

Donor Dialogue: Donor Collaboration to Advance the Human Rights of Sex Workers

11-12 November 2009 | Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Co-organized by Mama Cash and the Open Society Institute's Sexual Health and Rights Project (SHARP), in collaboration with AIDS Fonds, American Jewish World Service, Global Fund for Women, HIVOS, and the Oak Foundation

Meeting Summary and Outcomes

Around the world, sex workers face violations of their human rights, often in the forms of violence, exploitation, and lack of access to justice, social welfare and other services. These violations often result from the very laws, policies and practices of governments that are responsible for protecting these rights. Public policies and laws relating to sex work are often based on the assumption that sex workers are coerced or incapable of making their own decisions, resulting in initiatives that fail to involve sex workers and ignore their real needs and rights. In response, the meeting Donor Dialogue: Donor Collaboration to Advance the Human Rights of Sex Workers brought together sex worker activists and donors with backgrounds in human rights, women's rights, global health and social justice to strategize on the establishment of a formal donor collaboration mechanism to advance the rights of sex workers. A background report was commissioned to examine the current context of sex work and human rights, the range of organizations currently working to advance sex worker rights, and the expectations of the involved donors for the proposed collaboration.

The meeting aimed to:

- Define issues and areas where donor attention and collaboration are needed; and
- Define parameters, specifics, and next steps for collaboration(s) among donors.

The meeting began with two introductory panel sessions, one with sex worker activists and the other with donors, to share perspectives on advancing sex worker rights. Based on these discussions, the remainder of the meeting focused on determining key priorities and opportunities for donor collaboration, and establishing concrete next steps.

Based on feedback from the introduction sessions, three key priority areas were identified:

- Strengthening the sex worker movement;
- Building linkages with other movements; and
- Donor leadership.

Four key tools were identified to advance the priority areas:

- Information sharing and messaging;
- Convening;
- Grant making; and
- Technical assistance for capacity building and leadership development.

Participants agreed to meet again in a year to continue discussions on a formal donor collaboration mechanism to advance the human rights of sex workers.

Introductory Session: Advocate Perspectives

Objective: to gain perspective from sex worker activists on how to further sex worker rights.

Panelists:

- Ruth Morgan-Thomas, chair member of the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe and board member of the Global Network of Sex Work Projects
- Selvi Fatima Abdullah, Pink Triangle Foundation and board member of the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers
- Matt Greenall, consultant and author of background briefing note
- Moderator: Shalini Nataraj, Vice President of Programs, Global Fund for Women

Summary: The panelists provided a brief overview of their backgrounds, sharing their past experiences and challenges as activists advocating for sex worker rights. The panelists then discussed the needs of the sex worker rights movement.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT: Sex worker organizations are in need of greater financial support, particularly to fund advocacy, organizational capacity building, and activist leadership development. These organizations are often provided limited funding targeted at very specific activities around HIV programming or economic empowerment, leaving them with very little flexibility to determine their own programs and activities. For example, the total level of annual core funding to the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) is \$30,000 – all other funding is tied to specific projects. With general support, sex worker organizations could develop organizational infrastructure, build internal knowledge on human and legal rights, develop communications skills, and fund under-resourced services, such as sexual and reproductive health services. More support is also needed to build leadership within the sex worker rights movement, and to empower more sex workers to engage in advocacy. This funding could be invested in activities like English language training or participation at international conferences.

NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT: The activists highlighted three areas in which non-financial support is greatly needed, the first being opportunities for sex workers to voice their issues. Sex workers are occasionally invited to meetings to present their organizations' HIV and economic empowerment programs; however, they are rarely given opportunities to meet among themselves, to voice their opinions on issues concerning them, and to organize. Secondly, the activists highlighted the need for donors to consult more widely with sex worker communities in the development and implementation of funding strategies. Donors often make ideological decisions regarding what they are going to support, without taking into consideration the impact of their decisions. Thirdly, the activists highlighted the need for donor activism targeting other donors and movements. Donors can more readily access and influence other donors and movements than sex worker activists and organizations, and thus are uniquely positioned to engage these communities. Target movements include women's rights, HIV/AIDS, LGBT rights, human rights, and labor rights.

Introductory Session: Donor Perspectives

Objective: to gain perspective from donors on their role in advancing sex worker rights.

Panelists:

- Moderator: Irene Keizer, Program Manager, Policy and Subsidies, AIDS Fonds
- Annie Hillar, Director of Programs, Mama Cash, spoke of Mama Cash's strong commitment to sex worker rights. Mama Cash is the oldest international women's fund, and has always been forward-thinking in their funding priorities. They face tension with some their donors and women's rights partners on this issue.
- Anne Gathumbi, Program Director, Open Society Initiative for East Africa, spoke of OSIEA's partnership with the Open Society Institute's Sexual Health and Rights Project (SHARP) to advance the health and rights of sex workers in East Africa. OSIEA works in a challenging environment, where sex work is criminalized and governments are unfriendly to the concept of sex worker rights.
- Adriana Ermoli, Senior Program Officer, American Jewish World Service, spoke of AJWS's six year history of funding sex work-related projects, which began in India through trafficking and HIV work. Through dialogue with sex workers, AJWS began to realize the flaws in its approach and the harm done by "raid and rescue" oriented organizations. AJWS has shifted its perspective to focus on the human rights of sex workers.

Summary: The panelists provided a brief overview of their backgrounds, sharing their past experiences and challenges as donors advocating for sex worker rights. The panelists then discussed their perceptions of the state of the sex worker rights movement and the role of donors in advancing sex worker rights. Much of the discussion echoed and deepened sentiments expressed during the activist panel session.

CAPACITY BUILDING: Donors should invest in the institutional strengthening of sex worker organizations, identifying appropriate forms of technical assistance such as peer-to-peer learning. Knowledge can be shared by connecting sex worker organizations at differing levels of development; this will also allow expertise to be shared across different regions. More experienced organizations and donors should also aid nascent grassroots organizations in identifying their capacity building needs and becoming familiar with requests for core funding. There are groups of sex workers who are already organized informally and are providing support to each other – these groups can be engaged and supported to organize more formally and to do advocacy work.

CREATING SPACE FOR DIALOGUE AMONG SEX WORKERS: Participants reiterated the need to support sex worker organizing. Donors can create space and provide forums for dialogue among sex workers.

DONOR COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE: There is a need to leverage donors' comparative advantage in accessing other movements and donors. These ally building activities should be undertaken strategically, presenting the issues to donors in a way that connects to their current portfolios. Donors can also develop their own advocacy materials and messaging tools, to counter opposition such as the abolitionist approach to sex work.

DONOR-GRANTEE RELATIONSHIPS: Donors should be conscientious of the power relations between donors and grantees, and find space to openly discuss shared interests. Donors should be transparent about what they are looking for and their own organizational limitations.

Priority Area 1: Strengthening the sex worker movement

Vision: strong organizations and networks working effectively to advance the human rights of sex workers

Objectives:

1. To build the institutional capacity of sex worker organizations, ranging from community-based groups to regional and international networks
2. To support sex worker activists and leaders by building their confidence, knowledge of human and legal rights, and advocacy and language skills

Summary: There was agreement that the donor collaboration would work to strengthen the sex worker movement. There was discussion on whether support should take the form of pooled or unpooled funding. While pooled funding can incur more costs and be more cumbersome, it was determined that the benefits outweigh the costs. The potential benefits include: improving the quality of grant making, making a statement on donor support for sex workers, adding to the legitimacy of this issue, attracting more resources, covering more geographies and thematic priorities, and accommodating donors who lack the ability to give smaller grants. The criteria for this collaboration include efficiency, transparency, pragmatism, and flexibility. One key concern that was raised was the security of activists. Support given to strengthen the sex worker movement should include a security component, and donors can learn lessons on how to incorporate this feature from the experiences of human rights defenders and the women's rights movement.

Tools:

1. Grantmaking: providing core support to sex worker organizations at all levels that would include components of capacity building and peer-to-peer exchanges
2. Leadership development: providing support to sex worker activists who will be the voice of the movement
3. Spaces and forums: providing opportunities for expression and exposure, such as participation in international conferences
4. Technical assistance: providing trainings to support skills building and institutional strengthening

Next Steps: It was agreed that the next step for donor collaboration on strengthening the sex worker movement will be to conduct a global mapping, or "scan", that will have the following sections:

1. A quantitative and qualitative assessment of potential grantees and their needs, which would include a collection of grants lists from participating donors;
2. A list of intermediaries who can provide different forms of technical assistance; and
3. An overview of options for funding mechanisms, which would include criteria for funding, an evaluation of the comparative advantages of donors, a review process, and a timeframe for the launch of the collaboration

Heather Doyle, OSI, and Annie Hillar, Mama Cash, will take the lead on hiring two consultants, in collaboration with a working group including Adriana Ermoli, American Jewish World Service, Irene Keizer, Aids Fonds, and Pontso Mafethe, Comic Relief. The first consultant will cover the first two sections, and the second consultant will cover the third section. They will aim to conduct activities according to the following timeline:

- January–February 2010: draft two scopes of work for the consultants to be reviewed by the donor group
- March 2010 – April 2010: identify a first consultant to research and write the first two sections
- May 2010 – July 2010: first consultant to conduct the work
- August 2010: identify a second consultant to research and write the third section
- September 2010 – November 2010: second consultant to conduct the work
- December 2010: meeting of interested donors to discuss the content of the scan

In the interim period, the following information mechanisms will be set up:

1. OSI will take the lead in creating a listserv specifically for co-funding requests for grants.
2. OSI will collect donors' grants lists and circulate a compiled version bi-annually.
3. Aids Fonds will create a document with profiles of each donor, including funding criteria and current opportunities offered to sex workers.

Priority Area 2: Building linkages with other movements

Vision: sex worker rights integrated into the agendas and work of allied movements

Objectives:

1. To identify openings with other movements and key potential allies
2. To develop targeted messages to highlight the rationale for support from other movements
3. To build collaborations with other movements to advance sex worker rights

Summary: Building linkages between the sex worker rights movement and other related movements would strengthen the credibility of and support for the sex worker rights movement. As donors have access to organizations and leaders in allied movements, they can play a special role in building these linkages. The following related movements were discussed: women's rights, anti-trafficking, migration, LGBT, human rights, labor, youth and HIV/AIDS. After surveying the strengths of the donor group and past experiences by the sex worker activists, it was decided that the women's rights movement presents the most strategic opening. The aim is for inclusion of the sex worker rights agenda within the women's rights movement agenda, and for the recognition of sex worker rights activists as women's rights activists. AWID was identified as a key venue to network with members of the women's rights movement.

Tools:

1. Convening: using the convening power of donors to bring sex worker activists to the table with key potential allies from the women's rights movement
2. Messaging: developing messages that are specific to the women's rights movement, which connect sex worker rights with feminism. The messages can be in paper and/or video form.

Next Steps: Annie Hillar, Mama Cash, is to take the lead in developing a concept paper on a strategy to build linkages between the women's rights and sex worker rights movements. The order of activities will be:

1. Meeting with NSWP to discuss their opinion on this work;
2. Hiring a consultant to develop this concept paper, of which a draft version will be shared with the larger donor group; and
3. Using the AWID conference to build alliances.

Priority Area 3: Donor leadership

Vision: a donor collaboration that takes leadership in advocating for sex worker rights in contexts where this is appropriate

Objectives:

1. To promote donor leadership in sex worker rights advocacy, particularly with other donors, in cases where donors have access and sex worker activists do not
2. To undertake internal advocacy to promote institutional policies that advance sex worker rights

Summary: Donor leadership was identified as a key priority area for this group of donors, as donors have different levels of access and power bases than sex worker activists. Particularly within their own institutions and with other donors, donors have a comparative advantage over sex worker activists in being able to initially present an argument for supporting sex worker rights. The importance of messaging was emphasized - messaging tools need to be developed for target audiences (e.g. boards of directors, individual donors, private and public foundations, and bilateral donors), and there may be a need for regional specificity. While donors can create the space and opportunity for donor advocacy, it is essential that sex worker activists are part of the discussion. It was highlighted that donors should be strategic and avoid duplication in their outreach work.

Tools:

1. Messaging: developing messages targeting boards of directors, other donors, and staff to advance a case for sex worker rights. The messages should have a clear "why now" component, including reasons related to the economic crisis.
2. Toolkits and information sharing: sharing existing internal advocacy tools for donors to be able to make a case for sex worker rights within their own institutions. A preliminary list of materials includes: NSWP's funding guidelines, AJWS's internal advocacy documents, and the background paper commissioned for this meeting.

Next Steps:

1. Heather Doyle, OSI, and Adriana Ermoli, AJWS, will take the lead in developing guiding principles for donor leadership to advance sex worker rights. A draft of these principles will be circulated by email, and a conference call will be set up to discuss the draft. Sex worker activists will be asked to provide their input in the development of these principles.
2. Daniel Lee, Levi Strauss Foundation, will take the lead in developing messaging tools on how sex worker rights fits into various funding aims and portfolios. A communications consultant will be hired who can take the existing information in the field and articulate a convincing message to present to other donors and potential allies.
3. In the interim period, donors will make an effort to reach out to their own contacts. For example, Johanna Spreeuwenberg, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague, will follow up with other bilateral donors to make a case for sex worker rights (e.g. Denmark, Norway, and Germany). Comic Relief will share a list of donors in Africa to advance regional efforts there.
4. Donors will individually assess what institutional buy-in is needed to commit to a more formal donor collaboration mechanism in the following year, and what resources they will be able to commit in 2011 and beyond.

Conclusion

In closing sessions, sex worker activists expressed:

- Hope in their future relationship with donors;
- Hope for continued collaboration;
- Hope for continued opportunities where donors and activists talk together on the same level;
- A desire for donors to overcome their internal institutional barriers to funding sex worker rights; and
- A desire for sex worker rights to be realized, and for sex workers to no longer be portrayed as victims.

In closing sessions, donors expressed:

- A desire for unrestricted funds from individual donors to be able to support sex worker rights;
- A desire for donors to be better listeners and partners with sex workers;
- A desire to reach the hearts and minds of key potential allies for the sex worker rights movement;
- Hope for continued collaboration among donors in partnership with activists;
- Satisfaction with the nuanced conversations and learning opportunities presented in the meeting; and
- Hope in the number of donors interested in this issue.

In five years, donors would like to see:

- Strong regional and global organizations run and led by sex workers with diversified funding plans;
- The growth of local and national sex worker organizations;
- More resources allocated efficiently to sex worker rights;
- Creative and efficient approaches to rights-based funding for highly marginalized groups;
- Greater focused attention to advocacy efforts, and the development of strong counterarguments to the opposition;
- A broad-reaching collaboration with added value, for which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts; and
- An expansion in the list of donors funding sex worker rights.

Meeting Evaluation Form

According to the feedback from the meeting evaluation form, the meeting was given an overall average rating of 4.4 out of 5, with consensus that expectations had been met. Met expectations included:

- “Each of the deliverables that we have committed to developing in the upcoming year are things that I was hoping would be discussed/developed”;
- “Knowledge of interests of the donors and willingness to collaborate”;
- “Able to interact with organizations that have funded sex work for some time and share info”;
- “A concrete action plan and real hope that the collaboration will get off the ground”; and
- “I had the expectation that we could also end with some concrete joint grant making initiative, but I am very happy with the tasks we decided to take on.”

Some suggestions for improvement included:

- Having more sex worker activists present with more diverse representation;
- Having more donors at the table, particularly bilateral donors;
- Discussing more issues from a regional perspective;
- Further discussions on general comfort levels of all the donors in the room; and
- Further discussions with sex worker activists and greater attention to specific needs on the ground.

Appendix 1: Meeting Agenda

Donor Collaboration to Advance the Human Rights of Sex Workers

11-12 November 2009 | Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Eden Rembrandt Square Hotel | Amstelstraat 144NL | 1017 DA Amsterdam

Tel: +31 (0) 20 890 4747

Co-organized by Mama Cash and the Open Society Institute's Sexual Health and Rights Project (SHARP)
in collaboration with AIDS Fonds, American Jewish World Service, Global Fund for Women, HIVOS, and the Oak Foundation

Day 1: Wednesday, 11 November 2009

- 8:30-9:00 Registration by the Amsterdam room
- 9:00-9:30 Welcome, introductions, and review of agenda
- 9:30-10:45 Advocate perspectives: what is needed to advance sex worker rights?
Discussants:
Ruth Morgan-Thomas, Chair Member of the International Committee of International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe and board member of the Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Fatima Abdullah, Pink Triangle Foundation and board member of the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers
Matt Greenall, Consultant and author of background briefing note
Moderator: Shalini Nataraj, Vice President of Programs, Global Fund for Women
- 10:45-11:15 Break
- 11:15-12:30 Donor perspectives: what is needed to advance sex worker rights?
Discussants:
Annie Hillar, Director of Programs, Mama Cash
Anne Gathumbi, Program Director, OSI East Africa
Adriana Ermoli, Senior Program Officer, American Jewish World Service
Moderator: Irene Keizer, Program Manager, Policy and Subsidies, AIDS Fonds
- 12:30-13:30 Lunch
- 13:30-13:45 Recap of themes from the morning
- 13:45-15:00 Group discussions: Opportunities and priorities for funding
- 15:00-15:30 Break
- 15:30-16:15 Deepening and sharpening the discussion
- 16:15-16:45 Summary observations
- 16:45-17:00 Closing
- 18:00-19:30 Prostitution Information Center (PIC) Red Light District Tour
Those interested should meet at the hotel lobby at 18:00; the site is a 10 minute walk from the hotel.
- 20:00-22:30 Dinner at the Boat Lovers
Those attending the tour will go directly to the dinner; the others should meet at the hotel lobby at 19:15.

12 November - Thursday

- 9:00-9:30 Recap from yesterday and overview of day's objectives and expectations
- 9:30-10:30 Defining parameters for collaboration
Building from the first day's discussion:
What common priority areas and actions are people interested in supporting together?
Given financial constraints and commitments, what resources might be available for collaboration?
- 10:30-11:00 Break
- 11:00-12:30 Defining specifics of collaboration
In plenary or in working groups, participants to discuss specifics, such as:
- specific priorities
 - target (and minimum) threshold of investment
 - timing (i.e. time-bound or open-ended) and goals
 - possible mechanism
 - possible next-step process
- 12:30-13:30 Lunch
- 13:30-15:30 Plenary discussion of collaboration mechanism
To be structured according to the needs of the group
- 15:30-16:15 Next steps

Appendix 2: Participant List

Donor Dialogue: Donor Collaboration on Sex Worker Rights
Mama Cash and the Sexual Health and Rights Project (SHARP) of the Open Society Institute (OSI)

Amsterdam, the Netherlands | November 11 – 12, 2009

Adriana Ermoli
Senior Program Officer
American Jewish World Service

Aliya Rakhmetova
SWAN Project Coordinator
Hungarian Civil Liberties Union

Anne Criquillion
Executive Director
Central American Women's Connection

Anne Gathumbi
Program Manager, Health and Rights
Open Society Initiative for East Africa

Annie Hillar
Director of Programmes
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Daniel Lee
Executive Director
Levi Strauss Foundation

Debbie Walmsley
Programme Manager, Young People
Comic Relief

Ewa Szepietowska
Conference Coordinator
Mama Cash

Fatimah Abdullah (Selvi)
Board Member
Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers

Gabriela Leite
Executive Director
Davida

Heather Doyle
Director, Sexual Health and Rights Project
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Ireen Dubel
Programme Manager Gender, Women and Development
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Irene Keizer
Program Manager, Policy and Subsidies
Aids Fonds

Jessica B Nkuuhe
Urgent Action Fund

Johanna Spreeuwenberg
Senior Health and HIV/AIDS Advisor
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague

Jurgita Poskeviciute
Logistical Organizer
The I Can Live Coalition

Macklean Mary Kyomya
Director
Women's Organization Network for Human Rights
Advocacy (WONETHA)

Matthew Greenall
Consultant

Monique Middelhoff
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague

Nicky McIntyre
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Pontso Mafethe
Programme Manager, Women and Girls
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Rebekah Chang
Administrative Assistant, Sexual Health and Rights Project
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Ruth Morgan Thomas
Chair/ European Board Member
International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in
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Sam Avrett
Consultant

Shalini Nataraj
Vice President of Programs
Global Fund for Women

Shari Turitz
Director of Programs, Public Health Program
Open Society Institute

Ton Coenen
Director
Aids Fonds

Vicci Tallis
Programme Manager
Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa