

MURRIA

ACCOUNTABILITY & THE LGBTQI MOVEMENT IN WEST AFRICA



Myria is a dedicated space created by Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest (ISDAO) for conversation and reflection, open to LGBTQI persons, LGBTQI activists, and allies, on a range of topics relating to the community and the movement in West Africa. This space is dedicated to a plurality and diversity of voices, experiences, and perspectives.

Issue 2: Accountability and the LGBTQI Movement in West Africa

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The logo for MURIA is composed of six stylized, rounded letters. The letters are filled with a gradient of colors: orange, purple, and light purple. The 'M' is orange and purple, the 'U' is orange and purple, the 'R' is orange and purple, the 'I' is purple, and the 'A' is orange and purple. The background is a repeating pattern of the word 'MURIA' in a light grey, semi-transparent font, with various geometric shapes and symbols interspersed between the letters.

MURIA

**ACCOUNTABILITY & THE LGBTQI
MOVEMENT IN WEST AFRICA**

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

Orneill Latiyah (She/Her) is a young transgender feminist activist who defines herself today as a Human Rights Defender for transgender communities. Because of her passion for Human Rights and Social Justice, she founded 'Association Transgenres et Droits' in 2017, an association based in Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire. Her commitment to the legal recognition of transgender people has led her to join various working groups and initiatives such as the African Queer Youth Initiative where she serves as Board President, GATE (Global Action for Trans Equality) where she serves as Board Secretary and many others, with the aim of effectively participating in efforts to raise the profile of West African trans activism, but above all to contribute to the building of the global movement.

Marian Nwaokolo (She/Her, They/Them) is a radical lesbian feminist and activist junkie who is passionate about social change. She loves knowledge and community. When not working, she enjoys reading, writing, and tending to her plants. Marian lives by Emma Lazarus's quote that says "None is free until all are free".

Sheba (She/Her) is a community organizer and a French-speaking queer activist with many years of experience on LGBTIQ rights issues. She is interested in community development and the production of experiential knowledge based on the lived experience of communities. An important part of her work is based on resource production, supporting LGBTIQ+ communities, and promoting collective intelligence and advocacy.

Josh O. Victor (He/Him) is a multi-disciplinary creative and tech enthusiast who seeks to create meaningful experiences that make for a better and more equal world. He is also a creative entrepreneur and human rights activist whose work navigates socio-cultural discourse and how it can be used as a vehicle for change. When he is not telling stories, he's figuring out his night job - how to save the world.

Eric Yameogo (He/him) is an independent LGBTQI activist from Burkina Faso. He started his activism in 2008 as a Peer Educator at AAS (An organization fighting against HIV). He has participated in numerous training sessions and meetings on human rights, activism in Africa, and sexual and reproductive health. He brings his expertise to human rights organizations through consultation and support.

Justin Chidozie (He/Him/Justin) is a queer rights activist and the executive director of CHEVS, a youth-led organization advancing social justice for queer Africans. A life-long advocate for meaningful youth engagement. Justin believes young activists' political power can lead us all to freedom.

Marie-Jo (She/Her) is a lawyer and project manager. As an LBQ feminist activist, she advocates for LBQ women's rights and equality with the Initiative Tilé, where she holds the position of Vice President and Programme Officer.

Ehikioya Ataman (He/Him) is a human rights activist working at the intersection of programs that promote equality, social inclusion, and social justice for marginalized groups. Ehikioya is motivated by the ideals of human rights protection, promotions, and the benefit it adds to society. Ehikioya is passionate about community development and loves to champion advocacy that enables every human person to realize their full potential and lead a life true to their sense of identity.



EDITORIAL NOTE

ACCOUNTABILITY: WE CANNOT DEMAND CHANGE THAT WE DO NOT EMBODY!

When we were thinking about the theme for this issue of Myria, several ideas were proposed, but the theme of Accountability was the one that came up the most. At that very moment, many voices expressed the lack of accountability within the movement and wanted to reflect/ have a conversation around such a complex topic.

When we launched the call for contributions around this theme, several people reached out to us to find out how they could contribute without risk (risk of losing their jobs in organizations, risk of not being invited to conversation tables, risk of being silenced). They were afraid that what they were going to write about would cause tensions, or even "sanctions" because many "gatekeepers" of the LGBTQI movement would feel concerned and challenged by their writing. We suggested that they write and publish under a pseudonym. However, many of those people have refrained from contributing because they felt that what they were going to write was clear enough that they would be identified as the author even if their essay was published anonymously.

This has made us think and reflect, and become even more aware of the complexity of this issue in our movement:

How did we come to replicate in our midst the system that has long sidelined us by introducing exactly the same problematic elements that we had identified and condemned? At what point did we become afraid to ask for accountability for the work we do every day? At what point did activists become so afraid to speak out publicly because they were going to be sanctioned and prevented from accessing spaces to speak? What is the responsibility of donors in holding movement actors accountable and in this status quo?

In this issue of Myria, we will not have the answers to all of these questions. However, we have received a number of bold essays that address these questions with deep reflections on accountability and the power dynamics that interact in the accountability process.

Indeed, **Marian Nwaokolo** reflects on self-accountability as a political and primary act for building collective accountability within the movement, through feminist principles and approaches. **Marie-Jo** articulates the reflection on how organizations feel more accountable to funders than to the communities they are fundraising for, and how this can be problematic. And **Justin Chidozie** particularly raises the problem of the lack of accountability in the movement. As a solution, he suggests self-regulation as an essential tool, cooperation between different organizations to establish norms and standards of accountability among peers. These are all thought-provoking articles that challenge us as an LGBTQI movement (community activists and funders) to *embody the change we demand* in terms of accountability, as **Sheba** writes.

For us, this issue comes at a crucial time as an alert when several leaders of our movement are publicly denounced with evidence of having lacked transparency and honesty in the management of the resources of the group/organization they have led.

Enjoy reading this issue of Myria.

Stéphane Simporté,
Director of Communications and
Knowledge Management



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LEVERAGING TRAUMA FOR IMPACT

FOR LINGUISTIC JUSTICE!

Orneill Latiyah — Côte d'Ivoire





When we look at history, we see that LGBTQI rights movements around the world have developed in different ways. Generally speaking, we see a strong activism among Anglophones that imposes itself and takes up space without asking permission. These activists seem to be more reactive, in action, protesting more and demanding more. As for what we see in Francophone Africa, the movement seems stifled and struggles to capitalize on its developmental actions. Could this be because francophone people are portrayed stereotypically as much more passive, more inclined to reflection, and developing endless strategies? This being said, a retrospection is necessary.

For more than a decade, the stereotype has been on the decline. We are witnessing the emergence of a new activism, one that is more assertive, stronger, and more resilient, despite the difficult and sometimes quite hostile contexts for LGBTQI issues. More and more, we are talking about queer youth leadership and therefore about developing youth leaders to take ownership of the global movement. I am pausing here to ask myself, based on my experience, which youth are talking about developing as leaders? One observation is obvious; it is difficult and sometimes almost impossible for French-speaking queer youth in Africa, and more specifically in West Africa, to enter these spaces that want to promote the leadership of these young people, because of language barriers.

I am lucky, and I consider it lucky, to be able to enter these spaces because I speak English. This issue of representation also impacts the Portuguese-speaking, Arabic-speaking, and German-speaking movements, and on and on. Is the global LGBTQI rights movement talking about inclusion without actually practicing it? This seems to be the reality, and it also seems to be an imposition of powerful LGBTQI major groups through their partnerships and positions in the global LGBTQI rights movement.

I asked this question during a conversation: "Imagine for a moment a space where there were no English language interpreters but English-speaking activists were invited. What would be the reaction?" There would be a demand to bridge that language gap. However, in the opposite case, this is still not the case.

The issue of accountability in our movement is therefore about linguistic justice. It is unacceptable that in order to enter a space that claims to promote queer youth leadership, francophone queer people in West Africa must be able to speak a language that is not our own and that does not reflect our experiences.

Also, accountability in this movement will materialize when large LGBTQI groups that have power and influence accept that the movement contains different experiences, constructs, and languages. When we talk about youth leadership development, the question to ask is who is the door open to and who is left behind?



There is also a severe lack of documentation that would allow us to refer to other sources in our activism than those from the Anglophone movement. And when I speak of linguistic justice, I am also referring to the documentation of our commitments, actions, and our way of doing activism. We take on some frustrations that should not exist in a movement where everyone has a place, or at least should have a place.

Our accountability as activists and people committed to the promotion of LGBTQI people's rights in this global movement is no longer the search for inclusion in spaces where, in most cases, we are only acting as a presence; but rather the creation of an environment favorable to the validation of our languages through literary productions that clearly demonstrate the inclusion and consideration of the existing specificities in this movement on the linguistic aspect. We need more actions than strategies!



PRACTICING SELF- ACCOUNTABILITY

Marian Nwaokolo — Nigeria





Social accountability reflects self-accountability, even though often when we speak of ethical responsibility, it is in terms of holding public officials and corporations to certain values and standards. Accountability is treated like an elusive political concept solely for public spaces and linked to policies, ethics codes, and foundational documents, rather than a practice that should be incorporated into every activity performed as we go about the business of day-to-day living. In a nutshell, every person should live with the obligation of giving an account to themselves, the individuals, and the groups they are affiliated with.

But before we go any further, what is self-accountability for activists in the movement?

Simply put, it is committing to "calling yourself out". It is that debiasing strategy that helps you confront your prejudices so that you go beyond drafting diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) policies for political benefits and funding opportunities, to actually being inclusive in your everyday life. This means going beyond the ego to recognize that your accountability is partial and concentrated on organizational appearance and funders' expectations and/or perception; that your privileges even as a minority person may harm decision-making processes and the community you serve. It means understanding when to speak and when to decenter yourself and be silent; when to negotiate and when to shatter the table. It means learning not to speak over others when issues affecting them are being discussed or prioritized.

We've all seen what a lack of self-accountability leads to.

I was once invited to participate in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) where the organizer was groping the young men who were also invited. One may ask why they did not speak up even though they were noticeably uncomfortable with the "jokes". But the unspoken formal and informal power the organizer wielded in that space may have suppressed allegations and promoted harassment, as the organizer leads a reputable LGBTQI+ organization that firmly stands against sexual and gender-based violence.

An organization may therefore pump resources into SGBV campaigns, up-to-date harassment policies, and standard management strategies, but a leader who practices no self-accountability leaves the door wide open to scandals befalling the organization, leading to the community they serve suffering in big and small ways. Furthermore, a lack of self-accountability is a surefire way to hinder inclusion. Even within marginalized communities, there are sub-groups (LBQ women, trans and intersex persons, to name a few) that are further marginalized. While many organizations are gradually evolving their work scope to reflect the needs of these sub-groups, more remains to be done.



A lack of accountability is expensive. And yet, practicing accountability as an individual is a panacea to enhancing performance in organizations and movements since it can even make DEI policies a walk in the park because we then move from mere theories to practice.

One way we can practice self-accountability is by going beyond social media activism. While social media activism is great and has galvanized political and social engagements, the downfall of it is that it has placed people on a pedestal and promoted superficial impressions and performative acts.

Slacktivism makes it easy to key into inappropriate low-effort initiatives, and with the availability of social media platforms, performative accountability has become quite accessible. There is the risk of focusing more on 'how accountability matters to us' than being accountable in the real sense of the word. Values and advocacy efforts can be staged and exaggerated. Digitized efforts now mean that people can secure funding, and present narratives and reports without doing the work, putting further strain on the journey to equity and equality. More than ever, it is important to go beyond the digital age of validation to self-reflect on work conduct, values, and commitment to the movement. For instance, this self-reflection might mean journaling or being willing to receive feedback from colleagues.

One other point of note is that there are not enough resources or funding opportunities for LGBTQI+ organizing in West Africa. This has led to competitiveness and hostility within the movement, thus widening the gaps in communication and information and/or opportunity sharing.

The consequence of this is that we've seen a proliferation of groups and organizations with the results being an unsteady flow of funds, discontinuation of projects and programs, sustainability challenges, and continued disenfranchisement of further marginalized persons within marginalized groups.



Yet, collective power and participation contribute to integrating sustainability principles in an effective way to ensure long-term impact. They also greatly contribute to transparency and accountability by mobilizing diverse actors in the movement for a co-owned decision-making process for the benefit of individual activists and the entire movement. This creates a win-win situation and is of tremendous benefit to the movement. For starters, we have a movement that becomes impact-oriented if, of course, the issue of power dynamics is sorted.

Power dynamics tilted toward funders limits the commitments of grantees to social issues as efforts become target-oriented. A shift in power is of utmost importance otherwise proposal application and reporting processes will continue to be subtle coercive strategies that threaten the autonomy of an organization and justify target-oriented actions. A redress of power dynamics in the field of philanthropy will need to transcend policing organizations and the way funds are utilized to focus on a humility that seeks to shed light on how power and influence put a barrier between funders, grantees, and communities; and thereby and provide honest, deliberate actions to countering those barriers. One way might lie in the decolonization of power and collaboration with activists. In this way, the decision-making process is diversified, resources are properly allocated, and all parties are up to date in their learnings. It will also be important to center people being held accountable to the organization's culture: its vision, values, mission, objectives, purpose, and strategies, as well as the team itself.

Social change is real business with equality being the goal sought after. Efforts should be purposefully made to give a political voice to those otherwise disenfranchised in the movement. There must be a constant reflection and focus on the ways that diverse identities are integral to the achievement of goals, otherwise there lies the way to patriarchy. Leaders in the movement need to be humble and open to criticism, be aware of and question their power and privileges, and take responsibility for their actions and any harm they may have caused. Beneficiaries' requests for justification should not be perceived as defamation and/or responded to with silence, reverse victimhood, denial, and repression, but rather should be seen as opportunities for feedback mechanisms. Movement leaders need to strategically include community members in the design of internal and external accountability mechanisms, otherwise, younger activists and nascent organizations feel rudderless and lost.

In this practice of humility, accountability, alignment and focus should be implemented with cultural infrastructure in place in order to set clear expectations for leaders. Without a clear definition of what the organizations and groups expect from leadership, activists in leadership roles will not have any leadership model to be held accountable to. Expectations regarding workflows, processes, and performance must also be set for team members so that each staff member feels accountable to others. When this happens, the organization is more likely to meet deadlines and funders' expectations but also hold funders and other stakeholders to standards of transparency, participation,

inclusion, and fairness, and contribute better results to the movement. Setting transparent expectations for team accountability will lead to high performance.

Of course, we are fallible human beings, and issues around accountability will inevitably come up in an organization despite all the prevention mechanisms put in place. In those instances, rather than scapegoating one person, all concerned stakeholders (funders, board members, members of staff, and directors) must come together and examine their individual and collective roles in what may have gone wrong.

Fighting the enemy of social change that is the patriarchy means that feminist principles and approaches should be strategically incorporated into practice to ensure that power is shared, and accountability statements are collectively drafted and incorporated into practice. It will ensure that people are not bullied, silenced, or dissatisfied with the outcomes of accountability mechanisms.

In conclusion, self-accountability is paramount to collective accountability and cannot exist as theories and thought pieces, but rather as ethical obligations in our everyday lives that reflect who we are even when no one is watching.



WE CANNOT DEMAND CHANGE THAT WE DO NOT EMBODY!

Sheba — Togo



WDPITA



As I began to put words to this essay, several questions came directly to my mind: what is being accountable? Are we accountable? And if we are, how representative is this of the realities of the people we want to represent? In a basic sense, accountability is generally understood as an ability or obligation to be accountable to those who commission us for the actions we take for and on their behalf.

When asked in our organizations if we are accountable, we are quick to respond, "Of course we are! We submit regular narrative and financial reports to our partners and hold general meetings for our members!". But if our accountability is limited to that, we are retreating into elitist patterns and not encouraging transformative change, which is what most of our organizations' missions or reasons for activism are about. This is all the more astounding because as marginalized groups, we often repeat the same patterns of oppression and create frameworks of inequality.

I have attended several general meetings where more than half of the members present did not understand the narrative and financial documents presented to them. In retrospect, I must admit that at that particular moment, I was neither accountable to the communities I claimed to serve nor to myself. In that context, how representative is this exercise of the communities we claim to represent?

For me, accountability to and within a marginalized community should be year-round and not just at the close of the fiscal year in order to secure projects and funds from our partners.

So, what processes do we put in place to consult with our communities about their real needs? How intersectional are these processes? What about our members who live outside of major cities for example? What about those who don't have access to the internet or don't have the resources to contribute to processes that we often present in a very standardized way, for example, asking them to complete online surveys? The communities we represent and work with need to be able to fully participate and/or have an informed voice on the issues that affect them, and for that to happen, we need to democratize accountability and decolonize access to information.

The LGBTQI people we represent often have very little access to mechanisms for exercising control, and in doing so, have little influence over our organizations. As a result, it is very difficult for them to hold us accountable for the actions we take on their behalf. This power imbalance places great responsibility and duty of integrity on us. Strengthening our accountability is one way to restore the balance of power in our communities.

For me, this would mean applying a feminist approach to our accountability. It will be about giving space to voices that are not often heard to speak out. We will focus on intersectionality to examine and act on how our communities, at the intersection of many realities beyond sexual orientation and gender identity (educational attainment, intellectual ability, capacity, geography, etc.) are not only included in the accountability process but also have a voice that really matters.

It is a learning process that involves contextualization, collaboration, participation, inclusion, and responsiveness, but also reflexivity. What I mean by reflexivity is our ability to observe ourselves while we are in the process of being accountable to our communities, our teams, and our partners and being aware of the positioning we have, and de facto, the power inherent in that positioning. This observational posture will allow us to think differently about power sharing within the organization and in our relationships with the communities we represent. Of course, I do not pretend that this will be an easy exercise without a multitude of challenges.

I will focus here on two challenges in particular, including firstly, entrenched capacities and practices of power.

The capacities and realities of our organizations are diverse. They are disparate and changeable depending on different realities (type of organization, population served, locality, number of years in existence, available resources, competent staff, etc.), and therefore have a direct impact not only on the quality of our accountability but also on how we do it.

The second challenge is the power relations within our communities. Unfortunately, power relations and the dynamics and history of invisibilization of LGBTQI groups continue to negatively influence the quality of accountability that we must hold. Moreover, it is clear that some community leaders, deemed influential, or super activists as they are called elsewhere, are able to slip through the cracks of accountability due to despotism and/or non-participatory processes. In some of our organizations, the reality is that of the hegemony of the person in charge, reinforced by patriarchal procedures and the precarious condition that we know of for workers in community organizations.

Here we are clearly in contradiction with the feminist approach suggested above. The participatory and collaborative process is just as important as the outcome.

We can still make a difference by embodying the balance of power in our accountability practices. How we do this will raise awareness in our communities and be a legacy for generations to come.



Not claiming this is an exhaustive list, I would like to share some suggestions here on how we can improve our accountability in 4 points:



1. Transparency in the management and sharing of information;
2. Real inclusion and representation in an intersectional approach to our communities in decision-making;
3. The establishment of a real mechanism for advice, feedback, and/or complaint where communities can exercise their power to act and finally,
4. The establishment of a mechanism to assess and adjust practices.

I invite us to deconstruct our mental models of the hero leader and welcome the posture of the host leader, who is aware that they cannot represent everyone, and who therefore makes room at the table to welcome all voices in order to restore balance in the power relationships.

Dear fellow activists and community organizers, I hope that you will recognize yourself in these words, or at least that they will provoke some reflection in you since we cannot demand changes that we do not embody.



THE NEED FOR TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY

Josh O. Victor — Nigeria





WETQV

“I was already in hell. I did not see the point of hiding anymore.”

– Ryan, *Kito Diaries*, 2021

In the past decade, we have seen the LGBTQI+ movement in West Africa work slowly but steadily towards the decriminalization of same-sex relationships and the abolishment of anti-LGBTQI+ and discriminatory laws present in many West African countries. However, the accountability we demand from the state, church, culture, and other social institutions that perpetuate queer oppression must be made in tandem with accountability intra-communally. It is when we identify the instances of injustice and marginalization within the community and stand against it that we can build the strong bonds necessary to take on the larger oppressive structures that seek to undermine our right to life, liberty, and dignity. As the saying goes, *“He who comes into equity must come with clean hands.”*

It is my opinion that accountability starts with the individual. It starts with an obligation or a willingness to accept responsibility for one's actions or inaction. It is the result of individuals being willing to acknowledge the faults in a system and doing the work to rectify these faults. Significant aggregations of individual accountability come together to become accountable for the entire community. The more people are willing to do the hard work of introspection, the more

accountability takes root in the values of the communities they find themselves.

While it is difficult to create structures that support accountability in marginalized communities because the overarching structures of oppression distort the way conversations (and actions) within the community are discussed as well as how they are interpreted, it is not an impossible feat.

Before we begin to say that a group is marginalized, their marginalization must first be named before the nuances of their internal struggles come to the fore, and in the LGBTQI+ movement in West Africa, it is critical that the movement honors the intra-communal victims of discrimination, prejudice, and violence. Grooming, intimate partner violence, rape, and blackmail with the intent to Out an LGBTQI+ individual are some examples of internal challenges within the community. Although these issues are not exclusive to the queer community, it is vital to address them because until we are all free, none of us is free. For instance, when incidents that have been hushed up finally come to light, members of the community instantly feel betrayed, and homophobes and the queerphobic public immediately latch on these incidents as a stick with which to denigrate, castigate and invalidate the community's pursuit of rights.

While it is true that the queerphobic public should not be the authority that sets the terms of the conversation, their attempts at invalidation only further entrench the overarching structural issues. Instead, the community's sense of betrayal should be something that causes a pause in the current approach to these intra-communal issues, "calling out". The responses to this approach are to either ignore or throw a tantrum as to why these issues have now come to light. Because there is no form of justice within the system, most individuals in the community do not know what to do with the information. Many accept that the events that may have played out, whether it is grooming or sexual assault, are harmful but that there is nothing that can be done about it. Hence there is no reason for it to be out in public since it only fuels homophobia. Victims who speak up are now forced to withdraw and keep silent because now they don't only face backlash from the general homophobic public but also from their community. What plays out afterward is that the issues which need addressing are not addressed and everyone moves on until the next public call-out happens and then the cycle repeats itself.

In a Twitter thread published by **The Advocacy for Well-being Development**, K.C. wrote about the aftermath of a Kito Experience:

"For a month, I could not leave my apartment. Everyone's eyes held pity and an accusation. "How could he have done such a thing?" It was not seen as something terrible that had happened to me but something terrible that I had done."

Ryan, another diarist wrote:

"I was already in hell. I did not see the point of hiding anymore. So, when one of my brothers flippantly asked, "Are you a homo? Is that why you allowed yourself to be so stupid with another guy?" I responded, "Yes. Yes, I am gay."

There was silence at first, with the three of them looking at me like they thought I was just being rude. Then they took in the expression on my face and saw that I was serious. And my eldest brother reacted. He leaped up from his seat, his fists raised, and rage on his face, looking like he was ready to beat me to death. But I was faster. I jumped to my feet too and fled. I ran out of his house and made straight for my friend's place"

These situations highlight what we already know. There is no rest for queer people outside the community in a violently homophobic society that sees us as sexual deviants rather than showing us the compassion and care due to any human being. As such, a lack of accountability that considers the nuances of living in a state that criminalizes LGBTQI+ people's existence, further opens up queer people to harm and violence with no recourse. As it is, there are already multiple barriers to justice before the additional burden of being queer in the legal system is even considered. The people mentioned above will likely never receive even an acknowledgment of their injustice, never mind obtaining justice.



Accountability is therefore first and foremost about helping victims reestablish a sense of safety because the community recognizes the grave harm that has been done to them and is interested in helping them recover emotionally, socially, and otherwise. When accountability is done right, victims no longer live in mortal fear or shame about telling their stories. Rather, they are supported to share their stories in their own time while working through recovery at their own pace.

As the saying goes, "Charity begins at home." So, if we are to come to the table to dissect moral issues, it matters that we address these issues both within and outside the community. We must understand the specific forms of injustice and violence that affect the community, and demand accountability from every member of the community and the LGBTQI+ movement – not just from state and non-state actors.

Platforms like **Kito Dairies** that document the stories and experiences of people who have gone through such horrid experiences that plague the community, even at the grassroots level are so important. They also help spread the word on "Kito" suspects and have done extensive and impressive accountability work, skillfully using new media platforms like blogging, Instagram, and Twitter to keep members of the community safe. Despite their popularity, we need to transcend the usual "call-out" or "name and shame" techniques and come to a point as a community where the accountability process can lead to transformative justice.

A Wikipedia entry defines Transformative Justice as a series of practices and philosophies designed to create change in social systems. Mostly, they are alternatives to criminal justice in cases of interpersonal violence or are used for dealing with socioeconomic issues in societies transitioning away from conflict or repression. Transformative justice comes into play here because options within the criminal justice system for LGBTQI+ people are very limited and there is a dire need for community-based responses to violence. These responses will address the immediate needs for justice such as safety, dignity, connection, self-determination, support, healing, accountability, etc. It is particularly important to pursue measures that both address the survivor's immediate needs (including addressing the behavior of an individual abusive person) and change the root causes of that harm. The goal must be to ultimately end violence and oppression.

I look forward to a time when the accountability process within the community upholds morality, skill, ethicality, and empathy, and a recognition that there is a small but not insignificant amount of violence perpetuated by "members" of the community against others in the community.

We must understand that although each case is different, we can provide an end-to-end analysis that clearly contextualizes how the overall structures color all the aspects of the movement. This includes how the silence and lack of skill in the community are affecting the movement, how internalized homophobia results in violence towards members of the community, and how it is harming the community in terms of how it

represents us in society. Indeed, we cannot overemphasize the need for people to feel seen, to be heard, and to be safe and secure, all while championing the cause for queer liberation in the continent. And for this liberation to be a reality, we should, as a community:

- **Affirm and perpetuate values and practices that resist abuse and encourage safety, support, and accountability.**
- **Develop sustainable strategies to address community members' abusive behavior, creating a system that calls them into account for their actions and transforms their behavior.**
- **Commit to educating members of the community, and as a community itself, transform conditions that reinforce oppression and violence.**
- **Provide safety & support to community members who are violently targeted in a way that respects their self-determination.**



ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE LGBTQI MOVEMENT IN BURKINA FASO: A PERILOUS EXERCISE FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVISTS

Eric Yameogo — Burkina Faso





MYRIA

There is currently a flourishing of organizations and activists in the LGBTQI movement in West Africa, a testament to the vitality and dynamism of the movement in these different countries. The youth of the LGBTQI movement are not left out of the dynamism of African youth, with a population that is increasingly educated and demanding their human rights, young African LGBTQI people are fighting for their fundamental rights through associations or independent activism in order to raise the expectations of a population whose rights are being violated and who are looking for a better life.

The proliferation of organizations, apart from being proof of the expansion of the movement, could hide a malaise of the members within the organizations. It is often the case that after a dispute, an organization breaks up and the members set up other organizations with the same objectives and activities. This is justified by a lack of accountability, which is also one of the causes of disputes in organizations.

So what is accountability?

Accountability is an exercise in democracy and transparency that entails giving an account of the management of a good or a common cause. It allows for transparent management of resources and equity among members, but above all, it is a counter-power as it allows beneficiaries to check the actions of leaders.

However, there are several factors that complicate accountability in the LGBTQI community in West Africa.

First, the clandestine nature of organizations in West Africa. Almost all LGBTQI organizations are not legally recognized in their respective countries as human rights actors. This lack of legal recognition greatly limits the actions of movement members. The legitimacy of the actors of the LGBTQI movements is also to be underlined. To be accountable, legality and/or legitimacy are required. However, what we see most of the time is that the person who had the idea to create an association assumes the presidency and therefore appoints and dismisses in a discretionary way.

One might wonder if a leader speaks on behalf of the entire LGBTQI community, the members of their organization, or only on their own behalf. One also wonders about the scope of the statements made by association leaders and whether they consulted their community beforehand. Also, what about the opinion of people who do not recognize themselves in the said organization? These questions reveal the problem of the legitimacy of the person who claims to speak on behalf of an entire diverse and heterogeneous community.

There is also the issue of financial resource management. Some leaders and activists who receive funding remain at the stage of writing the report and do not communicate to their beneficiaries the sums received. By creating an omerta on the management of funds, the leaders rule as a monarchy; this mode of operation is against the principles of democracy and justice that are the fundamental principles of the LGBTQI community. The lack of a platform that would bring together organizations

that have received funding amplifies this situation. Such a platform could act as a model of accountability and transparency and would be a good approach for the LGBTQI movement in West Africa. It would allow an activist in a given country to know how much such an organization would have received from donors as well as the various expenses incurred. This mechanism would also allow LGBTQI organizations to be more rigorous in managing finances, and politics in the movement and allow for sub-regional and even African inclusion as most African countries have almost the same challenges and issues.

However, this is not to be seen as an indictment of the leaders of organizations and activists who are already doing much to advance a noble cause in a society hostile to human rights issues in general and to LGBTQI people in particular.

The disinterest of the grassroots community in so-called "intellectual" and "serious" activities does not encourage leaders to engage in accountability activities. How many times have review meetings been shunned by the community? How many times have unpaid workshop and training organizers found themselves alone in rooms almost empty of participants? How many people read the e-mails, answer them or ask questions to the leaders of the associations and activists? All of these behaviors demonstrate the lack of interest of the community in accountability activities, in favor of international trips, dance parties, and 'Miss' elections. Such behavior does not encourage activists and leaders of organizations to submit to the indispensable work of accountability.

Accountability should not be a one-way street, i.e. between leaders and beneficiaries, but also between funders and community allies. Indeed, allies and donors mobilize funds and carry out activities on behalf of the community. As a result, the community is entitled to accountability because it is the primary beneficiary of all these actions. As the saying goes, "Anything done without me is against me". By not involving the beneficiaries in the mobilization and management of funds, it is obvious that the objectives sought by the community will not be achieved because the activities and policies will not be in line with their deepest aspirations. It is important that community allies and funders set up targeting and monitoring bodies in order to have a participatory and inclusive organization in the management of funds, even if some have already integrated this consultation mechanism within their organization.



It should also be noted that accountability is not only financial but also ideological and political because a mismatch of ideas upstream and downstream can implicitly create effects contrary to the community's deepest aspirations.

In 2015, in Burkina Faso, deputies from PAREN (Party for the Renaissance), a party that does not hide its hostility towards LGBTQI people and organizations, proposed a bill to condemn LGBTQI people in Burkina Faso. Former U.S. Ambassador TULINABO MUSHINGI learned of the proposed law during a visit to the president of the National Transitional Council (CNT) and took the opportunity to address the issue while reminding the importance for Burkina Faso to respect "universally accepted human rights. This hearing, which was covered by local media, was a double-edged sword for the LGBTQI community in Burkina Faso: although the ambassador's visit was well-

intentioned, the media hearing heightened the public's sense of homophobia towards the community. An outcry of indignation and condemnation occurred on the media and social networks. Critics of the LGBTQI movement saw the hearing as interference by the United States in the affairs of another country. During this tumultuous period, activists and organizations defending the rights of LGBTQI people and allies had to keep a low profile in order to avoid the fury of the population and the press, which revealed in these issues with homophobic and rude comments.

To arrive at this situation of hostility towards the community, it is important to recall the key facts: in reaction to the introduction of the PAREN political party's bill against LGBTQ people and organizations, human rights defenders and their allies had already begun to meet in order to put in place a strategy to defend the community through human rights and health arguments. Advocacy with judicial and political institutions for the protection of the fundamental rights of LGBTQI people was carried out and a focal point on LGBTQI issues was appointed by the Ministry of Human Rights to develop a technical note to materialize the commitment of the Ministry to protect the rights of LGBTQI people in Faso. All of these actions are undertaken without media attention so as not to create a boomerang effect for the community. The media interview with the U.S. ambassador on the proposed law and the virulent reactions of the population almost undermined the efforts of human rights defenders who were doing a wonderful job under the radar. Thus, in this case, the accountability of Western chancelleries is engaged: even if they are



FAILURES OF ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN THE NIGERIAN LGBTQI+ MOVEMENT

Justin Chidozie — Nigeria





Accountability lies at the root of activism; with activism acting as a spiral of different activities spinning towards a singular core at which lies accountability. Whether it's fighting racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, or any other form of oppression, the goal of activism is to bring about an acknowledgment of the different forms of violence perpetrated on people, call for their cessation, and initiate a process of healing that involves remedying past wrongs and integrating these previously excluded persons and groups into their rightful place in the wider human society.

Activism takes different forms, ranging from the formal and more organized structures present in NGOs and CSOs to the more organic struggles of everyday individuals championing causes both online and in real life. But regardless of the different forms and methods employed, a basic approach underlies them all: an accusatory and outward-facing attitude that involves standing against an immoral other and shining a light on their moral shortcomings. For all the good that this does, and it does a whole lot of good, this predominantly outward focus leaves little room for turning the light in on oneself for honest self-assessment. The resultant lack of self-awareness puts one at risk of falling into the trap of moral self-righteousness with a disregard for the possibility of personal failure, which in turn precludes one from seeing the need for self-assessment. From Robespierre's reign of terror in 18th-century France to Stalinism in the 20th century, we see over and over again how absolutist morality and failures of self-assessment cause even activists and movements to morph into the very demons

that they fight against. Now, these examples might be extreme, but they serve to show the range of possibilities for the evil that a lack of accountability portends for activists too.

It is a vicious cycle that can be seen repeating itself throughout history as proof of the Nietzschean warning of the risks of becoming that which we fight against. While people's ideas of accountability may differ in some respects, I hold the belief that the very essence of accountability is a moral responsibility. A moral responsibility of transparency, honesty, beneficence, respect, and avoidance of harm to the best of our abilities. An important issue then is how to determine the people to whom this responsibility is owed. For me, it is simple: accountability is owed to those likely to be affected by our actions. In the context of activism, it follows that when a person holds themselves out as representing the interests of a given community, they put themselves in a moral relationship with the said community. One that requires accountability and all that it implies. Since activists exist in this kind of relationship with marginalized communities, they owe a responsibility of accountability to these communities.

This is even so important in a climate where heterosexism and homophobia are so virulent and seek to disarm the LGBT community through silencing and erasing voices and identities from social consciousness. This is achieved through violence against LGBTQI persons in a myriad of ways including physical violence, criminalization, religious and social condemnation, economic discrimination, and political exclusion all directed toward scaring

them into silence and hiding. The commonly held belief in many West African countries is that LGBTQI people are demon-possessed, mentally ill, rapists, social viruses, or threats to the established social order. These fuel the enactment of anti-LGBT laws that in turn grant a legal imprimatur to situations of violence that we see. For the LGBT movement in West Africa, activism becomes about survival and liberation because queer people must wake up every day to live in societies that dehumanize them and wish them death.

To that end and in response to this, LGBTQI activism must be carried out with the aim of ensuring the increased visibility of queer people and working at making their voices heard through an unapologetic presentation of diverse but nonetheless authentic queer identities, so as to make the case for their full humanities and to unequivocally demand the rights and dignities inherent to humanness. For it is only through this that we can hope to combat the many negative ideas and beliefs that support heterosexism. The problem however lies in the many ways in which the movement fails in its duty of accountability to the LGBTQI+ community.

One such failure is the underrepresentation of women in the LGBTQI+ movement. Much of the advocacy against queerphobia in West Africa has been focused on male sexuality and victimhood much to the disregard of women. Even at the organizational level, NGOs working with sexual minority women tend to have far lesser funding than those working with their male counterparts.

This dominance of the male face in the LGBT movement is an irony because, for a movement that dedicates itself to challenging heterosexism and heteronormativity, it mirrors patriarchy by centering men and disregarding the importance and equal validity of the struggles of women who form part of the community. In failing to properly ensure the visibility of lesbians, bisexual women, and transwomen in the struggle, the LGBTQI+ movement risks becoming a microcosmic representation of the very system that it claims to fight against. When one considers that sexual minority women must deal with a **complex of indignities and violence that society imposes on them first, as women, then, as sexual minorities,** it becomes more disheartening to see how they aren't spared these indignities even within the LGBTQI+ movement. As a movement, it is vital that LGBTQI+ advocacy is accountable to all identities contained under the umbrella and ensures that no one is left behind on the journey toward liberation.

When it comes to the more formal forms of activism, the nature of NGOs means that they also owe fiduciary responsibilities to their donors and this relationship may clash with their responsibilities to the LGBTQI+ communities that they seek to serve. Such clashes may arise in situations where the funding priorities of some grantmaking organizations do not address the needs of the community, whether due to the limited scope of grants, or a mismatch between the knowledge of the donors and the sociocultural situations on the ground. Oftentimes, when it comes to funding organizations in West Africa, grantmaking organizations usually apply a generic approach that is influenced either

by a Westernized interpretation of African LGBTQI+, or a monolithic understanding of African LGBTQI+ issues that disregards cultural peculiarities and nuances, usually for political purposes. The consequence then is that cash-strapped NGOs, beholden to these western institutions, risk becoming detached from their constituencies and forced to work in ways that may deviate from their core programs, thus failing to effectively address the peculiar problems of LGBTQI+ persons in their locales.

Balancing these competing accountabilities will require harmonization of the requirements of benefactors with the welfare of beneficiaries, and it is here that participatory grantmaking comes into play. This requires incorporating the voices of beneficiaries in the grantmaking process in order to fashion out an effective way to utilize funds in ways that align with the interests of beneficiaries. In this manner, West African LGBTQI+ persons can influence activism by tailoring it to their own needs as determined by them. Maintaining accountability in this regard then becomes resisting external pressures to derail activism from its core purpose.

Another issue worthy of note is the weak institutional capacity of NGOs. In [**"We Exist, Mapping LGBTQ Organizing in West Africa"**](#) a report published by ISDAO on the state of LGBT activism across West Africa, it was reported that NGOs across West Africa suffer from a problem of proper organization and weak institutional capacity. There was a failure to efficiently disburse funds towards employing staff that will enable them to fulfill their missions. Instead, they function with

a "skeleton crew of staff and/or volunteers with no experience and/or plans for on-the-job training, usually not for a lack of funding, but for "concerns about long-term financial stability".

What this creates is the lack of an oversight and audit mechanism to ensure that NGOs are faithful and efficient in the utilization of monies given to them. Things like regular audits or annual financial reports are essentially alien concepts to LGBTQI+-focused NGOs across West Africa. The lack of these structures is owing to several factors:

- **The physical distance between donors based in the West and West African NGOs precludes opportunities for direct and regular oversight from the donors.**
- **Considering the criminalization, and legal exclusion of LGBTQI+ relationships and organizations among many others, government regulatory oversight of these NGOs becomes a virtual impossibility. Here again, we see the consequences of hate affecting distant, or even seemingly unrelated things.**

It goes without saying that in the absence of formal accountability requirements and structures, these NGOs become liable to corruption, profligacy, and incompetence in their utilization of funds and performance of their duties, and donor funding for LGBTQI+ in Africa then becomes much ado about nothing, but rather smokescreens.

To address these problems of formal accountability, I propose a solution: Self-regulation. This essentially involves cooperation between different NGOs to establish norms and standards for peer-to-peer accountability, and where possible a body responsible for carrying out regular reviews in order to keep everyone in line. While this model is to be voluntary, endorsement by such a body could grant an NGO greater legitimacy within the NGO community, the LGBTQI+ community, and potential donors and grant organizations. Enforcement mechanisms could include reporting nonconforming NGOs to potential donors for blacklisting, and a refusal to cooperate with nonconforming NGOs on any projects.

In all this, we see the need to maintain a self-consciousness that keeps us aware of the many ways that we may also not live up to the standards to which we hold others. This is not to say that we are morally excused from making demands of others, rather, while advocating accountability for others, we should also make sure to step up to the moral responsibilities that our roles as advocates demand of us. To be accountable advocates is to remember that even as we fight against heterosexist patriarchy, and the many other similarly oppressive systems that emerge out of it, we heed the Nietzschean warning:

"Beware that when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster...for when you gaze long into the abyss. The abyss gazes also into you."



“I AM ONLY
ACCOUNTABLE TO
THOSE WHO FUND
ME”

Marie-Jo — Côte d’Ivoire





WANT TO KNOW

Accountability is defined as the fact that a person feels or is obliged to give an account of an action, a project, a fund, or financing received. It is also understood as the right of any person to ask a given entity for an account of its various actions, choices, or mode of operation and progress.

More and more organizations are being established in Africa to advocate and fight for the respect of human rights, including those of the LGBTQ+ community. Actions are being taken and groups with common interests or identities are working together to build a more inclusive and just world, without the imposition of a totalitarian expression of truth that is now partial and discriminatory.

In this surge of awareness and ideological awakening, philanthropists and donors contribute by providing grants, contributions, and aid funds for the development and even the survival of these associations. However, in this spirit of solidarity, the notion of accountability is sometimes forgotten. Not that we don't know what the term means, but it is too often not understood, hence the inability of some actors in the movement to put it into practice.

Let's try to understand this principle, which seems to many to be prohibitive or restricted to an inappropriate mode of operation.

The distinguishing feature of a minority and/or marginalized community at its core is solidarity. Therefore, each person should feel involved with their peers and work for their well-being. Therefore, any power acquired or resources granted should be for the good of

all and used responsibly, and ethically, taking into account and considering the needs and interests of the people and communities whose voice we represent as activists or as an organization. It is not for us to be sparingly, willy-nilly, or at will, accountable only to the financial institutions that fund us, through financial and narrative reports or any other documents or meetings in which we willy-nilly justify the resources provided. It should be necessary to disclose and justify action plans, activities, and results so that the intended beneficiaries can also judge their relevance and thus bring some transparency to the management of their interests while seeking redress where necessary.

I was recently a consultant for a project coordinated by an individual activist who ended up on the wrong side of the law. The organization that served as her fiscal host allegedly misappropriated some of her funding. The accountant was incriminated and the project manager in the donor's team was accused. As for the president, he claimed to have no information on the matter, which I found incongruous and inadmissible. An investigation was carried out, but in the end, it was a mountain that gave birth to a mouse.

In another consultancy sphere, financial management left something to be desired. People reported as they wished, or paid bonuses, even though they were funded, by the slingshot - a privilege, in fact. The organization ended up becoming a club of friends. Perhaps in this way, no one will be able to point a finger at bad practices or unjust and inadequate acts.

Why and how could this happen? Again, why?

Simply because accountability is only understood as an action towards the funding institution which is seen as a windfall not to be wasted. How can we work without funding if they withdraw their trust? One must then comply with all expectations, even if they are ridiculous. But if there is no community, no people involved, no volunteers or members, what is the point? Are we advocating? Are we fighting for something? What leader of a movement or association would exist without a cause to defend? Without people to represent? Without a team to accomplish the task, whatever it may be? Why should we be so unaccountable to these people who, in the end, are the links, all of them essential at whatever level for the survival and maintenance of the chain?

We need to understand that the heart of the decision-making process should be those men, women, children, adolescents, intersex people, binary or non-binary, whose right, dignity, and freedom to exist in all their differences we say we defend and that all of them should have a say in decisions affecting their lives, and be given all the relevant information that can help them in any decision making or participation. All assistance must be proportionate to their real needs, expectations, priorities, and preferences.

To do this, it is important to set up systems for lodging, receiving, and handling complaints, whether anonymous or not, which should be given credence, prompt responses, and real follow-up, so that everyone's opinions and feelings are taken into account.

It is, therefore, necessary to give the beneficiaries the right to complain and demand accountability, but also give the same right to the organizations working for the well-being of these people, who are sometimes slowed down in their tasks by difficult conditions or sometimes spurious demands that contribute to complicate their work or make them take shortcuts or roundabouts in order to provide satisfaction. It should be borne in mind that the LGBTQI+ movement in Africa is still in its infancy, despite all the hard work that has been done, and that finding providers who will accept collaborations or partnerships is not an easy task, nor are good fiscal hosts who do not take the funds allocated to others as pocket money or personal allowances.

A person's fame does not make them what they claim to be or show. Having social capital is all too easy to abuse with the "my word against yours" system in case of accusations, or the principle of non-interference, which leads to the practice of guilty silence. It is therefore essential that everyone has the right to speak, and this could be done through calls for anonymous or non-anonymous testimonies on activities and people in charge, knowing how to perceive the intricacies and psychology of the words in order to avoid a witch-hunt and personal vendettas.

All of this will not only contribute to strengthening the capital of trust between the different actors (financial institutions, beneficiary associations or organizations, and the communities concerned) but also to obtain a better quality of work that is constantly improving.

The target communities are also accountable and should participate in this search for improvement through their participation in events, activities, and projects or through continuous interaction on the associations' networks.

There can be no significant and genuine progress in any movement, let alone the LGBTQI movement in West Africa, which despite its actions, faces many difficulties in its growth, without a culture of accountability. This requires different actors to be competent, honest, inclusive in decision-making, and accountable. This is fundamental, as is the establishment of a regulatory authority to

hold people accountable for their actions beyond narrative and financial reports. This authority will be responsible for taking into account the opinions of members regarding the treatment they receive, their genuine participation in decision-making or other internal management, and for imposing sanctions if necessary and bringing each entity into compliance.

However, this must be qualified and not be conflated. It is not a question of depriving people of their own freedoms or practicing unilateral interference, or some kind of tyranny of the strongest. Far from it.



It is about holding each person accountable for their actions and decisions. After all, if resources are made available and people are recruited into teams of organizations, groups, or associations, it is because they are capable of contributing to this structure and breathing new life into existing organizations.

Isn't it said that we recruit people who can teach us what we don't know and educate us about what we think we know? The culture of accountability should be such that every actor feels fully involved.

The time has come to see our organizations, not as service clubs, business ventures, immigration aids, or grassroots unemployment reducers, but as groups of people with a common vision and a constant desire to work towards being the voice of the voiceless, to defend a population that has been bullied, oppressed, marginalized and left behind in order to achieve victories in the quest for a more serene, secure and peaceful future for the LGBTQI community in West Africa.



LEVERAGING TRAUMA FOR IMPACT

Ataman Ehikioya Godspower — Nigeria



WORLD

As a young boy growing up in Sapele, a town in Southern Nigeria, I was treated and cared for like a princess. I would wear my sisters' dresses, shoes, bags, and wigs and strut around the block in makeup. This was done with the full knowledge of my mom and older siblings, who would dress me sometimes and watch as I cat-walked. Neighbors joined in, clapping, and smiling, sometimes offering me money and other gifts. I needed everyone to see me in my beauty and in my element, to see me as a star, to see how confident I looked, and also felt. Even at that age, I knew I was being bold. I felt like a star. Sadly, this power was short-lived.

This stardom ended when I turned 6 and I started primary school. I had left nursery school and suddenly, neighbors who had applauded me and offered me sweets turned nasty. Classmates and teachers bullied me and called me derogatory names like "boy-girl". One day my classmates carried me to a pond and nearly threw me in. I screamed and begged for them to stop until a teacher intervened. I had no friends and couldn't bring myself to tell anyone I was being bullied, not even my family. My self-esteem plummeted. I couldn't help being me. That's just how I was.

As I grew older, I realized that I was attracted to boys. I didn't know there was a name for this kind of attraction, but I knew that it was "weird." As if it wasn't bad enough being bullied for being effeminate. I prayed and wished the attraction away to no effect.

I was 13 when a playmate first called me "homosexual". I didn't know what this word meant but I knew it meant something derogatory, especially in how he said it. We played "father and mother" - a play where children step into adult roles to act as parents. I was playing the role of a mother, and as I shared the bed with the other boy playing the "father", I got a mild erection and touched him. He ran out and told the other kids who teased me with taunts of "Homosexual, Homo, homo". When my parents heard about the incident, my father beat me with a TV cord, shouting as he flogged away, "You will not disgrace me in this house." The scars from that flogging remain to this day.

For the ensuing years, I stayed in my shell. It was only when I turned 20 in 2014 that I began to explore, chatting with other queer folks online. I met a man who was everything I was looking for. One day we decided to live out our fantasies. I arrived at his house, excited to be with him. Instead, I was ambushed, beaten, and robbed. The perpetrators took my phone and forced me to unlock it, gaining access to all my contacts. I became angry at the world and at myself. I developed an anxiety disorder. I wanted to die and bring everything to an end. My saving grace was that my family didn't find out and that gave me hope to keep on living.

After that experience, I began masking my identity to avoid a repeat. I channeled my anger into work and tried not to embarrass my family. I stayed in the closet but started helping other men deemed "effeminate" to chart their own paths. I joined the counseling department at my university and shared my story with them, teaching them how to stay

safe online and offline. I began volunteering with a non-profit organization working with youth to end bullying and other violence. The advocacy work made me realize the importance of my voice and brought reassurance that I was on the right path.

Meeting queer people in online spaces is relatively easy, but making the transition to real life remained scary for me. Eight years down the line, the fear that I will be attacked, mocked, and probably lynched constantly plays in my head whenever I interact with a queer person online despite the precautions I take. According to The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS), **over 500** cases of violence against LGBTQI+ persons were documented in 2021 in Nigeria. **Instead of letting fear win over me, it made me feel accountable and responsible to the people around me.**

In 2021, I joined an organization to host conversations on LGBTQI safety and security where we shared ways in which we could stay safe both online and offline. The experiences shared were horrific, traumatic, and heartbreaking. Some were not as lucky as we were to share their stories because they didn't make it alive. Many of the participants have been scarred for life. The Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA), a Nigerian law that criminalizes same-sex relations, coupled with religious teachings has been very instrumental in fueling homophobia often characterized by violence targeted at LGBTQI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexuals, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and other sexual and gender minorities) people.

Accountability in the Nigerian LGBTQI+ context means that individuals, organization leaders, activists, and allies (both state and non-state actors) need to first acknowledge that there is a movement influencing the political, economic, and social settings in Nigeria, then hold conversations that will gradually and eventually cause social acceptance, and to a great extent guarantee the safety and security of sexual and gender minorities. It is acknowledging that we all have a role to play in ensuring that the rights of sexual and gender minorities are respected and protected, and to that end, organizations, allies, and activists have a lot to do. There is a great need to work in synergy to systematically end this violence and cause a transformative movement.



In Nigeria, the number of organizations advocating for the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons has increased over the years. This has meant more activism and visibility for the LGBT community in Nigeria, particularly at the local level. There is an increased need for leadership, representation, and community participation of LGBTQI+ persons at both local and sub-national levels to amplify the faces and voices of the community as it contributes to the country's political, social, and economic happenings. This movement needs to start now (if there has been none) and be accountable as well as transparent to the community they serve. Unfortunately, organizations mainly work in silos, creating a toxic fight for power, leadership, and personal recognition. Working together as a unified body and coming together with one voice may be what helps to amplify the LGBTQI+ movement in Nigeria, foster transparency and accountability, as well as give the community a sense of ownership and belonging.

My LGBTQI+-specific work as an individual kicked off in 2019, first as a peer educator, then as a media and communications officer, and now as a program officer in a leading human rights and health advocacy organization working to advance the rights of sexual and gender minorities in southern Nigeria.

Nothing erases the trauma I've experienced, but at least now I leverage it to help young LGBTQI+ people make good choices as they navigate their own lives.







INITIATIVE SANKOFA D'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST

ISDAO is an activist-led fund dedicated to building a West African movement that advocates for sexual diversity and sexual rights through a flexible approach to grantmaking and strengthening a culture of philanthropy that promotes human rights and social justice.

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MURRIA

