

January - April 2022

Uganda Network of Sex Worker-led Organizations (UNESO) Newsletter

This Quarter's Newsletter Includes:

Healing in Solidarity Training of Trainers

Coalition Building, Partnership, Networking, and Sex Work Movement Building Training for Sex Worker Leaders

Baseline Study on Sex Workers who use and inject drugs

Digital and Physical Security Training for UNESO staff and Network Members

Executive Directors' Forum

Finance Training for Non-finance Officers for UNESO staff and Network Members

District Dialogue on Sexual reproductive health and rights(SRHR) Issues Affecting Sex Workers in Gulu and Busia

Sex Work Technical Working Group Meeting

UNESO new Staff

Significant dates that we celebrated

Violence against sex workers

Partner engagements

NEEKO Magazine launch



UNESO has a countrywide mandate to provide a systematic and all-inclusive coordination structure for sex worker-led organizations for a collective advocacy voice. With a mission to build a strong, unified, well-coordinated sex work movement in Uganda by empowering member organizations through advocacy and research to enable a free and safe environment for sex workers in all their diversity. UNESO's main mandate is to coordinate, empower, strengthen and build the capacity of sex worker-led organizations and as such implements programs in line with the mandate.

We hope that you enjoy reading this newsletter!

HEALING IN SOLIDARITY TRAINING OF TRAINERS

20th-21st February 2022 in Southern Uganda | 22nd -23rd February 2022 in western Uganda | 27th -28th February 2022 in Northern Uganda

UNESO's Programs Manager, Naomi Mujuni, and the Advocacy officer, Stella Nassuna were part of a Healing in Solidarity Training of Trainers workshop whose objective was to create a space to share, learn and understand the vast knowledge and practices around self and collective care that centers radical healing among African activist feminists in social justice work.



LBQ Sex Workers and UNESO staff at the Southern Region Healing in Solidarity Training of Trainers



LBQ Sex Workers and UNESO staff at the Western Region Healing in Solidarity Training of Trainers



LBQ Sex Workers and UNESO staff at the Northern Region Healing in Solidarity Training of Trainers

After the workshop, UNESO embarked on a regional training exercise on Healing in Solidarity Training of Trainers.

In January, LBQ sex workers from the northern and western regions of the country were provided with a space to share, learn and understand the vast practices that can be pursued for self and collective care to improve their physical wellbeing and emotional wellness.

COALITION, PARTNERSHIP, NETWORKING, AND SEX WORK MOVEMENT BUILDING TRAINING FOR SEX WORKER LEADERS

11th – 12th February 2022



Sex Worker leaders and UNESCO staff at the Western Region of the Coalition Building Training



Sex Worker leaders and UNESCO staff at the Eastern Region of the Coalition Building Training

From 11th to 12th February, UNESCO, with support from UHAI-EASHRI, convened a coalition-building training for sex work leaders in the Western and the Eastern regions of the country. This program was able to reach 30 sex worker leaders and was facilitated by our member organizations' leaders in those regions. The leaders were empowered in previous training and therefore knew how to conduct the training. The training offered a space for interaction and networking among the sex worker leaders as well as achieving all the objectives as outlined below:

- To equip rural sex worker leaders with knowledge and skills in coalition building and how to establish and strengthen partnerships and networking with likeminded people.
- To discuss alternative conceptual frameworks for understanding Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) relationships with other organizations
- To understand why CSOs enter into joint action with other organizations
- To discuss opportunities and challenges in organizing joint action at all levels, at local, national, and international.

BASELINE STUDY ON SEX WORKERS WHO USE AND INJECT DRUGS

Ongoing



The technical working group meeting at the UNESO offices to discuss the Baseline Study on sex workers who use and inject drugs

With financial support from UHAI, UNESO is currently conducting a baseline study on sex workers who use drugs. UNESO recognizes the diversity of sex workers and is aware of the intersectionality of vulnerabilities that affect the human rights and social justice of sex workers, notwithstanding the sex workers who use and inject drugs.

Therefore, UNESO intends to acknowledge and ground the differences among sex workers through innovation of response to issues that affect sex workers who use drugs that will create evidenced and documented information and related interventions to address and tackle issues that affect sex workers who use drugs in Uganda.

The main objective of this study is to establish a benchmark for evidenced policy advocacy and the implementation of interventions to address issues that affect sex workers who use and inject drugs and contribute to a better understanding of the situation in the area of access to health care services, social and legal services for sex workers who use drugs. This study will shed a light on and document a group of people that are often overlooked.

A Technical Working Group consisting of eight (8) members with expert knowledge on evaluations and Key Population programming and advocacy was established to support and oversee the Baseline study that UNESO is undertaking. The first meeting of the TWG was held on the 18th of March, 2022 at UNESO offices to introduce the group to the study.

DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL SECURITY TRAINING FOR UNESO STAFF AND NETWORK MEMBERS

21st -25th March 2022



The UNESCO board chairperson, Sham Batte, giving opening remarks at the Digital and Physical Security Training in Jinja



Executive Directors of sex worker-led organizations and UNESCO staff at the Digital and Physical Security Training that happened in Jinja from the 20th to the 25th of March

Sex workers and sex worker-led organizations/groups face a lot of insecurities in form of digital and physical insecurities from both the state actors, non-state actors that put their lives and work at a greater risk. Many of these insecurities and violations go unreported and even if they are reported, they never get justice.

It was with this in mind that UNESCO organized a five-day digital and physical security training for its staff and some of its members in order to equip them to better protect themselves from insecurities, both online and physically in their communities, and within their respective organizations.

During the five days of training, members and staff of UNESCO learned:

- To enhance their knowledge of Physical security, Digital security, and Wellbeing
- To assess the risks facing UNESCO and member organizations
- To develop a risk impact reduction and management plan
- To develop an action plan to reduce and manage risks facing UNESCO and its members.

The training brought together executive directors from 24 different organizations that are under the umbrella of UNESCO. These organizations serve sex workers in their diversities. It was a country-wide training, with Executive Directors from Malaba, Kabarole, Soroti, Kasese, Mukono, Wakiso, Masaka and Kampala.

The training saw the participants learn how to keep themselves safe while online, how to manage stress, and how to recognize and mitigate the physical security risks that they may face.

The digital training was led by Sonia Karungi, a digital security trainer and the physical security training was led by Defend Defenders, an organization whose mandate is to protect and promote human rights defenders in the East and Horn of Africa sub-region.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS' FORUM

1st April 2022



Zumba session during the EDs Forum

One of UNESO's thematic areas is to advance the wellness and well-being of sex worker leaders. In line with this, UNESO conducts a quarterly EDs Forum for its members. During this time, EDs meet, share, network, and participate in different games that enhance their overall wellness and well-being.

Some of the sessions during the forum are

- Physical exercises where a Zumba instructor is invited to lead the session
- Outdoor games such as netball and dodgeball
- Indoor games such as Ludo, Darts, and Draft, among others
- Tips on how to manage stress, are also discussed

The first EDs Forum of the year brought together 30 different Executive Directors of sex worker-led organizations from all over the country. They came from Kampala, Gulu, Malaba, Kasese, Wakiso, Mukono and Kabarole.

The Executive Directors participated in games and had a Zumba session to get their blood moving. Physical exercise through Zumba has been proven to alleviate the symptoms of stress and is generally a fun way to spend the afternoon.

FINANCE TRAINING FOR NON-FINANCE OFFICERS FOR ALL STAFF AND NETWORK MEMBERS

19th -23rd April 2022



Participants during the finance training for non-finance officers.



Non-finance officers and UNESO staff at the residential training

On 23rd April 2022, UNESO completed its five-day "FINANCE TRAINING FOR NON-FINANCE OFFICERS" among 25 participants including UNESO staff and Non-finance officers from the Network member organizations. It was an amazing week of being introduced to the world of financial management and accounting.

It is believed that accounting and financial management is the only profession that is practiced by all persons despite the profession, color, race, gender, etc, therefore making it essential for every individual within the organizational setting to know about financial management and accounting. "Accounting is not easy but we all need it because it is essential for personal as well as organizational management"

The participants were enriched with knowledge and skills in financial management and accounting that they can now confidently encounter and deal with financial issues put on their desks. The five days training was concluded with issuing of certificates to participants as a way to provide them with credibility and an inspiration to keep the financial management and accounting knowledge acquired up to date.

It was a country-wide training, with non-finance officers/managers representatives from different network member organizations from Malaba, Mbale, Kabarole, Luwero, Gulu, Tororo, Kasese, Mukono, Wakiso, and Kampala.

DISTRICT DIALOGUE ON SRHR ISSUES AFFECTING SEX WORKERS IN GULU AND BUSIA

27th April 2022



Participants in Busia



Participants in Gulu

As a strategy to promote the Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of sex workers, UNESO routinely holds community and stakeholders engagements. On the 27th of April 2022, UNESO, under the JAS program, held a dialogue with community stakeholders and sex workers in the districts of Gulu and Busia. The stakeholders included local chairpersons, women leaders in the respective communities, lodge and bar managers, and health workers. The main purpose of the meeting was to create a platform for district stakeholders, partners, and sex workers to discuss and strategize on how to promote SRHR and service delivery among sex workers in the districts.

During the meeting, a number of SRHR priority areas in both districts were identified and strategies for further collaboration between district stakeholders and sex workers on how to promote SRHR among sex workers were developed. **Among the key SRHR issues discussed were:**

1. The attitude of health workers that leads to stigmatization in the dissemination of treatment to sex workers who are prone to UTIs and STIs
2. The role of the lodge and bar managers in helping with the safety of the sex workers that work on their premises. Also, the hygiene of the brothels was brought into question.
3. The limited access to HIV self-testing kits, PEP, and PrEP services for sex workers.
4. Limited availability of comprehensive SRHR services including family planning services
5. The issue of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against sex workers

SEX WORK TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING

28th April 2022



Members of the Sex Work Technical Working Group

UNESO convened the Sex Work Technical Working Group meeting under the Joint Advocacy for Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (JAS Programme). The Technical Working Group(TWG) has representatives from the Ministry of Health(MARPI), HIV and Quality Health Parliamentary Forum Uganda, and different CSOs like UGANET, Men of the night Uganda, HRAPF, Lady Mermaid Empowerment Centre, WONETHA, OGERA, JEEWAG, Women Positive Empowerment Initiative, Scarlet Initiative Uganda, and Hope Focus Uganda. The meeting discussed SRHR priority issues affecting sex workers in the districts of Gulu and Busia that have been realized in the implementation of the JAS Programme.

Key SRHR issues prioritized were:

- The need for sensitization and awareness on SRHR services available to sex workers,
- Training on sexual and gender-based violence experienced by sex workers,
- Identifying strategies and interventions to support children who are engaging in prostitution in Busia district,
- Mental health prevention awareness,
- Nutritional needs for sex workers living with HIV,
- Limited availability of comprehensive SRHR services including family planning and
- Engaging with bar and lodge managers to understand SRHR issues of the sex workers under their care



UNESO's New Staff L-R Janet Adong, Stellan Nassuna, Edith Nagawa, Carol Nabukeera, Mable Amuron at the UNESO Digital and Physical Security Training

We are happy to report that the UNESO team is growing. According to our goals of a well-coordinated sex work movement that speaks to the needs of all sex workers in their diversity, four new professionals were welcomed to the team who will aid in the daily functioning of UNESO for institutional strengthening.

1. **Nassunah Stellan** - Advocacy and Membership Officer
2. **Nagawa Edith** - Monitoring and Evaluation Officer
3. **Amuron Mable Barbara** - Communications Officer
4. **Adong Janet** - Finance Officer
5. **Nabukeera Carol** - Programs Officer

SOME OF THE ADVOCACY EVENTS WE COMMEMORATED

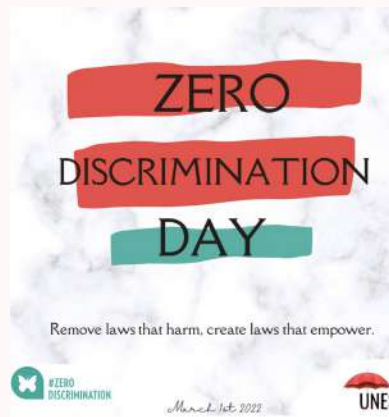
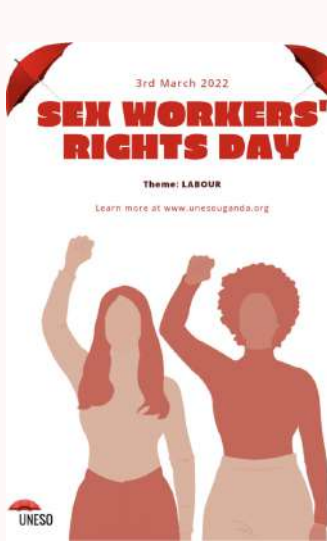
Being a network that serves the Sex Worker community in their diversity, UNESO is always honored to commemorate different advocacy events with her members and partners. Such events are a reminder of how far we have come, the progress made along the way, and that sex workers are part of the broader community. Below are some of the commemorated events:

International Sex
Worker Rights Day

Zero Discrimination Day

Transgender Day of
Visibility

World Tuberculosis
Day



During this period, we mounted an ongoing social media advocacy campaign to end inequalities in accessing HIV essential services among sex workers. The reason we have this campaign going is that HIV remains a major public health issue that affects millions of people worldwide. The HIV prevalence in Uganda among sex workers has been reported as 37%. This ongoing campaign is aimed at letting the Sex Worker community know about their rights in accessing HIV services.



PRESS RELEASE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST SEX WORKERS

During this period, UNESO received reports from member organizations indicating increased cases of violence against sex workers in the different regions of Uganda. A case in point is the reported killings of three female sex workers that happened in two weeks alone between 22nd March and 6th April 2022. Apio Monica, a 23 years old female sex worker was found stabbed by a sharp object at Valley Bar and Guest House in Busia district on

29/03/2022 at 2:00 pm. Ayenya Harriet, a sex worker was beaten by a group of 6 men in Kireka at Roddas Lodge, she later died at the hospital. The body of a female sex worker was found in a pool of blood in Busamaa Forest near Nkokonjeru in Mbale on 6/04/2022.

This trend is particularly worrying because these killings have taken place with absolute impunity. UNESO condemns these killings. These killings reveal a need for the decriminalization of sex work in Uganda.

The official Press Statement on the Increased Murder Cases of Sex Workers in Uganda can be found [here](#).

PARTNER ENGAGEMENTS

15th March 2022



JAS Media Fellows being trained on SRHR, Sex Work, and the Media

Partner engagement meetings provide opportunities to share information, develop relationships among partners, plan future actions, and get work done. While we had numerous partner engagements in this quarter, including taking part in the UGANET women's day campaign, there is one engagement that we would love to highlight because of UNESO's active involvement in the engagement.

As a member organization of the JAS Programme, UNESO took part in the training of journalists for the JAS Media Fellowship, where 15 journalists were trained on SRHR reporting. UNESO got an opportunity to facilitate a session on SRHR reporting on Sex Workers. This was organized by the Uganda AIDS Commission(UAC). The presentation from UNESO tasked the media fellows to check their bias and to remind them of their journalistic integrity and ethics as well as introduce them to the issues that sex workers face and their SRHR.

NEEKO MAGAZINE LAUNCH

3rd March 2022



Ms. Solome Nakaweesi, a Human Rights Activist, who was the chief celebrant, declared the magazine launched

On 3rd March 2022 history was made with the launch of the Neekeo Magazine by Lady Mermaid Empowerment Centre, in collaboration with UNESO. This day was monumental as it is International Sex Worker Rights Day. The magazine launch was in commemoration of the International Sex Worker Rights Day (every 3rd March). Neekeo Magazine is Uganda's First Sex Worker Magazine that speaks about the power, resilience, and agency of sex workers. It carries the stories of sex workers, their daily lives, love stories, and life hacks. The magazine includes the story of building the sex work movement in Uganda and how it went from a small movement to a thriving movement now with an increased number of organizations led by sex workers. The magazine was created by sex workers for sex workers.

Key people within the sex work movement, including the National Coordinator of UNESO, spoke about the difficulties and the triumphs they have faced which saw the culmination of this magazine.

There were so many triumphs and losses in these first four months of 2022. We are resolved to continue the fight for sex workers in our country and we thank you for joining us on this journey as we advocate for the Rights of marginalized sex workers.

You can follow us on our social media and see the programs we are implementing:



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