

# Blooming

Our 2022 Annual Report



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# 1. In Retrospect

## Rita Nketiah (Ghana)

Outgoing Interim Governing Body (IGB) member

My name is Rita Nketiah and I'm a queer feminist activist, born in Ghana, raised in Toronto and currently living in Accra - Ghana. I am a writer, community mobilizer and currently work in philanthropy.

I joined ISDAO's IGB in May 2017, after being approached by Brain Trust members Caroline Kouassiaman and Mariam Armisen. At the time, I had just moved back to Accra and was starting to get involved with the local queer feminist organization. I was excited to join this new initiative aimed at strengthening movement-building resources in the sub-region.

As a new fund, we, the IGB played a key role in setting up ISDAO's basic structure, including establishing ISDAO's presence in the region through information and activist consultations, developing and maintaining

key relationships with donors and, finally, recruiting ISDAO's first-ever Executive Director.

It goes without saying that ISDAO has filled a major gap in the funding of local movements in the sub-region. Prior to ISDAO, there were only a handful of donors who funded the work of movements on a fairly sporadic basis. ISDAO has been able to create a regional space for strengthening the capacity, knowledge and political analysis of activists in West Africa.

One of ISDAO's greatest challenges has also been one of our fundamental commitments: linguistic justice. I admire the dedication, thoughtfulness and patience it took to build a fully bilingual organization. I've never been in such a politically intentional space when it comes to language justice. As you can imagine, every conversation,

every decision and every strategy meeting took much longer. This meant that every meeting, every document and every email exchanged between IGB members was translated into French and English.

We made sure that everyone's voice was heard, and that no one felt excluded because of language barriers. This process



taught me a lot about what it really means to “leave no one behind”. Language justice remains an ongoing challenge for movement building in West Africa, but I believe ISDAO has created a strong example of how to do it in a practical and sincere way, some elements of which can be found in our **“Kuuma”** guide.

I’m particularly proud of our commitment to creating a fund inspired by feminist values. In the sub-region, we still find it difficult to work in collaboration and solidarity with the LGBTQI and feminist movements. ISDAO has always been committed to feminist principles and working methods. This is evident in the faces and actions of its leaders, and I hope the fund will continue to be a thought leader in promoting a movement rooted in feminist values. I’m also proud that ISDAO has become highly visible in key philanthropic spaces, such as the Global Philanthropy Project and regional advocacy spaces.

I’m confident that we, as the IGB, have left a solid foundation for the incoming Governance Board to move forward. I

hope that the new Governance Board members will feel empowered to make bold, experimental and movement-based decisions to strengthen support for the region. I also hope that the future Governance Board will continue to be representative of the diversity of the sub-region and our movements.

However, I am deeply concerned by the rise of anti-gender and anti-democratic movements in the sub-region, as it is indicative of a growing trend towards the infiltration of right-wing Western evangelicals throughout West Africa. As we have seen in other parts of the continent, the anti-gender movement seeks to promote violence against an already vulnerable population by further criminalizing it and violating numerous national and international human rights laws. In many West African countries, LGBTQI people have been the target of structural violence, discrimination and persecution. Our activist movements in the sub-region, many of which are still in their infancy, are under direct attack from these anti-gender actors.

We must continue to press for support for the sub-region so that activists can withstand the inevitable attacks on our communities. ISDAO’s role will be even more crucial in the years ahead, as it will be necessary to provide key resources for movement-building, strategic rallies and holistic support for safety and security.





## Nataka GMAKAGNI (Togo)

Outgoing Interim Governing Body (IGB) member

I joined the ISDAO Interim Governing Body (IGB) at the beginning of 2018 after responding to the call for applications to recruit new members of the IGB.

I am enthusiastic and excited to have joined this body, and proud that we have resolved some major issues, including operationalizing ISDAO as an activist fund run by West African LGBTQI activists, thus fulfilling the very vision of creating ISDAO. In addition, we made the concept of the flexibility of the fund effective, so that unregistered groups/organizations can benefit from ISDAO grants.

It has to be said that we experienced a number of challenges, one of them being the formation of ISDAO's first Activist Grant

Making Panel (AGMP). The members of this panel were recruited by the IGB because ISDAO did not have full-time staff yet. This was the first time we had set up a body of this nature in our region. We had the responsibility of ensuring that the AGMP reflected the diversity of ISDAO's identities, experiences and focal countries. It was complex, but I think we succeeded. This process enabled ISDAO to award its first AGMP approved grants as early as 2019.

A major challenge has been to ensure that ISDAO will always reflect its feminist values and policies. For example, in April 2019, we had to make the difficult decision to remove an IGB member because they had violated these policies. Of course, we are proud of what we have achieved throughout

our mandate. And one of our proudest achievements to celebrate was recruiting ISDAO's first Executive Director after years of searching for the right candidate. We wanted to ensure that the selected person would build ISDAO according to the vision and values that were defined at its creation, and we believe we made the right



choice. However, given ISDAO's current organizational growth, I believe we can do a better job of ensuring that our staff fully reflects the geographical, but especially the linguistic and gender diversity of our communities.

LGBTQI+ movement over a long period of time. It is therefore more than urgent for movements to reorganize and rethink their advocacy and engagement strategies in order to guarantee fundamental freedoms to our already highly marginalized communities.

Finally, as our mandate as the Interim Governing Body draws to a close, we are witnessing the emergence of structured anti-gender movements and voices calling for the further criminalization of LGBTQI+ communities in our sub-region; a region which is also plagued by a serious security crisis in the Sahel, and the militarization of certain states, including the restriction of civic space. I remain concerned about safeguarding the progress made by activists over the years. If left unchecked, this context can dismantle or even destroy entire systems of advocacy built up by the



## 2. Empowering the Movement through Funding: A Focus on Our Grantee Partners

ISDAO holds self-determination and autonomy as core values, exemplified through our commitment to empowering the movements and organizations we support, putting them in charge of defining their priorities and strategies. This approach has yielded a remarkable diversity of initiatives, spanning various areas to meet the multifaceted needs of the communities we work with in West Africa. **We find constant inspiration in the innovative and creative work of our grantee partners, and this chapter is a tribute to their unwavering hard work and resilience.** Below, we spotlight the work of some of our 2022 grantee partners, spanning all our grants, including special grants like the Love Alliance grant and the ASANKA creative initiatives fund.

### Regional Grants

Our regional Grants refer to our annual portfolio of grants awarded by our Activist Grant Making Panel (AGMP) to LGBTQI-led groups, organizations, and networks in our 9 focal countries, through an open call for proposals.

**Initiative Kêneya Sôro-yôrô (IKSô)** is a consortium of LGBTQI healthcare professionals committed to enhancing healthcare accessibility for LGBTQI+ individuals in Burkina Faso. Their mission revolves around offering affordable and easily accessible services that encompass preventive and curative healthcare,

sexual and reproductive health services, mental health care, psycho-social support, documentation, and advocacy. IKSô was born out of a need for healthcare services devoid of discrimination and stigma for LGBTQI+ persons, especially trans persons. In 2022, ISDAO supported IKSô with project funding, supporting the establishment



of a mobile clinic, and the acquisition of essential medical equipment that would enable them to provide subsidized in-home medical consultations for LGBTQI+ individuals. Subsequent to this grant, IKSô successfully launched its mobile clinic, procured the necessary equipment, and

delivered more than a hundred medical consultations. Their activities in 2022 also included healthcare awareness campaigns on social media and the organization of open days, offering free medical consultations to LGBTQI communities, Sex Workers, and People Who Use Drugs.

**Initiative Tilé** is a feminist organization in Côte d'Ivoire dedicated to advancing the artistic talents of LBQ women, empowering them with socio-professional skills, and championing the rights of sexual minority women, particularly LBQ individuals. Led by a passionate team of women and youth, Initiative Tilé uses social media and web radio to engage with their community, fostering connections through art, poetry, storytelling, information dissemination, and essential psycho-social support. In 2022, ISDAO provided core funding to Initiative Tilé, enabling the association to rent an office space and purchase essential work tools and equipment while enhancing its organizational capacity and technical expertise.

This helped the organization to expand its digital presence and visibility, forge

new strategic partnerships, and secure more funding, leading to the setup of its groundbreaking independent web radio, Radio Tilé, a dedicated radio station by, and for the LGBTQI+ community.

*"We feel that this grant has been the gateway to Initiative Tilé's growth, as it has made our work a little more visible and professional so that we started to receive invitations to workshops, seminars, and conferences, and enter spaces where we hadn't been included in our first year of work."*





## Special Grants: ASANKA Creative Initiatives Fund

ASANKA Creative Initiatives Fund was created to support innovative advocacy projects that use creative mediums such as film, literature, photography, radio, visual arts, digital campaigns, and more, to advocate for the rights of LGBTQI communities in our focal countries. ASANKA is a unique fund because it offers funding opportunities not only to LGBTQI organizations but also to individual LGBTQI activists seeking support for their creative advocacy projects.

**Drama Queens** is a youth-led organization in Ghana that is dedicated to using creative mediums like theatre, graphic novels, music, and film to advocate for social causes, including feminism, LGBTQIA+

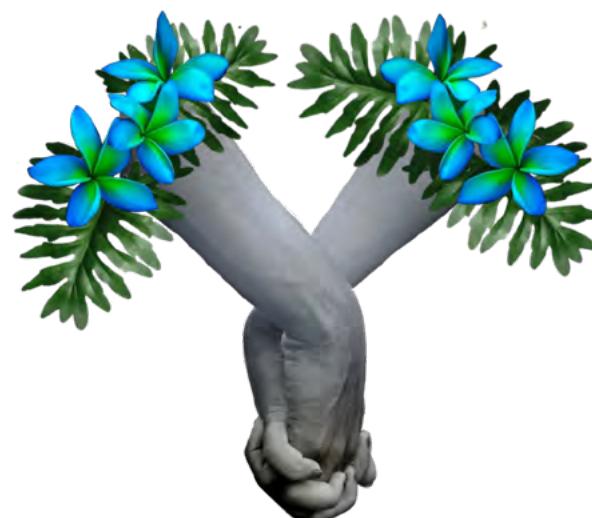
rights, Pan-Africanism, and environmental activism. With the support of ISDAO's pilot ASANKA creative initiative funds, Drama Queens organized the second edition of A Queer Film Festival (QUFF), a 2-day festival that showcases and celebrates African LGBTQIA+ media. More than just a film festival, QUFF also served as a safe and inclusive space where LGBTQIA+ persons could gather to discuss and celebrate the works of talented queer African filmmakers and storytellers. Despite the challenges they encountered during the festival's organization, the Drama Queens team takes pride in the fact that they successfully created a platform that fosters insightful conversations and promotes artistic activism through the medium of films.

## Special Grants: In Touch Pilot Fund

When establishing the In Touch Pilot Fund, we wanted to use this catalytic fund to support the visibility and communication capacity of groups and organizations already engaged in communication efforts, but needing dedicated resources to strengthen this. The beneficiaries of this pilot fund were selected from our pool of past and present grantee-partners with an existing communications plan or program, through an internal needs identification process.

Through this pilot fund, the grantee partners established or improved their websites and other digital platforms, to better communicate their actions. The fund has also enabled the organizations to produce communication products such as business cards, brand collaterals, and professional email addresses.

**Center For Health, Education, and Vulnerable Support (CHEVS)** is an LGBTQI+ Youth-led feminist organization focusing on advancing the human rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights of diverse youth groups in West Africa. With the In Touch grant, CHEVS improved its organizational communications by hiring a communications officer, purchasing infrastructure to enable it to host webinars and other digital events, creating a website and professional email addresses for its team, running marketing campaigns, and developing a brand guide.



*"This project has helped us to communicate our mission and values more effectively by sharing more information about our programs and activities and the impact we are making within the LGBTQI communities."*

**Club des 7 jours** is an LGBT organization based in Togo that advocates for the psychological and social well-being of minority groups through peer education, cultural events, and socio-professional integration. The In Touch grant helped Club des 7 jours to redesign and improve their website, increasing their digital presence. The organization was also able to train its team on the use of digital tools, produce communications materials like flyers and posters, and an audio-visual advertorial cataloging the history and achievements of the organization.

## Special Grants:

### Love Alliance

Through the Love Alliance Initiative, ISDAO supports creating and implementing stronger, more inclusive movements supporting sexual and reproductive health and rights in Burkina Faso and Nigeria. In addition to providing grants to community-led groups and organizations in both countries, ISDAO also supports regional initiatives aimed at enhancing community engagement in advocacy and the empowerment of movements at the regional level. The resources allocated through the Love Alliance promote inclusion and intersectional approaches, enabling funded movements to define their own priorities and strategies. Although not exhaustive, here are some bold initiatives led by our grantee partners in contexts that are becoming increasingly hostile and restrictive of individual rights.





### In Burkina Faso

**Association Wend-Yam (AWEYA)** is a community organization led by sex workers, working to promote the health and human rights of minority groups in Burkina Faso and contribute to their well-being and development. In 2022, with the Love Alliance grant, AWEYA set up spaces for dialogue between leaders from the Sex Worker, LGBTQI, and PWUD communities, to promote better social inclusion. The discussions focused on the realities of sex workers, LBQ women, and drug users at hotspots and in society in general. They also explored the roles and responsibilities of hotspot managers, particularly sex workers, in protecting these communities from violence. AWEYA also organized workshops and training sessions for peer educators on human rights and protection against gender-based violence. Another workshop convened healthcare service providers to foster collaboration and devise solutions for overcoming barriers to accessing Sexual and Reproductive Health

services within communities of Sex Workers, LBQ women, and People Who Use Drugs.

### In Nigeria

**Life Advancement Project Initiative (LAPI)** is a community organization that engages with communities of People Who Use Drugs (PWUDs), with a vision to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDs and other diseases, through advocacy, health awareness programs, and community outreach. With their Love Alliance grant, LAPI organized a series of advocacy activities, including workshops, trainings, stakeholder engagements, and media engagements on a local radio station and social media. These activities advanced LAPI's work to improve public perceptions of Drug Users and reduce discrimination and stigmatization. The Love Alliance grant also provided LAPI with core funding to support staff salaries, rent, and other core needs.

## Special Grants: Strategic Initiatives Grants

### 10th African Conference on Sexual Health and Rights - Purposeful

ISDAO awarded a strategic initiative grant to Purposeful, a feminist movement-building hub for girls' organizing and activism. Purposeful co-organized the 10th African Conference on Sexual Health and Rights in Freetown, Sierra Leone, under the theme: "Accelerating the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence in Africa". This conference serves as a space for African civil society to discuss the needs of young people and women, including LGBTQI people, in terms of access to and promotion of health and sexual rights. It provides an opportunity to present the political, social, and economic challenges and new strategies for advocating and securing equitable access to and protection of health and sexual rights on the continent.

ISDAO's strategic initiative grant supported the participation of West African LGBTQI communities in the space, in a safe and

inclusive manner, taking into account gender and linguistic diversity. With ISDAO's support, seven young LGBTQI activists from Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo participated fully in the Conference, taking part in panel discussions.

While speaking during the 'Feminist Movement and LGBTQI Communities in Africa' panel, a West African LBQ participant commented, ***"Some LGBTQI activists don't define themselves as feminists because they are constantly denied, rejected, or ignored when they try to join the feminist movement."***

Our engagement - and the presence and leadership of more LGBTQI persons in this space - was an important step in building this bridge. We were proud to support the participation of our grantee partners at this conference; for many of them, this was their first experience in a more inclusive space, with other civil society actors from across the continent, and notably the sub-region.

### Taboom Media: Telling LGBTQI stories differently

ISDAO awarded a strategic initiative grant to Taboom Media, a South Africa-based organization working to replace stereotypes and discrimination with accuracy and respect, by building ethical journalism on taboo subjects related to human rights.

ISDAO's grant expanded opportunities for LGBTQI West Africans to participate in the storytelling and illustrations through a training on media advocacy. These are featured in the second volume of their anthology series on Queer Activism in Africa, **'Courage to Share'** published in English and French. This anthology has contributed to the visibility of LGBTQI+ movements across the continent, particularly in West Africa, where nine of the twenty-eight contributors to the anthology are from.



### **3. Generating knowledge for a more strategic, resilient and resistant movement**

Across the West African sub-region, there is turbulence - political, social, security and economic. Recent political changes, including through coups d'états in some of ISDAO's focal countries and their aftermaths, have accentuated the shrinking and closing of civic space in the region, already weakened by the COVID-19 health crisis.

In addition, the fight against terrorism in the Sahel has led to the militarization of state institutions in many countries and the adoption of laws restricting individual freedoms. These various changes affect LGBTQI communities in their organizing, advocacy and ways in which they navigate in society , and in the mobilization of financial resources for their work. It is important to understand these changes, their dynamics and how they impact the LGBTQI movement's organizing in the region, in order to inform strategies of action.

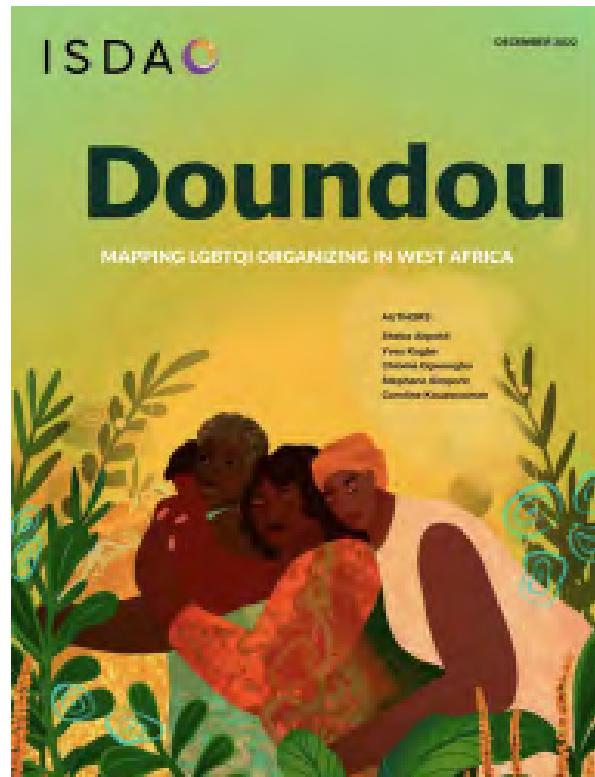
As a thought leader within the field ISDAO produces useful knowledge for and about LGBTQI organizations in the region, but also for the philanthropic and technical assistance community investing in the sub-region.



**That's why, in 2022, we published two major reports:**

**Doundou,**  
**Mapping LGBTQI organizing in West Africa**

ISDAO's second mapping research, after We Exist (2016), shows the state of the organization of the movement since its inaugural publication. The report which covered ISDAO's nine focal countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo), reveals an increase in the number of LGBTQI organizations, especially those led by Lesbians, Bisexual and Queer (LBQ) women as well as those led by Trans people. The research also notes the evolution and expansion of the organizations' missions with an emphasis on new themes beyond sexual health issues such as advocacy, and engagement in civic space, to name a few. In addition, we note the emergence of intersex-led groups and groups working specifically on issues of faith and religion.



Doundou's findings also point to challenges at various levels, from both external and internal sources:

- In the face of movement growth, organizing, and increased visibility, there is increased backlash from both state and non-state factors and political rhetoric that fuels anti-

LGBTQI campaigns and discourse in several countries, as demonstrated in this declaration by the President of Ghana: *"I've said it before, let me stress again, it will not be under the presidency of Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo that gay marriage will be legal, that gay marriage will be legalized in Ghana, it will never happen during my term as president."* - Nana Akufo Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana, February 27, 2021

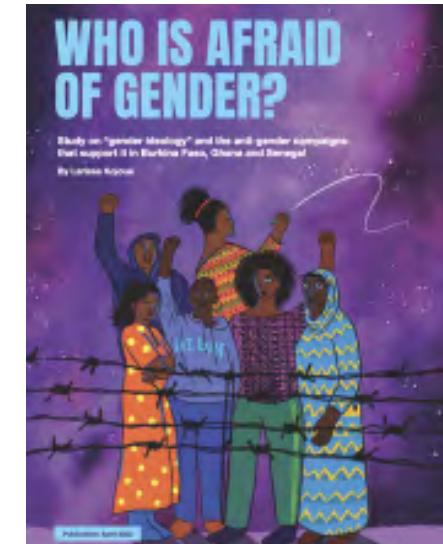
- The backlash and rhetoric and actions of anti-rights anti-gender actors have directly contributed to an increase in acts of violence against LGBTQI communities. As illustrated in Mali *"There has indeed been an upsurge in violence against LGBTQI people since the beginning of 2017, which goes hand in hand with strong media coverage and recurring debates on homosexuality in the Malian media."* - Mali respondent

- Internally, there are major challenges. Most young organizations have weak organizational and governance capacities, associated with leadership conflicts. Underfunding of LBQ, trans, intersex groups, and independent activists persists.
- There are persistent barriers to resource mobilization in community organizations, due to complicated and inaccessible processes and requirements, lack of shared information about opportunities, and donor mechanisms where application forms are often only in English, which is a considerable limitation for francophone organizations.
- Sustainability is a critical challenge both for organizations themselves and their initiatives due to the scarcity of available multi-year funding.

Doundou makes recommendations to all stakeholders in the LGBTQI movement in West Africa on issues of sustainability, safeguarding, and accountability in the movement, including addressed to the

movement itself but also to financial and technical partners of the movement on how to adopt best practices and do better amongst other recommendations, activists recommended that more donors promote community inclusion and flexibility of funding mechanisms in their approaches by allowing activists to participate in funding decisions, and; expanding funding of actions focused on priority and innovative themes aimed at improving the quality of life of community members.

## Who is afraid of gender? - A study on gender ideology



ISDAO and Queer African Youth Network (QAYN) commissioned an exploratory study of gender ideology movements in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Senegal and published a report in 2022 titled “Who is afraid of gender?”, a report on “gender ideology” and anti-gender campaigns that utilize this rhetoric in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Senegal. This is a first-of-its-kind study that sheds light on the organization and manifestations of anti-gender actors specifically in the region.

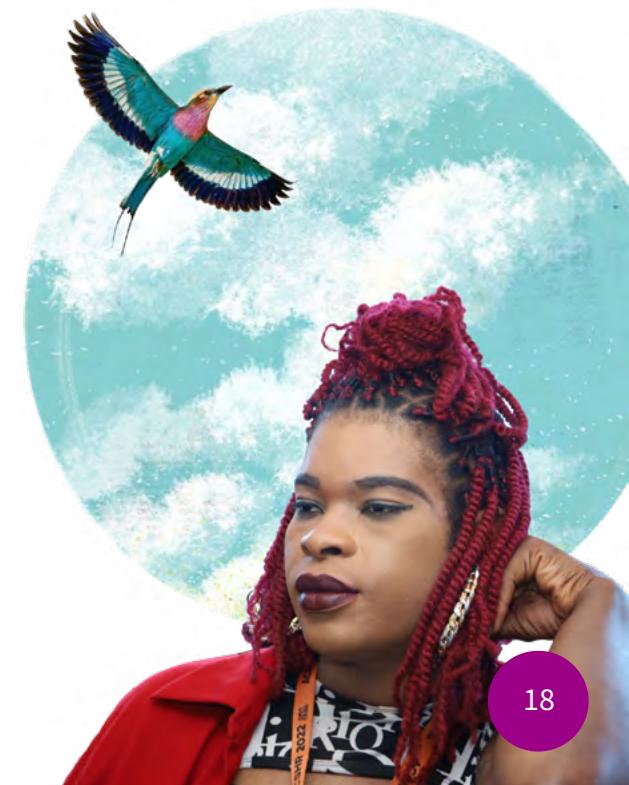
Across the region, there has been an increase in the rise of anti-rights rhetoric, especially through the actions of anti-gender actors are increasingly vocal and active in general, but the ways in which they organize and operate differ from context to context. In addition to organizing large-scale rallying events where they deliver structured and argued speeches, anti-gender actors carry out actions ranging from proposals for anti-LGBTQI laws, or toughening of already existing laws, to attacking communities' freedom to organize and assembly, through shutting down of offices and meeting spaces. spaces

"Who is Afraid of Gender?" confirms the presence and organization of anti-gender movements, recognizing that these movements are not homogeneous. Even when there is no apparent coordination across actors, they do influence each other, and have a clear agenda: the fight against LGBTQI communities and the dismantling of gains made in the advancement of women's sexual and reproductive rights.

The report also reveals the impact of anti-gender activists' rhetoric and actions on LGBTQI people and the organization of LGBTQI movements. As shared from Ghana: "***With the arrest of the 21 in Ho, I no longer dared participate in activities. We even stopped for a while until the situation calmed down. But with the law in Parliament, that's all people talk about. They insult you publicly in the street (...) So we keep a low profile***" - E - Ghana

The report makes recommendations at various levels, both to LGBTQI organizations and to donors and other technical partners on strategies to counteract anti-gender actors. These include investing in LGBTQ solidarity and community involvement, with an emphasis on legal training. Recommendations also include investing in the mental health of LGBTQI people, improving access to basic social services; and investing in efforts to strengthen/ restore broken family ties for LGBTQI people.

Finally, the findings of the report encourage dialogue between LGBTQI+ leaders and others from outside of the community, including but not limited to allies and civil society leaders, representatives of political parties, associations, trade unions, and beyond, to identify and build on common ground in order to understand the discourses and actions of anti-gender movements, organize and take action to counter them.



# 4. 2022 AT A GLANCE

## Number of grants made:

131

Grants made in 2022

29.7%

Increase from  
2021-2022

101

Grants made in 2021

## Total Grants Amount

### 2022 Total Grants amount

\$US 2,174,563.53



### 2021 Total Grants amount

\$US 1,452,480

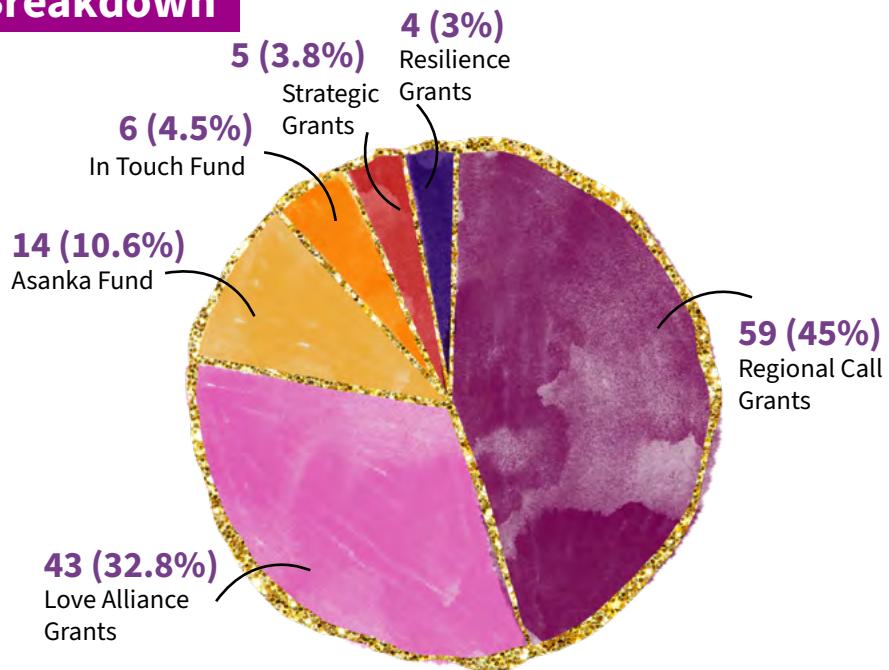
49.7%

Increase from  
2021-2022



## 2022 Grants type

### Breakdown



## Regional Call Grants breakdown by Country:

12

Bénin

14

Burkina Faso

9

Côte d'Ivoire

8

Ghana

5

Liberia

1

Mali

0

Senegal

14

Nigeria

5

Togo

1

Regional

## Public Calls for Proposals/Concept Notes - Breakdown

Regional Call	Love Alliance (Nigeria)	Love Alliance (Burkina Faso)
<b>130</b> proposals received totaling <b>\$ 1,489,482.36</b>	<b>133</b> applications received totaling <b>\$ 2,655,792.69</b>	<b>38</b> applications received totaling <b>\$ 1,434, 931.23</b>
<b>10</b> proposals ineligible	<b>10</b> applications ineligible	<b>11</b> applications ineligible
<b>59</b> proposals approved and funded totaling <b>\$ 731,511.53</b>	<b>24</b> applications were funded to a total of <b>\$ 780,000</b>	<b>17</b> applications were funded to a total of <b>\$ 375,000</b>
	<b>1</b> Joint movement network funded to a total of <b>\$ 30,000</b>	<b>1</b> Joint movement network funded to a total of <b>\$20,000</b>



## ASANKA Creative Initiatives Fund

**119**  
concept notes received

**20**  
were Ineligible

**90**  
from Organizations

**10**  
organizations funded

**29**  
from Individual activists

**4**  
Individual activists funded

### Targeted call for proposals - Breakdown

#### In Touch Fund

**6**  
organisations funded for  
a total of **\$ 26,702**

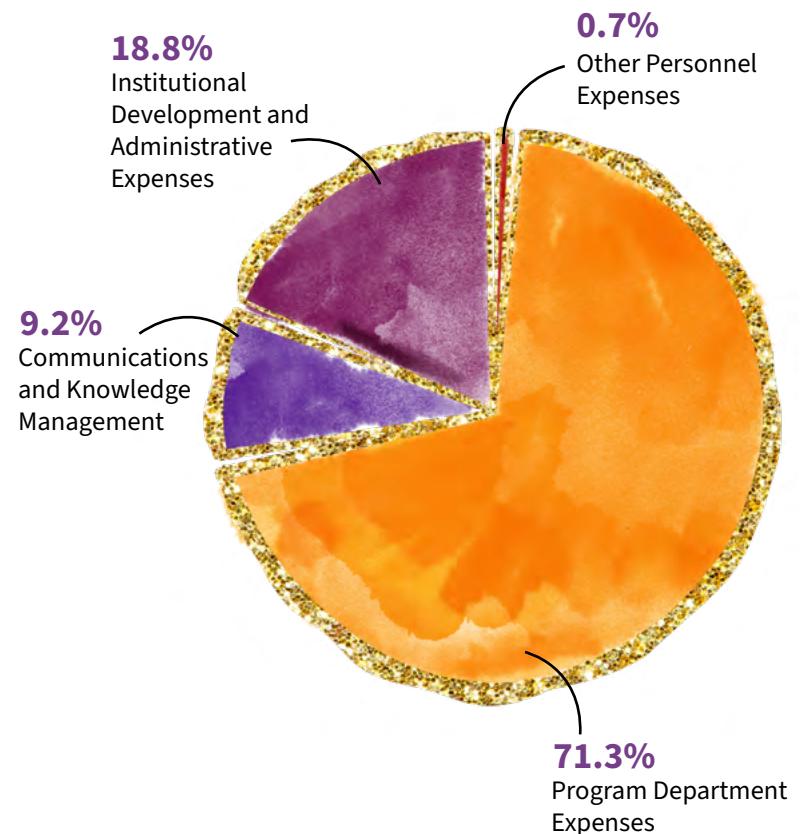
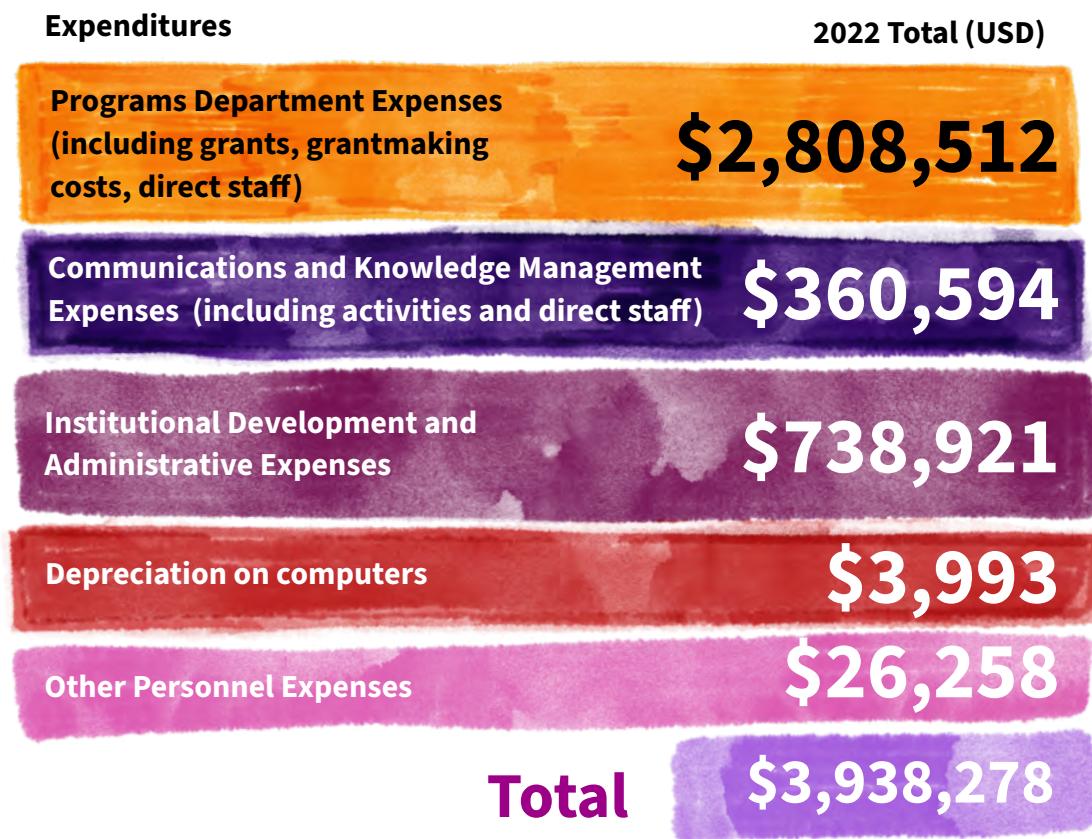
#### Strategic Grants

**5**  
organisations  
funded for a total of **\$ 37,000**



# 5. OUR FINANCES

## ISDAO 2022 Expenditures

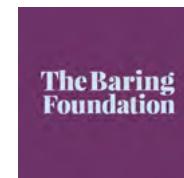


# 6. Acknowledgment

## Donors



Anonymous  
Donor



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands



## Fiscal Host



We extend our humble  
gratitude to all  
individuals, legal entities,  
and technical supporters  
who lent us their support  
in various capacities  
throughout 2022.

ISDA

