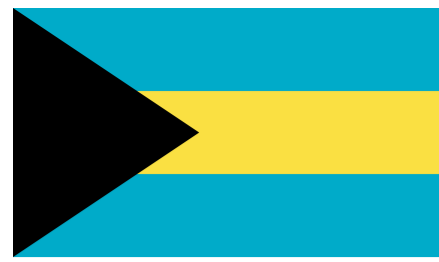


LOCAL CAPACITY INITIATIVE (LCI) PROJECT

SUCCESS STORY



THE BAHAMAS

Increased capacity to report human rights violation (HRV) and establishing partnerships for support and litigation

The Local Capacity Initiative (LCI) project funded by PEPFAR/USAID and implemented by the PANCAP Coordinating Unit in collaboration with University of the West Indies, Health Economics Unit worked to build the policy advocacy capacity of local civil society organisations (CSOs) that specifically focus on key populations to become more sustainable as they continue to support the overall goal of reducing transmission of HIV in the Caribbean.

Haitian Organisation for the Prevention of HIV/AIDS and STDs (HOPHAS) is the first Haitian organization in the Bahamas that works directly with Haitian Migrants. The Haitian communities are characterized by high poverty, high unemployment, very low education and poor health conditions. The majority of Haitians live in closely-guarded shantytowns, known as 'Villages' located in New Providence, Abaco, and Grand Bahamas, many of whom engage in sex work.

Under the LCI Project, HOPHAS with support from the National AIDS Programme was able to successfully conduct advocacy activities to address issues of human rights violations and stigma and discrimination against sex workers. HOPHAS successfully established a partnership with Bowleg McKenzie and Associates (Counsel and Attorney at Law) to provide capacity building training for HOPHAS staff and volunteers in constitutional and human rights of all people that live within the Bahamas irrespective of their immigration status. The trained staff and volunteers were then recruited to conduct human rights sensitization training for sex workers and participate in the project survey aimed at documenting cases of human rights violations in three islands with significant immigrant populations; Abaco, Grand Bahama and Eleuthera.

Two hundred and two (202) women including 120 sex workers participated in the sensitizations sessions. Interviews conducted by HOPHAS revealed sex workers previously lacked knowledge of their basic human rights, in many cases it is perceived that they have no rights.

Through this initiative and HOPHAS's public awareness campaign, women now understand their human rights and are empowered to report cases of human rights violation using the HOPHAS basic right violation "Watch Group".

Sex Workers are now reporting incidences of human rights violations and have access to legal counsel from independent lawyers and Bowleg McKenzie and Associates through existing partnerships with HOPHAS.

Three cases of human rights violation were reported by sex workers through the "Watch Group" in December 2017. One of which, resulted in the perpetrator being incarcerated.

No incidence of human rights violation was reported in January 2018.

In addition, HOPHAS also provided support to victims of human rights violations through referrals to The Bahamas Urban Youth Development Center and the Red Cross for empowerment training and food support.



Field Officer conducting field interview with a female participant during the HOPHAS Survey (picture courtesy of HOPHAS)

In summary, HOPHAS was able to achieve the following:

- Developed communication strategies to mainstream rights awareness through the media.
- Targeted training and outreach programs to educate communities on their rights and responsibilities, and
- Facilitated the provision of legal counsel to sex workers who are victims of human rights violations.

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