

ENDA Santé Is Building an Enabling Environment for Key Populations in West Africa Based on Universal Human Rights

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From April 2021 through September 2022, ENDA Santé worked with CSOs, cadres responsible for legal and social counsel, parliamentarians, and staff of media outlets to build capacity and facilitate dialogue around KP rights, needs, and services in West Africa. Through structural interventions, the project sought to create an enabling environment within civil society and government in which the range of services KPs need for health and well-being could be both provided and easily accessed.

In much of the world, efforts to provide health and social services to key populations (KPs)—including sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender people, and people who inject drugs—are hampered by anti-KP national policies and laws that institutionalize discrimination in service delivery. Even in countries that have an HIV strategy inclusive of KPs, contradictory laws and policies prevent equitable service delivery and negatively affect KP individuals' health-seeking behaviors. For example, where sex work is criminalized, sex workers face potential recrimination if they explain to providers the nature of their HIV risk and need for HIV services.

In West Africa, ENDA Santé, with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Key Populations Investment Fund (KPIF) and the Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project, helped to build a baseline understanding of a range of KP-related issues among key actors in five francophone countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, and Togo) and three anglophone countries (Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone). The goal was to create an enabling environment within civil society and government in which the range of services KPs need for health and well-being could be both provided and easily accessed.

To achieve this, ENDA Santé focused on structural interventions, an area with consistent gaps affecting KP programming throughout the region. From 2021 to 2022, the project worked with civil society organizations (CSOs), cadres responsible for legal and social counsel, parliamentarians, and staff of media outlets to build capacity and facilitate dialogue around KP rights, needs, and services. It did so through its partner, the [Civil Society Institute for HIV and Health in West and Central Africa](#), which served as a regional mechanism for coordination and collaboration among CSOs, nongovernmental organizations, community-based organizations, KP organizations and networks, patient networks, and national platforms across 20 countries.

Key Achievements

ENDA Santé's project portfolio and activities were designed to address three main gaps. **The first gap concerned the need to establish KP champions and allies to influence government and civil society stakeholders.** An increase in violence against KP communities and organizations in several West African countries threatened the regions' HIV and health gains among KPs, highlighting the urgency of the need for KP leadership. To this end, ENDA Santé held an in-person workshop funded by KPIF and other partners in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire in July 2021, to stimulate KP-led and KP-focused CSOs to rethink current approaches to delivering services for KPs in consideration of the challenges KPs were facing. Forty-nine individuals from 23 KP organizations in 12 countries participated. Follow-up meetings were subsequently held in July and August 2022, with a total of 80 participants from civil society, government partners, and technical partners, to further develop ideas and strategies.



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The project also hosted a webinar series on community-led monitoring. The two most recent webinars were held in FY22 and attended by more than 90 participants from CSOs and national HIV programs in six focus countries. The webinars featured presentations and discussions around approaches to policy change, lessons learned in several community monitoring observatories in the region, and use of the community observatory data in health policies.

In addition to fostering champions within KP organizations, ENDA Santé worked with lawyers, a group critically positioned to serve as allies and resources for KPs. In September 2021, the project conducted a virtual capacity-building workshop over three days with 30 lawyers from Mali and Togo on human rights and HIV, as well as to update them on HIV-related laws and policies in West and Central Africa. The project's work with lawyers continued with a regional webinar in December 2021, in which Ghanaian lawyers discussed the anti-homosexuality law in Ghana and colleagues from Mali described the intersection of HIV and human rights in their context. Lawyers from other countries in the region also shared their experiences using international human rights law and national laws to address human rights violations that have impeded KP individuals from accessing HIV prevention, treatment, and care services.

The project also organized workshops with 73 media staff in Liberia, Togo, and Ghana to strengthen the capacities of journalists and other media personnel around HIV and human rights, convey the importance of communicating factual information about HIV based on epidemiology rather than creating messaging catering to what sells, and cultivate their buy-in as allies of the HIV response.

In ENDA Santé's work with government, the project held three national reflections targeting parliamentarians in Liberia, traditional leaders in Togo, and justice stakeholders in Ghana. Legal changes related to HIV and KPs in the three countries were presented, and participants reflected on human rights and HIV in their respective contexts.

A second gap ENDA Santé worked to address was the need to develop regional capacity for KP advocacy among CSOs, allowing KP organizations to provide leadership at national and regional levels. As an initial step, the project held a virtual discussion with representatives from CSOs, KPs, and national HIV programs entitled "Improving the Environment and Service Delivery to Key Populations: What Are the Advocacy Priorities?" Participants mapped and analyzed the status of interventions targeting KPs and developed advocacy strategies and recommendations for improving the enabling environment.



Participants of the national media training in Togo, September 6–8, 2022

Photo credit: ENDA Santé

One factor that has limited CSOs' ability to serve as advocates has been the lack of a central, online location for accessing written resources such as regulations, policies, key technical documents, and other relevant resources related to HIV and human rights among KPs. Through the project, a virtual online library that categorized resources and provided working links was developed and will soon be integrated into the Civil Society Institute website.

Increasing CSOs' limited access to human resources who would be effective in advocating for KPs was another approach ENDA Santé used to boost KP-led advocacy. The project created and launched the ExBase database where CSOs and individuals with expertise in KP issues could register for potential consulting opportunities and CSOs could announce opportunities and positions to which experts and other CSOs could apply. The project also held a virtual regional event for CSOs and KP associations and networks to promote dialogue on advocacy, leadership, and policies, as well as opportunities for mentoring KP CSOs.

The third gap addressed in ENDA Santé's activities concerned the lack of a mechanism KP CSOs could use to post timely communication about relevant activities and events that would advance the KP human rights agenda at local and subregional levels; similarly, CSOs need ready access to clear processes they can follow to address social and legal emergencies among KP individuals. One project response was to develop and launch a database where CSOs could post information about meetings, workshops, trainings, and other events related to advocacy and advancement of the health agenda in West Africa. In addition, the project provided technical assistance to develop processes for seeking and providing legal counsel and social services such as emergency housing. Initial interest included inquiries from KP CSOs in Ghana and Liberia around the possibility of access to legal and social support. As awareness of the availability of the technical assistance grew, interest from KP CSOs in other countries followed.



National media training in Liberia, September 20, 2022

Photo credit: ENDA Santé




National reflection workshop for agents of justice in Ghana, September 23, 2022

Photo credit: ENDA Santé

Looking Ahead

Flexibility and responsiveness have been key to the project's achievements to date, given the unforeseen local and global challenges such as COVID-19 and national anti-lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer, and intersex (LBGTQI) demonstrations. Several technical assistance activities from ENDA Santé's original workplan could not be implemented as originally conceived but were successfully reworked to adjust to the changing social and health dynamics in the local contexts. For example, when governments put lockdowns in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 in 2020, in-person trainings and discussions became impracticable. Ongoing social hostility and violence toward KPs in Liberia, Ghana, and Senegal also made it dangerous for ENDA Santé to hold discussions in country. To continue to advance the objectives despite these issues, the team migrated capacity building and other activities from in-person events to a secure virtual platform.

KP human rights must be addressed through the lens of health equity to broaden support among stakeholders, given the high level of criminalization, harassment, stigma, and discrimination in the region. The PEPFAR in-country implementing partners will be ready to pivot and innovate to continue building an enabling environment in West Africa.

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