

Example from Calabar

We were faced with constant disruption due to police raids in the hotels, and solved the problem with a visit to our police commissioner. We explained to him the objectives of our project and why we needed access to women engaged in commercial sex. We explained that the frequent raids were forcing the women out of the hotels and underground, where we were unable to reach them with the intervention. In addition, we had heard that some of the women believed that the increased harassment was a result of our presence in the hotels. We explained to him that by showing the CSWs how to protect themselves from HIV, we were also helping protect the police force, since the police were frequent customers in the hotels. He was convinced by our argument and sent a message to all the police commands in town endorsing our project. He went one step further by commanding that there would be no more detention or harassment in the hotels, as this would seriously jeopardize the success of the project. Without his support, we never would have been able to reach as many CSWs as we did. We now realize that we should have secured his support for our work before we even started.

Official endorsement of and participation in all your activities will also serve to ensure the long term sustainability (sometimes called "institutionalization") of your programme. Since your funding may be limited (and come from donor agencies), it is important to secure long-term support for AIDS prevention activities with CSWs from local, indigenous sources. We have been very careful to keep local health officials informed about our work, and to ask them for any assistance they could provide. In Calabar, the health ministry has given us space for our STD clinic, and has posted health workers to our project. The health commissioners have attended major project activities and workshops. This demonstrates that the health ministry feels our work is important, and that they are ready to support what we are trying to do.

**Changing
the image of
CSWs in the
neighbourhood**

Hotels or compounds where CSWs live are often not well-liked by the other people who live in the same neighbourhood. By working with the local authorities, you can help improve their image in their neighbourhood. When others in the neighborhood see that the local health and law enforcement authorities have taken an interest in the health and well-being of the CSWs, they will not be as hostile. The subtle official sanction of what is going on in the hotel will give credibility to the CSWs. CSWs will feel their status in the neighbourhood change, and this will increase their own confidence and self-image.

Sometimes it is easy to understand why the CSWs are not welcome in the neighbourhood, because their behaviour does not always respect the rights of those living around them. They can be very noisy, have loud fights, and use derogatory language in the streets. We want to be careful not to stereotype CSWs—not all CSWs act this way. However, when they do, it is to your advantage to try to convince them to change this behaviour. Not only will they be more welcome in their own neighbourhood, but you and your project will be welcomed by the friendly faces of the hotel's neighbours when you come to the neighbourhood to work!