Stepping Up, Stepping Out
Economic Empowerment for Sex Workers

ACHIEVEMENTS
2012-2016
The Stepping Up, Stepping Out (SUSO) programme ran from 2012 to 2016 to economically empower sex workers in 11 countries in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America. Dutch NGOs Aids Fonds and ICCO Cooperation worked together with 15 in-country partners, including many sex worker-led organisations, to develop and implement innovative interventions. The programme is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Mid-2014 the SUSO programme was extended to specifically address the needs of minors involved in selling sex. This was called the Stepping Stones programme. The specific approach and results of this programme are described in a separate publication.
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Across the globe hundreds of thousands of men and women earn money through sex work. Regardless of the circumstances that led them into the trade, sex workers1 face heavy stigma and discrimination. They face violence from unscrupulous managers, police officers and clients and doctors frequently refuse to treat them medically. They are often rejected by their own families and excluded from their communities. Sex work is illegal in most countries, leaving sex workers vulnerable to exploitation and often not legally protected in cases of violence or exclusion. All these factors contribute to the fact that female sex workers, worldwide, are fourteen times more likely to be living with HIV than other women of reproductive age. For male sex workers in most countries, these estimates are even higher.

we hope to inspire others to join us in empowering sex workers across the world and strengthen the global movement for sex workers’ rights

Through the Stepping Up, Stepping Out (SUSO) programme, Aids Fonds, ICCO Cooperation and more than 15 sex worker-led organisations and other civil society partners worked together to increase sex workers’ economic empowerment to ultimately improve their health, safety and well-being.

The SUSO programme would not have been such a resounding success if we had not encouraged strong linking and learning among the partners and stakeholders involved. It is in this spirit that we developed this publication, sharing the highlights of the programme and of the partners involved. We think it is uplifting and inspiring to hear about sex workers who experienced a positive turning point in their life and feel more confident about themselves and their future.

This publication presents an overview of the main achievements and results of the programme, which reached more than 37,500 sex workers around the globe. Together with our SUSO Best Practise Collection, we hope to inspire others to join us in empowering sex workers across the world and strengthen the global movement for sex workers’ rights.

1 This programme works with female, male and transgender sex workers, meaning those who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally. Sex work varies between and within countries and communities. Sex work may vary in the degree to which it is more or less ‘formal’ or organised. The programme also focuses on sex worker-led organisations, and organisations supporting sex workers for capacity building.
SUSO at a glance

The Stepping Up, Stepping Out (SUSO) programme ran from 2012 to 2016 to economically empower sex workers in 11 countries in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America. Dutch NGOs Aids Fonds and ICCO Cooperation worked together with more than 15 sex worker-led and other civil society organisations to develop and implement innovative interventions to protect the human rights of sex workers, through economic empowerment, access to health care and prevention of violence.

Key principles of the programme were to have a holistic approach, promote community-based participatory interventions and encourage linking and learning. Foremost, we believed that ‘out’ is not the only way ‘up’ for sex workers.

SUSO in numbers

> 37,500 sex workers reached during the programme period

± 3,000 sex workers participated in trainings on economic empowerment

> 2,000 sex workers participated in trainings on personal development (including financial skills)

> 1,250 sex workers participated in vocational trainings or formal education

> 200 sex workers received micro financing or loans for new businesses

> 1,100 sex workers participated in saving systems

> 1,600 sex workers were trained as peer educators

> 21,500 sex workers were reached through outreach activities

± 8,700 sex workers visited drop-in centres

± 2,800 sex workers received psychosocial help

> 1,000 sex workers received legal support
Economic empowerment refers to the amount of control people have to determine their own economic destiny. The main economic empowerment strategies for sex workers are to diversify their income and to ensure their inclusion in existing social and financial systems, such as banking, loans, pensions and insurances.

Economic empowerment is an important factor in improving sex workers’ access to health care, psycho-social support and protection from violence.

Economically empowered sex workers are better able to take rest in times of illness or pregnancy, and deal with emergencies. Furthermore, when a sex worker is not fully dependent on sex work for survival, he or she has more leverage to say “No” in dangerous situations, such as to violent clients or clients that demand unprotected sex. As such, economic empowerment is an important factor in improving sex workers’ access to health care, psycho-social support and protection from violence. Globally, it is recognised that HIV prevention and treatment efforts among sex workers require not just a clinical approach. Interventions to reduce the vulnerabilities of sex workers need to address structural determinants, including legal, physical and economic factors.

Economic empowerment is not necessarily a way out of sex work. For some of the beneficiaries of the SUSO programme, economic empowerment meant learning to speak English and acquiring negotiation skills to help attract better paying clients and work in less dangerous locations. For others, economic empowerment meant that they could supplement their income from sex work by learning a new skill through vocational training or starting a small business.
Back to the basics: financial skills

Based on the key findings of the midterm review (CIDIN, 2014) and partners’ own experiences, we learned that basic financial skills are a precondition for the success of other economic empowerment activities. However, desk research showed there was no financial skills training available to address the specific needs and realities of sex workers. A tailor-made training module was developed under SUSO to focus on basic financial skills for sex workers. The training was developed together with experts on micro-financing, academic researchers, training specialists and most importantly, sex workers themselves. The training was pilot tested among 60 sex workers in Ethiopia, Indonesia and Botswana and adjusted accordingly.

Being in Control
Like most workers in the informal economy, sex workers are never sure of their income. Some days it might be enough, but other days there is no income at all. Stigma and discrimination make sex workers vulnerable to financial pressure and reduce their access to formal financial services. Many find themselves with large debts to exploitative money-lenders (so-called loan sharks) in order to meet their financial needs, including paying off debts to pimps and brothel owners. Taking these realities into account, the training module does not only focus on the budgets, numbers and figures but also takes into account the influence of sex workers’ social networks, basic planning, and prioritisation of expenditures. Through practical exercises and participatory methods it helps sex workers to make more informed decisions regarding their career and their health. By learning how to budget and to save, sex workers can plan for the future and gain financial security. They also become more aware of how their financial priorities and decisions may impact their health and safety.

Spending game

Financial control comes with the ability to choose what you spend your money on, even if - like in the case of most sex workers - your income is irregular and you experience no- or low-income days. In this exercise we let go of the value of money and focused on the choices and decisions participants must make in their daily life. In the Spending Game, participants receive 20 dried beans that represent their budget. The 20 beans are just sufficient for daily expenses plus some extra. They participants have to choose between cheaper and more expensive options within different categories (like housing and transport) to spend their beans on. Half way through the exercise participants have to cut their budget and give back 10 beans. Again they will need to make decisions about what they want to spend their beans on. The group discusses the choices they made and how their priorities impact their health and well-being.
Mapping relationships

In low-income situations, many social relationships have a financial dimension. Sex workers often encounter exploitative relationships, which makes them vulnerable to financial extortion and pressure. Exploring these kinds of relationships and any strategies to cope with them in a financially harmless way is an important part of the training.

Participants start by mapping all the relationships they have in daily life. The second step is to look for the financial component in the different relationships. Participants then classify them as ‘financially good’ or ‘financially harmful’. This also depended on the context in which the relationship occurs. For example, a policeman can be a paying customer but he can also act as a law enforcer who is looking for a bribe. The group decides what they consider to be the most harmful relationships sex workers encounter in their daily life. In a group discussion, they clarify in which ways this influences the level of control they have over their own financial situation and financial independence.

In the next step of this exercise participants work on strategies to deal with pressure and expectations in relationships. In small groups, they use an example of a harmful relationship to write a script for a role-play. The task is to choose a context in which the harmful practice occurs and to come up with a strategy to turn this into a less harmful situation. They role-play in front of the rest of the group, who will rate the chosen strategy and come up with any alternatives.

This exercise is a good example of participants learning different ways to deal with one factor which influences their financial control. The exercise builds on participants’ own experience and knowledge, which has a positive effect on their self-esteem and confidence.
Musings on the Relationship between People and Money

You need to first analyse the relationship that people have with money, before they can be empowered.

What makes an economic empowerment trainer a good trainer?
Naomi: "A successful trainer for an economic empowerment training needs to be aware of the local context. Each training needs to be country specific, and adjusted to the local cultural context as specifically as possible. During the training, the participants create their definitions of money, define priorities and the level of the training and the trainer leads the group. The most important capacity of the trainer is not to judge and make assumptions."

Why not make assumptions?
Naomi: "The most important lesson we learned during the research within SUSO is the need to analyse the relationship between the participants and money in detail. This differs per country, culture or subculture. What are people’s priorities and how do they see money? What does their environment expect from them? How do they perceive their income through sex work and what consequences does it have on the way they spend their money? We call it money logics. For example, social expectations about sharing money in Kenya means that after you have had a good financial night, you ‘dirty the table’ or pay for a round of drinks. So, if you don’t take this into consideration economic programmes on savings will fail. You need to first analyse the relationship that people have with money, before they can be empowered."

What is your favourite exercise?
Mariette: "We asked the participants to keep a financial diary, ideally prior to the training. It gave them insights in their own financial status. We used a very simple format, just to keep track of different incomes and expenditures. Before keeping these financial diaries people had no idea of what their money was spent on, and they found the diaries very useful. The Spending Game is another exercise that helps sex workers get better insights in their finances. Financial control comes with being able to choose what you spend your money on, even if your income is irregular and you experience no- or low-income days. In the Spending Game exercise we let go of the value of money and focus on the choices and decisions participants have to make in their daily life and how they impact their health and safety."

An economic empowerment training can be an excellent start-up, but the process after the training is just as important.

What is important for future trainings?
Naomi: "In the future, a follow-up of these trainings is crucial. An economic empowerment training can be an excellent start-up, but the process after the training is just as important, if not more important. There needs to be someone who can monitor the participants’ financial diaries, ask questions about expenditures, ask about priorities and reasoning behind spending or saving money. A trustworthy person challenges the sex workers by asking the right questions."

Mariette developed the Aids Fonds basic financial skills training for sex workers. During this process she worked together with Naomi, who is involved in a joint Aids Fonds and VU University research project on economic empowerment of sex workers in Ethiopia and Kenya. In the below Q&A they share some of their experience in economic empowerment of sex workers.

Q&A with Naomi van Stapele, Researcher at Free University of Amsterdam and Mariette Hamers, Training Specialist at Aids Fonds

Research & development

Aids Fonds
sexworkprojects@aidsfonds.nl
Results from:

**GLOBAL**
- Aids Fonds ICCO Cooperation
  Global coordination
  > Page 4 - 9
- NSWP
  Global advocacy
  > Page 32

**LATIN AMERICA**
- Asociación de Trabajadores para la Educación, Salud e Integración Social (TESIS)
  Nicaragua > Page 23
- Capital Humano y Social Alternativo (CHS-A)
  Perú > Page 24
- Instituto de Religiosas Adoratrices Esclavas del Santísimo Sacramento y de la Caridad (AASC)
  Bolivia > Page 20
- Organización Nacional de Activistas por la Emancipación de la Mujer (ONAEM)
  Bolivia > Page 20

**AFRICA**
- Al Shehab Institution for Comprehensive Development
  Egypt > Page 26
- Nikat Charitable Association
  Ethiopia > Page 28
- Health Options for Young Men on HIV, AIDS and STIs (HOYMAS)
  Kenya > Page 30

**ASIA**
- Sisonke
  Botswana > Page 25
- Sexual Rights Centre (SRC)
  Zimbabwe > Page 31

**OTHER REGIONS**
- Aye Myanmar Association (AMA)
  Myanmar > Page 18
- Targeted Outreach Program (TOP)
  Myanmar > Page 18
- Yayasan Perkumpulan Bandungwangi
  Indonesia > Page 16
- Organisasi Perubahan Sosial Indonesia (OPSI)
  Indonesia > Page 16
Sharing experiences among partners was considered an important part of the SUSO programme, especially because for many partners the implementation of economic empowerment interventions was a new addition to their regular activities. We held several partner meetings at global and regional level. Here are some highlights.

**Midterm conference in Amsterdam**

In July 2014, 45 staff and beneficiaries of partners—of which 17 were sex workers—gathered in Amsterdam to participate in the SUSO midterm conference. Over five days, a mix of plenary and small group discussions allowed participants to exchange knowledge and experiences around key topics of the SUSO project. Field visits to the red light district in Amsterdam and to local health and support organisations for sex workers meant participants could learn about and experience the Dutch legalized context of sex work. Joint dinners further facilitated informal exchange and networking.

**sex work must be accepted as work and treated like any other profession**

During one of the discussions the participants at the conference shared their understandings of economic empowerment. The consensus was that sex work must be accepted as work and treated like any other profession. It was also agreed that while for some sex workers economic empowerment can provide a way of stepping out of sex work, economic empowerment it is not a rehabilitation strategy. It is often a challenge to find alternative work that matches the levels of income earned through sex work. This is why other sources of income are often preferred as complementary rather than replacing the income earned through sex work.

A representative of the Dutch police force explained that they (in contrast to many other countries’ police forces) value sex workers as professionals, and that sex workers should be able to address complaints regarding clients and pimps freely. Police men and women receive thorough training to guarantee a professional attitude towards sex work. In cases of police discrimination or harassment of sex workers, he advised to engage in a dialogue, inviting police officers and sex workers to share their experiences to sensitize both groups about realities and rights.

Participants attended workshops on self-defence and on storytelling. The story telling session was aimed at putting the life experiences of sex workers into a compelling story, which can be used to increase awareness of sex workers’ concerns and needs.

The gathering of such an interesting and diverse group was a valuable opportunity to create awareness among the broader public about sex worker health and rights. Throughout the week over 23 items on the radio, newspapers and online magazines covered the conference. This included features on the personal life stories of the participants.

Finally, the group visited the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs who funded the SUSO programme, to share their personal experiences about the SUSO project and the insights they gained from the conference, which the Ministry considered to be very insightful and inspiring.

while for some sex workers economic empowerment can provide a way of stepping out of sex work, economic empowerment it is not a rehabilitation strategy

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2 NSWP (Global), ASWA (African region), APNSW (Asia Pacific region), Al Shehab (Egypt), Nikat (Ethiopia), HOYMAS (Kenya), Sexual Rights Centre (Zimbabwe), Sisonke (Botswana), TOP (Myanmar), Bandungwangi and OPSI (Indonesia), CHS (Peru), AAC and ONAEM (Bolivia), CEDECA-Emmäus (Brazil) and TESIS (Nicaragua)
Aml’s story

“My name is Aml. I am 28 years old and live in Cairo, Egypt. I live with my family of two children. My life was very difficult growing up. When I was 16 and living with my parents, I used to work as a street seller. As I came from a poor background I had to work to pay for my education. On the streets, and at home, I was exposed to a lot of violence and sexual abuse. I felt hopeless that I couldn’t exercise my rights and I had no one to lean on. This led me to be convinced that if I was going to be abused I might as well ask for money for it. I was so torn and upset but after meeting an outreach worker on the streets who told me about Al Shehab, I decided to take the initiative to change my life and approach the organisation for help.

Al Shehab encouraged me and helped me to finish my education and offered me psychological help and health check-ups. My life changed thanks to Al Shehab and I met someone and got married and had two children. I named my first child Shehab who is eight years old now. My marriage started off very smoothly but turned overnight into something very turbulent. My husband didn’t take any responsibility and again I was forced to go out and earn money to be able to provide for my children. I chose sex work because it was an easy way of earning a lot of money and it was very hard to find a job in Egypt due to its situation. At the same time Al Shehab gave me a hairdressing course, however it was difficult for me to learn it. After some time I was able to get job as a waitress through Al Shehab which enabled me to quit sex work.

Now I have a job as a waitress and am currently pursuing a Master’s degree in Business Administration with the financial support from SUSO. My dream is to complete my Masters and to continue going forward bettering myself. My fear is that I won’t succeed but if I do I would like to be became a lecturer and teach in front of groups of people.”
International conferences

Towards the end of the programme, Aids Fonds and its partners took the opportunity to promote SUSO and disseminate its results and its lessons learned to a wider international audience. With SUSO funding, both sex workers and representatives from SUSO partners participated in regional and global Aids conferences. Presence during such events is important for the sex workers movement worldwide as it remains crucial to keep on lobbying international donors and policy makers to improve the position of sex workers and remind them that sex workers are a key population that should not be left behind in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

ICASA
From 29 November to 4 December 2015 the International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA) took place in Harare, Zimbabwe. All African partners of the SUSO programme and the Aids Fonds programme team attended the conference. The SUSO programme received considerable attention during ICASA; we made an oral presentation on the lessons learnt from the SUSO programme and a poster presentation on the financial skills training developed under SUSO. Both were visited with great interest by lots of conference participants.

IAC
In July 2016 the International AIDS Conference took place in Durban, South Africa. Although the programme had ended, many SUSO partners were able to attend the conference and much attention was given to sex workers’ needs and rights. Aids Fonds made an oral presentation on economic empowerment for sex workers and the lessons learned from the SUSO programme, which is available for viewing on YouTube (youtu.be/k1IQZLZBPuw).

We will continue promoting the results and lessons learnt from the SUSO programme in future events and keep advocating for the economic empowerment of sex workers as an important strategy to strengthen the human rights of sex workers and to end the HIV epidemic.
Regional closing meetings

The programme ended in phases, as some partners continued their SUSO activities in the first half of 2016 with a no-cost extension, while others finished the programme in December 2015 as originally planned. Regional closing meetings were organized to take stock of the results and shared lessons learnt from the programme among partners.

Latin America
In October 2015, ICCO organised a regional meeting in La Paz, Bolivia. Two to three members from each SUSO partner organisation from Latin America participated. The aim of the meeting was to share best practices and lessons learnt, and to analyse partners’ organisational development within the programme’s execution. The main conclusion from the meeting was that economic empowerment first and foremost is about personal empowerment, and that this personal empowerment should include support for financial literacy.

Africa
Prior to ICASA 2015, 14 staff members and sex workers of the African SUSO partners met for a regional closing meeting. To encourage collaboration, a marketplace exercise allowed partners to indicate in which topics they have expertise to share with others and which topics they would like to learn more about from others. Interesting discussions took place on whether economic empowerment is effective for HIV prevention and how sustainable economic empowerment activities can continue beyond the SUSO programme.

Asia
A similar event to the one for the African Region was planned for the Asian partners during the International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP). It was supposed to be held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in November 2015. Aids Fonds had also submitted abstracts for this conference to draw attention to the SUSO programme, and was granted an oral presentation on the financial skills training and a poster presentation on economic empowerment for sex workers. However, due to security concerns in Bangladesh, the conference was cancelled and unfortunately the regional partner meeting did not take place.

It was concluded by everyone that economic empowerment does provide long lasting results and is key to providing for livelihoods. As one participant said: “Medicines can give you some years to live, but if you are hungry you won’t make it beyond a few days”. At the end of the meeting it was agreed that it was important to use ICASA to promote economic empowerment of sex workers and stress its importance and effectiveness in the HIV response.

“Medicines can give you some years to live, but if you are hungry you won’t make it beyond a few days.”
SUSO was implemented in Indonesia by two partners. **Yayasan Perkumpulan Bandungwangi** is a sex worker-led organisation in Jakarta founded in 1995. It focuses on access to health care and supporting women who want to step out of the sex industry. **Organisasi Perubahan Sosial Indonesia (OPSI)** is the national network of sex workers in Indonesia that focuses on lobbying and advocacy for sex workers’ human rights, and access to health care and legal support.

**Supporting sex workers in North and East Jakarta**

Bandungwangi offered sex workers the opportunity to start their own business by providing them training in financial skills and developing business plans. Sex workers could also receive small loans to finance the startup phase and some sex workers opened small stalls to sell prepaid telephone cards, instant food and drinks, and clothes. They met regularly for peer support. The profit they made was not very high, but they explained that they were happy to have some additional income in times when there was little sex work.

In some case, however, it was challenging to secure long-term success. This was due to the sex workers’ high mobility, often low levels of education, and high levels of work-related fatigue. One of the main reasons, however, was that some sex workers were not prepared or confident enough to make a relatively large investment before starting to actually earn from it. However, they still found the financial skills training to be valuable, because it encouraged them to make plans for the future and better manage their money.

**Health education and mobile services**

Reaching out to the sex workers that work from the bars in North Jakarta proved to be a major challenge for Bandungwangi in the first year. Since many do not self-identify as sex workers, they were not open to discuss matters of sex and protection. It became clear during the needs assessment and during outreach work that many of the women were not aware of health risks associated with unprotected sex. As a result many women did not use condoms or go for HIV and STI testing. Bandungwangi’s health and safety trainings were a success in increasing knowledge and awareness among the participants. Bandungwangi’s mobile clinic, running in both North and East Jakarta, also proved very effective, and was even of occasional use to other NGOs.

**Neneng’s food stall**

Neneng is older and lives alone. With a grant from Bandungwangi she started her own food stall. Due to her age, it is hard to earn enough money as a sex worker and she is happy because now she gets most of her income from the food stall.

**Cooperative for and by sex workers**

OPSI became a partner of the SUSO programme in 2014. It is a national network for sex workers, with local hubs across the islands of Indonesia. As part of the SUSO programme, the network established a cooperative bank. This offers sex workers the chance to save and gain access to credit at a low interest rate, enabling them to invest in their own businesses. The cooperative is owned and run by its members, who are all required to save a minimum of 20,000 Rupiah (USD 1.38) per month. After a certain period, members can take out a loan that is a maximum of double the amount they have saved, at an interest rate of just 1%. Every year the interest gained is shared among all members of the cooperative including those who did not take a loan, based on how much they saved. The cooperative is therefore an income generating entity in itself. One of the requirements to participate in the cooperative is to have successfully completed a financial skills training, provided by OPSI with technical assistance from microfinance experts.

**Violence against sex workers**

In 2014, OPSI was able to establish an emergency response system. Fifteen sex workers were trained as paralegals, four of which operate the hotline service. Sex workers can contact the hotline service 24 hours per day to report violence and request support. OPSI offers support by assisting victims of violence to file formal reports, offer legal support in case of arrest and also provide psycho-social support. In order to strengthen their
lobbying and advocacy to fight violence against sex workers, OPSI also registers all cases that are reported to them. The hotline is advertised in hotspots and by peers during outreach work.

Bandungwangi
ypbandungwangi@yahoo.com

OPSI
seknas.opsi@gmail.com
www.opsi-network.org
www.facebook.com/opsinetwork

**SUSO Indonesia in numbers**

1,169 sex workers were reached through outreach

36 sex workers visited the Bandungwangi drop-in centre

632 sex workers received health services

102 sex workers participated in vocational trainings

93 sex workers participated in saving systems

54 sex workers received micro finance and loans for new businesses
Myanmar

Sex workers learn new skills and feel empowered

SUSO was implemented in Myanmar by two partners. The Targeted Outreach Programme (TOP) was established in 2004 in Myanmar as a community-led network of sex workers and men who have sex with men. The organisation provides sexual health services, including prevention through outreach, voluntary testing and treatment of STIs and HIV. As part of the SUSO project, TOP builds the capacity of sex workers so they can employ them and strengthen the organisation’s community-led response. The Aye Myanmar Association (AMA) is a sex worker-led network of sex workers of all genders who are active in Myanmar. Established in 2007, AMA focuses on empowering sex workers and protecting their human rights.

Learning centre
In 2014, AMA set up a Learning Centre in Yangon where sex workers can learn English and computer skills in a stigma-free environment. Sex workers can either join a three-month course, or attend individual classes. By teaching these skills, AMA aims to improve the working conditions and job opportunities for sex workers, as well as their self-confidence.

Access to bank accounts
Sex workers often struggle to access financial systems because they lack the education, knowledge or papers to do so. AMA facilitated the opening of bank accounts by sex workers, an initiative launched in 2012. During the project period AMA organized five workshops in five major cities across Myanmar, which were attended by up to 35 sex workers each. In total, 157 sex workers opened new bank accounts and, if required, obtained a National ID card. Savings provide a buffer for emergency needs such as sickness of family members. Moreover, once sex workers have savings they are in a better position to avoid risky situations, such as violent clients or clients who demand unprotected sex.

Legal services
Sex work remains criminalized in Myanmar and harassment from law enforcers is a real problem. Pioneering legal support for sex workers, AMA recruited a lawyer, who is also a sex worker, who was able to provide counselling on legal issues to 250 sex workers.

Advocating the government
AMA also invested in lobby and advocacy activities, which proved very fruitful. While the National AIDS Commission (NAC) was previously very reluctant to work with sex workers, by the end of 2014, AMA staff received the first requests for cooperation from local government representatives. For example, the NAC has contributed to the health and wellbeing of sex workers by providing a mobile clinic. No institutional changes have been made with regard to the legal status of sex work yet, but these were promising first steps.
Key achievements of TOP under the SUSO programme include establishing a pool of sex workers who are trained in rights and advocacy, and increasing the quality of outreach and drop-in centre activities which has led to increased uptake in HIV testing and counselling. They are in a better position to avoid risky situations, such as violent clients or clients who demand unprotected sex.

Building the capacity of sex workers
TOP invested in the capacities of individual sex workers to achieve greater leadership and meaningful involvement of sex workers. At the start of the SUSO programme, TOP started an extensive leadership programme that included providing knowledge about SRHR and human rights and training for transferrable skills such as advocacy, communication, English and computer work. A number of women who participated in the leadership programme are now community counsellors and assistant site supervisors.

The high turnover of peer educators and sex workers in the leadership programme was a main challenge for TOP. The management of TOP used several approaches to reduce this including closer monitoring and mentorship, higher compensation for sex workers that work as peer-educators and more participatory methods in training and other group activities. As a result, the group that started the leadership programme in 2014 is more actively engaged with the network and has better peer-to-peer relations than the group that started in the first year.

Quality HIV services
TOP has continued to improve the quality of HIV testing, counselling and treatment for sex workers. Together with PSI they developed service delivery standards to be used in the TOP centres, which are now implemented in all sites. To further increase the quality of services for sex workers, peer educators participated in refresher training sessions on SRHR and communication skills in Yangon and Mandalay. Close supportive supervision by TOP staff over the team of peer educators has also proven to increase the quality of care and support significantly.

SUSO Myanmar in numbers
260 sex workers received legal support
519 sex workers visited Drop-in Centres
331 sex workers received social-psychological support

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TOP
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Adaptive training, businesses and advocacy: a winning combination in Bolivia

SUSO was implemented in Bolivia by two partners. The Instituto de Religiosas Adoratrices Esclavas del Santísimo Sacramento y de la Caridad (AASC) is an international religious institution, whose primary mission is to support women in social marginalization situations and sex workers in particular. They have over 150 years of experience in supporting sex workers who want to step out of the sex trade. Organización Nacional de Activistas por la Emancipación de la Mujer (ONAEM) is a female sex workers’ organisation that advocates for the human rights of sex workers and aims to make sex work recognised as work.

Empowering adolescents
AASC provided education on sexual and reproductive health, and job training to sex workers who voluntarily wished to step out from the sex industry. They offered training in beauty, cooking, jewellery-making and other vocations. But unlike most courses, the Adoratrices organized their training into flexible modules to suit the high mobility and irregular hours of sex workers. Sex workers that graduated from these vocational courses were trained to start a business and supported to get credit for their new ventures: 30 sex workers received seed capital.

Involving beneficiaries’ parents helped to re-establish or strengthen family ties
AASC also provided comprehensive support to adolescents involved in selling sex including occupational workshops, psychological support and counselling, psychiatric consultations and specialized medical care. Meetings and therapies involved beneficiaries’ parents. This helped to re-establish or strengthen family ties, resulting in 18 adolescents being reunited with their families. Twelve adolescents acquired computer and bakery skills. A multimodal ‘Art and Personal Development’ project was pioneered, combining therapeutic dimensions including body regulation,
teamwork and emotional expression. This innovative intervention method was shared with partners at a national meeting of institutions working with children and adolescents. Moreover, the Sayari Warmi Centre has become the main reference centre for the support of adolescents (that have been trafficked for) selling sex.

**Nice to know**

8 SUSO beneficiaries were among 2015’s top-ranking graduate students at the La Merced Institute (Santa Cruz).

**Advocating for sex worker rights**

ONAEM focused on raising awareness about sex workers’ rights to decrease stigma and discrimination. Nineteen workshops led by peer educators were held to raise awareness among female sex workers about human rights, stigma, discrimination and human trafficking issues. ONAEM also reached out to the general public through radio and television interviews with their peer educators and through daily social media activities reaching an estimated audience of 12,000 followers and friends. The organisation also disseminated Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials and held activities in connection to a number of thematically dedicated events, including the annual International Female Sex Workers Day.

Contrary to many other SUSO countries, the Bolivian legal framework neither regulates nor prohibits sex work. This offers a stronger base to advocate for a more progressive legal framework. As a key approach for economic empowerment, ONAEM lobbies for the labour rights of sex workers by having sex work formally recognised as work. A sex work rights and conditions law was drafted by ONAEM’s legal counsel and run past departmental leaders. Unfortunately, it has not advanced beyond the level of the Ombudsman’s informally expressed support. A roundtable with governmental agencies initially secured commitments from attending delegates (specifically with the intention to draft a protocol for workplace raids) but these had not yet materialized by the end of the programme. This was partly due to staff turnover among agencies which stalled commitment. However, one success was the instalment of a toll-free information phone line to report human trafficking for sexual exploitation in the city of La Paz.

**SUSO Bolivia in numbers**

- 3,097 adult sex workers were reached through the SUSO project
- 280 sex workers participated in trainings on personal development
- 161 sex workers participated in training for economic empowerment

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**ONAEM**
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CEDECA is a Brazilian NGO working to protect the human rights of children and their families. In 2004, it set up a project specifically to tackle sex trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. Through the SUSO project, CEDECA has broadened its network of partners to include sex worker-led organisations.

To guide their work, CEDECA explored a number of life stories of sex workers, which provided it with very rich and valuable information. CEDECA realised there were many young women working in the sex industry interested in their economic empowerment programme. It worked together with sex worker-led organisation GEMPAC to reach them, by strengthening GEMPAC’s management and advocacy capacity and training members in vocational and leadership skills.

“I feel very good here, because we can speak and we learn many things we did not know.”
(adolescent SUSO beneficiary, Brazil)

CEDECA was proactive in advocating for public policies to improve sex workers’ living conditions, workplace safety and education opportunities. Guided by the motto of Zero Discrimination they presented proposals furthering the human and sexual rights for sex workers. CEDECA also actively participated in setting the agenda for the protection of children and adolescents exposed to sexual exploitation during the FIFA World Cup championship held in Brazil in 2016.

In January 2015, it organized an international workshop, ‘Sex Work and Public Policy’ bringing together researchers and sex workers from national sex worker-led movements across Latin America. The event resulted in an Agenda for the Future, a statement of joint action co-signed by Brazil and other Latin American countries. This in turn led to national sex worker meetings in Brazil and Ecuador and plans to organize a global meeting.

Another example of CEDECA’s alliance building efforts at regional level is the formalization of a strategic partnership with Surinamese NGO Stichting Liefdevolle Handen (www.liefdevollehanden.org). The organisations work together to protect female victims of human trafficking and sexually exploitation in Suriname, an effort in which CEDECA is supported by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**SUSO Brazil in numbers**
- 1,080 sex workers were reached through outreach activities
- 185 sex workers participated in training on personal development
- 36 lobby and advocacy events with authorities took place

CEDECA
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www.movimentodeemaus.org
The Asociación de Trabajadores para la Educación, Salud e Integración Social (TESIS) is a Nicaraguan NGO that works to improve the lives of sex workers through socio-psychological support.

**Income diversification**
Under SUSO, TESIS supported sex workers to set up their own business to diversify their income and 45 sex workers received seed capital. Multiple follow-up visits to each of them showed that 18 had left sex work altogether, five had made sex work secondary to their new means of income-generating and 20 had successfully diversified their income. Two factors contributed to this outcome. Firstly, the participation of the sex workers in the personal empowerment programme (including individual, group and family therapy) aimed at developing and implementing new ‘life plans’. Secondly, the entrepreneurial training process included strategies for managing a business and was conducted in cooperation with financial and academic partners and other NGOs.

“I realised that I have to stop spending so much. I cannot believe I earned so much and have nothing.”
(SUSO beneficiary, Nicaragua)

**Savings**
TESIS found that one of the major constraints for the economic empowerment of sex workers is their chaotic handling of money. Often sex workers’ did not realize how much they earn and spend which caused negative finance balances. For this reason emphasis was put on creating awareness about savings, and the message ultimately reached 242 sex workers. The project successfully fostered a culture of saving, with 21 sex workers managing to open a savings account, securing creditworthiness.

**Sensitizing police**
TESIS conducted awareness and sensitization workshops with sixty law enforcement officers from three districts to provide them with the tools to improve their attitudes towards sex workers. The work with police officers showed results. According to the sex workers who participated in the project, they perceived positive changes in attitude towards them, more protection, less abuse and a better relationship.

**SUSO Nicaragua in numbers**
- 198 sex workers participated in trainings for economic empowerment
- 87 sex workers participated in vocational trainings or formal education
- 732 sex workers participated in health training
- 517 sex workers received health care

TESIS
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Peru

Supporting children and raising awareness of sexual exploitation

Capital Humano y Social Alternativo (CHS-A) is a Peruvian NGO supporting the social development of individuals, organisations and society, focusing on human rights. They work to prevent human trafficking, sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and child labour.

Support services
A great number of girls, boys and adolescents victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation crimes received psychological and legal assistance. Support included help with processing identification documents, return trips, educational reintegration, food and other needs. Since the victims are often minors, CHS-A aimed their economic empowerment initiatives at their families. For example, mothers of four adolescents received resources to start small businesses to improve their economic situation and ensure greater protection for their daughters.

To promote care at drop-in facilities, 49 Residential Care Centre professionals participated in coordination, case evaluation and technical assistance meetings. A total of 720 civil service workers participated in training activities supported by CHS-A to strengthen their support, justice and service tools and skill sets. Peruvian public institutions and networks took part in scheduled feedback meetings and exchanges and a three-day meeting brought together support, justice and service operators from 13 regions.

Raising awareness about sex worker rights
To create awareness among the general public about sex workers and their needs and rights, CHS-A conducted multiple outreach activities ranging from the distribution of videos, brochures and flyers, to press releases (53 issued), digital newsletters and media interviews. In December, CHS-A took part in a HIV/AIDS information fair organized by the Ministry of Health, which raised awareness to over 500 attendees on human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and the related health risks.

Advocacy
CHS-A focused their political advocacy on human trafficking and sexual exploitation, which included preparation and presentation of the ‘Third Alternative Report’ on human trafficking in Peru (IA2015), for which CHS-A was a public administration social auditor. Structural work to advocate about political and legal modalities took place during coordination meetings with the Ministry of Women and working sessions with a congressional Working Group on human trafficking and sexual exploitation. This advocacy work made issues related to human trafficking more visible and put them on the public agenda. In addition, the publication and dissemination of a Guide for Detection and Referral of CSEC Victims was a major vehicle in bringing together civil society and governmental parties in the early detection, referral and support of minors selling sex. In addition, CHS-A formally established a procedure for referral and support of cases with two ministerial agencies.

SUSO Peru in numbers

- 297 lobby and advocacy were held (for authorities)
- 8302 people were reached with public events
- 35 victims of human trafficking were supported

CHS-A
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Botswana
Comprehensive community-based support for sex workers

Sisonke is the only national organisation run by sex workers for sex workers, set up in 2010. Under the SUSO project, Sisonke developed its first economic empowerment initiative to offer sex workers the chance to develop skills to work in alternative sectors.

Financial skills and stokvels
Sisonke provided financial management trainings for sex workers, covering all phases of planning, organising, controlling and monitoring long-term investments, as well as the handling of day-to-day expenditures. To build economic resilience at community level, five stokvels were established involving eighty sex workers. Stokvels are invitation-only clubs of (in this case) sex workers. They serve as rotating credit unions or saving schemes. A lesson learnt from this experience was the importance of group trust. One stokvel dissolved due to lack of trust. However, the other four saw the continuation of saving schemes beyond SUSO and in one of them the revenue was put to good use with the opening of a small shop.

Social support
Sisonke realized that the success of empowerment activities for sex workers rely for a big part on the psychosocial wellbeing of sex workers. It partnered with the Botswana National Association of Social Workers to provide sex workers with psychosocial support. Twenty-nine beneficiaries received one-on-one counselling and 93 received group counselling. Throughout the programme the services were extended to a broader spectrum of work. For example, sex workers were supported to apply for government funds. Sex workers involved in legal cases were prepared for court hearings by advising them on how to handle the hearings and how to keep calm during court proceedings. The families of the sex workers were also engaged to support them to cope and manage the situations they needed to deal with.

SUSO Botswana in numbers
- 95 sex workers participated in trainings for economic empowerment
- 80 sex workers participated in saving mechanisms
- 960 sex workers were reached with outreach
- 263 sex workers received psychosocial support
- 104 sex workers participated in health trainings

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www.facebook.com/BONELA.HumanRights
The Al Shehab Institution for Comprehensive Development in Cairo works to achieve greater access to health care and the empowerment of vulnerable populations including sex workers. In Egypt, sex workers are severely criminalised and discriminated against. They are also denied basic social services such as health care and legal aid. Many sex workers lack formal identification papers, a situation which leaves them legally unprotected. Al Shehab tries to improve their social position by advocating for their rights and helping them access official social protection mechanisms.

Sex workers have their own specific experiences and vulnerabilities and often have to cope with a negative self-image that can constrain change and development.

Difficult start in a challenging context

The start-up of the programme in Egypt was challenging as the unstable political context made it difficult for Al Shehab to roll out the SUSO programme smoothly. Prolific public protests and an unsafe public domain meant it was hard to operate, but, at the same time, it made the need to improve the situation of many vulnerable women even more urgent. Al Shehab specifically targets sex workers as vulnerable women and is in daily contact with sex workers as its office is combined with a drop-in centre. This way they are able to stay close to and involve their beneficiaries in decisions and practice.

Vocational skills

A total of 104 beneficiaries participated in workshops on hairdressing, sewing, handicrafts and cooking. The training might not lead directly to an alternative career or source of income.

“I feel the change and even my husband feels the change. Now I can better talk about myself, confront and ask for my own rights, even my relationship with my husband changed for the better, which encourages him to let me come to Shehab regularly.”

(SUSO beneficiary from Egypt)
because of high competition in the market, but once a sex worker passed the exam, Al Shehab facilitated formal registration with the syndicate (similar to a union) for that profession. In Egypt, syndicates offer many advantages including social and legal support, entitlement to a state pension and access to health services.

**Listening Units**

Al Shehab believes in the importance of psychological support as a key element that should go side-by-side with other activities. Sex workers have their own specific experiences and vulnerabilities and often have to cope with a negative self-image that can constrain change and development. The Listening Unit facilitated in-depth interviews and the development of personal plans with each beneficiary.

**Information on SRHR**

Al Shehab found that many misconceptions regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) existed among their beneficiaries, due to the lack of sex education in the Egyptian school system. Al Shehab produced new IEC materials for minors to provide them with proper information and resolve any existing misconceptions. Eight minors were selected for peer education training covering interlocking topics such as gender roles, HIV/AIDS and STDs, sexual and reproductive health, stigma and discrimination, legal awareness and reporting violence.

**SUSO Egypt in numbers**

- 1,804 adult sex workers were reached through the SUSO project (estimated)
- 306 sex workers participated in health training
- 49 sex workers received legal support
- 118 sex workers benefited from services at the Psychological Unit

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Al Shehab
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The Nikat Charitable Association (Nikat) is the only sex worker-led organisation in the country. Established by a group of sex workers in 2006, it focuses on supporting sex workers in Addis Ababa. Economic empowerment has always been at the core of Nikat’s work. Under the SUSO project, Nikat was able to extend these activities by offering its members training in managing their finances and access to financial services.

Drinking coffee in Ethiopia
Drinking coffee during traditional ceremonies is key to Ethiopian culture. For Nikat, these traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremonies serve as a means of introducing sex workers to the organisation and the activities it offers. Several hundreds of sex workers have been reached, have shared their experiences and discussed topics such as sexual health and customer handling, while drinking coffee. Nikat invited bank representatives to some of the coffee sessions to speak with the sex workers and explain the procedures and requirements for opening a bank account and taking out money, so that sex workers can become familiar with the system. This proved a great opportunity as it also made the bank representatives more aware of the financial needs and challenges of sex workers.

Education and vocational training
With remuneration for transport expenses and tuition fees, sex workers were able to follow vocational trainings or formal education. This included the popular cooking and catering classes at the Benvenido School as well as hair dressing and nail art training provided by Nikat’s in-house beauty training centre. Nikat provided financial aid to 18 sex workers to help them pursue their college studies. Not a single one dropped out since the start of their studies, showing a great deal of focus and commitment to achieve their goals. Sex workers also learned how to handle money in a sustainable way through the Self Saving Groups and business skills trainings. Nikat provided micro finance to 61 sex workers who showed entrepreneurial spirit and set up their own micro-scale businesses.

Community sensitisation
Nikat conducted several workshops on sex work-related issues to sensitise law enforcement officers, government officials, hotel owners, pimps and traditional drink house owners. In addition, Nikat attracted attention in the public realm by entering a hundred of their beneficiaries in the annual women’s run and displaying several posters drawing attention to sex workers’ issues. A radio programme that drew attention to sex workers’ issues and was picked up by international media was a great success.
Sheger FM’s weekly radio programme shakes up the public on the reality of sex work

Nikat worked together with Sheger FM 102.1, which covers the area of Addis Ababa, to do a weekly segment on sex work. It aired on Wednesdays between 19.30-20.00 hrs and followed one girl for about 10-12 episodes. Each episode revolved around a specific theme such as HIV or violence. The story of the sex worker lasted about 7-10 minutes and the rest of the time was used for follow up, discussion and questions from listeners.

listeners said that hearing these personal stories opened their eyes as it showed that sex workers are also people like themselves, their mothers, daughters or sisters

Sosane Tesfaye who presented the programme usually met the girls at Nikat to record their stories. The girls did not have to use their real name and could leave out places or things from their story if they wanted. A voice change was also possible if needed.

The public reaction
The radio station received a lot of positive reactions from its listeners who were often not aware of the challenges sex workers face. Radio listeners said that hearing these personal stories opened their eyes as it showed that sex workers are also people like themselves, their mothers, daughters or sisters. They learnt that they have similar hopes and dreams, but they often suffer through a lot of hardship. The programme even led to listeners offering direct support to sex workers on air, such as offers for jobs or to pay for education.

Also for presenter Sosane Tesfaye it has been a meaningful experience that has taught her a lot. She had no idea of the many challenges sex workers face in their daily lives and she thinks that the conservative Ethiopian culture plays an important role in this. She also recognised that most of the girls she talked to would like to change their lives, yet poverty is a big factor in pulling them into and keeping them in sex work. “It is deeply encouraging that Nikat can help them to change their lives through their empowerment programmes.”

International media attention

SUSO Ethiopia in numbers

- 251 sex workers participated in vocational training or formal education
- 721 sex workers participated in saving systems
- 2,517 sex workers visited Nikat’s drop-in centre
- 906 police officers have been sensitised

Nikat
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Health Options for Young Men on HIV, AIDS and STIs (HOYMAS) is a community-based organisation in Kenya founded in 2009 by male sex workers and men who have sex with men living with HIV/AIDS. As part of the SUSO project, HOYMAS has set up a Savings and Credit Cooperation (SACCO).

Financial training and microfinance for sex workers
Microfinance programmes are key to poverty reduction strategies in Kenya, yet none specifically targeted marginalised groups such as sexual minorities and sex workers. As part of the SUSO programme, HOYMAS trained male sex workers in financial skills and set up a Savings and Credit Cooperation (SACCO). In 2014, HOYMAS partnered with the Small Micro and Enterprise Programme (SMEP) for follow-up trainings focusing on financial management, business development skills, and savings and loans acquisition processes. An assessment of the training showed positive changes in habitual behaviour: more male sex workers started saving in bank accounts, rented houses rather than staying in hotels, and minimised expenses on alcohol and clothes. Follow-up with 80 of the men that were trained in microfinance and business skills showed that mentorship and motivation are crucial elements in supporting individual entrepreneurs, with a potential role for exchange visits.

Sensitizing police
Violence against sex workers and gay men heavily affect HOYMAS’ work. Staff and community members have been victim to several attacks during the project period. This is why police sensitisation remained a vital part of HOYMAS’ activities. Through familiarising key people within the police force with the organisation’s work and members, awareness gradually spread to other parts of government agencies. In other cases sensitisation was achieved less explicitly.

HOYMAS often required police security during events and gatherings and through their presence the policemen become more accustomed to male sex workers and sex work-related issues.

Medical and psychological support
Many male sex workers living with HIV face serious stigma and discrimination by clients, family and health professionals and lack access to appropriate care. HOYMAS’s Text SMS system reached an estimated 2,000 subscribing community members with security alerts and news updates. In addition, the Home Based Care (HBC) and Rescue Centre were set up in the past year, providing several health services to male sex workers, including psychological support.

HOYMAS
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SUSO Kenya in numbers

180 police officers were sensitized on sex work issues
3,350 sex workers were reached through outreach
1,730 sex workers visited the drop in centre

Launching HOYMAS SACCO
Official Launch on 11th Sept, 2015
Offering: Hoymas Cabs, Savings, Shares, Loans, etc.

Supporters of HOYMAS
KPMG Foundation
CRS
Kenyatta University
Kenyatta National Hospital
The Sexual Rights Centre (SRC) offers sex workers a platform where they can unite to address issues and policies that affect them.

**Entrepreneur groups**
In the first year of the SUSO programme, SRC created several entrepreneur groups which were strengthened and bolstered with monthly meetings. SRC also offered several skills workshops on computer literacy, financial management, communication skills and public speaking. Two sex workers received formal support from SRC to pursue their nurse aid studies and they are expected to take this further as a career choice.

**Movement building**
SRC set up an intensive leadership programme for sex workers. Sex workers taking part concentrated on the importance of sex worker-led movements and the ability to articulate issues affecting them. Another training with a group of 17 sex workers focused on the technical and legal issues involved when building sex worker movements.

**Increased insecurity for sex workers**
During the programme, safety and security became substantial and growing concerns. Increased police harassment and lack of action about human rights violations presented major challenges to sex workers’ safety. SRC managed to create media opportunities to draw attention to these issues and to sex workers needs and rights. This included a press release on violence against sex workers, community radio discussions, launches of various social media platforms and big events. In addition, the annual Official 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign proved to be another opportunistic platform, especially for encouraging solidarity and collective action across sex worker and LGBT communities. More than 140 sex workers marched with the Human Rights Commission of Zimbabwe, spreading awareness about sex worker abuse. Condoms and other materials were distributed to the more unreachable sex workers during a ‘bar tour’. SRC managed to create media opportunities to draw attention to these.

**SUSO Zimbabwe in numbers**
- 202 sex workers participated in trainings for economic empowerment
- 27 sex workers participated in vocational trainings or formal education
- 1,149 sex workers were reached through outreach
- 138 sex workers received legal support

**Sex workers have lust... for their rights!**
Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP)
Voicing the sex worker movement globally

The Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) has membership organisations in 72 countries worldwide. Many of the implementing partners within the SUSO programme are members of NSWP. The focus areas of NSWP are to advocate for sex workers’ rights and to build leadership among sex workers and their networks nationally, regionally and globally.

Developing advocacy tools and guidelines
NSWP worked with its Asian Pacific and African regional offices (APNSW and ASWA) to develop background materials for advocacy tools to help sex worker-led groups’ ability to engage effectively with policy makers and programmers. This led to a number of publications developed under SUSO.

Together with APNSW and ASWA it documented case studies of good practises of sex worker-led economic empowerment projects and the lived experiences of the sex workers involved. These varied from interventions to improve access to banking and credit opportunities for sex workers, to sex-worker-focused legal aid, and fighting violence and criminalisation to make sex work a safer working option. A common factor throughout the good practices is that they enable sex workers to increase their own degree of economic empowerment, ultimately putting the sex worker in control of their own lives.

It is crucial to focus on fighting the stigma and discrimination of sex workers and on empowering them socially and economically.

NSWP also looked at the impact of programmes that focus on ‘rehabilitation’ requiring sex workers to exit sex work. Evidence shows that non-sex workers often consider ‘trafficking’ and ‘sex work’ to be the same thing and do not consider the option that people might choose to do sex work. The effectiveness of such rehabilitation and exit programmes is therefore low. Sex workers are often willing to try other income options, until they realise the income is not adequate. Instead of focusing on rehabilitation, it is crucial to focus on fighting the stigma and discrimination of sex workers and on empowering them socially and economically. The latter requires a focus on sex workers rights such as their ‘right to health’ and their ‘right to work and free choice of employment’.

Finally, NSWP developed the Smart Sex Workers Guide to Sustainable Funding, which is being translated in all five official NSWP languages.

Movement building
In addition to their advocacy and documentation work, NSWP and its regional offices built the capacity of sex worker-led networks to strengthen the sex worker movement across Africa and Asia Pacific.

NSWP
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Evaluation and lessons learnt

To strengthen the programme’s effectiveness and efficiency, researchers from the Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen (CIDIN) carried out an extensive mid-term and end-term evaluation. The evaluation set out to provide a first and preliminary assessment of the effects of the activities undertaken by the different partners as part of the SUSO programme.

Methodology

The CIDIN team conducted one-on-one interviews with sex workers. The interviews explored how the sex workers perceived their own progress on the five dimensions of their lives that the SUSO programme aimed to influence:

1. economic situation,
2. acceptance by their social environment,
3. the extent to which they try to lead a healthy life,
4. their feeling of safety, and
5. their sense of control over life.

Constraining factors

As it was not feasible to do this exercise in all countries, the evaluation focused on one country in each region (Latin America, Africa and Asia): Bolivia, Ethiopia and Indonesia. The CIDIN team visited beneficiaries and staff of the five partners (AASC, ONAEM, Nikat, Bandungwangi and OPSI) in these countries.

Duration of the programme

It was not easy to draw general conclusions about the impact of the programme. This was due to the fact that the programme was quite ambitious in its set up.

Evaluation and lessons learnt

The programme was implemented in a relatively short period of time, which makes it hard to identify long-term impact. Not all partners started at the same time, causing variance in the programme duration for each of them. In addition,
for many partners economic empowerment was a new element to their existing work with and for sex workers. This required learning and trial and error. This meant the period during which the project was effectively implemented was relatively short, varying from three to in some cases one and a half years. This made it more difficult to look at the medium- to long-term impact of the programme.

Evidence shows a rather robust correlation between positive life changes and participation in the SUSO programmes

Variety of activities under SUSO
Further complicating the assessment of the impact of the programme as a whole is the diversity of activities carried out. The key principle of SUSO was the involvement of sex workers and ensuring that the activities apply to their context and needs. As shown by the chapters describing the achievements of our partners, the interpretation and execution of economic empowerment for sex workers varies widely.

Diversity within the target group
The respondent pool for the evaluation was extremely diverse. The ages, origins, types of sex workers (street, brothel and bar) and the level of dependency on sex work varied within the different groups. Therefore, it did not come as a surprise that respondents show wide diversity in the scores that they report.

Results and lessons learnt

Despite these challenging factors it can be concluded that SUSO did have a positive impact on sex workers’ lives. Both the quantitative and qualitative evidence shows a rather robust correlation between positive life changes and participation in the SUSO programmes.

Improved lives
Sex workers involved in the activities of SUSO partners in Bolivia, Ethiopia and Indonesia have, overall, reported improvement in their economic situation, their social acceptance, their health condition, their sense of safety and their control over life. However, levels in each of these areas varied among partners, countries and individual sex workers. For instance, beneficiaries of ONAEM reported no improvement in the area of health; but this makes sense as the work of ONAEM mainly focuses on fighting stigma and discrimination and improving human rights of sex workers. Other partners’ areas of work included health education and referrals to health services as part of their interventions.

The impression from interviews with beneficiaries in all three countries is that sex workers have also gained substantially in terms of self-confidence and self-esteem, which fits the observation of enhanced control over life.

Economic benefits are mostly seen in the longer term

A remarkable finding was that financial improvement showed the lowest results of the five dimensions. This can be explained because respondents who choose to exit sex work tend to report a substantial decline in their income. This may have a negative impact on the economic dimension, but is likely to show more positively on the other dimensions and even benefit economic security in the longer term. Still, the picture emerges that it is very difficult to substitute income from sex work with other income sources and that retracting from sex work is a gradual, long-term process if ‘economic suicide’ is to be avoided.

Retreating from sex work is a gradual, long-term process if ‘economic suicide’ is to be avoided

Changing the economic situation of sex workers generally takes a substantial period to materialize, much longer than the SUSO implementation period. At the same time, it is interesting to see that after the programme, many sex workers, especially in Indonesia and Bolivia, already do not exclusively depend on sex work for income and engage in a wide range of other income-generating activities.

Economic empowerment as a new strategy

Adding an economic programme to the existing regular activities of SUSO partners required time for adoption and capacity building. Yet despite its novelty, the programme resulted in interesting and potentially promising interventions. We hope with this publication and our Best Practice Bundle we will inspire others to join us in strengthening economic empowerment for sex workers across the world.