



Introduction

Sisters with a Voice Programme

Zimbabwe has one of the most severe and sustained HIV epidemics in sub-Saharan Africa, and as is the case in many settings, female sex workers bear the brunt of the HIV epidemic. Recognised globally as a “key population” in the HIV pandemic, female sex workers are vulnerable to numerous poor health conditions not only due to their involvement in selling sex, but also for social reasons including their criminalisation and the stigma and discrimination they face from society, including when they try to access health services.

Recognising female sex workers’ vulnerability and the broader role that sex work plays in driving the country’s HIV epidemic, NAC and MoHCC supported the establishment of the *Sisters with a Voice* programme in 2009. Initially serving 5 sites through a static site in Harare and outreach sites on the Harare Nyamapanda highway, the programme expanded to 36 sites by 2013 (six static and 30 outreach sites). The clinics offer a “sex worker friendly” environment, with all staff having been trained in maintaining supportive and non-judgmental attitudes so that sex workers feel comfortable openly discussing their sex work and resulting health problems. Clinical services include primary care, contraception, and condom provision, STI screening and treatment, voluntary counselling and testing for HIV (including on-site self-testing procedures), and referrals for antiretroviral therapy (ART). By the end of 2017, the *Sisters with a Voice* programme had seen over 60,000 female sex workers and this number continues to grow.

In each site, the programme is supported by sex worker peer educators who conduct outreach, organise community mobilization activities, and link women to services. Community empowerment interventions that build social cohesion among sex workers have been shown to reduce risk of HIV infection, other sexually transmitted infections and increase reported condom use in a number of settings and sex workers’ who feel supported by their peers are more likely to use prevention and treatment services, negotiate condoms with clients, and advocate for better treatment from the local community, clients, and the police. In view of this global evidence, the *Sisters with a Voice* programme has integrated provision of healthcare with facilitation of community-based activities for sex workers that aim to create a sense of community identity and collective action.

Over time, *Sisters with a Voice* has evolved, and new components added. For example, peer education has been considerably expanded since the inception of the programme. As new peer educators were recruited and trained, a collection of participatory activities was developed and standardised through production of a peer education manual. Following this, additional activities and tools were designed to support specific new developments such as Adherence Sisters (a “buddy” system for ART and PrEP adherence), workshops for adolescent and young sex workers aged 15-24, establishment of Self Help Groups to increase mutual assistance among sex workers, and micro-planning, which intensifies the role of peer educators in identifying and responding to high risk among their case load. The *Sisters with a Voice* programme has also reached out to health care workers in general public sector clinics to introduce “sex workers friendly” concepts to them and provide an opportunity for nurses to “shadow” providers in targeted Sisters clinics.

With each new programme component, training materials accompanied the new tools, manuals, and protocols. The aim of this Training Package is to bring together all the different materials used for training and implementation of *Sisters with a Voice*.

Training Package

This training package includes all the materials that have been used throughout the *Sisters with a Voice* programme to introduce new programme components. The package has been compiled so that

it can be made widely available both within Zimbabwe and beyond, providing a resource for programmes targeting female sex workers. Although the training and implementation materials make specific reference to *Sisters with a Voice* and the Zimbabwean context, many of the activities should be easily adaptable to other programmes and settings.

An important underlying principle guiding this training package is that female sex workers are active agents who can shape their own lives and make their own choices, even if they are also vulnerable due to circumstances beyond their control. Training activities are designed to encourage active participation and critical thinking among participants, whether they are peer educators, sex worker leaders, programme staff or health care workers. Training provides the first opportunity to build trust, develop positive relationships, and increase cooperation between sex workers and programme implementors or health care providers.

Content and Format of the Training Package

This package includes 5 sections in total, with each section including a basic overview, a training guide (with sample agenda and practical exercises), powerpoint presentations, and any tools or manuals used in implementation of each specific programme component. The order of the sections roughly follows the chronological development of the *Sisters with a Voice* programme, with peer education materials provided first, followed by resources for working with young sex workers, setting up self-help groups and introducing microplanning as an approach to peer educators' case management. The final section addresses sensitisation of health care providers, and there is also a stand-alone manual on the legal rights of sex workers that was developed for the programme by Zimbabwean Lawyers for Human Rights.

The training package does not need to be followed in order – it brings together all relevant *Sisters with a Voice* materials from which new programmes can “pick and choose” as required. It is designed to be flexible, so facilitators can adapt it to meet local needs.

Section 1: Peer Education is the largest and most substantive section, as peer education is at the crux of the *Sisters with a Voice* programme. Materials for a 1-week training course for new peer educators are provided, alongside the peer educators' facilitation manual, and additional activities on adherence to ART and PrEP, including specific training for pairs of “adherence sisters” who support each other in their engagement with care.

Section 2: Working with Young Sex Workers provides specific activities for addressing younger women's needs, particularly those of adolescents (15-19) who may not yet self-identify as sex workers and/or have child protection needs. A specifically designed Activity Pack for facilitating workshops with young women who sell sex is included in this section.

Section 3: Setting up Self Help Groups further builds sex workers' skills and confidence, both as individuals and as supportive peers. Specially designated Empowerment Workers are trained to bring 10-20 women together into supportive groups that meet regularly to identify and act on their shared concerns and priorities. This section includes specific guidelines for Empowerment Workers to use for their first 10 meetings.

Section 4: Microplanning introduces a set of procedures and tools for peer educators to use to help them systematically assess the level of vulnerability and risk of the sex workers in their case load. The training guide introduces the routine data collection forms, and how they should be used to collect real-time information about the changing needs of local sex workers in a given “hot spot”, and regularly discussed and analysed with supervising Outreach Workers.

Section 5: Sensitising health care workers is useful for working with providers who work in general population clinical settings, and thus may not be familiar with the specific needs of female sex workers (and, in fact, may hold stigmatising attitudes and inadvertently discriminate against them). In addition to training materials, this section includes a sample Action Plan template for newly trained health care workers to use to identify how they will integrate “sex worker friendly” approaches in their institutions.

Finally, the “Sex work and the Law” manual is provided as an additional resource to help train sex workers, peer educators, or programme staff about sex workers’ legal and human rights. This was developed specifically for the legal context in Zimbabwe, and thus may need to be significantly adapted in other countries.