Learning and sharing
within and beyond KP Connect:
A follow up report

By Katie McDonald

June 2016
Introduction
In 2015 and 2016, KP Connect hosted two Learning and Sharing Events (LSE). The central theme of LSE 1 was HIV programming for Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and the broader Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community. LSE 2 focused on HIV, Health and Rights for Sex Workers.

These events were a key mechanism for information exchange, learning, reflection, and sharing at the programme level within KP Connect and beyond. As such, we wanted to examine some of the long term benefits of these learning and knowledge sharing events and the extent to which event learnings have been transferred, retained and applied since the events. This paper also explores some of the internal and external barriers to institutionalising learning and provides some suggestions on how we can maximise the learning momentum within our organisations and networks after and between LSEs.

Background
KP Connect
KP Connect (also known as the Africa Regional Programme 3 phase 2) is a 4 year programme, running from 2014 to 2017, operating in 10 countries in Africa: Botswana, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. KP Connect works with Alliance Linking Organisations (LOs) and their respective community based Implementing Partners (IPs) to create a more enabling environment for effective HIV, health and rights programming in relation to key populations, particularly MSM, transgender people, sex workers and People Who Use Drugs (PWUDs). The programme aims to:

- Improve the technical capacity of LOs to promote KP access to HIV, health and rights services;
- Increase the engagement of national policy makers in KP issues; and
- Improve processes for regional knowledge sharing and learning by LOs.

The programme is implemented by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance (the Alliance) partly through a Capacity Building Unit set up by the Alliance LO in Namibia, Positive Vibes, to coordinate all technical assistance to other participating LOs. It builds on more than 10 years of programming experience in Africa and extends the work done in previous iterations of the Africa Regional Programme, with an increased emphasis on key populations.

Learning and Sharing Events (LSEs)
In order to facilitate regional and cross-national knowledge sharing and learning between LOs and partners, KP Connect hosted two annual LSEs. Each LSE focused on work with a different key population, bringing together LOs, IPs (who represent that particular key population), and other resource partners with particular thematic or programmatic technical expertise.

In May 2015, KP Connect convened the first LSE, focused on health and rights programming with MSM and the broader LGBTI community.
In April 2016, KP Connect convened the second LSE, this time focusing on sex work and effective health and rights programming with persons who sell sex. The event was co-hosted by ANCS in Senegal, with significant inputs from the Alliance Secretariat and African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA).

Both events included a variety of plenary sessions, panel discussions, interpersonal engagement, country-level group-work and case study presentations, allowing participants to share learnings from their own experience.

Specifically, the LSEs aimed to:

- Introduce participants to a range of relevant experience, knowledge and learning informed from the practice of peers and resource people.
- Encourage participants to process the meanings of this information at individual, organisational and country-group level, stimulating fresh insight and intention for programmatic response.
- Identify some key steps forward and possible peer support or technical support needs of participating organisations.

Mid-term review

The KP Connect Mid-Term Review (MTR) found the mechanism of LSEs to be highly relevant for learning, reflecting and sharing at the programme level, providing fertile ground for information exchange amongst LOs and partners; and opportunities to learn from organisations based in other global regions. According to the MTR, particularly valuable to LSE participants were the participatory format of events; insights into KP programming; appreciation of challenges and responses in different contexts; exchanging information on key topics such as litigation, media engagement and human rights; and establishment of collaborative working relationships. As one informant commented:

“Though LOs are at different stages and levels of programming, cross fertilisation can take place, and we can see when people are struggling with an issue. We can learn from other countries.”

As a result of the LSEs, a number of positive developments were documented in the MTR. For example after the LSEs, ANS-CI, Ivory Coast developed a new project to target religious leaders; and CHAU, Uganda submitted a proposal on sex workers to the Elton John Foundation.

Given the relevance and effectiveness of the LSEs as a mechanism for learning, the MTR recommended following up on the long term impact and added value of the LSEs. In particular, to ensuring that the LSEs are not an end in themselves but a means to an end.

---

Methodology

In order to explore some of the long term benefits of the LSEs, a brief 10 question survey was distributed to participants in one or both of the events. Participation was voluntary and confidential.

Sample

In total 32 people completed the survey:

- 7 from LSE 1;
- 18 from LSE 2; and
- 7 from both LSE 1 & 2.

This represents a total response rate of 31% (out of a population of 102 unique participants to both events, excluding interpreters and those whose email address is no longer functional).

The response rate was somewhat higher for participants from the second LSE compared to the first LSE. This is not surprising considering the second LSE was much more recent, and therefore likely to be more front of mind for participants. Accordingly, there was a greater representation of participants from sex worker organisations than from MSM/LGBTI organisations. Also unsurprisingly, the largest cohort of respondents was from the International HIV/AIDS Alliance (including the Secretariat and LOs).

Figure 1: Sample by LSE attendance

Figure 2: Sample by organisation type

Legend:
- Linking Organisation
- Secretariat
Survey participants came from 12 countries (out of 19 represented at the events).

**Figure 3: Sample by country**

![Bar chart showing the number of survey participants from each country. The countries are ranked from top to bottom as follows: South Africa (8), Kenya (6), UK (4), Senegal (3), Zimbabwe (2), Burundi (2), Uganda (1), Tunisia (1), Tanzania (1), Peru (1), Ivory Coast (1), Botswana (1)].
Learning and sharing events as a mechanism for learning

As a mechanism for learning, the LSEs offered a number of opportunities for programmatic learning by individuals and organisations.

Individuals tend to learn from experience – by acting or doing, reflecting on the outcomes of the action, making connections with existing knowledge and then testing connections and new ideas through further action. Organisational learning follows a similar cycle. For learning to take place at this level, organisations need to be able to create, acquire, interpret, transfer and retain knowledge; and to apply that knowledge by modifying its behaviour in response to new insights. Organisations can create and acquire knowledge from reflecting on their own internal experience and/or lessons learned from other organisations, which they then connect back to their own experience.

In the build up to and during the LSE, participating organisations had the opportunity to create, acquire and interpret knowledge through documenting and sharing their experiences with others. However, the opportunity to transfer, retain and apply knowledge only existed after the LSE, as depicted in Figure 4 below.

Whilst immediate workshop feedback, provides valuable information about the opportunities to create, acquire and interpret knowledge during the event, it is only afterwards that we can see how that knowledge has been transferred, applied and retained. This paper briefly touches on and re-caps the in-event learning, before focusing more in-depth on post-event learning.

Figure 4: Organisational learning opportunities during and after the LSE

---


Creating knowledge

Prior to each LSE, a number of participants were invited to document their experiences, thereby creating knowledge with which to share at the event. Specifically, they were asked to reflect on a specific area of work of which they were especially proud; has been really successful, innovative, or exciting and where change has resulted; or which required overcoming significant challenges. Then to document the work by describing the issue, problem or opportunity that sparked the intervention; the context in which the work took place; the key elements of the work; the main outcomes; and core lessons learned from the experience.

The process of documenting one’s own experiences is a valuable learning opportunity in its own right as it allows for reflection and understanding of the processes that led to success or failure and can inform action and improvement.\(^5\)

In all, representatives from 16 organisations documented and presented on their experiences during the first LSE; while 23 organisations documented and presented on their experiences during the second LSE. The larger number of organisations presenting during LSE 2 was largely due to the introduction of panel sessions. Key topics covered included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LSE 1 – Key Topics</th>
<th>LSE 2 – Key Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender violence and vulnerability</td>
<td>What is sex work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes to MSM</td>
<td>Vulnerability and risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care systems</td>
<td>Building sex worker organisations and movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging with media</td>
<td>The role of communities in providing the continuum of care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual and reproductive health and rights for MSM</td>
<td>Programming for male and LGBTI sex workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in hostile environments</td>
<td>Decriminalisation of sex work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety and security</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination approaches to HIV</td>
<td>Working with young people who sell sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional advocacy for rights of LGBTI people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV programming for transgender women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acquiring knowledge

During the LSEs, organisations had the opportunity to learn from others’ experiences in order to acquire knowledge. Indeed, 90% of survey respondents agreed with the statements that “Since the LSE, I have a better understanding of KP programming”, and “a better understanding of KP issues”.

Both LSEs covered a diverse range of topics and experiences. Although the two events focused on different populations, some common themes and principles for programming emerged from the workshops, for example:

Holistic human development as a foundation for programming

During the first LSE, a reoccurring discussion was around the tension between public health and human rights approaches. Many participants identified the value in using a public health approach to advance Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for KPs in hostile environments. However, for others, such an approach also presented a risk of depoliticising LGBTI rights. This debate was also evident in discussions surrounding the language of MSM versus LGBTI. Particular approaches and/or language may have more traction in different national contexts. 6

The second LSE highlighted the need to move beyond a narrow focus on HIV towards a more holistic and integrated human development approach to sex worker health and rights. 7

These discussions were underpinned by the notions that LGBTI people and sex workers are more than just ‘KP’ groups for HIV services, and have a diverse range of interests, needs and skills.

Community led and community owned

Any movement for change should be led and owned by those at the centre of the issue. This sentiment was epitomised during LSE 2 by the slogan adopted by the sex worker movement – ‘nothing for us without us’. The need for meaningful participation coupled with personal and organisational leadership was emphasised in discussions.

Likewise, LSE 1 participants recognised the need for greater involvement of KPs at all levels of programming and decision making. The event highlighted the vital role peer educators play in LGBTI programmes.

Diversity of experience and intersections of vulnerability

Both events highlighted the diversity of experiences for LGBTI people and sex workers. Key populations are not a homogenous group; there is a great deal of diversity in identities, practices and social positioning, even within specific KP groups such as MSM. This diversity translated to different lived experiences of vulnerability. Individuals are uniquely positioned in relation to social structures of discrimination, as multiple stigmas are enacted and intersect in different ways. 8

What was apparent was that multiple vulnerabilities have a compounding affect – both increasing marginalisation and reducing access to services.

For programme implementers and development practitioners, these groups were hardest to reach. For example, during the first LSE, transgender programming was identified as a significant gap. The specific needs of transgender people are often not taken into account or integrated into programmes. During the second LSE, male and transgender sex workers, and young people who sell sex were identified as particularly complex from a programming perspective.

**Working in partnership**

The need for *real* collaboration and partnerships was identified as particularly important for KP programming. Participants expressed excitement around the possibility of joint initiatives and the need for honest open conversations to move forward in a mutually agreeable way.

**Engaging a broad range of stakeholders**

Participants identified the need for ongoing sensitisation work with a broad range of stakeholders to overcome stigma and discrimination – including family members, police, religious leaders and non-medical staff who work in health care facilities. The media was highlighted as a particularly important stakeholder which should be *engaged not evaded*.

**Creative solutions**

Participants expressed a desire to incorporate new ideas into their programming. For example, through the innovative use of technology such as social media, web radio and SMS for communicating with and mobilising communities.

**Safety and security**

The need for a comprehensive and implementable safety and security plan was highlighted during the first LSE, along with some practical suggestions on what this might look like based on the experiences of the Alliance’ Sexual Health and Rights Programme (SHARP). This was situated within discussions of broader principles such as do no harm, risk tolerance and solidarity.

**Evidence-based programming**

Both events highlighted the importance of research and data collection and emphasised the need for more national level data, including population estimates, to inform advocacy. However, the events also revealed the breadth and depth of evidence available to us as a group through our own experience and networks.

---

9 Through SHARP, the Alliance contributed to reducing the spread and impact of HIV among men who have sex with men and building healthy MSM communities in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe from December 2012 to November 2015. For more details visit: http://www.aidsalliance.org/our-impact/the-sharp-programme
Interpreting knowledge

We process new information (acquired knowledge) with reference to prior experiences (created knowledge). Thus, experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning. All new ideas and experiences are linked to previous experiences. However, there does need to be active engagement with knowledge and experience for learning to occur. This means interpreting new knowledge through the lens of our experience.

To facilitate information processing and interpreting knowledge during the LSEs and to ensure that information was not just surfaced, but connected back to experience, a synthesis working group was convened at each event by the Alliance Centre for Practice, based in Cape Town. The Synthesis group members were self-nominated and included a diverse mix of participants. The group was tasked with listening carefully, sensitively and reflectively in order to identify not just what was being said, but what it might mean and the potential implications for organisations, their work with key populations, their strategies, approaches, and relationships.

The synthesis working group met over the duration of each event, in order to reflect on content and identify themes emerging from the discussions, and opportunities relating to programming and practice. At various points in the workshop, the group would recap and reconnect with the content and each other, and inject some thoughts into the broader group to frame emerging content.

This process of interpreting knowledge helps to stimulate learning rather than simple information exchange.¹¹

LGBT and MSM Forecast

The “LGBT and MSM Forecast” report synthesised the key themes emerging across the LSE 1 content and offered some ideas for strategic responses.¹²

Specifically, the report provides:

- a regional snapshot of the present LGBT-programme landscape in Africa, characterised around 16 Emerging Themes
- insight into possible future trends and priorities for responsible, effective LGBT-programming
- critical gaps in the LGBT-response, and ways of working and thinking – principles - that are useful for programme design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LSE 1 – Key Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Legitimate Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Language and Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Safety &amp; Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Religion and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Partnerships and Alliance-building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Social Transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Adapting the Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Combination Approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Gap: HIV in LGBT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Trans Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Resourcing and Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Mental Health and PSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Gap: Working with young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Data: Evidence and Impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Bridging the Gap

The “Bridging the Gap” report reflects on the possible meanings and implications of the content and conversations that surfaced through the LSE2, and highlights priorities and opportunities for action. It identifies gaps in practice and thinking about sex work programming, and suggests responses for bridging those gaps and adapting our behaviour as organisations.¹³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gaps</th>
<th>Bridging Behaviours</th>
<th>Adapting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. An Alliance Position</td>
<td>2. Play an appropriate role as allies in a “sex work alliance”</td>
<td>2. Learn to let go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Two Pathways for Programming</td>
<td>3. Programming around young people who sell sex</td>
<td>3. Learn to loosen up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Competing, Conflicting Theories of Agency</td>
<td>5. Programming around young people who sell sex</td>
<td>5. Enable genuine participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Finding the mutual interest</td>
<td>6. A cloudy gender lens on sex work</td>
<td>6. Be vigilant about ‘Growth’ -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Legitimacy</td>
<td>7. Poor donor coordination</td>
<td>7. Advocate for sex work organisation resourcing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Young People who sell sex</td>
<td>8. Pursuing a holistic, integrated programme approach</td>
<td>8. Commit to Consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. A cloudy gender lens on sex work</td>
<td>10. Programming around young people who sell sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. A cloudy gender lens on sex work</td>
<td>11. Poor donor coordination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The synthesis process was well received during both LSE events.

“Congratulations! The conceptual idea to do something like this as part of the week is really quite innovative. We often don’t create the space in these meetings to have that objective view that helps us think about what it all really means”

- Catherine Simmons, Alliance Secretariat

Transferring knowledge

Follow up feedback from the LSEs suggest that one to two years (respectively) after the events, knowledge has primarily been transferred internally (by 97% of respondents) compared to externally (by 22% of respondents). The main mechanism for transferring knowledge was to discuss learning informally with colleagues, employed by 75% of participants as demonstrated in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Transferring knowledge post-LSE

Communication systems can both formal and informal. Participants who distributed knowledge internally, tended to favour informal means of communication - although most used a combination of formal and informal processes for transferring knowledge internally. This is good because organisational learning takes place at various levels – individually, and within and between teams.\(^{14}\) Using multiple mechanisms for transferring knowledge suggests that content has been shared at different levels and dispersed across organisations.\(^ {15}\)

Participants who distributed knowledge externally tended to favour formal means of communication. This suggests that there may be a hierarchy of communication preferences across the four quadrants (internal – external / formal – informal) as depicted in the figure below.


This also suggests that higher levels of familiarity may correlate with lower levels of formality. By this logic, when we have content we want to distribute we should consider who our primary audience is (internal and/or external), and design materials accordingly (formal and/or informal). When we have multiple audiences, we may also need to package materials in multiple formats to align with the most appropriate communication style.

However, it is worth noting that transferring of knowledge requires more than just the communication of information. ‘More’ is not always ‘better’. Indeed many of us are already overloaded with information. Thus, there needs to be a focus on quality, relevance and accessibility, not just quantity and availability.
Retaining knowledge

Retaining knowledge is an important part of learning. Yet, we tend to lose much of what is learnt in a matter of days or weeks unless we put it into practice or consciously review newly learned material.

In the case of the LSEs, the focus was not so much on learning content as it was reflecting on practice. For many participants, this was not necessarily ‘new’ knowledge, rather new ways of looking at existing knowledge.

Nonetheless, there is still a likelihood that much of the detail of the LSE content was forgotten over time. So what do people remember from the LSEs? What were the key take-aways that have stuck with them over time?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one to two years after the LSEs (respectively), it was the passion, principles, and practice that participants remembered, rather than the facts and figures.

For one participant in particular, the workshop had a lasting impact on their own personal values and attitudes. As each participant draws on their unique perceptions and experiences, the same event can be quite a different experience have a different impact for each individual.16

---

*This has changed my perspective permanently...I am a changed person including the way I relate with LGBTI individuals in my extended family.*

---

Passion

For a lot of participants, it was the passion and inspiration that has stuck with them. This is not surprising as learning involves both cognitive and affective elements.17 Indeed, learning that taps into both our heads and hearts is most effective.

Participants remembered being impressed by the breadth and depth of work undertaken by peers in difficult environments.

---


The breadth and detail of the sometimes pioneering work that partners are doing - especially in places deemed “difficult” or where we think movement building is impossible.

The impressive work of sex worker led organisations in the Latin America and the need to build relationships with partners in Africa

This work was seen as powerful as it was underpinned by passion and integrity.

Passion is the core of any effort to change society for the better. Without it there is little we can do. It has stuck with me because it was a message delivered without hypocrisy, very honestly.

The many examples of great work demonstrated that change is possible no matter how hostile the environment. There are loopholes that can be exploited, pockets of friendliness and opportunities for incremental change. It may take time and require a long term, innovative and multi-faceted effort, but shifts are happening across the continent and around the world.

Participants saw their own realities reflected in others’ experiences and were perhaps surprised somewhat by the degree of commonality in experiences. This mirroring of self reinforces and validates one’s own experiences, whilst inspiring potential steps forward.

The fact that so many different people and organisations from many countries share common issues & have so much to learn from one another. The solutions focus was well received as it offered ways forward.

Sharing experience with other organisations was the most rewarding thing I learned. Indeed, I have great appreciation for the exchanges led by Gavin Reid. We were able to discuss the existing situations in our respective countries and find suitable solutions to get out or get around the risk-free obstacles.

For many participants, witnessing success of others in the face of adversity offered hope, which requires both the will (agency) and the way (pathways) to pursue and achieve goals.\(^{18}\) This opened up a sense of possibility and renewed enthusiasm and energy for the work.

---

Principles

As well as passion, many participants recalled some principles for programming and influencing that has stuck with them and informed their work since the event. For example:

**Partnership**

Participants highlighted the importance of working in partnership.

> Working with MSM in MSM spaces and working through community members and peer education strategies for MSM.

> Partnership building was particularly important as we have scaled-up our work with KP organisations in-country.

**Empowerment**

Empowerment and ownership was seen as essential for social justice.

> that empowerment is key for justice and [a] fair approach to sex work and protection of Sex workers rights. It stuck with me because I met and had chats with some of the sex workers participants during 4 days

> Community empowerment is vital. Nothing for us without us

**Rights based approaches**

Participants reflected on the value of rights based approaches, including workers rights.

> That the rights of sex workers should be respected since it’s a job like any other

**Complexity**

For many participants it was a renewed appreciation of the complexities involved in this work. There is a high degree of diversity in experience, resulting in different levels of vulnerability, choice and agency amongst key populations. These complexities need to be factored into programming.

> The diversity of experiences, the complexity of the issues and, above all, the need to take into account the vulnerability of the population and the protection of children, ie persons under 18 years of age.
The difficulty of choice especially for young women selling sex. One presenter made a case for the health rights of young women selling sex in Uganda

Listening

Both a skill and a way of working, listening to the people at the heart of the intervention, in order to ensure services meet their needs, was identified as a key principle underpinning KP work.

The importance of "listen" and, therefore, working directly with the population (networks) in order to identify gaps and opportunities, and to tailor and validate interventions

Practice

Many participants remember the good practice examples in LGBTI and sex worker programming and influencing work. For example:

Engaging stakeholders

Several participants were struck by initiatives involving a wider range of stakeholders than ‘government’, such as traditional healers and religious leaders.

What I did learn most that has stuck in mind up to date during the workshop was the involvement of the traditional herbalist as we struggle to scale up services to the sex workers and using all the available strategies in making sure the sex workers access health services in friendly environment without stigma and discrimination

The approach with the religious leaders for their involvement in the actions towards the key populations, as well as the approach with the media men for a better treatment of the information towards the key populations.

Creative strategies for influencing

Participants were also struck by some of the creative strategies for influencing used by other organisations, such as strategic litigation.

One of the significant thing I learnt during all sessions was the use of strategic litigation for the sustainable legal environment for KPs
Creative advocacy by sex work networks and organisations, including how they communicate and promote good health amongst their peers

**Movement building**

Movement building was a strong focus of the second LSE and various elements of the movement building process and dynamics made a lasting impression on participants, such as the boundaries between actors within a movement and the allies that support the movement, as well as the roles, responsibilities and relationships of those actors in and around the movement.

I learnt on how to build a strong sex worker movement

The movements of sex workers, the creation of movements makes it possible to have a strong voice of sex workers

* better understanding the links between naming and ownership * better understanding the boundaries around who is and is not 'in' a movement

**Situating practice within broader discourses**

Language and meaning featured strongly in the first LSE as there was much discussion around terms such as MSM and LGBTI and how these connect to broader public health and human rights discourses. For one participant, a better understanding of these concepts has helped inform their practice of community engagement and writing funding proposals.

Language and Meaning. The significance of this is that it has helped in meaningful engagement with the LGBTI community and the use of appropriate language including in funding proposals.

While for another participant, understanding how international organisations were positioning themselves in relation to the various, at times, competing discourses, helped inform their own stance.

The most important thing I have learned is that [the World Health Organisation] WHO has reported that the decriminalisation of sex work is a HIV intervention and that Amnesty International has also decreed that the criminalization of sex work violates human rights.
Applying knowledge

Applying knowledge is the ‘ultimate test’ of learning. Only when knowledge is applied, and there is a resultant adaptation in behaviour, has learning occurred.\(^{19}\) Within an organisational context, learning serves two broad purposes – improving (internal effectiveness and efficiency) and adapting (to changes in the external environment).\(^{20}\) However these are closely related as demonstrable organisational efficacy can result in better positioning within the competitive external market. In uncertain environments, the rate of learning and internal change must outpace the rate of change in the environment for organisations to stay relevant and effective.\(^{21}\)

Some 88\% of survey respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) to the statement that “Since the LSE, I have applied learnings to practice”. Furthermore, some 31 out of 32 respondents reported applying knowledge and making changes within their organisations since participating in one of the LSEs (with the other respondent not answering this particular question). As depicted in Figures 6 and 7, the types of changes made include continued internal reflection (and thus continuation of the learning cycle); using knowledge to inform programming, strategy and decision making; and adapting specific methodologies, tools and practices.

Figure 7: Top 10 ways in which participants have applied learnings from the LSE

---

Figure 8: Other ways in which participants have applied learnings from the LSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimented with different approaches to programming</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established or joined KP networks/movements</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invested in KP leadership development</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporated a more holistic, human development approach to programming</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilised knowledge to strengthen funding applications</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified and filled gaps in programming</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated different forms of technology in programming (e.g. radio or social media)</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewed or updated peer education policy</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed or updated safety and security plan</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewed theory of change</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified specific tools (e.g. training tools, referral forms, M&amp;E tools)</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Barriers to institutionalising learning

Participants identified a number of barriers to institutionalising learning from the LSE, which ranged from internal to external factors. Resourcing in terms of time and funding was a prominent issue which seemed to connect to both internal and external factors. It is worth noting that a number of participants reported no challenges in implementing the learning.

Figure 9: Barriers to institutionalising learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Culture</th>
<th>External Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Internal

Leadership

The need for strong supportive organisational leadership was identified as critical for the integration of learning within an organisation.

Need to ensure that the top leadership resonates with the new approach, including the board members.

Leaders play crucial roles in promoting or inhibiting learning. Supportive leaders prioritise learning by integrating it in their organisation’s strategy and meeting agendas; acknowledging it as a worthwhile use of time and resources; role-modelling good learning practices; recognising staff contributions to new learning; and supporting a culture of learning at all levels.22

Systems

Participants also highlighted the need to embed learning within the organisational culture and systems.

Moving to a more embedded learning style of working where time and resources for reflection and learning are made available; workload issues - trying to move mentality away from this is just another meeting and ensuring that learning methodologies are better integrated as part of day to day work and actions based on reflection are taken

Ultimately, organisational learning is a systemic process. It occurs within the formal and informal interactions of an organisation.23 Learning needs to be built into the organisational structures, systems, procedures, standards and resource allocation. This includes embedding it in an

organisation’s vision, mission, and values. While it may not lead to learning by itself, it creates the formal structures and conditions necessary for learning to take place.  

**Organisational culture**

Participants also identified organisational culture as a barrier for implementing new learning. 

> Organisational culture has been a barrier and staff is unwilling to consider new way of looking at issues. This can be overcome by continued learning and sharing.

An organisation’s ability to learn is a consequence of its organisational culture. A culture of learning is one that supports and encourages collective discovery, sharing, and application of knowledge on a day to day basis, through an ongoing process of inquiry, feedback, reflection, and change. Leadership; processes, policies and practices; and a supportive learning environment are all key factors that reinforce a culture of learning. One way of working towards this can be by establishing the “motives, means, and opportunities” for organisational learning.

**External**

**Hostile environment**

Several participants reported barriers within the external environment that make implementation of new learnings difficult. Indeed, KP programming in general is difficult in hostile environments where governments restrict KP related programming and there is heightened risk due to the political and legal frameworks.

> The only obstacles is the change of the government regime in our country which restrict[s] doing of some of the KP interventions.

> The main barrier experienced currently is the fact that sex work is illegal in Kenya and this affects programming.

In these contexts, it is important to consider our risk tolerance and response. To what level of risk are we prepared to expose our organisation? Is this level the same for our partners? How can we reconcile the difference? Do we want to work under the radar without attracting too much

---

24 Jamtsho, S. The Importance of Developing a Culture of Learning in NGOs. Available from: https://www.academia.edu/7547143/The_Importance_of_Developing_a_Culture_of_Learning_in_NGOs


attention? How can we build safety and security into our work so that the risks are minimised? How can we condition the environment to make it less hostile and mitigate the risk?

**Dominant development frameworks**

Aside from the safety and security risks inherent in working in hostile environments, other environmental factors influence what work can be done, and how – largely through the availability of funding opportunities for particular types of work.

As some participants highlighted, it is not necessarily easy or fundable to do holistic human rights based work, when the main funders operate in a public health paradigm.

Although human rights based, community owned and comprehensive/holistic approaches keep being mentioned as fundamentals of any programming, what donors/bilateral and multilateral agencies want, is very often far from this. The reality of the need for funding, (of which we are all victims), and of funding applications, is one where there is little space for KP-led empowerment initiatives. KPs and vulnerable people are turned into numbers of tests, yield, ART, LTFU, viral loads and similar. We are numbers falling in/out/off a cascade rather than people with inner and outer worlds of thoughts, experiences, needs, hopes and so on.

Rights of key populations in Kenya is only tied to the accessing quality health services hence there is major challenge in incorporating human rights perspective in programming due to laws of the land coupled with stigmatization and conservative cultures

In these contexts, it is important to consider the prominent and competing development discourses; to identify which paradigms different donors subscribe to and what type of work they are prepared to fund; to align ourselves with those that best fit our own organisational values and ways of working; and at times (and where feasible given our risk tolerance), challenge donors on their frameworks and assumptions and actively advocate for the value of holistic, human centred approaches to development.

**Resources**

As alluded to above, ‘resources’ was a commonly raised barrier for participants in implementing learnings from the LSE. This included human and financial resources linked to both internal and external factors.

On the one hand, participants just did not have the time for learning and reflection; or the time required to do this was not budgeted for within their respective organisations.
The cost of time

Many participants identified time as a barrier. Particularly that the time for learning and reflection is not budgeted for.

Resource gaps to train staff on how to embed learnings into practice. Advocacy is a high-paced implementation field and staff hardly give time for learning and reflection and unfortunately this exercise is not budgeted for within our programs.

In order to expand the work we are doing, we need more resources and joint projects, which enable us to connect and do good work together.

The issue of funds has been a major challenge and barrier for me to implement what I learnt and influence change.

This can be both an internal and external issue as it may signal that learning is not prioritised by the organisation’s leadership or by funders.

However, there is a case to be made that integrated learning and reflection can actually save an organisation money as learning from mistakes can stimulate quality improvements and efficiencies. This in turn stimulates innovative thinking and action which helps the organisation to develop new programs and products that will improve its donor prospects and financial viability. This is due to its ability to use its knowledge base. Furthermore, documented learnings can build transparency and make a stronger investment case to donors with an interest in continuous improvement.

Registration

Registration affecting ability to access funding was a particular issue for community based groups in hostile environments where government was blocking registration. This makes it difficult to apply for funding.

We haven’t registered our group we need funding to register our Male Sex Workers group.

As a new group of male sex workers and not yet registered it is hard for us to have workshops. We need funding and assistance in registering.

29 Bhikoo, A. (2017). The role of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in Organisational Learning. SA Monitoring and Evaluation Association
Within these contexts, it is especially important to work in partnership. Established organisations may be able to nurture and sub-grant or do micro-disbursements to emerging organisations and community groups. We can also explore creative / self-funding opportunities, such as the ‘union fees’ paid by sex workers in Latin America to help fund activities which donors are not interested in supporting.

For movement building not many sex workers want to contribute financially or sometimes even their time when they don’t see immediate benefit. More exchanges are needed but also documentation. Sex workers need to come up with initiatives of their own and should be encouraged to fundraise.

The most valuable was around the networking as well as seeing how different organisations manage to work especially with limited resources. The notion that sex workers pay or contribute towards workshops a great form of income generation for movements.
Maximising learning momentum

LSE feedback immediately after the events and subsequent follow up provides a number of insights for how we as individuals, practitioners, organisations, and collectively as a network can maximise learning and sharing during, after, and between learning events. For example in the ways that we design and facilitate such events; how we share information and collaborate between events; and how we integrate learning and reflection in our organisations to make better use of existing knowledge.

Design and facilitation of learning events

Some key workshop design elements that appealed to participants were identified. These elements are consistent with principles of adult and group learning and can be consciously built into workshop design for greater impact and learning. For example:

- **Diversity of content, session types and participants** – to keep it fresh and interesting; appeal to different learning styles; and surface diverse opinions.
- **Practical, solutions-focused** – so that content is concrete, applicable, connected to reality and optimistic; opening up possibilities for plausible success based on what does and does not work.
- **Participatory, engaging** – adults learn by doing and need to be actively involved in directing and owning their own learning processes.
- **Respectful and non-judgmental environment** – A culture of learning is epitomised by a culture of questioning. This requires a supportive environment that is open to new ideas, and respects differences, where we can raise doubt, issues, mistakes and concerns constructively.\(^{30}\)
- **Reflective** – create the space to interpret knowledge so that participants can connect new content to their own experiences.
- **Collaborative** – this approach allows the group to construct knowledge through shared inquiry rather than to discover “objective truths” held by experts.\(^{31}\)

---

\(^{30}\) Jamtsho, S. The Importance of Developing a Culture of Learning in NGOs. Available from: https://www.academia.edu/7547143/The_Importance_of_Developing_a_Culture_of_Learning_in_NGOs

Ongoing sharing and learning after and between events

There is a lot of existing knowledge, which can be leveraged. We can learn from each other’s experiences. This is something that should continue between events. Survey participants offered important suggestions for how this might happen effectively, including:

- **Package information for transference and dissemination** – if the workshop or learning event has as one of its goals that knowledge should be transferred beyond the group in attendance, that knowledge can be packaged for the intended audience (i.e. internal/external and informal/formal)

  It was difficult to do a presentation on the workshop as it would have taken lots of time to summarise, illustrate and go through the all report. For dissemination, and sharing by participants once back to their colleagues, it might be a good idea to create a ‘ready made’ but tailorable ppt of the findings with simple finding and recommendation, illustrations, photos etc

- **Schedule content refreshers/reminders** - if the workshop or learning event has content retention as one of its goals, reminders of that content can be scheduled from the outset. A follow up survey and report such as this one offers an opportunity to remind participants of the key points.

  My only comment is that if possible a refresher course be organised to create an opportunity for the organisations to share their achievements after the LSE so that others can pick the best practices.

- **Mechanisms for sharing knowledge** – technology such as online platforms, WhatsApp groups, and email list serv’s all offer valuable mechanisms for ongoing learning and sharing. One such example is the Alliance Intranet ‘Inspire’. The challenge is focus on quality not quantity and avoid information paralysis.

  It was a great event, I think creating an online platform to facilitate other engagements would be great

Collaborations and partnerships

Inter-organisational relationships that focus on learning from each other can be powerful and cost-effective. Indeed, there is a wealth of experience and resources within and between organisations that participated in the LSEs. Some 68% of survey respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statements that “Since the LSE, I have better relationships with organisations across Africa” and

32 http://inspire.aidsalliance.org/
“with organisations in my own country”. Stronger relationships make it easier to reach out to others when we have questions or need support.

Encouragingly, some 93% of survey respondents have connected with other LSE participants since the event, most commonly to share information.

Figure 10: Post-LSE Connections

Survey participants offered some suggestions for how these connections could be further institutionalised and strengthened, for example through some seed funding to initiate joint work.

It would be interesting to learn whether/how LOs and partners have connected since the learning event. Would some seed funding to initiate a joint project have sparked stronger collaboration/engagement so learning is put into practice?
Integrating monitoring, evaluation and learning

The importance of research and data was raised at both LSEs, with many organisations struggling to find the evidence necessary to influence government and other stakeholders. Yet it was also apparent that there is enormous amounts of experiential knowledge that sits within individuals and organisations. This knowledge can be utilised as evidence to inform programming and influencing work.

A lot of this relevant information is already collected through existing Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems. However, the potential of M&E data as an internal learning and external influencing resource is often not realised due to time and resource pressures, as highlighted above. Yet there are a few simple ways in which we can get more out of our existing M&E data by integrating it with learning systems. For example:

- **Action learning approaches** – designing programmes with an action learning approach consciously connects the processes of action and reflection.
- **Mainstreaming lessons learned** - by including lessons learned in all M&E activities and reporting templates, it becomes mainstreamed into a way of working rather than an add-on activity.
- **Reflect forwards and backwards** - Sometimes the answers to questions of strategic importance can be found in past work, other times such questions form the foundations of future work. Thus it is important to look backwards as well as forwards.
- **Involve stakeholders** – involving a wide range of internal and external stakeholders in all stages of programme design, monitoring and evaluation adds both validity and buy-in to our claims.

---

33 Bhikoo, A. (2017). The role of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in Organisational Learning. SA Monitoring and Evaluation Association