communities because the programme did not properly take into account how stigma and discrimination would affect other income-generating activities that sex workers undertook. The case study of the Empowerment at Dusk Women's Association highlights that stigma against sex workers in the communities in which they work negatively impacts upon the chances of the programme being successful.

Other negative factors that impact sex workers include:

- 1** Initiatives based on discrimination and stigmatisation of sex workers and aimed at rehabilitating sex workers to stop sex work.
- 2** Initiatives that are not based on the needs of sex workers but are imposed on them.
- 3** Initiatives that do not have a capacity-building component to enhance the skills of sex workers.
- 4** Failure to conduct market research to identify suitable business areas where there is a demand for a particular good or service to be provided.
- 5** Sex workers are not appropriately engaged in programmes: their participation is a requirement and is often regarded as something they must do 'for their own good'. This is stigmatising and undermines the agency and autonomy of sex workers.
- 6** Lack of experience of management to implement successful programmes based on the needs identified through meaningful engagement with sex workers.
- 7** Poorly funded programmes that are not able to sustain activities for longer than the initial pilot period.
- 8** Programmes can be compulsory and often do not take into account the jobs or skills that the sex workers themselves are interested in undertaking.
- 9** Rather than ensuring that the intervention and training provided is of sufficient quality, programmes are often more interested in the number of sex workers reached and 'rehabilitated' .
- 10** Lack of good monitoring and evaluating frameworks to enable learning and improvement for future programmes.
- 11** Lack of consultation and inclusion of sex workers in design and implementation of programmes.

Conclusion



There is, in general, a lack of economic empowerment programmes for sex workers in Africa. This situation contrasts significantly when compared to other regions. For example, the first part of this SUSO project documented case studies of economic empowerment programmes in the Asia Pacific region. The output from this part of the SUSO project is documented in the Regional Report¹⁸ 'Sex Workers Demonstrate Economic and Social Empowerment' and the Regional Briefing Paper¹⁹ titled: 'Sex Workers Demonstrate Economic and Social Empowerment: Overcoming Practices That Limit sex Worker Agency in the Asia Pacific Region'.

The Africa Regional Report and Briefing Paper draws similar conclusions with regards to the role of sex workers in the planning and design stages of these programmes. Sex workers should be at the front of the process: to inform programme staff of their expectations of economic empowerment programmes and of their past experiences with other programmes. This learning can be a way of limiting harmful outcomes that impact upon sex workers, such as increased levels of stigma, and the various forms of abuse and harassment from the communities in which they live and work. The failed Family Health International project in conjunction of EADWA in Uganda is a case in point. Without targeted programmes that improve sex workers' access to quality economic empowerment programmes, sex workers will continue to face marginalisation.

If run correctly using the principles from the lessons learnt in this report, these types of programmes are excellent vehicles for sex worker empowerment. For economic empowerment programmes for sex workers to succeed, the needs and the programmes should be determined by sex workers themselves, and each programme's activities must be based on the needs and demands of the sex workers. Sex workers should also be part of planning and implementing the projects. Stakeholders should strengthen the capacity of the sex worker-led organisations for them to be effective and efficient, but sex workers themselves should run the initiatives.

18 http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/SUSO%20Asia%20Pacific%20Report_Oct2014.pdf

19 <http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/SUSO%20Asia%20Pacific%20Briefing.pdf>

Many sex workers enter sex work because of poverty. Economic empowerment programmes for sex workers need to be enhanced if the initiatives are to succeed: there is a need to involve sex workers themselves in identifying economic empowerment programmes. For economic empowerment programmes for sex workers to be successful, business ideas must be driven by the sex workers to ensure that they are able to choose the initiatives they have a passion for.

In almost all the communities in Africa, sex work is heavily stigmatised and people have negative perceptions about sex work. It is therefore reasonable to expect that economic empowerment programmes which do not consider the dynamics of stigma and discrimination within communities are destined to fail. Worse still, the programmes fail sex workers by increasing their vulnerability in their own communities.

Economic empowerment initiatives for sex workers must adopt a rights-based approach that focuses on giving sex workers the economic power to make informed choices about their lives, including their sexual health. These initiatives should not necessarily focus on making sex workers exit sex work. Economic empowerment programmes for sex workers should aim to provide an alternative source of income to reduce their vulnerability, but the programmes should not aim to entice sex workers to stop sex work when they are not ready to do so.

Recommendations



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

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



nswp

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