

## GENDER-RESPONSIVE HIV RESEARCH FOR KEY AND PRIORITY POPULATIONS

Kenya's HIV epidemic affects female sex workers (FSW), adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), young women who sell sex (YWSS) and men in sex work locations in markedly different ways. Yet their experiences and needs remain unevenly understood.

KENYA | HIV RESEARCH | STRATEGIC PLANNING



## CONTEXT

In Kenya, FSW and AGYW remain priority groups due to high HIV incidence and limited access to services. Sustained efforts have improved outcomes for these groups, but their male sexual partners and young women who sell sex are often overlooked. Current population-specific interventions can also become inefficient and exclusive when delivered in isolation without integration, flexibility or attention to intersectionality.

Emerging evidence shows that sex work locations are sites of high HIV vulnerability. Multiple sexual partnerships begin there, and high levels of violence make condom negotiation difficult. These locations also offer strategic opportunities to deliver integrated prevention services and reach the diverse groups who gather there. A major challenge is ensuring that these groups are meaningfully involved in research so that evidence reflects their lived realities.

The Zingatia Maskan (ZiMa) study, led by the Institute for Global Public Health, University of Manitoba, and Partners for Health and Development in Africa, applied a gender lens to examine sex work locations across Nairobi's 17 subcounties. It explored how physical, social and relational factors shape HIV risks, access to services and safety.

# STRATEGY IN ACTION

The Kenya country card illustrates the Strategic Planning sphere of Programme Science. It applies a gender lens to ensure evidence generation is inclusive and grounded in community realities.



## Defined Gender-Responsive Goals and Objectives

- Goal: Strengthen strategic planning for HIV and STI prevention by generating inclusive, gender-responsive evidence grounded in lived experiences.
- Objective: Ensure meaningful participation of diverse study populations in study design, implementation and interpretation.



## Adapted Delivery

- Study teams attended routine peer educator meetings to orient FSW peer educators about the study.
- A ZiMa Community Advisory Board (ZiMa CAB) was established with representation of FSW, AGYW, YWSS and men who frequently visit sex work locations.
- CAB members received a two-day orientation on study objectives and advisory roles.
- CAB members were trained in sex work location mapping and characterisation methods and contributed to refining study tools and field implementation plans.
- Half of the study team members were community researchers from sex work community, representing the ZiMa study populations.
- FSW peer educators helped identify key informants and supported data collection.
- CAB members assisted with mapping and played a key role in identifying new sex work locations.



## Allocated Dedicated Resources

- Budget lines were allocated for CAB orientation, training and supervision.
- Funds supported peer educators' participation during implementation.
- Funds supported consultation and interpretation meetings with CAB members and community researchers.

# WHAT CHANGED



**Timely completion:** Mapping and characterisation were completed within 30 days.



**Expanded reach:** Teams mapped 3,430 locations across 17 subcounties; 37.1 percent locations were new.



**Enhanced access and safety:** Community researchers enabled wider access and safer entry into diverse sex work locations.



**Improved tools and strategies:** CAB feedback strengthened and contextualised data collection tools and field implementation approaches.



**Stronger trust and participation:** CAB members' and peer educators' local knowledge built trust and improved stakeholder participation during mapping and characterisation activities.



**Capacity and ownership:** Training workshops improved skills and strengthened confidence and ownership among CAB members and community researchers.





### What's Next: Community-Led Interpretation

CAB members and community researchers will join dissemination and interpretation workshops to co-create programmatic recommendations. These sessions will enable community-led analysis of mapping and characterisation findings and guide programme refinement.

## TIPS FOR APPLICATION

- Establish CABs with representation from different constituencies to enable active engagement and inclusive decision-making during study planning and implementation.
- Hold regular engagement meetings with community researchers and CAB members to review progress, receive feedback, and refine implementation strategies.
- Integrate CAB feedback into tool development, field protocols, and implementation plan.
- Involve CAB members in supervision, data collection, and interpretation.
- Allocate dedicated budgets to support training, meetings, and ongoing engagement with CABs and community members.
- Engage community researchers, CAB members, and peer educators to strengthen study relevance, and enhance trust and safety in fieldwork.

## TOOLS USED



Community Advisory Board  
Terms of Reference



Community Advisory Board  
meeting agenda



Mapping and sex work  
location characterisation  
learning document

In Programme Science, Strategic Planning focuses on using evidence to identify priority populations, locations, and interventions. The ZiMa study demonstrates how applying a gender lens at this stage strengthens the evidence base and ensures planning decisions reflect the realities of diverse groups in sex work locations.