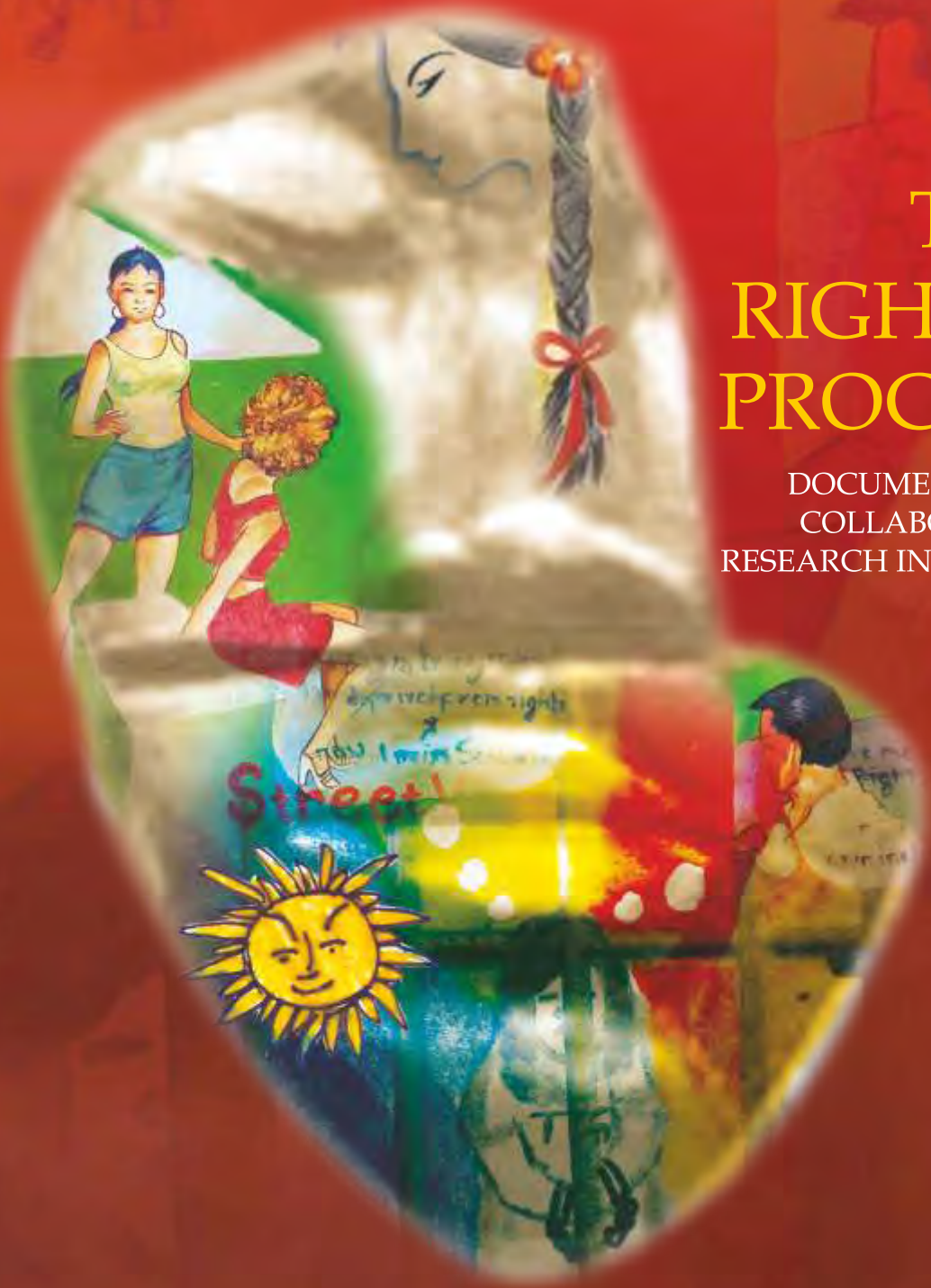

THE RIGHT(S) PROCESS

DOCUMENTING A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH INITIATIVE

UNDP
UNFPA
ASIA • PACIFIC NETWORK OF SEX WORKERS

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Photographs : The photographs used in this document were taken by the author during the interview process. Consent to be photographed and for use of the photos in this document was obtained from all participants.

THE RIGHT(S) PROCESS

DOCUMENTING A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH INITIATIVE

ASIA • PACIFIC
NETWORK OF
SEX WORKERS

ROBERT CARR AWARD 2014

In 2014, the research project Sex Work and Violence: Understanding Factors for Safety and Protection[1] received the Robert Carr Research Award for its innovation and the involvement of many and diverse participants in its process. It is an honour bestowed by the International AIDS Society, the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations, Human Rights Watch, the Johns Hopkins Center for Public Health and Human Rights and experts from academic research collaborations.

The award is a recognition of the efforts made over three years to ensure a rigorous research process and robust commitment by UN organizations, the sex worker community, academic researchers and government agencies to a study on violence against sex workers and to translate the emerging recommendations into policy and programmes.

In its decision, the selection committee noted, "The participation of sex workers throughout the research process, a population often neglected by research or difficult to reach, was deemed especially important. The committee believes that the research project has the potential to achieve a great impact by influencing policies and practices in the field and providing a model for similar research projects."[2]

1 The project was later renamed as The Right(s) Evidence — Sex Work, Violence and HIV in Asia: A Multi-Country Qualitative Study.

2 Robert Carr Award Notification, International AIDS Society, email communication, 10 June 2014.

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International Sex Worker Rights Day

MARCH 3

성노동은 노동이다

যৌনকাজ একটি পেশা

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वेशया धंदा काम आहे

SEX WORK IS WORK

性工作是工作 งานบริการคืองาน

pekerja seks ialah kerja

セックスワークは労働

Youn Pesa , Pesa Ho

APNSW Solidarity+Support

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication documents the lessons learned from the process of implementing a four-country research project on sex work and violence through the narratives and reflections of those who participated in the research since its inception in 2011. The publication was commissioned by the Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization in consultation with APNSW, UNDP, UNFPA and P4P (Asia-Pacific regional offices in Bangkok). Funding for the travel to conduct interviews towards this documentation was provided by UNDP.

The author gratefully acknowledges all individuals who contributed their insights and reflections on the research process. These include members of UN agencies, technical assistance agencies and the various sex worker-led organizations. The author also acknowledges the contributions of members of the National Working Groups who provided inputs.

The author specifically acknowledges the support and technical guidance provided by members of the project's Regional Steering Committee: Laxmi Murthy and Meena Saraswathi Seshu (Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization); Marta Vallejo-Mestres (UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Centre); Julia Cabassi (UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office) and the late Andrew Hunter (Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers).

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This document chronicles the process behind the multi-country study 'The Right(s) Evidence — Sex Work, Violence and HIV in Asia', from the time of initiating the research in 2011 up to the completion of the regional report in December 2014. The report is available at http://sangram.org/resources/the-right-evidence-sex-work-violence-and-hiv-in-asia-regional-report.pdf **

Data for this document was collected through interviews with community members who participated in the research, lead researchers, peer lead researchers, the Regional Steering Committee members and members of the four National Working Groups. Additionally, I observed the peer interviewer training in Myanmar and the validation with the sex worker interviewers and research participants in Indonesia as initial and ending points in the process to understand the steps undertaken during the research. During these visits, I interacted with members of the Regional Steering Committee and National Working Groups, lead researchers, peer interviewers and research participants. Skype calls with the Regional Steering Committee members further helped to understand and distil the research process.

Three regional workshops in which researchers and the Regional Steering Committee came together to finalize the qualitative protocols (2012), another in which guidelines for the validation of findings were discussed (2013) and a regional roundtable to present and discuss the regional recommendations for advocacy (2014) were observed.

Participation in this process documentation was voluntary. Care was taken to ensure informed consent from all participants in collecting their views. The purpose of this document was explained in detail and the interviews with sex workers were conducted in the presence of sex worker community leaders from each country or in the presence of the study's researchers. In some cases, the interviews were conducted over email and facilitated by the country researchers and members of the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers.

Names of some community participants have been changed to protect their confidentiality. Consent was also obtained from research participants for the use of workshop and training photographs.

I undertook this process documentation as an independent consultant with the Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization in 2012. Subsequently, I joined the organization as its director (as of June 2013).

** Also available at www.aidsdatahub.org/rights-evidence-sex-work-violence-and-hiv-asia and http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/library/hiv_aids/the-right-s--evidence--sex-work--violence-and-hiv-in-asia--a-mul/

ABBREVIATIONS

APNSW	Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers
CASAM	Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization
CSDF	Community Strength Development Foundation
JMMS	Jagriti Mahila Maha Sangh
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NWG	National Working Group
OPSI	Organisasi Perubahan Sosial Indonesia
P4P	Partners for Prevention
RSC	Regional Steering Committee
SANGRAM	Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha
SWIM	Sex Workers in Myanmar
TOP	Targeted Outreach Project
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preventing and addressing violence against sex workers requires an understanding of the different forms of violence that they experience, how such violence increases the risk of exposure to HIV and how it undermines access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Robust evidence of the risk and protective factors is critical for developing good programmes and policies.

Protection of sex workers' human rights is a requisite for their involvement in national HIV programmes to reduce their vulnerability and HIV risk. Although violence is exacerbated by stigma and the criminalized environment within which sex workers operate, violence within sex work is often unreported as an HIV risk and overlooked when understanding the factors for safety and protection from HIV.

The impact of violence on health-seeking behaviour and access to prevention commodities and services are poorly understood when designing programmes meant to reduce the spread of HIV. To be effective, HIV prevention programmes need strong enabling environments that reduce and ultimately eliminate violence against sex workers.

THE STUDY ON VIOLENCE AND SEX WORKERS

A multi-country qualitative study, 'The Rights(s) Evidence — Sex Work, Violence and HIV in Asia', was developed to better understand female, male and transgender sex workers' experiences of violence, the factors that increase or decrease their vulnerability to violence and how violence relates to risk of HIV transmission. With research carried out in Indonesia (Jakarta), Myanmar (Yangon), Nepal (Kathmandu) and Sri Lanka (Colombo), the findings were intended to inform policies and programmes to prevent and respond effectively to violence against sex workers. The project's guiding principles centered on human rights, gender justice, empowerment and research for change.

The multi-country study involved many partners: the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia and Pacific Regional Office, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Asia-Pacific Regional Centre, the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW) through their partner, the Center for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization (CASAM),the UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Asia and the Pacific, and Partners for Prevention (P4P).The six partners jointly conducted the study with UN country offices and sex worker-led organizations in Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal and non-government organizations in Sri Lanka.

A Regional Steering Committee (RSC), with members from each partner, collectively provided strategic and technical guidance and administrative support, including ethics and quality assurance.

A National Working Group was established in each country to coordinate and conduct the research and involved government and UN agencies and sex worker organizations.

The National Working Groups managed each research study, including the data collection and the report writing. The national report findings and recommendations were presented to each National Working Group, which then generated a respective country action plan.

The study comprised a total of 123 in-depth qualitative interviews with 73 female, 20 male and 30 transgender sex workers aged 18 or older. The interviews were conducted by other sex workers who were trained in qualitative research methods by a lead researcher, with technical inputs and guidance from P4P and CASAM.

Additionally, 41 key informant interviews were conducted by the lead researchers with police personnel, NGO officers, health and legal service providers and national AIDS authorities for insight on contextual information to aid with the analysis and shape the recommendations. Data was collected between 2012 and 2013.

Analysis and recommendations

The findings from the research were assembled into four country reports. Then a regional team collated the analysis in each country report and drew out common themes and patterns as well as a variety of recommendations to generate a regional report. The RSC coordinated an external peer review of the final regional report and then disseminated the study findings and recommendations among the National Working Groups in the four countries.

Lessons from the research initiative

Based on observations throughout the research process and the post-study interviews with all parties involved, five primary insights emerged that would be useful to other sensitive studies on sex work or other large-scale studies.

1. Flexibility within a large multi-country research project is essential to achieve outcomes within a limited time period. The presence of a Regional Steering Committee overseeing all aspects of the project, including the research and its management, helped to overcome bottlenecks in a timely manner.

2. Meaningful involvement of the research subject community requires appropriate and sustained investment over a long period to strengthen individual and organizations' capacities and leadership.

3. A strong United Nations role is valuable in shaping the regional strategy and building the foundations

PICTURE 1. PARTICIPANTS AT THE REGIONAL ROUND TABLE, BANGKOK

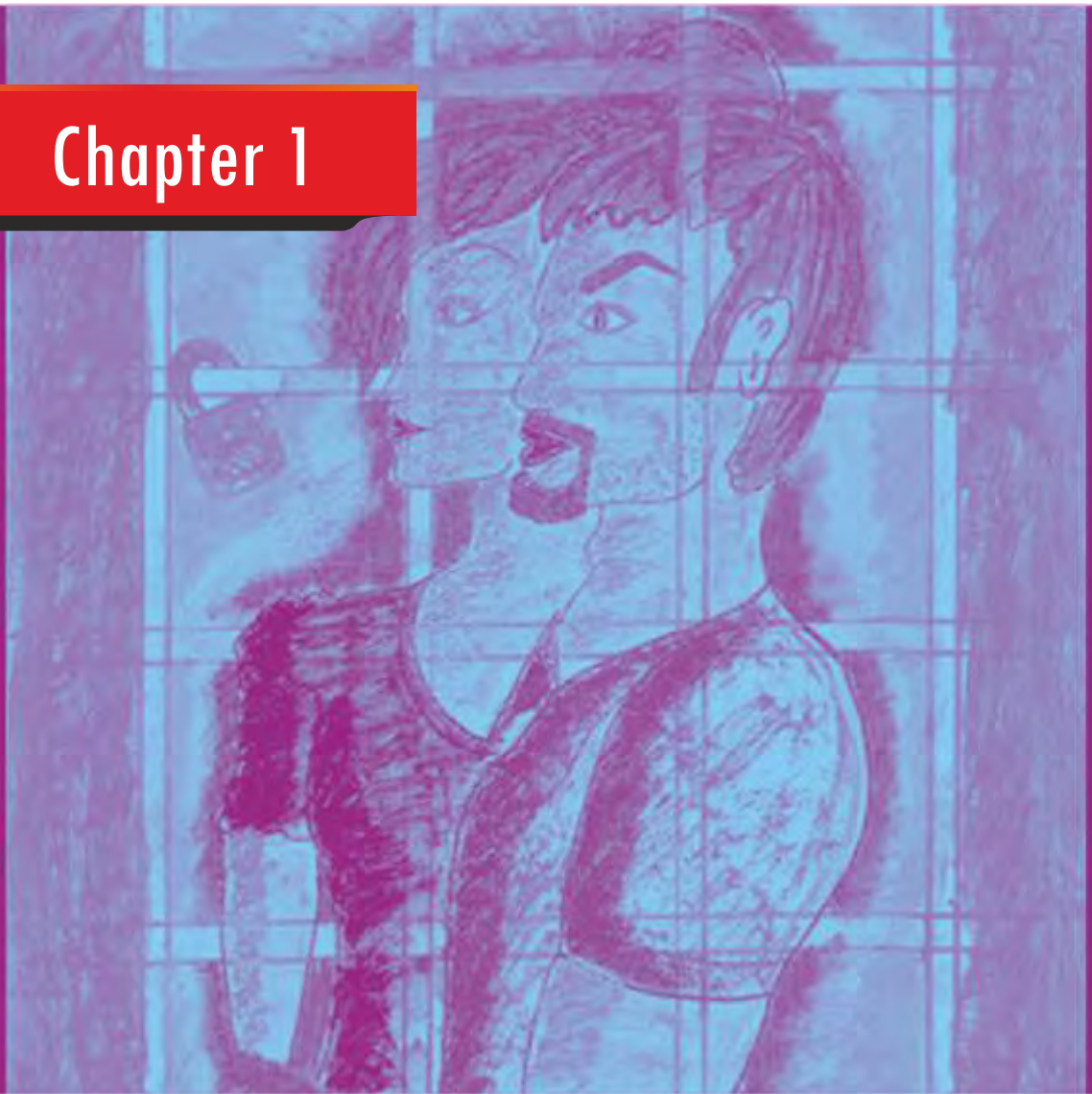
of in-country engagement. The commitment of several UN agencies enabled a potentially sensitive subject to be researched with the involvement of the subject community and in a supportive environment.

4. Government commitments are important to steer and support a research agenda on sensitive issues. In the four countries, government involvement strengthened the credibility of the research and ownership of the findings, thereby paving the way for further dialogue on policy change.

5. In sensitive research on violence, validation at various stages (in this research at the country and regional levels) helps to strengthen the analysis and recommendations. It also helps balance the needs of the rigors of research with the safety of vulnerable communities, such as sex workers.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1



People need to engage with the role of sex workers in effecting policy change. We hope that by the end of the process, we will have created a channel of communication between the sex worker communities, governments and the UN agencies that will herald change in the lives of sex workers.

Andrew Hunter, APNSW

Researching violence and sex workers

The protection of sex workers' human rights is a requisite for their involvement in national HIV programmes and to reduce their vulnerability and HIV risk. Although violence is exacerbated by stigma and criminalized environment within which sex workers operate, violence within sex work is often unreported as an HIV risk.

it is overlooked when assessing the factors for safety and protection from HIV exposure. The impact of violence on health-seeking behaviour and access to prevention commodities and services are poorly understood when designing programmes meant to reduce the spread of HIV. To be effective, HIV prevention programmes need strong enabling environments that reduce and eventually eliminate violence against sex workers.

Preventing and redressing violence against sex workers requires an understanding of the different forms of violence they experience, how such violence increases the risk of exposure to HIV and how it undermines access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Robust evidence of the risk and protective factors is critical for developing good programmes and policies.

At the international level, there is growing recognition that human rights need to be central to HIV responses. A human rights-based approach recognizes the imperative to protect individuals most at risk of HIV infection with appropriate laws, policies and law enforcement practices[3]. The United Nations system affirms the universality, inalienability and interdependence of human rights and promotes protection for sex workers, even in countries where sex work is criminalized[4]. Sex workers are entitled to their fundamental human rights, including

PICTURE 2. Regional meeting of partners, Bangkok

3. UNDP, Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok, 2012) p. 12.
4. UNAIDS, Guidance Note on HIV and Sex Work(Geneva, 2009)
5. UNDP, Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok, 2012) p. 12.

TABLE 1. COUNTRIES SELECTED FOR STUDY

Country	Site
Indonesia	Jakarta
Myanmar	Yangon
Nepal	Kathmandu
Sri Lanka	Colombo metropolitan area

the right to non-discrimination, equal protection before the law and the right to the highest attainable standard of health[5].

PURPOSE AND SCOPE IN DOCUMENTING THE RESEARCH INITIATIVE

This document presents reflection on award-winning research on violence and sex workers, particularly the participation of sex work organizations, UN agencies and academic researchers in conducting the study.

The exercise set out to look analytically at the spirit of collaboration of a diverse set of actors all working towards one goal: increasing the safety of sex workers by creating an enabling environment in which they can access their rights to safe working conditions and as citizens.

Findings of the study or its analysis are not covered. Instead, this document chronicles the challenges faced and the lessons in handling them throughout the process.

The process document thus looks at the strategies adopted by the regional and country research teams to conduct the study in a manner that ultimately might shape future policy advocacy on violence against sex workers. Included in the review are examples of how the research study has impacted the sex worker interviewers who participated in the project.

The analysis is meant for donors, research agencies and community groups seeking to undertake policy research in similar areas. From the outset of the study, the research process was considered to be as important as the outcome; hence, documenting the process to capture the challenges encountered and strategies devised was treated as a valuable exercise.

FIGURE 1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE RESEARCH

This document can help in developing a template for undertaking community-led research and building on the lessons learned from this initiative to improve future efforts to strengthen evidence on violence against sex workers.

Conducting research for change

The Right(s) Evidence — Sex Work, Violence and HIV in Asia study was conducted in Indonesia (Jakarta), Myanmar (Yangon), Nepal (Kathmandu) and Sri Lanka (Colombo). The study was developed to better understand female, male and transgender sex workers' experiences of violence, the factors that increase or decrease their vulnerability to violence and how violence relates to risk of HIV transmission.

The findings were intended to inform policies and programmes for preventing and responding effectively to violence against sex workers. The project's guiding principles centred on human rights, gender justice, empowerment and research for change (Figure 1).

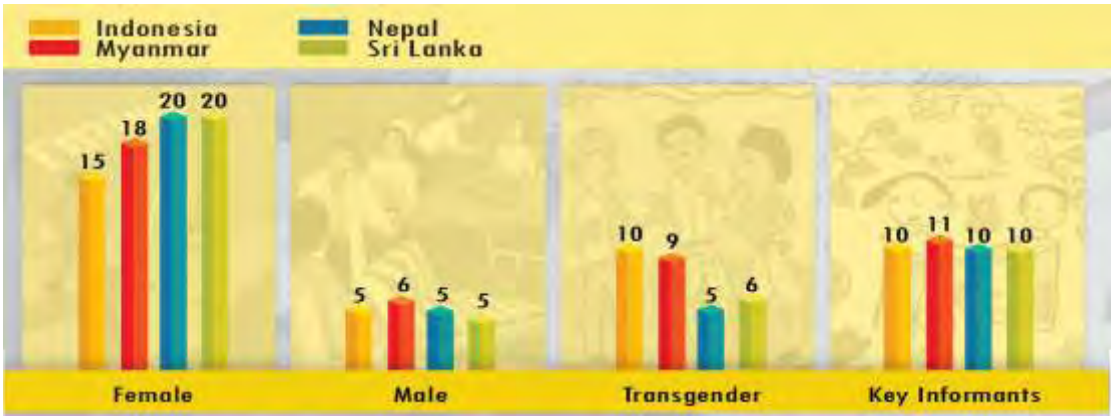
The multi-country study involved many partnerships at the regional and country levels, gathering together government and UN agencies, NGOs, sex workers' collectives and academic and research institutions. A Regional Steering Committee (RSC) guided the process and comprised specialists from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Asia–Pacific Regional Centre, the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW) through their partner, the Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization (CASAM), Partners for Prevention (P4P)[6] and the UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Asia and the Pacific.

All organizations brought significant expertise to the research and a deep commitment to protecting human rights, addressing gender-based violence, building networks and alliances, and reducing the risk of HIV transmission. The RSC provided strategic and technical guidance and administrative support, including ethical and quality assurance, for the study's outcome and the overall management of the project.

The RSC members were convinced of the relevance of the peer interviewer method for research on a sensitive topic like violence against sex workers. Even though the RSC members saw great opportunity in the partnership, they also recognized the challenges in using sex workers for data collection, particularly consequent disputes that might emerge over data quality. The long-term goal of building up their research, advocacy and leadership capacity and creating or sustaining sex worker networks in all four countries overshadowed the concerns. Their involvement was deemed a

6. Partners for Prevention is a UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV regional joint programme for gender-based violence prevention in Asia and the Pacific and was involved from the project's inception in November 2011 until November 2013.

TABLE 2. SAMPLE SIZE FOR THE STUDY



priority. The value for advocacy and potential action motivated the involvement of APNSW and CASAM, along with the need for academic research.

In addition to identifying the risk and protective factors associated with sex workers' exposure to violence and HIV, the project sought to build local and regional awareness of violence against sex workers as well as alliances among UN agencies, civil society networks and governments. Ultimately, such alliances were expected to guide collective action throughout the region.

In each of the four study sites, a National Working Group was established to coordinate and conduct the research and then use the findings and recommendations to develop a country plan for further action. NWG membership reflected all partners.

123 sex workers were interviewed during the study—73 female, 20 male and 30 transgender participants (Table 2). Sex workers conducted the interviewers after being trained in qualitative research methods by a lead researcher, with technical inputs and guidance from P4P and CASAM. In each study site, 30 interviews were conducted (except in Myanmar, where 33 interviews were conducted).

41 key informant interviews were conducted by the lead researchers with police personnel, NGO officers, health and legal service providers and national AIDS personnel for insight on contextual information to aid with the analysis and shape the recommendations. Data was collected between 2012 and 2013. In Indonesia and Myanmar, the lead researchers were assisted by a sex worker (peer lead) researcher.

The lead researchers drafted the country research reports. The RSC reviewed each country report before presenting the findings and recommendations to the National

FIGURE 2. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION DESIGN

Working Group. Thereafter, regional analysis and recommendations were drawn from the findings of the four country reports by a separate regional team of writers. To generate the regional analysis, a standardized approach was developed at the regional level to ensure consistency across the study sites. The regional team collated the analysis from the four country reports and drew out common themes and patterns. Upon completion of the regional report, the RSC coordinated an external peer review as well as review by the Global Network of Sex Work Projects and the UN agency partners.

In envisaging a study of this intensity and sensitivity, participants at the regional and country levels had to develop processes that were adequately calibrated to ensure that various stakeholders participated and supported the research. This document summarizes the lessons from that experience.

Shaping the

Research INITIATIVE

Chapter 2

> Research often ignores the local country context and discussions, which impact the lives of sex workers. It needs to acknowledge the country environment and documented positions vis-à-vis sex work, if we really want to make a change and mitigate the violence faced by sex workers.
>
> **Andrew Hunter**, APNSW

At the first Asia-Pacific regional consultation with sex workers in Pattaya, Thailand (in 2010), sex worker rights leaders, activists and UN agency specialists agreed on the need to document narratives of the violence against sex work and use the empirical research findings to advocate with the police and other state actors for change[7]. APNSW leaders recognized the need for a strategy to work with governments to address discriminatory laws and policies and violence that people in sex work experience. They also thought that protecting sex workers' universal rights is a critical pathway for ensuring successful HIV prevention among sex workers.

At the core of the proposed research initiative was the principle of meaningful participation of sex workers. This would entail a more 'holistic empowerment-led approach' that enabled sex workers to equally engage in the process and redefine the rights agenda that affected them. It was a point that had been uniting sex workers groups across the Asia-Pacific region for the past decade. It was clear that without the rights of sex workers protected, no rights-based HIV response would be possible. It was also clear that sex workers needed to lead the process.

The UNDP mandate in the global HIV response in early 2011, as defined by the UNAIDS Division of Labour strategy, was to support the policy and legal environment, building on a human rights-based approach to sex work and HIV. Following this mandate, the UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Centre commissioned (in 2011) the first regional review of the legal environment on sex work in 48 countries. That was followed by the plan to initiate research to obtain empirical data on the extent and type of violence that sex workers experience. Marta Vallejo-Mestres, Programme Specialist with the UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Centre, realized at this point the need for partnerships to conduct the research.

> Limited work had been done in the region to bring together government, civil society and the UN system as equal partners and address violence against sex workers. We hoped that by developing this partnership through research we could help shape the initial steps for greater engagement around reducing violence.
>
> **Marta Vallejo-Mestres,** UNDP and Regional Steering Committee

7. APNSW, UNFPA and UNAIDS, Building Partnerships on HIV and Sex Work: Report and Recommendations From the First Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on HIV and Sex Work(Bangkok, 2010).

The APNSW leaders had called for greater empowering research on sex work issues during the Pattaya consultation in 2010. They had strongly articulated the need for research to effect policy reform to reduce violence against sex workers, with sex worker community participation as an essential strategy.

The involvement of sex workers was seen as critical in achieving an understanding of their experiences and realties and ensuring that they were heard and addressed by policymakers and other stakeholders. It would also help to empower the community by building up the skills in research, advocacy and negotiating with other stakeholders and by their inclusion in forging solutions. Involvement with trained community consultants for data collection was accepted as the primary mechanism towards achieving all the ambitions[8].

Given these imperatives, the partners had to develop a research model that would capture sufficient, detailed narratives of the types of violence and sex worker community responses for effecting programmatic actions. The research had to be shaped and led by sex worker networks and groups to ensure that affected communities were integral to discussions on reducing violence.

The first inception meeting, in October 2011 in Bangkok, brought together representatives from the six partner organizations and sex worker community groups from Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand (see section 4 for explanation of the country selection). The meeting helped narrow the focus within the issues of violence and HIV prevention that needed more in-depth research. Roles for each partner were agreed and preliminary discussions began on the research design, including potential sample groups, sex work settings and sites in each country.

The following research principles emerged from the preliminary discussions during the inception meeting:

1. Ensure the research is robust and sufficiently evidenced to shape future national and regional advocacy on protective strategies to reduce violence against sex workers.

2. Place communities at the centre of the research and ensure their participation in all aspects of the research to achieve inclusive programmatic and policy change.

3. Involve stakeholders from the national governments who could contribute to furthering the research and support the evolution of strategies for reducing violence against female, male and transgender sex workers.

4. Provide strong leadership at the regional level to shape the research agenda, and provide a forum for exchange of research ideas while maintaining the integrity and comparability of data in all countries.

8. APNSW, UNFPA and UNAIDS, Building Partnerships on HIV and Sex Work: Report and Recommendations From the First Asia–Pacific Regional Consultation on HIV and Sex Work(Bangkok, 2010),p. 20

FIGURE 3. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION DESIGN

PHASE I CONSENSUS SEEKING

Discussions between UNDP and APNSW
Seeking partnerships with UNFPA and UNAIDS, with CASAM and P4P as technical partners

Oct 2011

First partner consultation - Orientation to the research project
Developing roles for regional and in-country partners
Developing the research methodology and tools for research
Formation of the Regional Steering Committee (RSC)

PHASE II SHAPING THE RESEARCH

Discussions within RSC on design, methodology, ethical considerations; research protocol designed
RSC develops selection criteria for in-country research team
UN begins process of setting up National Working Group
Lead researcher selection process initiated
Community leaders identified from sex worker networks and organizations in each country
Ethics approval sought for the research in each country
Assessmentf existing literature initiated through desk review

Regional training workshop
Review of research methodology, ethics, safety of doing research on violence against sex workers
Adapting interview guides to country situations and discussions on sample
Review of progress made in setting up National Working Group and adapting for local situations

Aug 2012

PHASE III LOCALIZING THE RESEARCH

Selection of peer interviewers
Translation of interview guides and ethical guidelines into local languages
Adapting interview guide for country context, Training peer interviewers
Obtaining ethics approval
Conducting interviews

PHASE IV VALIDATION OF FINDINGS

Transcribing interviews and collating findings and first draft developed
Peer validation of findings with peer interviewers, research participant sex worker community

Apr 2013

Regional validation consultation
Findings shared with RSC members for initial discussion with in-country teams
Validation meeting to discuss findings and structure of the country reports

PHASE V ANALYSIS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE WAY AHEAD

Data analysis and writing of the four country reports
Collation of national analyses, identification of common themes patterns for regional report
Peer review of regional report
Developing country action plans to implement recommendations

5. Support research participants to share their narratives in a sensitive and empowered manner while protecting their interests.

The research initiative begins

The research project progressed over five phases, each with a distinct set of activities (Table 3) that sometimes overlapped in the timeline. The phases are introduced here and detailed in the following chapters.

Phase 1. Consensus seeking

The initial phase involved selecting the partners at the regional and country levels, identifying the roles and responsibilities of each partner (including the sex worker community) and developing a research plan; forging a consensus on the need for the study, outcomes and advocacy opportunities; selection of the study sites and discussions on how the research project could engage with government structures. An inception meeting was conducted with country and regional partners to define the parameters of the project.

Phase 2. Shaping the research

The second phase involved developing the research design at the regional level while simultaneously setting up the country infrastructure to conduct the research. Sex worker community networks and groups were approached at the country level. The partner UN agencies began communicating with government departments to set up the National Working Group. International and national lead researchers were selected (two per study site except in Indonesia where a national researcher with international experience led the research).

The RSC at the regional level developed the overall research protocol, research tools and ethics guidelines and reviewed the progress made in setting up the National Working Groups. The RSC also defined the steps needed to implement the project in each site. A four-day training of trainers session was conducted with country teams, including lead researchers and peer lead researchers. Although intended as a training for the lead researchers and sex worker community leaders, the session helped the participants to focus on localizing the research protocol for application in their own context.

Phase 3. Localizing the research

The project design was then presented to the National Working Group members and the peer interviewers, who were found through the sex worker community. For the selected peer interviewers, the sex worker community leaders and lead researchers jointly conducted five-day training session in qualitative research and interviewing. Ethics approvals were sought from the appropriate authority in each country. Once the approval was received, the interviews began.

Phase 4. Validation of findings

When the interviews with the research participants and key informants were completed, the researchers shared the preliminary findings with the sex worker community (most of the interviewers and some of the research participants), and their inputs were incorporated into the findings.

In addition to the country-level validation, a regional validation was carried out. The lead

researchers and sex worker community representatives in each country came together to review the findings of the research and identify common themes and trends that could be written up as part of a composite regional report and to flag sensitive issues.

Phase 5. Analysis, recommendations and the way ahead

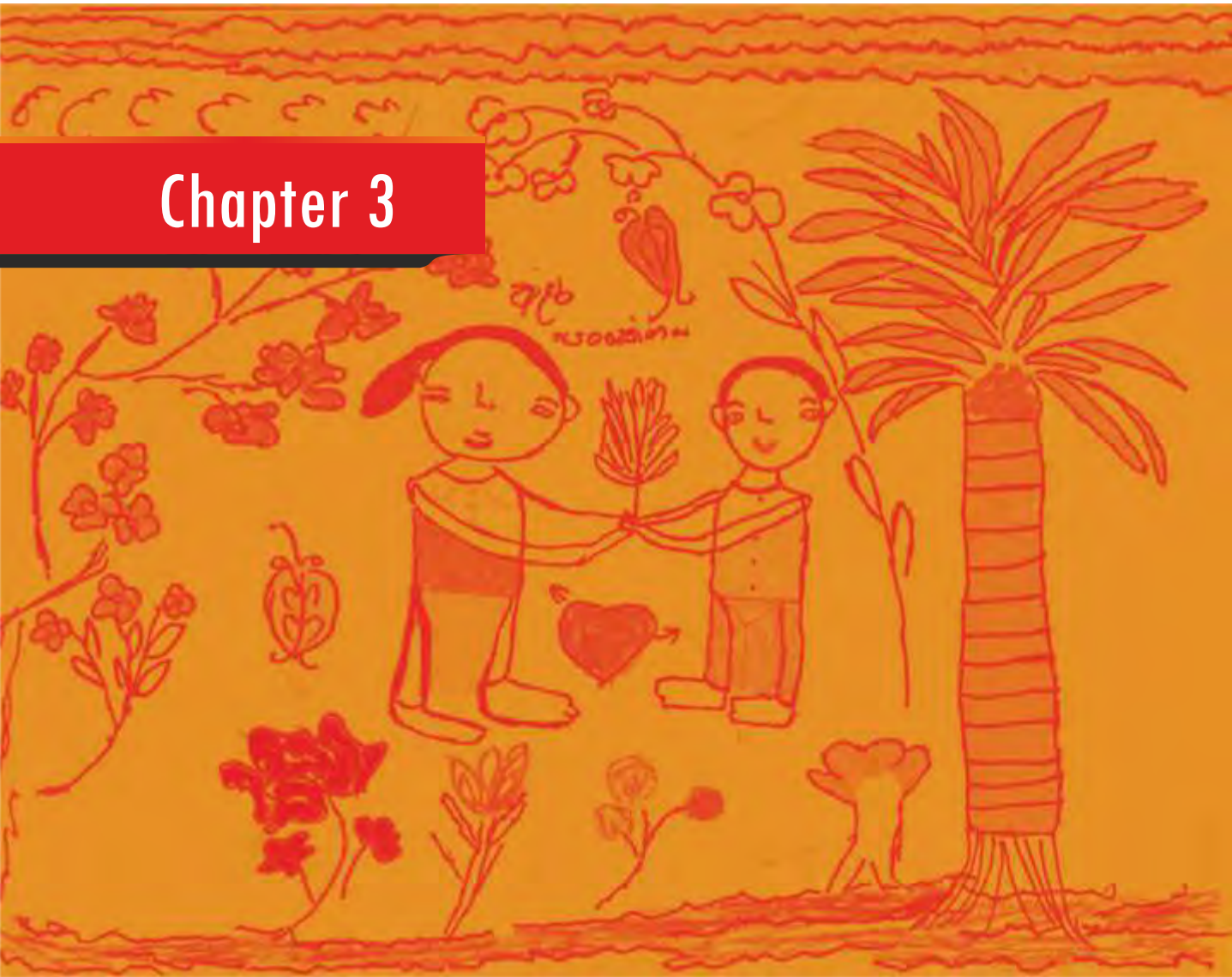
The findings and recommendations from the sex worker community and regional validation process were collated and analysed for shaping the national reports and the regional report. The RSC provided crucial oversight during the writing of the four country reports and regional report and ensured that the sensitivities of the research were balanced with the need for robust evidence needed to influence policy on violence against sex workers in the region. The RSC also ensured that the National Working Groups wanted to take ownership of the regional report's findings and recommendations and develop an action plan for their country.

PICTURE 3. COMMUNITY MEETING TO DISCUSS FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS, BANGKOK 2014

Research Design

Ethics & Safety FIRST

Chapter 3



One of the challenges of a multi-country study coordinated at the regional level is the possibility of national-level participants feeling disassociated from the process. That has implications on the data ownership and its further use by the community and other stakeholders. The methodology had to be constantly reviewed to balance the needs of sound qualitative research and the space for community voice and participation.

Emma Fulu, P4P, Regional Steering Committee and co-author of the regional report

Multi-country research on sex work is complicated by differences in perceptions of what constitutes violence among female, male and transgender sex workers, which makes comparability difficult. The four countries selected for the research have varying cultural background, systems of governance and legal environments relating to sex work. Additionally, each of the sites has somewhat different types of sex work environments. Added to this is the complex layer of gender identities of the individuals engaged in sex work in those settings. Hence, to make recommendations applicable across the region, the research had to be flexible to accommodate the varied settings and typologies while also capturing similarities in patterns of violence.

A qualitative research methodology was agreed as the most appropriate for the conditions. The three components of the research design encompassed the following parameters:

1. Literature review of research on violence and sex workers in Asia and the Pacific, HIV exposure and NGO activities and campaigns related to these issues;

2. Interviews with female, male and transgender sex workers per country; and

3. Key informant interviews with representatives of the police, sex worker community leaders and policymakers to provide more information on the context.

Literature review: Identifying gaps

The literature review was initiated while the project partners were being determined and the research methodology and protocols were being discussed. The literature review revealed numerous gaps in the research on violence against sex workers. For instance, it found that although quantitative studies focused on links between violence and exposure to HIV, there was a paucity of research studying the impact of violence on inconsistent condom use, violence experienced by sex workers from a human rights perspective and violence among men who have sex with men and transgender sex

The aim of qualitative is to produce a deeper understanding of a particular situation. Wider implications come not from the diversity of the sample but from the depth of understanding. The aim is to select a situation that can be researched and that, when well understood, will provide a platform for thinking about the society. In terms of a human rights and feminist approach, it is vital that the voices of sex workers are heard and reflected.

Emma Fulu, P4P, Regional Steering Committee and co-author of the regional report

workers. The literature review also indicated that a critical gap existed in involving the sex worker community in research design and data collection. The review helped determine gaps that the pending research initiative would address and thus influenced the research design and interview guides.

Methodology and protocols

Balancing standardization and specificity

A qualitative rather than quantitative approach was chosen for the study in order to fill the gaps in the existing research. The link between gender-based violence and HIV infection is well established, but research only recently has begun to examine violence against sex workers in the context of a wider risk environment, including the risk implications associated with different perpetrators and the relationship between disclosure and the protective role of collectivization.

A sample of 30 community participants for each country was accepted as sufficient to produce a deeper understanding of violence against sex workers (as noted, 33 interviews were conducted in Myanmar). This was a substantial sample size for a qualitative study of this nature.

There was a perception that the wider implications for better policy would emerge from an in-depth appreciation of the types and sites of violence experienced by individuals in sex work. The research would delve into understanding the patterns of sex work, sex workers' perceptions of their rights and their experiences with the law and with violence and the consequences of violence in relation to HIV risk and the support received in protecting sex workers from violence.

The four country research teams were given interview guides, one each for female, male and transgender sex workers. The guides were designed to be administered by peer interviewers. The questions were divided into six broad segments — demographic information, family background and childhood, adulthood and current life, sex

We conducted in-depth life history style interviews which included exploring sex workers experiences across their whole life course. Given the length of the interviews it was decided by all that the number of interviews should be limited to 30 per country in order to fully analyse data in its full complexity.

Emma Fulu, P4P, Regional Steering Committee and co-author of the regional report

work, experience of violence and sex workers' knowledge of their rights. Each segment had a brief paragraph explaining the aim of that set of questions, which made it easier for peers to understand their purpose. This explanation enabled some peers to rephrase the questions without changing its meaning and intention and thus elicit responses from the research participants.

Another example of achieving balance between a complex research questionnaire and a needed simple approach was the supporting 'probes' that accompanied each question in the interview guide. For example, for a broad question regarding entry into sex work, supportive probing questions included :
- When did you start sex work? How old were you?
- Who introduced you to sex work?
- Was anyone in your family also engaged in sex work?
- Does your family know you are engaged in sex work?

The probing questions helped most peer interviewers understand the intent of each question and to select the appropriate manner in which they could interview the participants.

"

The interview guides were designed as open-ended instruments to give the lead researchers space to adapt it to the local context and cultures, without being prescriptive.

Laxmi Murthy, CASAM, Regional Steering Committee and co-author of the regional report

"

"I used the guide and not always in the same order. I realized that when they started narrating, they were sharing in detail so I didn't interrupt. When they stopped, I used to ask supporting questions to get further information. So I didn't always use the interview guide in the same order."

Shiromi Pradeepika, Female sex worker peer interviewer, Community Strength Development Foundation, Sri Lanka

Although generic interview guides (female sex workers and male and transgender sex workers) were developed by the regional research team to encourage a certain standardization of the research queries, ample space and opportunity were provided to the country teams to experiment with questions and terminology that was more culturally appropriate or specific to the sex worker community in each country.

At a four-day regional orientation and training meeting at the end of the second phase, the country and regional research teams reviewed each section of the interview guides and provided comments and inputs. For instance, suggestions were given to incorporate questions around first sexual experience, stigma and discrimination by family and friends because of being a sex worker, experience of violence in rehabilitation centres, drug and alcohol use, and experience of using legal services after a violent incident. Based on those inputs, the interview guides were amended by the regional team and returned to the country teams.

The interview guides were translated into Nepali and after that, one female sex worker representative from [Jagriti Mahila Maha Sangh] and Umesh from [Blue Diamond Society] sat with us. They reviewed the language, phrasing whether the terminology resonates with the community. Based on that, we revised the guides.

Annie George, Co-lead researcher, Nepal

In-country adaptations

Following the transition into the third phase of the research; the focus shifted to the country level and the generic questionnaires were translated into local languages, facilitated by the country research teams. Translation, however, was a complex process, given the varying local terms for sex, violence, rape, etc. Even as this process began, the lead researchers began to engage in depth with the interview guides. The lead researchers in Sri Lanka, for instance, thought that in their context, questions on experiences with the police and criminal justice system needed to be strengthened. A subset of questions was added and then circulated among the other research teams. Even though this raised concern about the comparability of data across the countries, the regional research team monitored the adaptations and thought that the addition would not affect comparability as long as the general subsections remained similar and the same processes of data collection, ethics and interviewer training were followed. It was thought that such additions and adaptations ensured that specific information relevant to specific contexts could be captured in detail.

Other suggestions were made by the lead researchers in Nepal regarding style and length of the interview guide and questions on childhood experience of violence), which were considered in a discussion between the lead researchers and the regional research team.

Peer interviewers: Providing the nuance

The contribution of the peer interviewers in adapting the interview guides cannot be emphasized enough. At the regional workshop and in country, the peer interviewers drew from their personal experience and explored the different forms of violence that sex workers experience and the different perpetrators and modes of violence and gave inputs on style and language. Their contributions often helped to provide appropriate terminology for sex work and related issues. During the country training workshops, the peer interviewers reviewed the translated guides in great detail.

We suggested that the order of the questions be changed to make it easier to administer. We also requested that questions on drugs and alcohol be introduced.

Umesh Shresta, male sex worker peer interviewer, Blue Diamond Society, Nepal

In Indonesia, the peer interviewers suggested many changes in the primary and probing questions that were eventually amended as bullet points to serve as reminders. The peer interviewers suggested that questions on childhood violence should be covered later in the interview because they could adversely affect the research participants if asked early on and possibly making them defensive and negatively impacting the process.

In Myanmar, the changes in the interview guide focused on questions related to gender and self-identification. The transgender peer interviewers thought that to understand violence on transgender sex workers, it was important to have questions on how others perceived the participants' gender. . The peer interviewers wanted a question that dealt with rape that would enable an analysis of rape as different from other coercive sexual acts. The female sex worker interviewers in Myanmar, however, focused on rewording questions so that they were comfortable asking them.

The RSC had a strong coordinating role in this phase of localizing the interview guides, patiently discussing each aspect of the guide and requests for changes and adaptations. The lead researchers oversaw the various adaptations in the interview guides and the results, which made for valuable reflection. The online Dropbox service proved invaluable for the research teams in this phase; amended versions, country updates and other resources were placed in the Dropbox file and constantly updated as the research progressed in a country. This enabled a great deal of dynamism and flexibility in the implementation phase.

Ethical considerations: Guiding Light

Any research involving marginalized communities, such as people in sex work, is extremely sensitive and raises ethical and safety considerations. For research on gender-based violence, the International Research Network on Violence Against Women and the World Health Organization stipulate the prime importance of confidentiality and safety; the need to ensure that the research does not cause participants to undergo further harm (including further trauma); the

Box 1. Ethical guidelines

Ethical guidelines for the regional research project emphasized the following principles:

1. Personal safety
2. Informed consent
3. Voluntary participation
4. Respect for persons
5. Confidentiality
6. Justice
7. Beneficence
8. Attending to researchers' needs
9. Provision of crisis intervention

One country government requested us to include a national co-investigator in the study. This raised concerns of ethics, confidentiality being breached by involving a non-researcher in the interview process and the threat for the community in the long run. We discussed and decided that it was paramount to protect the confidentiality of the participants and efforts to include a national co-investigator would compromise that. All this took place within a very short period of time.

Marta Vallejo-Mestres, UNDP and Regional Steering Committee

importance of ensuring that participants are informed of available sources of help; and the need for interviewers to respect research participants' decisions and choices, including the decision to withhold information about HIV status[9].

Research teams have the responsibility to ensure that the risks are adequately addressed throughout any research process. With the study on violence and sex workers, the presence of peer interviewers from the sex worker community posed an additional element of risk. To further mitigate concerns, CASAM and P4P developed detailed ethical guidelines, with inputs from the RSC.

PICTURE 4. PEER LEAD RESEARCHER TRAINING COMMUNITY INTERVIEWERS

The guidelines were in accordance with internationally approved standards[10] and covered personal safety, individual informed consent, voluntary participation, respect for persons, confidentiality, justice (for the communities being studied), benefits (do no harm and ensure that benefits outweigh the risks), attending to researchers' needs and providing counselling, legal aid and other support during a crisis. During the data collection period, CASAM and P4P provided advisory support as and when ethics issues arose. APNSW coordinated any needed responses through its member organizations.

A regional ethics board was constituted, comprising representatives from the UN agencies, CASAM, P4P, research institutes and independent researchers. The board was responsible for advising on any major ethical issues or adverse events that occurred at the country or regional level. At the country level, safety committees were set up with sex

9. World Health Organization, Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence Against Women(Geneva, 2003),pp. 6–7.

10. ibid.

worker community representatives, the lead researchers and representatives of the AIDS authority in each country.

An ethics kit was developed containing an information leaflet presenting the study in simple language to the sex worker community and research participants, with contact details for the research team. Another leaflet provided information on the study, explaining it involved detailed questions about violence that the participant had experienced. Two copies of consent forms were included, along with a resource list of referral centres for counselling or legal assistance and NGO and network support. A translated version of the entire kit was made available to the peer interviewers, and they were trained on how to use each resource.

Ethics clearance was obtained in all the countries with the relevant authority: the Atma Jaya Catholic University Ethics Committee(Indonesia),the Department of Medical Research (Myanmar), the Nepal Health Research Council Ethical Review Board and the Sri Lanka Medical Association. The clearance required translated copies of the ethics guidelines, the ethics kit, the interview guides, concept notes and research protocol.

The Sri Lankan Medical Association questioned the involvement of peers in conducting research, raising concerns about the quality of the findings. The lead researchers defending the application provided justification for the involvement of peers as enhancing the quality of data collection and explained the measures being taken to support the peers in the conduct of the interviews and to ensure robustness of the data.

> The medical association was concerned whether sex workers were competent to do the research. I explained that we would supervise them to ensure quality and would regularly debrief.
>
> **Nilu Abeyaratne,** Co-lead researcher, Sri Lanka

Precautions were taken during the research implementation phase to protect the confidentiality and safety of participants and peer interviewers.

- ☞ A 'safe' project name was developed —'Health study among sex workers in X country' —that the peer interviewer used when responding to anyone interested in knowing details of the research.
- ☞ Only adult self-identified sex workers, drawn from the peer interviewers' and peer researchers' extended networks, participated in the study.
- ☞ To ensure narratives of sex workers living with HIV in the sample, only self-identified HIV-positive persons were included in the study.
- ☞ The interviews were conducted in the office of a sex worker network or NGO wherever possible. In the event interviews had to be conducted

outside the office space, the peer interviewer was requested to find a secluded and safe space, where the confidentiality of the participants could be protected.

- Interviews were conducted by peer interviewers only; the lead researchers were not present to ensure that each participant was comfortable.

- A daily debriefing session was designed to ensure that the lead researchers provided emotional support, information and space for the peer interviewers to share their experiences and discuss any problems. The lead researchers had a crucial role in motivating and encouraging the peer interviewers by applauding their work, listening to their concerns without judgement and pointing out areas for improvement.

Data gathering, storage and management

The peer interviewers were trained to use audio recorders, and each person was provided with a recorder. Peer interviewers were encouraged to keep notes in diaries and recording their observations, although it was recognized that writing would be a major constraint. The audio recordings were downloaded into a computer by the lead researchers daily when they met with the interviewers for debriefing. These debriefing sessions also provided the lead researchers an opportunity to take detailed notes of the peer researcher's observations of each interview, listen to the recordings and highlight any concerns. In the case of an interview conducted in Myanmar, the peer interviewer accidently deleted data and decided to redo the interview. But the resulting interview was extremely truncated because the participant did not want to repeat the responses. Following the debriefing session, it was decided to interview an additional participant.

The audio interviews were transcribed, and in Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka they were translated into English for the benefit of the international lead researchers. The consent papers were stored with one of the networks, NGOs or community organizations involved in the research.

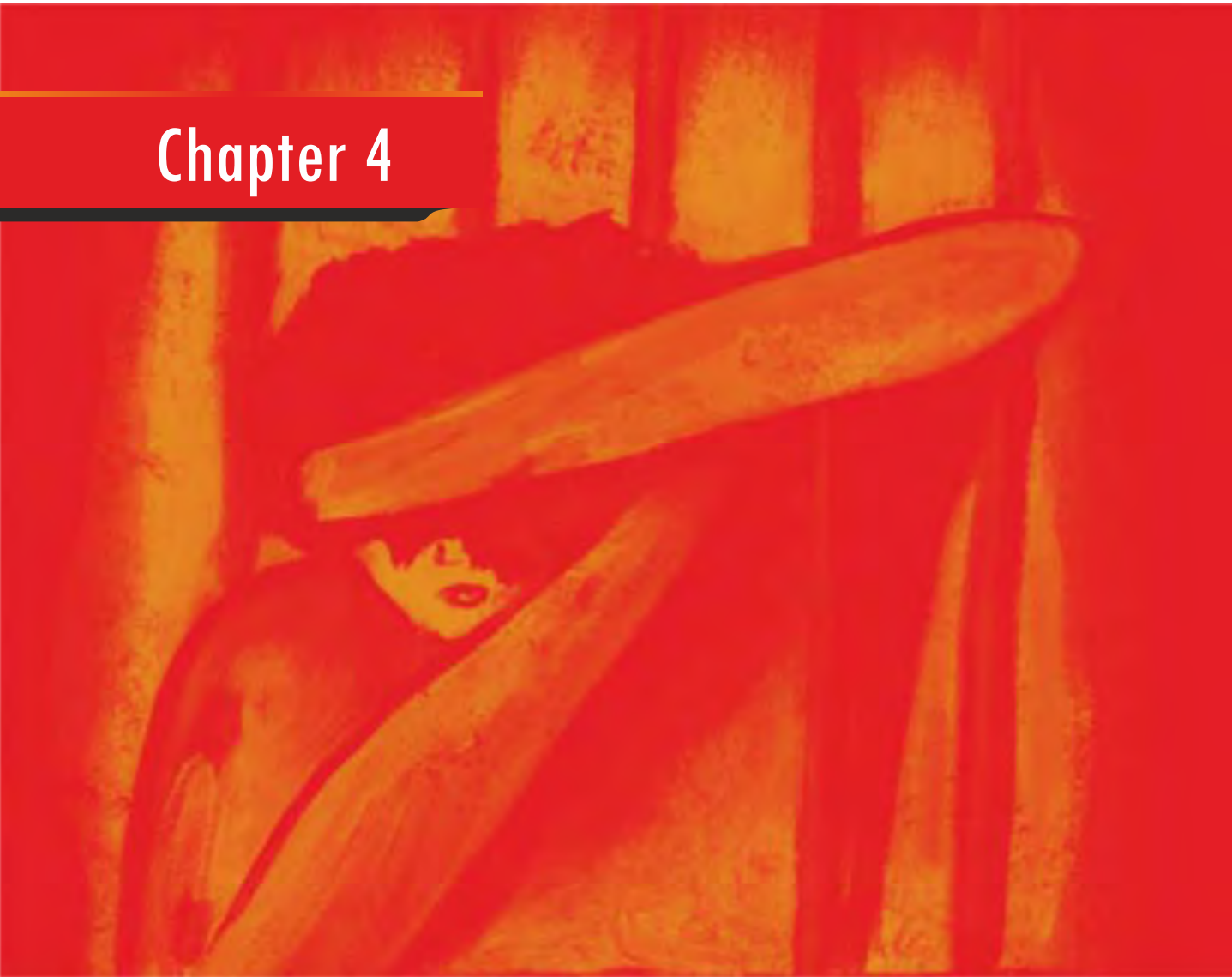
Box 2. Lessons

1. Cross-sharing of experiences within countries as the research unfolds enables research teams to adapt good practices and strategies.
2. To ensure comparability, countries should keep changes to the interview guides to a minimum (except to capture unique aspects of the local context) and avoid adding more questions, unless essential.
3. Sex worker community inputs and participation in localizing the interview guides provides nuances and also helps to strengthen community ownership over the research.
4. The ethics kit containing information on referral services, contact information of sex worker networks and details of the study is an important resource for carrying out sensitive research.
5. The peer interviewer approach enables participants to participate in the research study and share sensitive details with a greater degree of comfort.
6. Safety should be a primary consideration for peer interviewers. In research involving vulnerable populations, such as sex workers, there is high risk of sex workers being physically targeted for seeking sensitive information on violence and perpetrators. Researchers should consistently enforce appropriate strategies to protect interviewers from harm.
7. The debriefing and review sessions are extremely useful for the peer interviewers in identifying gaps in an interview. The sessions also help to strengthen the working relationship between the lead researchers and peer interviewers and helps peer interviewers increase their confidence.

Developing and

Managing the RESEARCH

Chapter 4



Research has to bring together information that is grounded in lived experiences of people most affected and to influence policy change that is also effectively implemented.

Andrew Hunter, APNSW

A research project of this complexity required varied skills of project management, knowledge of violence within sex work, the world of sex work, legal frameworks within countries, qualitative research, UN interagency work, finance and logistics. Given the sensitivity of the topic, it was also critical to engage with governments and seek their commitment to long-term outcomes, such as promoting strategies to reduce violence against people in sex work.

Hence, the partnerships had to go beyond project management at the regional level and pave the way for the research in each country while laying a foundation for the long-term goals. Additionally, the project had to develop at two levels: conceptualization of the research design at the regional level and implementation at the country level through a complex partnership of qualified researchers and sex workers trained as interviewers.

Selection of countries

To demonstrate the need for long-term outcomes in policy change through research, selection of the study sites was important. The partners deliberated on achieving a balance between the desired outcomes while also strengthening country capacities to conduct research and strengthen sex worker community processes.

Countries in the Asia-Pacific region were selected based on HIV prevalence, little availability of data on violence against sex workers, access to key informants and the potential for programme enhancement or policy change. After initial discussions, the partners chose two South-East Asian and South Asian countries — Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka —to facilitate comparison at the regional and sub regional levels.

In Sri Lanka, sex work collectives are still nascent and need much support; Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal have managed to establish community organizations and networks focused on sex workers' rights. Willingness of government stakeholders to recognize the risk of HIV to sex workers through increased violence and to partner with the sex worker community and UN

We were looking at a range of factors — strong civil society and community, countries where the government was committed to the research and where there were opportunities to link with the communities and opportunity to build capacities of community networks and organizations.

Julia Cabassi, UNFPA and Regional Steering Committee

This research is important for us. We often hear that a sex worker faces violence from different people, but we don't have the evidence so that we can identify the causes and find solutions to reduce her risk to HIV. Once this research is published, we will hear the voices of sex workers and how they cope with violence.

Kay Thi Win, Peer lead researcher, Myanmar

agencies was a crucial factor that weighed in on the final selection of the four countries.

Other factors that contributed to the selection of study sites was (1) a strong HIV country programme that would provide lessons on mitigating violence against sex workers and (2) the capacity and involvement of UNDP, UNFPA and UNAIDS country offices in HIV programmes.

The capital or the largest city of each country was selected as the research site to ensure comparability of findings across countries. These sites also had a larger concentration of sex workers as well as NGOs and sex worker networks that could participate in the research. They also had greater potential for collaboration with stakeholders, such as in government and universities.

Regional partnerships

As already elaborated, six organizations with varying skills and expertise came together to form the broad regional platform on which the research would be launched. Following initial discussions between UNDP and APNSW on the necessity of conducting research on violence, partnerships were sought with various organizations, leading to UNFPA, CASAM, P4P and UNAIDS joining the research initiative.

APNSW was founded in 1994 by members of Asia's first organizations to work on health and human rights for sex workers. With more than 50 member organizations in 17 countries, APNSW focuses on facilitating sex worker participation and information sharing on technical and policy issues, sex work advocacy and building leadership among female, male and transgender sex workers.

CASAM, an organization based in India and an APNSW member with expertise in working with sex worker communities and research for change, was asked to provide technical support. CASAM is a project of Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha(SANGRAM), which builds on grassroots experience to inform policy at the national and international levels. SANGRAM's work with sex worker-led interventions is recognized as a best practice.[11]

P4P, a regional joint programme of UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and United Nations Volunteers in Asia and the Pacific, brought to the initiative its experience with multi-

11. UNFPA, UNAIDS and APNSW, The HIV and Sex Work Collection: Innovative Responses in Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok, 2012).

country research on violence against women. In particular, its recent quantitative and qualitative seven-country gender-based violence research project designed to produce a holistic, evidence-based set of policy and programmatic recommendations for more effective prevention brought valuable research experience to the partners.P4P was involved from the project's inception in November 2011 until November 2013 (when it ended as a programme).

UNDP, under the 2011–2015 UNAIDS Division of Labour strategy, had been mandated to strengthen the enabling environment for HIV prevention efforts by working on "removing punitive laws, policies, practices and stigma and discrimination that block effective responses to AIDS"[12]. In that same strategy, UNFPA was mandated to co-lead with UNDP on the "empowerment of men who have sex with men, sex workers and transgender individuals to protect themselves from HIV infection and to fully access anti-retroviral therapy"[13] and "meet the HIV needs of women and girls and stop sexual and gender-based violence"[14]. UNAIDS took responsibility to ensure the "functioning and accountability"[15] of UN agencies in relation to HIV policy and programming. In addition, UNFPA, UNDP and UNAIDS are co-convenors of the Regional Thematic Working Group on HIV and Sex Work, which had deemed responses to violence against sex workers as a priority area emerging from the recommendations of the first Asia-Pacific Consultation on HIV and Sex Work (in Thailand in 2010).

PICTURE 5. REGIONAL ROUND TABLE, BANGKOK

For each of the six partners, the outcome of the research would prove critical in gaining a better understanding of the associations between gender-based violence and HIV risk in the context of sex work and HIV programming. Importantly, it was envisaged that the recommendations would be useful in developing evidence-based policies and programmes that prioritize gender-based violence prevention towards sex workers.

12. UNAIDS, Division of Labour, Consolidated Guidance Note (Bangkok, 2010), p. 5. Available at : www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/sub_landing/files/JC2063_DivisionOfLabour_en.pdf.
13. ibid.
14. ibid.
15. ibid., p. 7.

Flexibility within the RSC also helped to harness multi-dimensional skills of individuals, which helped to tackle various local problems relating to methodology, interviewer skills, logistics, timelines, clearance etc that emerged as the project was introduced at the field level in each country.

Laxmi Murthy, CASAM, Regional Steering Committee and co-author of the regional report

Regional Steering Committee

At the regional level, the RSC steered the research project with its amalgamated skills of management and oversight, balancing complexities of sex work issues and qualitative research. In short, the RSC had responsibility for three areas designated as critical for the smooth running of the project:

- management coordination;
- technical coordination and support; and
- ethics and safety coordination and support.

The RSC partnership was maintained throughout the research process and report-writing process, with UNDP and UNFPA taking responsibility for technical review of the draft reports from inception to the final stages.

UNDP and UNFPA took the lead in shaping the broad mandate of the research initiative regionally. In the four study sites, they took on the coordination of the country work and in bringing together government stakeholders and sex work organizations to talk together on addressing and reducing violence against sex workers.

UNDP took the lead in Myanmar while UNFPA was instrumental in shaping the country process in Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka. They supported the country teams to establish the National Working Groups and draft its terms of reference, provided assistance in securing ethics approvals to conduct the research, contracted the lead researchers and managed the financial aspects of the research project.

CASAM's base in the sex worker community and experience with advocacy on sex workers' rights and the P4P research experience were harnessed throughout the research period to provide leadership on qualitative research techniques and application in sex work settings. This included developing standardized tools, such as the research protocols and interview guides; providing support to the National Working Groups in selecting the lead researchers; and developing resource material and training the lead and peer lead researchers. CASAM and P4P also took the lead in developing the ethics and safety guidelines to ensure that the data gathered was robust and adhered to international research guidelines. The availability of this centralized technical group throughout the project period helped to maintain quality and standardize the research process.

Although the roles within the RSC were well defined initially, as the project progressed those roles became more flexible. Regular emails, Skype calls and face-to-face meetings took place between the RSC members on all aspects of the research project. These conversations drew on the collective experience of the RSC members in management, conducting multi-country research, working with governments and vulnerable communities and helped to negotiate potentially sensitive situations as they occurred at the regional or country level.

According to the lead researchers, the regular feedback and review mechanisms instituted by the RSC helped them to share concerns on the interview guides, clarify and standardize terms and adopt innovations during the research process. In Indonesia, for instance, the lead researches introduced the pre-validation process with the peer interviewers as a mechanism for ensuring that the data was robust. An RSC member was on hand and witnessed the engagement of peer interviewers during the pre-validation exercise and recommended its inclusion into the research design.

The nittygritty of coordination

Multi-country research projects that are coordinated at a regional level can result in national teams feeling disconnected with the broader research agenda. There may be apprehension that regionally directed programmes may not be nationally applicable, which often impacts ownership of the study and the use of its findings.

> There was constant liaison between the regional UN offices and their country offices and between the sex worker communities. CASAM and P4P ensured that the national teams continuously identified as part of the research and fostered a feeling of ownership.
>
> **Stephanie Miedema,**
> P4P and Regional Steering Committee

Cognizant of this, the RSC emphasized coordination between the regional and country UN teams, research teams and sex worker networks. Face-to-face meetings, email updates, researcher exchanges, steering group interactions and country visits maintained the flow of information and communication.

Three regional meetings were organized after the inception of the project to bring together the national and regional research teams, plan the project design, develop research protocols, address national variations and finally to discuss the country findings.

The UN regional and country research teams had an important role in ensuring that the research stayed on course. This included not just finance and logistics monitoring but ensuring flexibility in the management processes, arbitrating between the country research teams, community organizations and government stakeholders and tackling problems as and when they arose.

Overcoming challenges

Because the project spanned a period of more than three years, some turnover was

There was a misunderstanding with the local organization supporting the research early on in the project. UNFPA immediately stepped in to discuss and resolve their concerns and ensure that the training went on without a hitch.

Nilu Abeyratne, Co-lead researcher, Sri Lanka

experienced in the teams at the regional and country levels. The UN agencies took on the responsibility of ensuring that the project was not affected. For instance, when a lead researcher had to abruptly leave the project, the UNFPA regional and country representatives promptly stepped in to ensure that the UN contracting procedures did not delay the research process.

The project also faced delays, including constituting the National Working Groups, locating qualified and experienced researchers and finding community networks that could sustain the needed advocacy beyond the final reports. The RSC members held steady to keep the initiative on track. For instance, in Myanmar where setting up the National Working Group was delayed, the RSC worked closely with the team members to ensure that the peer interviewers and lead researchers were selected and that the interview guides were translated and localized in consultation with the community representatives.

Research design

As the research study progressed, flexibility and adapting to local requirements was essential due to the sensitive subject matter, which required constant monitoring and support for the country research teams. The RSC had to adapt its role according to the shifting needs of the research. For instance, in the first two phases, the focus was on shaping the research agenda and building the research protocols, guidelines for interviews and ethics guidelines — processes that the RSC led. In the third phase, as the emphasis shifted to implementing the research within countries, the RSC took on a more supportive role to ensure that country-specific research protocols and interviews were developed, taking care to maintain common standards of data gathering to ensure comparability.

The lead researchers, sex worker leaders who helped shape the in-country research process (peer lead researchers in Indonesia and Myanmar) and peer interviewers led this process. The RSC returned to a leading role in the final phase and generating the regional report.

CASAM, with its experience of working on sex workers issues, was ideally suited to contextualize the research to the needs of a community partnership and to help the team

We were faced with the challenge of turnover of consultants on the project. We consistently re-engaged and re-briefed people, got them to engage with the complexity of the initiative. RSC members took on the responsibility of inducting new people, allowing for some amount of seamless transition.

Julia Cabassi, UNFPA and Regional Steering Committee

Involvement of peer sex workers in implementing the research forced us to review the methodology anew. How do you break up the technical language so that sex workers internalize and understand it? We needed to transition the peer researcher from an activist role to a researcher role — those are fundamentally different approaches.

Laxmi Murthy, CASAM, Regional Steering Committee and co-author of the regional report

simplify the interview process to make it easy for sex workers to participate.

CASAM and P4P were entrusted with the task of developing the initial draft of the research tools, including the research protocol and interview guides. They adapted interview guides that had been successfully implemented in previous studies on violence, keeping in mind the variations that were required for a marginalized group, such as sex workers.

Changes suggested by the country research teams were shared and discussed in regular calls between the lead researchers and coordinated by CASAM and P4P. These update meetings were meant for the lead researchers to share the status of the in-country research and innovative strategies, analyse the methodology and amend aspects that were not working.

The regular interactions quickly became a forum for knowledge sharing and exchange of experience and also allowed the lead researchers to adapt based on other country teams' initiatives. For instance, the excerpted email exchange in Box 3 and other

Box 3. Constructive Communication

Is there a pre-defined set of definitions of key concepts, e.g., sexual violence, that are to be used for the country and regional reports? For instance, are there definitions of rape and non-consensual sex that all the country researchers have agreed on?

Annie George, Co-lead researcher, Nepal

Since legal definitions of rape and sexual assault might differ from country to country, these variations will have to be noted and specific acts analysed and understood within the legal framework of that specific site. It will also be extremely important to arrive at an understanding (based on primary data) of what sex workers themselves perceive as abusive or as rape, even if it might not be so defined legally.

Laxmi Murthy, CASAM, Regional Steering Committee and co-author of the regional report

What a great idea to explicitly address how sex workers' understandings of sexual violence compare with legal definitions in-country. I hadn't thought of doing this directly. But crucial for advocacy indeed!

Jody Miller, Co-lead researcher, Sri Lanka

Excerpts from email exchange, February 2013, illustrates the quality of exchange and intra-country learning on the definition of sexual violence.

PICTURE 6. REGIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING, BANGKOK

similar conversations led to more nuanced definitions.

The country research teams moved at different paces due to uneven capacities and constraints of ethics clearance. The staggered pace had not been anticipated but proved to be beneficial because research teams could learn from each other's experiences and adapt their strategies.

The RSC also became a sounding board for clarifying issues of sample size, terminology, definitions and variations in the questionnaire.

> In Nepal, suggestions from other lead researchers helped to develop the training methodology, place emphasis on the language used in the questionnaire and sequence the questions better.
>
> **Annie George,** Co-lead researcher, Nepal

From the outset, it was recognized that the crucial challenges that would need to be overcome would lie at the country level, given the context of existing policies and the marginalized communities. Hence, the country research teams would need to have strong voices through motivated community participation and experienced researchers with prior work experience in gender-based violence and qualitative research, whose contributions would strengthen the academic significance attached to the research. Much importance was given to the selection of the community partners and researchers.

SELECTING SEX WORKER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Partnerships with the sex worker community would have to be forged through existing networks of sex workers and efforts made to develop their leadership and advocacy skills as the study progressed. Sex worker

Violence against sex workers has not been worked on in Myanmar, and there is potential for obtaining much needed evidence that would help to strengthen policy against HIV and AIDS responses.

Khin Su Su Hlaing, Co-lead researcher, Myanmar

organizations with a strong track record were selected as partners: Organisasi Perubahan Sosial Indonesia (OPSI) in Indonesia, Sex Workers in Myanmar (SWIM) and Targeted Outreach Project (TOP)in Myanmar and Blue Diamond Society and Jagriti Mahila Maha Sangh (JMMS) in Nepal. In Sri Lanka, which is in a nascent community-mobilizing stage, an NGO providing HIV prevention services for female sex workers in Colombo, Community Strength Development Foundation (CSDF), and the Heart to Heart NGO were asked to partner in the research.

With its emphasis on community engagement and given the nascent skills among sex worker organizations, the project emerged as a long-term investment in strengthening the leadership skills of community members. The partners were cognizant that these varying capacities would provide differing results in each country. However, the necessity of a strong capacity-building engagement to ensure long-term community gains was built into the research project. Achieving the balance between strengthening community skills, ensuring robust data and protecting the confidentiality of participants proved to be a slow process.

Selecting researchers

Care was taken to find lead researchers who were not just qualified in qualitative research but could translate the project vision to robust research practices with meaningful community involvement. The UN country offices and community organizations had the task of selecting the lead researchers. The National Working Group advised on the appointment and decisions were reached through consensus.

Four lead researchers with international experience were appointed. Because three of them (in Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka) were non-nationals with a limited understanding of the local language, co-lead researchers from within the country were also appointed. Their primary responsibilities were to liaise with

The project was aiming to have a policy impact instead of doing research for the sake of research. When I had done previous research on sex work issues in Sri Lanka, we didn't have any organizations and people with whom we could partner and bring about change.

Jody Miller, Co-lead researcher, Sri Lanka

the National Working Group to obtain ethics clearance from the ethics review board, translate the research tools and provide training and implementation support.

In addition, two peer researchers were also appointed from the sex workers groups in Indonesia and Myanmar to assist in shaping the research study. Since they were senior leaders of the sex workers' rights movement in the Asia Pacific region, the research and sex worker communities would benefit from their presence and inputs. This was an innovative formal partnership of community and academic researchers. This amalgamation of formal research experience in consultation with sex workers was crucial to demonstrate that robust evidence could be gathered while adhering to principles of community and stakeholder participation.

The researchers also appreciated that the project was attempting to shift from a traditional research project and redefine community engagement in research and were open to the new approach. They also realized that prior research on sex work was limited to academic engagement, and the research they were embarking on was seeking to break down the divide between the researcher and the community being researched. At critical stages of the project, the lead researchers merged community experiences and perspectives into the research design.

> Most research is developed by NGOs and has focused on developing strategies and evidence to decide where to put the money. Now, a collaboration is emerging between sex worker organizations and academic organizations and researchers to sift through voices and place the evidence necessary for good policy.
>
> **Andrew Hunter,** APNSW

Box 4. Lessons

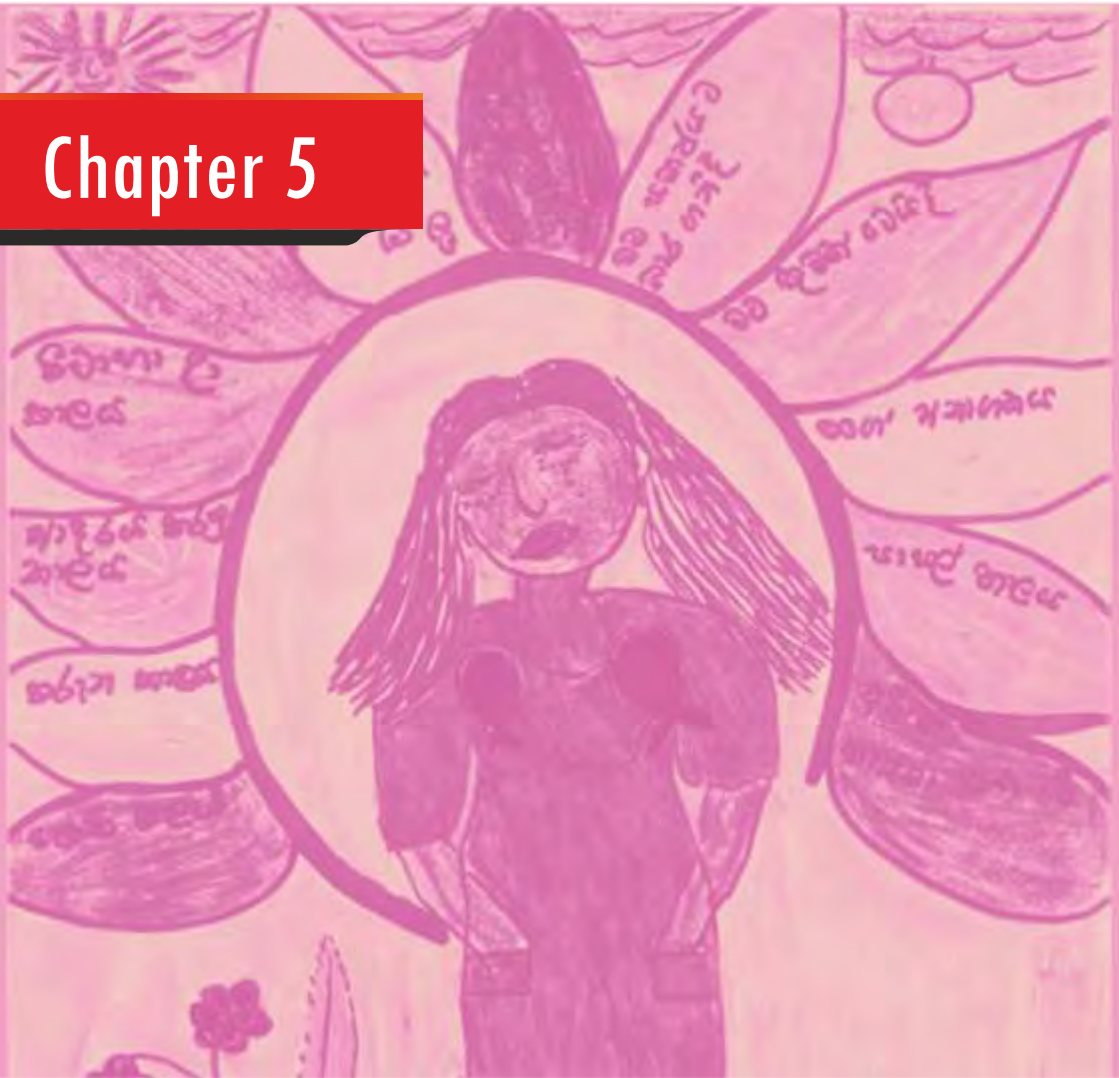
1. Flexibility within a large multi-country research project is essential to achieve outcomes within a limited time period. The presence of a Regional Steering Committee overseeing all aspects of the project, including research and its management, helped to overcome bottlenecks in a timely manner.
2. To implement a project of this complexity and magnitude, a team comprising skills of management and research is needed at the regional and country levels.
3. The continued presence of technical partners throughout the design, training, implementation and report writing stages is vital to continuously resolve questions while ensuring that the sex worker community remains involved.
4. Experienced lead researchers are critical in translating the vision and research design of combining traditional research processes with new approaches of community partnership.
5. In research involving marginalized communities, the most difficult aspect is achieving balance between gathering robust data with sound research principles while protecting the confidentiality of participants and strengthening the communities who are at the centre of and are driving the research.
6. A strong UN role in shaping the regional strategy and building the foundations of in-country engagement enables a potentially sensitive subject to be researched with the involvement of the subject community in a supportive environment.
7. A multi-country research initiative can benefit from staggered timelines across sites, which enables country teams to learn from experiences and adopt course-correcting strategies.

National

Working GROUPS

Strengthening Government & Stakeholder Involvement

Chapter 5



The national working group is innovative because we are seeking to have sex workers, governments and the UN engaging in an ongoing dialogue on issues around violence against sex workers. The findings from the study can be a meeting point to further the dialogue into constructive policy measures in eliminating violence.

Marta Vallejo-Mestres, UNDP and Regional Steering Committee

In a study such as this, which has the potential to address policies to reduce violence against sex workers, the involvement of government, law enforcement, judiciary and other stakeholders in the process is critical. Their involvement in this particular study helped guide and overcome initial challenges and created a supportive environment for conducting the research and eventually to result in policies on eliminating violence against sex workers.

The National Working Group was conceptualized as a forum to bring together partners who would understand the need for the research, participate in its commission, review the findings together and take them forward in terms of policy design. The need for government engagement and participation in guiding the research was underscored during the inception meeting in 2011. The involvement of government stakeholders would enable the research to be carried out with minimal barriers and hopefully would engender commitment to the eventual research outcomes. A more transparent process of engaging with governments would also facilitate a smoother transition into the final phase of disseminating the research findings.

The challenge of setting up the National Working Group was to ensure that it included representatives of the governance systems who would eventually help provide a safe environment by working to prevent and redress violence against sex workers. This included government departments, the police, the judiciary and health professionals. Additionally, the National Working Group had to be set up in the first phase to provide maximum support and leadership.

Sex worker network representatives co-chaired the National Working Group in Indonesia and Myanmar. The UN regional and

This model has enabled the engagement of key partners at the outset, especially government and related institutions who are in a position to address the findings and take forward the recommendations and to do so working in partnerships with sex worker communities.

Julia Cabassi, UNFPA and Regional Steering Committee

The National Working Groups illustrate the potential and challenges of collaboration between multiple government sectors and communities to strengthen community rights. They can also help to position this work within a range of relevant agendas, including gender based violence, HIV, human rights (including labour rights), rule of law and access to justice.

Brianna Harrison, UNAIDS and Regional Steering Committee

country research teams worked closely with the sex worker network representatives and community groups to identify potential members.

Chaired by the AIDS authority or the health ministry in each country, the National Working Group in most cases included representatives from the equivalent departments/ministries of social justice, home affairs, women's affairs, legal affairs or law reform, the police and development NGOs.

Draft terms of reference were shared with the National Working Group, which were then further developed within the context of each country to define the role. Each Working Group contributed to creating a research work plan, approving the selection of lead researchers, assisting in obtaining the ethics approval to conduct the research and giving input on the research process, such as selection of areas for the study and sample size.

National Working Groups' experiences differed among the four countries. In Indonesia, for instance, the group's engagement with the research process was quite high. Coordinated by the National AIDS Commission and OPSI, the group met on four occasions to provide inputs. The group comprised the Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the National Commission for Women, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Social Affairs and UN agencies. The group was initiated by early April 2012 and helped to select the lead researchers. The National AIDS Commission took the lead in bringing the government departments together and coordinated the meetings, which helped to ensure participation.

In Indonesia, while there is a structure to address violence against women, we don't speak much of the violence in the context of HIV. We come to actively facilitate that process rather than only the research. The National Working Group has various departments represented, including the social ministry, legal aid, civil security and health care. In addition, there are NGOs working with sex workers and anti-trafficking groups. There are many perspectives to violence, and the Working Group has to represent those perspectives if we want viable outcomes.

Ingrid Irawati Atmosukarto, National AIDS Commission, Co-chair, National Working Group, Indonesia

Once the National Working Group took ownership, we were able to coordinate all other related activities, such as obtaining clearance for the research and support during the field implementation.

Dr. Win Mar, UNDP, Myanmar

The research benefited from the diversity of stakeholders, such as those working on violence against women, providing legal aid or harm reduction services and organizations working on anti-trafficking initiatives. In Indonesia, the research enabled the National Working Group to have a multi-faceted discussion on the problem of violence in sex work and to differentiate trafficking from sex work and focus on the violence. For the National AIDS Commission, these conversations were key to reaching a middle ground and shaping the research agenda.

In Myanmar, the National Working Group took nearly a year to be constituted but was an important part of the research design. Two rounds of consultations were undertaken with three Ministries that would endorse the research — Home, Health and Social Welfare — and the Supreme Court. The UN agencies introduced the study and developed a concept paper along with the terms of reference and interview protocols.

Given the sensitivity around the issue of sex work in Myanmar, the National Working Groups' role assumed importance for the successful initiation and conduct of the research. The group initially took time to clarify the purpose of the research and its outcomes. They thought that given Myanmar's track record of a robust HIV prevention programme, the research could further contribute towards reducing HIV incidence.

In Nepal and Sri Lanka, the participation of and inputs from the National Working Group were sporadic. Regular transfers of government officials and police officers who were members contributed to the low participation in the early days of the research process.

In Nepal, the National Working Group consisted of representatives from the National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, the police, NGOs working on women's legal issues and HIV prevention services for sex workers, sex workers' organizations and UN agencies

The first meeting had a high turnout with high-level officials attending, and we informed them about the purpose of the research and its potential benefits. The list of National Working Group members was presented to the Sri Lankan Medical Association while obtaining ethical clearance and that may have helped to strengthen the credibility of the research project. However, the Working Group was affected by constant transfers and changes.

Revati Chawla, UNFPA, Sri Lanka

Discussions within the National Working Group focused on the geographic coverage. They wanted the hill areas of Nepal included in the research. We explained that the research was primarily qualitative, and it would be difficult to include large numbers. After some discussion, they were convinced and realized that this sort of detailed research with a small sample size was equally important.

Madhu Koirala, UNFPA, Nepal

(UNFPA, UNAIDS, the International Labour Organization and UN Women). In the initial stages, the researchers found it difficult to convince the National Working Group that the sample size was representative; the group also wanted a larger geographical research site.

For the sex worker organizations in Indonesia and Myanmar, the National Working Group's engagement gave them a vital space to meet together and encouraged them to devote greater thought in responding to the violence that sex workers experience. Two sex worker community leaders were elected as co-chairs of the National Working Group, and they actively coordinated the discussions and provided community inputs and perspectives. This involvement gave them confidence that communities would be able to participate with greater clarity once the recommendations of the research emerged.

Overall, the experience of the research teams with the National Working Group was mixed. The research teams found the constant transfer of government officials impacted the efficiency of the National Working Group. At the same time in the initial phase, the National Working Groups provide contribution in ensuring that the research could be conducted without too much inconvenience; in a couple of countries, the presence of the National Working Group facilitated the ethics approval. In Sri Lanka, the timely intervention of the police representative who was a member on the National Working Group made a positive intervention in an adverse incident of a peer interviewer who was arrested. The community groups who participated in the National Working Group meetings thought that the group was critical to the long-term outcomes from the research and that it was an empowering experience for them to sit at the same table and discuss issues of violence that they and other sex workers experience routinely.

We were able to work with government institutions such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, Human Rights Commission, Ministry of health and other institution. The process gave us the space to convey our inputs and make our voices heard.

Aldo Napitu, Co-chair of the National Working Group and President of Organisasi Perubahan Sosial Indonesia.

Box 5. Lessons

1. **Government commitments** are important to steer and support the research agenda on such a sensitive issue. It strengthens the credibility of the research and ownership of the findings, thereby paving the way for further dialogue on policy change.

2. **Including sex worker leaders** as co-chairs in the National Working Group helps to recognize them as vital partners and build community confidence in the research process. It also brings community and government representatives together to discuss needed policy changes.

3. **Regular meetings** to update the stakeholders helps to strengthen their commitment to the research process and final outcomes.

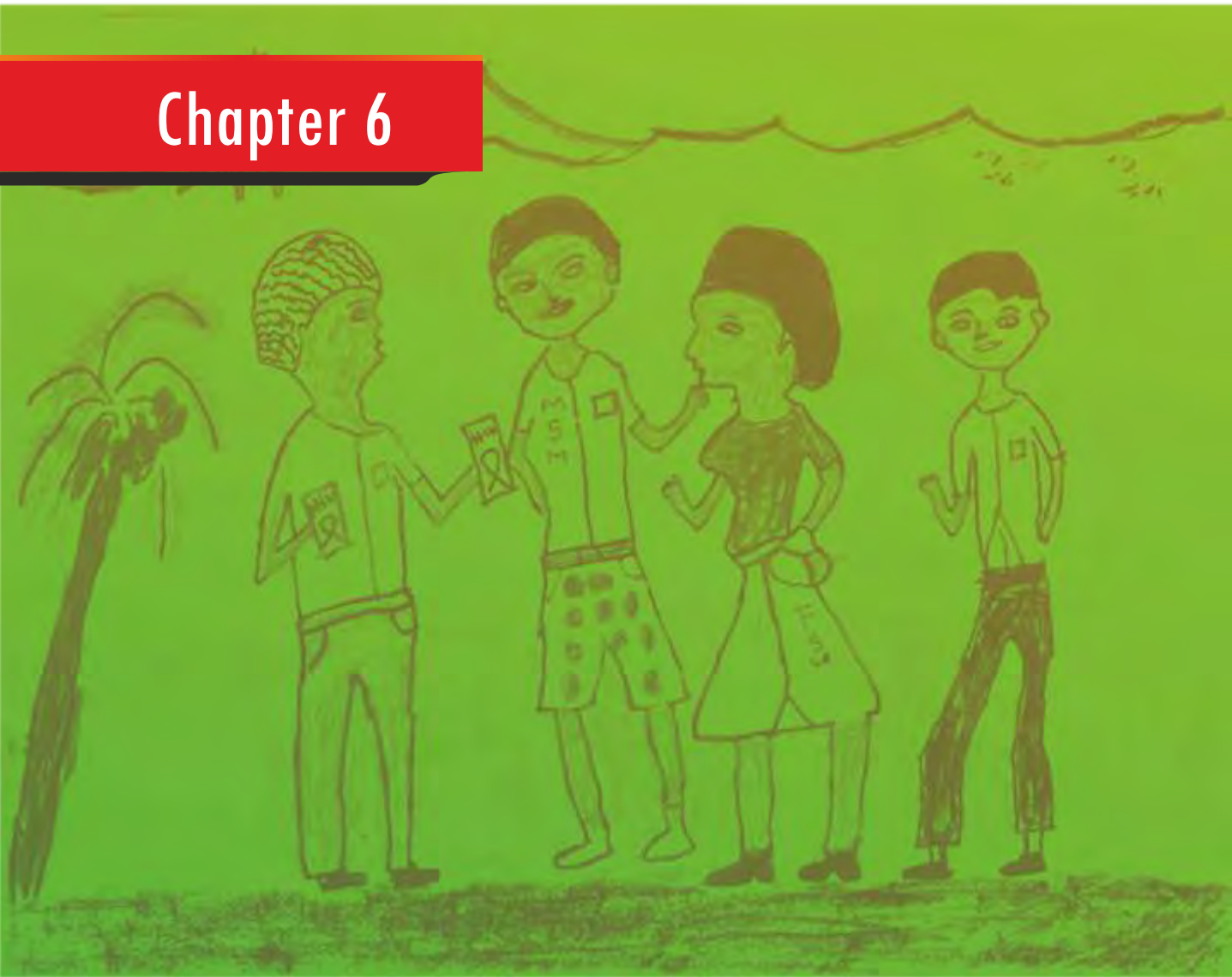
4. Transfers of government representatives affects the **consistent engagement** of the research project and need to be accounted for within the project design.

5. **Bringing stakeholders into the process** in the early phase helps create a supportive mechanism for conducting the research.

Ensuring

Community ENGAGEMENT

Chapter 6



We need to listen to voices of all people to ensure that the findings and recommendations that emerge are useful for advancing change. A key part of this was to support communities to recognize that advocacy is a joint initiative. The process has led to powerful partnerships that harness the comparative advantage of different partners to bring about change in policies and programmes.

Julia Cabassi,
UNFPA and Regional Steering Committee

Response to the global HIV epidemic has emphasized sex worker community involvement as a cornerstone of good practice. Sex workers also have been recognized as critical enablers to ensure the uptake of HIV programme services.

Emerging partnerships

To date, the presence of the sex worker community in policy research has been limited. There is a perception that the research agenda is defined and driven by public health concerns rather than the interests of the affected community. Research on sex workers additionally is perceived as guided by negative public attitudes towards the sex industry and those working within it —it is a perception that stifles sex workers' opinions about policies that impact them.

As already well elaborated, the project was conceptualized as a collaborative initiative with sex workers participating in the conception, implementation and dissemination of the research findings. The potential benefits went beyond critical input on the sites and the telling narratives of violence to sex workers as valuable partners in the interview process.

As well, their engagement would ensure long-term ownership of the broader advocacy process to reduce violence against sex workers. To achieve this, community leaders and representatives had to understand what would emerge from the research, the community's stake in the process and how they could plan advocacy by forging partnerships with other stakeholders.

In Indonesia there is no tradition of doing action research and with the involvement of the community. Researchers normally resist the collaboration model because the researcher asks the [subject] community and rarely the other way around. To make the research useful and implementable, we tried to change this tradition. While the academic community brings the scientific knowledge, the community brings the everyday experience. At the same time, the government brings in the broader perspective about policy and law. We can ensure a more effective intervention when these aspects are bought together.

Ignatius Praptoraharjo, Lead researcher, Indonesia

Box 6. INVOLVING THE SEX WORKER COMMUNITY

This research is a good opportunity to bring out our issues and be heard by the State.

Female sex worker peer interviewer, Myanmar

Strengthening and sustaining capacities

The partner organizations were aware that this aspect of collaborative research would require tremendous skill-building inputs for the sex worker community. Thus, skills building on leadership and qualitative research methods and participation was built into the project design through various strategies, such as formal training for the peer lead researchers and participation in the National Working Group and validation of initial research findings (Box 6).

Peer interviewers

In Indonesia and Myanmar, the community organizations selected around 15-20 participants to undergo training, from which eight to nine peer interviewers were selected. Even those who were not selected expressed that they had learned numerous practical skills that they could apply in their daily work in HIV programmes when confronted with a crisis. A common response from participants was that they had learned they had rights as sex workers and that they could seek redress against the violence they experienced.

This is the first time I have been in such a research project. My confidence has gone up and I feel that I too can do something.

Sekar Sarma, Male sex worker peer interviewer, Blue Diamond Society, Nepal

The selection criteria for the peer interviewers entailed a minimum level of education or literacy, age, mobility, prior experience in conducting research, being in sex work for a significant period, a non-judgemental attitude, respectful to the sex worker community, comfortable talking to peers, reliability, an ability to maintain confidentiality and good listening skills and open mindedness.

Kay Thi [peer lead researcher] and we had discussions on the research, role of researcher and how we can do things, like role play, to make it easier for peer interviewers to understand. She knew many things and could play a central role in the peer training.

Cath Sluggett, Co-lead researcher, Myanmar

Box 7. PARTICIPATING SEX WORKER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Organisasi Perubahan Sosial Indonesia (OPSI) — A national network of sex workers, formed in 2009 and working across 22 provinces

Targeted Outreach Project(TOP)—An NGO-supported HIV prevention project for female sex workers and men having sex with men in Myanmar, formed in 2004

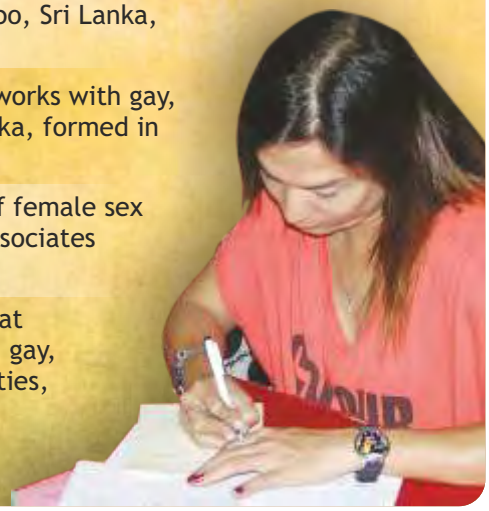
Sex Workers in Myanmar(SWIM)—A network of sex workers, formed in 2011

Community Strength Development Foundation (CSDF)— An organization working with sex workers in Colombo, Sri Lanka, formed in 2004

Heart to Heart—A community organization that works with gay, transgender persons and bisexual men in Sri Lanka, formed in 2011

Jagriti Mahila Maha Sang(JMMS) —A federation of female sex workers, formed in 2006 and now numbers 26 associates spanning 23 districts of Nepal

Blue Diamond Society (BDS) —An organization that advocates for the rights of Nepal's marginalized, gay, transgender and other sexual minority communities, including sex workers, formed in 2001



Different strategies were used across the countries to select the interviewers. In Indonesia and Myanmar, the networks and research team went through a two-step selection process. The network put out the word among the community that research process was looking for interviewers. Following the first training, the sex workers who would eventually conduct the interviews were shortlisted. In Nepal and Sri Lanka, the local NGO and community organization selected the peers who would conduct the interviews. The final selection was based on the criterion of competence in interviewing. The decision was made by consensus within the group.

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This training is valuable because it's related with violence. I could immediately apply back and utilize [the training] for the community, for example, using interviewer's skills to unburden one's feelings or open one's heart. This training upgraded my skills and it is convenient for me to use it [in the future].

Female sex worker peer interviewer, Myanmar

The session on taking interviews was very good. I also learned a lot about the theory of gender and discrimination. Before this, I had only a vague idea. The tips to interview were very practical, and I could use them while interviewing participants. I could see them open up to me.

Uma Budathoki,
Female sex worker peer interviewer, Nepal

The peer interviewers who were selected expressed the hope that they would be contributing to something worthwhile —something that would help reduce the extreme violence they and their peers experience.

Peer lead researchers

Recognizing the leadership of sex workers in the research process, peer lead researchers were included to further strengthen the sex worker community's involvement in the research. This strategy was applied in Indonesia and Myanmar where two sex worker leaders, Aldo Napitu and Kay Thi Win, were appointed as peer lead researchers. They participated in the National Working Group meetings, assisted in selecting the lead researchers and the training of peer interviewers and provided inputs to the research design and interview guides.

Training and technical inputs

Regional training of trainers

At the regional level, a training of trainers was organized by the RSC for community leaders and lead researchers to understand the purpose of the project, research design and the rationale for using qualitative research techniques. The regional training was conducted by the members of the RSC and technical experts while the second training within each country was conducted by the lead researcher and sex worker organization staff and supported by CASAM and P4P, which provided technical inputs and resources as and when requested.

The four-day workshop included a review of the conceptual framework on gender-based violence, violence against sex workers and connections with HIV risk. The group discussions assisted participants to reflect on the experiences of violence against sex workers.

The training also incorporated a review of the research methodology, understanding of informed consent, ethics concerns and safety aspects of conducting research with sex workers. The lead researchers and community leaders at this point adapted the

I learned a lot about law and policy related to transgender people and the reason for our status. [I learned about] the types of violence and how to build confidence in other transgender people to come out and speak of their experience.

Aparna, Heart to Heart, Transgender peer interviewer, Sri Lanka

PICTURE 7. PEER INTERVIEWER TRAINING, SRI LANKA

qualitative research guides for use in their context. These interactions were extremely useful for the community leaders and lead researchers as they began to engage with each other's strengths and weaknesses. They showed how the partnership could be harnessed to deliver robust evidence at the country level. The peer interviewers gave numerous inputs on adapting the language of the interview guide. Since the sex workers were involved at all stages of the research process, the interview questions were more nuanced and able to capture their lived realities.

In-country training

A second five-day training session was organized at the country level by the lead researchers and community leaders, with assistance from the UN agency focal point

> The training was very practical, and the demonstration of techniques of how to talk to clients, how to make them feel comfortable — this was very useful. Some clients refused to talk in the beginning — being drug users plus sex workers, they are always scared to talk. But the techniques I learned at the workshop really helped me to reassure them and make them feel comfortable. Most training is just talk and theory, but this one was practical — I liked it because of that.
>
> **Bigens Nebang,** Female sex worker peer interviewer, Dristi, Nepal

The lead researchers, an RSC representative and I sat to discuss how the training would be done and what each session would achieve. These discussions helped to be prepared for the actual training, I was able to translate and guide the session for the peer interviewers.

Kay Thi Win, Peer lead researcher, Targeted Outreach Project, Myanmar

(UNFPA in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Nepal and UNDP in Myanmar). In each country, 10–15 peer interviewers who had qualified through the selection attended the training. Based on the inputs received at the regional training workshop, each country team designed a training course to disseminate the material for the peer interviewers in a clear and simple manner. They included gender-based violence and human rights, the qualitative research method of data collection and the interview guides. The questionnaires and interview protocols were translated into the local language, and dedicated sessions were organized for reviewing each segment in detail.

The training sessions were designed for diverse education levels and lack of skills in research. Research concepts like qualitative research, sample, types of violence and ethics were constructed unambiguously, with examples to enable participants to easily relate and discuss among themselves. The sessions were kept flexible, and the training team constantly reviewed session outcomes and allocated extra time for concepts that they thought had not been understood by the participants.

Emphasis was placed on technical skills for interviewing, such as the use of data recorders, administering informed consent forms and providing participants seeking assistance with information on referral services for counselling, testing and other health needs.

Inspiring adaptations

The country research teams experimented with different formats and sessions to ensure that the peer interviewers found the learning process easy and interactive. Given the scope of the initiative, this was not an easy task and tremendous thought went into planning. To reduce the gap between the peer interviewers and the other research team members, sex work leaders who were trained

This is the first time I am doing the research. Sex workers came to my organization and I conducted the interviews and recorded them myself. I learned how to frame questions in the training and that was very helpful while conducting interviews. Sometimes I found it difficult to follow the order. When a person was asked her background, she didn't stop at all. So I didn't force her.

Aparna Prabath Kumara, Transgender peer interviewer, Heart to Heart, Sri Lanka

PICTURE 8. PEER INTERVIEWER TRAINING, NEPAL

at the regional training workshop had a crucial role. Their active participation in training and localizing the questionnaire helped to make the sex workers comfortable and confident in their own abilities to deliver as interviewers.

The peer lead researchers(in Indonesia and Myanmar) assisted the lead researchers by explaining difficult research terms and complicated issues, such as research ethics. Principles such as confidentiality, respect for participants and informed consent generated much discussions because the participants were curious how these would manifest when doing the interviews.

Though not part of the original training design, mock interviews were conducted under the supervision of the research team to

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When the interviewee is exhausted or does not wish to respond, I gave him some space and came back to the issue later. I learned to understand his situation and body language.

Mona, Transgender peer interviewer, Organisasi Perubahan Sosial Indonesia, Indonesia

The informant did not want to share his experience of violence during the mock interview. But Eric was very good. He was able to draw out the information, slowly making the informant feel comfortable.

Ignatius Praptoraharjo, Lead researcher, Indonesia

test the readiness of participants (it was suggested by the peer lead researcher in Indonesia and followed in the other study sites).All the sex workers were invited to participate in these interviews and conduct an interview with a mock research participant. The exercise gave the peer interviewers an opportunity to practice and thus ease their initial trepidation about doing interviews alone. It also gave them opportunity to use the digital recorder and obtain detailed feedback from the lead researchers on their strength areas and gaps.

In Indonesia, the mock interviewees reflected on being interviewed, including their discomfort levels with some methods of questioning, difficult questions and attitudes of the interviewers. They also gave input on positive aspects that made them divulge confidences. Such simple and practical strategies were easily understood by the peer interviewers and helped build their skills. In Indonesia and Myanmar, where the final peer interviewers were selected after the training, this exercise gave the lead researchers an opportunity to make an initial assessment of the participants' capacity to conduct interviews.

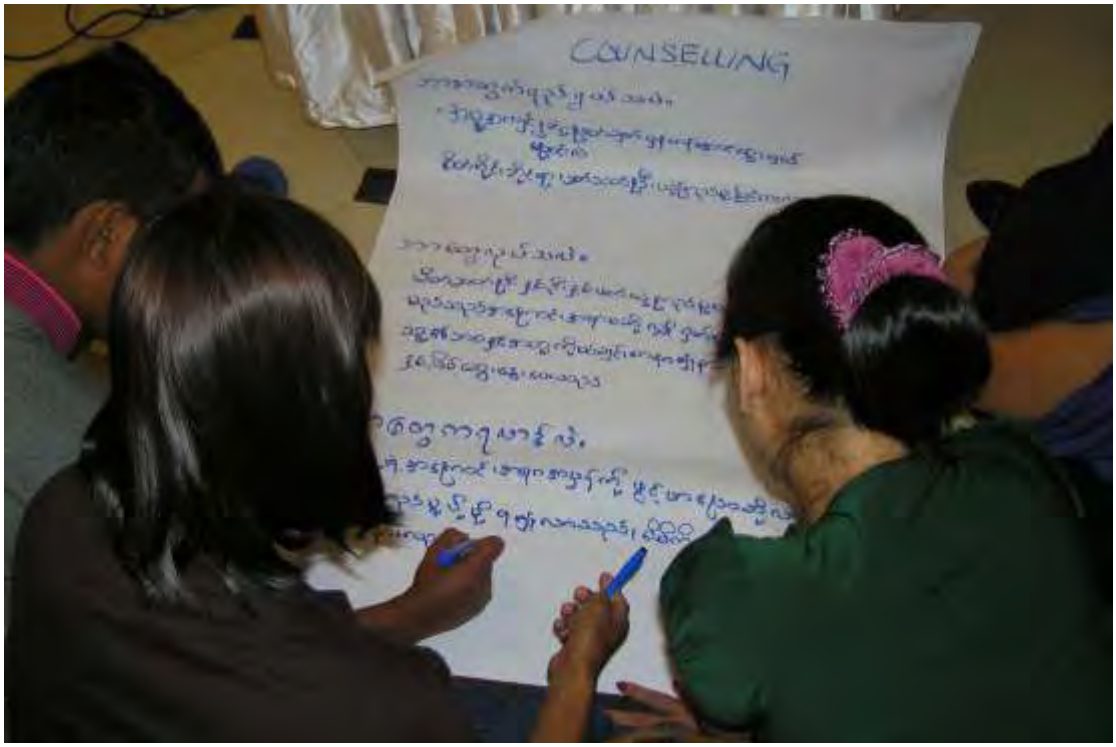
When the interviewers were completed in Indonesia, the research team decided to share the initial findings with the peer interviewers and the participants. Although this was not part of the research design, the research team thought that given the rationale of a participatory effort with the community, it became the responsibility of the research team to report back on the initial findings. Furthermore, it was seen as enriching the research data and creating greater community ownership with the research process.

The other three research teams also adopted the community validation exercise quite successfully into their strategy. For the peer interviewers, it was a satisfying moment to see the fruit of their research efforts emerge as cohesive evidence and findings. The

Some peer interviewers saw the mock interviews as some sort of 'test' and brought their 'best' interviewees forward — the most articulate, confident, etc. Unfortunately, none of these interviews, which were actually of the best quality, could be included in the final analysis.

Laxmi Murthy, CASAM, Regional Steering Committee and co-author of the regional report

PICTURE 9. PEER INTERVIEWER TRAINING, MYANMAR



They trained us how to deal with participants and how to elicit their issues, their problems and their experiences and opinions. The [research participants] also felt good talking to us — for many, it was the first time anyone had bothered to sit down with them and talk to them in such detail.

Bigens Nebang, Female sex worker peer interviewer, Dristi , Nepal

I talked to an HIV-positive person and the immediate impact of the training was that I didn't feel awkward or any sense of distaste for that person, which I used to feel before. The training helped me to understand and overcome my own biases.

Uma Budathoki, Female sex worker peer interviewer, Jagriti Mahila Maha Sangh, Nepal

I am not educated and used to think that only academicians can do this type of research. I am proud to be a researcher and have the self confidence that I can transfer this knowledge to others.

Yun Yun, Female sex worker peer interviewer, Indonesia

Clearly, having peers involved was hugely successful in terms of access and trust building, which for this kind of research topic is essential. They have been able to get people to speak about things which otherwise would not have been explored or explored superficially. The involvement of sex workers has been hugely enriching for others involved in the research, especially for people who sit in high positions and what it has meant for them to listen and discuss a research project of this scale with sex workers.

Cath Sluggett,
Co-lead researcher, Myanmar

validation process gave them an opportunity to engage with the data, review the collated recommendations and provide suggestions on how sensitive findings could be analysed and presented in the country reports. In Indonesia, for example, there was an intense discussion on how the findings relating to trafficking should be presented in the country report. Some sensitive issues that emerged across the four countries during the community validation discussion included presentation of the extent of police violence and corruption, abuses in remand homes and prisons, discrimination by health care providers and consistent NGO support during episodes of violence and detention.

What worked for the peer interviewers?

From the reflections of the peer interviewers, it is evident that the training helped them to clarify policies related to violence and use the knowledge they had gained in their work. Their own experience of violence was a key factor in their determination and interest to participate in the research. A common observation was that individual incidents of violence would not help change outcomes, but this research would bridge the gap and develop robust evidence. Hence, they were conscious of the value of their contribution to the project design.

The presence of peer lead researchers (in Indonesia and Myanmar)instilled confidence among the peer interviewers that the research was not impossible. They shared anecdotal evidence and used language that was familiar for the participants, which made it easier for them to grasp abstract concepts.

The peer interviewers benefited most from the mock interview sessions; they felt they were able to apply the training guidelines and figure out what was difficult for them in an

Since the data collection finished early in Indonesia, the RSC debated whether it would be useful to discuss the initial data with the peer interviewers. The Indonesian team agreed and on my visit to Jakarta for the peer validation, it was amazing to watch the community representatives engage with the findings and what it meant for future advocacy. This was an excellent way of strengthening the robustness of the data and peer validation was introduced into the research design.

Meena Saraswathi Seshu, CASAM and Regional Steering Committee

Some questions were difficult and it used to get very emotional for the interviewee. They get upset or start crying. So we had to be cautious and allow them some time. I went back to the guidelines where they had given a list of counsellors. So I referred some of them to the counsellors.

Leanna, Female sex worker peer interviewer, Organisasi Perubahan Sosial Indonesia

I interviewed a person who became disabled after a police attack. Whenever I asked questions, the participant kept forgetting. It was a difficult experience to get information from her.

Shiromi Pradeepika, Female sex worker peer interviewer, Community Strength Development Foundation, Sri Lanka

In one interview, I heard that [a sex worker] was stabbed. I felt very helpless. The authorities, instead of finding the perpetrators and punishing them, imprisoned the participant for prostitution. She was punished twice. I felt no one was on our side. That evening I was depressed and unsatisfied.

Female sex worker peer interviewer, Myanmar

I was impressed with the peer interviewers, their comfort in writing notes during the training and their ability to organize their interviews and maintain a record of their work.

Annie George, Co-lead researcher, Nepal

When Mona [transgender interviewer] interviewed another wariya [transgender], she was able to communicate and put forward the questions very easily. I was confident that after the training they would be able to conduct the interviews.

Ignatius Praptoraharjo, Lead researcher, Indonesia

actual situation. In Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal, numerous suggestions on amending the length of the interview guide and simplifying the language emerged after these mock sessions.

The peer interviewers learned various techniques of conducting interviews in a sympathetic but balanced manner. The easy pace of the training workshop provided ample space and time to engage with the issue of violence, its importance and the actual design of the research. For the peer interviewers, the training was a crucial bridge to linking the rigours of research to their joint experiences of violence and abuse to generate evidence that they would use to strengthen their collectives' work on rights.

Conducting interviews

From the initial 42 individuals who attended the trainings, 32 peer interviewers were eventually selected.

The flexibility of the interview guide allowed the peer interviewers to experiment and conduct their interviews, depending on the participant. Some peer interviewers found it more useful to allow each research participant to speak uninterrupted rather than follow the interview guide. Some found that when they created an atmosphere of sharing stories, the participants were inspired to respond more proactively. Similarly, other peer interviewers found that when questions resulted in the participants becoming emotionally disturbed or angry, they used different mechanisms to cope.

Conducting these interviews is sometimes emotionally taxing for some interviewers. Several said that they felt like crying during the interviews, felt irritated and difficult to be with afterwards. Some transgender sex worker interviewers were upset on hearing about the sexual degradation of other transgender [workers] by the police. Some male sex worker interviewers felt 'suffocated' when they heard about the prison experiences of other male sex workers. There was a sense of helplessness among some of the female sex worker interviewers on the fact that female sex workers cannot go to the police for crimes committed against them.

Peer training and interview report, Myanmar, May 2013

Some peer interviewers shared their own experiences to put participants at ease, others gave the informant space and time to cope and created a break in the interview. And others used the list of referrals provided to suggest professional assistance.

Many peer interviewers reported that participants were emotionally disturbed while narrating incidents of violence or abuse. The peer interviewers responded with various techniques, ranging from providing the participant some time to calm down and/or narrating their own experiences of abuse to comforting the participant and referring them to support services, such as counselling centres and the network counsellors, where available.

The lead researchers stayed in the background but provided advice and reviewed the interviews with the peer interviewers. The interviewing stage lasted a week in each country. Once the peer interviewers completed their daily interviews, they reported back to the lead researchers. The lead researchers were responsible for maintaining the quality of interviews and flagging any problems that were emerging and ensuring no violation of research ethics. The researchers also ensured that in the event of adverse incidents emerging from the interview process, they could respond promptly. Lead researchers

TABLE 3. PEER INTERVIEWERS PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH

	Female sex workers	Male sex workers	Transgender sex workers
Indonesia	3	1	2
Myanmar	5	2	2
Sri Lanka	6	1	1
Nepal	6	2	1
TOTAL	20	6	6

During the practice sessions, I got feedback from the observer so I knew which areas I needed to improve during the actual data collection period.

Female sex worker peer interviewer, Myanmar

When we started analysis, we found differences between the interviews conducted by the male and female sex workers. Because the men were more educated and they had previous experience of research, the quality of interviews was better. In the case of the female sex workers, lack of empowerment and education resulted in some of the interviews having limited data.

Jody Miller, Co-lead researcher, Sri Lanka

Since I am working for the last five years in the field, I know the women and am able to locate them. I went to the different locations that I knew had different types of sex workers and discussed about the research project. If they expressed an interest in participating, then I used to refer their name to the lead researcher.

Wai Wai, Community organizer, Targeted Outreach Project, Myanmar

If researchers go on their own, most people will think they are from the police or from [the Criminal Investigation Department] and will not give answers. Because sex workers were involved, we got much more answers. When I went to another district and did the interviews, they didn't know me and so they ran away.

SP, Female sex worker peer researcher, Community Strength Development Foundation, Sri Lanka

were expected to talk peer interviewers through any issues they were encountering, particularly if the interviewing process was triggering negative feelings.

The lead researchers listened to the audio files and reviewed any problems with the peer interviewer. During these interactions, the lead researcher clarified any doubts of the peer interviewers, and any gaps seen in the interviews were immediately highlighted so that they could be amended in the next interview.

In Nepal, the lead researcher reported that almost all the peer interviewers felt dissatisfied with their first interview because they were not confident they had completed the interviews or had 'good' responses. Their confidence grew with the number of interviews they conducted. She also thought that most of the research participants were comfortable (rather than diffident or defensive) in sharing their life experiences and were happy that there was someone they could share with

In Myanmar, the lead researchers monitored the interviews of each peer interviewer and interacted with them daily.

However, in one particular debriefing session, a peer interviewer expressed a 'dislike' of one of the research participants and thought that he was providing "exaggerated responses". The lead researcher went over the ethical guidelines with the peer researcher and the need to maintain a non-judgemental attitude.

This [pre-validation meeting] was very good — this was good follow up. Most other organizations, they do training and go away. It was very good that you all came back and told us what the research found.

Bigens Nebang, Female sex worker peer interviewer, Dristi, Nepal

Community participation : Strengths and challenges

Of the 32 peer interviewers who participated in the research across the four countries, a sizeable segment had only a basic education and had never participated in any form of research previous to the current project. This proved to be a critical challenge for the lead researchers.

Lead researchers thought that at times the quality of the data was hampered by the inadequate experience in probing at appropriate moments in the interview, which could be addressed through more intensive training processes. In some instances, differing skills of the interviewers also led to patchy data.

Some researchers thought that the familiarity with the issues sometimes led peer interviewers to assume background information about a particular participant and thus not ask the relevant questions, which led to gaps in the information. In such cases and where possible, the lead researcher followed up with the sex worker network to gather the information.

There was limited understanding on the part of some peers of the rationale behind certain questions, which led to limited responses. This required the lead researchers to sit with them and go over the motivation and rationale for the questions.

Another factor that the researchers had to contend with as the interviews began was the distress and emotional trauma that participants' narratives stirred up among the peer interviewers. Across all countries, lead researchers recalled that peers were disturbed after listening to the stories of abuse and violence. For a couple of them, the participants' stories unlocked their own memories of abuse and violence. These instances underscored the importance of the safety mechanisms put into place, such as counselling referrals, to assist the interviewers and participants. The practice of daily debriefing sessions helped the interviewers cope with any emotional trauma.

When the interviewee is exhausted or does not wish to respond, I gave him some space and came back to the issue later. I learned to understand his situation and body language.

Mona, Transgender peer interviewer, Organisasi Perubahan Sosial Indonesia, Indonesia

PICTURE 10. TRAINING SESSION FOR INTERVIEWERS, MYANMAR

The participation of the sex worker community in the research has been central and critical for this research process. Without their involvement, the quality of respondents who participated and the narratives of violence that were eventually collected would have been difficult to obtain. The peer interviewers were able to select individuals from their network who shared strong testimonies of violence. For instance, in Indonesia and Myanmar, the lead researchers reported that the sample of female sex workers selected by the peers was well distributed in terms of age, location and their narratives.

The peer interviewers found that the participants confided much more in them once they realized that they were also sex workers and had experiences of violence. They became more invested in the research

"

I learned how to face difficult situations while interviewing, reading the body language of the interviewee. The role play helped a lot.

Eric, Male sex worker peer interviewer, Indonesia

PICTURE 11. PEER INTERVIEWER TEAM, INDONESIA

outcomes and hoped that they would benefit from it in the long run. It can be argued that this sort of disclosure may have had an effect on the quality of responses from the participants because they disclosed only expected responses. According to one researcher, another challenge posed by peer interviewers having prior experience of violence was being desensitized to a participant's narrative of violence, as was noted in one instance.

The outcome of successful rapport building had some unexpected results also. For example, in the case of Myanmar and Sri Lanka, some participants felt comfortable enough to disclose their HIV status to the interviewer, increasing the number of HIV-positive sex workers in the sample and helping to further analyse the narratives of violence in the specific context of HIV-positive sex workers.

"

This research format is good because it engages the community. You are asking the community to be the participant and also facilitate information gathering. They are the best in understanding sex work and violence

Mona, Transgender peer interviewer, Indonesia

PICTURE 12. COMMUNITY PANEL, REGIONAL VALIDATION MEETING, BANGKOK

Many peer interviewers noted that they were able to establish an empathetic relationship with the informant, which helped them disclose difficult experiences of abuse.

A conscious decision was taken to pay specific attention to gender categories in the research design. For starters, the interview guide was adapted by gender categories to elicit nuanced data specific to that gender. In addition, peer interviewers interviewed participants from their own gender categories to build on the life experiences of the interviewers in the process of data collection. The attempt thus was to gain specific insights by the strategy of female sex workers interviewing other female sex workers, male sex workers interviewing other male sex workers and transgender sex workers interviewing other transgender sex workers.

"

It was remarkable how the peer interviewers imbibed the research process and meticulously followed all the ethical principles, both inside and outside the research process.

Khin Su Su Hlaing,
Co-lead researcher, Myanmar

Box 8. Lessons

1. **Meaningful involvement** of the sex worker community requires appropriate and sustained investment over a long period of time to strengthen their capacities and leadership. Creation of the post of peer lead researcher was a critical indication of the necessity of community engagement in the project.
2. **Pairing interviewers** with **participants of the same gender identity** enables the research to gain specific insights on each community.
3. Involvement of the **community as peer researchers** and interviewers strengthens their ownership and enables them to engage with the study process and findings in a manner that will help them build their perspective for future advocacy on violence against sex workers.
4. A focus on **strengthening community capacities** that is built into the project framework is essential to ensure that the community can sustain the research efforts beyond the immediate project. This practice contributes immensely to community confidence and ownership in the project.
5. **Lead researchers who understand and incorporate the community involvement** principle enhance the strength of the research.
6. Focused **in-country trainings, close coordination with the peer lead researcher**, daily debriefing sessions between lead researchers and the peer interviewers are key elements for the good collection of data.
7. **Community validation** is an innovative strategy to ensure accuracy of data collated and encouraged greater ownership of the findings. It allows the community to provide advice on how sensitive information emerging from the research should be presented so that no harm is caused to the community.
8. Research processes on violence involving peers needs to build in **reliable and sensitive mechanisms to address the emotional trauma** that peer interviewers experience when conducting the research.

In the Final ANALYSIS

Validating the findings, country and regional reports

Chapter 7

Two levels of reports were planned. One report would enable country-specific analysis and the second report would bring together the commonalities of factors and patterns that led to violence across the region and recommendations for the way ahead.

The four national reports are detailed in their observations of the specific contexts of sex work in the respective country, sites and patterns of violence against sex workers; when, where and how sex workers are more or less at risk of exposure to violence; and how they protect themselves from violence. This analysis can be used to inform country policies and programmes to prevent and respond to violence against sex workers.

The RSC decided to publish the findings of only the regional report. The country reports were shared with the National Working Groups. In the scheme of things, this was a crucial strategy to adopt for two reasons. First, given the sensitivity associated with the country-specific research, it was important to convey to governments that they were not alone with the problem or in the search for solutions. Second, this approach enabled a discussion within the National working group of the country specific findings and the common recommendations and solutions to advocate for better policies.

Collective brainstorming: Regional validation

Given continued emphasis on collective learning and decision-making that the RSC had established as a foundational principle of the research, representatives from the four research teams, community groups, UN agencies, CASAM, P4P and APNSW were invited to participate in a regional validation meetings in April 2013.

At the time of the regional validation meeting, Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka had completed the primary research, data collation and analysis. Due to delays in the ethical clearance process in Myanmar, the data collection process had not been initiated. However, the RSC thought that the Myanmar research team and the sex worker community could learn from the other experiences and invited them to the meeting.

The RSC identified four central themes from the presented research and meeting discussions:

- experiences of violence
- consequences of violence

The purpose of the regional validation was twofold

1. to brainstorm on the data and findings emerging from each country, with the researchers, community networks, technical agencies and the country and UN teams; and
2. to sustain involvement and partnership with the community and country UN agencies so that they would take ownership of the country and regional reports.

FIGURE 4. DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS[16]

16. M. Bhattacharjya, E. Fulu and L. Murthy, The Right(s) Evidence – Sex Work, Violence and HIV in Asia: A Multi-Country Qualitative Study(Bangkok: APNSW, CASAM, UNFPA and UNDP, 2015).

> The regional validation meeting helped because it was the first time that we put the countries together after the research and initial analysis. The researchers who had gone through the initial research could question how they were going to present the research and the findings. Since we were breaking new ground, we had to emerge with answers together and that was the key outcome of the validation. It was to make sure that the country teams could share their experiences and brainstorm together on the structure of the regional report.
>
> **Marta Vallejo-Mestres,** UNDP and Regional Steering Committee

- responses to violence
- risks and protective factors related to the experiences of violence.

In addition, the RSC asked the researchers and sex worker community to identify potentially sensitive findings and possible strategies for sharing those findings in the country reports. The RSC was aware that a balance was required in presenting potentially sensitive research findings and protecting the sex worker community from a backlash.

A common framework for the country reports emerged at the conclusion of the four-day meeting. Findings on the experiences, causes and consequences of violence that sex workers experiences would be highlighted along with strategies suggested by the meeting participants on coping with violence. The analysis would also identify the factors that lead to increased violence or reduce it.

Finalizing the country reports

UNFPA took the lead in finalizing the country reports from Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka, while UNDP finalized the country report from Myanmar. The regional report was written under the guidance of CASAM. One RSC member would comment on the first draft and then send it for comments and inputs from the other RSC members.

Despite having agreed on a common template for the country reports, the RSC team had to remain engaged with each country's draft report as contentious issues emerged through the report writing phase. For instance, the themes of sex work, sites and types of violence and the further complexity of gender identities in the four study sites had to be represented as cross-cutting themes without losing the nuance in specific sites.

Another issue that emerged was the definitions used for various terms, despite a style sheet with operational definitions. In particular, there was discussion on the operational definition of 'rape' and 'forced sex by law enforcement personnel'. In numerous participants' narratives, being forced to have sex with or without payment came up repeatedly. Given the international human rights articulation, these incidents would be viewed as rape. However, a challenge for the researchers lay in the fact that the participants themselves distinguished what they saw as 'rape' (sex without consent) from

'forced sex' (sex used for bargaining). The participants in several sites referred to the experience of negotiating safety as well as ability to pursue their livelihood through 'forced' sex and did not want it considered as rape. The overlap of sexual violence and economic violence was also tricky terrain, 'extorted sex' by state actors being used as bribes to prevent arrest or early release from detention. This definition later evolved to the one of 'sexual extortion' currently used in the report.

Another significant discussion that took place during the report writing in Indonesia, Myanmar and the regional document centred on the interpretation of narratives of client violence, which were reportedly quite common. But the sex worker participants were wary of the treatment of this finding. Through discussions led by CASAM calling for nuanced interpretations that included the community perspective, the finding was qualified by articulating a methodological limitation — because participants were not asked about positive or neutral experiences with clients, there was inadequate data for a comparative measure of client behaviour. The only experiences with clients that were asked about were those that involved violence, thus there was insufficient data regarding the proportion of experiences with clients that did not involve violence. Additionally, sex workers' narratives made it clear that police impunity fuelled client violence and impunity, and this linkage was deftly drawn out in the regional report.

The RSC constantly fed insights from one country's report-writing process to other researchers. The absence of the P4P technical expertise by this stage (the project was shut down)meant that the RSC had to take on the added responsibility of ensuring that the data analysis and report writing were sound. This led to some delays in the writing process. By early 2014, the country reports of Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka were completed; the Myanmar report was completed by the end of the year.

National Working Groups and Country Action Plans

The country reports were presented to the National Working Group in Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The findings and final recommendations were discussed in an effort to draft a plan of action that outlined the future course of activities. Adoption of the country reports within each country was not without its challenges. Once again, the RSC

The entire process had many challenges, but its beauty lies in the fact that it wasn't driven by a purely research agenda of a research institution. We were able to ensure that the sex workers' voice and perspective were present in every aspect of the research. The continuous validation process with sex workers as active partners is just one example of this involvement.

Meena Saraswathi Seshu, CASAM and Regional Steering Committee

> The action plans were hampered in some countries because of the reaction against the issue of police violence, which came across explicitly in the research findings. This reaction, though expected, has left a sense of helplessness among the sex workers who participated whole heartedly in opening up and sharing their issues.
>
> Meena Saraswathi Seshu, CASAM and Regional Steering Committee

had a crucial role in getting the country UN teams and National Working Group members to engage with the findings and move the discussion forward. UNFPA and UNDP took the lead in encouraging the country UN teams and government agencies in the National Working Group to accept the recommendations and develop strong action plans. Julia Cabassi from UNFPA and Marta Vallejo-Mestres from UNDP presented the broader regional research to each National Working Group and explained how the emerging action plans would enable countries to tackle violence against sex workers.

Summary reports were prepared and translated in the local language to enable sex worker community groups to engage with the findings and recommendations and have a more proactive dialogue with the government partners in the National Working Group. In Sri Lanka, the UN agencies organized a half-day meeting with the sex worker community to strengthen their skills in negotiating with government officers on the findings and recommendations. A briefing paper with key findings of the research was also prepared for the National Working Group in Sri Lanka.

The outcome of the National Working Group engagement across the three countries was mixed. In Indonesia, as a result of an empowered sex worker community, a committed National AIDS Commission and a strong UN presence and engagement with the report process led to a proactive dialogue on what steps were needed to follow through on the recommendations. Indonesia and Sri Lanka National Working Groups reviewed their draft reports and developed the action plan.

The long gap between the last National Working Group meeting and the final country report meant that in Sri Lanka and Nepal the government was represented by new officials who had to be oriented on the research. Consequently, their ownership of the report

> The environment in Sri Lanka is challenging for sex workers. The legal, social environment and moral attitudes makes it difficult. So we need to create a good partnership between the government, police and these communities to make a difference. It is a difficult partnership, but if we work together, it will work.
>
> **K. Ajith Rohana,** Senior Superintendent of Police, Sri Lanka, and National Working Group member

A high level of engagement was required with the UN teams and governments in country to get them to engage, take ownership and emerge with an action plan to implement the recommendations. The second phase of our engagement with the National Working Group was much more challenging.

Julia Cabassi, UNFPA and Regional Steering Committee

was limited. For instance, in Sri Lanka, the new members in the National Working Group had questions on the methodology and sample size, which had been discussed and settled in the first phase of the process. The new members were hesitant to accept recommendations based on findings from a small sample. Similar questions were also raised in Nepal. The suggestions from the group members were incorporated into the final draft in Sri Lanka, following which the National Working Group developed an action plan to strengthen the capacities of the health and social sector departments to engage with vulnerable populations.

Regional report: Drawing the threads together

CASAM was tasked with developing the regional report, based on the four country reports. The CASAM team hired a qualitative researcher with previous experience in writing up multi-country research studies. A second writer was hired towards the end of the report writing process for a fresh perspective.

The RSC met in October 2013 to agree on the framework for the regional report, referencing a framework from P4P and its recently completed research study on masculinities.

The regional report was a first-time attempt to shape a potentially sensitive document on violence against sex workers in the region, complete with recommendations for a holistic response. The writing team and the RSC wrestled with many challenges. The report was finalized through the inputs of multiple authors bringing various strengths and sensitivities.

The report organized data from the four study sites along various themes, such as gender identity, childhood experiences of violence and violence in sex work. A first draft of the report was developed and presented to the

The success of the National Working Group in Sri Lanka was in the fact that there was a lot of interest from the government and community to make this work. Senior officials participated in the dialogue. They were inclusive and open to suggestions. The coordination between the UN, community and government agencies was also instrumental in creating the space for this crucial dialogue to plan and implement the next steps in Sri Lanka.

Jayan Abeywickrama, UNFPA, Sri Lanka

One of the highlights of the dialogue between the government, sex worker community and UN agencies in Indonesia was the remark from the head of the National AIDS Commission. He said that 'our entire relationship with the sex worker movement has changed as a result of this process. We have worked on this process together. There has been genuine partnerships and dialogue with the sex work community to make a difference.

Julia Cabassi, UNFPA and Regional Steering Committee

RSC in February 2014.The RSC thought the first draft needed to include more trends and to better quantify the violence.

At this point, a meeting was organized among the RSC members to discuss possible strategies to address the gaps of the report. From the perspective of many RSC members, this was an important meeting. It had become difficult to articulate concerns and provide suggestions online, considering the many perspectives responding. The meeting in April 2014 helped to bring renewed focus for the entire team. The chairperson of the Network of Sex Work Projects was included in the meeting.

After two days of intense discussion, there was agreement that some data, such as experiences of violence, would be quantified to establish trends. An alternate structure was also proposed for the report, including the use of quotes and thematic analysis. There also was agreement to use fresh data to quantify themes, such as forced sex and extortion, and to use secondary literature, such as reference to the use of condoms as evidence for arrest. The third draft needed to strengthen the human rights perspective, sharpen the definitions and nuance the analysis. Detailed comments from the RSC followed before the draft was finalized.

Peer review

In 2013 when the initial structure of the regional report was discussed, the RSC realized that the document would present complex analysis and would benefit from a review by gender experts, academicians, human rights experts and UN agency representatives. To strengthen the analysis and identify discrepancies in content or language, the RSC sought out several peer reviewers(Box 9).

The peer reviewers gave extensive comments on the conceptual framework, the reviewed literature, definitions of terms, gender constructs and identities, explanation of the

Since the key actors from the RSC were present at the first meeting, it was a good experience for me to understand the history of the research and the dynamics. It was also useful to have a combined meeting to develop the first structure of the regional report.

Manjima Bhattacharjya, CASAM and co-author of the regional report

The initial structure of the regional report was different in order to co-opt themes from the four country reports. However, this structure changed over time as the report was written up. It was written in a more readable style rather than in pure academic language, since it was meant for a global audience.

Laxmi Murthy, CASAM, Regional Steering Committee and co-author of the regional report

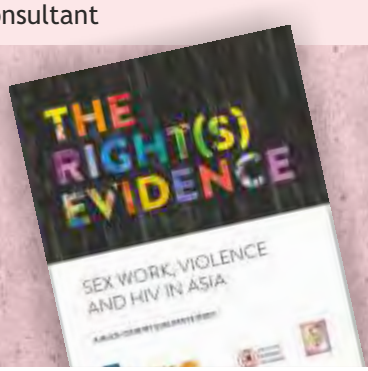
laws used against sex workers and methodology. The peer review comments were extremely constructive and enabled the writers to further sharpen the document.

Shaping messages for advocacy

Prior to the launch of the regional report, a regional roundtable was organised in November 2014 to discuss key findings from the study and recommendations in addressing and reducing violence against sex workers, as well as sex workers' vulnerability to HIV. Since the report has a strong emphasis on anti-violence and HIV programmes for sex workers, the roundtable also looked at increasing and sustaining funding for these interventions.

Box 9. Peer reviewers for the regional report

- Sealing Cheng, Associate Professor, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- Joanne Csete, Adjunct Associate Professor, Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health
- Michele Decker, Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
- **Kate Sheill,** a human rights consultant



The regional report was helped by the fact that there were many levels of lead researchers who lent their expertise and perspective. At the national level there were researchers who read and analysed the data minutely. It was further collated by a lead researcher at the regional level and given shape, following which writers input the human rights language and sharpened the analysis. At the final level, the RSC engaged with the final draft and gave its comments.

Meena Saraswathi Seshu, CASAM and Regional Steering Committee

We reviewed the recommendations and realized that our first and foremost demand would be to demand full decriminalization of sex work. Only that can help to end violence against sex workers.

Kay Thi Win, peer lead researcher, Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers

PICTURE 13. REGIONAL VALIDATION MEETING, BANGKOK

Thirty-six members including the study participants (from Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka); participants from Thailand, representatives of the National Working groups and members of the Regional Steering Committee attended the meeting. The regional report findings and recommendations were presented by CASAM, following which the participants discussed emerging advocacy messages for various target audience such as parliamentarians, law enforcers, health sector workers, establishment owners, local administrators. A key outcome of the roundtable was the commitments made by the country teams to strengthen community networks; enable

Sex workers through a network of peer researchers have been able to demonstrate that where communities themselves develop and lead a research agenda, the research findings and recommendations can profoundly influence national and local policy and programming dialogue.

Tony E. Lisle, UNAIDS and Regional Steering Committee

PICTURE 14. COMMUNITY MEETING TO DISCUSS RECOMMENDATIONS, BANGKOK

their active participation to addressing specific laws that negatively impacted sex workers and strengthen collaborations between NGOs, UN agencies, government departments and law enforcement to eliminate rights violations and violence.

The community role was crucial to articulate the need for active community involvement and leadership in country dialogues without harming sex workers. These articulations were shaped by an intensive dialogue between sex workers from the four countries prior to the regional round table, where they came together to discuss the key learning for sex workers in the region and the need for using the evidence to drive in country and regional advocacy. Based on the recommendations of the regional report, the participants decided to frame advocacy messages which they would share at the Regional Roundtable.

PUBLICIZING THE FINDINGS

The regional report was launched at the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on HIV and AIDS in January 2015, an event that brought together representatives from across the region to discuss progress in relation to commitments to address HIV, including evaluation of national reviews of policy and legal barriers to universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

The launch event included a presentation of process and findings by the project partners, followed by a panel discussion involving representatives of government and the sex worker community: the Secretary of the National AIDS Commission in Indonesia, the Acting Executive Director of the Blue Diamond Society in Nepal, the APNSW Co-Coordinator, the Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Justice in Sri Lanka and the HIV Programme Manager for the Ministry of Interior in Cambodia.

The event enabled

1. countries to share action already being taken in response to the country reports;
2. participants in the project to share the benefits of the community and government collaboration;
3. community representatives to share their views on priority reforms and demonstrate the need for ongoing community involvement in this process.

The event was well received; delegates from several countries voiced renewed commitment to improving measures to address violence against sex workers and work more closely with community.

Community launch of the regional process
To popularize the innovative partnership as a role model for research for change in the region, APNSW, NSWP and CASAM launched the research process report in March 2015, on Sex Workers' Day.

PICTURE 15. REGIONAL REPORT LAUNCH, BANGKOK

The research will enable academia also to think differently on how to view research. Sex workers are no longer just passive participants. This research has shown that it can be done differently.

Laxmi Murthy, CASAM, Regional Steering Committee member and co-author of the regional report

THE WAY AHEAD

Some of the countries participating in the research have already committed to sensitize government officials, build the networking and advocacy skills of sex worker community groups and sustaining the project's forums, such as the National Working Group, for continued dialogue and to implement the action plan. The evidence generated from the research will be analysed through different lenses to maximize the learning and reproduced in academic journals to contribute to the scholarly discourse on gender-based violence and more specifically on violence against sex workers.

The research process took more than three years to complete. Although considered excessive by some measures, it was a complex multi-level partnership to study a highly sensitive issue in countries with varying legal responses and was never expected to be a routine research initiative. Several innovative elements were attempted through this study process, including the partnership with sex workers to undertake the research, the inclusion of sex workers as lead researcher and the sex worker participants' pre-validation of the findings. The formation of working groups with government involvement and a regional steering group that led the intensive research process from beginning to end were also critical to the process. The research was undertaken with a clear intention that it would benefit policies and programmes in the region. Creating long-term support and ownership for future action through a slow process of negotiation required investment of time and resources.

It's been too long — but we are building partnerships, and you can't build a partner in one year. These are groups which have never spoken with each other, and there was a lot of antagonism between partners. Building trust takes a lot of time. To some extent, you could cut down maybe six months, but not more than that, otherwise the process would not be sustainable. We were thinking of how we would structure the report, gain acceptance and ownership in country. If you do it again, you have a template, but if you have never done it before, you have to do a lot of trial and error.

Marta Vallejo-Mestres, UNDP and Regional Steering Committee

Box 10. LESSONS

1. A strong steering committee with varied expertise in research, management and community empowerment that remains at the helm during the entire project is absolutely required for a project of this magnitude and complexity.

2. Sufficient time and resources need to be invested to maintain partnerships and create ownership at the regional and country levels.

3. Validation at various stages and at the country and regional levels help to strengthen the analysis and recommendations. It also helps balance the needs of the rigors of research with the safety of vulnerable communities, such as sex workers.

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES FOR THE PROCESS DOCUMENT

1. United Nations
Martha Vallejo, Programme Specialist, UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Centre
Julia Cabassi, Regional Adviser, HIV and MARPs, UNFPA Asia and Pacific Regional Office
Brianna Harrison, Human Rights and Law Advisor, UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Asia and the Pacific
Tony E. Lisle, Regional Programme Advisor, UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Asia and the Pacific

2. Partners for Prevention
Stephanie Miedema
Emma Fulu

3. Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization
Meena Saraswathi Seshu
Laxmi Murthy
Manjima Bhattacharjya

4. Asia Pacific Network for Sex Workers
Andrew Hunter
Kay Thi Win
Tracey Tully

5. Lead researchers
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Jody Miller, Sri Lanka
Nilu Abeyaratne, Sri Lanka
Annie George, Nepal
Sumi Devakota, Nepal
Khin Su Su Hlaing, Myanmar
Cath Sluggett, Myanmar

6. Peer lead researchers
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Kay Thi Win, TOPS, Myanmar

7. Peer interviewers
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Shiromi Pradeepika, CSDF, Sri Lanka
Nirmala Mahajan, JMMS, Nepal
Umesh Shreshta, BDS, Nepal
Yu Yun, OPSI, Indonesia
Mona, OPSI, Indonesia

8. UN country teams
Revati Chawla, consultant, UNFPA, Sri Lanka
Win Mar, UNDP, Myanmar
Madhu Koirala, UNFPA, Nepal
Jayan Abeywickrama, Program Analyst, UNFPA, Sri Lanka

9. National Working Group members
Ingrid Irawati Atmsukarto, National AIDS Commission, Indonesia
K. Ajith Rohana, Senior Superintendent of Police, Sri Lanka

10. Focus group discussion

Mona, peer researcher, Indonesia
Yun Yun, peer researcher, Indonesia
Eric, peer researcher, Indonesia
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