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defesa da sua imagem pública e à reserva da sua vida



Technical multi-sector working group meeting with law enforcement

Photo: Pathfinder

CHANGE STORY 4:

ENGAGING LAW ENFORCEMENT IN REDUCING VIOLENCE AGAINST SEX WORKERS IN MOZAMBIQUE

INTRODUCTION

Sex workers in Mozambique face high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly from law enforcement, which makes them more vulnerable to HIV. Based on positive experiences in other Aidsfonds programmes, the Aidsfonds Sex Work team kick-started an unlikely and innovative partnership between the sex worker community, its partner Pathfinder, the Mozambique Republic Police (PRM) and the Ministry of Interior to embed a key population and human rights perspective in the training curriculum for law enforcement officers.

PROBLEM

In 2013, 30 percent of annual new HIV infections occurred among sex workers in Mozambique.¹ Violence is a key factor that increases sex workers' vulnerability to HIV, as it often causes inconsistent condom use and prevents sex workers from accessing necessary support and health care. A study conducted by Aidsfonds, Pathfinder and Tiyane Vavasate showed that sex workers in Mozambique experienced high levels of social stigma, discrimination, and multiple forms of violence, such as beatings, rape and theft.² 18 percent of the sex workers surveyed experienced violence from law enforcement officers, and 16 percent had sex with law enforcement officers in exchange for their freedom.

Although there is no legislation in Mozambique that criminalises sex work, the legal system does not provide protection for sex workers. The relationship between sex workers and law enforcement is ambiguous; officers should serve as protectors

but are perpetrators of violence as well. Sex workers are reluctant to trust law enforcement and avoid reporting violence or seeking legal aid.³

CHANGE

The training curriculum focuses on clarification of the status of sex work, the obligations of law enforcement in relation to the law, sex worker rights, and the policing of sex work. It was rolled out from the national level to the provincial level in July 2019, and has been given to 300 law enforcement officers (30% of the total police force). In 2020, all officers will be trained. As of July 2019 in all of Mozambique's 11 provinces, sex workers hold weekly meetings with the police to hold them accountable in regards to violence. The discussions are informed by cases of violence reported through a designated phone number for sex workers and through an online system used to report human rights violations. Both systems are managed by sex workers and have led to officers being suspended or even fired.

Data gained through a small focus group discussion with 20 trained law enforcement officers and 5 interviews with sex workers indicate that some changes can already be seen.

- 1 Aidsfonds. (n.d.-a). Bridging the Gaps Sex Work Mozambique Pathfinder. From: <https://aidsfonds.org/work/bridging-the-gaps-sex-work-mozambique-pathfinder> on 10-01-2020
- 2 Aidsfonds. (2016). Hands Off! Sex work & violence in Mozambique. Needs Assessment report. From: <https://aidsfonds.org/assets/resource/file/Needs%20Assessment%20Handsoff%20Mozambique.pdf>. On 05-03-2020
- 3 Aidsfonds. (n.d.-b). A story of change: Training South Africa's police to work with vulnerable communities. From: https://aidsfonds.org/assets/resource/file/0216-Aidsfonds_Track%20Record_NR6_COC-South%20Africa_WEB.pdf. On 05-03-2020

Bridging the Gaps is an international HIV programme with a focus on the health and rights for LGBT people, sex workers and people who use drugs, currently operating in fifteen countries. For more information on the programme, visit www.hivgaps.org.

BRIDGING THE GAPS
Health and rights  for key populations

Officers are more respectful towards sex workers, use proper language and avoid derogatory terms of abuse after receiving the training. There are also early signs of improved police conduct.

“ I found out that not all sex workers come from broken families...some practice sex work to support their families; others say they do it for pleasure and for the money... others to pay for school expenses. This means they are people like me. ”

– PRM respondent

CONTRIBUTION

The strategy used by Aidsfonds was inspired by the results of the Hands Off programme in South Africa, funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Mozambique. Following this programme, which ran in five countries in southern Africa from 2015-2019 and aimed to reduce violence among sex workers, the national police force in South Africa is funding the training of all of its 153.000 police officers. Aidsfonds linked a law enforcement expert from South Africa with the group in Mozambique to help tailor the curriculum to their context, using lessons learned from South Africa.



Photo: Pathfinder

ANALYSIS

Collaboration between law enforcement and sex workers and accountability systems which empower sex workers as facilitators are now established in Mozambique. Research shows that these types of interventions can lead to a reduction in new HIV infections of 25%.⁴ This study also showed that after a similar intervention, sex workers reported a better environment, less intense violence and greater ease in reporting cases. It also underlined the shift in police attitudes towards sex workers: instead of automatically linking them to crime, they now provide access to justice and support crisis responses.

LOOKING AHEAD

Aidsfonds' Hands Off II programme (2020-2025) will study the impact of the strategy in Mozambique by researching the number of cases of violence towards sex workers and new HIV infections. By giving ownership of interventions directly to organisations as the PRM, structural change can be achieved. PRM must continue to document cases of violence, further roll out the training to the municipal level and ensure quality reporting on results back to the central level.

PERSONAL STORY

Ines Roberto is a 35 year old male sex worker in Maputo, Mozambique. He has experienced discrimination from law enforcement on several occasions in the past. However, in December 2019 he said he had noticed a number of changes in the behaviour of law enforcement. He said the police have even taken his side in disputes with clients and helped him file a lawsuit against a woman who verbally assaulted him. He feels more comfortable interacting with police and noted that other sex workers feel the same. He attends the meetings with police officers organized by Aidsfonds and says he feels his rights as a sex worker are being better recognised.

“ I feel very good because now the police do not despise me and discriminate, instead they serve me just like anyone, like someone who has rights. ”

– Ines Roberto

4 Decker, M. R. et al. (2014). Human rights violations against sex workers: burden and effect on HIV. *The Lancet*, vol. 385 (9963), 186–199