

**Contact**

Jerushah Rangasami / Director  
c +27 (0) 82 776 2286  
e [jerushah@impactconsulting.co.za](mailto:jerushah@impactconsulting.co.za)



# END EVALUATION OF THE HANDS OFF PROGRAMME

**Final report to:**

Aidsfonds Sex Work Programme

5 July 2019



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END EVALUATION OF THE HANDS OFF PROGRAMME**

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**Report to:**

Hands Off programme, AIDSFONDS

**Written by:**

Jerushah Rangasami, Tracey Konstant, Michael Field

**Data collection team:**

Tracey Konstant, Diana Meswele, Peter Chibatamoto, Jerushah Rangasami, Keith Mienies

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Hands Off programme, implemented between 2014 and 2019, aimed to reduce the unacceptably high levels of violence suffered by sex workers in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Country partners implemented the programme in each country, and in four of the five countries the programme was planned and implemented by a partnership comprising an established non-governmental organisation and a membership-based sex worker-led movement.

This largely qualitative evaluation study included a desk review and primary data collection for all five countries with 176 individuals participating in interviews and focus groups. Evaluation participants included a sample of sex workers in each country, peer educators where relevant, implementing partner management teams, government representatives, partners and other stakeholders as key informants at various levels, Aidsfonds Hands Off staff and management and Hands Off board members. The evaluation design included site visits for more in-depth enquiry in the five programme countries. Furthermore, a joint data analysis and reflection workshop with sex workers and implementing partners was organized to validate the findings.

<b>Evaluation participants</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Interview type</b>
Sex workers and/ or peer educators and paralegals	106	Focus group discussion
Aidsfonds staff and management and Hands Off board members	5	Interviews
Management of implementing partners	26	
Joint management of implementing partners (host and hosted parties)	17	
Key informants (NGO representatives, district officials, social workers)	13	
Other (police, media, health care workers)	30	
Total	197	
Duplication	21	
Total individuals	176	

The study found that **the Hands Off programme has been successful in reducing both individual and structural violence in all five programme countries, to varying degrees**. This has had a significant impact on the lives of the sex workers whom it has reached. In all countries, reduction in violence was most prevalent in the cities/areas where Hands Off was implemented most intensively, with impact diminishing further afield from the partners' core base.

Sex workers face less police violence in all countries where police were engaged, also to varying degrees – some impact was seen in Botswana and Zimbabwe, and significant impact in Mozambique and South Africa. In Mozambique, the police now even act as protectors of sex workers, and sex workers can approach them directly. It was reported that the more sensitised police were, the less violent they were. This resulted in sex workers facing less physical violence, less harassment, and fewer unlawful arrests and exploitation.

*“Now they [the police] really do listen, it’s no longer the same as in previous times... The programme helped in stopping the harassment we were subjected to by the police...”*  
(Sex worker focus group discussion 2, Zimbabwe)

There was also reportedly less physical violence from community members in all countries, although psychological violence continued in most areas. Religious and traditional/community leaders and the media were all important influencers in the community. Though more work is needed in general to engage these stakeholders, good practices have been identified that can be built on going forward. When sex workers were more empowered in that they were confident to assert their rights and stand up for their work as an occupation, and when sex workers displayed more prosocial behaviour in their communities, this also reduced community violence and stigma. Localised, multi-stakeholder, crisis/emergency response teams have been a key success strategy in reducing violence in the communities in which they operated.

Sex workers learnt how to protect themselves through the programme – both through taking individual safety and violence prevention measures, and through the building of solidarity amongst themselves and taking care of each other. This has led to sex workers suffering less

violence at the hands of clients, and each other.

*“We have created a sisterhood campaign. The motto is that if I see danger, I cannot watch my sister walk into danger. It’s my duty as your sister to warn you that ‘this client has done a, b, c or d’. If I know you are taking ARVs it’s my duty as your sister to ask you ‘but you didn’t come home for the last three days and your medication is in the drawer. You are not taking your medication. You are busy taking alcohol.’ My sisterhood protects me. They have created something beautiful in Beitbridge.” (North Star Alliance)*

In terms of structural impact, some sex workers in some countries have been able to access police services – for example protection when they are in the streets and assistance to report cases and to hold violent perpetrators to account. In all countries, sex workers were more able to access necessary legal services to claim their rights, through access to implementing partners’ services, or through allies that have been brought into the programme. In all countries where healthcare workers had been sensitised or engaged, improvements in their attitudes and behaviour meant that sex workers could more easily access healthcare services. In Botswana, for instance, Hands Off played a role in contributing toward policy change which extended free healthcare for sex workers to include foreign sex workers. Increased access to health services has meant that sex workers have been better able to manage prevention and treatment of HIV and other STIs.

*“If I aim to give service to the people, let it be service. Even if it’s a criminal, even if it’s whatever - what I do is I give out help as a human being. I’m very passionate about this. When we start talking about sex workers and other key populations, I tell them ‘no discrimination, nothing whatsoever, keep your emotions out of everything’.” (Healthcare worker/sister in charge, Zimbabwe)*

Although there has been no dramatic legislative change in any of the countries over the programme period, there has been good progress made in current advocacy campaigns, as well as the development of new guidelines that uphold sex worker rights, and plans at a national level that are more inclusive of sex workers and their rights. There is evidence of a shift in decision makers’ attitudes, which in some countries have even led to parliamentarians being openly supportive of sex workers’ rights. Regionally, there is a need to build more partnerships and to strengthen existing partners to play a stronger regional coordination role.

Programme management has been efficient and successful, mostly because of a fully participatory and inclusive approach that has upheld the principle of “nothing for us, without us”, as well as very regular communication, and needs-based capacity building. The programme was also designed based on data from baseline assessments<sup>1 2 3 4 5</sup>, which was not only good practice but also proved to be effective on the ground.

*“There was a lot of violence. We called a big meeting with different stakeholders, such as police, health workers, sex workers, other organisations, and ourselves as researchers. Then we shared the information (needs assessment) with the whole government. ... We have enough [proof] to face the police. It was found that the police were the greatest perpetrators ... The police could understand that what they were doing was wrong. Now, they sensitise one another about the rights of sex workers. ... Now we could go to the police station and tell the police officer to set loose one of our colleagues, by showing him the needs assessment.” (Partner organisation manager, Mozambique)*

In terms of sustainability, informants felt that many elements of the programme and a lot of the outcomes will continue. It must be acknowledged that success has been achieved through intensive work, and that building relationships to sensitise stakeholders – particularly with perpetrators of violence, and with the significant barrier of criminalisation – is slow work. Therefore, intensive and careful intervention will continue to be necessary to make any significant difference on a grander scale. It is recommended that the programme continue to build on the momentum it has created through this first round, and that all relevant lessons and best practices are implemented in core programme areas first before expanding the reach of the programme.

Core impactful strategies that should be rolled out include: sex worker movement-building (or establishment if this does not exist in the country); police engagement; sensitisation of service providers and leaders; working with the media; continued advocacy for the decriminalisation of sex work; expanding the evidence base, and; working collaboratively with multiple stakeholders. Capacity-building should continue with country partners, particularly with the movements who have the potential to extend the programme’s impact with sex workers through its networking functions.

Hands Off has had an impressive impact in only a few years, and the continuation and expansion of the programme promises results that would significantly reduce the individual and structural violence that sex workers face. Hands Off also holds a niche position in terms of HIV funding in that it is the only programme which has focused specifically on reducing violence for sex workers in Southern Africa. It is highly recommended that further careful investment is made to build on the successes already achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> Hands Off (2016) Sex work & violence in Botswana: Needs Assessment report

<sup>2</sup> Hands Off (2016) Sex work & violence in Mozambique: Needs Assessment report

<sup>3</sup> Hands Off (2016) Sex work & violence in Namibia: Needs Assessment report

<sup>4</sup> Hands Off (2016) Sex work & violence in South Africa: Needs Assessment report

<sup>5</sup> Hands Off (2016) Sex work & violence in Zimbabwe: Needs Assessment report

