



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

BRIDGES UNDER THE WAVES

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The background is a solid teal color with a subtle, organic texture. Overlaid on this are several sets of wavy, concentric lines in varying shades of teal and blue, creating a sense of depth and movement, similar to topographical map lines or liquid ripples. These lines flow from the bottom right towards the top left.

INTRODUCTION

Experiences in building bridges under the waves in 2020

By B. Caroline Kouassiaman, Executive Director

In our staff retreat in December, we undertook a creative exercise where we each had to design a soundtrack for ISDAO's 2020, name it and create a tracklist for the soundtrack, as part of reflecting on the year. One of us created a soundtrack with just four songs which spoke to four eras within 2020, starting from "Everything is Love" to "Turbulences", "*Déscente aux enfers*" ("Descent into Hell") and ending with "*Souffles*" ("Breaths"). Another soundtrack had eleven eclectic songs of emotions and common expressions from 2020, including the #1 hit song "*Est-ce que vous me recevez?*" ("Can you hear me?"). And one of us simply titled our soundtrack "WE MADE IT".

Collectively, our imagined soundtracks weave our story of 2020, which for ISDAO, as for many organizations, was a complex, dynamic, surprising, ever-changing, and evolving year.

While our ability to travel was limited, it was surprising that 2020 was a year of noteworthy movement. Movement restrictions forced us to work differently and to adjust – movement took on new forms and happened in different and sometimes unprecedented ways.



At ISDAO, we already had a virtual working structure, and the staff is geographically spread across the region. While the COVID context brought about global changes in the ways of working, it did not shake us up as much as other organizations because we were used to working remotely, and we already had the infrastructure for it. However, it was a process of re-learning because although our working structure and set-up did not change, much of the rest of the world did have to adapt to this new way of working. For us, and for most of our partners, this context created more meetings, more virtual engagements, with its difficulties, challenges, stress and mental fatigue.

Prior to 2020, even though we all work remotely, we had the ability to move around and have flexibility around where we work. Restrictions put in place in our various countries dramatically limited the options. Moments where had planned to be together in person as a team and with other LGBTQI West African activists – including outreach trips in different countries, visits with grantee partners, at conferences and key meetings, etc. shifted suddenly.

So... what are some of the lessons learned?

We have learned the importance of being adaptable to changing situations. We have also learned the importance of interpersonal communication – keeping in touch and staying connected even when we can't physically be together. For us and other LGBTQI persons across West Africa, **confinement increased the sense of loneliness and isolation – concepts that are already too familiar to our communities.** In those moments where physically being with and seeing families (including our chosen families), lovers, partners, friends and comrades often was so difficult, technological tools, apps and social media became the vehicles for connection. In 2020, **apps like Zoom, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok became our transport – our buses, our planes, our okadas/taxis-motos/zemijans, our gbakas/tro-tros/taxi-brousses to connection, to information, to community.**

In these moments, we all had to find new ways of being together. For ISDAO staff, for example, we started meeting for a coffee break online every Monday morning, where we connect socially. This tradition continues. We also prioritized keeping in contact with grantee partners, many of whom we stayed connected to even when we couldn't meet in person.

Of course, we recognize the limitations of technology as a meeting tool. Many organizations held webinars and virtual meetings in 2020, and while it is important to create alternative ways of meeting and convening, we were and remain mindful of the challenges of internet access, costs and connectivity in our region and the digital divide that exists within our communities – and we know that virtual spaces cannot fully replace physical spaces. It must also be recognized that the hyper-virtualization of human relationships has come with its share of stress.

Being open and ready to adapt was key! We developed an ISDAO COVID plan, which we reviewed and updated every few months to identify the best ways to stay connected to our grantmaking and support work with LGBTQI groups/organizations in West Africa. For example, our grantmaking process includes a site visit prior to finalizing contracts. Given the context of closed borders, we had to revise our plans by conducting virtual visits with most partners, as well as some decentralized visits by staff in their respective countries of residence. We assured partners of our flexibility and in some cases were able to provide dedicated resources for organizational resilience. Our flexible approach and responsiveness enabled many partners to utilize ISDAO funding to provide direct assistance and services to community members. In some cases, our support had a catalytic impact, as partners were able to leverage ISDAO funding to access other emergency funds and assistance from other funders. We know that this austere period has accentuated the vulnerability and fragility of our LGBTQI communities and

movements. It also revealed the urgency of supporting our movements not only to be RESILIENT but also to be RESISTANT.

One of my favorite song titles from our team's imagined soundtracks from that December retreat is “Souffles” (“Breaths”). It's an important reminder and take-away from 2020.

After a year full of twists and turns, emotions, anxieties, uncertainties, we are reminded of the importance and urgency of taking breaths – deep breaths – as individuals, as teams, communities, and as organizations. This means taking moments to pause and reflect, cultivating a nourishing workspace for all, building spaces of trust which prioritize wellbeing and wellness, and strengthening mutual support.

On behalf of the ISDAO community, I am delighted to present this report which beautifully captures so much of the spirit, the stories and the voices that make up the songs of ISDAO in 2020.

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CONVERSATION WITH OUR REGIONAL AGMP MEMBERS: WHAT WE ARE LEARNING FROM PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING



As an activist-led fund, we place equitable representation of the LGBTQ community in the decision-making processes of the Fund as central to ensuring responsiveness, transparency, and accountability. This means that the majority decisions are made by activists through an autonomous participatory body called the Activist Grant Making Panel (AGMP). The AGMP is made up of 13 members who are activists from the different LGBTQ communities in West Africa. Members are recruited to reflect diverse institutional, social, and political experiences within the West African LGBTQI movement.

We asked two members of our regional Activist Grant Making Panel (AGMP) to share with us their learnings from being part of our participatory grantmaking process. Members of our AGMP remain anonymous.



1. Why is participatory grantmaking important for local activists and groups?

Participatory grantmaking is important for local activists and groups because it allows us to directly address the priorities for our communities. It avoids imposing on groups what actions and issues to work on and/or engage in, and it brings out the real needs of these groups without imposing anything on them. This process also engages the activists themselves and contributes to their capacity building. It balances the sharing of resources and addresses issues that are often not funded by donors while also engaging young associations and identities that are often overlooked. It allows the activists involved in the assessments to have a voice for all the local groups, which makes it possible to take into account different themes and bring the different realities and needs of the communities to the table.



2. What challenges have you experienced as members of the participatory grantmaking committee?

One of the difficulties encountered was the integration at the AGMP level because of the different origins, languages, experiences and backgrounds of the activists. We had to find our way and adapt. Also, at the level of evaluations, despite the priorities of the region, it was necessary to take into account the country contexts in order not to prejudice certain requests because some countries are more advanced than others in terms of commitment and actions. After reading the proposals it is often difficult for us to make choices to meet the real needs of the targets. Apart from that, there are no major difficulties.

3. What lessons have you learned as a member of the participatory grantmaking committee?

As activists, we are not careful enough and are negligent in the grant applications we send out which can be detrimental to us very often and we will complain that we don't get funding when we have good ideas to help our communities but in writing the applications, we don't bother to follow the guidelines.

If the majority of donors allow groups and activists to decide what actions to take according to their needs and priorities, there will be more efficiency and the situation will improve in our different countries.

4. Would you say participatory grantmaking is effective?

I think it is effective because the strategies and actions that are funded are innovative, in line with the region's priorities and rarely receive funding. Effectiveness is measured by results and the feedback we get confirms this. This strategy has allowed us to address issues that are not typically addressed in grant applications with other funders, to address issues that are extremely important but are often not funded, and to diversify the identities of grantees. Today, when we see the young organizations that receive funding and the LBQ groups that manage to carry out certain actions thanks to ISDAO's funding, we are proud of them and we believe in the effectiveness of the strategy used by ISDAO, the provision of participatory grants.

5. How do participatory approaches support diversity, inclusion and/or equity?

Participatory approaches support diversity, inclusion, and equity in that they allow for representation of all identities in terms of decision-makers, evaluators, and consideration of all identities in resource sharing and action. They balance resources at the level of the LGBTQI community so that no identity is left behind.

All projects are treated with equal attention and rigour. No one project is sacrificed to the detriment of another. The work is done in such a way that all components are included. The AGMP respects this because all of its members are of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.



6. Do you think more funders should engage in participatory grantmaking? If yes, why?

Yes, funders should think about this and engage in participatory grantmaking. We know our priorities and the strategies that can work in our contexts. Donors should think about involving activists if they really want to make a difference and achieve change. They should stop imposing on us specific action plans and areas to work on, as the LGBTQI situation evolves from one context to another. We want to leverage strategies that work in other regions, but not have priorities imposed on us.

We need more funders to engage in this process because it gives activists the opportunity to learn about the movement. It also allows them to define their own priorities and needs in their different contexts. This way they feel involved.



“
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“

GRANTEE PARTNERS



AREFM

AREFM is an exclusively trans* association fighting for the promotion and defence of trans* people and also against HIV / AIDS. Their vision is to allow trans* people to live their difference in serenity, to be respected for who they are, regardless of their HIV status, and to have access to a healthy environment.

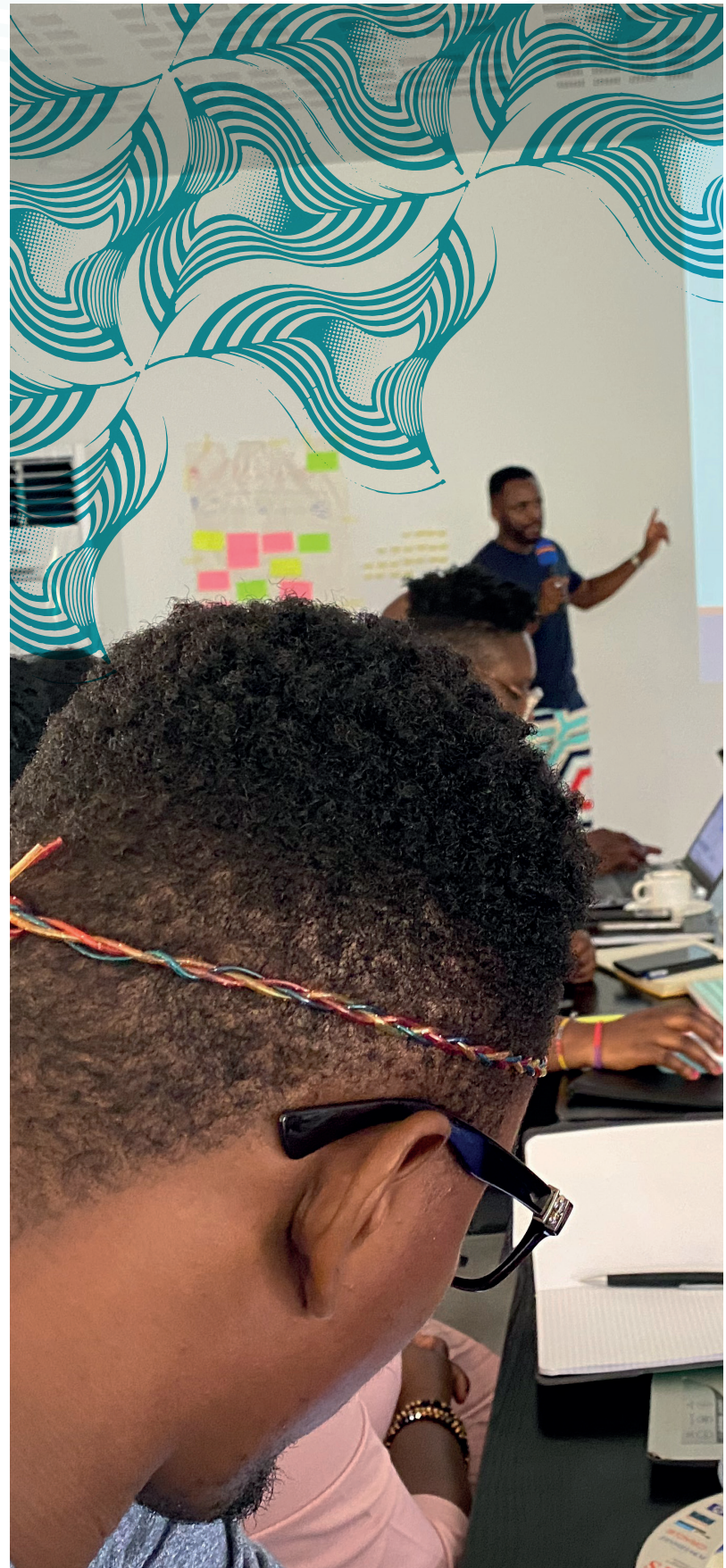
Our project was focused on strengthening community ties. Through this project, we documented 102 cases of verbal violence experienced by 44 Trans* persons, including 30 Trans Women and 14 Trans Men. We also trained six new peer educators for the association which allows us to have a pool of peer educators for the future. We conducted educational workshops that included 57 trans persons who had never participated in an educational workshop with the association before. The project also brought together all the identity associations of the country in a flagship event to strengthen community ties.

Drama Queens

Drama Queens is an under-30 led non-profit art-ivist organization that is dedicated to using arts for human rights activism. Through a feminist, LGBTQIA+, environmentalist and pan-Africanist worldview, Drama Queens engages in the production of theatre, film, music, graphic novels and comic books, literature and other forms of creative initiatives that is not afraid to disrupt the status quo and advocate for a world free from injustice, oppression, prejudice and violence, specifically towards girls, women and the African LGBTQIA+ community.

The most important intervention our team implemented with the funding from ISDAO in 2020 was our disbursement program of emergency funds to provide safety and security for LGBTQIA+ community members. When we put out a call for those most in need of our assistance, our community members responded with evidence of their dire circumstances due to the recent media frenzy and homophobic violence that in the country.

This project was a success on two notable fronts; we were able to establish deeper relations with our community and ensured community building through our emergency intervention. It is normal in our country for family members to respond with violence when queer people are outed, thus, it has been our goal to prevent the exacerbation of the life circumstances of LGBTQIA+ people due to the revelation of their sexuality in a hostile environment. Through our emergency





intervention, we provided empowerment and monetary assistance to community members who would have otherwise been in danger. However, we received a larger number of applicants for the emergency fund than we expected, due to the climate of homophobic violence that was being reinforced by the state and media. We could not provide for all them, and in the end, we didn't have enough resources left to take care of other administrative work.

We are most grateful for the flexibility of the funds provided by ISDAO.

This was essential to our project implementation as it allowed us to craft our chosen intervention program to the circumstances we often witness our community members suffer. We were able to work more organically to tailor an assistance initiative to fit the particular lives of some of those most in need in our community with the blessing of our funders and we cannot thank ISDAO enough for the lives improved by their grant.

Glorious Interfaith Initiative

Glorious Interfaith INITIATIVE is a grassroots initiative that aims to empower LGBT+ people of faith in better representation of its members' issues. We seek to be the voice of our members to the International bodies, organizations, institution for cooperation and joint strategies. Glorious Interfaith envisions a world where people of faith in all diversity are able to express and defend their sexuality, are able to participate fully in all aspects of life, are free, respected and recognized without being discriminated and stigmatized.

The most important project we carried out with our 2020 grant from ISDAO was organisational capacity strengthening and registration of the organisation. As a result, we now have a fully transformed and well-equipped volunteer team including an Executive Director, Programs Officer, Finance officer and Project Officer.

We also organized a 3-day capacity building workshop for our team to build our capabilities as leaders of a new organisation. We were also able to register Glorious Interfaith with the Registrar Generals Department, which makes it legal for us to operate as an organisation.





As a result of our registration and improved capacity, the community can now count on us as “credible” and also rely on us to provide assistance anytime the rights of the community members are violated in their various faith spaces. The ISDAO grant was our very first external funds and it helped us achieve a lot. It means so much to us.

Ladies' Voice

Ladies' Voice is a nonprofit organization with the aim to defend and promote the rights of Lesbians, Bisexuals, Trans* and Queer people (LBTQ) and work for a respectful community life. Ladies Voice has a mission to reduce the spread of Sexually Transmitted Infections among women who have sex with women and promote the human rights of LBTQ people. They work to improve access to appropriate prevention, treatment and care services and to create a social and legal environment free of stigma and discrimination against LGBTQ people.

The most important project that we had implemented in 2020 with ISDAO funding remains unquestionably the "BOUCLIER" Project. This project aimed to contribute to the reduction of human rights violations, to build capacity in entrepreneurship and income-generating activities of the LBQ community, and to strengthen the self-esteem of the community through an orientation on the different identities that make up the community.

The workshop allowed Ladies' Voice to mark the official start of the project activities. A formal framework was established with the participants on the objectives, expected results and activities of the project. Thus, input from stakeholders facilitated the implementation of the project. This activity allowed the LBQs to decompress and boost their self-esteem in order to break the isolation during the period of COVID-19 when most of them were forced to stay at home

due to the state of emergency decreed by the Government. Many of them were subjected to gender-based violence and pressure from their families. A feedback from a participant: "this sharing activity must be continuous in order to allow us to weave the bonds of friendship and fraternity between us members of the community."

The discussion groups on entrepreneurship have allowed 25 LBQ persons to benefit from capacity building in entrepreneurship and the creation of small businesses. It is thanks to this activity that some of our members were able to develop mini income generating projects in order to apply to the call for projects supported by another community organisation.

Indeed, two applications coming from our organization were retained and subsidized. This grant allowed the beneficiaries to create their own businesses and to be able to support themselves. At the end of this project, Ladies' Voice supported 5 of its members in the implementation of small income generating activities. Through these activities, our organization contributes to the empowerment of the LBQ community.



LEGAL

LEGAL is a Human Rights Organization dedicated to advocating for the wellbeing and protection of the LGBTIQ community and other discriminated groups. LEGAL believes in a world where the rights of all are respected and where everyone has a voice, without discrimination or stigmatization. LEGAL centers, in particular, the fundamental rights of lesbian women, girls, and transgender people to ensure they live a dignified life free of oppression, harassment, and discrimination.

With the 2020 ISDAO grant at LEGAL, we sought social health delivery services for the wellbeing of the LGBTIQs community in four counties, in terms of access to Sexual Reproductive and Health Rights services, and education for nurses at the community level. The project aim was to enhance the local environment for access to social health delivery services for LGBTIQs and other Key Population. Our intervention involved mapping health facilities for collaboration in addressing the challenges our community go through whenever they try to access health care services including stigma, discrimination, hate crime etc., capacity building training for nurses on human rights advocacy, sexual reproductive health and rights information, and education. Our intervention also covered the COVID-19 awareness on prevention, and emergency distribution of food and non-food items for response.

This project has impacted the community greatly; community members can now access services at the health facilities without any form of homophobic and transphobic perception of nurses them. The COVID-19 awareness and emergency relief for nurses at these facilities also made a great impact on the community. We were able to reach many nurses and our work was rewarded by the behavior change of some of the nurses and their willingness to work with our community through the clinics to enhance access and services for our community members.

The ISDAO Grant was very significant for us an LGBTIQs Organization, because of the amazing work we do in a society that does not accept us, and does not accept our community issues as human rights concerns. The Grant helped to support and strengthen our community, and strengthened our organization to be able to implement our Programatic and Projects interventions.



Transgenres et Droits (TransD)

Transgenres et Droits is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that promotes the human rights of Trans* people. Their primary goal is to promote awareness of human rights related to Trans* people by the target population (Trans*); to put an end to discrimination, stigmatization but especially to gender-based violence.

Thanks to the funding from ISDAO, in 2020, we were able to organize capacity building trainings for the executive board of the association. The training that was essential to us, is that of the peer educators (PE) on Human Rights, Outreach Communication and the role of the Peer Educators in facilitating outreach sensitization sessions within the trans* community. Together, we defined important themes of sensitization, notably the importance of human rights, the ways and means of claiming them, the importance and the stakes of the legal recognition of trans* people. At the end of this training, the PEs saw their capacities reinforced and were able to start the sensitization programs and reached a wide range of trans* people by prioritizing the diversity of identities and sexualities existing in our community, namely queer people, transgender women and men, people identifying as half-boy and others as androgynous.

Each month of sensitization is followed by a focus group session which allowed us to come back each time on the lessons learned during



the sensitizations. During these focus groups, the floor is given to the sensitized community members and the feedback we got is that our members really appreciate the fact that we came to educate them with notions that were still unknown and misunderstood by the general population as well as by the community. Some members admitted that they had always thought that Human Rights existed only for the rest of the population and not for the community, so learning that we are supposed to benefit from them makes them want to join the march for the realization of these and therefore encourages our work as an association. This incitement and awareness of the importance of human rights and the fight for their effective realization by the members of the community is the most important result, to us.



The flexibility of ISDAO's grant has been of great help to us as we have been able to use part of the funds to set up a space that serves as our headquarters where we carry out our activities and receive our community in safety and tranquillity.

It has also allowed us to define by ourselves the actions that we consider important for our community and to implement them. Basically, we were the main actors of the change we want, and in the implementation of our actions.



WORKING THROUGH A GLOBAL PANDEMIC





A chat with ISDAO's Executive Director, Caroline Kouassiaman and ISDAO's Director of Programmes, Olumide Makanjuola on how the Covid-19 pandemic affected our work at ISDAO, how we adapted externally and internally and worked with grantee-partners to adapt.

Question 1: How has the coronavirus and subsequent health policies and travel restrictions implemented across the region affected ISDAO's operations and finances?

Caroline: As with most organizations, the pandemic had a significant impact on our work, including limiting our ability to travel and conduct site visits; not being able to host our planned grantee forum (in 2020); having to move more meetings online in a region with significant challenges and barriers for many around internet access and reliability; and delays or cancellations of many of the key meetings and strategic spaces (such as Pan-African ILGA Forum) that we had planned to engage in or organize. It has not been possible for ISDAO to organize any in-person meetings of the Governing body in the last year, which slowed the processes around transitioning to a permanent governing body. Our grant-making processes took much longer than usual, especially during the months when most countries were on lockdown. Our in-person visits, which are critical for relationship-building, due diligence, identifying capacity needs but also for understanding the contexts in which activists are working in, and for building ISDAO's visibility in the region, had been to be significantly limited or shifted, especially in 2020.

Fortunately, the majority of ISDAO's funders are flexible and responsive donors who also provide general operating support for our work. They also believe in the long-term vision and mission of ISDAO, and in the importance of supporting the organisation overall. So, this helped quite a bit. We, fortunately, did not face any cuts in funding, and our funders maintained their commitments to ISDAO. In addition, four of our funders provided us specific funding to help address any emerging issues that were arising both for ISDAO and for our grantee partners in the context of COVID-19.

As several recent reports have highlighted, including the most recent Global Philanthropy Project report, Outright International's report on the impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTQI organizing, African Queer Youth Initiative's report on impacts on LGBTQI youth, the context put additional pressure and strain on community organizations, including most of our partners, who had to halt, pause or pivot from their ongoing work, and stretch resources to also provide humanitarian assistance to community members. Moreover, the economic impacts of COVID-19 have also significant and felt throughout our region, as the overall costs of operating and the costs of living have increased significantly.

Question 2: What strategies did you implement to adapt internally and externally to changing circumstances?

Caroline: As the Executive Director, I felt it was important for us to have a comprehensive plan that we would use to guide us, and which we would review and evaluate and adjust every 2-3 months. It was clear that the context was continuously evolving, even from one day to another, and that it also looked different in each country, especially between March and June/July, where most of the countries went on lockdown or had significant restrictions around movement. While the team already worked remotely, the shift to working exclusively from home and dealing with everything else moving online was a challenge for many of us. So, it was important to try to build and sustain a culture of "checking in" with each other. It's also during this time that we also started our weekly virtual coffee breaks to create time to check in on each other. Flexibility around work hours and space has always been important for me, and I made sure that we maintained this.

Question 3: What are the major challenges that ISDAO's grant-making partners have faced as a result of the pandemic?

Olumide: The pandemic and the lockdowns around the world reminded us of some of the biggest challenges that our communities face within the region. We were reminded about the impacts of economic inequalities, the systematic disenfranchisement of our communities and the impacts of social rejection. During the lockdown,

LGBTQI+ persons in the region were unable to access the services that they needed because community organisations were closed. The safe spaces that are provided by many organisations were shut down due to Government restrictions on public gatherings, closure of non-essential services and other pandemic related restrictions. This meant that people were forced to stay in spaces that humiliated, traumatised, and discriminated against them. Our grantee-partners had to find ways to adjust and meet the needs of their communities while trying to sustain the operation of their organisations. Through our engagement, we were reminded that one of the biggest challenges that organisations face in the region is a lack of access to core funding and/or flexible funding. While many organisations had project funding, they struggled to find core funding to sustain their operations, especially with increased costs like providing internet for the individual staff working from home and buying personal protective equipment (PPE). These increased costs were barely covered by their existing grants which were mostly project-focused. In addition, many of our grantee partners were forced to also become social welfare support systems to their community members who were faced with challenges around their incomes and ability to work and had no access to Government support. In places where the Government provided social support, such support was not made accessible to the LGBTQI+ communities. These new realities required our grantee partners to provide support to persons who were faced with the highest levels of social needs, providing food, money and housing support to them.

Question 4: As an already flexible funder, how did ISDAO further support its grantee-partners and community to help them adapt to the crisis?

Olumide: At ISDAO, we understood the importance of flexible resources and how they can support organisations to take the necessary action as the context of their work evolves. With this understanding, at the start of the pandemic, we notified our grantee-partners that they were allowed to redirect their resources as their contexts evolved to meet the needs of their communities. We also provided room for our grantee-partners to request extensions for their report submissions where needed. We were keen to ensure that the administrative burden on our grantee-partners was reduced and that our partners could focus more on meeting the needs that were evolving daily for their communities.

We also created a new fund, our Resilience Grant, to provide additional support for our grantee-partners as needed. The Resilience grants enabled us to provide additional funding to partners to cover costs such as office rent, staff salaries or stipends, internet, and other related costs. This was our way of extending additional support to our partners in response to the covid-19 pandemic.

We also ensured that we shared all available funding opportunities to partners, especially opportunities that were providing emergency funding to offset the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and opportunities funding for community support. To support them further, we provided references to grantee-partners that were trying to access resources from other donors. Many of our partners were able to secure additional funding to support their needs.

Many of our partners were able to secure additional funding to support their needs.

Question 5: What type of civic engagement did ISDAO carry out in response to the coronavirus?

Caroline: In addition to the measures that Olumide spoke to, we were quite engaged in different philanthropic spaces around this context, and used our presence and our voice to share with other funders and international partners about the context and impacts on LGBTQI communities and organizations, as well as the need for them to be a part of COVID-19 response funding and planning. In April, we posted a reflection piece on the ISDAO blog about the importance of not using the COVID-19 context to further stigmatize individuals. In 2020, we spoke about the context and impact on LGBTQI communities and organizing in West Africa in panels hosted by Funders Concerned About AIDS (FCAA), Global Philanthropy Project, UNAIDS/ECOWAS West African Health Organization, African Grantmakers Affinity Group, amongst others. One of the sessions that stood out to me the most was the one with UNAIDS/ECOWAS, which was a 2-day virtual conference in July. Most of the presentations were by representatives from UNAIDS country programs and national HIV departments across ECOWAS, with a short time slot for a few regional civil society organizations. Much of the presentations focused on the numbers – how countries were keeping up with the 90-90-90 targets by doing things like providing 3-month stocks of ARVs, doing home delivery of ARVs, more mobile testing, etc. Some country representatives also spoke about providing some emergency assistance to 'Key Populations', including food and PPE, but none spoke about the role that community organizations were playing in the response, and the need to bolster support to community-led organizations during this time! This was an important space for us to be in, to remind them about why it was important to strengthen the leadership, resilience and response of LGBTQI groups and organizations, and provide practical recommendations for how to do this. Throughout 2020, in such spaces, we continued to provide perspectives and voices that were often missing from critical conversations.

In April, we posted a reflection piece on the ISDAO blog about the importance of not using the COVID-19 context to further stigmatize individuals.

Question 6: Would you say the pandemic had a major effect on the NGO/Philanthropy landscape in terms of flexibility, especially in West Africa?

Caroline: That's an interesting question. I think that the pandemic has highlighted the need and that the funders who were/are the most flexible were already flexible before the pandemic. There was an interesting research that was produced by the Global Philanthropy Project that is important to note – while LGBTQI funders have been flexible overall, and have maintained or increased funding overall in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a huge gap with humanitarian funders (which are the main source of COVID-19 response) in terms of inclusion of LGBTQI communities. Again, what we are seeing is that those funders who are already there, who are already the most flexible have maintained or increased their commitments, but the biggest gaps remain around other sources of funding and support, including amongst humanitarian funders and HIV funders.

The major hurdle remains many of the HIV funders, which is the greatest source of funding for LGBTQI organizing across West Africa. The continued emphasis on targets and numbers -- despite the clear evidence that we must significantly address criminalization, discrimination and the human rights context to have a sustained impact on HIV – shows that there is work to do to improve this landscape. In one of my site visits in 2020, I met with one of our partners who spoke about how now, in the context of COVID-19, they have to do peer educator outreach in several groups of 10-15,



whereas before they could meet 30 people at a time. So, greater costs for doing their work and more time needed, but the targets and resources for this work had not shifted. In addition, they spoke about how some of the most pressing needs were around psycho-social support and counselling, especially for community members who were confined in spaces that were not safe for them – but not being able to pivot their funding to address this.

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Question 7: What is your biggest learning from 2020?

Olumide: Providing organisations with flexible funding is a key solution to sustain local movements and collective action in the region, especially as our movement is faced with constant crises that can limit their support to communities where funding is not flexible. We have already seen how flexible funding allows organisations to immediately respond to the needs of their communities as they evolve. In addition, 2020 reminded us of the importance of funding proactively rather than reactively. We were reminded that proactive funding can help build, sustain, and support movements for collective action. We were reminded that core funding is just as important as project funding.

Caroline: It was important as we were building the COVID-19 plan to not only look at the short-term, but also the longer term. Not to underplay the disastrous impacts of this pandemic, but this is not the first emergency or humanitarian crisis that we have faced in the region, and it will not be

the last. What is key is how we learn from it, and use this to be better prepared and resilient, both as an organization, as a funder, as a movement. For me, the biggest learning is three-fold: (a) the importance of building resilient organizations (both for ISDAO and for our grantee partners) to have the ability, space and resources to pivot as needed, to strategize/reflect on what needs to shift and to withstand such shocks – this also means that we have to start having real conversations (and commitments!) as funders about economic resilience and security, and sustainability and what it means to support this; (b) as we were already practising, another form of organizational structure can exist and be effective – the traditional one physical office is not a requirement for all, and there are other ways to organize, and; (c) virtual spaces and digital tools are useful, important, necessary and valuable, but not sufficient.





GRANT MAKING IN 2020: INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF THE MOVEMENT THROUGH GRANTS

In 2020, ISDAO made 42 grants supporting 41 LGBTQI led organizations and groups in 8 West African countries totalling \$US 429,811. Out of the 42 grants, 78% were made through our public call for proposals, while the remaining 22% were made through our Resilience Grant, a new mechanism created to provide additional support to our grantee partners. We announced the 2020 grant cycle in October 2019, seeking proposals from groups or organizations in our nine focal countries. The application window was open for four weeks, and closed on October 31st 2019, with 89 proposals received.

As an activist-led fund, it is important to us that our grant-making decisions are made by activists. Thus, we have a participatory structure called the Activist Grant Making Panel – AGMP. This autonomous body is made up of 13 LGBTQI volunteer activists who reflect diverse institutional, social, and political experiences within the West African LGBTQI movement. In March 2020, the AGMP met for in-depth consideration of the eligible proposals and approved 34 for funding.

Following the AGMP's approval of proposals, the ISDAO team would usually conduct in-person field visits to the groups and organizations that had been approved, for due diligence. However, because of travel restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, in-person visits only happened in Nigeria, Ghana and Burkina Faso. For the other countries, we conducted virtual site visits to ensure that all grantee partners received their funding on time despite the travel restrictions.

**42 GRANTS
SUPPORTING
41 LGBTQI
LED ORGANIZATIONS & GROUPS
IN 8 WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES
TOTALLING
\$US 429,811**

SAFETY AND SECURITY – AN EMERGENCY IN OUR COMMUNITIES

In 2020, we introduced the RESPOND Fund to provide for the safety, security and emergency needs of our grantee-partners and the communities they serve. We believe that it is important for local organizations to have residual emergency funds for them to provide timely and effective responses when needed. The RESPOND fund is made to all grantee-partners as an addition to the amount approved by the AGMP.

We also introduced the Resilience Grants to offer support to our current and past grantee partners that have needs or gaps to fill that require urgent funding. In 2020, we provided Resilience Grants to nine groups in Ghana, Nigeria, Bénin, and Côte d'Ivoire. Both the RESPOND fund and the Resilience Grant proved to be useful for our grantee-partners in 2020 and will continue to be disbursed in 2021 and beyond.

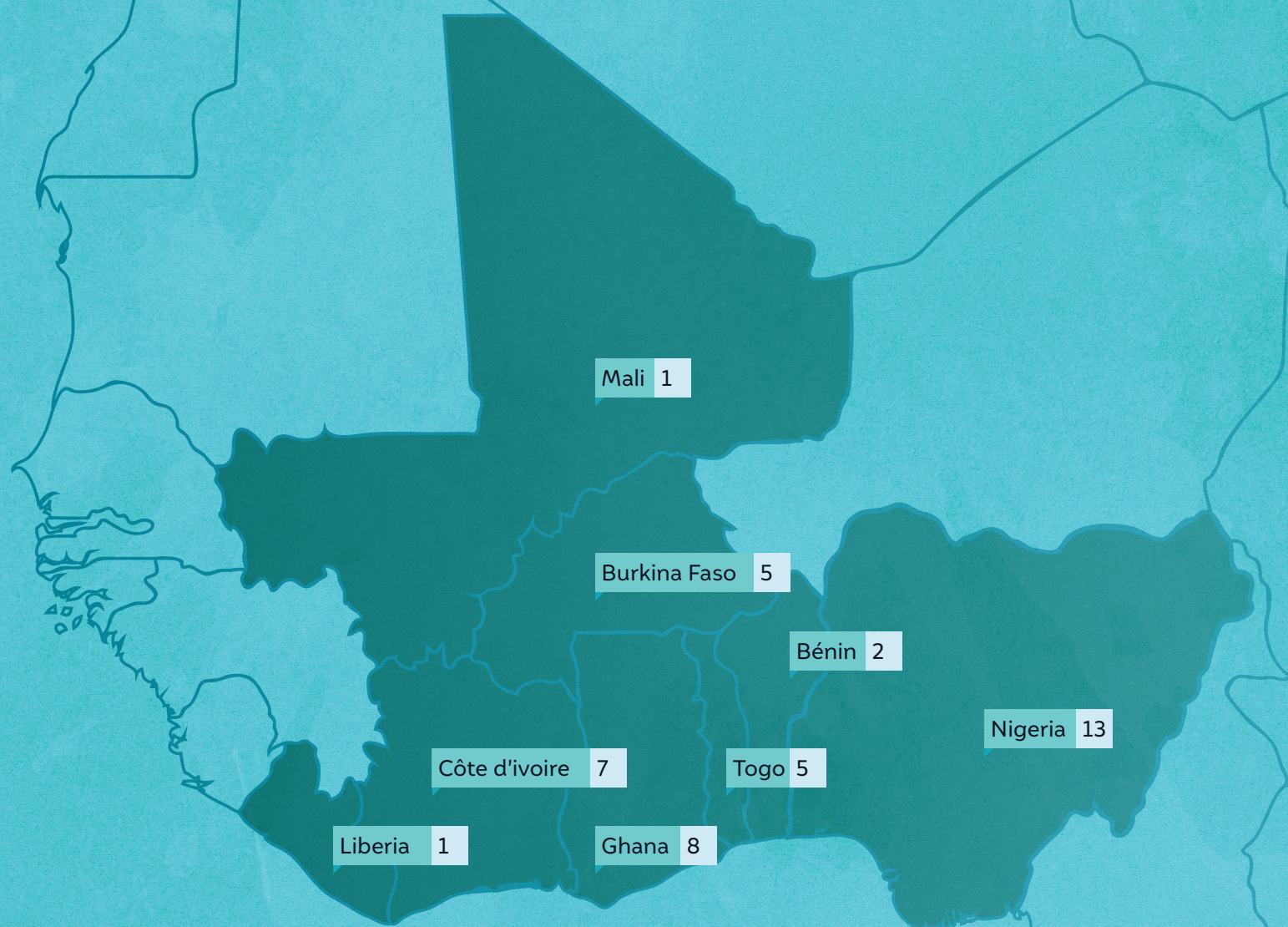
ISDAO is committed to increasing support to movements in Francophone West Africa and supporting more initiatives led by LBQ women and trans persons, as well as other emerging voices across the movement. In 2020, we increased our grantmaking in Francophone countries and resourced more organizations and groups led by LBQ women and trans persons. More than ever, 2020 showed us that providing core and flexible funding to LGBTQI-led organizations and groups is critical to supporting their resilience and dynamism, and strengthening LGBTQI movements in West Africa. This way, organizations and groups can adequately pivot and adapt as and when needed, and are better equipped to respond to community priorities in times of need.

**BOTH THE
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CONTINUE TO
BE DISBURSED
IN 2021 AND
BEYOND.**



2020 AT A GLANCE

Grants awarded, breakdown by Country:

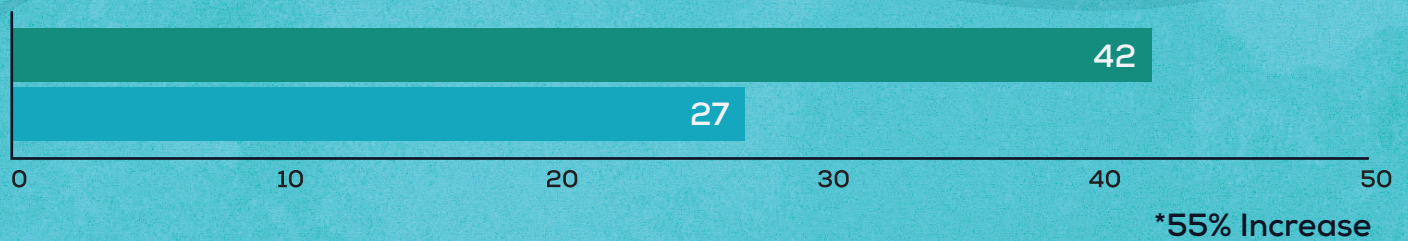


Country

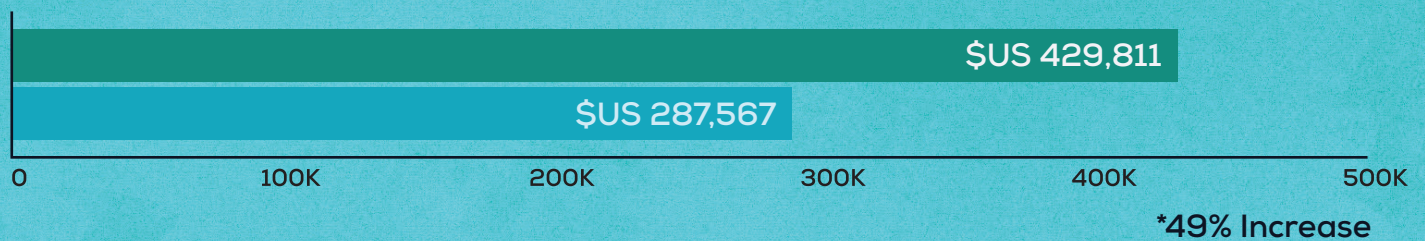
No. of Grants

**OUT OF THE 42 GRANTS, 78%
WERE MADE THROUGH OUR
PUBLIC CALL FOR PROPOSALS,
WHILE THE REMAINING 22% WERE
MADE THROUGH OUR RESILIENCE
GRANT, A NEW MECHANISM
CREATED TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL
SUPPORT TO OUR GRANTEE
PARTNERS.**

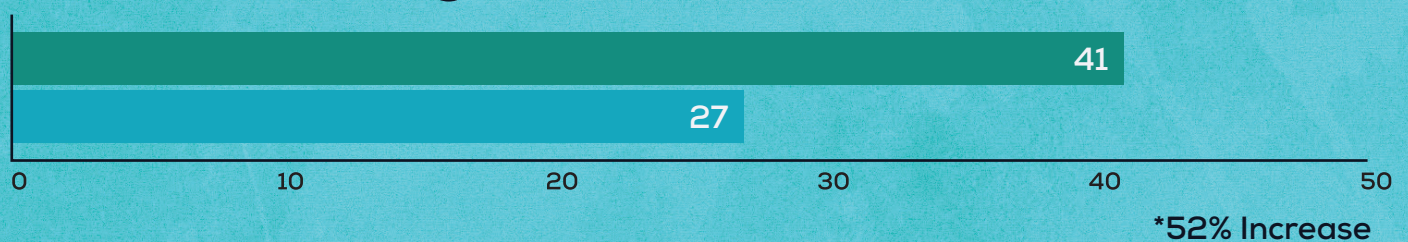
Number of Grants made:



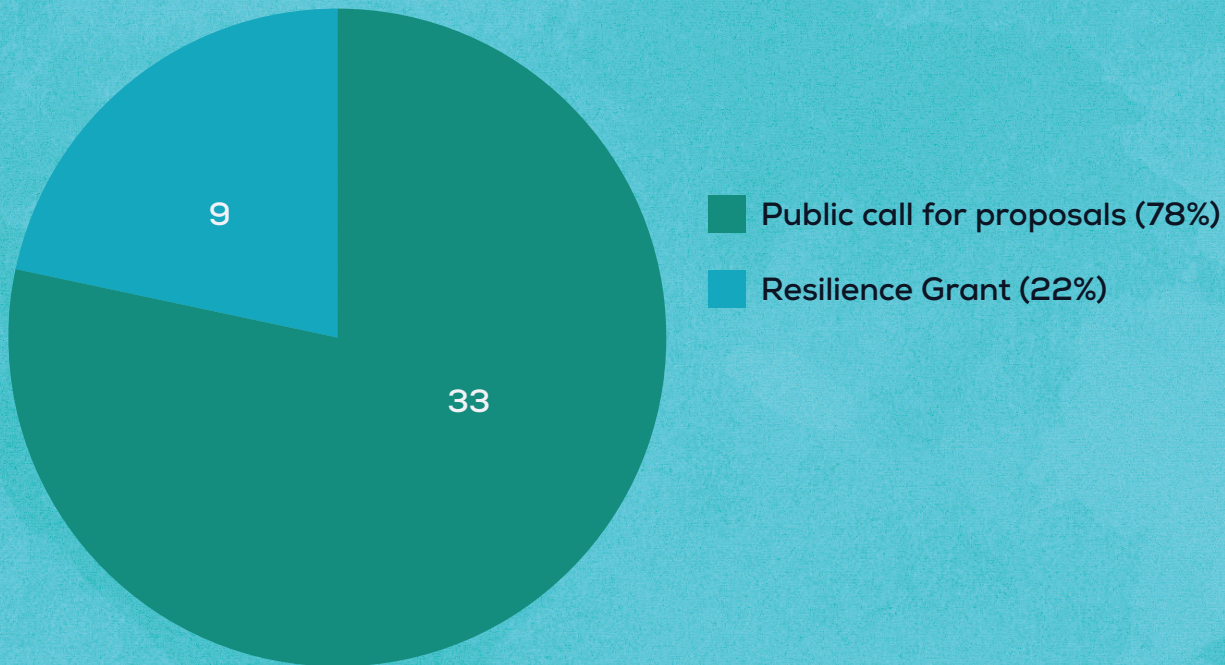
Total Grants amount:



Number of Organizations funded:



2020 Grants type breakdown:



Public Call for Proposals breakdown:



- Proposals Received
- Proposals Approved
- Proposals Ineligible

*33 Proposals Funded

COMMUNICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT



At ISDAO, we are committed to sharing regular updates on our work and our progress in the development of LGBTQI movements in West Africa, and also to giving voice to the communities we support and showing solidarity in times of crisis.

In March 2020, early on in the Covid-19 pandemic in the region, we published a **message of solidarity** from our Executive Director, B. Caroline Kouassiaman, recognizing the unique challenges that social distancing measures pose for LGBTQI+ organizing and the community. She also assured our grantee-partners of our commitment to flexibility and our availability to accompany communities in times of crisis.

Then, in April, our Director of Communications and Knowledge Management, Stéphane Simporé published a blog post titled **'COVID19: Drawing the fine line between prevention and stigma in black ink'** where he reflected on the systemic stigma that occurs during pandemics under the guise of prevention, citing the different forms of discrimination and stigma directed at vulnerable people in times of crises like the covid-19 pandemic.

'Remember: in times of crisis, resilience cannot and must not be acquired at the cost of marginalisation of the most vulnerable.'

— Stéphane Simporé

But, in spite of the global health crisis, we are navigating to present other perspectives, to reflect on our engagement with the LGBTQI movement in West Africa.

While the crisis has reduced travel and gathering around the world, we wanted to reflect on how we have supported activists to occupy regional meeting spaces in our first newsletter issue of the year. This edition, titled **'XAALAT'** means

'thoughts' or 'reflections' in the Wolof language, one of many languages spoken in Senegal, Gambia and part of the West of Mauritania in West Africa. In this edition, we reflected on our participation (and that of our partners) in key LGBT+/LBQ convenings including the 7th Changing Faces, Changing Spaces (CFCS) conference hosted by UHAI-EASHRI (Kenya), the First Global Feminist LBQ Women*'s Conference (South Africa), and the Key Populations Pre-Conference of the 20th ICASA (International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa) (Rwanda). These reflections made it clear that we must continue to prioritize the participation of LGBTQ West Africans in such key spaces, particularly those who are usually less represented, like Women, Trans* and Intersex persons, youths and Francophone activists

And later in the year, we published the second edition of our newsletter, Sankofa, titled **'Breaking the Silence'** to explore the ways LGBTQI groups and organizations are using music and ICT (information and communication technology) to tell LGBTQI+ stories and amplify the voices of the LGBTQI communities in West Africa. We spotlighted groups and organizations doing innovative work across the region including Nigeria and Ghana and in several French-speaking countries.



JUSTICE AND LANGUAGE INCLUSION DURING OUR STRENGTHENING OF THE MOVEMENT

We edited and published a blog post titled **'The era of LGBTQ feminist activism: Linguistic justice!'** written by activist Emma Onekekou, coordinator of Emma LInfos. Emma's piece, a call to action for linguistic justice, was inspired by the lack of translation from English at several key convenings for activists, which leaves people who do not speak English at a disadvantage, unable to actually engage.

**She calls out:
'In our struggles
for justice and
freedom, how can
we make the voices
of our most silent
communities heard
without giving them
the opportunity to
speak and be heard
in the language
in which they are
comfortable?'**

— Emma Onekekou

WE PRACTICE OUR VALUES: ACCOUNTABILITY

We published our 2019 Annual Report titled, **'Moving with the Movement'**. This was our first ever Annual Report, presenting an overview of the grantmaking and accompaniment work of LGBTQI activists and organizations in the West African region in 2019 as an activist-led fund for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) organizing in West Africa.

In a final **newsletter** in December, we shared our key successes, moments of celebrations and some important updates with our community.

HEARING FROM THE MOVEMENT

Towards the end of 2020, we launched two major initiatives to amplify the voices of the movement, and update our knowledge and documentation of LGBTQI+ organizing in West Africa, centering the diverse perspectives and experiences of activists and organizations on the ground.

The first initiative is the commissioning of a regional research that would provide a local situational analysis of LGBTQI-led groups/organizations and the new priorities of local activists in the region. The research report will present a current look at the funding landscape for LGBTQI activism in the different West African countries, identifying local and thematic trends and gaps; as well as present recommendations from the voices of West African LGBTQI communities to donors and other organizations providing technical support in the movement. This report will be published in 2022.

The second initiative is the launch of a journal that will center and amplify the voices of west african LGBTQI activists on various themes and topics in the different issues. A public call for contributions to the first issue on the topic 'Citizen engagement of the LGBTQI movement in social justice struggles in West Africa' was released in December 2020. This issue will be released in 2021.



SPECIAL INITIATIVE: LOVE ALLIANCE



In December 2020, we announced our participation in the Love Alliance, a 5-year project with the overall aim of ensuring that communities of LGBTQI persons, sex workers and persons who use drugs are healthy and empowered, through a more inclusive and people-centered approach to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). The project is implemented through funding and partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Fund.

The Love Alliance was developed and is being implemented by a bold consortium of organizations with a strong track record in advocacy, global partnership management, participatory grantmaking, thought leadership,

movement building and capacity strengthening. In addition to ISDAO, consortium members include Aidsfonds, the Arab Foundations for Freedoms and Equality (AFE), GALZ, the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+), South African Network for People Using Drugs (SANPUD), Sisonke, and UHAI EASHRI. This project is being undertaken and managed within ISDAO as an Initiative and complements, but does not replace ISDAO's existing and ongoing programmatic work to strengthen and support LGBTQI-led organizing across West Africa. The overall vision of ISDAO is to build a more just and inclusive West Africa, a vision with which this project closely aligns. Read more about the Love Alliance initiative in our [press release](#).

SOME NEWS FOR 2021

OUR TEAM IS GROWING

After a long recruitment process beginning in December 2020, we have welcomed five new staff members to the ISDAO Family - Phidelia, Raymond, Anthony, Aye and Igor. Our new staff members bring to ISDAO a wealth of experience, skills and knowledge of the West African LGBTQI movement in the following roles:

- **Phidelia Imiegha – Communication Officer**
- **Raymond Adadjisso – Policy and Advocacy Officer**
- **Anthony Nkwocha – Program Officer, Focal Person Nigeria**
- **Aïssétou Sawadogo – Program Officer, Focal Person Burkina Faso**
- **Igor Koffi – Finance and Administration Officer**

WE ARE LAUNCHING NEW FUNDING PORTFOLIOS

In 2021, we are launching two new funding portfolios to support ISDAO's mission of strengthening the West African LGBT+ movement.

The ASANKA Creative Initiatives Pilot Fund aims to support, through the provision of grants, innovative creative activism developed and carried out by LGBTQI groups/organizations in the West African region as well as by individual West African LGBTQI activists living in the region and in the diaspora. We define creative initiatives as those that are other than initiatives typically included in traditional forms of activism, for example, the production of a mini-documentary, the editing of a book, design of a comic book, the creation of a web radio station, a photo project, etc. This fund will be granted through an open call.



The Communication Pilot Fund aims to support, through financial support, the existing and structured communication work of current and past partner organizations/groups of ISDAO. In the context of this support grant, Communication includes, but is not limited to, all visibility actions undertaken by LGBTQI groups/organizations to support advocacy, resource mobilization, awareness raising/education, information, etc. This fund is only available to our current and past grantee-partners, and so, there is no open call.

WE ARE GRATEFUL!

Partners

DONORS

American Jewish World Service, Anonymous Donor (USA), Anonymous Donor (UK) via Charities Aid Foundation UK, Astraea Foundation, Baring Foundation, Dreilinden, Foundation for a Just Society, Global Fund for Women, Horizons Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.



FISCAL HOST

UHAI-EASHRI



Consultants and other Technical Support

INTERPRETERS/TRANSLATORS

Claire Bâ – Senegal
David Living Asiam – Ghana
Ady Coulibaly – Ghana, RCI
Simone Bado – Burkina Faso
Pascaline Lamien Bambara – Burkina Faso
Meryld Sinka Kouï – Ghana, RCI
Angela Mebalé – Ghana & Gabon
Nicolas – Burundi
Fabrice Akey – Togo
Damaris – Kenya

RAPPORTEURS

Pascaline Lamien Bambara
Simone Bado

INTERNS

Naomi from Senegal
Zech from Nigeria

ONE-TIME LOGISTICAL SUPPORT PERSONS

Dany Gbetry – RCI
Kyky – Togo

OTHER TECHNICAL SUPPORT PERSONS

Njau Samson – Graphic Designer
G-TECH – Web Designer

WE ARE ISDAO

ABOUT ISDAO

Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest – ISDAO is an activist-led fund dedicated to strengthening and supporting a West African movement for gender diversity and sexual rights by adopting a flexible approach to grant-making and building a culture of philanthropy committed to human rights and social justice.

VISION

A just and inclusive West Africa free from violence and discrimination.

MISSION

An activist-led fund dedicated to strengthening and supporting a West African movement for gender diversity and sexual rights by adopting a flexible approach to grant-making and building a culture of philanthropy committed to equality and social justice.

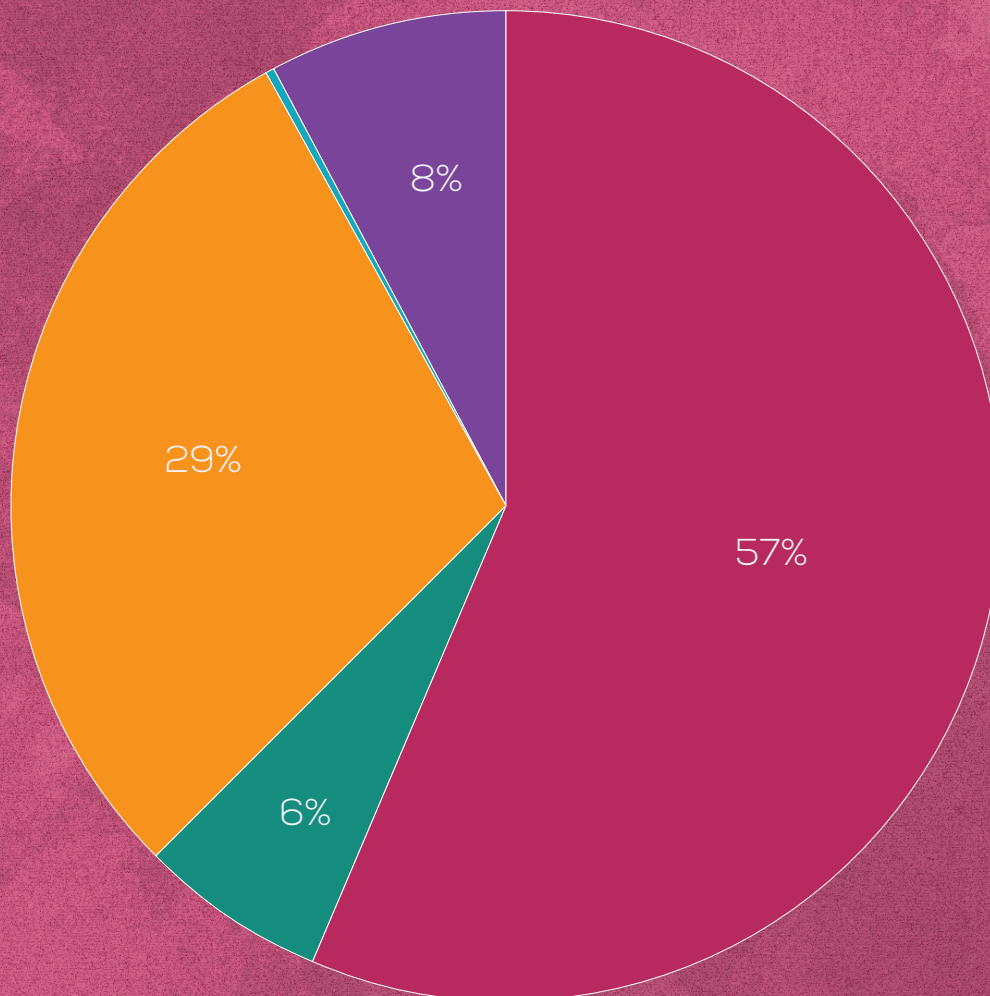
VALUES

- Power Analysis
- Self Determination
- Autonomy
- Activist led
- Feminism
- Inclusivity
- Diversity
- Documentation
- Intersectionality
- Equitable Representation
- Flexible, transparent and accountable approach
- Movement Building



ISDAO 2020 EXPENDITURES

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Programs Department Expenses <i>(including grants, grantmaking costs, direct staff)</i> | \$638,556 |
| Communications & Knowledge Management Expenses <i>(including activities and direct staff)</i> | \$71,674 |
| Institutional Development & Administrative Expenses | \$331,459 |
| Depreciation on Computers | \$3,975 |
| Other Personnel Expenses | \$86,225 |
| TOTAL | \$1,131,889 |





ISDAO

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