

Widening Outreach – Improving Bhutan, Malaysia and Sri Lanka’s HIV Solutions for the Future

In the decades since HIV first reached Bhutan, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, each Government has built a response while navigating legal, financing and health-system constraints. Much is already in place. Bhutan offers HIV prevention, testing and treatment free of charge through facilities run by the Ministry of Health. Malaysia works through umbrella organisations such as the Malaysian AIDS Council to coordinate the community and civil society groups delivering its response. Sri Lanka delivers services for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections through 41 full-time district clinics run by the National STD/AIDS Control Programme. The focus has now turned to making those responses last, giving them the breadth and depth to reach everyone who needs care and the financing to keep going.

Health Equity Matters’ work in Bhutan, Malaysia and Sri Lanka began under the Sustainability of HIV Services for Key Populations in South-East Asia (SKPA) program and continued through SKPA-2. In Bhutan, HIV self-testing kits were rolled out to 20 referral, cluster and district hospitals in 2024 in under two months. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) became available in late 2024 and, with SKPA-2’s technical assistance to the National AIDS Control Programme, reached five service delivery sites by May 2025. PrEP monitoring is now being integrated into the national health information system. In Sri Lanka, the National STD/AIDS Control Programme has secured a dedicated, recurring line in the national health budget for key population HIV services, confirmed for the 2025 financial year. The country is also strengthening the workforce that connects key populations to HIV and sexual health services. Nationally accredited Level 3 and 4 qualifications for community outreach workers launched in April 2026 with SKPA-2 support, turning years of practical experience into recognised competencies, with pilot enrolment and full implementation to follow in 2026–2027.

‘We were not starting from zero. Many outreach workers had built their knowledge through years of working directly with communities. The qualification turns that experience into competencies the national system can recognise and carry forward.’

– Dr Harisch Yakandawala, Lead Consultant, National Vocational Qualification Certification for Community Service Providers

The efforts in Malaysia, which were included in SKPA-2 a year after Bhutan and Sri Lanka, have focused on drug policy reform. Health Equity Matters had worked with the Malaysian AIDS Council since the first SKPA program, and in 2023, the Council asked for technical support as momentum for reform grew. That same year, the community-led Drug Policy Program Malaysia secretariat was set up, which supported the formation of the National Task Force on Decriminalization in 2024 and the development of a decriminalisation road map.

What lasts is what gets built into the system: a budget line inside the national vote, a qualification the state recognises, a task force that puts ministries, police and communities at one table. Continued funding lets Health Equity Matters help Bhutan, Malaysia and Sri Lanka finish that work and hand it on.