

Final findings

Economic empowerment and sex work

The research project 'Creating opportunities? Economic empowerment, political positioning and participation of sex workers in Kenya and Ethiopia' looks at how sex workers in Kenya and Ethiopia can be supported by strategic actors to be economically empowered and how to make developments in the sector more inclusive. The following are the final key findings and policy messages.

Final findings

- The stigmatization of sex workers in Kenya and Ethiopia has a great impact on their identity and opportunities, impeding their chances for economic empowerment, with different outcomes for different groups (i.e. male and female sex workers).
- Different legal frameworks govern sex work in different ways and can enable policing practices that infringe on sex workers' rights, which are a precondition for empowerment. In Kenya, for example the possession of condoms (which are important to combat HIV/AIDS) is taken as a sign of 'prostitution' and used by the police as an excuse to ask for bribes and sexual services. This illustrates the gap between policies/laws and the way they work in practice.
- Basing economic empowerment programmes and projects on 'money logics' can help counter the unintentional inequalities produced by such programmes. Money logics emphasize that saving, spending and earning are contextual activities embedded relationally in communities and societies and reflect notions of masculinity and femininity.
- Some policies that are meant to protect human rights lead to adverse outcomes; for example, special attention to 'vulnerable groups' can lead to their increased visibility in society, triggering reactionary responses (e.g. homophobic or anti-sex work responses).
- The specific needs of community-based organizations (CBOs), related to their often sensitive position in poor communities, need to be taken into account in interventions by the government or NGOs and studied further. CBOs handle a multitude of demands and expectations from communities, while at the same time being expected to engage in timely and complicated bureaucratic processes, without the resources to meet such demands.
- Strategic actors (officials, justice system agents, NGOs and sex workers' organizations) agree that more horizontal partnerships are crucial for combating HIV/AIDS, experienced violence and other risks. However, all of these actors report experiencing great obstacles in developing effective collaborations. This is partly due to the different understandings of what each actor brings to the policy table. For instance, there is a huge bias against the qualitative and experience-based knowledge of sex worker-led organizations.
- Morality politics manifest differently in Kenya and Ethiopia. This affects the potential of sex workers to organize, the political positioning of sex workers, and how individual sex workers see themselves (i.e. self-stigmatization). This ultimately has a negative impact on their individual economic empowerment.

Policy messages

- **First understand the 'money logics' of the groups involved:** To improve economic empowerment initiatives (e.g. micro-financing and financial literacy programmes), it is necessary to understand the 'money logics' of the groups targeted. This requires community-based, non-bureaucratic and qualitative investigation of monetary practices.

- **Tailor economic empowerment interventions to particular situations:** Economic empowerment cannot be achieved in a top-down manner, and 'a one-size fits all' approach will not suit every set of circumstances. Tailor-made measures should be implemented to develop a more nuanced, sensitive and inclusive approach to economic empowerment. Economic empowerment projects need to adopt a long-term vision, as the majority are currently implemented in the short term.
- **Include sex workers' organizations in policy dialogues:** policy interventions will be more successful when sex worker-led organizations are included in dialogue as equal partners in the process.

Knowledge products

- INCLUDE (2016) Decriminalisation of sex work in Kenya, Policy Brief, <http://includeplatform.net/downloads/policy-brief-decriminalisation-sex-work-kenya/>
- Nencel, L, Sabelis, I, Van Stapele, N, Markos, B & Tadele, G (2017) Creating enabling economic opportunities for sex workers in Ethiopia, Policy Brief (printed version available since 14 February 2017).
- Proposals: Three proposals for consortium partners in Kenya for an economic empowerment programme based on money logic that will reach in total approximately 400 sex workers.
- Presentation of mid-term findings of the research project: 'Creating opportunities? Economic empowerment, political positioning and participation of sex workers in Kenya and Ethiopia', at Kenyan stakeholder meeting, Nairobi, February 2016.
- Van Stapele, N, Tadele, G, Sabelis, I, Markos, B, Kageha, E & Nencel, L (2015) Between tensions and opportunities: strengthening partnerships among civil society and sex worker-led organizations in Kenya and Ethiopia. Presentation at ICASA conference, Zimbabwe, 29 November–4 December 2015.
- Survey: A survey on the ways in which the qualitative findings are more generalizable is being developed with sex workers (and will be conducted by trained sex workers) in both country contexts as part of the PhD of Sally Hendrix and for further publications in international journals.
- Participatory workshop: 'Sharing stories through telling photos', August 2016 (this workshop led to an exhibition in Kenya and Ethiopia in February 2017).
- Exhibition: 'Telling photos. The lived realities of key populations in Nairobi and Mombasa', at Nairobi National Theatre, 17–21 February 2017.
- Participation and leadership in international conferences: 'Gender, Work and Organization' (Keele, June 2016), American Anthropology Association (USA, November 2016), African Studies Association (USA, December 2016).
- Special issue on sex work and money logics for Focaal, Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology, Berghahn Publishers (in progress, end of 2017).
- Book series, Dislocations, L Nencel, I Sabelis, N Van Stapele (eds) Oxford & New York: Berghahn Publishers (in progress, 2017).

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