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MAPPING LGBTQI ORGANIZING IN WEST AFRICA

Summary Report

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Table of contents

List of abbreviations	2
Acknowledgments	5
1.Introduction	7
1.1 Context and rationale for the mapping	7
1.2 Mapping methodology	8
1.3 Limitations	8
2.Evolving Contexts in West Africa: Continuity and Change	9
2.1 Legal context	9
2.2 Socio-political context	10
3.Evolution of the movement since 2016: new structures, new issues, same challenges?	11
4.Multi-faceted challenges	13
4.1 Challenges related to the legal, social and political environment	13
4.2 Organizational and Governance Challenges	13
4.3 Technical and Financial Challenges	14
5.Response Strategies	17
6.New priorities	19
7.Geographic and thematic expansion of sources of technical and financial support	21
8.Recommendations	25

List of Abbreviations

ARVs	Antiretrovirals
AQYI	African Queer Youth Initiative
CAL	Coalition of Africa Lesbians
GBT	Gay, Bisexual, Trans
MSM	Men who have sex with Men
IDNOWA	Interfaith Diversity Network of West Africa
ISDAO	Initiative Sankofa D’Afrique de l’Ouest
ISLA	Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa
LBQ	Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex
TFPs	Technical and Financial Partners
PEPFAR	U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PI7	Plateforme Initiative des 7
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
QAYN	Queer African Youth Network
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
SSMPA	Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
UAF-Africa	Urgent Action Fund - Africa
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WATF	West Africa Trans Forum



Acknowledgments

Akpé | Aní kié | Enachè nuwe | Nagode | Barka | Nouari | Meda wo as | Jërëjéf | O sheun

Thank You

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1. Introduction

The first mapping of LGBTQ organizing¹ in West Africa "We Exist,"² was published in 2016 (Armisen). This groundbreaking report highlighted the emerging community engagement and embryonic stage of the movement, which also focused on HIV/AIDS and issues pertaining to MSM³. Although expanding, the space dedicated to lesbian, bisexual and trans (LBT) people was still insignificant. The report also highlighted problems faced by LGBTQ communities and individuals, from family rejection to human rights violations, organizational challenges, difficulties in accessing funding, and the lack of critical and political analysis of gender and sexuality systems and their consequences. The report also emphasized the urgent need for an LGBTQI fund run by and for activists in the region.

Six years later and following the launch of the ISDAO fund in 2018, how is the LGBTQI organizing fairing in West Africa? Are there any changes in issues, perspectives, and priorities?

This executive report briefly presents the main developments and new challenges facing the movement(s).

The full report is available upon request by email to info@isdao.org

¹ Intersex communities and groups are not mentioned here because at the time of data collection (in 2014 and 2015), no intersex groups had been identified and there was no intersex organizing.

² We Exist - Mapping LGBTQ Organizing in West Africa, Mariam Armisen, 2016 <https://isdao.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/We-Exist.pdf>

³ Men who have sex with men

1.1. Context and rationale for the mapping

Guided by the recommendations of the 2016 mapping, reflections as well as recommendations from various consultations with activists, ISDAO was gradually established. The organization currently covers nine countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo. Based on feminist principles and values of autonomy, self-determination, inclusion, equitable representation, power analysis, and a participatory funding mechanism, ISDAO makes grants to LGBTQI organizations in these focal countries. The analysis of sub-regional organizing shows that despite political and social contexts that are still as hostile as ever, and in some cases even more so, there is a growing visibility of groups and organizations catering to LBQ women, trans and intersex people as well as of groups working on questions of faith and spirituality or operating in rural areas. [However], this community push raises some questions, especially since the region remains one of the least funded on the continent. Hence the interest for ISDAO to conduct a new study to achieve a clearer vision of the current state of LGBTQI organizing in West Africa, the main objective being the possibility of giving a voice to the communities as to what the next orientations as well as the funding plan and objectives should be for donors and technical partners. It is about ensuring that it is not the funding that drives the movement's agenda, but rather the movement that informs how and to whom funding is given.

1.2. Mapping methodology

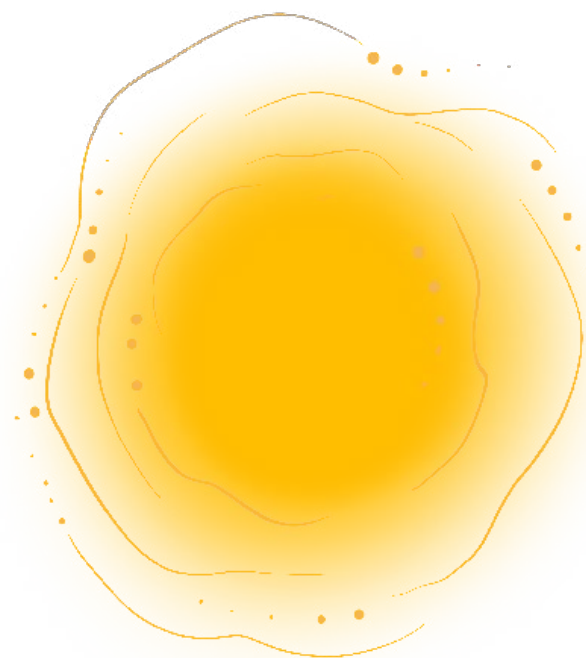
To get a clear picture of the current state of the movement, the developments, the challenges and the strategies needed to address these challenges, as well as a renewed vision of priorities, two research methods were used. Adopting a participatory approach, the qualitative research consisted of interviews and focus groups (some conducted among mixed groups and some among caucus groups [(groups that have a shared affinity)], facilitated by country consultants, with a variety of individual and collective stakeholders (such as independent activists, registered and unregistered organizations, members of organizational networks, technical partners, funding partners, and beneficiaries) working with the LGBTQI movement. In total; 289 individuals participated in this qualitative survey. Twenty-six (26%) of these participants were independent activists, 4% were representatives of financial and technical partners working in the region, and 70% were from LGBTQI organizations, groups, networks, or consortia.

As part of the quantitative approach, an online survey for organizations was made available solely for organizations. As a result, 166 members of organizations or groups from the nine focal ISDAO countries expressed their priorities and specific needs. Thus, the data collected in groups of two (or three in the case of Nigeria) in these nine countries was compiled and analyzed by a team of consultants before being presented for discussion and validation during a three-day workshop held in Abidjan from March 11 to 13, 2022.

1.3 Limitations

- ISDAO is active in nine of the many more West African countries. Therefore, the results of this survey do not adequately capture the realities across the subregion, although generally similar

in nature. Due to Covid-19 pandemic-related travel restrictions, covering all geographies all nine countries was not feasible. The survey was mainly limited to urban areas even if it breaks new ground by giving a more substantial coverage of semi-urban and rural areas, such as the case of Liberia. Furthermore, given how sensitive LGBTQI issues are in the sub-region, and considering some countries' security and political contexts, the data collection method favored snowballing (using interviewers' personal networks), which undoubtedly excluded profiles that were unknown to the interviewers but that are no less important. In fact, even though the survey was intended to be as representative and inclusive as possible, very little information could very little information could be collected on certain specific groups, such as intersex organizing, which is currently not very visible or well known.



2. Evolving Contexts in West Africa: Continuity and Change

2.1 Legal context

Although all the countries covered in this study have adopted international and regional human rights frameworks that guarantee respect and protection for LGBTQI people¹, there is a tendency to restrict citizen expression and adopt more stringent legislation. While the situation has deteriorated in some contexts, there have been slight improvements in others.

From a legal standpoint, Ghana, Liberia, and Senegal have drafted and introduced bills into their respective parliaments aimed at tightening already repressive criminal justice frameworks. In Ghana, the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill was submitted to Parliament in 2021. In addition to criminalizing same-sex sexual activity, the bill intends to punish any person or organization that spreads positive messages about the LGBTQI community as well as any attempt to provide financial support to an LGBTQI organization. It also plans to institutionalize gender reassignment surgery at birth and hormone therapy for intersex people, as well as conversion therapy for LGBTQ people. Finally, this bill is intended to be unassailable because it plans to make any attempt to change it illegal once it is passed. Parliamentarians in Liberia and Senegal have also introduced bills to increase the penalties for same-sex sexual acts. While the Senegalese attempt by the collective "And Sann Jikko Yi" and its leader have failed, the same cannot be said of Liberia or Ghana, where proceedings are still underway. In all

cases, these attempts to change the legal framework have the effect of fueling tensions, promoting hate speech, as well as exacerbating the marginalization of LGBTQI people.

As part of the war on terror in countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria, some identity theft laws are routinely used against trans people and, by extension, the community as a result of increased controls and widespread surveillance of communications and travel.

To mitigate this bleak picture, however, there are legal provisions aimed at protecting LGBTQI people - both directly and indirectly. This is the case in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Burkina Faso, which adopted decrees in 2017 and 2020, respectively, ensuring that human rights activists are protected from harm. Such protections explicitly extend to LGBTQI human rights defenders, with the exception of Mali where such protection is deemed illegal. Indirectly, in Ghana, the Parliament has approved a maximum three-year prison sentence for discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS. This follows the passage of a bill by the House of Representatives, sponsored by the Ghana AIDS Commission. LGBTQI activists working on health and HIV issues have the opportunity to use this legislation if necessary.

¹ These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

2.2 Socio-political context

Anti-LGBTQI rhetoric is used as a political tool in all the countries covered by this survey. One could even speak of the institutionalization of an "anti-gender" movement due to the emergence of organized actors and the multiplication of actions aimed at tracking down, punishing and silencing any discourse promoting respect for LGBTQI human rights. In Senegal, the collective "And Samm Jikko Yi", which instigated the bill to tighten existing sanctions, organized a protest, and had a petition signed by many religious and traditional leaders. In Ghana, where the bill was introduced in the Parliament, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo and the Minister of Gender², Children and Social Welfare have made harsh and condemnatory remarks about LGBTQI people. The President has stated that same-sex marriage would not be legalized under his tenure, while Minister Adwoa Sarfo declared that the law was clear and that she would abide by it. In Burkina Faso, a former Minister in charge of women's affairs and gender publicly lashed out at trans women via social and mass media, prompting a wave of vicious comments and inciting violence across these platforms. A trans activist in Senegal confirmed this instrumentalization: "We have seen that anti-LGBT struggle has become a political argument. Many use this as an argument to convince voters by accusing the current government of being our ally."

The overall insecurity and instability in some of these countries is fueling violence against LGBTQI people. Trans and non-binary people with more assertive gender expression are most at risk of these acts of violence. Such violence, magnified by the media and spurred on by religious leaders, takes form in a variety of ways. In addition to being denounced in the media, some organizations have seen their premises ransacked, activists have been detained

(as was the case in Ghana in May 2021) and many people have been forced to live in hiding: "To live our sexuality and be safe from homophobic violence, we are obliged to live very secret lives" (respondent from Benin). Family rejection is the major factor of exclusion for LGBTQI people and the consequences are long-lasting: homelessness, dropping out of school, difficulties in accessing employment, mental health issues, various addictions, etc.

The Covid 19 pandemic has also exacerbated this widespread social exclusion. Where they are not being blamed for causing the pandemic (divine punishment) on account of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and/or sexual characteristics, LGBTQI people in some countries are being accused of attracting terrorists who wish to punish them for their alleged collusion with the West.

3. Evolution of the movement since 2016: new structures, new issues, same challenges?

Being aware of the injustices that affect them and the need to change the political and legal environment or at least improve the daily lives of the hundreds of thousands of people whose gender identity and sexual orientation are severely repressed, social justice initiatives for LGBTQI people have gathered momentum over the past six years. The sudden increase in the number of organizations has thus allowed various subgroups such as trans people, and at a still embryonic stage, intersex people to enjoy greater visibility. The 2016 report highlighted the male hegemony and dominance of the HIV/AIDS agenda in the otherwise MSM-focused responses, while also acknowledging the emergence and institutionalization of community associations co-founded and led by LBQ and/or trans women. In 2022, 166 organizations participated in this survey compared to 50 in 2016. Among these 166 organizations, mainstream LGBTQI groups remain the majority (25). Nevertheless, there are now almost as many LBQ organizations (15) as there are GBT organizations (13) or trans organizations (16). Nowadays, there are also intersex organizations (2), as well as a regional consortium of independent activists.

Such strong momentum can be explained by a growing awareness of the importance of organizing as a collective, group, or network to give a voice to marginalized groups, including those within the movement coupled with an increased presence of donors and technical assistance providers. With regard to raising awareness, the multiplication of regional meeting fora such as the bi-annual QAYN activist schools, the Changing Faces-Changing Spaces (CFCS) conference also held bi-annually by

UHAI-EASHRI, and other international meeting spaces have greatly contributed to strengthening LBQ women's leadership capacities in West Africa. In addition to these learning, meeting, and sharing spaces, new initiatives such as the PRIDE program (Partnership for Human Rights, Inclusion, Diversity and Equality) funded by the Dutch government through COC Nederland, as well as the first round of funding from ISDAO, have helped emerging community organizations to better organize and own their growth. We can also note the presence of international organizations that have bolstered donor and organizational efforts in the sub-region. For example, ÉGIDES (Alliance internationale francophone pour l'égalité et les diversités) and other partners such as ASTRAEA, Urgent Action Fund - Africa (UAF-A), FRIDA, etc., undoubtedly play a key role in structuring community mobilization.

This grassroots engagement has not only grown in scale by spreading beyond the capital cities and major urban centers but has also seen its focus broaden to include issues pertaining to the intersex community, age, generational inclusion, faith and spirituality, and even digital outreach. In Ghana and Nigeria, there are now intersex organizations such as Intersex Ghana (established in 2019) or Dynamic Initiative for Health Care & Human Rights (DIHHR) and Intersex Nigeria. In 2020, a Ghanaian filmmaker produced a short film on intersex¹.

Organizations such as One Love Sister and Glorious Interfaith Initiative in Ghana, or Levites Initiative for Freedom in Nigeria were founded by Muslim and

² At the time of data collection. At the time of publication of this report, this person no longer holds this position.

¹ To know more, refer to the original report

Christian activists to reconcile notions of faith and spirituality with those of sexual orientation and/or gender identity, to challenge repressive discourse based on religion, and to promote dialogue on gender-based violence within religious communities.

We are also noticing a more effective approach to age-related issues. This is the case with Big Mama in Togo, which focuses on older LGBT people, and African Queer Youth, which focuses on LGBT youth. Although the latter is based in Nigeria, its activities extend across the continent. Finally, some groups have opted to organize exclusively online. This is the case of Emma L'infos, both a collective and a digital media that produces engaged digital content (podcasts, interviews, news, lexicons, poetry, etc.) with and for the Francophone West African and Cameroonian LBTQ community. Almost all of the organizations that participated in this study use digital platforms to communicate about their activities, share their experiences, conduct support campaigns and build a virtual community.

Far from being static, organizing has been increasingly taking the form of regional and national networks. The study identified a total of nine networks including three at the regional level: the West African Trans Forum (WATF), the Interfaith Network for Diversity in West Africa (IDNOWA) and PI7, the LBQ women's network.

Beyond organizations and networks, the LGBTQI landscape has also been enhanced with the presence of independent activists who, while not affiliated with specific associations, contribute to the movement in a variety of ways, whether it be in the form of unpaid or paid expertise, material, psychological or financial support, etc. Nowadays, there is even a regional consortium of independent activists. While all the organizations have to deal with a hostile and sometimes dangerous environment, their working and development conditions depend on other factors such as the national context, organizational and governance challenges, and the lack of human, technical, and financial resources.

4. Multi-faceted challenges

The challenges discussed in this report affect both LGBTQI individuals and LGBTQI organizations and activists. At the individual level, members of the LGBTQI community who participated in this study reported numerous cases of violence and human rights abuses, often at the hands of institutional actors such as the police and the gendarmerie: "In Mali, for example, [out of] 16535 cases of verbal and physical violence recorded from 2019 to 2020, 95% [of victims refused] to go to the police or justice" (Activist from Mali). They also mentioned the difficulties in accessing basic or emergency social services that are often available in HIV/AIDS programs, the lack of mental health services, the absence of shelters and care mechanisms for survivors of violence, and the absence or the inadequacy of economic empowerment programs given the precariousness of the informal sector in which the majority of people live. Finally, they share difficulties encountered in accessing endocrinologists, hormones, and gender-affirming care for trans people, as well as the lack of specific programs for younger (under 18) or conversely older (over 50) groups. At the collective or organizational level, the challenges are external and internal.

4.1 Challenges related to the legal, social and political environment

The current social, security, and political environment has fostered a climate of fear that is characteristic of most LGBTQI people's lives: fear of family rejection, fear of losing one's job, fear of not being able to complete one's education, fear of having to report assaults, fear of going to public health centers, etc.

In Liberia, a former soldier lured, kidnapped, and assaulted 27 LGBTQI people using the Internet, resulting in the death of two of his victims. Formally charged with attempted murder and murder, he was later released on bail, leaving members of the community in a state of constant anguish.

It is because of this environment that some organizations are not able to legally register as LGBTQI associations. For those organizations that are registered, they resort to using various ruses to circumvent these restrictions and not explicitly mention the type of populations they serve. Sometimes, simply gathering can present challenges, and may even lead to imprisonment, as was the case in the city of Ho, Ghana, in 2021, where 21 activists were arrested during a workshop, and detained for several weeks

4.2 Organizational and Governance Challenges

The 2016 report stressed the lack of organizational capacity among the organizations and groups surveyed, raising an issue of governance and leadership. As of 2021, while the organizations have matured and seem to be better structured at least on a formal level (existence of statutes and documents organizing membership, organizational processes, etc.), decision-making power remains in the hands of a select few, thus posing a problem of leadership and power sharing. In some spaces, it is often the same leaders who are present, despite the growing number of actors. This suggests a lack of transmission, transition, and/or renewal

mechanisms at the grassroots level. This situation is certainly understandable given the limited employment opportunities in the sub-region. However, it undoubtedly undermines the movement and raises the question of whether it is sustainable. Furthermore, the proliferation of organizations also comes with a scramble for funding, which in some instances necessarily pits one group against another. Within mainstream groups, leadership positions are still predominantly held by cisgender men

4.3 Technical and Financial Challenges

On the technical level, the challenges are many, starting with the assessment of technical support needs. Most technical support provided to LGBTQI organizations and groups in the sub-region is rarely based on a real capacity and needs assessment. Other challenges include inadequate human resources, lack of tools, services, and safety plans for staff, and lack of office space. In most cases, staff are volunteers and are paid very little, and when they are paid, it is sometimes contingent on the duration of the project. The ability to recruit and retain qualified staff is limited. This affects important programmatic areas such as advocacy due to a lack of resources and the skills to brainstorm, develop and implement advocacy initiatives. In fact, there is a great need for advocacy in the areas of data production, support for the development of relevant and high-impact reports, and participation in advocacy fora at the national, regional, and international levels. Advocacy opportunities do however exist, yet remain unknown and untapped precisely because of the organizational limitations of these associations. These weaknesses also explain the difficulties in mobilizing resources outside of calls for projects. There are however other ways of mobilizing resources but they too are little known and little utilized, a problem that would not arise if there were, for instance, a regional hub of experts devoted to capacity building of the movement's actors. Several independent activists

have stated that they are not being given sufficient recognition for their important contributions. Internally, few organizations have the capacity to capitalize on what they have learned and to transfer their skills. This sometimes weakens the organization when trained personnel leave. Lastly, knowledge creation is highly insufficient. When this knowledge is available, it is poorly disseminated and/or poorly appropriated. In this regard, transferable and exploitable technical resources exist. Nevertheless, they are produced in English and their use raises the question of accessibility for countries whose main working language is French.

From a financial standpoint, even though the nature of partners has diversified, and their number doubled sometimes tripled in some places, access to information on funding opportunities remains limited (and competitive), and is [further] exacerbated by language barriers, especially with regard to calls for proposals formulated in English. Application processes are often complex and tedious (registration of the organization, availability of a strategic plan, office, audit reports, etc.). As a result, some countries and groups remain underfunded. Bolstered by increased political awareness and new funding opportunities, organizations or collectives led by LBQ women or trans people have emerged, needs have been identified and priorities have become clearer. However, funding remains insufficient, uneven and sometimes difficult to access for groups serving similar target groups and operating in the same cities. The challenge is therefore to innovate programming. However, HIV/AIDS remains a major area of interest, which undoubtedly correlates to funding availability for HIV/AIDS. When compared to the needs, resources are clearly insufficient, which creates a competitive climate between organizations operating in the same country. It is not uncommon for networks vying for funding that other network members have applied for, which is contradictory. For this activist from Liberia: "The movement is not homogeneous, there are systems, competing priorities, and there are conflicts that affect solidarity

and interpersonal dynamics, especially when funds are scarce. The priority is to know what I can secure for my organization".

Several organizations thus remain dependent on one-off foreign grants, often earmarked, and therefore do not have the financial stability that would allow them to evolve into autonomous and sustainable institutions. There is no (or very little) core funding or multi-year funding (or organizations are unaware of the existence of such funding), which makes it difficult to cover operating costs and threatens the sustainability of activities. The majority of available funding cycles generally span one year, which is not sufficient to secure both the activities as well as the trained, skilled human resources.



5. Response Strategies

To meet these challenges, several organizations have developed strategies that range from a global and collective network approach to a micro-social approach focusing on individuals. Thus, on the technical front, capacity building activities are being developed at country level jointly between older and younger organizations. These activities also address questions of leadership, organizational development, and human rights. Some activities are coordinated at a network level and are aimed at external players such as police officers, journalists, health personnel, and civil society, religious or traditional leaders in order to sensitize them to issues of human rights and to enable them to better understand the issues plaguing the community. For example, an organization in Burkina Faso has identified focal points in some police stations and gendarmerie posts to facilitate interventions and specifically handle complaints from LGBTQ people. In Liberia, one organization has enrolled members who are current or former police officers, and can therefore, provide training to law enforcement as well as technical and legal assistance to members of the community.

Most organizations are now community-led and therefore, work towards serving their own interests, unlike in the early years of organizing when they had to act under the umbrella of larger, better structured mainstream organizations that were better integrated into international networks. Today, LGBTQI organizations develop their own projects suited to their needs and seek the funding to implement them. They often use a global approach to action that fits perfectly into mainstream themes while specifically addressing issues of gender-based violence, sexual violence, feminism, human rights, etc. This not only

builds their expertise and increases their visibility on issues that concern them, while also creating jobs for community members.

Community members have spoken of self-censorship techniques (being careful about what they post on social media, the way they dress, etc.) as a collective and individual survival strategy [in what can be a hostile context]: "I always say and repeat that our safety depends on us and our behavior with respect to our surroundings and the society [we live in]..." - (Respondent BF). While questionable, this approach, places the burden for attacks on violence survivors and not on those [actually] responsible for the attacks. It also contributes to depoliticizing the debate and reducing it to a mere issue of clothing choice. This amounts to shifting what the real focus of the issue at heart should be; that is the [needed] transformation of the social, legal and political environment conducive into one that upholds basic and fundamental human rights.

6. New priorities

Among the priorities identified in the 2016 report, six major themes had emerged : economic empowerment, safety and security, mental health, human rights, capacity building, and advocacy. The 2022 study highlights similar priorities with a few new ones, however.

At the collective and organizational level, the need for capacity building or skills training remains high and centers around organizational development, resource mobilization support, and economic empowerment. Participants once again identified advocacy as a priority theme, expressing the wish to participate and strategically occupy relevant advocacy spaces as well as compile and use data for advocacy purposes. It is also important to support awareness and advocacy efforts that use art, culture, and the media, as means of expression currently of little interest to donors. Community safety is a concern that is more pressing than ever and that must be addressed through specific programs that emphasize and teach safety and security practices (physical, psychological, online/digital) for all community subgroups. The defense of human rights remains a major challenge, but one that is only possible with capacity building in advocacy and gender-based violence. The question of organizations' financial autonomy is a cross-cutting priority that concerns both community members and organizations. For the former, it comes down to designing training that facilitates access to the job market or to entrepreneurship opportunities, and for the latter, it implies access to core funding. Such funding should ensure the functioning of organizations outside of the often-ad hoc project cycles.

On a more individual level, health remains an

important priority. Nevertheless, LBQ women's reproductive health, trans-specific health services, mental health and wellness will also need to be considered. The desire to become a parent (procreation, adoption, etc.) is now being specifically addressed within LBQ communities and is receiving much needed attention. Mental health issues [also] seem to be less taboo than in the past. However, there are still no programs dedicated to the question. Services available at this time are limited to access to a psychologist, often volunteering, for a few hours a week. The impact of the COVID 19 epidemic has shown the importance of mental health support for LGBTQI people. Communities now want to prioritize counseling, including talk therapy, monitoring, and mitigation of negative consequences related to drug addiction.

Interventions focusing on LBQ women, trans and intersex people are also among the new priority themes. Similarly to LBQ women, trans people are gradually gaining visibility in the nine countries covered by this study. The movement is growing, and members of these communities deserve more attention, including within existing LGBTQ+ organizations and networks. Developing concrete and appropriate responses to trans people means considering gender-affirming care needs such as hormone therapy, which is currently difficult to access. In all countries, the issues of self-medication and lack of endocrinological care for trans people on hormone therapy have been raised as a pressing health issue.



7. Geographic and thematic expansion of sources of technical and financial support

Current donors supporting the work of LGBTQI groups and activists in the region primarily include international NGOs and philanthropic organizations, as well as multinational agencies, foundations, and diplomatic missions. In 2016, only one Africa-based donor (Urgent Action Fund - Africa) was working in the sub-region. Almost all the donors funding LGBTQI associations and organizations were therefore outside the region, and the vast majority only funded HIV/AIDS-related projects as a priority. At the end of this mapping exercise, we can see that the number of donors present in the region today has increased, and the areas covered have also evolved, even if funding for HIV/AIDS still largely dominates.

Regional partners that occasionally provide technical assistance include ISDAO, Urgent Action Fund - Africa (UAF-Africa), Queer African Youth Network (QAYN), African Lesbian Coalition (CAL), Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa (ISLA), Africa Gay Rights, African Queer Youth Initiative (AQYI), and African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA).

ISDAO has reshaped the funding landscape for independent organizations, groups, and even activists in the sub-region, introducing a flexible process that is sensitive to the specifics of the various contexts and to principles of transparency and accountability. Between 2019 and 2021, ISDAO saw a 35% increase in the number of grants awarded and a 33% increase in the amount of funding granted. ISDAO relies on an activist panel called AGMP (Activist Grantmaking Panel) made up of grassroots activists whose role is to review grant applications and collectively decide which applications should be funded. This same system has been adopted in Burkina Faso and Nigeria as part of the Love Alliance

initiative launched in 2021¹. ISDAO is also the only funder to provide funding to independent activists through the ASANKA Fund for Creative Initiatives. QAYN and CAL are two regional organizations whose contributions in terms of technical capacity building are particularly significant. Since 2012, QAYN has been running an activist school that convenes every two years, with the stated goal of strengthening queer feminist leadership and expertise in the sub-region. Through its WACA (West And Central Africa) program, CAL is committed to training LBQ women in community-based research and data production as tools for social change. ISLA coordinates a pool of experienced lawyers who provide training in women's and LGBTQI advocacy. In West Africa, ISLA promotes and supports the legal empowerment of lawyers seeking to work with the feminist and LGBTQI movements but who lack the skills and know-how to do so.

Among the top international donors and technical partners are COC Netherlands, particularly valued for its flexibility and openness, or the International Trans Fund (ITF), which similarly to ISDAO, relies on a grantmaking activist panel. Other technical partners and donors are only present in French-speaking countries. Such is the case of ÉGIDES, the International Francophone Alliance for Equality and Diversity, the Global Alliance of Communities for Health and Rights (GACS)/Coalition Plus, the Fondation de France, SIDACTION, Solidarité Sida and the French government's 5% Initiative. Except

¹ The Love Alliance Initiative is a 5-year project whose overall goal is to ensure the health and empowerment of communities of LGBTQI people, sex workers, and people who use drugs (PWUD), through a more inclusive and people-centered approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights. The project targets Burkina Faso and Nigeria in West Africa

for ÉGIDES, however, all of these Francophone donors focus primarily on HIV/AIDS-related programs, although in some cases they may support organizational development and capacity building (as does SIDACTION, a French association). ÉGIDES, through the new Charlot Jeudy Fund, specializes in capacity building and knowledge sharing. For instance, it facilitated collaboration on an advocacy project between the University of Montreal with PI-7, a platform that brings together LBQ organizations in West Africa and Cameroon.

Some donors also intervene in situations emergency, safety and security. This is the case of Urgent Action Fund-Africa, Frontline Defenders, Frontline AIDS or Dignity Fund. Synergia- Initiative for Human Rights, an international organization that is part of the Dignity Consortium, works with local and regional groups/organizations to develop security strategies that not only mitigate risk, but also provide rapid responses to unforeseen crises.

Some LGBTQI organizations receive international grants as sub-recipients of larger funding from, for example, the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, or U.S. funding such as USAID or PEPFAR. Some organizations have also received funding from diplomatic missions such as the United States, the Netherlands, or Sweden. However, given the political context and available funding, few diplomatic missions communicate openly about these funding opportunities.





8. Recommendations

Recommendations from the field and data analysis are directed at donors, TFPs, and LGBTQI organizations.

Thus, to donors, as it pertains to their funding mechanisms, it is recommended they foster community inclusion and work towards greater flexibility particularly by easing access conditions for younger organizations. It is also recommended that they facilitate funding for emerging issues (such as mental health, arts projects, reproductive health, hormone therapy, vocational training, scholarships, etc.) and for programs that benefit less visible communities (trans, intersex, youth, seniors). Lastly, there is a need to improve access to information and participation in calls for proposals through better-suited communication strategies.

To technical and financial partners, it is recommended that they develop new programs aimed at better responding to the needs of communities, that they encourage and support the participation of groups, especially French-speaking organizations as well as emerging ones, through the introduction of information and opportunity sharing platforms. Furthermore, TFPs should contribute to the creation of a sustainable framework that would aim to : facilitate the sharing of experiences between Francophone and Anglophone groups, improve linguistic access to information and training, keep providing support to ongoing projects, and help integrate independent activists.

As to LGBTQI organizations, it is recommended they: be more innovative in program design and implementation, broaden the scope of action to include mental health and wellness issues, to promote literacy, training, integration and economic

empowerment projects, and develop programs specific to each community subgroup so as not to face the same recurring issues over and over. It is also recommended that organizations (especially Francophone ones) take more active involvement in regional and international advocacy spaces, develop tools to better communicate, better understand community needs, and work at better conflict management. Internal power struggles weaken organizations and therefore, weaken the movement. Deconstructing power dynamics in favor of balanced, more inclusive and collective leadership, strengthening mechanisms to safeguard and protect the institutional memory of organizations, as well as facilitating frameworks for collaboration and intergenerational sharing were also some of the recommendations made in the report.



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