ISDAO

TAFFIYA

An Assessment of our Grantmaking Process

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TAFFIYA means *'journey'* **in the Hausa language. The Hausa language is spoken in several countries in West Africa and beyond including Burkina Faso, Benin, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, etc.**

Contents

List of Acronyms

AGMP	Activist Grant Making Panel
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
IGB	Interim Governance Body
ISDAO	Initiative Sankofa D'Afrique de l'Ouest
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex
USD	United States Dollars

1. Background

Since it began its operations, Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest (ISDAO) has successfully funded numerous organizations through three funding rounds. Now, four years after the launch of its first funding round, ISDAO is undertaking an assessment to measure the impact of its grantmaking process, gauge its reach, and probe the resulting challenges for grantees, non-funded organizations, staff, the Activist Grant Making panel, and the Interim Governance Body. As an organization that continually seeks to strengthen the LGBTQI movement in West Africa, ISDAO is committed to a participatory, inclusive, and reflective grantmaking process.

''This assessment will help identify what is due, and what we have failed to listen to. We are a donor organization. Who says donors, says power. So, organizations are not always able to tell us what could be improved because of the [nature] of our relationship. This assessment is an opportunity to take stock since our inception and to invite partners to tell us how we can improve our work.''

—Excerpt from an interview with an ISDAO staff member.

''We wish to keep learning. This way, we can continually learn from the multiple years of funding and experiences we've had and continue to do work that resonates with our community.''

—Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's Interim Governance Body

2. Methodology

To conduct this impact assessment, we designed an internal and external diagnosis that allowed us to collect quantitative and qualitative data over a one-month period. This diagnosis includes:

An internal evaluation comprising:
- 10 interviews with the ISDAO team, including staff, members of the Activist Grant Making Panel, and members of the Interim Governance Body.

An external evaluation based on:
- 4 focus groups with 2 French-speaking groups and 2 English-speaking groups.
- 1 online survey with 49 French-speaking groups (48 funded and 1 non-funded).
- 1 online survey with 55 English-speaking respondents (54 funded and 1 non-funded).

Although an invitation was extended to non-ISDAO-funded organizations, we noted that most of the respondents were groups that had already received funding from ISDAO. To draw attention to the experiences and contributions of minority and non-funded organizations, we have included some of their feedback throughout the report.

Below, you will find quotes from internal members *(staff, Activist Grant Making Panel members, and Interim Governance Body members)* **highlighted in orange**, quotes from external parties *(funded and non-funded organizations)* **highlighted in purple.**

3. Strengths of the grantmaking process

3.1. An inclusive, flexible, and innovative fund

Discussions with internal and external parties alike indicate that ISDAO is an inclusive, flexible, and innovative fund. Everyone involved with the organization has praised the fund for its centralized decision-making by community members, and its ability to place the voices of LGBTQI activists at the core of the funding process. The participatory and innovative formula allows for a revolutionary approach to resource distribution as it pertains to philanthropy in West Africa. In addition, requiring as a major criterion for funding eligibility, that the applicants "be an LGBTQI community-led organization" in an often-precarious financial landscape, allows many LGBTQI organizations to conduct their missions effectively. Finally, providing a fund that allows grantee partners to respond to emergency and security situations is also one of the advantages cited by community members. This demonstrates that ISDAO is a donor that is responsive to the emerging needs and realities of the continent.

"Currently, ISDAO is the flagship LGBTQ fund in West Africa and its flexibility helps [further] consolidate the West African LGBTQ movement."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

"The fact that ISDAO is a participatory fund, where the community is at the heart of the decision-making process, makes it an extremely innovative fund. It is innovative to see a fund managed by the community."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

3.2. A learning stance

During the interviews, many people described ISDAO's grantmaking process as a flexible and continuous learning process. Over the course of three funding rounds, the fund has humbly listened to feedback and taken them into account. There have clearly been changes between the first and latest funding rounds. The fund has become more robust and more inclusive through the continuous integration of the feedback provided. ISDAO is an inquiring fund that is eager to learn and that is always looking to educate itself on best practices in philanthropy.

"Our Q&A page has continually improved over time, considering the needs and questions of the organizations. Today, it provides answers to many more questions than it did when initially created."

—Excerpt from an interview with an ISDAO staff member

"What I admire about the fund is its ability to change and grow. We are definitely not where we were 4 years ago. We have evolved and learned so much, and it shows."

—Excerpt from an interview with a member of the Interim Governance Body

3.3. A transparent process and useful resources

The majority of those consulted mentioned the efforts undertaken by ISDAO to make its funding process clear and transparent, with the goal of facilitating organizations' understanding and participation. Information is shared via several channels, social networks, and the ISDAO website, making it accessible and available to the groups.

> *"ISDAO provides us with a very simple canvas to respond to the call for funding. The steps are very explicit. If needed, you also have access to the webinar for answers. This makes the process easy for many."*
>
> —Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

In the online survey, when asked if the French-speaking groups had a good understanding of the steps in the funding process, 91.8% of respondents answered "yes".

Do you know the differnt stages of our grant-making process? (49 responses)

- **Yes (91.8%)**
- **No (8.2%)**

As part of the resources available, ISDAO provides organizations wishing to apply for available funding with the opportunity to attend a webinar and a frequently asked questions (FAQ) page to further explain the funding steps and answer questions that are often asked by organizations. Several internal and external members have mentioned ISDAO's wish to make the process most flexible and accessible for all.

A large majority of funded organizations report having already used the FAQ page and having attended the webinars. This shows that these tools, for accessibility purposes, are widely used by organizations.

Have you consulted ISDAO's frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the call for proposals? (49 responses)

- **Yes (91.8%)**
- **No (8.2%)**

Would you describe the information provided at the webinar?(52 responses)

- **Very helpful (80.8%)**
- **Fairly helpful (17.3%)**
- **Not helpful at all (1.7%)**

3.4. Building relationships with organizations

ISDAO spends a considerable amount of time cultivating relationships based on trust with its grantees. The field visits contribute to creating and strengthening relationships with the organizations. Whether it be for ISDAO's staff or for the grantee organizations, this approach has been highly praised during the focus group sessions. It demonstrates that ISDAO is always willing to go the extra mile to reach out to organizations.

> *"ISDAO takes the time to visit their grantees. Not all donors make this effort. It allows us to explain directly to them what we do and build a relationship with them."*
>
> —Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

> *"To tell the truth, it's not just the money that counts, but rather the trust we can build with a donor within the movement. The trust built with ISDAO is very valuable. In 2018, we were a very small organization. We applied for ISDAO funding. Today we are a larger, stronger organization, and we are still standing. This is thanks to the relationship we have established with ISDAO."*
>
> —Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

3.5. A diverse Activist Grant Making Panel and an accessible team

Several people have pointed out that one of the strengths of the activist grant-making panel is its diverse makeup. Indeed, having activists from various West African countries, who can contribute through their knowledge as well as their experiences, allows for a deeper understanding of these countries' context.

Finally, ISDAO's staff was frequently mentioned as one of the strengths of the organization and the funding process. Indeed, they are reactive, open, and always available for organizations.

> *"The ISDAO team are well trained. They are always responsive. Whenever you have a question, you know that you will get an answer as soon as you send them a message. They are open, responsive and are an asset to the smooth running of the organization."*
>
> —Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

4. Funding process challenges

During our internal and external conversations, we gathered many stories of the fund's successes and achievements. However, for ISDAO to strengthen its funding process, we will focus more on the current challenges that need to be overcome.

4.1. Procedural and processing challenges

4.1.1. Processing time

During our interviews, several people reported that the current 5-month processing time for grant applications was too long. This has an impact on organizations, as they are unable to start their activities or complete them on time. The organizations that receive funding, also attest to the lengthy wait time before funds are accessed, sometimes forcing them to cover the launch of activities out of pocket, in the hopes of being able to pay themselves back later. The issue of the many steps required to evaluate applications is also a concern for several internal ISDAO members.

> *"The evaluation is a drawn-out process. This impacts our activities because we are not able to start them on time."*
> — Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

In the French survey, 61.2% of respondents felt that the processing time for applications was too long.

How would you describe the processing time for the applications once they are submitted?(49 responses)

- **Reasonable (38.8%)**
- **Lengthy (61.2%)**
- **Short (0%)**

4.1.2. Level of Funding

In the online survey and during focus group sessions, organizations reported that it was important for ISDAO to re-evaluate the level of their funding. Groups felt that having more funding would allow them to operate more sustainably.

When we asked the English-speaking groups whether the proposed funding levels should remain the same, 70% of them answered no (for the sub-regional call) and 16.7% answered no (for the Love Alliance calls).

FOR THE SUB-REGIONAL CALL FOR PROPOSALS: We have three levels of funding on the regional call; 1. up to $5000; 2. between $5000---our range of funding for the regional call (48 responses)

- **Yes (29.2%)**
- **No (70.8%)**

FOR THE LOVE ALLIANCE CALL FOR PROPOSALS: We have three funding level on the Love Alliance call for Burkina Faso and Nigeria; 1) up to--is should remain our range of funding for this call? (30 reponses)

- **Yes (83.3%)**
- **No (16.7%)**

4.1.3. Renewing annual funding in a strained climate

Renewing funding annually raises several questions, starting with the number of times an organization should be funded. Some internal ISDAO members believe that it would be important to reassess the number of times an organization can receive funding by considering its surrounding financial landscape. Indeed, some are concerned that the endless renewal of ISDAO's funding for the same organizations will rob newer and more vulnerable organizations of the opportunity of receiving support. Some internal members believe that ISDAO should consider setting up a 5-year funding cap, at the end of which, the organizations will be encouraged to move on to other donors.

"After 5 years, we should encourage organizations to seek other opportunities to make more room for emerging organizations, thereby continuing to strengthen the movement with organizations that are still operating in a dangerous socio-political climate."

—Excerpt from an interview with a staff member of ISDAO

On the other hand, the organizations express mixed feelings. Some organizations that have received funding over the past few years report the disbursement of funds in tranches as a drawback. This weakens the funding offered to [individual] organizations as it is divided into several tranches over the yearlong period, thus preventing organizations from carrying out activities for which they have applied. They also perceive ISDAO's willingness to fund all organizations, both new and old, as a threat to the funding they are accustomed to receiving, which has been decreasing with each renewal.

Tensions have arisen between the fledgling or newly funded organizations [on the one hand], and the older organizations [on the other hand], that do not want to make room [for the newcomers]. These organizations feel that it is always the exact same organizations that are granted funding renewal.

Funded, fledgling and unfunded organizations alike attest to a tense climate that exists in some countries as a sense of competition for ISDAO's funding has set in.

"We feel as if we're being given the evil eye for being an organization or a group capable of mobilizing substantial funding. There is less funding today because ISDAO wants to share its resources with all the organizations."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

"As a fledgling structure, we sometimes feel that older, more established organizations don't want to make room for us. It's often the same organizations that are being granted funding renewal. This creates a lot of animosity in some countries. As an emerging organization, we are seen as if we want to hog resources. There is distrust towards newer organizations."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

Recommendations for this section:
Procedural and processing challenges

Specific recommendations

By the consultant	By internal members	By the organizations
Funding renewal Explore paths to resolve existing tensions between funded, fledgling, and non-funded groups by facilitating a conversation on resource sharing in relation to the sense of "scarcity" experienced in the movement. If a funding cap is considered, it should feature a toolkit or a plan that would allow organizations to reach stability in the long run (e.g. by introducing them to other donors, by building capacity for fundraising...). Allow organizations that have reached the 5-year mark to re-apply after a 2-year break.	**Funding renewal** *Several staff members and members of the activist grant-making panel:* Explore the idea of a funding cap for the organizations following 5 years of funding for organizations to seek new funding sources.	**Level of funding** *Funded organizations:* The groups suggest that ISDAO increase its funding to a range between USD 10,000 and 50,000. **Funding renewal** *Funded organizations:* Not limit funding allotted to organizations that are able to leverage multiple sources of funding. *Non-funded organizations:* Make more room and support fledgling organizations.

Specific recommendations

- Administrative delays
- Review the steps (including roles and responsibilities) for grant applications review.
- Review the application processing time.
- Facilitate the resolution of conflicts that arise between funded and non-funded organizations due to the accessibility and competition for ISDAO's funding.

4.2. Accessibility challenges and communication

4.2.1. Communicating on the grantmaking process

To reach and inform the groups about its funding process, ISDAO uses multiple methods of communication. These include mainly the use of social media and webinars. However, some of these communication methods have limitations.

Lack of communication strategy

ISDAO does not appear to have a communication strategy specifically designed for calls for funding. With each call for funding, information is published via the already existing digital communication channels. However, no specific action has been initiated to reach out to organizations that do not use these channels. The lack of a communication strategy means that it is often up to the groups to seek out the information, rather than for ISDAO to look at ways to make the information more accessible via other channels.

"We lack a communication strategy for funding calls. If that had been the case, we'd be able to implement broader strategies to reach isolated and non-funded groups, as well as gauge the reach of our communication strategy as it pertains to calls for funding."

—Excerpt from an interview with a staff member of ISDAO

"It is [always] the (same) groups that are digitally literate that have access to our funding information"

—Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's activist grant-making panel

Limitations of the webinars

The webinars were initiated for informational purposes, so that groups could ask questions directly and share concerns about the funding process. What we realize today is that webinars are often characterized by low participation and low engagement. Indeed, the groups often end up writing to ISDAO to ask questions that are covered during the webinars or addressed in the FAQs. Using the FAQs and participating in the webinar do not always turn out to be useful for everyone. One question that came up in several internal discussions was how could ISDAO ensure that the webinars reached people seeking information about the grant application.

"We need webinars to be more interactive and engaging with the community. They are also too short."

—Excerpt from a survey of an organization funded by ISDAO

"The webinars are often only informational, and neither engage us, nor our knowledge. It would be interesting to see how organizations that have been funded in the past could share their advice and experiences with other organizations so that the webinar's content is more in line with their reality."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

"We often have low participation and engagement rates for webinars. And often, groups end up asking us the same questions that were in the webinar via email. So, there's clearly a problem with our webinars."

—Excerpt from an interview with an ISDAO staff member

4.3. Application format

The current application format is a downloadable Word format, which requires an internet connection. Several internal members have expressed a willingness to explore options for the application to be uploaded to a platform that would allow the document to be filled out offline while finding ways to expedite and simplify the application process. The organizations also expressed the need to be able to resume the application process where last interrupted in case of internet connection issues or power outages. The use of an online portal could also make it easier for organizations to access past applications and previously inputted data.

While the written format is the one most traditionally used in the landscape of donor organizations, the possibility of exploring other formats for application submission was mentioned during several internal and external exchanges. Audio or video applications using messaging apps such as WhatsApp with integrated real-time translation/interpretation features could be explored.

> *"We must continually strive to make our applications more accessible to the underserved and explore multiple avenues that allow [donor] organizations to respond to the groups' current situations."*
>
> —Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's activist grant-making panel

> *"The ISDAO application is already accessible, however, ISDAO may start looking into another simpler, digital platform where the applying organization could create an account with relevant information that only needs to be updated from time to time. In the event of a power outage, they can easily connect to the platform through other devices and resume the application process."*
>
> —Excerpt from a survey of an organization funded by ISDAO

4.3.1. Annual funding

In both internal and external conversations, many audit participants shared the challenges associated with annual funding. For internal members, the process of reviewing grant proposals each year is getting longer and longer, and it is often the same organizations that keep applying to maintain funding for their projects and programs. For some internal members, exploring multi-year funding would enable ISDAO, after several years of funding and organizational support, to move away from some organizations that have achieved greater stability.

For organizations, the annual funding not only makes their operations more precarious but their ability to retain staff over the long run is also threatened, as they are not able to offer long-term contracts.

> *"ISDAO doesn't realize the turnover we experience due to the annual funding cycle."*
>
> —Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

> *"Providing funding over several years would lighten the yearly review process of funding requests."*
>
> —Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's activist grant-making panel

"The multi-year funding would allow us to evaluate the impact that our funding has had on an organization over several years."

—Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's interim Governance body

4.3.2. Eligibility criteria

Currently, when an organization wishes to apply for funding, the first criterion that makes them eligible is whether the organization is led by members of the LGBTQI community. While this ensures, for some members, that LGBTQI people have a place in the leadership and decision-making of their organizations, this criterion excludes feminist organizations that have LGBTQI staff and/or that would like to encourage LGBTQI members within their organizations to apply for project-based funding. [And] even if these organizations do not have LGBTQI people in their leadership, they are involved in strengthening the movement.

Secondly, this eligibility criterion causes another issue. Today, any emerging LGBTQI organization can apply for ISDAO funding. This would not be a problem if some of these emerging organizations did not emerge in response to a conflict within the community. ISDAO's internal members, as well as the organizations, all attest to this phenomenon. Many organizations emerge because of a conflict. However, they do not necessarily offer different/novel programs and services, nor do they address pressing issues. In several conversations, misappropriation of funds and use of ISDAO funds for personal gain has been noted among several emerging organizations.

"There are a lot of conflicts within the movement, which is something important to consider. The way to resolve the[se] conflicts right now is to let everyone create their own organization and receive their ISDAO funding. We need tools and skills to address ongoing conflicts within our community."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

"Some organizations are not there for associative projects, but for the monetary aspect of ISDAO's grants. They are not motivated by a real drive to serve the community."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

"Many organizations are born out of conflict with other organizations. Sometimes you wonder whether these organizations would exist without ISDAO's grants?"

—Excerpt from an interview with an ISDAO staff member

4.3.3. Quality of the applications is paramount

Several internal members report that when an organization has not prepared a well-written application, it is often disqualified. However, not all organizations have the capacity to express themselves in French and English. It is important to value the content of the applications, rather than to judge solely based on the form. ISDAO's discourse needs to be closer to the people, especially the underserved groups with minimal education. The quality of the language is also a criterion that disqualifies some organizations, and for many, French and English are not their first language.

"While it may not be possible to make our format accessible for everyone, we can reduce the barriers to accessing the grant application or the steps an intermediary would have to take to fill out the application for a group."

—Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO Interim Governance Body

4.3.4. Documentation

Several organizations in the English-speaking and French-speaking focus groups, as well as from the survey comments, report that it is sometimes difficult to capture all the documentation required for the grant application and the evaluation of post-funding activities.

"At times, the amount of documentation required is unclear, therefore making the process stressful. We don't always know what documents to provide at the various stages of the process, from when we are submitting the application to when we receive the funds and the post-funding review."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

4.4. Application review

4.4.1. Fatigue

Following our interviews with internal members, several of them report that the application review sessions format (i.e., from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.) during the AGMP meetings has an impact on the way applications are reviewed.

"Applications that are reviewed in the morning and early afternoon tend to get more attention, while applications that come in late in the day do not get the same quality review due to fatigue."

—Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's Activist Grant Making Panel

4.4.2. Language

In our interviews, both internal and external, many people questioned the use of French and English in responding to applications. For many, this excludes organizations or individuals in the movement for whom English or French is not their first language. In addition, it also excludes people who have not had access to education in French and English.

"We need to consider the use of local languages to respond to applications."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

"We need to probe the impact of asking groups to respond to our application in French and English, which are colonial languages."

—Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's Activist grant-making panel

Recommendations for this section
Accessibility and communication challenges

Specific recommendations

By the consultant	By internal members	By external members
Include organizations in the creation of webinars to foster engagement and participation. Investing in conflict management capacity of organizations (e.g. Providing management training in conflict mediation and management for each organization's leadership). When an emerging organization applies, ask as part of the application whether the applicants have ever worked with an organization that has received funding from ISDAO in the past and if so, provide a space to understand the context in which this new organization was created. Review the planning for the review sessions weeks by: • Incorporating activities that energize the group (icebreakers, energizers). • Balancing the day with other activities that build AGMP capacity for applications review (integration of training and capacity building at the end of the day). • Separating the applications.	*Several staff members:* Improve the flow of information about funding even before funding calls are even launched to encourage organizations to become familiar with the process.	*Funded and non-funded organizations:* Record webinars with participants' authorization and disseminate to funded and non-funded organizations that were unable to attend. *Funded organizations:* Increase the length and frequency of the webinars and offer 2 webinars per funding period. One at the beginning of the funding period and one near the end of the funding period. *Funded and non-funded organizations:* Allow webinars to be uploaded to the website so that groups can always access them. *Funded organizations:* Provide maximum clarity and simplicity as to documentation-needed pre, during, and post-funding for organizations.

Specific recommendations for the section

- Establish a communication strategy around the funding process that addresses both organizations that have a digital presence and organizations that do not.
- Exploring the use of informal communication tools, which are more popular among some groups, would allow the dissemination of this information more easily, in particular, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Snapchat.
- Explore the use of a different method of application when applying for smaller grants (audio, video, etc.).
- Provide multi-year funding.
- Review eligibility criteria with a feminist and intersectional lens.
- Invest in an application portal that can:
  – Operate offline.
  – Allow the applicant to resume the application process where they previously left off.

5. Strategic Challenges

5.1. Defining a strategy up-front

During AGMP meetings, the activists meet on the day of voting and define their funding strategy for West Africa. While organic and participatory, this method has limitations. The strategy is based solely on the activists' perception at the time of review. There is no fundamental analysis being conducted on the needs of the groups to shape the funding strategy. Being aware of the groups' trends and needs based on assessments conducted in the field, and considering disparities and differences within the region would help in participating in the meetings with a strategy informed by the grassroots. This would also allow for better evaluation and monitoring of the grant's impact.

> *"We always decide on the funding strategy at the beginning of our meetings. Which sometimes go well and sometimes don't. Sometimes, it seems the strategy will focus on the needs of the most vocal countries, and I worry that we sometimes forget to come up with a more global strategy. We need to make sure that we mainstream an intersectional dimension into the strategy, thus strengthening the organizations while strengthening the movement."*
>
> —Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's activist grant-making panel

5.1.1. Lack of political outlook

Several internal and external members report the lack of a political perspective when reviewing the applications. The funding applications are considered within their political contexts. For example, in some countries, the political and social context of LGBTQI struggles means that some organizations have access to more funding and resources, but this is not the case for all countries in West Africa. There are still overwhelming disparities within the region. This dichotomy is sometimes difficult to navigate, many internal members report. They are concerned about how to ensure that ISDAO meets the basic needs of some organizations, while at the same time ensuring that it supports organizations that are already well established within the movement and do not need such support. A political outlook for some members would also mean strengthening the technical and financial support offered to French-speaking organizations that operate in contexts that are more precarious.

> *"It is urgent that we, as AGMP members, learn to look at the political context, rather than the identity of the organization. It's time to accept that some of the organizations that receive the most funding are the ones that have an easier time conducting their activities because of the more favorable socio-political climate."*
>
> —Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's activist grant-making panel

5.2. Biases in Analysis and Decision-Making

The funding decisions are made by the AGMP, which allows decisions to be made by and for activists. The ISDAO team is present at AGMP meetings and can inform the AGMP about the work of some organizations but cannot intervene in the decision-making. Several internal members have noted that the grants review process is solid yet seems to prove difficult when it needs to be applied without bias. Today, the decision-making process is too biased, which impacts the need for impartiality in decision-making for several reasons.

"Sometimes one gets the impression that the analysis of the applications is a payback between the country representatives and the applying organizations."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

5.2.1. AGMP Membership

Following our internal and external conversations, it was reported that it would be important to review the composition of the AGMP, which is currently one representative per country (except for Nigeria and Ghana). Many of those consulted felt that it would be important to have two representatives per country to provide more nuance and neutrality. Indeed, the fact that some countries are represented by a single individual leads to a biased understanding of local contexts. If the country representative has direct conflict, or on the contrary, has a strong affinity, with an organization applying for funding, this affects their ability to remain neutral in the decision-making.

"In our deliberative conversations, we notice that some country representatives may display limitations in their neutral reading of certain applications. Even when the ISDAO team weighs in on an organization, the country representative does not always consider that input. We would need to have at least 2 representatives to balance out the concentration of power given to the country representatives."

—Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's activist grant-making panel

5.2.2. AGMP Anonymity

The AGMP members are expected to carry out their mandate anonymously. Following our internal and external discussions, it has become quite clear that AGMP members are known. This has raised several concerns in the past. For example, some AGMP members have received threats from applicant organizations, or AGMP members have used their mandate to threaten applicant organizations with the possibility of not funding their proposal. The community is small, and everyone knows everyone. Therefore, it is hard to preserve anonymity when AGMP members and applicants have a relationship.

"Everyone is part of the movement, so everyone knows everyone. It is very likely that you know the AGMP member who represents your country."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

"The people have not been put in a position of neutrality, so how can it be expected of them that they be neutral?"

—Excerpt from an interview with an ISDAO staff member

''We can't guarantee the anonymity of AGMP today. And we need to recognize and think about another method to ensure an equitable distribution of funding.''

—Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's AGMP

5.2.3. AGMP members are also applicants

The fact that AGMP members can apply for funding places virtually all AGMP members in a conflict of interest, as de facto, all AGMP members share a close relationship. Several members report that there is an unspoken power dynamic in the room that dictates decision-making. All organizations, of which AGMP members are a part, expect to be funded, and if this does not happen, it creates complex dynamics between members.

''Sometimes you don't have to say, 'support my application,' you already know who will vouch for you and who won't.''

—Excerpt from interview with a member of ISDAO's AGMP

"Not supporting an application from one of your colleagues in the AGMP has been the source of a lot of conflicts."

—Excerpt from an interview with an ISDAO staff member

''It is important that AGMP members can no longer apply to ISDAO funding to make it truly fair, transparent, and honest."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

"The conflict of interest started as soon as AGMP members were allowed to apply for ISDAO funding."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

5.2.4. ISDAO team members and their lack of power

Although the entire decision-making process is entrusted to the AGMP, ISDAO has institutional responsibility because the ISDAO team conducts the field visits and is in contact with the partners. The ISDAO team is also aware of the work and progress of the groups. They may keep the AGMP abreast during discussions with them, but sometimes their input is not considered, which creates frustration and makes it easier for bias and conflicts of interest to persist.

"To make the process fair, ISDAO members should be allowed to have a degree of power in decision-making, as they are the ones who know us and with whom we have a relationship that is more neutral than the one we have with the AGMP members."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

"The ISDAO team should have a say in decision-making because they are the ones closest to the organizations. The decision-making should be 60% AGMP's and 40% ISDAO's."

—Excerpt from an interview with an ISDAO staff member

5.2.5. Lack of accountability process

The AGMP has decision-making power, but no accountability process has been put in place. To this day, the lack of an accountability mechanism makes the AGMP responsible for everything but accountable for nothing. Following our internal and external conversations, there have been calls to review the degree of authority given to the AGMP members.

"Where are the accountability mechanisms? To whom is the AGMP accountable? In theory, it would be to the movement, but there are no mechanisms in place."

—Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO Interim Governance Body

"Sometimes AGMP members divulge information about organizations that they shouldn't in order to gain support from the rest of the group."

—Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's activist grant-making panel

"It is important to question whether so much power should be granted to the AGMP."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

Recommendations for this section
Strategic challenges

Specific recommendations		
By the consultant	**By internal members**	**By external members**
Instead of anonymizing the AGMP, anonymize the applications: • Those responsible for anonymizing applications cannot analyze them and take part in the decision-making. Split the decision-making power: • One part of the AGMP and the team anonymizes the applications • One part of the AGMP analyzes and the ISDAO team reviews and analyzes the applications. • One part of the AGMP makes the decision based on the review.		

Specific recommendations
Recommendations made by 2 or more groups of people consulted

• Incorporate a bi-annual or tri-annual survey conducted by an external consultant that informs as to the needs and funding priorities of LGBTQI organizations in French-speaking Africa, incorporating a political and intersectional perspective.
• Train AGMP members to integrate a political perspective in the analysis of grant applications.
• Increase country representation by:
  – Increasing to two the number of representatives per country.
  – Two people with different, but complementary visions.
• Remove the ability of AGMP members to apply for funding: *Allow them to access resources outside of ISDAO by introducing them to other donors.*
• Create an accountability mechanism for the AGMP.
• Incorporate the votes and perspectives of the AGMP members: *Score of 60 for the AGMP and 40 for ISDAO's staff.*

6. Capacity building challenges

6.1. Capacity Building for the AGMP

ISDAO's participatory and recent funding process means that many of the members involved in the funding decision-making, including AGMP members, became familiar with their functions of analyzing and reviewing funding applications. In recent years, thanks to sustained practice and a rigorous funding process, the AGMP members have been able to achieve a better understanding of funding analysis and granting. However, continued capacity building on grantmaking standards and good practices would be beneficial to AGMP members. This capacity building could include covering topics such as the sociopolitical contexts of countries that are going through changes, and the developing and strengthening of grantmaking assessment techniques.

6.2. Capacity building for organizations

Following our conversations with the organizations and ISDAO members, the need for capacity building for organizations came up repeatedly. Beyond seeing funding as a method to support the movement in the region, there is also a need to invest in their training. Training themes that emerged are often related to financial literacy, financial management, and conflict management within LGBTQI organizations and the movement.

"ISDAO should promote greater collaboration between the organizations."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a non-funded organization

"ISDAO should consider setting up a coaching/mentoring program in a way national organizations can mutually support each other while fostering dialogue between the national organizations at the country level and strengthening the movement."

—Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a funded organization

6.3. Post-application follow-up

ISDAO should do a better job of post-application follow-up. When asked about post-application follow-up, 56.3% of French-speaking organizations considered it sufficient compared to 27.8% of English-speaking organizations.

How would you rate the feedback you received from ISDAO once your application was selected?(48 responses)

- **Extensive (25%)**
- **Satisfactory (56.3%)**
- **Insuffecient (18.8%)**

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How would you rate the feedback provided by ISDAO after the selection of your proposal? (54 responses)

- **Good enough (51.9%)**
- **Enough (27.8%)**
- **Not enough (20.4%)**

6.4. Non-funded organizations

Following our internal and external conversations, it often came up that organizations that are not selected do not receive follow-up/feedback on their applications. It is important to look at the funding process not just as one that leads exclusively to funding, but also as an opportunity to build capacity in grant writing and application for organizations that are part of the LGBTQI movement in West Africa. The organizations would benefit greatly from AGMP follow-ups. Next, it would be important for field visits to be extended to the organizations that did not receive funding. For many members, this would encourage them to reapply and would provide a learning experience for all.

> *"If we evaluate the applications and people don't receive any feedback, not only do they not get what they applied for but [there is] no opportunity for improvement."*
>
> —Excerpt from an interview with a member of ISDAO's AGMP

> *"ISDAO never provides feedback, thus preventing us from understanding how we can improve as an organization and improve our work. Sometimes it's not even about the money, but rather an opportunity to see if our activities and projects are being reviewed/ assessed."*
>
> —Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a non-funded organization

> *"It's disheartening when you don't get funded because you can't even figure out why."*
>
> —Excerpt from a focus group discussion with a non-funded organization

Recommendations for this section
Capacity building challenges

Specific recommendations

By the consultant	By internal members	By external members
Establish a relationship with non-funded organizations by inviting them to ISDAO events and activities (annual meetings, webinars, etc.)	*Several staff members:* Extend field visits to non-funded organizations.	*Non-funded organizations:* Provide feedback to non-funded organizations.

Specific recommendations

- Provide ongoing capacity building for AGMP members.
- Provide peer-to-peer training for ISDAO grantees.
- Provide better follow-up after applications.

7. Conclusion

Since its inception, ISDAO has positioned itself as one of the most important resources in the region for LGBTQI organizations. Its tremendous flexibility, inclusiveness, and accessibility are what make its strengths and set it apart from other donors. Its ability to incorporate feedback makes it a learning and innovative fund.

Nevertheless, the [aforementioned] flexibility also comes with limitations. Some members and organizations sometimes take advantage of this quest for inclusion for all. The lack of a solid and strong accountability process hinders ISDAO and is a source of internal and external conflict. In particular, the very close and intimate ties shared by internal and external members of the organization, without a robust accountability process, directly affect the organization's desired position of neutrality.

After 4 years of funding, and a great deal of momentum, it is time for ISDAO to strengthen funding mechanisms to continue its mission of strengthening the LGBTQI movement in West Africa.

Appendix 1:
Internal Interview Questionnaire

1.   What is your name, your position at ISDAO, and the pronoun you prefer to use?

2.   What do you think of the way ISDAO advertises and communicates around its grantmaking process?

3.   What do you like about this process?

4.   What could potentially hinder the growth of the organization?

5.   What do you think of the way ISDAO manages its application process?

6.   What do you like about this process?

7.   What are the areas for development?

8.   What do you think of the way ISDAO manages its selection process?

9.   What do you think of the decision-making process?

10. Could this process be improved?

11. Are the selection criteria inclusive enough for marginalized and hard-to-reach groups (disabled, illiterate, non-educated...)?

12. What is the decision-making process?

13. What is the selection announcement process?

14. How is feedback given to groups that have not been selected?

15. Do you feel that sufficient (non-financial) support is provided to groups that are selected for funding?

16. What improvements would you make to the overall process?

Appendix 2:
Focus Group Scripts

Key Questions

Here are some examples of the questions we will attempt to answer together.

Strengths of the ISDAO grantmaking process:

What part(s) of the ISDAO grantmaking process work(s) well and why?

In your opinion, what has the participatory process helped ISDAO achieve, and how?

Weaknesses of the ISDAO grantmaking process:

What part(s) of the ISDAO grantmaking process can be improved and why?

What would you like to improve or change: the application process, the application form, or both?

Opportunities for the ISDAO grantmaking process:

In the future, in what areas would you like ISDAO to invest and why?

What additional steps could ISDAO take to make the application process easier and simpler for applicants?

How can ISDAO improve the grantmaking process for AGMP members?

Threats to ISDAO's funding process:

What reason(s) would lead the community to stop participating in the ISDAO grantmaking process?

In your opinion, what could pose a threat to the ISDAO grantmaking process and why?

Do you think that the growing number of organizations and groups in West Africa can be a threat to ISDAO's funding process? If so, why?

Appendix 3:
Online Survey Questions

1. Have you ever applied to an ISDAO call for proposals?

2. For which call(s)for proposals did you receive funding (please check all that apply)

3. Are you familiar with the different stages of our grantmaking process?

4. Are you aware that the funding decisions are made by our Activist Grant Making Panel (AGMP), which is made up of activists from our communities?

5. Have you ever attended a webinar on the ISDAO funding process?

6. How would you describe the information provided during the webinar?

7. How can we make the webinar more valuable to you as you develop your proposal/grant application?

8. Have you consulted ISDAO's frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the call for proposals?

9. If you consulted the FAQs, how helpful were they to you when developing your proposal?

10. Would you say that our communication and information strategy around the calls for proposals has been successful in reaching a wide range of LGBTQI organizations in West Africa, particularly in the nine (9) ISDAO focal countries (as well as SWs and DUs organizations in Burkina Faso and Nigeria as part of the Love Alliance)?

11. How can we improve our communication and information strategy to reach a diverse range of LGBTQI organizations in West Africa (as well as SWs and DUs organizations in Burkina Faso and Nigeria as part of the Love Alliance)?

12. How would you rate the ISDAO form(s) (proposal requestor concept note) when preparing your application?

13. What would make the ISDAO forms more accessible or easier to use for you?

14. Are there any sections of our grant application form (proposal or concept note) that you had difficulty with when preparing your application? Kindly specify.

15. Currently, our calls for proposals are open for a period of two to four weeks. Is that enough in your opinion?

16. If you answered "No", please tell us what an ideal timeframe would be?

17. How would you describe the turnaround time for processing applications once they are submitted?

18. FOR THE SUB-REGIONAL CALL FOR PROPOSALS: We have three funding levels for the regional call, 1) up to USD 5,000; 2) between USD 5,000 and 15,000); and 3) between USD 15,000 and 20,000. Do you think this should remain our funding range for the regional call?

19. SUB-REGIONAL CALL FOR PROPOSALS: If you answered no, what do you think ISDAO's funding range should be?

20. For the Love Alliance call for proposals: We have three levels of funding for the Love Alliance call (Burkina Faso and Nigeria), 1) up to USD10,000; 2) between USD 10,000 and 30,000); and 3) between USD 30,000 and 50,000) per year. Do you think this should remain our funding range for the Love Alliance call for proposals? [For organizations in Love Alliance countries only]

21. CALL FOR PROPOSALS - LOVE ALLIANCE: If you answered no, what do you think ISDAO's funding range should be? [For organizations from Love Alliance countries only]

22. After your application was selected, did ISDAO provide you with sufficient feedback on your application?

23. After your application was selected, how would you describe the steps leading to receiving the grant?

24. As a current and/or former grantee organization, what do you think needs to change in our grant submission process?

Appendix 4:
Summary Of The Recommendations

Recommendations for this section: Procedural and processing challenges		
Specific recommendations		
By the consultant	**By internal members**	**By the organizations**
Funding renewal Explore paths to resolve existing tensions between funded, fledgling, and non-funded groups by facilitating a conversation on resource sharing in relation to the sense of "scarcity" experienced in the movement. If a funding cap is considered, it should feature a toolkit or a plan that would allow organizations to reach stability in the long run (e.g. by introducing them to other donors, by building capacity for fundraising...). Allow organizations that have reached the 5-year mark to re-apply after a 2-year break.	**Funding renewal** *Several staff members and members of the activist grant-making panel:* Explore the idea of a funding cap for the organizations following 5 years of funding for organizations to seek new funding sources.	**Level of funding** *Funded organizations:* The groups suggest that ISDAO increase its funding to a range between USD 10,000 and 50,000. **Funding renewal** *Funded organizations:* Not limit funding allotted to organizations that are able to leverage multiple sources of funding. *Non-funded organizations:* Make more room and support fledgling organizations.
Specific recommendations		
• Administrative delays • Review the steps (including roles and responsibilities) for grant applications review. • Review the application processing time. • Facilitate the resolution of conflicts that arise between funded and non-funded organizations due to the accessibility and competition for ISDAO's funding.		

Recommendations for this section
Accessibility and communication challenges

Specific recommendations

By the consultant	By internal members	By external members
Include organizations in the creation of webinars to foster engagement and participation. Investing in conflict management capacity of organizations (e.g. Providing management training in conflict mediation and management for each organization's leadership). When an emerging organization applies, ask as part of the application whether the applicants have ever worked with an organization that has received funding from ISDAO in the past and if so, provide a space to understand the context in which this new organization was created. Review the planning for the review sessions weeks by: • Incorporating activities that energize the group (icebreakers, energizers). • Balancing the day with other activities that build AGMP capacity for applications review (integration of training and capacity building at the end of the day). • Separating the applications.	*Several staff members:* Improve the flow of information about funding even before funding calls are even launched to encourage organizations to become familiar with the process.	*Funded and non-funded organizations:* Record webinars with participants' authorization and disseminate to funded and non-funded organizations that were unable to attend. *Funded organizations:* Increase the length and frequency of the webinars and offer 2 webinars per funding period. One at the beginning of the funding period and one near the end of the funding period. *Funded and non-funded organizations:* Allow webinars to be uploaded to the website so that groups can always access them. *Funded organizations:* Provide maximum clarity and simplicity as to documentation-needed pre, during, and post-funding for organizations.

Specific recommendations for the section

• Establish a communication strategy around the funding process that addresses both organizations that have a digital presence and organizations that do not.
• Exploring the use of informal communication tools, which are more popular among some groups, would allow the dissemination of this information more easily, in particular, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Snapchat.
• Explore the use of a different method of application when applying for smaller grants (audio, video, etc.).
• Provide multi-year funding.
• Review eligibility criteria with a feminist and intersectional lens.
• Invest in an application portal that can:
  – Operate offline.
  – Allow the applicant to resume the application process where they previously left off.

Recommendations for this section
Strategic challenges

Specific recommendations

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Specific recommendations
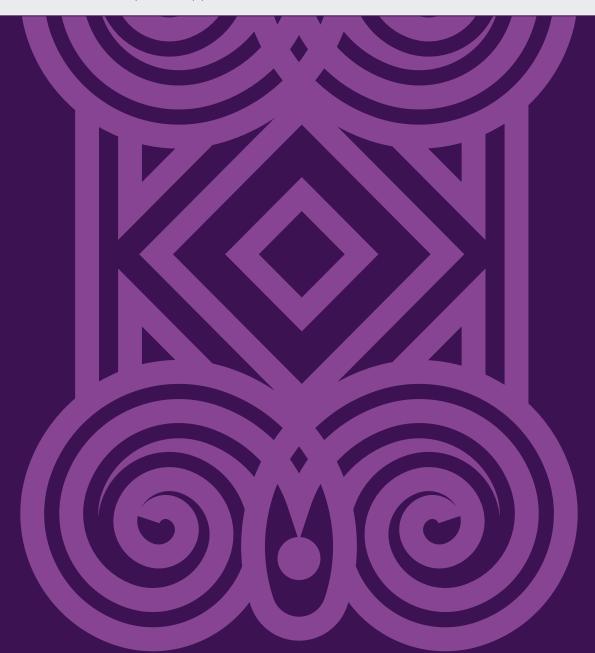*Recommendations made by 2 or more groups of people consulted*

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- Provide better follow-up after applications.

ISDAO

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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