

ASWA NEWSLETTER

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Q1 Strategic Milestones

During Q1 2026, ASWA member organizations made significant progress in advancing the rights, health, and safety of sex workers. Key highlights include:

- Strengthening participation in Global Fund GC8 country proposal processes.
- Webinar on anti-rights pushback and movement narrative change.
- Supporting community led monitoring of health services in multiple regions.
- Engaging in capacity building, advocacy, and psychosocial support for sex workers and key populations.
- Amplifying intersectionality of sex workers, challenging harmful media narratives, and promoting inclusive health programs.
- Ensuring representation in national and regional policy processes, including Global Fund consultations, UPR, and HRC62 engagement.
- ASWA remains committed to promoting rights based, and community led approaches to protect and empower sex workers across Africa.
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**Demand Decriminalisation.
Demand Protection. Demand Justice.**

INSIGHTS FROM THE SECRETARIAT

Our Voice at the Kenyan National Integration Summit

ASWA joined other Key Populations in the Integration Summit hosted by the Kenyan Ministry of Health through NASCOP, under the theme:

“Health Without Barriers for a Holistic HIV Response.”



Key outcomes of the summit:

- Strengthened dialogue on integrated, people centered HIV services.
- Advanced discussions on removing structural barriers for key populations, including sex workers.

ASWA Q1 Led Webinars

GC8 Information Session

ASWA hosted a GC8-focused webinar led by Onesmus Mlewa, offering members a clear breakdown of the Global Fund process.

The session emphasized why sex workers must be meaningfully involved in proposal development and provided guidance on influencing country dialogues and securing stronger community representation.



“ They have taken the language we used to fight for our rights and are now using it to fight us,”
-Nguru Karugu

Anti-Rights & Narrative Change Webinar

As anti-rights pushback continues to rise across the region, ASWA held a webinar facilitated by Nguru Karugu and Mamello Sejake. Members explored how to counter harmful narratives and strengthen movement messaging.

CHALLENGING STIGMA, EXPANDING ACCESS: ABORTION RIGHTS TRAINING IN UGANDA



Why This Matters

In Uganda, sex workers continue to face stigma, criminalisation, and restricted access to safe abortion services. These barriers push many into unsafe conditions, putting their health and lives at risk.

With support from AmplifyChange, ASWA convened sex worker-led organizations for a focused training to address these gaps through knowledge, rights, and community-led solutions.

“For the first time, I feel like I have the right information to protect myself and my community. Before this training, we were navigating fear and misinformation now we have knowledge and confidence.”

Participants engaged in interactive and participatory sessions that explored:

- Safe abortion methods and post-abortion care
- Understanding the legal and policy landscape in Uganda
- Rights-based approaches to SRHR for sex workers
- Identifying and addressing stigma, discrimination, and misinformation
- Community-led advocacy strategies to expand access to care

A key focus of the training was strengthening peer-led responses. Participants explored how sex worker networks can play a critical role in providing accurate information, supporting referrals, and building trust within communities where formal healthcare systems often fail to respond adequately.

Members also discussed practical strategies for engaging policymakers, health providers, and community stakeholders to challenge harmful narratives around abortion and advocate for more inclusive, rights-based health systems.

As restrictive laws, stigma, and anti-rights movements continue to threaten access to safe abortion across the region, we remain steadfast in pushing for change working toward a future where all sex workers can make informed choices about their bodies and access safe, stigma-free care without fear.

Training Highlights



Focus on safe abortion, SRHR, and rights-based advocacy



Strengthened peer-led referral and support systems



Built capacity to challenge stigma and misinformation

FROM ARRESTS TO ADVOCACY: HOW MEMBERS ARE DRIVING CHANGE



Lady Mermaid - Uganda

Conducted an orientation meeting with health service providers at Bukoto HC II to strengthen Community-Led Monitoring (CLM) of HIV, TB, and Malaria services.

The session focused on improving accessibility, acceptability, affordability, and quality of health services for key populations. delivery.

As a result, collaboration between community members and healthcare providers improved, supporting more inclusive and responsive service

Rise Initiative for Women's Rights Advocacy (RiWA) – South Sudan

RiWA responded to major protection and health needs among sex workers in Juba. Following the arrest of 62 sex workers by city authorities, the organization provided emergency bail support and legal representation.

RiWA also delivered paralegal and psychosocial support training to sex workers and LGBTIQ leaders to build knowledge and emotional resilience. Additionally, dignity kits were distributed to support SRHR needs, and the organization engaged with the Ministry of Health and the South Sudan AIDS Commission to ensure sex worker and LGBTIQ concerns are reflected in upcoming national guidelines.



Springs of Life – Zimbabwe

Springs of Life hosted a Reframing the Narrative media workshop aimed at strengthening positive, rights-affirming storytelling within the sex worker movement.

Chisungu Trust – Harare, Zimbabwe

Chisungu Trust marked Bisexual Health Awareness Month by advocating for inclusive healthcare, improved mental health support, and comprehensive sexual health education for bisexual and other queer communities.



From Arrests to Advocacy: How Members Are Driving Change



Equal Rights for All Movement (ERAM) – Namibia

ERAM advanced its strategic advocacy by strengthening global partnerships and collaborating nationally with SFH Namibia and UNFPA. The organization made key human rights submissions including to the UPR, HRC62, and SOGI expert mechanisms and provided rapid response support following the murder of transgender woman Sexy.



Voov Eswatini – Eswatini

Voov Eswatini conducted an ORWs refresher on PrEP options to ensure outreach workers are equipped with updated HIV prevention knowledge. The organization also facilitated a staff capacity-building session focused on enhancing program delivery, organizational coordination, and overall effectiveness across the region.

Change Makers Gambia (CMG) – The Gambia

CMG underwent key leadership restructuring to strengthen organizational direction and accountability.

The team continued active community engagement while sustaining HIV awareness activities, including condom distribution, referrals, and treatment follow-up to support the health and wellbeing of sex workers in the region

Greater Women Initiative for Health and Right (GWIHR) – Nigeria

In Q1 2026, GWIHR strengthened sex worker leadership and health access across Rivers, Akwa Ibom, and Abia States. In Rivers, two young sex workers trained as Gender Equality Champions contributed to the HIV Anti-Discrimination Law domestication process and participated in the State HIV TWG.

In Akwa Ibom, four SRHR Mentor Mothers advanced reproductive justice, secured PHC referral points, and referred 48 young sex workers for post-abortion care. In Abia, community-led monitoring drove improvements at Ahieke PHC through accountability engagement with Ward Development Committees.



Regional & Continental Updates

International Days Observed:



International Condom Day 13 February

International Condom Day was commemorated to promote safer sex practices, raise awareness about HIV and STI prevention, and encourage open dialogue on condom use within key populations.

Community outreach teams engaged sex workers, clients, and healthcare providers to address stigma around condom negotiation and highlight the role of condoms in sexual health and rights.

International Sex Workers' Rights Day 3 March

International Sex Workers' Rights Day on 3 March stood out as one of the most critical advocacy moments of the quarter. Across the continent, sex workers mobilized to demand recognition, dignity, and full protection under the law. ASWA member organizations used this day to amplify powerful messages calling for decriminalization, an end to police violence, and the right of sex workers to live and work safely without discrimination.

Member organizations organized community dialogues, public marches, digital campaigns, and solidarity actions that highlighted the daily realities faced by sex workers: unlawful arrests, extortion, stigma in healthcare settings, exclusion from social protection, and barriers to justice. The day also provided space to celebrate the leadership of sex workers who continue to build resilient, community led movements despite hostile environments.

This year's commemoration proved that sex workers are not just beneficiaries but key leaders, advocates, and experts shaping the trajectory of health, human rights, and justice movements in Africa.

"International Sex Workers' Rights Day remains a powerful reminder that any rights based agenda must include sex workers at its core."



International Women's Day-8 March

Under the theme "Give to Gain," ASWA network highlighted the intersectional struggles faced by women sex workers, including gender based violence, limited economic opportunities, and exclusion from mainstream women's rights movements. Activities included leadership dialogues, digital campaigns, and solidarity statements justifying that the fight for gender equality must include sex workers.

International Transgender Day of Visibility - 31 March

ASWA honored transgender sex workers by celebrating their resilience, leadership, and contributions to the wider movement for rights and justice. Member organizations also spotlighted the ongoing challenges transgender sex workers face: criminalization, discrimination, and exclusion from policy spaces while calling for stronger regional solidarity and structural reform.

ASWA Regional Coordinator Appointed NSWP President



African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) proudly celebrates the election of our Regional Coordinator, Grace Kamau, as President of the Global Network of Sex Work Projects—a historic moment for African leadership in the global sex worker movement.

Grace's election reflects her unwavering dedication to advancing the rights and wellbeing of sex workers across Africa. Her leadership at ASWA has strengthened advocacy, amplified community voices, and fostered deep regional solidarity. In her acceptance message, she emphasized that this victory belongs to the entire movement, highlighting the power of unity and collective action.

“This moment is not mine alone—it belongs to all of us and to the entire sex workers’ movement,” she noted. “Together, we have shown the strength of our solidarity, and it is this unity that we must continue to build upon.”

We extend deep pride and joy as Grace steps into global leadership. Her presidency marks a powerful step forward for African-led advocacy, signaling a new era of strengthened collaboration, inclusive leadership, and transformative progress for sex workers worldwide.

Lenacapavir Rollout Across Africa

Africa has entered a new phase of HIV prevention with the rollout of the long-acting injectable lenacapavir across nine countries, including Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, and Zambia. This twice-yearly PrEP option is especially promising for sex workers, offering a discreet and more manageable alternative to daily pills.

Countries such as Kenya, Lesotho, and Nigeria have already held national launches with support from the World Health Organization, the Global Fund, and PEPFAR.

For sex workers who face stigma, mobility challenges, and barriers to daily PrEP adherence, lenacapavir provides a more accessible prevention option. Early reports show strong demand and optimism across community-led networks as this new tool becomes available.



Navigating Challenges: Barriers to Progress

While Q1 2026 has been marked by significant victories, the movement continues to face systemic and emerging hurdles that require urgent attention and sustained resilience:

- **Anti-Rights Pushback & Shrinking Civil Space:** We are witnessing an intensified wave of organized anti rights rhetoric across several regions. This pushback not only threatens the safety of activists but also complicates legal advocacy efforts by fueling hostile political environments.
- **Persistent Healthcare Stigma:** Sex workers continue to report judgmental treatment and in clinical settings, which directly undermines health seeking behaviors and retention in HIV/TB care.
- **Funding Constraints & Sustainability:** Limited core funding restricts the ability of member organizations to provide rapid response legal aid or maintain long term psychosocial support programs.
- **Marginalization in Decision Making:** We have noted a concerning trend of reduced participation for key populations in national level policy forums. When sex workers are excluded from these decision making spaces, policies are developed without the nuance and lived experience required for effective implementation.

Strategic Roadmap: Priorities for Q2 2026

As we transition into the second quarter, ASWA is committed to building on our momentum by focusing on five strategic pillars:

- **Pillar 1: Narrative Change & Media Advocacy**
We will aggressively expand our media engagement strategies to counteract stigma. This includes training community members as spokespeople to share authentic stories, ensuring that the public discourse is grounded in human rights rather than harmful stereotypes.
- **Pillar 2: Strengthening GC8 Engagement**
With the Global Fund GC8 cycle in motion, we will provide technical assistance to ensure member organizations are not just present, but influential in country proposal processes. Our goal is to secure dedicated funding for community led interventions.
- **Pillar 3: Scaling Community Led Monitoring (CLM)**
Data is our strongest evidence. In Q2, we will expand CLM initiatives to more regions, and use the findings to hold healthcare systems accountable for inclusive care.
- **Pillar 4: Comprehensive Capacity Building**
strengthening the "whole person," we ensure our leaders are equipped to handle the emotional and legal complexities of the movement.
- **Pillar 5: Amplifying Representation in Policy Spaces**
ASWA will continue to demand a seat at every table. We are prioritizing attendance and active contribution at regional health summits and international human rights reviews (such as UPR and HRC) to ensure sex worker rights remain a non-negotiable part of the global agenda.



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