



Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

Global Expert Meeting Report 3-7 September 2017 - Kiev, Ukraine

[Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers: Practical Approaches from Collaborative Interventions](#), also known as the Sex Worker Implementation Tool (SWIT), provides practical guidelines on how to implement rights-based programming thanks to 6 chapters all centred around the principle of Community Empowerment. The SWIT was published in 2013 by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the 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.

The SWIT calls for a community-led approach and identifies sex worker-led organisations as best-placed to develop and implement programmes that respect and uphold the human rights of sex workers. Organisations that are not sex worker-led but provide services to sex workers are encouraged to meaningfully involve sex workers in the development, implementation and monitoring of services and programmes and to build the capacity of the sex workers they work with to form their own organisations.

In line with the principles of the SWIT, sex worker-led organisations are best-placed to evaluate the rollout of this international normative guidance at national, regional and global level.

LINKAGES/UNDP contracted NSWP to develop and pilot a community-led evaluation framework to evaluate the rollout of the SWIT and a framework for assessing meaningful involvement of sex workers in policy development and programming, at local and national levels. Given the meeting was primarily funded through LINKAGES the Global Expert Meeting had to be held in a USAID country; NSWP identified Ukraine as a suitable location that would allow other regions to also participate in the meeting. LINKAGES funding was used to support the participation of sex workers nominated by regional networks in Africa, Asia Pacific and the Caribbean. NSWP identified additional funding from its Bridging the Gaps and Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund grants to enable sex workers nominated by regional networks in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia to also participate in the meeting. The frameworks developed will be piloted in Kenya, Africa; Indonesia, Asia Pacific; and Suriname, Caribbean thanks to LINKAGES funding; and in Ukraine, Central/Eastern Europe and Central Asia through Bridging the Gaps funding. At the time of writing this report, funding was still to be found to pilot the frameworks in Latin America.

NSWP Secretariat organised the five-day Global Experts Meeting, which took place 3 - 7 September 2017, in Kiev, Ukraine. The first two days were dedicated to a sex worker pre-meeting with the final three days bringing together representatives from sex worker-led organisations and other stakeholders from UNAIDS Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA and WHO), the Global Fund, PACT/LINKAGES and the Bridging the Gaps programme. UNAIDS Ukraine, provided essential support to facilitate the issuing of visas to sex worker participants. Unfortunately, even that was not sufficient to overcome the technical difficulties experienced at the Embassy of Ukraine in Senegal which prevented the African Francophone representative from obtaining her visa in time to attend the meeting and the three week delay in the Caribbean representative obtaining her Canadian transit visa which also prevented her from attending the meeting.

The goals of the meeting were to:

- develop the framework for how the community would evaluate the rollout of this important international normative guidance; and
- develop a framework for meaningful involvement of sex workers.

The meeting had no formal agenda or presentations from experts, but NSWP had identified a collaborative process for developing the frameworks, which was entirely community-led. NSWP Global Coordinator and Programme Manager facilitated the plenary sessions, while representative of a regional sex worker-led network facilitated the small group work during the meeting. NSWP Communications Officer acted as Rapporteur.

“The consultation process during the meeting was very productive and benefited greatly from not having a formal agenda”

- Participant from WHO

This report documents the process undertaken to develop the frameworks that would be used to evaluate the rollout of the SWIT and assess meaningful involvement of sex workers in more detail.

“It was a humbling experience to participate in the process of developing an evaluation framework/tool for the international normative guidance for implementing a ‘Comprehensive HIV/STI Programme with Sex Workers: A practical approaches from collaborative interventions’. It was encouraging to see the process being led by the community and also noted the wealth of knowledge amongst the community members on what works/does not work for them when programmes are being developed.”

- Participant from UNDP

The Global Expert Meeting process:

The two-day sex worker pre-meeting focussed on arriving at community consensus on the principles of meaningful involvement of sex workers and determining the stakeholders who should be engaged in the national process and the issues that needed to be explored in evaluating the roll-out of the SWIT at national level.

The three-day multi-stakeholder meeting focussed on reviewing the issues identified during the sex worker pre-meeting using the World Café method to develop and refine the issues and

questions to be answered during the community-led evaluation and identify appropriate indicators for the frameworks. It involved participants moving across four tables, each table was assigned a different stakeholder who should be involved in the roll-out of the SWIT for each participant to have an opportunity to input across the full range a range of issues and stakeholders. Participants spent half a day at each table to allow for in-depth discussion, with each table being led by a representative of a regional sex worker-led network. The final day of the meeting was spent reviewing and refining the questions and indicators with until a short-list of questions was agreed indicators in plenary.

Sex Worker Pre-Meeting

Participants represented the African Sex Workers Alliance - ASWA/Sex Worker Academy, Africa – SWAA (Regional - Kenya); Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers – APNSW (Regional - Thailand) and Organisasi Perubahan Sosial Indonesia - OPSI (Indonesia); Sex Workers' rights Advocacy Network - SWAN (Regional - Hungary), STAR-STAR (Macedonia), Legalife-Ukraine UCO (Ukraine); and Plataforma LatinoAmerica de Personas que EjeRcen el Trabajo Sexual - PLAPERTS (Regional - Ecuador) and Tamaulipas Diversidad Vihda Trans A.C. (Mexico). Non-English speaking participants were able to meaningfully participate thanks to Bahasa, Russian and Spanish interpreters.

Participants discussed the necessity of ensuring the frameworks would be relevant and useable across all regions of the world. For some, this was challenging, because they were experts of their own context but not necessarily aware of the context in other regions.

Participants determined the relevant external stakeholders that would be consulted during the community-led evaluation of the roll-out of the SWIT at local and national levels and the concerns/issues that need to be addressed for each of the stakeholders. Four key external stakeholders were identified:

- Governments;
- UN agencies;
- Global Fund supported programmes for sex workers; and
- International and national NGO's providing services to sex workers within a community-led evaluation of the rollout of the SWIT and the assessment of meaningful involvement of sex workers.

“Evaluating the government and international NGOs working in Latin America is very important.”
- Participant from PLAPERTS

“The government has different plans that impact us. For example their HIV plan. Which are relevant for our community and how do they impact us? Trafficking policies are another example. Sex work and trafficking are not the same. So how does this impact us?”
- Participant from Legalife Ukraine

“In Africa it's important to measure the government. When it comes to key populations, they feel like they own them and their programmes. It's 'their' programme. We need to challenge this mentality. They must be evaluated. Not just national but also local governments that should be evaluated.”

- Participant from ASWA/SWAA

During the discussion, the community identified itself as the primary stakeholder. As part of the evaluation of the roll-out of the SWIT participants felt it was necessary to also find out how the SWIT was being used by the community and the level of knowledge within sex worker-led organisations. The sex worker pre-meeting identified the issues *and* developed questions that would be asked within sex worker-led organisations, because they felt that sex workers are best placed to evaluate the rollout of the SWIT within their own community.

“Looking at the community is very important. If a community member comes out against the SWIT, does it mean there is a gap in knowledge? How do we continue promoting the SWIT and educating people about the SWIT?”

- Participant from ASWA/SWAA

“It is very important to look at the community. We want to ensure that we understand and implement the SWIT in a similar way. The SWIT has been translated into Indonesia language but the quality of the translation is bad. The language is complicated and hard to understand. I finally understood the SWIT when Kay Thi from APNSW explained it to me.”

- Participant from OPSI

The issues the community raised included:

- Lack of meaningful involvement of sex worker-led organisations in the development of programmes.
- Lack of knowledge and understanding of SWIT among sex worker-led organisations.
- Lack of capacity to receive funding, resulting in lack of funding.
- Lack of follow up after trainings (applying learning).
- Lack of access to funding and resources and opportunities to apply learning.
- Promoting community ownership of SWIT.
- Lack of support from UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNDP country offices in promoting SWIT.
- Lack of full access to the SWIT in local languages. *N.B. Some NGO's, including UN agencies, have translated part of the SWIT in various local languages but have not consulted with the community on which parts to translate. For example, it was reported that one UNFPA country office translated only some of the SWIT leaving out the section on Human Rights in the Community Empowerment chapter.*
- Lack of consultation with sex workers when prioritising which elements of SWIT to promote and implement in resource constrained contexts.
- Concept of community differs across regions, and among different actors – sex worker community geographic community, NGOs, governments and UN agencies.
- How to overcome resistance to community-led responses and organising.
- Lack of support from other civil society organisations.
- Shrinking sex worker community voices within shrinking civil society space, which leads to silencing sex worker voices.
- Community leaders employed by NGO, who are conflicted for fear of losing their salary.

“We have to evaluate why the community won't support the SWIT”

- Participant from Legalife Ukraine

The sex worker pre-meeting reviewed existing definitions and determined the community's criteria for the meaningful involvement of sex workers in the design, development, implementation, management, and monitoring and evaluating in programming, policy and legislation. It was very easy for representatives from sex worker-led organisations to reach consensus on this as sex worker-led organisations have been discussing such criteria for many years, and since sex workers are so often excluded from these processes.

"How are they [UN Country Offices] working with community? We can do a lot of work to improve UN response. We need meaningful community participation. We can monitor community involvement in NGOs as well and in their management of programmes."

- Participant from APNSW

The following definition was agreed on criteria for the meaningful involvement of sex workers, during the sex worker pre-meeting. The criteria are drawn from those identified by sex worker-led organisations and networks over a number of years. These criteria will form the basis of the community-led assessment framework to allow sex worker-led organisation to assess the meaningful involvement of sex worker-led organisations and sex workers in the design, development, implementation, management and evaluation of programmes, policies and legislation across the full range of stakeholders:

1. Sex worker-led organisations choose how they are represented and by whom.
2. Sex worker-led organisations choose if and how they engage in any process (law reform, policy development or programming).
3. There is a transparent and accountable process for consultation and decision making that allows time for genuine consultation within sex worker-led organisations in the country. Elements of the transparent and accountable process must include:
 - ↳ Information about processes and timeframes must be made available to all known sex worker-led organisations in a timely manner, including any requirements, criteria and deadlines.
 - ↳ Communications that document the consultation with sex worker-led organisations and across a diversity of sex workers.
 - ↳ Sufficient time to allow for genuine consultation (sex worker-led networks allow a minimum of 1 month for consulting members).
4. In the event that sex worker-led organisations do not have the opportunity to choose how they are represented and by whom, a transparent and accountable mechanism for how 'their community representative' consults with and feedbacks to sex worker-led organisations must be identified and shared with all known sex worker-led organisations.
5. An appropriate process must be agreed prior to the start of any selection process for community representatives, to ensure that the sex worker representative is genuinely endorsed by sex worker-led organisations.
6. Sex worker representatives must represent the consensus position agreed across sex worker-led organisation, and not their personal opinions or own interests.

7. Sex workers are not only beneficiaries of programmes, but are involved at all levels in the programme and partnerships including:
 - Board (legal-decision making)
 - Programme advisory committee
 - Monitoring and Evaluation committee
8. A diversity of sex workers are engaged with representation drawn from:
 - ↵ Female, male, transgender sex workers
 - ↵ Sex workers with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities
 - ↵ Sex workers living with HIV
 - ↵ Sex workers who use drugs
 - ↵ Sex workers with different education levels
 - ↵ Sex workers who are young adults and aging sex workers
 - ↵ Sex workers from various sex work settings
 - ↵ Urban and rural sex workers
 - ↵ Migrant and mobile sex workers, particularly undocumented migrants and refugees
9. Translation and interpretation is provided to sex workers if required during events and activities
10. Sex workers choose to participate or not in the programme or process.

Multi-Stakeholders Meeting

The meeting opened with everyone introducing themselves and where they were from, then NSWP Global Coordinator outlined the process that would be followed over the 3 days of the meeting. Following the meeting, NSWP Secretariat would further refine the questions and indicators for each external stakeholder, ensuring the framework was practical and realistic for communities to implement, in terms of plain English language and length. The final draft would be validated by the sex worker representatives who had attended the Global Expert Meeting prior to it being piloted in-country.

The facilitators from the regional networks at each World Cafe table summarised the work that had been done by the community during the sex worker pre-meeting. This allowed the external stakeholders to be informed about and understand the process undertaken by the community as an opportunity was provided for them to engage and ask clarifying questions.

“The pre-work done by the community was very effective and kick started the questions.”
- Participant from the Bridging the Gaps Sex Work Programme

There were a number of issues that overlapped across all stakeholders that will need to be appropriately explored across all stakeholders, the common issues include:

- Lack of comprehensive knowledge and/or understand of the SWIT.
- Lack of meaningful involvement of sex worker-led organisations.
- Failure to request that sex worker-led organisations nominate their own representatives.
- Lack of recognition of expertise and knowledge within sex worker-led organisations and sex workers (failure to recognise lived experiences of community as contributing essential knowledge in effectively responding to HIV).

It emerged during the discussions on deciding upon indicators that there was not a shared understanding across all stakeholders of the definition of an indicator. An interesting discussion occurred in the small groups on defining indicators that are useable and useful for sex worker-led organisations when evaluating their own and external stakeholders roll-out of the SWIT.

There was great discussion about the importance of the Community Empowerment chapter in the SWIT, it was concluded that Community Empowerment must be incorporated into all services offered to sex workers to be aligned with the SWIT. Community Empowerment is instrumental, in enabling programmes to reach their full impact and ensure the respect, protection and fulfilment of the human rights of sex workers. There was a consensus that Community Empowerment should be the focal point of the evaluation, and the narrative of country-reports (similar to national report cards previously produced by UNFPA) that would be created for participating countries. NSWP was charged with working with the sex worker-led organisations in the pilot countries to develop the template for country reports. Many sex workers felt the Community Empowerment chapter was so important it should be weighed more heavily in the evaluation framework.

Community members advocated strongly in the meeting that sex workers must be seen as experts of equal standing to academics, scientists and health workers. Due to stigma and discrimination, not all sex workers believe they are experts of their own lives and this is something the external partners must work in collaboration with sex worker-led organisations in addressing.

“The rotating group work was a good way to think through tough questions and indicators. It worked very well that we were in smaller and mixed groups. It even felt a bit of an opportunity to sensitise UN staff. Some did not even know the SWIT.”

- Participant from Bridging the Gaps Sex Work Programme

There were also discussions about inconsistencies in the approaches to sex work from within governments, the UN, and other partners. For example, some Departments of Health provide condoms and lubricants to sex workers, while the Department of Justice within the same country allows those condoms and lubricants to be used as evidence of criminal activities by sex workers and third parties. Another inconsistency is in reporting mechanisms, different bi-lateral partners have similar, but slightly different reporting mechanisms for collecting quantitative data, which place a double burden on sex worker-led organisations in collecting and reporting data which often does not capture the broader qualitative impact of Community Empowerment and community-led programming on the lives and health of sex workers. Donors and partners need to ensure they do not unduly burden the community and work collaboratively with the community to demonstrate the full impact of their work.

External stakeholders had to adjust their normal approach and thinking to work with the sex worker community during the World Cafe. Some were very respectful of sex workers voices and experiences, while others presumed to know more about sex work than the sex workers themselves, spoke over sex workers and on occasion expressed unacceptable and stigmatising views on sex work. One example, was during a discussion at the Government table in the World Café when an external stakeholder asserted that only sex workers who were ‘healthy’ should continue working; this opinion was challenged by sex workers in the group who argued that sex workers living with HIV have the same right to work as every other person and the same right to

have sex as every other person living with HIV. It was a learning curve for all, particularly on the first day.

“HIV does not travel on dollar bills. Sex work is no different than other work. The sex workers have is no different than the sex everyone else has. Condoms work.”

- Participant from KESWA

The use of biometrics also came up in the discussions, as many implementers seem to be moving towards the use of biometrics to track service users, as well as hotspot mapping. The use of biometrics to track individuals is considered unsafe by sex worker activists for a number of reasons. Sex work is criminalised and sex workers fear being identified if the biometric data is breached by or shared with government. Sex workers face severe legal repercussions if they are identified in many countries. Sex workers fear invasion of their privacy and potential exclusion from services if access to services is contingent upon providing identifying information, including biometrics, legal identity documents or passports. For example, when service users are asked for identifying information to ensure services are not provided to illegal or migrant workers. Such measures pose significant barriers to migrant sex workers accessing essential healthcare and other services.

In addition to the shared learning between sex workers and external stakeholders, there was substantial South-South learning as sex workers learned about the realities of other regions, and had an opportunity to share experiences and knowledge, which strengthened the capacity of the sex worker community to construct globally relevant questions and indicators for the community-led evaluation of the rollout of the SWIT.

Throughout the meeting external stakeholders encouraged sex workers to continue engaging with the UN and governments despite multiple failed attempts in the past. The UNAIDS representative explained to participants that UNAIDS has a mandate to convene and facilitate connections between sex workers and government. A number of sex workers reiterated the challenges and dangers for members of a criminalised community to meet with government representatives in some countries, even if the UN is responsible for the convening. In addition to the serious safety issues, not all sex workers are equipped to deal with the discrimination and blatant animosity they often face in such meetings when they are a small minority. Such work is exhausting and has resulted in burn out of many community members; ‘not giving up’ is emotionally and physically taxing for under-resourced sex worker-led organisations and community members.

“Positive highlights and achievements include, diverse participation at the consultation, representatives of all stakeholder, regional spread of participants and an inclusive atmosphere and participating mode of working.”

- Participant from UNAIDS

In addition, a reception was held one evening bringing together Ukrainian key population representatives, people living with HIV, service providers, and other key stakeholders to share experiences and knowledge.

Consensus Building

The final day of the multi-stakeholder meeting was held in plenary and facilitated by the NSWP Programme Manager. It involved working together to review the questions and indicators developed at each table and through discussion come to a consensus on which questions and indicators should be included in the framework. There was a discussion about how the information gathered would be used and what would be useful to advocate for rights-based programming for sex workers, which greatly facilitated the consensus building process. At this point, it was important to remind participants that the goal was not to evaluate SWIT programming, but to evaluate the rollout of the SWIT itself and assess meaningful involvement of sex workers. Despite all participants' best efforts to reduce the number of questions and indicators there remained 22 pages of questions and indicators, It was agreed that NSWP Secretariat would work with regional networks to refine and prioritise the remaining questions and indicators to achieve more realistic and useable frameworks.

Conclusion

"I was pleasantly surprised to see representatives from so many different countries, as well as our partner UN agencies. This clearly shows that the initiative you are taking is important."

- Participant from UNFPA

The 2-day sex worker pre-meeting was instrumental in identifying the issues faced by sex worker-led organisations and the sex worker community in rolling out of the SWIT. It was a great opportunity for sex workers from the different regions to learn about one another's issues and identify what they wanted to examine in-depth, and why it was important to do so. It further enabled the sex worker participants to have a global as well as their own national or regional perspective when developing the evaluation framework.

The remaining 3-day multi-stakeholder meeting while challenging at times, was very worthwhile. The continuous process of collaboration enabled the meeting to develop concise questions and indicators that will ensure a robust community-led evaluation of the roll-out of the SWIT.

NSWP will work with regional networks in finalising the questions and indicators for each stakeholder, develop a report card template for countries to disseminate the results of their evaluation of the roll-out of the SWIT and assessment of meaningful involvement of sex workers, as well as providing technical support in piloting the frameworks in the first half of 2018.

This process demonstrated the benefits and importance of meaningful involvement of sex worker-led organisations in developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks; not only should sex workers be included in the development, implementation and management of sex work programmes, but they should be included in the monitoring and evaluation of programmes to ensure they are aligned with the SWIT. Additionally, this community-led meeting provided a rich opportunity for sex workers and other stakeholders to work together as equals, to learn from one another and reflect on their current practices. Within this setting sex workers acted as technical support providers and their expertise was clear and recognised.