

2nd International Conference on
Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Infections and AIDS
October 17-18, 2018 Las Vegas, USA

Realization on sex workers rights in Southern African Development Community (SADC): A critical analysis of SADC protocol on gender and development

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Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a grouping of 16 countries in Africa established under a treaty and founded on principles of human rights, democracy and rule of law. The aim of the grouping is economic growth in the region. However these SADC countries have committed themselves to address human rights issues by developing charters, protocols and declarations. Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development is one of such protocols that were adopted with an aim of promoting women's rights, empowering women and girls to achieve gender equality and equity in SADC countries. This paper analyses SADC protocol on gender and development from the perspective of sex workers rights. The focus is on female sex workers and female sex work exists in all SADC countries. However, all SADC countries have criminal laws that have an impact on sex work. At the same time all the SADC countries have signed and ratified international and regional human rights instruments such as International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) and protocol to the African charter on human and people's rights on the rights of women in Africa. These human rights instruments provide the framework on women's rights and gender equality. One issue to address in women's rights and gender equality is sex workers rights. Majority of countries in SADC region criminalize sex work. The paper therefore analyses the implication of criminalizing sex work in addressing issues of women's rights and gender equality. The paper focuses on SADC Protocol on gender and development as opportunity to address issues of equality and non-discrimination and whether the protocol addresses issues of female sex workers at all. Did SADC countries make progress on sex workers rights under the protocol on gender and development?

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