

# ASWA NEWSLETTER

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## Building Power, Advancing Rights, and Centering Sex Workers' Leadership Across Africa

As 2025 came to a close, the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) continued to strengthen regional solidarity, amplify sex workers' voices, and advance rights-based, community-led solutions across Africa.

Through leadership development, regional trainings, community-led research, and global recognition of sex worker-led innovation, the quarter reflected the resilience, courage, and collective power of the movement.

Despite shrinking civic space, persistent stigma, and ongoing funding challenges, ASWA and its members remained steadfast in building power from the ground up centering lived experience, investing in emerging leaders, and reaffirming that sustainable change is driven by sex workers.



**Demand Decriminalisation. Demand Protection. Demand Justice.**

# ASWA Concludes 3-Day Regional Training in Rwanda



In October, ASWA successfully concluded a three-day regional Francophone training in Rwanda, bringing together sex worker leaders and organizations from across Francophone Africa.

The training focused on community strength, resilience, leadership development, and advancing human rights and SRHR advocacy in increasingly challenging civic and funding environments.

A major highlight was the introduction of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) principles—an approach that centers community strengths, skills, and existing resources rather than deficits.

Through interactive sessions, participants identified ways to mobilize their own assets to drive sustainable, community-led change.

**“Every individual has something to offer, and communities know themselves best,” ASWA emphasized, reinforcing the power of collective action.**

The training also created space for cross-country exchange, peer learning, and regional solidarity, reaffirming ASWA’s commitment to amplifying sex workers’ leadership across Africa. ASWA extends sincere gratitude to our donors whose support made this impactful convening possible.

## Nurturing Africa’s Next Generation of Leaders

ASWA officially launched the third cohort of the Young Emerging Leaders (Y.E.L) Mentorship Program, a flagship initiative that empowers young advocates to champion human rights, health, and social justice within their communities.

Launched in July 2025, the cohort brings together a diverse group of young leaders from across the continent, including **Zerbo Djeneba** from Burkina Faso, **Joalane Tibi** from Lesotho, **Dzah Adjo Christas** from Togo, **Bahati Zenny** from the Democratic Republic of Congo, **Nicole Khayanje** from Kenya, **Uzoeto Annet** from Nigeria, **Christabel Mawufemor Kpodo** from Ghana, **Michaella Mthetwa** from Zambia, and **Khrseed Allan Wani** from South Sudan.



By December 2025, mentees had begun designing and implementing community-based projects addressing real challenges in their contexts, ranging from improving access to SRHR services to strengthening accountability and justice mechanisms.

# ASWA Regional Coordinator Appointed to EmpowHER Fund Advisory Committee



During the October–December 2025 period, the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) proudly celebrated the appointment of Grace Kamau, ASWA’s Regional Coordinator, to the EmpowHER Fund Advisory Committee by Aidsfonds.

This milestone reflects ASWA’s growing leadership and influence in advancing gender equality, health rights, and the meaningful inclusion of sex workers and other marginalized women in global health decision-making spaces.

The EmpowHER Fund envisions a world where women and girls, in all their diversity, are able to use the HIV-prevention method of their choice. Despite progress in HIV prevention, young women and adolescent girls in Southern Africa continue to bear a disproportionate burden of new HIV infections, accounting for nearly 63% of all new cases.

Grace Kamau’s appointment brings vital lived experience and movement-rooted expertise to the Advisory Committee.

Her leadership strengthens the Fund’s commitment to ensuring that women and girls, including sex workers and other marginalized communities, are not only beneficiaries of HIV-prevention initiatives but active leaders shaping policies and programs that affect their lives.

Grace’s inclusion on the EmpowHER Fund Advisory Committee is a proud moment for ASWA and a strong affirmation of the collective work of sex worker-led movements across Africa.

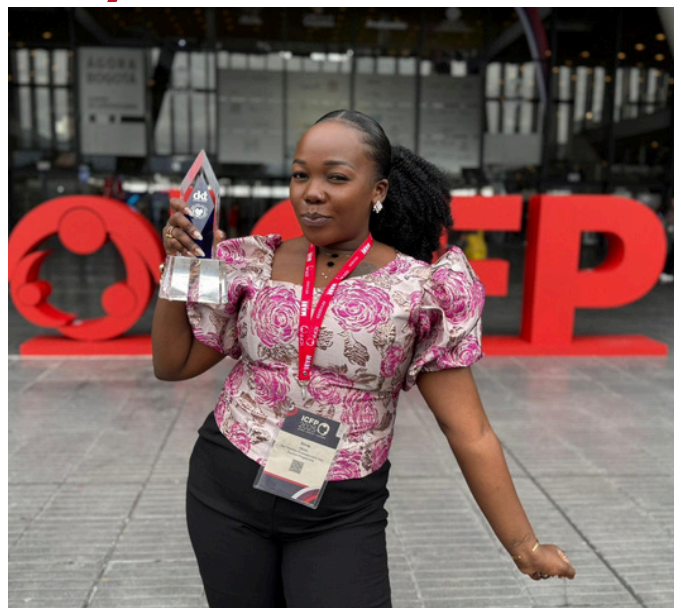
ASWA congratulates Grace on this well-deserved appointment and looks forward to the transformative contributions she will make in advancing choice, equity, and empowerment for women and girls in all their diversity.

## Silvia Okoth Wins the 2025 Phil Harvey Innovation Award

ASWA proudly celebrated Silvia Okoth, faculty member of the Africa Leadership Sex Workers Academy (ALESWA) and Advocacy & Policy Manager at BHESP, for winning the 2025 Phil Harvey Innovation Award at the International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP) in Bogotá, Colombia.

Silvia was recognized for her groundbreaking initiative, “Dumpsite Dadas: Reclaiming SRHR for Kenya’s Most Forgotten Women,” which delivers sex-positive, peer-led SRHR services to women and girls living in dumpsites and on the streets.

Her powerful acceptance speech highlighted resilience, dignity, and the right to choice for women living in the harshest conditions: “This award reminds me that our stories, no matter how painful, can still become a source of power.”



This recognition underscores the impact of sex worker-led, community-rooted innovation across Africa.

# World AIDS Day 2025: New HIV Prevention Tools Offer Hope—but Access Gaps Persist for Sex Workers



During the period October to December 2025, as the world commemorated World AIDS Day 2025, new findings from the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) revealed a growing demand among sex workers for equitable access to emerging HIV prevention technologies.

While scientific advances such as Lenacapavir, CAB-LA injectable PrEP, and the Dapivirine Vaginal Ring offer promising opportunities to reduce HIV infections, many sex workers reported continued barriers to benefiting from these innovations.

The findings draw on data from ASWA's ongoing survey, *"Sex Workers' HIV Prevention & Acceptability of New HIV Prevention Technology."* The anonymous and confidential survey seeks to better understand sex workers' current HIV prevention practices and their perspectives on emerging technologies.

Sex workers remain among the most disproportionately affected populations in Africa's HIV epidemic, facing heightened vulnerability due to criminalisation, discrimination, violence, and widespread stigma in healthcare settings. Although global progress has expanded access to HIV services, ASWA's research highlights that sex workers are often excluded from the rollout of newer biomedical prevention tools.

According to respondents, sex workers are eager yet cautious about adopting new HIV prevention options. Many emphasised the need for clear, accessible, and community-tailored information on how each method works, potential side effects, dosing schedules, and overall safety. For sex workers in countries with limited prevention options, lack of access remained a major concern.

One respondent from Namibia explained:

**"Currently, only oral PrEP pills are available in Namibia. To make an informed choice between other options like Lenacapavir, CAB-LA, or the Ring, I would need clear information on access, side effects, dosing schedules, and how each method fits into different lifestyles. Support with adherence strategies and updates on future availability would also be valuable for communities navigating prevention choices."**

ASWA's findings aligned closely with the World AIDS Day 2025 theme, "Overcoming Disruption, Transforming the AIDS Response." For ASWA and its partners, transformation means more than scientific advancement—it requires centring sex workers' rights, dismantling punitive legal frameworks, and ensuring sex workers have a meaningful voice in health policy decisions that affect their lives.

ASWA's research sends a clear message: ending AIDS by 2030 is only possible if the needs, rights, and voices of sex workers are at the centre of the response. Expanding community-led services, ensuring access to accurate information, and making prevention options affordable remain critical steps toward a future where no one is left behind.

# December 17: Standing Together to End Violence Against Sex Workers

Every year on December 17, the world marks the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers—a day dedicated to remembering the lives lost, honoring survivors, and demanding an end to the systemic violence faced by sex workers globally.

Across Africa, violence against sex workers remains widespread, brutal, and deeply rooted in criminalisation, stigma, and exclusion. New data from the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) Murder Monitoring Tool underscores the urgency of this ongoing crisis.

In 2025 alone, ASWA documented a significant number of cases of violence against sex workers, reflecting an alarming and persistent pattern of harm across the continent. These reported cases represent only a fraction of the reality, as many incidents go unreported due to fear of arrest, retaliation, or further abuse.

The data reveals that over 80% of reported cases occurred in Zambia, Nigeria, Kenya, and Uganda, highlighting regional hotspots where sex workers face extreme risks. The majority of survivors were female sex workers, reflecting the gendered nature of violence and the compounded vulnerability faced by women in criminalised settings.

Physical violence was the most commonly reported form of abuse, including severe assaults and killings. Alarming, perpetrators were not limited to clients or intimate partners—law enforcement officers and community members were also identified, pointing to the role of state and societal violence in perpetuating harm. Nearly half of all cases were classified as high urgency, requiring immediate medical, legal, or psychosocial support.

**“These are not isolated incidents,” ASWA notes. “They are part of a broader system that punishes, silences, and dehumanizes sex workers.”**

Criminalisation and stigma continue to block access to justice, healthcare, and protection, leaving survivors with few safe reporting mechanisms and little hope for accountability.

## ASWA’s Call to Action

As part of the December 17 commemoration, ASWA calls for urgent, concrete action, including:

- **Decriminalisation of sex work to reduce vulnerability and impunity**
- **Accountability for all perpetrators, including state actors**
- **Inclusion of sex workers in national gender-based violence and human rights frameworks**
- **Investment in community-led safety, emergency response, and documentation systems**

December 17 is not only a day of mourning—it is a call to action. Ending violence against sex workers requires political will, legal reform, and the recognition that sex workers’ lives matter. Until safety, dignity, and justice are guaranteed for all sex workers, this day remains as urgent as ever.



# December 17: Standing Together to End Violence Against Sex Workers in Eswatini



On December 17, 2025, in commemoration of the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, a community-led action organised by Voice of Our Voices (Eswatini) and supported by the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) brought sex workers together to reflect, learn, and demand an end to violence, criminalisation, and stigma.

The event created a safe and inclusive space for conversation, learning, and visibility, centering the voices and lived experiences of sex workers in a context where sex work remains criminalised and heavily stigmatised. It contributed to ongoing advocacy efforts under the Decriminalisation Now campaign.

The activity was held in two sessions. The first session was a learning and dialogue forum, conducted in a round-table setting, where sex workers openly discussed what decriminalisation means to them and whether it is achievable in Eswatini.

Participants shared personal experiences of stigma, fear, and violence, and reflected on how criminalisation limits access to protection, justice, and basic rights. The discussion was open, honest, and empowering, with strong engagement throughout.

The second session was a short road march focused on visibility and solidarity. Due to safety concerns and fear of police harassment, the march covered approximately 500 metres.



Despite the short distance, the march carried powerful meaning—serving as a brave act of unity and a public demand for dignity, safety, and recognition of sex workers' rights.

Overall, the event was a success. It strengthened solidarity among sex workers, provided a meaningful platform for shared learning and advocacy, and reinforced the importance of community-led action in challenging violence and criminalisation.

ASWA remains committed to supporting sex worker-led organisations like Voice of Our Voices as they continue to advance safety, justice, and human rights across Africa.

# Uganda Marks December 17 with National Dialogue to End Violence Against Sex Workers



On 17 December 2025, the Uganda Network of Sex Workers Organisations (UNESO) convened a National Stakeholder Dialogue Meeting in Kampala to commemorate the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers.

The dialogue, held at Skyz Hotel, brought together sex worker leaders, civil society organisations, legal aid actors, law enforcement representatives, and key allies to reflect on the drivers of violence against sex workers and identify practical actions to strengthen protection, accountability, and collaboration.

Sex workers in Uganda continue to face a persistent human rights crisis driven by criminalisation, stigma, and systemic exclusion.

Although sex work is not explicitly illegal, provisions within the Penal Code and public order laws are frequently used to target sex workers, leading to arbitrary arrests, harassment, extortion, denial of services, and limited access to justice. These conditions significantly increase vulnerability to violence and abuse.

The urgency of the dialogue was underscored by alarming violence trends in 2025, during which sex worker networks documented at least 38 killings, including cases of femicide. These incidents reflect patterns of targeted violence and serious gaps in investigation and accountability, reinforcing the need for coordinated national action.

A total of 52 stakeholders participated in the dialogue, with 32 attending in person and 16 joining virtually. The meeting aimed to amplify sex workers' voices, promote constructive engagement with duty bearers, and develop a shared advocacy roadmap for ending violence and discrimination. Through plenary presentations, moderated discussions, and open dialogue sessions, participants shared evidence of violations, reflected on barriers to reporting abuse, and explored opportunities for reform.

A key outcome of the meeting was the commitment by police representatives to support the development of a consolidated reform document to guide legal, policy, and institutional responses to violence against sex workers. This marked an important step toward strengthening collaboration between sex worker-led movements and law enforcement actors.

The commemoration was supported by the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA), alongside Red Umbrella Fund, UHAI, and the Common Wealth Foundation. ASWA contributed Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials, including T-shirts, posters, stickers, and a banner, which enhanced visibility, reinforced anti-violence and decriminalisation messaging, and supported advocacy and stakeholder engagement throughout the event.

The stakeholder dialogue concluded with an agreed action plan and advocacy roadmap, focusing on legal reform, accountability mechanisms, improved referral pathways for health and legal services, community empowerment, and public awareness.

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