

# THE LINK - NEPAL

Volume 12 | July–September 2019

**COMMUNITIES**  
*make the difference*

*Special Issue on*

Community Engagement

## LINKAGES Community Engagement Activities to Attain Epidemic Control in Nepal

The FHI 360-led [Linkages across the Continuum of HIV Services for Key Populations Affected by HIV \(LINKAGES\)](#), is the largest United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded project that focuses specifically on HIV services for key populations (KPs) and people living with HIV (PLHIV). On December 1, LINKAGES will commemorate World AIDS Day 2019, whose theme this year is **Communities Make the Difference**. This is an opportunity to recognize the vital role that communities have played and continue to play in the HIV response at the international, national, and local levels.

and local nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners. LINKAGES Nepal also works closely with national networks of KPs and PLHIV, and their community-based organizations (CBOs) at the national and local levels, to create an enabling environment and provide high-quality services. The project recognizes that it is through these community networks that a sustained response to HIV is driven and the most impact is attained.



**Photo 1:** Outreach staff conducting online outreach



**Photo 2:** Community HIV screening by outreach staff

The LINKAGES Nepal project supports the Government of Nepal’s [National HIV Strategic Plan \(2016–2021\)](#), and USAID Nepal’s Country Development Cooperation Strategy. The project works in 19 districts (133 local government bodies) in six provinces in collaboration with the government of Nepal

Prevention, care, and treatment services for KPs are reinforced by KP community engagement and capacity development, including strengthening KP organizations and their leadership; addressing structural barriers, including stigma, discrimination, and violence; and advocating to scale up what works and ensure the long-term sustainability of KP interventions.

LINKAGES Nepal conducts stigma and discrimination reduction activities in community and health care

### Contents

• LINKAGES Community Engagement Activities to Attain Epidemic Control in Nepal	1-2
• What Beneficiaries and LINKAGES Nepal Partners Say about Community Engagement	3
• Community Voices	4
• LINKAGES Nepal Project Achievements (October 2018–September 2019)	5
• Important Activities and Events (July–September 2019)	6-7
• Visitors Log	8

settings and provides gender-based violence (GBV) prevention through GBV screening and referral from community-based outreach and clinics. LINKAGES Nepal capacitates and mobilizes local NGOs, national networks of KPs and PLHIV, and their CBOs to provide HIV services efficiently and with high quality. The project has also sensitized both its implementing partners (IPs) and government HIV service providers in project districts to provide services that are KP- and PLHIV-sensitive, -friendly, -competent, and gender-affirming. The project also commemorates national and international special days and events at the national and district levels, both virtually and through various offline events. National networks of KPs and PLHIV—such as Federation of Sexual and Gender Minorities in Nepal (FSGMN), Jagriti Mahila Maha Sangh (JMMS), National Association of People Living with HIV in Nepal (NAP+N), and the National Federation of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (NFWLHA)—and their member CBOs do national-, provincial-, and local-level advocacy and hold consultation meetings to identify structural barriers and service quality issues and to make recommendations to address these barriers. LINKAGES Nepal plans to conduct capacity assessment of its IP agencies and help them prepare and implement a capacity-building plan to enable them to receive direct funding.

district targeting KPs. Recruitment of participants and distribution of PrEP was conducted from November 2018 to June 2019. In total 104 KP individuals participated in the study. Community members and KP networks were engaged during demand generation and follow-up for PrEP services.

LINKAGES Nepal also is implementing community-led testing (CLT), where HIV screening is done by trained lay-providers (community-based supporters) using Determine rapid test kits following the [National CLT Guidelines 2017](#). Another community-based testing approach, HIV self-testing, was also initiated to provide HIV testing services in locations preferred by KP members. As a part of the enhanced peer outreach approach (EPOA), peer mobilizers (PMs) are recruited and incentivized to identify and refer peers exclusively from their hidden/hard-to-reach social networks (social network strategy). LINKAGES Nepal planned to expand community-based antiretroviral therapy (CB-ART) services to provide same-day ART services. The project mobilizes community “peer champions”—PLHIV who have good treatment adherence, who access HIV services on a periodic basis, and who are virally suppressed—to help to dispel myths related to HIV and promote HIV testing and treatment support in the community.

LINKAGES Nepal implemented an electronic tool (called the LINK) to receive feedback from clients about service quality. LINK is used in all LINKAGES districts, and there are plans to



**Photo 3:** Stigma and discrimination reduction session

About 55 percent of LINKAGES IPs are KP- and PLHIV-led organizations in the program districts. LINKAGES Nepal is mobilizing community-based supporters (CBS) and peer navigators (PNs), who are community members. At the national level, LINKAGES Nepal has engaged community members to develop the HIV standard package of services. To provide HIV information and KP-friendly services, LINKAGES Nepal is conducting edutainment/creative activities in drop-in centers (DIC).

LINKAGES Nepal has introduced HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) as an additional method of HIV prevention through a demonstration study in Lalitpur

scale it up at the national level to (a) monitor experiences of stigma and discrimination against KP members and PLHIV at health facilities and (b) maintain a feedback loop between KP individuals/PLHIV and service providers with actionable data.

Communities’ engagement contributes to the HIV response through their leadership and advocacy, which keeps them in the center, leaving no one behind. Community engagement activities help to sensitize the general population about stigma related to HIV and KPs. Similarly, feedback from beneficiaries, IP staff, and peer outreach workers is also crucial to create an enabling environment to attain 90-90-90 by 2020 in Nepal.

## What Beneficiaries and LINKAGES Nepal Partners Say about Community Engagement

*"You reached me, approached me for risk identification, helped me to take an HIV test, and I was able to find out my status. Not only that, you helped me to initiate the treatment, which has helped me a lot to improve my health."*

A beneficiary receiving services from the STD/AIDS Counseling and Training Service (SACTS), Bhaktapur

*"Now it has become very easy to work in the field after community-led testing (CLT), and finding HIV-positive people has also become easy."*

Ram Chandra Chaudhary,  
Community-based Supporter,  
Sudur Paschim Samaj (SPS)

*"MeroSathi is very helpful in reaching unreached populations for HIV testing. We are planning to mobilize social media influencers to promote and encourage virtually active individuals to go for HIV testing."*

Pareena Chaudhary,  
Project Coordinator,  
Western Star Nepal



*"I am happy to be treated as a friend without any discrimination in the Lagankhel clinic. One of the staff members supported me for ART initiation."*

A person living with HIV receiving services from Nari Chetana Samaj (NCS), Lalitpur

*"We have been doing index testing for HIV case finding in our site and in the community. The response from index patients has been very positive—they want to have their partners and family members learn their own HIV status and enroll in treatment. Through their constant support and our team's regular follow-up, case finding and treatment enrollment has increased in Kaski district. We believe that we will be able to test many high-risk individuals using index testing approaches."*

Manisha Subedi,  
Health Assistant,  
Naulo Ghumti Nepal

*"I feel this kind of forum [adherence club meeting] helps us to connect with the updates that we need to know about HIV. Nepal National Social Welfare Association (NNSWA) is helping us in this connection."*

A beneficiary participating in an adherence club meeting



## Community Voices

### Meaningful involvement of PLHIV to achieve 90-90-90 in Nepal



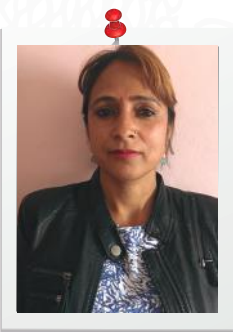
NAP+N is working with various HIV Projects with FHI 360 Nepal since a decade and supporting to capacitate and strengthen PLHIV momentum. NAP+N is delighted to have contributed to achievements like index partner testing and the introduction of oral fluid-based testing in the field to reach first 90; we are contributing to the second 90; and our support groups for PLHIV,

sharing session and adherence meetings, and stigma reduction activities, all help develop an enabling environment toward reaching the third 90. By this, NAP+N feels that LINKAGES Nepal Project is providing huge contribution to reach 90-90-90 in Nepal.

HIV programs has covered majority of the districts and its accessible to individual PLHIV. NAP+N is working with CBOs with the principle of meaningful involvement of PLHIV in every step of activities, which has helped to create enabling environment. NAP+N is working with LINKAGES Nepal Project to achieve national strategic goal at the national and community level.

**Rajesh Didiya**  
President  
NAP+N

### Working with community members for continuum of HIV services



The status of our community engagement at the district, provincial, and national levels is strong. We are working through our CBOs in the districts to reach our community and help its members address issues of concern. JMMS is also a member of Asia Pacific Networks of Sex Workers (APNSW) and Network of Sex Work Projects

(NSWP). JMMS is actively engaged in conducting stigma and discrimination reduction training in the community and among health care providers to address the negative perceptions about our community in society. JMMS also has been supporting HIV prevention, care, and support by identifying new hot spots, referring clients to HIV and STI services, and promoting undetectable = untransmittable (U=U) messages.

**Bijaya Dhakal**  
Executive Director  
JMMS

### Community approaches and advocacy for enabling environment

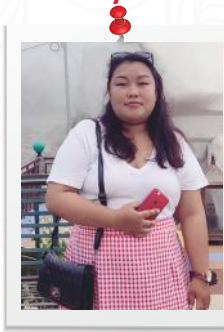


After South Africa and Ecuador, Nepal is the third country that has recognized and included sexual and gender minorities' rights in the constitution. In recent years, the community of sexual and gender minorities has become increasingly visible in the society. As technology and the media have vastly improved in the country, government, NGOs,

and international NGOs are supporting the movement. As a result, people belonging to sexual and gender minorities are "coming out" and becoming established in fashion, make-up, film, and business sectors, among others. There are various regional and international networks that raise awareness and advocate for protection and promotion of sexual and gender minorities globally. FSMGN is actively involved in The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) at the United Nations Headquarters at Geneva to make the community's voice heard. For local and provincial advocacy and engagement, FSGMN is associated with Right to Health women's group. Our CBOs and community members are engaged with local municipalities for budget allocation and policy reform. CBOs need to scale up strategies to enhance uptake of HIV testing and links to care, and donor agencies need to design and invest more in community system strengthening and human right activities to create an enabling environment for 90-90-90.

**Simran Sherchan**  
National Program Coordinator  
FSGMN

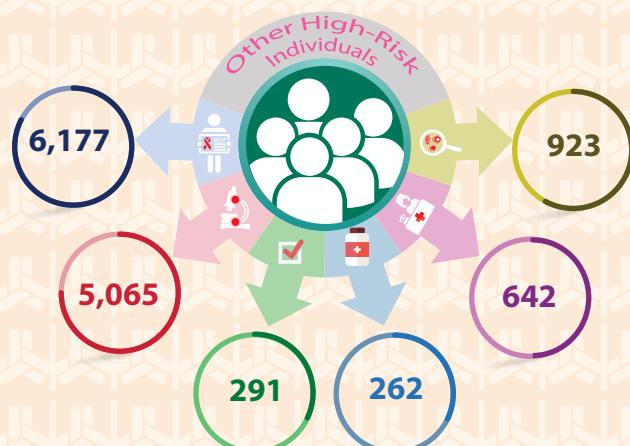
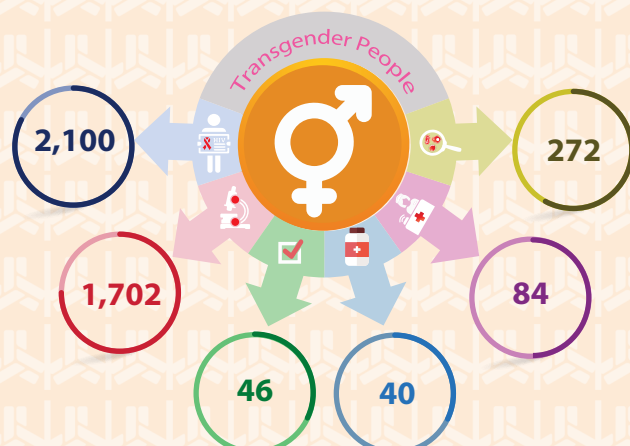
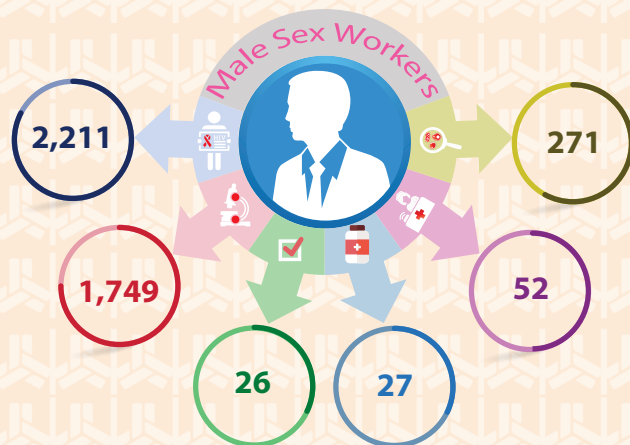
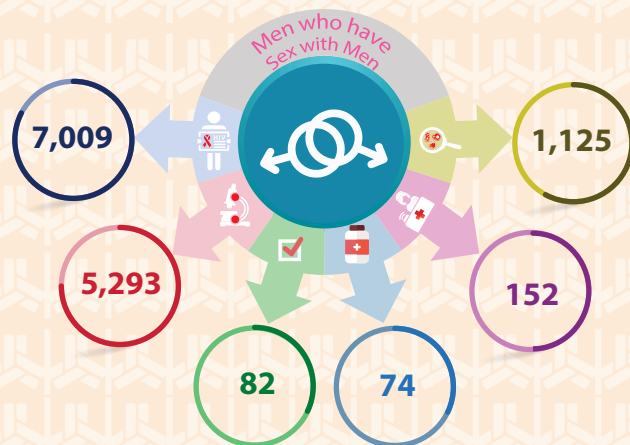
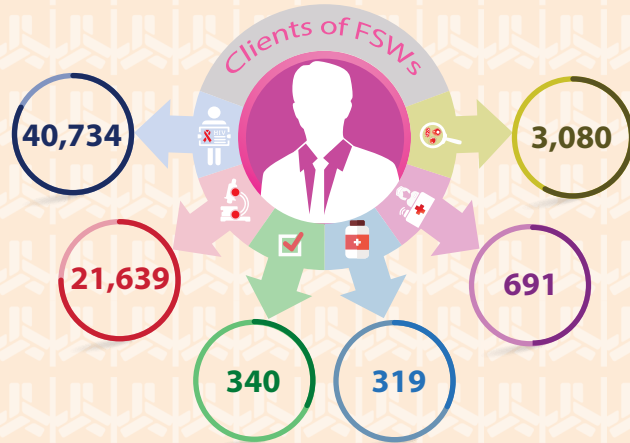
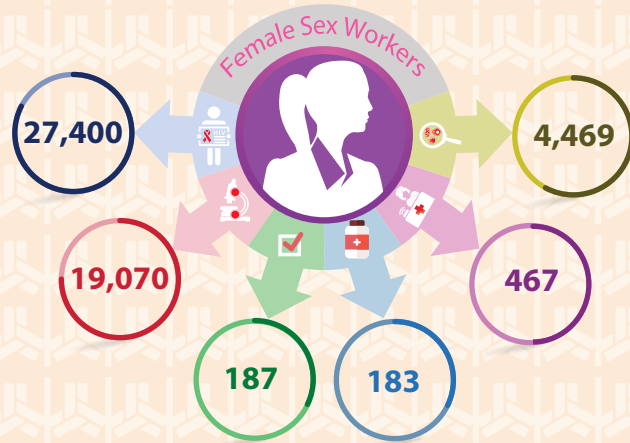
### Capacitating communities for awareness and advocacy



Compared to previous years, there is a vast change in community engagement at district, regional, and national levels. Activities are more focused on community engagement. As a result, community members became more active and were able to develop capacity to raise issues with concerned stakeholders. NFWLHA has affirmed the voice of women living with HIV

at international forums and plays a vital role in strengthening the community and ensuring that community voices are woven into advocacy agendas. KPs networks and community are linked: networks provide the platform for the community to share and discuss their issues and determine how best to address them. Community-led organizations play a significant role in creating an enabling environment to reach 90-90-90, such as by building treatment literacy through support group meetings and information dissemination.

**Sara Thapa Magar**  
President  
NFWLHA



### TOTAL



**85,631**  
HIV Prevention Interventions



**54,518**  
HIV Testing and Counseling Services



**972**  
HIV-Positive Diagnosed



**905**  
HIV-Positive People Linked to Treatment (ART)



**2,088**  
HIV-Positive People Receiving Care and Support in Community



**10,140**  
Screened for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

### Condoms Distributed



Total: 3,354,323



Male  
1,731,053



Female  
1,464,424



Transgender  
People  
158,846

### Lubricants Distributed



Total: 550,221



Male  
396,160



Female  
8,861



Transgender  
People  
145,200

## Important Activities and Events (July–September 2019)

LINKAGES Nepal participated in and contributed to a workshop organized by National Center for AIDS and STD Control (NCASC) in collaboration with World Health Organization (WHO) to revise the 2017 National HIV Testing and Treatment Guidelines. The workshop attendees decided to include/revise recommendations on index testing with recency (as an innovation); guidance on the ARV regimen, including tenofovir/lamivudine/dolutegravir (TLD) as first-line regimen; and differentiated service delivery, including adding CB-ART service delivery with multimonth dispensing. LINKAGES is leading the writing team on HIV diagnosis. The draft will be ready by December 15, 2019.

LINKAGES Nepal conducted a dissemination meeting for government and nongovernment stakeholders to release the findings and recommendations from the PrEP demonstration study. The findings show that PrEP is acceptable and feasible for roll-out among KPs in Nepal. The study findings were also shared with ART clinicians in the national hepatitis and HIV workshop organized by NCASC and WHO.



LINKAGES Nepal shared highlights from 10th International AIDS Society (IAS) Conference on HIV Science, Mexico in NCASC Discussion Series-2 with HIV stakeholders in Nepal.



LINKAGES Nepal in collaboration with NCASC and SPARSHA Nepal, organized a workshop on ART optimization that was attended by 57 government and nongovernment stakeholders and services providers. Participants discussed the evidence, needs, and importance of TLD transition; differentiated service delivery; multimonth dispensing; and CB-ART.



LINKAGES Nepal conducted training on CLT in Kathmandu. Thirty people participated, including project coordinators from IPs implementing HIV programs among MSM and transgender people, outreach staff, and peer navigators.



LINKAGES Nepal completed two batches of HIV self-testing training in Kathmandu. Altogether, 74 participants from IPs of LINKAGES Nepal, Save the Children/Global Fund, and AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) in Kathmandu Valley were trained to conduct HIV self-testing among KPs, and partners and children of PLHIV. LINKAGES Nepal IPs in Kathmandu Valley initiated implementation of HIV self-testing using oral fluid -based HIV self-testing kits (Ora Quick) among KPs. LINKAGES Nepal also procured the test kits and provided them to the national HIV logistics and supply chain system to supply nationally as per the national rollout plan.



LINKAGES Nepal conducted a training for IPs' outreach staff on motivational interviewing and communication skills for HIV services. The objective of the training was to provide motivation and communication skills to be used in outreach sessions on STIs and HIV prevention, care, and support services. The training covered the use of online platforms including social media technology to motivate people to make and maintain positive behavior change.



LINKAGES Nepal participated in 16th lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) pride parade organized by the Blue Diamond Society (BDS) and FSGMN on the day of Gai Jatra, a local festival. This event is commemorated annually to remember individuals who lost their lives in the past year because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. The march ended with a musical concert.



LINKAGES Nepal in collaboration with a data quality assessment (DQA) core team consisting of The Global Fund Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM), NCASC, Save the Children/Global Fund, UNAIDS, WHO and AHF, completed a DQA of all 77 ART sites in Nepal in between July and September 2019. The DQA core team was formed to provide overall guidance and monitoring to ART sites. LINKAGES Nepal trained a team of consultants and DQA core team members on DQA protocol and tools and then mobilized for DQA. The DQA protocol and tools were finalized based on the pilot DQA conducted in seven ART sites in Kathmandu Valley. The DQA team assessed the current status of data quality, strengths, and areas for improvement in addition to verifying the total number of PLHIV currently on ART reported between December 16, 2018 to March 14, 2019.



LINKAGES Nepal supported NCASC to conduct a District Health Information System (DHIS) 2 tracker data cleaning workshop. The goals were (1) for ART service sites to identify data errors and correct them in the HIV care and ART tracking system, and in the monthly ART report generated from DHIS2 tracker; and (2) to guide participants in the use of the system for proper client management for positive treatment outcomes.

LINKAGES Nepal with NCASC's leadership, and in collaboration with Global Fund/Save the Children and UNAIDS, helped to finalize the subnational PLHIV estimation and national investment case analysis. The workshop estimated PLHIV for subnational, province, and district levels, KPs living with HIV, based on the method of disaggregation analysis using proxy incidence.

LINKAGES Nepal participated in a workshop organized to finalize the standard service package of HIV services in the country. The revised service package was further discussed with Global Fund representatives in a funding realignment meeting.



LINKAGES Nepal with IP staff and a representative from NCASC, visited and observed the LINKAGES India program activities in Andhra Pradesh from September 16 to 21, 2019. The team observed HIV prevention, care, and treatment services among FSWs, MSM, MSWs, and transgender people and learnt about EPOA and online to offline approaches implemented in India. Similarly, a team of LINKAGES Nepal staff and its IPs visited and observed LINKAGES Thailand program activities at the Tangerine clinic and SWING Foundation in Bangkok, Thailand on September 20, 2019.



LINKAGES Nepal with IP staff participated in "Optimizing Testing Modalities: Asia Regional Workshop on Index Testing" from July 15 to 19 in Delhi, India and September 16 to 19, 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand.





LINKAGES Technical Director Chris Akolo provided technical assistance to the LINKAGES Nepal team from September 16 to 19, 2019. During his technical assistance visit, he participated in HIV PrEP dissemination, observed services provided by LINKAGES Nepal in its districts, visited a CB-ART and ART center, and interacted with the NCASC Director, the NPHL Director, and a clinician from the Teku ART center. During his visit, he provided recommendations on optimizing HIV case finding, treatment initiation, and viral load optimization. Based on these recommendations, LINKAGES Nepal developed and action matrix for implementation with timeline.

NCASC Director Dr. Anuj Bhattachan and the LINKAGES Nepal Project Director visited Naulo Ghumti Nepal, and an opioid substitution therapy (OST) site and ART site at Pokhara Academy of Health and Science (PAHS) in Kaski. They observed the services site set-up, recording and reporting, and interacted with service providers.



Senior Public Health Administrator/Section Chief, Monitoring, Evaluation, Surveillance & Research Section, NCASC; Project Director of LINKAGES Nepal; strategic information (SI) consultant from UNAIDS; and Sr. Project Manager of Save the Children/Global Fund conducted a monitoring visit to a LINKAGES Nepal IP in Kaski and observed reporting and reporting, operational and coverage map, clinical service, and DIC service. Similarly, Senior Public Health Administrator /Section Chief, Monitoring, Evaluation, Surveillance & Research Section, NCASC visited in Rupandehi and Kapilbastu districts.

The team leader for HIV, Family Planning, and Social Marketing from USAID Nepal visited a LINKAGES Nepal IP in Kapilbastu and observed the DIC, operational and coverage map, recording and reporting formats. She, along with an SI focal person of NCASC, also visited in LINKAGES Nepal IPs in Kaski district.

Representatives from local government bodies and health offices visited LINKAGES Nepal IPs in Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, and Makawanpur districts and observed clinical set-up and services, program activities, and recording and reporting, and they interacted with project staff and beneficiaries.

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