

Project Background

Since mid-2004, standard contracts between US government contractors and NGOs under PEPFAR have included a requirement that organizations receiving money from the US government "oppose prostitution." Known as the "prostitution pledge" or "prostitution loyalty oath," this clause in US global AIDS funding contracts and agreements has included the statement that "as a condition of this contract or subcontract, the contractor/subcontractor must have a policy explicitly opposing, in its activities outside of the United States, prostitution and sex trafficking." Contractors and cooperating agencies are US-based international technical agencies that receive funding from the US government to implement program in many parts of the world. These include organizations like POLICY Project, Family Health International (FHI), and John Snow International (JSI), CARE USA, Academy for Educational Development (AED) and others. We are interested in how local and/or regional NGOs across the world are grappling with this threat to their freedom of expression, and their ability to effectively combat the AIDS pandemic.

For many years organizations have fought to ensure that sex workers can access condoms and sexual and reproductive health services as part of broader efforts to combat HIV and AIDS and protect and promote the rights of all citizens of this region - regardless of their socio-economic status. NGOs that sign the pledge (and most do because they have no choice if they are to access scarce funds) are not allowed to engage in any activities that may be seen as promoting sex work. Unfortunately the US government does not explain what these activities might be, and thus organizations on the ground are forced to make up the rules as they go along - guessing as to what is meant by 'opposition to prostitution.' Your information at this early stage is critical.