

# PACTE-VIH INTERVENTIONS PROVIDED MODEL FOR ALLIANCE WITH POLICE TO IMPROVE SECURITY OF KP IN TOGO AND BURKINA FASO

"To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity" -- Nelson Mandela

## I. Violence against FSW and MSM

Key populations (KP) covered by the HIV/AIDS prevention and care project in West Africa (PACTE-VIH) are subjected to various forms of violence every day. What these persons -- men who have sex with men (MSM), and female sex workers (FSW) -- fear most is contact with the security forces, especially the police because of possible insults, exploitation and punitive violence.

PACTE-VIH interventions are helping to create an enabling environment that allows KP to feel more secure during encounters with law enforcement and, like any other citizen, expect and receive just treatment.

A March 2016 study sponsored by PACTE-VIH on gender-based violence against KP in Burkina Faso and Togo revealed that FSW and MSM suffer daily violence inflicted mostly by law enforcement personnel but also by neighbors and family members. The violence has an appearance of legitimacy because the social and cultural context in both countries rejects homosexuality and stigmatizes sex workers.

"What these people fear most is the contact with the security forces, especially the police. Men who have sex with men are hunted down, humiliated, beaten because of their sexual orientation. FSW say they are harassed, insulted, arrested, beaten, raped and sometimes 'deported' by men in uniform simply because of their activity," the study said.

Police do not seem to understand that the worst thing to do to a FSW is to expose her to family and friends. They also exhibit even stronger hostility towards MSM partly because of prejudice and false beliefs about homosexuality. In Burkina Faso, FSW are often violently beaten at the time of arrest and may be raped. In Togo, they are often taken to locations many kilometers away from their work areas and abandoned without money and may be raped.

PACTE-VIH interventions have shown results because some FSW and MSM now find the courage to confront the police and complain about abuses. "Before we were very scared of the police, now my sisters and I have rediscovered our smiles because we know that we can receive support from the police, if needed," a FSW said in Lomé (interview in a hotspot in November 2016).

On a positive note, the study added, "In the opinion of FSW and some MSM, a minority of police officers in Togo and most elements of the judicial police in Burkina Faso show impartiality when they seek police help... In Burkina Faso, there even exist some state councils that ensure confidentiality to MSM."

It recommended intense and continuous advocacy towards police because fear causes KP to avoid visiting health services, which increases their vulnerability to STI including HIV/AIDS.

## II. The strategic focus of PACTE-VIH

PACTE-VIH focuses on going beyond workshops and information sessions to use KP leadership for stabilizing alliances with police and security forces in localities used by KP. Police stations have at least one senior person trained by PACTE-VIH and its partners that a local KP leader can contact safely in case of need. That contact official helps to ensure that KP can register complaints without being rejected or seek protection, as needed. They also ensure that KP are not insulted or badly treated at the police station by personnel working there.

Another element is the central emphasis on the importance of law enforcement in protecting KP against stigma, discrimination and violence against them. These are common experiences of MSM and FSW. The police contact person knows the KP leader and this personal contact between them improves trust. Patrol officers on streets also become more careful in encounters with KP to avoid human rights violations or corrupt practices e.g. bribes.

The PACTE-VIH goal is to continuously reinforce government efforts in Togo, Burkina Faso and other West African countries for HIV prevention and reducing stigma and violence against KP. Tools include strategic interventions to create an enabling environment for support programs that are evidence-based, adaptable, replicable and transferrable throughout the region.

PACTE-VIH interventions with police are important because police and security officers often mirror the socio-cultural, moral and religious prejudices that cause the marginalization and rejection of KP.

A core element of PACTE-VIH's work is KP-led joint activities to raise the awareness of law enforcement about the insecurity and human rights violations suffered daily by FSW and MSM. The overall results have been positive in Togo and Burkina Faso.

## III. Earning support at all levels of police for alliances

Winning the attention of busy law enforcement personnel for interventions designed to protect KP against prejudice and violence required innovations and skillful handling by PACTE-VIH.

Its strategy emphasized human rights and used as much direct contact as possible with police and security officials at all levels. This was because police personnel work in proximity with people and have direct encounters with KP in hot spots and clubs, and on the streets.

To earn the support of police, the first requirement was to foster trust and credibility as alliance partners of law enforcement in parts of cities that some find disreputable. Focus was placed on the following among others:

- Regular visits to police stations and security offices for in-person encounters to stabilize the human relationships necessary for alliances and partnership with law enforcement.

- Interventions to implement intense and continuous advocacy through workshops and meetings with senior officials of the police and justice sectors.

- Capitalize on PACTE-VIH's wider experience and knowledge-base to constitute alliances with police to reduce the fear of harassment and marginalization that causes FSW and MSM to avoid health services and increase vulnerability to STI, including HIV/AIDS.

- Encourage KP leaders to attend workshops and meetings with police so that they are perceived as persons endowed with human rights and protected by laws that apply to everyone.

- Raise awareness of KP-related stigma and other issues among top-level police and justice officials, including prefects, mayors, judges and gendarmes.

- Improve understanding and awareness of how the behavior of law enforcement personnel may worsen stigmatization and discrimination against KP.



Involve a police officer in workshops for KP being trained to conduct advocacy with the police, justice and other security sectors.

## IV. Leveraging and capitalizing on gains

Advocacy events with PACTE-VIH support elicited lively interest from senior law enforcement persons. The presence of KP at capacity-building and training workshops for police at all levels was an element that improved outcomes. Both sides learned a lot from each other. Positive outcomes included the following:

- Police and security personnel usually saw KP on the other side of the law enforcement fence, not in the same room as equal participants from whom knowledge could be gained. This knowledge gain was a revelation for them and lead them to see KP with more respect as persons who deserved equal treatment under the law.
- Police officials said they wished to be more engaged and offered suggestions on expanding the effectiveness of advocacy by reaching out to still more personnel, including through visits to police barracks.
- There was little awareness among police and security officers of human rights issues affecting MSM and FSW and implications for preventing HIV/AIDS. For this

reason, among others, they found advocacy to be very useful and desired its continuation.

- They gained appreciation of the need for an environment of safety and trust to encourage key populations to seek appropriate health services.
- KP learned from the police participants at the meetings how to earn respectful treatment from patrol officers on the streets, like other citizens. Police would treat them better:
  - o If they kept away from thieves, drug addicts, sellers of drugs and places where police made raids regularly.
  - o If they dressed decently when they went to police stations to seek assistance.
  - o If they behaved with normal courtesy with police on the streets.
  - o If FSW did not ply their trade near police stations and MSM were discreet.

## V. Anecdotal evidence

Law enforcement and KP participants in knowledge-sharing and capacity-building workshops sponsored by PACTE-VIH underlined several positive

outcomes in interesting remarks about their experiences. Some anecdotal evidence is noted below:



“A MSM friend was being harassed by owner of his apartment. She wanted to expel him because of his sexual orientation after neighbors saw men visiting him regularly. She made a complaint to the police. When I arrived at the police station, I saw that my friend was being insulted by the policemen at the reception while the landlady looked on. I asked for the police contact person. He immediately scolded the receptionists and asked the landlady if the man was causing a nuisance or did not pay the rent. When it became clear that the only reason for her complaint was his sexual orientation, the contact official told her she had no legal basis for registering a complaint. I was surprised to witness the effectiveness of the PACTE-VIH training that the police official had attended. It opened his eyes to the injustice suffered by KP solely because of stigma, prejudice and discrimination.” -

**- MSM leader Togo (interview in Lomé in November 2016)**



A FSW was violently attacked by a client. She was too scared to register a police complaint because she feared that she would be rejected and stigmatized at the police station. A friend accompanied her and they met the police contact official. To the client's surprise, the complaint was registered and the client was condemned after due process for causing bodily harm.

-- **A FSW, Togo**



"I think the workshop was very beneficial and do hope that this model can be extended widely to other police personnel in Burkina Faso. Earlier, I thought MSM was a practice contrary to nature and should be banned. But the workshop caused me to revise my opinions. It is evident that our country is taking big steps for HIV prevention and it would be foolish to discourage KP from seeking help from health services and, thus, increasing the risk of augmenting infection rates. We should all work together to increase awareness of HIV prevention and issues that affect KP and continue to marginalize them."

-- **Bayili, Bada, Inspector of Police in Burkina Faso**



"I am leaving this workshop with a renewed sense of commitment. I will be the resource person at my institution and will help to improve conditions for persons incarcerated in our prison. It is true that respect for human rights is not a reality in our prisons because of limited resources. But I hope that we will be able to improve the situation."

-- **Baziomo, Charlotte, Security Chief in a penitentiary, Burkina Faso.**



"All our policemen should be trained on the human rights of KP. I think proper training is absolutely necessary to reduce discrimination against them."

-- **Chief of Police (interview in Lomé in November 2016)**



"My duty is to protect all people. I participated in the workshop for police. So now I understand better the situation and I will not discriminate against FSW or MSM. If they ask for protection, I will help them."

-- **Police Officer (interview in Lomé in November 2016)**



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## VI. Evidence-based interventions for better results

PACTE-VIH emphasized person-to-person advocacy with police and security personnel and placed KP at the center of workshops and other meetings. Below are

some of the evidence gathered from interventions so far.

### Pointer 1: Police and KP can respect each other

- The purpose was to humanize both KP and the police in each other's eyes so that they shared experiences and learned from one another to become more open-minded.
- Attendance of KP leaders at capacity-building workshops for police and security officers was essential to reduce KP fear of the police and negative

perceptions about KP by police.

- Having the presence of high level police commissioners and other senior security and justice officials was essential to ensure more careful behavior from lower level personnel in police stations and on the street, who may not yet have attended PACTE-VIH workshops.



## Pointer 2: Both police and KP must listen to each other

- The innovative and important component was to create an atmosphere that allowed both police and KP leaders to listen carefully to one another during the workshop.
- The facilitator of the workshop had to demonstrate the necessary personal qualities to create a relaxed enough atmosphere for the necessary sharing of knowledge. The point was that KP have always lived in fear of the police and the police was used to treating the KP without the courtesies given to other citizens. That gap had to be bridged before both could interact with some empathy for one another.

## Pointer 3: The rights of KP as citizens should be at the forefront

- KP are marginalized and rejected groups often subject to harsh laws, in addition to negative socio-cultural and religious attitudes. Fair treatment towards them is not a matter of compassion, it is their natural human right guaranteed by the Constitutional protections for citizens.
- Police and security personnel at all levels recognized this fact after the PACTE-VIH interventions, when they realized that stigma, discrimination and violence emerge from insufficient knowledge about the lives of KP.

## Pointer 4: Both police and KP should give up prejudices

- A conflictual relationship between police and KP was caused by negative expectations from both sides. The police must maintain authority because their job is to main law and order. At the PACTE-VIH interventions, they learned to appreciate that sexual orientation of MSM and the profession of FSW do not threaten social peace and order in the absence of other faults also found in other citizens e.g. crime, drug dealing and other anti-social activities.
- KP recognized that they too should try to trust law enforcement despite their fear and bad experiences of the past. They realized that interventions by PACTE-VIH and its partners are changing the attitudes of law enforcement personnel, with the full support of government strategies for HIV prevention and protection of KP.

## VII. Moving forward with the PACTE-VIH model

Below are some methods to multiply gains through alliances and strategic partnerships with the police. They are based on innovations used by PACTE-VIH and lessons learned so far.

### Strategy 1: Carefully structure alliance with police at the highest policy-making levels and work down to the bottom of the pyramid to local police stations and police patrols.

- Skillful approaches are required to achieve this level of cooperation with law enforcement whose natural role is to maintain authority and instill fear, as necessary.
- A good starting point is to emphasize the rights of KP as citizens guaranteed by the Constitution and backed by the full support of government strategies.
- Police and security personnel at all levels have a deep sense of duty towards citizens. The PACTE-VIH interventions give evidence that they disregard social prejudices when they understand that HIV prevalence could increase if KP avoid seeking health services because they fear loss of anonymity and subsequent mistreatment by police.

**Strategy 2: The approach that worked best for PACTE-VIH was to invite both KP leaders and top police and justice ministry officers to interventions, including workshops.**

- Alongside the top-level contacts, PACTE-VIH sponsored visits by KP and its staff to police stations to conduct advocacy for HIV prevention and protection of KP. That sensitized police personnel towards negative impacts of stigma and prejudiced violence against KP on the streets, bars, maquis and motels in their localities.
- Police personnel were also reminded of regulations and professional codes that might punish abusive behavior towards KP solely because of sexual orientation or exercise of FSW right to work.

**Strategy 3: An evidence-based, adaptable, replicable and transferrable model of alliance with police has emerged from PACTE-VIH interventions. Its essential elements include:**

- Early capacity-building of at least one senior official in police stations located in areas where KP are usually present. That official becomes the police contact person for local KP leaders.
- Whenever a KP needs police assistance, the KP leader accompanies the complainant to meet the police contact person. This method reduces the possibility that an untrained police person at the police station insults the complainant or violates his/her human rights or rights as a citizen.
- This procedure is very reassuring for the KP complainant. The point is that the experiences of FSW and MSM at the hands of police have been negative for a very long time. Many would rather suffer abuse than seek protection from police.
- Until interventions by PACTE-VIH and its partners are scaled up sufficiently, the “police contact person” structure helps to prevent the worst abuses suffered by KP.

**Strategy 4: Leadership must come from the top for better police-KP relations**

- Evidence emerging from PACTE-VIH interventions shows that junior police personnel avoid abusing their authority when they understand the difficulties faced by KP, after person-to-person encounters in the unbiased atmosphere of workshops. They even offer helpful advice to KP on how to avoid trouble with the police on the streets and hotspots.
- However, KP must also moderate their attitudes and treat law enforcement with respect because they too are trying to perform their jobs as best they can.
- Leadership must come from the top for improved attitudes towards KP on the part of police personnel at lower levels.

## **VIII. Scaling up for the region**

Evidence-based, adaptable, replicable and transferrable models of alliances with police at various levels have emerged successfully from the work of PACTE-VIH so far. The experiences in Togo and Burkina Faso suggest that police alliances are welcomed by professionals. They can produce positive impacts over time to reduce socio-cultural attitudes

among police that motivate stigma and violence against KP.

Designation of police contact persons for KP leaders is a vital tool for improving the quality of encounters between KP and police on the streets and at police stations.

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