

STORY OF CHANGE: MOZAMBIQUE

Recognition of Transgender Women as a Key Population in Mozambique

The context

Within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) communities in Mozambique, transgender people represent the group which faces the most violence, stigma, and discrimination. This is particularly the case for transgender women, and therefore, they are also at higher risk of contracting HIV.

PITCH partner, LAMBDA, fully realized this situation and conducted a research in 2017 on the Political, Economic, and Social Situation of LGBT People in the Cities of Maputo, Beira and Nampula (LAMBDA 2017). In this research it was shown that transgender women in Mozambique encounter severe barriers in accessing healthcare services and, facing socio-economic exclusion. The study also demonstrated how social vulnerability and employment barriers push individuals into sex work, which in turn results in higher risk of HIV for transgender women.

The problem

In Mozambique there are no specific public policies or laws that cover LGBT communities. Despite the recommendations given by WHO to recognize transgender people as one of key population in HIV/AIDS¹, this was not the case in Mozambique. In the Mozambican National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS 2015–2020, which established guidelines for intervention packages and services to be offered to different population groups, the Ministry of Health (MoH) recognized only four key populations, in which transgender people were excluded and transgender women were mentioned as part of MSM. Despite commonalities experienced by key populations, each group has specific needs and thus it is important to promote approaches which respond to the particular characteristics of each group.

“The needs and challenges of transgender women and MSM are different, and need to be addressed differently. This was the problem.” (PITCH CFP).

The lack of recognition and representation of transgender people had a big impact on the focus of the services for HIV prevention, care, and treatment, as well as the availability of funds and general support for this group. Moreover, the exclusion had a severe impact on self- and social stigma, as well as on the recognition of a transgender movement.

¹ <https://www.who.int/hiv/pub/guidelines/keypopulations/en/>

The change

Prior to joining PITCH in 2017, LAMBDA had started advocacy activity to sensitize Mozambican civil society and government on transgender people's rights and needs, as well as to the differences between transgender women and MSM. LAMBDA is also part of the Technical Working Group of the National AIDS Council (CNCS), constituted within the framework of the process for preparing Mozambique's HIV/AIDS COP (Country Operational Plan) and funded through PEPFAR. The CNCS plays a key role in the process of policy making and direction for the administration and implementation of multi-sectorial, HIV-related programs. Despite LAMBDA's advocacy work as a member of the CNCS with the National AIDS Council and the Ministry of Health, the CNCS was not able to develop research, programmes, and activities focused on transgender women due to the fact that they were not recognized as a key population by the country's MoH.

PITCH started in 2017 in Mozambique and supported transgender women by providing funds for activities that focus on or contribute to address the needs of transgender women. PITCH partners Pathfinder, the National Platform for the Rights of the Sex Workers², and LAMBDA, unified their voices and focused their efforts on strengthening the capacity of transgender women, while also working to sensitize wider society on the needs and challenges faced by transgender women. This represented an important intervention, prior to pursuing more active engagement with the National AIDS Council and the Ministry of Health. Under PITCH, the following advocacy activities for transgender women were conducted:

- In 2017, LAMBDA were able to develop and share a key study about the needs of transgender, bisexual and lesbian women, which was published on the newspaper IKWELI. This has increased the visibility of transgender women at country level.³
- With the support of PITCH, the National Platform for the Rights of Sex Workers organized training for health workers to address stigma toward transgender people and transgender sex workers. This national platform is considered a community led movement. The platform carried out activities in different regions of the country through its 23 focal points and trained health workers in health and safety, community mobilization, SRHR, stakeholders engagement, and the reporting system ONA. By using ONA, the focal points were able to produce reports of their activities as well as the challenges experienced by the transgender community, sharing them with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Interior during regular monthly meetings. And as of 2019, transgender sex workers began to systematically report cases of violence, through monthly reports, with support from the focal points of the Platform for the Rights of Sex Workers.
- On the 28th, 29th, and 30th of October 2019, all PITCH partners worked together organizing a Universal Health Coverage (UHC) workshop in Maputo on "Putting Key Populations and Vulnerable Groups at the Core of UHC". The main objective of the workshop was to raise awareness on UHC and, within the UHC, to discuss the barriers faced by KPs in accessing health service quality (such as discrimination and the misrepresentation of transgender people). Representatives of UNDP-Mozambique, the

² The National Platform for the rights of Sex Workers consists of 9 members, of which 2 international organizations (Pathfinder and MSF) and 7 national organizations (ICRH-Mozambique, Tiyane Vavasate, Ungagodoli, Abevamo, Amodefa, Muleide and LAMBDA) and 18 focal points at the provincial level.

³ PITCH Mozambique country report 2017.

Ministry of Health, the National AIDS Council, the Maputo National Health HQs and CSOs, attended the workshop. Prior to the workshop, all PITCH partners joined efforts conducting several informal advocacy activities, such as networking “in the corridors”, in order to engage the Government representatives, ensuring their participation. During this workshop, on October 29, 2019, the Representative of the National Platform for the Rights of Sex Workers and the President of Tiyane Vavasate (PITCH sub-grantee Community-Based Organization) contributed to the plenary session on “Rights and Duties of Key Populations”. Barriers faced by sex workers in accessing health services including of transgender women were discussed.

“The representatives of all communities were present and speaking at the round tables. We didn’t have a representative of MSM speaking on behalf of a transgender women but rather a transgender woman speaking for herself about her problems” (PITCH CFP).

During the UHC workshop, the National STI/HIV Programme Focal Point of the MoH of Mozambique, Dr. Jessica Seleme, publicly committed to include transgender people in the key populations of the next National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS (2020–2024). The recognition of transgender women as a key population is the result of a long and complex process, in which PITCH partners contributed together with other organizations and programmes, meaningful engaging with the government. In December 2020, the National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS was approved and finalised, with the needs of transgender women reflected as committed to by Dr. Seleme, with transgender women no longer included in the same population group as men who have sex with men.

Significance

The recognition of transgender women as a key population is a milestone in the history of transgender people in Mozambique, which empowers the movement in general. The change has encouraged community engagement. For instance, on the 1st of December 2019, as part of the celebrations of the International HIV/AIDS world day celebration, the Maputo Council invited for the first time a transgender woman at the roundtable on “*Stigma and Discrimination within the key population*”⁴.

The constitution of a transgender movement today, was a work that PITCH leveraged, formed a more visible group of transgender women and they are now in the process of creating a specific movement for transgender women.

The recognition of transgender women supported also the allocation of resources by the MoH for specific prevention, care, treatments, and mitigation services targeting specifically towards transgender women. The inclusion of transgender people in Mozambique’s next National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS has also been used to inform the Global Fund’s process of drafting their annual plan for 2020.

Lesson learned

The combination of the advocacy carried out by the focal points of the National Platform for the Rights of Sex Workers; the participation of PITCH in the process of developing the National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS (2020–2024); and the planning and implementation of the UHC

⁴ PITCH Mozambique country report 2019.

workshop lead successfully to the inclusion of transgender people in the National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS. This showed PITCH partners the value and impact of collaboration. Organizations such as LAMBDA, Pathfinder International, ACAM, UNIDOS, MULEIDE, COALIZAO, and REPSSI worked together and from their coordination efforts started seeing substantial change in terms of advocacy for the key populations. By maximizing single efforts, joint advocacy strongly contributed to achieving the goal of equal access to HIV-related services.

The story was prepared as part of the End Term Evaluation of the PITCH Programme in 2020, conducted by ResultsinHealth team: Aryanti Radyowijati, Conny Hoitink, Zaire van Arkel, Maurizia Mezza, Lingga Tri Utama, Marianne Brittijn and Jacinta Tiago (national consultants).

