

ISDAO 

Mosaic of Stories

Our Annual Report
2021



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1. Message from ISDAO

2021, a Mosaic of Stories

By Caroline Kouassi Aman
Executive Director

What a year! When I reflect on 2021 and the story that it tells about ISDAO and our journey, it brings me back to the question of ISDAO’s origin story.

ISDAO’s origin story is not one story and it never was a linear journey.

Rather, it is a beautiful mosaic that many people contributed to at different points in time. One of the first moments of ISDAO’s origin story is that of a group of feminist queer women sitting in the kitchen at Mariam Armisen’s house in 2014 and discussing what would it mean to have a West African LGBTQI feminist fund that would contribute to resourcing and strengthening the movement across the region. This was a catalytic moment in our story. Another key moment was the mapping of the current status of movements and funding, which led to the publication of **We Exist** in early 2016. Through the mapping process, we heard about our communities’ dreams, aspirations, and what they would do with more - and better - funding. We also heard about the importance of going beyond funding - supporting connecting, convening and movement building. Between 2015 and 2018, other key moments contributed to the development of ISDAO, including several regional and country-based consultations with activists, the formation of an activist-led steering committee, which later evolved into the interim governing body, and hearing and learning from other participatory grantmakers. Throughout this journey, there have been many voices and a diversity of moments that collectively contribute to dreaming, shaping and building the ISDAO that we are now. The story also includes moments of pausing, stopping, re-strategizing and rethinking.



Just as the origin story of ISDAO is a compendium of diverse stories and of multiple paths that came together to build one ISDAO, the story of 2021 is also such a story, as the following pages of this annual report will unveil.

There is not just one 2021.

Internally, we often talk about 2021 being a “build” year, but it could also be called the “let’s try it out” year, especially as it was a year of trying new things, learning and adapting.

It was the year when we grew from a small-but-mighty staff of three to a staff of eight, including staff based in Togo and Côte d’Ivoire, countries where we previously did not have staff. Through this, we have learned, and continue to learn about what it means to build and operate a virtual, bilingual regional organization.

2021 was the first year of implementation of Love Alliance activities, including the formation of the new local activist-grantmaking panels in Burkina and Nigeria and the first round of country-level grantmaking. Within the context of this special initiative, we also began to work directly with communities that also intersect with our core community (LGBTQI), notably sex workers and people who use drugs (PWUDs).

2021 was the year of finding new ways of working, including hosting our first virtual residential meeting. Some aspects worked well, some not so much. We had our first experience of organizing a regional meeting in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and had many lessons of learning-by-doing, including around management of risks, being able to quickly adapt, and addressing new and more complex travel logistics.

In 2021, we sought to make space for critical conversations and documentation around topics and issues affecting our movement through MYRIA, an ISDAO journal. The initial discussion began with the idea for a blog post, but we realized that there was a need for a dedicated space for more voices and engagement from within the movement. The first edition of MYRIA was published in 2021 and focused on the question of LGBTQI activists’ citizen engagement in social justice struggles.

In 2021, we expanded our regional activist grantmaking panel to improve the representation of our diversities of communities and geographies on the panel. And, we launched the ASANKA fund, dedicated specifically to supporting creative initiatives undertaken by organizations and independent activists. With ASANKA, we took the opportunity to try new approaches, including opening the call to independent activists (individuals), extending the call to West African independent activists in the diaspora, and incorporating virtual video interviews in the selection process.

2021 was also the year of “connecting” and “listening”. A dream since 2019, we finally organized our first grantee forums, starting with in-country forums in Togo and Benin. Country forums created an opportunity for ISDAO to get closer, for organizations to connect with each other, to understand the bigger picture of ISDAO’s work, to ask questions, to give feedback and reflect on the contributions of ISDAO at a country level. They also provided a space for reflection on how the movement is evolving and what we are collectively learning. With the support of a research team of 21(!!!) researchers, we undertook a mapping research to get a picture of the current status of the LGBTQI movement, in all nine focal countries. We were able to get closer to grantee partners through in-country visits to grantee partners in all nine countries, including our first visits in Mali and Senegal.

Collectively, these moments and activities, and many others described in the following pages tell the story of ISDAO’s 2021. They are not linear or straightforward, but rather made up of complex and rich experiences. As these moments have been full of learning and insight for us at ISDAO, we are excited to share them here with the movements that we are a part of and the broader philanthropic community. This is our 2021 mosaic.

Enjoy!



2. In Their Own Words: Hear from our Grantee-Partners

Envol-Association Action Santé Trans*

Association EnvoL- Action Santé Trans works to accompany, help and support Trans people and LBTQ youth, and contribute to their well-being and fulfilment. With their 2021 grant, the organization produced two short documentaries detailing some of the discrimination faced by the LGBTQ community, particularly transgender people. It also trained and equipped its members in entrepreneurial and other income-generating skills. The organization found that the health professionals it reached with the documentaries became more aware of transgender people and began to welcome transgender people seeking care into their facilities without discrimination.

‘The flexibility of ISDAO’s funding has allowed the community to make their own decisions and develop a learning capacity. The grant has also helped develop a network.’

ONG Likekpa

LIKEKPA dreams of a country where respect for human rights is guaranteed without discrimination or stigmatization based on one’s sexual orientation, gender, status or social practice. With their 2021 grant, they launched a survey project to estimate the size and needs of LGB persons in three towns as a means to develop evidence for future programs and projects. They also held a human rights workshop for public health workers in the region. The group now has a database that can be used for advocacy, collaboration and future fundraising.

“ISDAO’s grant is an excellent initiative that enables several new CSOs to carry out activities on the ground.”

Coalition Anti SIDA (CAS)

CAS advocates for LGBTIQ rights and fights AIDS, and is working to promote the building of an LGBTIQ community that is united, proud, courageous, creative, determined, supportive and active. Their 2021 grant helped to strengthen safety, security, and emergency response at the community level through a participatory and community-building approach. They conducted community workshops on safety and security in five regions and produced documentation on the history of the LGBTIQ community and an analysis of advocacy and violence against LGBTIQ people.

“One of the key outcomes is a stronger and more resilient LGBTIQ community movement to address the many challenges and barriers at individual and collective levels.”

Achievers Improved Health Initiative (AIHI)

AIHI works to create and improve the livelihoods of youth and vulnerable people, including LGBTQI people, through advocacy, health care services, human rights and health protection, community outreach and capacity building. Their 2021 grant supported their Sustainable Skills Empowerment Program which provided skills to 200 LGBTQI youth and empowered them to become knowledgeable in a specific trade or profession. The grant also funded the AIHI football academy, supporting LGBTQI football players who cannot find support in mainstream spaces. These projects have resulted in increased financial independence, acceptance, reduced vulnerability and the creation of safe spaces for their community members.

“ISDAO funding has enabled AIHI to respond to emergencies. The core funding has paid for staff salaries and funded the implementation of activities that have furthered our work, such as institutional strengthening and improving staff capacity.”

Due to safety and security risks faced by organizations working in the LGBTQI+ movement in our region, we have deliberately not identified the countries where these grantee-partners are working.



3. Learnings: Working in a fully remote and linguistically diverse team

By Stéphane Simporé
Director of Communications and Knowledge Management

How did you experience the transition from a team of 3 people to a team of 8 in a few months? What were the challenges? What were the delights?

ISDAO hired its first staff members in early 2019 and onward. Between this period and mid-2021, ISDAO had three staff members. Then new people joined the team, growing to eight people. We welcomed this growth with delight and relief because we knew our workload would be more evenly shared and we could expand our commitment to our movement. We were excited about the energy, enthusiasm and skills these new people were bringing to the development of ISDAO. And that was indeed a reality.

ISDAO is increasingly reflecting the energy and diversities of our communities, including linguistic diversity, through this growth in staff. We had two major fears: working 100% online and remotely as a team, and the language difference. Although ISDAO is a fully bilingual - English and French - organization, not all staff members fully understand both languages. For example, in the Communication and Knowledge Management Department, the two staff members are respectively only French and only English speaking.



What are the challenges of working in a linguistically diverse and fully remote team?

Being a linguistically diverse team working remotely is complex and requires a shared infrastructure. The challenges are manifold: Language is a major vector for sharing data daily in professional relationships. However, if there is a language barrier, this can be a major obstacle to collaboration. Moreover, working remotely makes this more difficult because if one cannot express oneself verbally, one has other means of expression such as body language and mime. But this only works when both people communicating see each other physically. The other challenge is interactions with partners including grantee partners who are based in a country with a working language different from the main language of the ISDAO team member. Therefore, it was important for ISDAO to put in place a set of mechanisms and tools to overcome these challenges and to continue to be an inclusive organization, including linguistic inclusion.

What are the strategies or efforts adopted by ISDAO to address these challenges?

First, I want to acknowledge the advantages of working remotely, including the flexibility for each member to organize their work. This gives moral responsibility to the individual and creates a spirit of mutual trust in the collaboration. Moreover, it builds self-discipline and creates conditions for a culture of individual and collective accountability. The other issue is the language difference among staff members. ISDAO made this choice in recognition of the scarcity of knowledge resources in the region, but also with the vision of overcoming recruitment criteria that may be discriminatory in the philanthropy and social justice sectors in our region and beyond.

At ISDAO, we have tried several tools and structures to overcome the language barrier and challenges of remote working. For linguistic inclusion, we have adopted an application for the automated translation of emails and messages between staff members. This means that messages exchanged are in both French and English. For the content of formal and/or external documents, we contract professional translators and have built an extensive repertoire of translators.

We have also built up a large repertoire of professional interpreters who, in addition to mastering the techniques of simultaneous or consecutive interpretation, have a perfect command of our working vocabulary while respecting gender diversity

and inclusion. These interpreters work with us during internal virtual meetings and external meetings with partners, including physical meetings. Finally, within ISDAO, there is a support mechanism for staff to take language courses to become fully bilingual in French and English and several staff members have enrolled.

As far as remote working is concerned, a suitable mechanism has also been put in place to “reduce” the distance between staff through the adoption of several channels of interaction between members including WhatsApp, Zoom, and of course, professional email exchanges. Every week, we organize a virtual coffee break with all staff. As the name suggests, this is an informal virtual conversation space to discuss “anything and everything” except work. We have regular staff meetings with technical support from interpreters. We also have department meetings, leadership meetings, etc. It may seem like too many meetings, but they are needed to keep in touch and reduce the hundreds or thousands of miles that can separate staff members.

Finally, we hold our staff retreat about every 6 months which is an important time to physically connect, plan our work and build our team around our commitment to the LGBTQI movement. We also use times of physical visits to our grantee partners in a given area to connect in person.

What are the strategies or efforts adopted by ISDAO to address these challenges?

An operating structure like that of ISDAO is rare and relatively new. We recognize the complexity of putting it into practice in many ways. However, the challenges involved are not insurmountable, and the operation of ISDAO is proof of this. At ISDAO we are open to learning: adopting this structure of distance working and language diversity has been a learning process and as we try out different working tools and collaborations, we are evaluating and adopting the best of what we have. We evaluate and adopt the tool according to the needs of our work.

Moreover, one should not hesitate to take a participatory approach in building such a system. This means opening up the approach to all staff to be able to propose innovative and adapted solutions according to the needs and contexts. For example, at ISDAO, formal meetings have sometimes been organised through a group call on Whatsapp, as internet access can be erratic from one country to another in the region.

The other important point is flexibility in such an approach: it means being flexible to adjust a tool or change it radically if it does not seem to work for a staff member. At ISDAO, we have also benefited from the advice and suggestions of professional interpreters in setting up our working infrastructure to make it viable and sustainable. One should therefore not hesitate to seek their input.



Do you have any other thoughts, tips or lessons to share about your experience with the ISDAO team?

Adopting an infrastructure for a geographically distributed team working remotely with language disparities may seem impossible. However, the recent global health crisis forced several organizations/firms/companies to implement a remote working infrastructure unexpectedly and this has continued although the level of the crisis has generally decreased today. Many organizations continue to gradually change their work structure to remote, and staff appreciate this as it has more benefits than insurmountable challenges.

The same is true for the composition of a linguistically diverse team. At ISDAO we have capitalized on our practice and learning over the past few years in a recently published guide to support organizations that want to approach it to be able to do so and to adapt the tools to their needs.

4. Grant Making in 2021

In 2021, ISDAO had its largest grant portfolio to date, awarding **101 grants** totaling **\$1,452,480** in our nine focal countries, including grants through our regional call for proposals, resilience grants, and the Love Alliance initiative.

Regional Grants

We launched our regional call for proposals in October 2020 and received 115 applications for a total of **\$1.4 million**.

ISDAO's grant making is decided in a participatory process by our Activist Grant Making Panel – AGMP. The AGMP is an autonomous panel of 14 LGBTQI volunteer activists who reflect diverse institutional, social and political experiences within the West African LGBTQI movement. The AGMP meets to deliberate on eligible proposals and, through a voting process, decide which proposals are funded and for what amount. At the decision-making meeting held in March 2021, the AGMP approved 44 of the 100 eligible proposals for grants totaling **\$501,841**.

In addition to the amount awarded by the AGMP, grantee-partners under the regional fund also received **\$1000** each, being our RESPOND fund. We introduced the RESPOND fund in 2020 as a resource to enable organizations and groups to address immediate and urgent needs in their organizations and/or communities focusing on safety, emergency and security. The RESPOND fund has taught us that giving communities the agency to determine what constitutes an emergency, safety, or security issue is an effective way to achieve a community response to these issues.



Special Grants

We are proud to have disbursed our first round of grants to Nigeria and Burkina Faso as part of the Love Alliance initiative in 2021. Love Alliance is a 5-year program with the overall goal of ensuring that communities of LGBTQI people, sex workers, and people who use drugs are healthy and empowered through a more inclusive and people-centered approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). As a member of the consortium, ISDAO is anchoring this initiative in West Africa by providing grants and supporting advocacy, movement building, and community organizing in Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

The call for concept notes for Love Alliance grants in Nigeria and Burkina was issued in May and June 2021 respectively. In Nigeria, we received 133 applications for a total of **\$3.7 million**, and in Burkina, we received 31 applications for a total of **\$630,000**.

In keeping with our participatory approach to grantmaking, we formed local activist grantmaking panels (Local Activist Grant Making Panels - LAGMP) in both countries with volunteer activists from the LGBTQI, sex worker, and people who use drugs (PWUDs) communities. After the decision-making processes in July, 27 applications were funded for a total of **\$509,979** in Nigeria, and in Burkina, 11 applications were funded for a total of **\$162,688**. As part of strengthening local networks across the movement, ISDAO also funded 7 networks across the communities in Nigeria with a total of **\$140,000** to support movement building, coordination and capacity building.

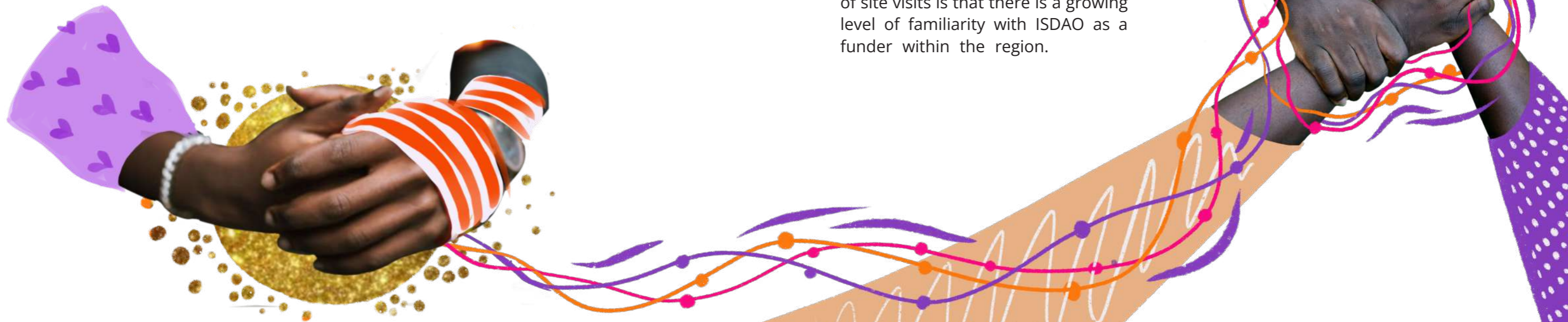
Our Resilience Grants, also introduced in 2020, are non-competitive and non-publicized grants made on invitation only, to support organizational and movement resilience. They are short-term, flexible one-time grants provided to past or present ISDAO grantee partners past and present that have needs that require urgent funding. In 2021, we awarded 10 resilience grants in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Nigeria, including one regional resilience grant.

Resilience grants allow us to provide critical support and resources that enable partners to address specific, critical, time-limited administrative or community needs. Examples of the grants awarded under this initiative in 2021 include funding an LGBTQ-led organization in Togo to launch a self-sustaining agricultural business that will contribute to their income in the future; providing urgent funds for rent and utilities for a trans-led organization in Côte d'Ivoire that was about to lose its office space, and funding the LBQT consortium in Ghana with a grant that allowed them to actively respond to a time-bound community approach to the growing anti-LGBTIQ rights movement and agenda.

Site visits

Following the grant decisions at regional and country levels, staff of ISDAO began site visits to current grantee-partners and new groups/organizations that were approved for funding. Our in-person site visits help us build relationships with our partners, carry out due diligence, identify capacity needs and gain an understanding of the working contexts of our partners. While most site visits had to be done virtually in 2020, we were able to fully resume in-person visits in 2021, visiting more than 60 new and old grantee partners across our 9 focal countries.

Conducting our first site visits in Senegal and Mali helped us to understand some of the nuances and contexts, the current stage of the movement and the general local organising. Understanding these nuances helped us to effectively understand how we can strengthen our support at the community level in both countries. One of the important lessons we learned during this round of site visits is that there is a growing level of familiarity with ISDAO as a funder within the region.

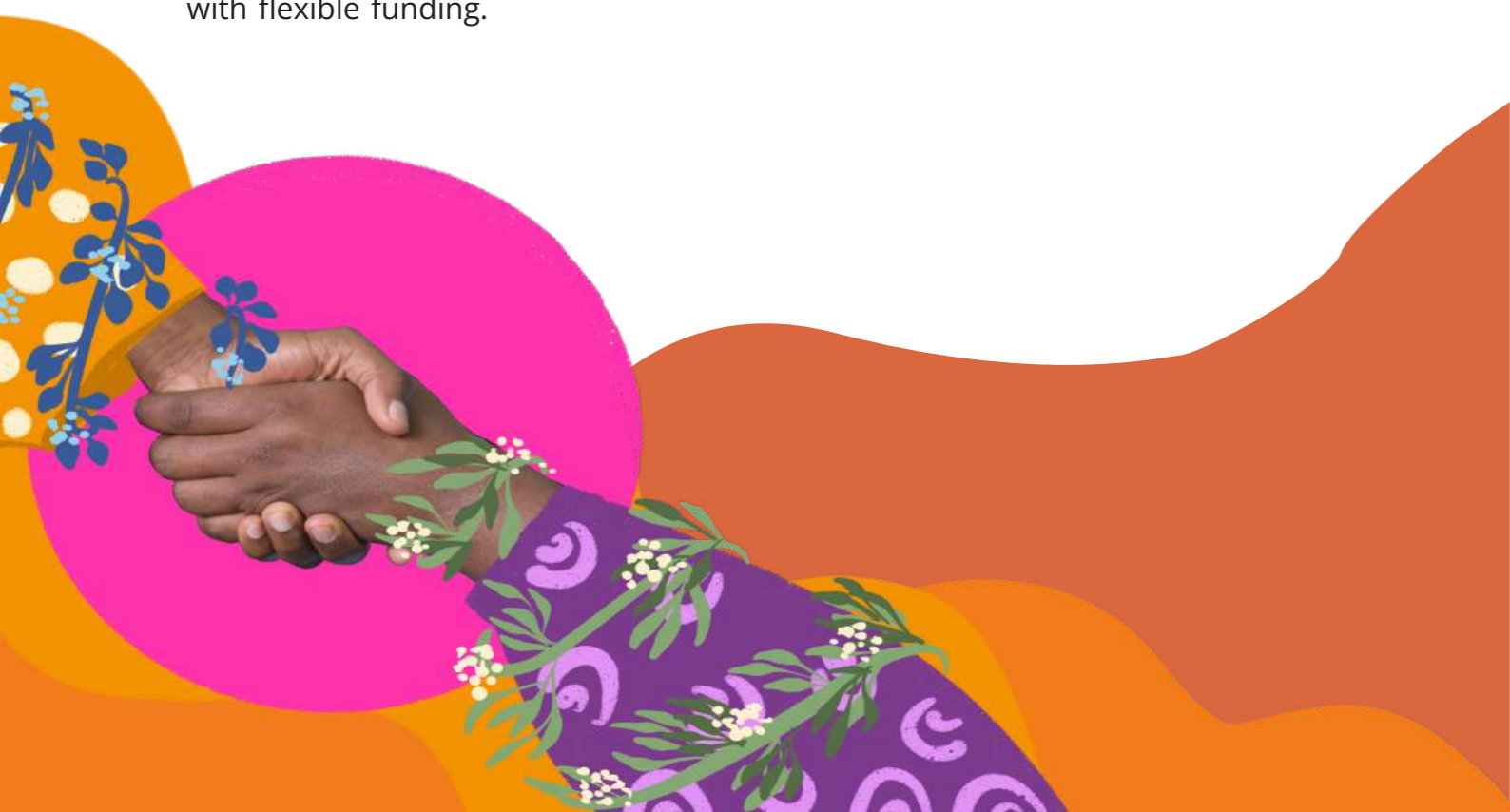


Reflections

Overall, we are proud to have funded more LBQ and trans-led groups/ organizations, as well as other emerging voices in the movement in 2021. We are committed to continuously increasing our funding to underserved groups in the region. We also recorded increased funding to francophone countries in this grant cycle compared to the last. Although the resources that went towards anglophone countries increased significantly as a result of the Love Alliance grants in Nigeria, it is important to note that these funds were “intersectional”, cutting across the communities of LGBTQI people, Sex Workers and People Who Use Drugs.

As our Grants portfolio increases, so does the number of applications we receive and the amount requested, reminding us that the needs of the movement are infinitely larger than our resources. While we received requests worth almost \$6 million across all our public calls for application - Regional and Love Alliance Initiative (Nigeria and Burkina Faso) - we were only able to give \$1,452,480 in grants to the public applications received.

The movement will continue to need resources, and we must continue to find innovative and flexible ways to fund community-led initiatives. As we look back at our 2021 grants, we are reflecting on ways to work with other donors to increase the resources of the West African movement and provide more sources of funding, especially to new and emerging voices. We are also concerned about the rising anti-LGBTQI and anti-gender movements in the region and recognize that in order for communities to continue to take action, they must be effectively and adequately resourced through community-led and community-centred processes with flexible funding.



5. 2021 at a Glance

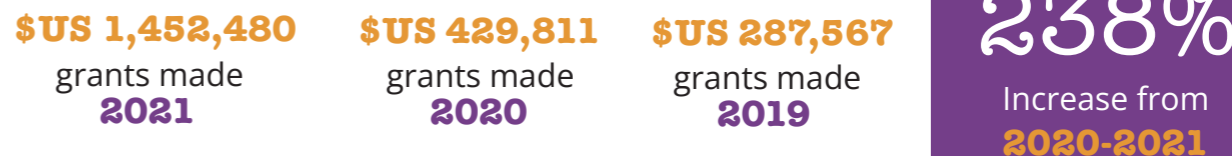
Grants breakdown by Country



Number of grants made



Total Grants Amount



2021 Grants type Breakdown



Regional call for Proposals Breakdown

115	proposals received totalling	\$1,475,919.48
15	proposals	ineligible
44	proposals approved and funded totalling	\$501,841

Nigeria-Love Alliance Call for Proposals Breakdown

133	applications received totalling	\$3,762,865.76
30	applications were	ineligible
27	applications were funded to the total of	\$509,979.78
7	Networks funded to the total of	140 000

Burkina-Love Alliance Call for Proposals Breakdown

31	applications received totalling	\$630,019
2	applications were	ineligible
11	applications were funded to the total of	\$162,688

Number of organizations funded

87	organizations in 2021 (80 orgs, 7 networks)
41	organizations in 2020
112%	increase

6. Communications and Knowledge Management



**By Phidelia Imiegha
Communications Officer**

Over the past year, the Communications and Knowledge Management team has grown from a one-person team to two people, to accommodate the growing number of projects within the department, including two pilot funds. The team remains committed to sharing more about ISDAO’s work and its grantee partners, supporting creative advocacy in the region, and finding ways to focus and amplify the voices of our communities.

To do so, we have been brainstorming about establishing a framework for conversations and reflections, open to LGBTQI activists and their allies, on issues that affect the development of the LGBTQI movement in West Africa, including philanthropy, democracy, the environment, feminism, and more.

Earlier in 2021, we issued a call for submissions for the first issue of Myria, a journal that centres and amplifies the voices of West African LGBTQI activists on different themes and topics regarding various issues.

We named the journal Myria, a word in Dioula - Bambara, two languages spoken in Burkina, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire and by extension in Senegal and Guinea, and which means Reflection, Thought, Meditation. The theme of the first issue was 'Citizen engagement of LGBTQI activists in social justice struggles in West Africa'. We received several submissions and, although we couldn't publish them all, we were delighted to read all the reflections from across the region.

Then in April, we published our first newsletter of the year, 'Everything is Love,' which focused on our special initiative '[Love Alliance](#)'. By sharing a video of our Executive Director, Caroline Kouassiaman, we wanted to better convey the vision and goals of the Love Alliance initiative, which we are anchoring in West Africa, as well as ISDAO's role within the Love Alliance. If you missed this video, you can watch it [here](#).

In this newsletter, we also talked about our research project on LGBTQI organizing in our 9 focus West African countries.

In August, we launched the first fund of ISDAO's Communication and Knowledge Management Department, the ASANKA Pilot Fund for Creative Initiatives. The objective of Asanka is to support innovative activism and creative initiatives of activists such as film, literature, photography, radio, painting, drawing, etc. at local and regional levels. The call for concept notes was open to both organizations and individual activists in our 9 focus countries, and we received 119 concept notes. Following the selection and interview process conducted by an activist grant committee, we awarded 14 grants worth \$65,000. Of these 14 grants, 10 were awarded to organizations and 4 to individual activists.

Our second pilot fund, the In Touch Fund, was only open to current and past ISDAO grantee partners, and thus, was not awarded via an open call. This means that this fund was directly targeted to partners who have already been approved by our Activist Grant Making Panel. We launched the In Touch Fund to support and strengthen the existing communications work of partner organizations funded in our current and past cycles. We recognize that areas such as advocacy, communication support and resource mobilization have received little attention in the funding priorities of most donors, and we wanted to fill this gap. After sending out a survey to determine the communication needs of our partners, we invited organizations to submit letters of interest as a way to apply for this fund. Finally, six organizations were awarded \$26,000 as part of our In Touch grants.

In September, after many months of reading, editing and translating submissions, we launched the first issue of Myria. Published in English and French, the first issue contains ten essays written by LGBTQI activists and allies from Benin, Burkina, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo, with special participation from Cameroon. According to Stéphane Semporé, Director of Communication and Knowledge Management at ISDAO, **"These contributions are proof and a powerful voice that the West African LGBTQI movement does not operate in a vacuum as conveyed by the popular imagination of civil society in general. This rather shows that it is engaging and is willing to engage even if its engagement is often ignored and sometimes erased or vetoed."**

The issue is available [here](#).

To continue the conversations started in the journal, we hosted two webinars, with some of the journal's contributors as panellists. The webinars served as a broader, interactive space for LGBTQI people, activists, and allies to discuss the journal's themes and envision a united West African movement. We are very proud of the first issue of Myria, and we look forward to putting out the call for the next issue.

Later, when we published our 2020 annual report, "Bridges Under the Waves," we reflected on the year in which we had to learn to build bridges under the devastating waves that emerged unpredictably in the first quarter of the year: the global health crisis of COVID-19 and its direct restrictions and collateral damage. We shared lessons learned from our work during a global pandemic, as well as reflections from our Activists Grant Making Panel (AGMP) members and stories from our grantee partners.

Among the projects we have started in 2021 and will complete in 2022, we have the refresh of ISDAO's brand and the transition to a new logo and website. We have been working on our visual brand identity refresh since mid-2020 and are excited to launch our new logo and website in 2022.

We have initiated a regional research project that will provide an analysis of the local situation of LGBTIQ-led groups/organizations, the current funding landscape, and the emerging priorities of local activists in the nine focus countries of ISDAO. In 2021, the research team of 21 consultants from the nine countries conducted extensive data collection and analysis, including focus group discussions, interviews, and an online survey. The final regional report and country-specific reports will be published in 2022.



7. What is ISDAO's positioning and strategy for policy and advocacy?

By Raymond Adadjisso
Policy and Advocacy Officer



When it comes to advocacy, as a philanthropic activist organization, we can support the advocacy work of our grantee partners, or define the advocacy priorities of our area of expertise and be an implementer, or do both. Given the current situation and based on feedback from consultations with our partners and key stakeholders in the sub-region, it is strategically more relevant for ISDAO to be in a supportive position rather than an implementer. This is also consistent with our mission of supporting movements, and our values of empowerment and self-determination.

Thus, our strategy is to support our partners in policy and advocacy, providing the technical and financial resources needed to build sustainable alliances and to create and ensure quality participation and representation in advocacy spaces. This

commitment to supporting our partners does not prevent us from amplifying and bringing their voices into the field by ourselves whenever possible. Similarly, when it comes to philanthropic advocacy and increasing flexible resources for the region, we are fully involved. The final thoughts on this strategy are being discussed internally at the moment and a strategy document will be validated soon.

There can be no policy or advocacy without a platform, space or framework to address them. In 2021, we continued to support the inclusion of our partners in different advocacy spaces by organizing and supporting several frameworks to have important conversations. We organized our first national forums in Benin and Togo under the theme of reaffirming our engagement with national movements. In addition to policy and advocacy issues, these forums allowed us to learn from the movements we support, their expectations and their needs. The forums also allowed the movements to better understand our work, our vision, our mission, our values and our support and funding framework. The forums will continue in the remaining ISDAO focal countries in 2022.

In addition, we were present at the Pan Africa ILGA (PAI) regional conference, which was virtual, as a contributor and to ensure and facilitate the participation of our partners. We organized a panel that discussed the essence and diversity of LGBTQI people and organizations in West Africa from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, with the goal of starting a conversation about the forgotten history of our



communities. It was a very enriching conversation that we plan to replicate on other platforms with different panellists.

Ensuring participation is very important, but understanding the spaces, how to engage with them, what power dynamics are at play, and what priorities can be addressed with what strategies are all critical aspects that must also be considered for high-impact policy and advocacy initiatives. This was strongly emphasized in the partner consultations that supported the definition of our policy and advocacy strategy and positioning. In addition to supporting inclusion and integration in policy spaces, in 2021 we were able to support training, learning, experience sharing, and community networking. We equipped partners for quality participation and helped build their capacity to implement their advocacy efforts. We supported the participation of five additional activists in a training organized by PAI on engagement with regional human rights mechanisms.

In Nigeria and Burkina Faso, through the Love Alliance initiative, we invited activists from the LGBTQI, people who use drugs, and sex worker communities to a meeting to identify their policy and advocacy priorities and to strategize around the identified priorities. The meetings provided a platform for community activists to identify their intersections and collectively decide on their advocacy priorities. At the end of the workshops, participants identified their collective advocacy priorities, which will be important in shaping the work that will be done in the remaining years of the Love Alliance initiative.

In thinking about advocacy and policy in our region, another major challenge that emerged in defining our strategy was the availability of evidence (studies, surveys, polls, figures, and all necessary data) to back the arguments. This need was more pressing in 2021 with the many degraded environments for LGBTQI people in the sub-region. We collaborated with Queer African Youth Network (QAYN) to commission a study on gender ideology movements in Burkina Faso, Senegal and Ghana. We are doubly proud of this study, as it is a first in the sub-region and was conducted by an experienced team of local researchers. We are particularly excited about the prospects of the study's findings and recommendations for advocacy and initiatives. This report will be published in 2022.

8. Special Initiative: Reflection on the first year of Love Alliance

By **Olumide Makanjuola**
Director of Programmes

How would you summarize the Love Alliance's first full year of implementation by ISDAO?

The first year of the Love Alliance was a year of building for us at ISDAO. We leveraged our experience in grantmaking and organizing meetings to bring movements together for collective action. In 2021, we deepened our engagement with LGBTQI communities in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. We also built relationships with the sex worker and people who use drugs (PWUD) communities in both countries, gaining a contextual understanding of their levels of organizing and programming through grassroots community consultations and grantmaking.

The consultations focused on understanding the organizing context of the sex worker and people who use drugs communities, their funding challenges, their programming context, and how they conduct their advocacy work at the national level. We also established Local Grant Making Panels (LAGMPs) in both countries with representation from the LGBTQI, sex worker, and people who use drugs communities. We built on our existing regional grantmaking principles and processes to ensure that the grantmaking process was community-driven and participatory.

With the support of the LAGMP, we have been able to provide resources to community organizations of LGBTQI, sex workers, and people who use drugs in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. In addition to providing resources to these communities, we also brought them together to collectively identify their advocacy priorities and their approach to engaging and achieving those priorities.



This process ensured that the communities were at the center of defining their advocacy priorities and strategies, and that they were the key players.

The first year of the Love Alliance allowed us to create a foundation that supports and works to empower communities in a way that allows them to define their purpose, goal and strategies. In the past, we have funded LGBTQI organizations working with sex workers and People Who Use Drugs (PWUD), but with the Love Alliance, we are able to build on that foundation and strengthen cross-community engagement.

Were there any challenges and breakthroughs during the first year?

While some ISDAO staff had previously worked with these communities at various stages, this was the first time ISDAO worked with sex worker communities and PWUDs. During the building phase in 2021, identifying sex worker- and PWUD-led organizations in Burkina Faso was a major challenge. Although there are programs for sex workers and people who use drugs, most of these programs were not community-led, although some community members were involved as educators or community mobilizers.

This again shows that programs are created for communities without any input from community members in key decision-making processes. In addition, getting communities to think intersectionally has been a major challenge, as many of them are used to working only within their own communities. These challenges can be attributed to the limited resources that have often caused communities to focus on HIV/AIDS-related programs, services, and treatment.

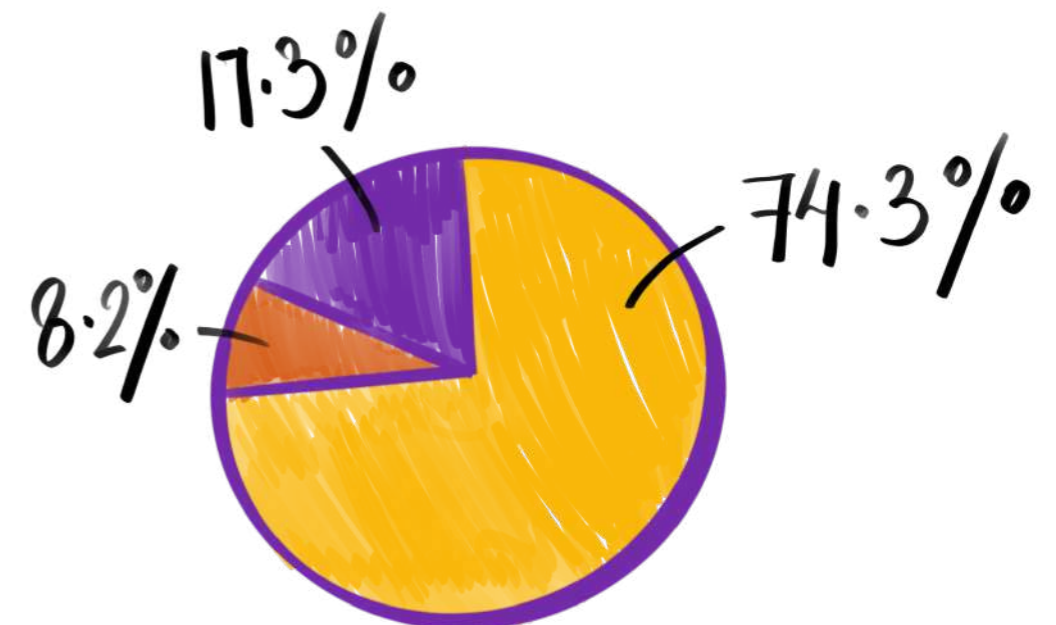
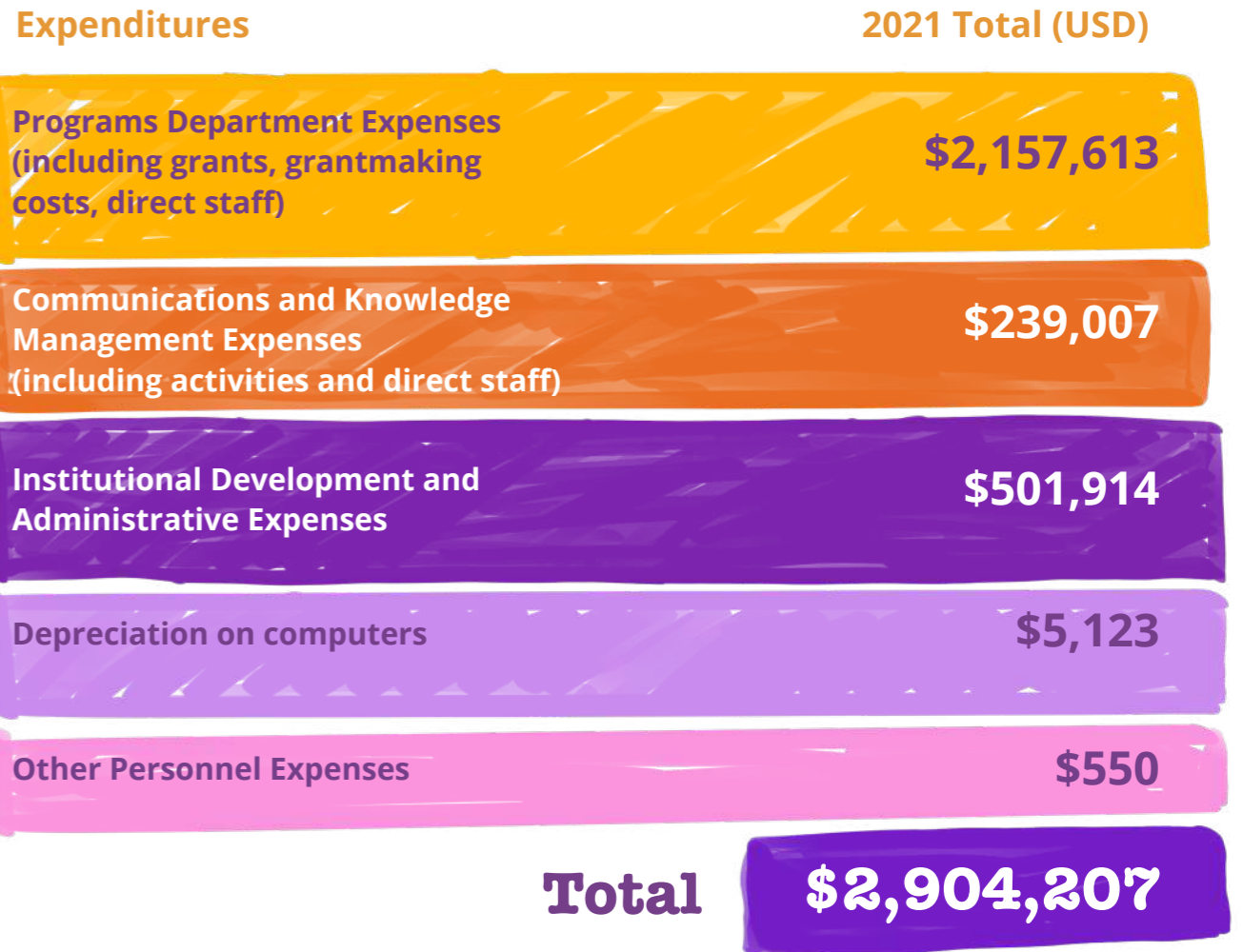
While LGBTQI communities in both counties had previously benefited from participatory grants, this was new to the sex worker and PWUD communities. For them, it was a real breakthrough to have the communities' voice heard in the decision-making process. This process allowed for grants to be approved based on realities and lived experiences, rather than donor-defined priorities. The flexibility of the funds also allowed communities to define their strategies and areas of focus.

What are ISDAO's hopes for next year and the remaining years of the Love Alliance?

In 2022, we hope to expand our funding, provide multi-year grants, and leverage strategic advocacy moments by supporting our communities to come forward and occupy spaces in ways that make their voices heard on issues that affect them. Most importantly, we hope to strengthen community involvement in key advocacy spaces and provide flexible resources that allow communities to pursue their work in ways that meet their self-determined strategies, needs, and realities.

9. Our Finances

ISDAO 2021 Expenditure



10. We are Grateful!

Partners

DONORS



Anonymous Donor
(USA)



ASTRAEA
LESBIAN FOUNDATION
FOR JUSTICE



DREILINDEN
Gesellschaft für gemeinnütziges
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FJS
International



Horizons Foundation



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands

FISCAL HOST



UHAI-EASHRI

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Logistic support - Togo

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- G-TECH - Web Designer/ Web Hosting / Graphic Designer - USA
- Baltazare - Web Designer - France
- Symposia Consult - Interpretation Equipment - RCI
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11. 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

EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION

SELF DETERMINATION

INCLUSIVITY

DOCUMENTATION

POWER ANALYSIS

DIVERSITY

FEMINISM

AUTONOMY

ACTIVIST - LED

FLEXIBLE, TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE APPROACH





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