Remembering the most vulnerable: a multi-sectoral, multi-strategy approach to address violence against sex-workers in Eswatini

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22 October 2019
Presentation Outline

- Background
- What works
- Eswatini’s approach
- Interventions
- Results
- Lesson learned
The Landscape – some background

- SW in Eswatini experience social and legal issues, including:
  - violence from society, clients, intimate partners, and service providers (police, health care providers)
  - punitive laws criminalizing sex work (Crimes act of 1889)
  - human rights abuses and violations
  - Stigma and discrimination from society and service providers;
  - Police arbitrary arrests of SW often resulting in secondary violations (police violence and rape).
- The physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse violates their human rights while increasing their vulnerability to HIV infection and impeding access to HIV services.
- Such violence is not reported given SWs’ marginal social status, limited access to information on their rights.
- Social and legal status of SW allow these abuses to continue with impunity.
What works

• The ministry of health is committed to universal access to health services for all citizens;
• Research: information from conducted research utilized advocating for change;
• A public health approach is used to address these barriers which are human rights violations.
Our Approach

- Working with as many stakeholders as possible to sensitize and engage to respond on violence against SW and other KP;
- A multi-sectorial national TWG was set up in 2012 under the MoH:
  - All these stakeholders are part of decision-making and contribute in addressing KP structural issues.
Multiple-sectoral strategy in Eswatini

MOH
Stigma reduction in health care facilitates

Police
Reduction of human rights violations and violence

Civil Society
Community engagement to address S&D and HR violations

Local and International orgs
Technical and policy-shaping support
Interventions

- Creating forums for KP stakeholders to plan and implement activities
  - Formed the KP technical working group.
  - Multisectoral VPR forum: civil society, law enforcement, KP, and law makers and judiciary

- Stigma reduction in health facilities
  - Conduct pre-service trainings for nursing students in tertiary institutions.
  - In collaboration with KP ambassadors conducted in-service trainings for HCWs.

- Police training and sensitization
  - Conducted trainings and sensitizations from executive, senior management to station-based police
  - Trained focal police in unit responding to violence and HR violations.
  - Developed a HR training manual for pre- and in-service police

- Community engagement:
  - Created forums where SW networks meet to discuss issues affecting them and plan advocacy;
  - Assisted the development, registration and operation of the first SW-led organization

- Engaged human-rights lawyers and the Human Rights commission on SW interventions
Interventions continues...

- Collaboration with local, international organizations:
  - Local organizations for referring cases.
  - International bodies for policy and technical issues: some UN agencies, AMSHeR.

- Created channels of responding to violence:
  - Trained OWs workers as front-liners in responding at community level
  - Education on violence and HR issues to SW
  - Channels of reporting and support through OWs and social workers at community level
Results

• More SW are educated about violence and their rights
• SWs’ reports of violence to ORWs and the social workers have increased by 40%
• SW led organisation is actively responding on HR and violence experiences of SW
  – They are able to assist other SW through partnerships with other stakeholders they have created.
Results continue...

• Senior-ranking law enforcement officials have publicly committed to improving services for SWs
  – They have actively participated in development of their training manual
  – Have appointed focal police for KP in some stations
  – Have led sensitizations for their junior officers after themselves have been sensitized.

• Raids targeted to SW has dropped – at least none in 2019, dropping drastically from 2018;
• Police report an increase of SW who report violence to them;
• Increasing interaction between SW and police at different forums
Lesson Learned

- Stakeholders’ collaboration
- Top-bottom approach for police works: it’s a command institution.
- Constant engagement, at all levels, is key, memory can be lost.
- Pre-service training for both police and HCWs.
- Community empowerment important: vulnerable populations should know their rights.
- Engagement of legal fraternity and judiciary can be a game changer for both the REPS response and the KP individual perception