

## **Can a soccer bonanza bring relief to South African sex workers?**

### **The 2010 Football World Cup and sex work legal reform**

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**Issues:** a summary of the issue(s) addressed by the abstract.

Sex workers are recognised as particularly vulnerable to HIV. But the specificities of their vulnerabilities remain under-researched and under-theorised. Prevalence rates in South Africa were between 45% - 69% in 1998. At present they are probably much higher. On-going criminalisation of the sex work industry may well fuel the aids epidemic by precluding effective prevention and education strategies, and infringes human rights. The 19<sup>th</sup> FIFA World Cup™ will be held in South Africa in June – July 2010 and is expected to attract 450 000 visitors. Intense attention is focused on HIV transmission and public health in a country that has the highest number of people with HIV/AIDS in the world. The soccer bonanza offers a rich opportunity for advocacy and education.

**Description:** a description of the intervention, project, experience, service and/or advocacy.

Members of civil society and the South African National Aids Council have engaged government, FIFA organisers and the media on strategies to ensure the safety and rights of sex workers and international tourists. Practical strategies include a public health campaign targeting spaces where soccer-lovers congregate to watch the games and sex worker “hot spots” in host cities; calling for a moratorium on sex work-related arrests; enhancing the media skills of sex workers; and generating research on the demand/supply of paid sex during international sporting events.

**Lessons learned:** conclusions and implications of the intervention or project.

Sex workers have generally been overlooked in South Africa and research and advocacy on HIV/AIDS and sex work is severely limited. The publicity and excitement generated by the World Cup have been harnessed strategically to focus on the vulnerable position of sex workers in South African society and to highlight the negative consequences of outdated criminal laws on public health and human rights.

**Next steps:** possible next steps for implementation, or recommendations.

Strategies on sex work, HIV and the World Cup have directed attention on the untoward delay of the South African Law Reform Commission in recommending modernisation of South Africa's criminal laws on sex work. This momentum will be utilised to advocate for the decriminalisation of sex work in South Africa and to implement long-term health and social programmes that are sex work-specific and properly tailored.