



Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

Making the Global Fund Work for Sex Workers:

*the journey to ensure the
meaningful engagement of
sex workers in Global Fund
national processes*

**GLOBAL FUND
CASE STUDY 2020**



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Introduction

This case study will describe the journey of sex worker-led organisations in gaining knowledge about the Global Fund and its national processes to ensure the meaningful involvement of sex workers in 2020 Global Fund funding proposals development, and explores the barriers that sex workers face.

Participating in Global Fund national processes is an important step towards achieving rights-based policies and programmes that meet the needs of sex workers. But, as this case study will reveal, there is resistance and lack of political will to meaningfully involve sex workers. As a result, sex workers need to make an immense community mobilisation and advocacy effort to be included in Global Fund-related national processes.

This case study describes the challenges sex worker-led organisations face when engaging with the Global Fund and will present key interventions implemented to support communities in overcoming them. This includes the catalytic contribution of NSW's Global Fund capacity-building programme and community-led solutions; these were critical to ensure sex workers' needs and demands were included in 2020 funding proposals and in further grant development processes.

From November 2017 to the end of 2020, NSW implemented *Making the Global Fund work for sex workers*, funded by the Global Fund's Communities, Rights and Gender Strategic Initiative (CRG-SI). Through interventions at global, regional and national levels, the programme aimed at strengthening the capacity of sex worker-led organisations and networks to effectively and safely engage in the development, implementation and overseeing of Global Fund funding proposals and related processes at national and regional levels. The programme built on the capacity-building work with sex worker-led networks and organisations within the Sex Worker Networks Consortium, a 3-year programme funded by Global Fund and Robert Carr Networks Fund¹.

¹ NSW documented the goals, strategies and impact of this programme in 2 Case Studies: [The Global Fund Workshop Case Study \(December 2015\)](#) and [Enhancing Community Capacity to Engage with Global Fund Processes \(June 2017\)](#).



Making the Global Fund Work for Sex Workers was implemented in collaboration with regional sex worker-led networks in Asia (APNSW), Africa (ASWA), the Caribbean (CSWC), Latin America (PLAPERTS), Eastern Europe and Central Asia (SWAN). Regional networks identified sex worker-led organisations in 27 countries to participate in regional meetings and to receive ongoing technical support from regional community experts and NSWP Senior Programme Officer². Sex worker-led organisations in 20 of these countries received small grants to implement national activities in line with their identified priorities and needs³.

In early 2020, NSWP received a top-up grant from CRG-SI to provide intensive technical support and national grants to sex worker-led organisations in 6 countries – Kyrgyzstan, Ghana, Papua New Guinea, South Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia – to enhance their engagement in Global Fund 2020–2022 allocation cycles. Technical support and national activities supported the engagement of sex worker-led organisations in influencing funding requests, responses to TRP comments, and during grant making and beyond. During 2020, NSWP Senior Programme Officer offered virtual technical support on request to NSWP members in all Global Fund eligible countries.

Except for sex worker-led organisations in Ghana and Zambia who were working with NSWP for the first time, the extension grant leveraged on the impact of previous NSWP capacity building programmes.

Methodology

NSWP staff conducted structured interviews with country focal points in Democratic Republic of Congo, Kyrgyzstan, South Sudan and Suriname as well as with regional coordinators in Latin America and Asia-Pacific to learn about the impacts of NSWP Global Fund capacity-building programmes at regional and national levels. The findings of these interviews were supplemented by data from the NSWP Monitoring and Evaluation framework, including documentation of global, regional and national activities undertaken from November 2017 until the end of September 2020.

Background: the involvement of sex workers in Global Fund national processes before NSWP capacity building programmes

The Global Fund has in place a series of accountability mechanisms to ensure key populations meaningfully influence the development and implementation of programmes funded by the Global Fund. Nevertheless, there is a lack of effort to include sex worker-led organisations in national processes which could ensure vital funding for community-led, rights-based sex worker programming.

When NSWP began implementing Global Fund capacity-building programmes in 2015, many sex worker-led organisations had no previous involvement and very little knowledge about the Global Fund.

2 Africa: Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, South Sudan, Tanzania and Zimbabwe; Asia and the Pacific: Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand; Caribbean: Guyana and Suriname; Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA): Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine; Latin America: Ecuador and El Salvador.

3 Africa: Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, South Sudan, Tanzania and Zimbabwe; Asia and the Pacific: Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea; Caribbean: Guyana, Suriname and Jamaica; Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA): Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Kazakhstan; Latin America: Ecuador, El Salvador, Colombia and Peru.



Sex workers had little understanding about the Global Fund decision-making processes or about the role that sex workers and other key populations could play in the development and implementation of grants.

“We saw the Global Fund logo around in stickers and t-shirts. Global Fund had visibility, but we didn’t know what Global Fund was about before I attended the first Global Fund Training in 2015 as national representative from DRC⁴.”

Aimee Furaha – General Director ACODHU-TS and country focal point for DRC

Although some sex worker-led organisations were aware of Global Fund’s presence in their countries, they viewed it as a remote institution that only governments could engage with, and not something that sex workers could ever be involved in.

“We used to see these gringos with suitcases, in a reality which we would never reach – we would never talk to them because we believed they were at another level. The representatives from Global Fund also mainly met with country representatives and never with key populations”.

Karina Bravo – regional coordinator PLAPERTS and regional expert for Latin America

In South Sudan, where sex workers experienced extreme abuse, constant arrest by police, high levels of stigma and discrimination and disregard for confidentiality at health facilities, sex workers did not consider engaging with large global institutions like the Global Fund.

Sex workers in Suriname were not involved in the implementation of activities funded by the Global Fund. Services were delivered by non-sex workers and, as such, sex workers were not aware that they could be involved in the development and implementation of such services:

“There were some services for sex workers, but these were run by non-sex worker organisations and we had no input into what the programmes were or how they were run. We did not even know that we could be involved. We felt really lost. We always thought that others had to speak for us, and we did not believe we could speak up for ourselves or that we could be leaders”.

Denise Carr – executive director SUCOS and country focal point in Suriname

Even in countries where sex workers had some knowledge about the Global Fund, such as Kyrgyzstan, there was little involvement within national processes.

“We knew about the Global Fund from the start, but our level of engagement was minimal, really. Any information was only shared with high level senior managers and only very basic information reached sex workers.”

Shahnaz Islamova – director of Tais Plus NGO and country focal point in Kyrgyzstan

⁴ Aimée Furaha attended the Regional Workshop for Community Experts in Francophone Africa, held in October 2015. NSWP documented the goals and impact of the series of Regional Workshops in the case study [The Global Fund Workshop Case Study](#).



Challenges faced by sex workers when engaging with Global Fund National processes

When sex workers started participating in NSWP capacity-building programme and became aware about their role in Global Fund national processes, they still needed to overcome a series of further challenges to voice their priorities and needs. Clearly, there are some challenges that go beyond the scope of the Global Fund, but to fully understand the journey that sex workers are making, it is important to understand the challenges they face and continue to overcome.

Violence

Mobilising sex workers, undertaking community consultations and being a sex worker leader can be dangerous in countries where sex work is criminalised; for male and transgender sex workers it can be even more dangerous as these groups are targeted for their sexual orientation and gender identity as well as for being sex workers. In South Sudan, sex worker-led organisations need to work with these groups in secrecy as they are constantly persecuted by the police as well as by conservative society members.

“The community are as dangerous for MSM and transgender sex workers as the police are. [People] will beat and hurt them and even kill them if they find out.”

Country focal point – South Sudan

In a post-conflict country, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), armed gangs set up road barriers that prevented sex workers from accessing health services and adding further challenges to mobilising sex workers to engage in national Global Fund processes.

Stigma and Discrimination

Stigma and discrimination against sex workers create a persistent challenge, one which pushes sex workers into precarious situations and compromises their involvement in Global Fund national decision-making processes. Influenced by conservative views on sex work, national stakeholders often do not accept the involvement of sex workers or see their contributions as legitimate.

“Stigma and discrimination was rife and there was no real understanding of sex workers. We were really undervalued.”

Denise Carr – executive director SUCOS and country focal point in Suriname

“Most stakeholders think that sex workers have no capacity to manage the funds, sex workers have less education, sex workers cannot manage financial issues, sex workers have no responsibility.”

Kay Thi Win – APNSW regional coordinator and regional expert for Asia Pacific

Key populations groups in South Sudan are not represented at the CCM by representatives elected from among key populations. When pressurised to allow sex workers to be represented, the CCM chair responded with the observation that “South Sudan is not ready”.

“A big challenge was trying to get involved, especially with the government. They did not want us. You need to address the root cause. South Sudan is not ready for key populations, like sex workers, on the CCM.”

Country focal point – South Sudan



Stigma and discrimination are often internalised by sex workers and this undermines a belief that sex workers can do things for themselves – a major barrier to making progress and engaging in Global Fund processes.

“We were always told ‘you don’t know enough, you need teaching, you’re not capable of doing it for yourselves’.”

Denise Carr – executive director SUCOS and country focal point in Suriname

Lack of acceptance of sex workers as experts in their lives and undermining of their confidence leads sex workers to feel intimidated in large formal meetings, inhibiting their ability to effectively participate:

“There is a fear among sex workers about making a mistake, about saying something wrong and being embarrassed.”

Shahnaz Islamova – director of Tais Plus NGO and country focal point in Kyrgyzstan

Sexism and misogyny

As a result of ingrained sexism among decision makers, the use of derogatory terms undermines the voices of sex workers participating in Global Fund national processes. Latin America’s regional coordinator reported that sex workers participating at the CCM are often considered “too aggressive, unpolite and confrontational”, whereas in South Sudan they are called “noisy makers”.

For sex workers in Kyrgyzstan, older men as heads of government departments, UN agencies and international NGOs form a cadre of decision makers unwilling to listen to sex workers, making it difficult for sex workers to engage in discussions and processes.

“They try to silence sex workers. Most often, it is older men who are allowed to speak and who are listened to, they get precedence.”

Shahnaz Islamova – director of Tais Plus NGO and country focal point in Kyrgyzstan

Lack of representation or involvement at the Country Coordinating Mechanisms

Many sex worker-led organisations were not aware that Country Coordinating Mechanisms concerned sex workers, nor that they could approach the CCM to advocate for rights-based quality health programmes and policies. Additionally, sex worker-led organisations did not know who represented sex worker’s issues and they received hardly any communication from CCM secretariats.

“It took me 3 years just to find out who represented us on the CCM. Sex workers were always represented by non-sex workers.”

Country focal point – South Sudan

“In Ecuador, we didn’t even know who represented sex workers or other key populations – which clearly means that the CCM was not even fully complying with GF policies. People were elected but we never knew what this person did, we never were able to present a proposal to this person. People managed everything themselves, we were not even consulted during the process to develop a new strategic plan for future grants.”

Karina Bravo – regional coordinator PLAPERTS and regional expert for Latin America



In Suriname, realising they were not being represented by their peers further undermined the confidence of sex workers to use the CCM to advocate for rights-based programmes and policies:

“It was devastating to find out that sex workers were being represented on the CCM by a non-sex worker. That they were speaking for us and we had no influence on what they said.”

Denise Carr – executive director SUCOS and country focal point in Suriname

Further challenges as a result of COVID-19

Sex worker-led organisations continued to support sex workers in need; many also developed mutual aid funds while also continuing to advocate for long-term rights-affirming policy changes in very challenging scenarios marked by rampant police violence and discrimination.

As governments shifted their priorities to address Covid-19, sex workers found it harder to participate in the national decision-making processes in which they had previously been involved. Sex worker-led organisations participating in country dialogue processes reported difficulties in obtaining up-to-date information on the priority submission processes and development of funding proposals. COVID-19 lockdowns and social distancing limitations were given as the reason. However, the sex worker-led organisations believe that COVID-19 has been used as an excuse to exclude the voices of sex workers and other key populations.

“Before COVID-19, Tais Plus was able to visit other cities and during meetings the Heads of organisations did not attend, so the meetings were more productive. But after COVID, for example, in responding to the TRP Window 1 comments, once again only Directors were allowed to speak.”

Shahnaz Islamova – director of Tais Plus NGO and country focal point in Kyrgyzstan

Being recognised by the CCM, being invited to participate in national decision-making meetings, and having their opinions heard and listened to with respect are impressive achievements when placed in the context described above.

The next section looks at some of the progress and achievements sex worker-led organisations have made while participating in the NSWP capacity building programmes.



Key successes

The NSWP capacity-building programmes, supplemented by the consistent, reliable and informed technical support provided by Regional Community Experts and regional sex worker-led networks, have enabled sex worker-led organisations to make remarkable progress in engaging and contributing to Global Fund national processes.

Asia and the Pacific

Sex worker leaders from APNSW member organisations were elected as CCM representatives in Indonesia, Mongolia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam. In Papua New Guinea, in 2019, a sex worker was elected as CCM representative for the first time. In Nepal, the sex worker who is a CCM member has a regular allocated time to voice sex workers' issues and priorities, whereas previously sex workers did not have a voice in CCM meetings. In Indonesia, a sex worker leader from OPSI, the national sex worker-led organisation, sits on the CCM and is participating in Global Fund programme review as a member of the Technical Working Group.

In Malaysia, sex workers from the local organisation PKKUM participated in the transition workplan consultation during 2019. In Papua New Guinea, the national sex worker-led organisation Friends Frangipani, a Global Fund sub-sub recipient, consulted sex workers and submitted written contributions to the Global Fund funding proposal writing team in 2020. In Mongolia, sex workers identified their priorities and were involved in the development of the Window 1 funding proposal to the Global Fund, securing 3-year funding for rights-based sex worker-led programmes in the country.

These are major accomplishments, especially in countries where sex workers face extreme stigma and discrimination and criminalisation.

Latin America

In Ecuador, through community mobilisation processes driven by the Regional Coordinator of PLAPERTS, there are now representatives from all key populations on the CCM and all the representatives have been elected by their own communities.

“We are closer to the CCM now and we sit at the table to make decisions as equals.”

Karina Bravo – Regional Coordinator PLAPERTS and regional expert for Latin America

Sex worker-led organisations are also engaged in the monitoring and evaluation of Global Fund funded programmes in Ecuador and El Salvador. In Ecuador, El Salvador and Peru sex workers participate in other spaces related to the national HIV strategy and in the development of normative sex worker health guidelines. In Ecuador, sex worker leaders developed and gained approval from the Ministry of Health for the *Manual de Atención de Salud Integral a las PERTS (Manual for Health Care for Sex Workers)*. The manual establishes a national model of health care for sex workers, including a holistic health approach that includes not only gynaecological exams and STI testing but also services such as psychological and dental care. Sex workers are now advocating for the Ministry of Health to promote the manual and to implement the guidelines in health centres across the country.



Sex worker-led organisations are now regularly involved in country dialogues in Ecuador, El Salvador and Peru, with the confidence and knowledge to contribute to funding proposals for an increased focus on human rights, community empowerment, and recognition of sex work as work. Sex worker-led organisations in Ecuador and El Salvador participated in the development of the new transition plan. In Ecuador, sex workers successfully advocated for community-led organisations to be able to sign social contract agreements.

“We are now involved in key decisions that affect us because we know what we need, and we know that nobody can make decisions for us.”

Karina Bravo – regional coordinator PLAPERTS and regional expert for Latin America

Democratic Republic of Congo

Sex worker-led organisations in DRC created a national network – ACODHU-TS – to fight for sex workers’ rights, and developed strategic advocacy objectives at each decision-making level.

“We started by engaging with the Ministry of Health, to whom we showed that there were complications at every level: logistics, implementation and service delivery.”

Aimee Furaha – General Director ACODHU-TS and country focal point for DRC

The next step was to write letters to the CCM and other relevant stakeholders to highlight concerns about an individual, who is a non-sex worker, representing sex workers on the CCM. The individual was removed and replaced with a representative from the LGBTI community; while this was not the ideal solution, sex workers felt it was a progression.

Another important strategy was to establish relationships with key national stakeholders. ACODHU-TS hosted meetings in 2018 and 2019, attended by representatives from the Ministry of Health, from the National Programme to Fight AIDS (PNLS) and Multi-Sectoral National Programme to Fight AIDS (PNMLS), the Principal Recipient and the sub-recipient. The meetings were key to sensitising the national stakeholders about the problems faced by sex workers and to increasing involvement in Global Fund-related national decisions. This ensured more resources were programmed for sex workers and more sex workers had access to services funded by the Global Fund, even though there are still provinces where sex workers cannot rely on such resources.

“In my opinion, the greatest fight was first to break the silence. Because while there was money, the community was still suffering. Now there are 11 Health Zones [out of 23] that are already taken into account by the Global Fund programme. It’s already an improvement because the members of the community, especially those who are living with HIV, are taken account in the Global Fund’s programme even if there are gaps in the way it is managed.”

Aimee Furaha – General Director ACODHU-TS and country focal point for DRC

During 2020, ACODHU-TS contributed to the development of the Window 1 Global Fund proposal; the writing team and CCM complimented them for the quality of their contributions.



Suriname

Sex workers in Suriname now participate as observers at the CCM meetings and expect to elect a sex worker representative in the upcoming elections to be held before the end of 2020.

SUCOS has been formally registered with endorsement from the Ministry of Health, and now has an office and safe space to host sex worker meetings. This is another huge step for sex workers, as previously SUCOS couldn't register as its name included the words "sex workers".

Kyrgyzstan

Sex workers are represented on the CCM, as main and alternate members, and are often more knowledgeable about Global Fund processes than many other CCM members. They are increasingly respected, and their influence has grown steadily over the past five years. In 2020, sex workers were fully involved in the development of the Kyrgyzstan Window 1 proposal. Advocacy on the part of Tais Plus, the national sex worker-led organisation, ensured that a consultative meeting was held involving all key populations in the development of the funding proposal to the Global Fund.

South Sudan

According to the country's focal point, one of the biggest achievements of FEMISS, the national sex worker-led organisation in South Sudan, has been the elimination of discrimination in at least 90% of health facilities. There are no more shortages of ARVs for sex workers living with HIV in the capital Juba, although there are still issues in other parts of the country.

Another achievement has been their full involvement in the Global Fund Window 2 proposal development process in 2020, despite the COVID pandemic. Through NSPW's CRG Extension grant, FEMISS reprogrammed funding to hire three zonal coordinators who consulted 180 sex workers to identify their needs and priorities. The comprehensive and detailed report on sex workers' needs across the regions was welcomed by the country writing team.

The results of the consultation in South Sudan are being used to strengthen FEMISS' advocacy beyond Global Fund processes, and have helped FEMISS to secure additional funding to hire peer navigators to collect and deliver ART medication to sex workers living with HIV who can't reach health facilities due to Covid-19 related restrictions.

FEMISS' National Coordinator is now engaging in key national decision-making processes regarding HIV programming, has participated in meetings of the Key Populations Technical Working Group, and has built a relationship with the Key-Populations representative in the CCM, which now includes sex workers. Yet, this is still not ideal and FEMISS continues to advocate for a sex worker representative.

“Having a sex worker representative on the CCM to express our needs and opinions directly is critical.”

Country focal point – South Sudan

Since the start of the NSWP Global Fund Capacity building programmes, there has been significant progress in the engagement and influence of sex workers and sex worker-led organisations in Global Fund processes in many countries, including Georgia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Guyana, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Senegal, Colombia, Malaysia, and Mongolia. This progress has been supported by NSWP and regional sex worker-led networks but, most importantly, it has been achieved by the skills, courage, energy and commitment of sex workers and sex worker-led organisations themselves.



Actions and Strategies

Making the Global Fund Work for Sex Workers entailed interventions at global, regional and national levels to increase knowledge about and capacity to influence Global Fund processes among regional and national sex worker-led networks and organisations. The programme's overall objective was to strengthen the capacity of sex worker-led organisations to support sex worker engagement, and for sex workers to effectively and safely engage in the development, implementation and oversight of Global Fund grants and related processes at national and regional levels. Interventions at three levels were designed to complement each other, working together to achieve the goals of the programme.

At the global level, the programme built the capacity of five regional sex worker-led networks, with two Regional Community Experts from each of the five regions, to provide technical support to local and national sex worker-led organisations engaging with Global Fund national processes. The programme started with a kick-off workshop in November 2017 organised by NSWSP and attended by ten representatives from regional sex worker-led networks and 21 participants from other key populations nominated by INPUD, MPACT and GNP+.

A key element of the programme at the global level was the ongoing virtual and in-country technical support to regional sex worker-led networks, Regional Community Experts, and national sex worker-led organisations from NSWSP Senior Programme Officer. During *Making the Global Fund Work for Sex Workers*, NSWSP Senior Programme Officer provided virtual technical support to 27 countries and in-country technical support and workshops in seven countries⁵ that included staff from the five regional sex worker-led networks.

NSWSP Senior Programme Officer was regarded by Regional Community Experts and country focal points as a trusted source of information and advice, reinforcing and expanding on the learning gained during regional and national trainings. He worked with sex worker-led organisations to identify challenges and to come up with concrete solutions and impactful interventions for engaging with Global Fund national processes.

NSWSP also produced three Smart Sex Worker Guides⁶ providing accessible explanations of Global Fund processes in the five NSWSP official languages, developed by NSWSP Senior Programme Officer. The Smart Guides were used by Regional Community Experts and country focal points as a resource to transfer knowledge to sex workers in their countries. The 27 country profiles and eight Global Fund quarterly updates⁷ developed by NSWSP Senior Programme Officer provided Regional Community Experts and country focal points with up-to-date information about the Global Fund relevant to their country, such as country context reports and details of active Global Fund national grants, contact details for Fund Portfolio Managers, planned country team visits, and contact details for CCM members.

5 Colombia, El Salvador, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, South Sudan and Suriname.

6 [The Smart Sex Worker's Guide to The Global Fund \(August 2015\)](#), the [Sex Worker's and Drug User's Guide to the Global Fund Transition \(November 2017\)](#) and the [Smart Sex Worker's Guide to the Global Fund Strategy 2017-2022: "Investing to End Epidemics" \(June 2017\)](#).

7 [Global Fund Quarterly Update 1, 2018](#), [Global Fund Quarterly Update 2, 2018](#), [Global Fund Quarterly Update 3, 2018](#), [Global Fund Quarterly Update 4, 2018](#), [Global Fund Quarterly Update 1, 2019](#), [Global Fund Quarterly Update 2, 2019](#), [Global Fund Quarterly Update 3, 2019](#), [Global Fund Quarterly Update 4, 2019](#).



At the regional level, the five regional sex worker-led networks organised regional convenings, bringing together 50 sex workers from 22 countries participating in *Making the Global Fund Work for Sex Workers*. During these convenings, sex workers gained a fuller understanding of the importance of community empowerment in advocating for meaningful participation at the CCM, in transition planning, and in the development of proposals that truly reflect the needs and priorities of sex workers.

At the national level, sex worker-led organisations in 27 participating countries could rely on technical support from the NSWSP Senior Programme Officer, from regional sex worker-led networks and Regional Community Experts in the implementation of national activities. Regional Community Experts have an in-depth understanding of the context and realities within each region and played an inspirational role among their peers guiding them on how to mobilise their communities to engage with national Global Fund processes and stakeholders.

During *Making the Global Fund Work for Sex Workers*, 63 national activities were implemented in 20 countries. Activities varied according to national context and priorities, and included workshops, meetings with key stakeholders, national convenings of sex workers, meetings with other key populations, consultations, and community-led monitoring of Global Fund grant implementation. Countries also used national grants to support their participation in transition planning (Kyrgyzstan), the development of concept note (Ukraine), to translate and adapt training materials (Kyrgyzstan), to mobilise their communities to participate in Global Fund processes (Georgia and Mongolia), and to develop shared advocacy strategies with other key populations (Kenya, Ecuador, Suriname and Guyana).

Making the Global Fund Work for Sex Workers Cost Extension Grant in 2020

ASWA, APNSW and SWAN identified the focus countries that would receive national grants directly from NSWSP as part of the Cost Extension from the CRG-SI. Sex worker-led organisations Feminist Initiative South Sudan (FEMISS) in South Sudan, Women of Dignity Alliance (WODA) in Ghana, Women with Dignity (WW) in Tanzania, Zambia Sex Workers Alliance (ZASWA), Friends Frangipani in Papua New Guinea, and Tais Plus in Kyrgyzstan were selected as national partners. Given the COVID pandemic, no country visits were undertaken, and virtual technical support and training was provided by NSWSP Senior Programme Officer to support the implementation of activities designed to strengthen sex worker-led organisations engagement and influence in the development of country proposals for Global Fund 2020–2022 allocation cycle.

NSWSP Senior Programme Officer provided advice on the development of activity plans and advocacy strategies and supported country focal points in strengthening their submissions to country funding proposal writing groups and comments to the TRP. Virtual Training of Trainers was developed and implemented for sex worker-led organisations in Ghana and Zambia, where they had little previous experience and knowledge of Global Fund national processes. This training enabled sex worker leaders in these countries to share knowledge about Global Fund national processes with more sex workers in locally organised workshops. In Ghana, one of the African Regional Community Experts facilitated a virtual workshop on community empowerment as a tool to engage in and influence Global Fund processes.



Activities in 2020 needed to be reimagined to respond to the new reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. Trainings were adapted to run as virtual sessions. Zonal consultations among sex workers were carried out in smaller groups with PPE budgeted for, and authorisation was obtained to run larger face to face consultations with sex workers in Zambia and Tanzania. There were challenges in convening sex workers from across the regions of the countries, so national partners either held virtual trainings and consultations, as in Kyrgyzstan, or implemented provincial on-site activities and consultations led by zonal coordinators, such as in Papua New Guinea, South Sudan, and Tanzania. Despite all the challenges, country partners successfully implemented 18 activities reaching 325 sex workers to the end of September, with more activities planned.

In South Sudan, three zonal coordinators consulted 180 sex workers, and their priorities were consolidated into a national report. In Tanzania, 16 sex worker leaders carried out consultations with sex workers in four regions, and an additional consultation was conducted with 15 transgender sex workers after the national partner learned that the transgender community had been inappropriately incorporated in MSM needs and priorities. In Papua New Guinea, consultations were organised by the National Coordinator and two Provincial Community Experts with 45 sex workers from three provinces.

NSWP Senior Programme Officer worked with sex worker-led organisations in each of the six countries to integrate sex workers' priorities, identified through the various consultation processes, into the modular framework for funding proposals. After national partners reviewed how their priorities had been captured in the modular framework and made amendments if required, they sent the sex worker submissions to the funding proposal writing teams, and the NSWP Senior Programme Officer shared their submissions with the Fund Portfolio Managers for each country. This was critical in ensuring that transgender needs were clearly identified separately to those of MSM in Tanzania. In Kyrgyzstan and Democratic Republic of Congo, the CRG Team and Fund Portfolio Managers were particularly helpful in ensuring sex worker priorities were considered. At the time of writing, sex worker leaders are waiting to review the TRP comments to assess how successful our approach has been in getting sex workers' priorities included in funding proposals and eventually in national contracts.

Ensuring sex worker-led organisations were engaged in Window 1 and Window 2 countries' proposal development was an intense exercise, for both sex worker-led organisations and NSWP Senior Programme Officer. However, the results from national activities implemented by sex worker-led organisations during such a challenging time is evidence of how sex worker-led organisations have gained and used knowledge to increase their influence of Global Fund national processes and rights-based sex worker programming since 2015.



Lessons

A | NSWP capacity building programme was key to meaningful sex worker engagement with the Global Fund

While the Global Fund's strategy clearly sets out a central role for key populations in identifying priorities and determining programmes, the interviews with sex worker leaders show that initially there was an abyss between Global Fund-related national processes and sex workers, and that there is still a way to go for this aspiration to be realised. Many sex workers didn't understand what the Global Fund was beyond "t-shirts and sticks" and "gringos with suits carrying a briefcase". And those who did understand were unable to influence or use the Global Fund related mechanisms to bring change for sex worker communities, as stakeholders ignored or undermined sex workers' inputs. The NSWP Global Fund capacity-building programme and advocacy tools were developed to make visible and amplify the realities of sex workers, and to bridge existing gaps between sex workers and decision makers.

"When NSWP Senior Programme Officer came [for onsite technical support in July 2018] and made a training with us, it was a big shock! Especially learning about the role sex workers could play and that we had the right to be involved and heard. This was when we first heard about the CCM and about how sex workers could be involved"

Country focal point – South Sudan

For many sex worker activists, NSWP Global Fund workshops were a game changer and showed sex workers that they "could do things for themselves", and that there were clear actions sex workers could put in place to get more involved:

"After the training, we started learning more about what Global Fund was, who participated in it, who were its members, the existing departments and Global Fund perspective over key-populations. It was important to know all this because there was a lack of knowledge that didn't allow us to participate and influence these processes. What NSWP taught us – which we promptly share in our region – has totally changed the role we played inside the CCM and inside the country dialogues"

Karina Bravo – regional coordinator PLAPERTS and regional expert for Latin America

"[During the Asia Pacific regional convening in 2019] the first step was to identify the barriers to be involved in Global Fund national processes. The second step was to define how we can get involved despite – the all barriers. Then participants made a list of people/stakeholders who have positive image to sex workers and decided to do advocacy with them and influence them to include sex workers in the Global Fund project."

Kay Thi Win – APNSW regional coordinator and regional expert for Asia Pacific



The NSWP capacity-building programme provided resources with the flexibility for sex worker-led organisations to adapt them to fit their context, based on their experience of what actually works for sex worker communities.

“After NSWP Global Fund training in Cambodia, our representative brought all the materials back with her and shared with the community. Tais Plus translated this information into simple, street-level Russian language and made them relate to the reality of sex workers lives. We also reformatted some of the material to make it more interactive, with a knowledge map exercise we use a lot in our trainings. This provides a visual map, built by sex workers about the knowledge they have of the Global Fund and allows for misunderstandings or inaccuracies to be corrected”

Shahnaz Islamova – director of Tais Plus NGO and country focal point in Kyrgyzstan

This flexibility also allowed sex worker-led organisations to adapt national activities to the new realities of the Covid-19 pandemic, such as hiring peer zonal coordinators as an alternative means of securing broader geographic consultations among sex workers. This strengthened submissions to writing teams, which should, in turn, secure increased funding for rights-based sex worker programmes.

“The proposal writers were connected to us by NSWP, the GRG extension grant enabled us to run consultations to make our submission. Without NSWP we would not be here.”

Country focal point – South Sudan

With the right training and support, sex worker-led organisations will evolve and grow, becoming strong dynamic informed contributors to Global Fund processes and national HIV responses, and positive forces for change to improve the lives and the social, political, legal and health status of sex workers in all their diversity.

B | Community empowerment continues to be a core principle to ensure sex workers are meaningfully involved in Global Fund national processes

NSWP’s capacity-building programmes hold “community empowerment” as a core principle, putting sex worker-led organisations and sex workers at the centre, giving them control over their learning and ownership of the national programme. The elements within the programme are designed so that sex worker leaders are resourced to inspire and motivate their communities, transfer knowledge to their peers, identify sex workers priorities, develop their own advocacy strategies around the Global Fund, and mobilise sex worker communities to engage in national Global Fund processes.

The collective engagement of sex workers through sex worker-led organisations enhanced the participation and influence of sex workers within national Global Fund related decision-making processes. In Ecuador, national community mobilisation led to sex workers being elected to the CCM and the amplification of their priorities during the country dialogue.

“Ecuador got a national grant from NSWP and this was used to host Global Fund trainings about the role of the CCM and about the decision-making process to develop Global Fund grants. With all this knowledge, 24 sex worker organisations engaged in the country dialogue. We all met and decided how we were going to influence issues such as HIV prevention, human rights, updates on sex workers’ prevalence statistics, etc.”

Karina Bravo – regional coordinator PLAPERTS and regional expert for Latin America



Regional Community Experts provided essential and inspirational knowledge and guidance to national sex worker-led organisations during NSWP programmes. These experienced sex worker leaders supported their peers in organising national workshops and convenings by advising on logistics and content of trainings. They also shared their experiences and knowledge on the best advocacy strategy to ensure the needs of sex workers in all their diversity were considered by national stakeholders. In Latin America, the Regional Community Expert supported the sex worker-led organisation in El Salvador to demand that local government address commodities stock outs during 2020 lock downs. In Francophone Africa, the Regional Community Expert played a key role in ensuring sex worker programming received more resources through catalytic funds.

“In the integration of catalytic funds, there were problems until very recently to follow up with stakeholders. The Ministry of Health have avoided understanding what is at stake in this implication. So, Lala has really helped us to do our advocacy and we have worked together with authorities to clarify grey zones”

Aimee Furaha – General Director ACODHU-TS and country focal point for DRC

In South Sudan, the consultations done by the three zonal coordinators not only strengthened the submission to the country writing team but identified 212 sex workers who had lost access to ARTs due to economic insecurity and travel restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. The zonal coordinators managed to ensure that 89 of the sex workers were able to regain access to ARTs.

C | NSWP capacity building programmes provided evidence that the meaningful involvement of sex workers is key to ensure more effective HIV responses funded by the Global Fund

Once empowered to demand meaningful involvement in Global Fund national processes, sex worker-led organisations soon started to provide evidence that resources from the Global Fund were not adequately allocated due to corruption among stakeholders:

“Sometimes ARV medication for the community is out of stock. We still don’t know if the break in the chain of supply happens within the Ministry of Health, or at hospital level, or in the Drop-in Health Care Centres. So, there is embezzlement happening at some level, which causes the medication to go out of stock. But at least the community is already included in the programme, which we didn’t have access to in the beginning, and then the funds were completely lost, because we didn’t know about the programme.”

Aimee Furaha – General Director ACODHU-TS and country focal point for DRC



Not only are funds and resources diverted, some interventions funded by Global Fund are based on outdated statistics and inaccurate information about sex workers in the country, leading to commodity stock outs and poor-quality services delivered by professionals who don't understand the needs and realities of sex workers. Programmes developed without the meaningful involvement of sex workers too often prove to be ineffective, described by Karina Bravo as 'white elephants' that are not accessed by sex workers due to lack of trust in national stakeholders, the criminalisation of sex work, and discrimination against sex workers and sex workers living with HIV.

Sex workers must be recognised as experts in their own lives and needs – not just as a tokenistic gesture but as key to ensuring Global Fund resources are effectively allocated to address the disproportionate burden of HIV carried by sex workers in all their diversity.

“If you are found with ARTs, they use this as an evidence that you are spreading HIV. If you have condoms, this is evidence that you are a sex worker and you are punished. We need to sensitise the police urgently; we need activities for us by us. This is essential for HIV testing and counselling, for instance. Train peers to do this. We need sex worker organisations contracted to deliver services for sex workers”.

Country focal point – South Sudan



Looking ahead / Conclusion

Sex worker-led organisations have come a long way, from very little knowledge of and almost total exclusion from Global Fund national processes to being complimented for their involvement in funding proposal development processes. The level of engagement achieved by sex worker led-organisations during 2020 country dialogues as well as their capacity to continue implementing activities with an extended geographical reach amidst the COVID-19 restrictions show the strengthening of sex workers' organisational, advocacy and leadership capacities.

The achievements also show that sex worker-led organisations are better equipped to identify needs and propose solutions to address the challenges faced by sex worker communities. This should not be underestimated, as their involvement impacts the effective use of resources in national HIV responses. As seen in Ecuador, sex worker-led organisations are now approached by the national government to provide up-to-date data about their community. In Kyrgyzstan, sex worker leaders showed themselves to be more knowledgeable than some CCM members during the country dialogue in 2020.

NSWP's capacity-building programme was key to building the confidence and knowledge of sex worker leaders engaging with Global Fund national processes, and these leaders in turn are inspiring sex worker communities to learn about and engage with the Global Fund to more positive change.

As much as the achievements documented in this case study show that sex worker-led organisations are on the right path, the journey for sex workers to truly influence the development and implementation of quality, evidence- and rights-based sex worker programming is far from over.

There is a need to continue work in building basic capacity and knowledge about Global Fund national processes in countries where sex workers have not been meaningfully engaged. This should happen, alongside continued strengthening of the capacity of sex worker-led organisations and sex worker leaders to engage beyond national consultation processes and become central to the design, development, implementation, management and evaluation of sex worker programmes. There is also a need to create opportunities for experienced sex worker-led organisations and sex worker leaders to share lessons learned. Addressing these needs will require ongoing financial and technical support for sex worker-led networks and organisations to stimulate the growth and involvement of emerging sex worker leaders, mobilise sex worker communities, and expand their reach beyond large cities.

The Global Network of Sex Work Projects uses a methodology that ensures the voices of sex worker-led organisations are made visible. Case studies examine the strategies, activities and impact at global, regional and national levels of NSWP and regional sex worker-led networks in consultation with NSWP members. Case studies are based on ongoing monitoring, utilising internal reports, and in-depth interviews.

The term 'sex workers' reflects the immense diversity within the sex worker community including but not limited to: female, male and transgender sex workers; lesbian, gay and bi-sexual sex workers; male sex workers who identify as heterosexual; sex workers living with HIV and other diseases; sex workers who use drugs; young adult sex workers (between the ages of 18 and 29 years old); documented and undocumented migrant sex workers, as well as and displaced persons and refugees; sex workers living in both urban and rural areas; disabled sex workers; and sex workers who have been detained or incarcerated.



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

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