



**Global Network of Sex Work Projects**  
Promoting Health and Human Rights

# Measuring the Impacts of the Sex Worker Implementation Tool:

*a Global Perspective*

case **STUDY**



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## case **STUDY**

### Introduction

Sex workers are one of the key populations most affected by HIV. There are many reasons for this, including but not limited to: criminalisation, penalisation and repression of sex work, same-sex activity and gender expression; mandatory testing; discrimination and mistreatment within the health sector; exclusion of male and transgender sex workers from programming; inappropriate and inadequate services that do not use a rights-based approach; and funds diverted into ‘rescue and rehabilitation’ programmes that do not support sex workers in their efforts to protect themselves from HIV.

*Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers: Practical Approaches from Collaborative Interventions*, also known as the Sex Worker Implementation Tool (SWIT), is a large document that provides practical guidelines on how to implement rights-based programming that are directed by and that empower sex workers. The SWIT was produced in 2013 by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), The World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The SWIT is designed to be used by policy makers, public health officials and programme managers; health and social workers; and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including sex worker-led organisations; and health workers.

Sex worker-led organisations are best placed to develop and implement programmes that respect and uphold the rights of sex workers. Organisations that are not sex worker-led but provide services to sex workers should work towards sharing power through the meaningful involvement of sex workers in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes, with the ultimate goal of shifting power through building their capacity to lead their own programmes. The SWIT provides practical examples of how this can be done.



Thanks to PJ Starr who supplied the image featured on the cover of this document



## History

In 2012, the WHO published the *Guidelines on Prevention and Treatment of HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections for Sex Workers in Low – and Middle – Income Countries: Recommendations for a Public Health Approach*. The guidelines were written through collaboration between WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS and NSWP. These guidelines were informed by the *Values and Preferences survey* conducted by NSWP between July and September of 2011. Fifty in-depth interviews were conducted with sex workers in 33 countries across the five NSWP regions. At least one sex worker in every region was living with HIV. The values and preferences survey was an opportunity for sex workers to provide their input on the recommendations being proposed. Sex workers' input was used to grade the acceptability of the recommendations in the Guidelines. For example, the WHO guidelines recommend correct and consistent condom use among sex workers and clients. Respondents of the NSWP survey unanimously supported condom promotion and distribution to sex workers. This resulted in a strong recommendation in the WHO guidelines.

While the WHO Guidelines were useful, programmes implementers wanted to know how to implement the guidelines in communities. The SWIT, therefore, is a practical approach to the guidelines, and provides an overview of best practices with case studies from around the world to demonstrate what rights-based sex work programming should be.<sup>1</sup>

## Forecast

Despite the available evidence in support of rights-based health interventions with sex workers<sup>2</sup>, a number of governments and NGOs have undertaken HIV interventions that, rather than empower sex workers, actively violate their human rights through such measures as mandatory or forced testing; public disclosure of test results; and police repression of sex workers under the pretext of 'fighting HIV', 'fighting trafficking' or 'fighting sexual exploitation'. The human rights of sex workers are further denied through 'rescue and rehabilitation' programmes. The resulting widespread violence against sex workers by state and non-state actors, unjust and unsafe working conditions and frequent discrimination have created significant barriers to HIV prevention and treatment services for sex workers, which has resulted in avoidable HIV transmission.

This trend will continue until governments, policy-makers, and international and local non-governmental organisations, adopt a rights-based approach to sex work programming with sex workers.

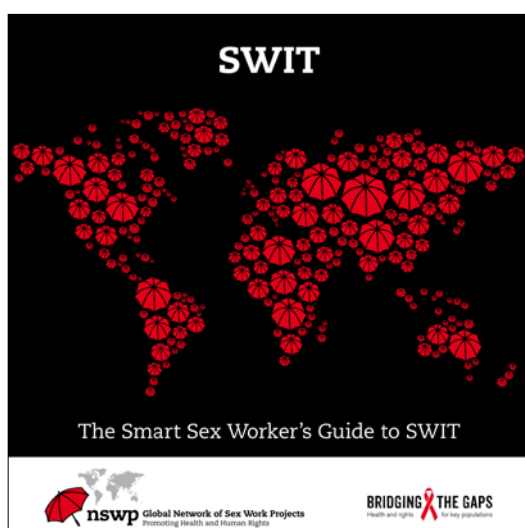
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- 1 Rights-based sex work programming respects and upholds the rights of sex workers as defined in the NSWP Consensus Statement.
  - 2 See the most recent results of sex work HIV?interventions based on community mobilisation as a key component in UNAIDS 2015 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic.



## Timeline

**“The SWIT is a very good guideline for sex workers and sex worker leaders. Sex workers often want to build their organisations and build their capacity to offer services, but organisations did not have a document like this before and it took so much time. When the SWIT was published, even if people do not use all of the chapters, sex workers can modify and pick what is useful.”**

*Kay Thi Win, APNSW, NSWP Member*



- 1 **2011:** NSWP became involved in the process of developing the WHO Recommendations.
- 2 **JULY–SEPTEMBER 2011:** NSWP completed the Values and Preference survey with 50 sex workers globally, from all 5 NSWP regions.
- 3 **DECEMBER 2012:** The WHO Recommendations were published.
- 4 **JANUARY 2013:** Stakeholders wanted to create a practical tool for interventions with sex workers to complement the WHO recommendations.
- 5 **JANUARY–MARCH 2013:** SWIT Development Group was formed which included UN agencies, USAID, Gates Foundation, and NSWP.
- 6 **MARCH 2013:** Working groups were established to write each chapter of the SWIT. Working groups always had at least one sex worker lead.
- 7 **MARCH 2012–APRIL 2013:** Chapters were drafted and reviewed by the working groups prior to being circulated to sex workers and other stakeholders for further review. The feedback was reviewed by the Development Group and incorporated into the final drafts sent to consultation participants.
- 8 **29 MAY 2013:** NSWP facilitated and funded a sex worker pre-meeting in Ghana to discuss and agree consensus on the draft chapters.
- 9 **30–31 MAY 2013:** Consultation on draft chapters of the SWIT with key stakeholders in Ghana. At least 25 percent of participants were current or former sex workers.
- 10 **OCTOBER 2013:** SWIT published.
- 11 **31 JULY 2015:** NSWP publishes the *Smart Sex Worker's Guide to the SWIT*.
- 12 **9–13 NOVEMBER 2015:** USAID and UNAIDS give four-day workshop on SWIT in West Francophone Africa to national representatives who work with sex workers.
- 13 **18–21 NOVEMBER 2015:** The Sex Workers' Advocacy Network for Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (SWAN) in collaboration with NSWP, provide a four-day intensive training for five country teams of sex workers on the SWIT.



## Goals

**“NSWP argues we have to build the capacity of the community first before we work with service providers. Unless communities are empowered, they will not be able to go into conversations at a national level on equal playing fields [with governments, policy makers, and programme developers and implementers].”**

*Ruth Morgan Thomas, NSWP Global Coordinator*

One of NSWP’s goals is to promote rights-based policies and programming for sex workers globally. All policy development initiatives related to sex work must meaningfully involve sex workers. Sex workers are the experts on the policies that would benefit sex workers and uphold their human rights.

When NSWP became involved in the development of the SWIT in 2011, NSWP wanted to ensure stakeholders were taking a rights-based approach and prioritising the voices of sex workers in its decision-making. It identified the following goals:

- **GOAL 1:** ensure the meaningful involvement of sex worker in the development of the SWIT.

*Why?* Sex workers are the experts about what practical interventions will be most effective in their community.

- **GOAL 2:** ensure the SWIT is accessible to sex workers, and sex worker-led organisations.

*Why?* Sex workers and sex worker-led organisations are more likely to use the SWIT as a programme development and advocacy tool if they understand it. It is important to build the capacity of the community first, before engaging with service providers.

- **GOAL 3:** ensure sex workers are included in the implementation and rollout of the SWIT.

*Why?* Sex workers are best placed to implement the SWIT in their communities, and provide community-led capacity building and training about the benefits of using the SWIT.

## Strategies to Achieve Goals

NSWP identified the following strategies necessary to achieving the goals listed above:

- **STRATEGY 1:** facilitated the values and preferences consultation about proposed WHO guidelines, which informs the SWIT.
- **STRATEGY 2:** provided case studies from NSWP members’ initiatives and best practices for inclusion in the SWIT.
- **STRATEGY 3:** facilitated a sex worker-only meeting prior to a larger consultation with all stakeholders, to develop consensus among sex workers about changes that need to be made to the draft SWIT.
- **STRATEGY 4:** created an easily accessible *Smart Sex Worker’s Guide to SWIT* for the community.
- **STRATEGY 5:** applied to the Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund (RCNF) to support regional and national capacity building and training on the SWIT [awaiting response]
- **STRATEGY 6:** monitor how NSWP members and other implementers are using the SWIT to promote rights-based programming with and for sex workers [on-going].



## SWIT Development

**“NSWP held a pre-meeting the day before the consultation started. This enabled sex workers to critique each section of the draft, compile a list of non-negotiable points and to develop a strategy for how we would approach the two-day consultation. This sex worker-only session is critical to getting the most out of the consultation. In fact, when NSWP or APNSW meet with UN on important consultations, we now insist on a pre-meeting as a part of the overall process.”**

*Tracey Tully on behalf of Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers, APNSW Blog*

Fifteen sex workers from fifteen different countries were present at the NSWP sex worker-only pre-meeting in Ghana on 29 May 2013. The goal of this meeting was to create a safe and welcoming space for sex workers to discuss their concerns about the various draft chapters of the SWIT.

The Regional Networks identified sex workers to attend the NSWP sex worker-only pre-meeting. NSWP and the regional networks

ensured a diversity of sex workers with different backgrounds and experiences would be present. There were sex workers living with HIV, sex workers who use drugs, and female, male and transgender sex workers at the meeting.

The sex workers present were divided into small groups to compile feedback on the 6 draft chapters of the SWIT. The small groups discussed the drafts and developed a consensus on what should be changed. Sex workers discussed how they could advocate for the changes in the larger stakeholders consultation, which included representatives from the UN, governments, INGOs, donors, academics, and national NGOs. Some sex workers were nervous about whether their feedback would be taken seriously so this provided an opportunity to build confidence and gain support from colleagues.

The larger consultation included all stakeholders. Approximately one third of people at this meeting were either current or former sex workers. Participants broke up into groups to discuss the chapters, similar to what happened at the sex worker pre-meeting. Afterward, a representative from each group provided a brief overview of what was discussed, and the larger group would discuss the recommended changes.

Almost all of the suggested edits from sex workers were accepted, and integrated into the final version of the SWIT.

*APNSW representatives at the sex worker-only pre-meeting in Ghana.*



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## Impact of the SWIT

### Sex Worker-Led Impacts

**“We have referred to the SWIT in our internal activities at WONETHA but we have also shared the SWIT with the partners we work with. The Sex Worker Academy Africa is in the process of reviewing the curriculum; hopefully the next trainings will focus more on the SWIT.”**

*Daisy Nakato, WONETHA, NSWP Member*

The Global Fund workshops, as well the Sex Worker Academy Africa, use the SWIT as part of their curriculum. Case studies on the Sex Worker Academy Africa and The Global Fund workshops are currently available on the NSWP website.

Roxana Vasi from SWAN participated in the Sex Worker Academy Africa (SWAA). She told NSWP in an interview that SWAN used what she learned to develop a four-day capacity building workshop on the SWIT in Budapest from 19 to 22 November 2015 in collaboration with NSWP.

**“I had the privilege of participating in the African Sex Workers Academy, and to see a model of organising a training based on SWIT. Despite its difficulties, our region is still in the Global North. We have much to learn from the struggles and some of the strategies used by sex workers in Africa and Asia. My experience with ASWA has informed this SWAN training; however, everything was planned according to this region and particular issues faced by sex workers, facilitating dialogue between participants from different parts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia.”**

*Roxana Vasi, SWAN, Regional Network*

Twenty-three sex workers from 5 different countries including Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine attended the workshop. All twenty-three sex workers completed the training and intend to use what they have learned in their advocacy at a local and national level.





**“This training was quite useful since members of our community do not know about their rights and do not know how to apply them. Our knowledge grows through participation in such events and we can then pass it down to other sex workers.”**

*SWAN training participant*

**“I will be able to use and disseminate the knowledge I received here back home.”**

*SWAN training participant*

Kay Thi Win from the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), stated they are translating the NSWSP *Smart Sex Worker’s Guide to SWIT* in local languages. She also reported that APNSW members in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Indonesia are actively using the SWIT in their advocacy, but other countries need more capacity building and training to fully appreciate the SWIT.

Some NSWSP members used the SWIT throughout the Presidents Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief’s (PEPFAR) consultations on the

2016 draft Country Operational Plan from 16 to 19 November 2015. The SWIT is being used to put pressure on the US government to end their ‘anti-prostitution loyalty oath’ (APLO) also known as the ‘anti-prostitution pledge’ (APP), as a requirement to receiving funding. The APLO prevents organisations from actively promoting the decriminalisation of sex work.

Umbrella Lane, a sex worker-led organisation in Glasgow, Scotland, uses the SWIT in their funding applications.

**“I was at The Global Fund workshop with Mick from NSWSP when I first learned about the SWIT. The SWIT is my bible, it validates everything we are doing, and helps fine tune where we are lacking. I am now working with the AIDS Council in South Africa as a member of Sisonke. Sisonke is on the Sex Worker Technical Task Force Working Group and we created a decriminalisation document based on the SWIT.”**

*Gavin Jacobs, Sisonke, NSWSP Member*



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## Other Impacts

**“Smart Sex Worker’s Guide to the SWIT helps people analyse the gaps in programming, and quickly see where programme shortcomings are.”**

Joe Rossouw, *The Networking HIV, AIDS Community of South Africa (NACOSA)*

USAID, the World Bank and UNAIDS provided a training for Francophone countries in West Africa in November 2015 on the SWIT. There were representatives from national organisations, governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations. There were two people present who were involved in the sex industry.<sup>3</sup> According to Tisha Wheeler from USAID, during the 5-day training USAID and UNAIDS urged representatives to pay peer-workers for their labour and to respond to violence against sex workers immediately, and effectively using the guidelines outlined in the SWIT.

Many non-governmental organisations have circulated the *Smart Sex Worker’s Guide to SWIT* in their networks. For example, NACOSA circulated the *Smart Sex Worker’s Guide to SWIT* and the full SWIT throughout their network of 18 organisations, including some NSWP members.

## Analysis

**“I really respected the level of commitment and expertise that NSWP brought to reviewing the material.”**

James Bear, *Consultant Editor and Coordinator of the SWIT*

For this case study, NSWP spoke to representatives of most of the stakeholders who participated in the development of the SWIT. All representatives spoke of NSWP highly, and stated NSWP is a very well organised key populations network. NSWP is the only key population network that had a pre-meeting prior to the formal stakeholder consultation to finalise content of the implementation tool. There is an implementation tool written for men who have sex with men entitled *Implementing Comprehensive HIV and STI Programs with Men Who Have Sex With Men: Practical Guidance for Collaborative Interventions (MSMIT)*, which was published in September 2015. Currently, there are implementation tools being finalised for people who inject drugs (IDUIT), and transgender people (TRANSIT) to be published in early 2016.

One representative stated it was hard to get case studies from sex worker-led programmes to include in the SWIT. As a result, the representative stated that the quality of NSWP case studies were not as good as they could have been; however, another representative stated that it has been very difficult for all key population implementation tools to find appropriate case studies exemplifying best practices. Some reasons for a lack of accessibility to case studies include: language barriers, stigmatisation, discrimination, and criminalisation which may prevent the implementation of rights-based programming.

<sup>3</sup> It is unclear whether these participants were current/former sex workers or third parties.



One issue raised throughout the development of the SWIT was that sex workers involved had to speak English fluently; this created barriers for the inclusion of sex workers who did not master the English language.

The SWIT is an advocacy and programming tool that sets out minimum standards in low, middle and high-income countries. NSWP successfully advocated for the inclusion of high-income countries in the SWIT, which might not have happened otherwise. Without the addition of high-income countries, sex worker-led organisations in those countries would not be able to use the SWIT as an advocacy or programming tool as effectively as those in low and middle-income countries. Despite the addition of high-income countries in the SWIT, some NSWP members in high-income countries are not aware of its existence and assert their governments do not take WHO and UN recommendations for rights based programming and legal reform seriously.

## Future of the SWIT

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**“The process for the development of SWIT is the best model. Working with a group of sex workers is a key element in community empowerment. It created a sense of ownership. Now we are asking agencies to translate the SWIT. OPSI did advocacy work with WHO and UNAIDS Indonesia to get the SWIT translated and now we have the translation in Bahasa. We also want the Smart Sex Worker’s Guide to the SWIT translated in our language so we can use it in our communities.”**

*Aldo Napitu, OPSI, NSWP Member*

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Every regional network agreed that training on the SWIT is a priority in the upcoming years. Building the capacity of regional networks is part of NSWP’s mandate; therefore, NSWP as lead agency applied for consortium funding from the Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund to support the global and regional networks in building capacity at regional, national and local levels to advocate for rolling out the SWIT.

NSWP encourages all UN agencies, donors, governmental organisations, and non-governmental organisations to build capacity among programme implementers who work with and for sex workers to adopt and implement the SWIT. However, it is important for sex workers to be meaningfully involved in the process. Agencies developing trainings should reach out to regional and national networks to ensure sex worker-led organisations and sex workers are meaningfully involved in the development of trainings. Working in partnership with the sex worker community is promoted in the SWIT, and will strengthen the trainings.



## Conclusion

**“What we have found so far in terms of participants’ knowledge of the SWIT is that most have heard about or know of it but few have realised what a useful tool it is or how they can make best use of it to improve programming and strengthen their advocacy.”**

*Mick Matthews, NSWP Senior Programme Officer*

The SWIT is integrated at all levels of NSWP advocacy and activities. NSWP uses it frequently, quotes it often, and it forms the basis of many trainings and workshops. All stakeholders praised the process of developing the SWIT. Sex workers were central to the entire process. Unfortunately this is rare. If sex workers are not meaningfully involved in every step, resources and programmes are often useless at best, or harmful at worst.

The SWIT is a powerful tool that can be used for programme design, implementation monitoring and evaluation, and sex workers’ rights activism.

This case study shows that sex workers and sex worker-led organisations can benefit greatly from the SWIT. As stated in the SWIT, “community empowerment is both an intervention in itself, and also essential to effective planning, implementation and monitoring of all aspects of HIV and STI prevention, treatment, and care.” Sex workers worldwide need access to rights-based programming in line with the SWIT. For this to happen, government and non-governmental organisations must recognise that sex workers have the capacity to develop and implement programming, and funding is needed to build the capacity of sex worker-led organisations to use and promote the SWIT.



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