ISDAO

DOUNDOU

MAPPING LGBTQI ORGANIZING IN WEST AFRICA

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC REPORT FOR **NIGERIA**

Contents

List of Acronyms

COVID-19   Coronavirus disease

HIV/AIDS   Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Virus

ISDAO   Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest

LGBTQI   Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex

MSM   Men who have sex with men

NACA   National Agency for the Control of AIDS

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

OSS   One Stop Shops

SSMPA   Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act

Summary

In Sub-Saharan Africa, existing homophobic laws create an enabling environment for violence against people perceived to be members of the LGBTQI community. These laws continue to threaten the existence and activities of organizations providing programs that focus on LGBTQI rights protection and service delivery.

In response to these challenges, ISDAO conducted a mapping of the existing LGBTQI movement in Nigeria, and of the actors driving the movement. The data in this report details the different political, legal, and socio-economic contexts of Nigeria in which organizations and activists operate. Additionally, the report lists the organizations that implement LGBTQI programs and the resources and opportunities available to them. It also explores the challenges and gaps in the movement. Recommendations from organizations, activists, and partners are also highlighted.

The extent of the LGBTQI movement in Nigeria described in this report is not comprehensive. However, the details in this report will present a working overview of the different voices and subgroups that make up this movement in Nigeria.

Introduction

This report aims to update the general picture of the LGBTQI West African movement provided by the report We Exist: Mapping LGBTQ Organizing in West Africa (Armisen, 2016) published in 2016 by ISDAO. As 1 of 9 country reports, it also helps shed light on the existing funding landscape for West African LGBTQI movement building. It focuses on youth-led LGBTQI organizations, LBQ women-led organizations, and transgender and intersex-led organizations. It also includes mobilization done by LGBTQI organizations based in locations outside of major cities.

Methodology

Data was collected through one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The respondents were selected randomly with a focus on the youth demographic and the leadership structure of the respondents' organizations. The country consultants identified LGBTQI organizations and independent activists, as well as partner organizations, represented from various regions of Nigeria (South-East, South-West, North-East, and North Central Nigeria). The aim was to promote inclusive sampling and get a diverse response that better reflects the community.

The distribution of the respondents can be seen in the table below.

Actors	Number of respondents
Independent activists	12
LGBTQI organisations	15
National Partners	7
Focus groups	40

The research team encountered some challenges and limitations during the data collection process. The first one was linked to travel restrictions. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, travel to different parts of Nigeria was challenging. One-on-one interviews with independent activists and LGBTQI organizations were conducted virtually using web-based meeting platforms and/or over calls.

Furthermore, poor internet access made conducting virtual interviews challenging. This limited the number of interviews conducted using web-based meeting applications. As a stopgap, many interviews were conducted via regular telephone calls. This however was hampered by variable commitments and availabilities of respondents as some rescheduled or cancelled at the last minute.

Legal, Political, and Socio-Economic Contexts

Legal Context

In Nigeria, several laws criminalize LGBTQI mobilization. Furthermore, the legal context is characterized by a North-South split in the criminal laws, with the Criminal Code Act of 1916 applicable in the South and the Penal Code (Northern States) Federal Provisions Act (No. 25 of 1960) in the North. Sections 214, 215, and 217, of Nigeria's Criminal Code punish sodomy with 14 years' imprisonment. Sections 284, and 405 of the Nigeria Criminal Code also criminalize sodomy and cross-dressing with 14 years imprisonment or a fine as may be determined by the Court. Sharia law has been adopted by the 12 northern states in Nigeria (Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara). Sharia law confers the punishment of death by stoning for 'sodomy' if the offender is married. However, if the offender is unmarried, the punishment is 100 lashes of cane and imprisonment, the number of years to be determined by the court.

The Same Sex Marriage (Prohibitions) Act, 2013 (SSMPA) further prohibits marriage between same-sex persons and the *"registration (participation and operation) […] of gay clubs, societies and organisations"* (§ 4-5). This law is applied in such a way that affects any form of LGBTQI registration or mobilization since legislators and enforcers of this law seldom make a conceptual distinction between the subgroups of the LGBTQI community. The law recommends 14 years imprisonment for anyone who enters a same-sex union and 10 years imprisonment for anyone who operates an LGBTQI organization or witnesses and abets LGBTQI unions. Beyond the law explicitly targeting sexual and gender minorities, the discriminatory application of federal and state legislation, subsidiary laws, judicial precedents, as well as customary and religious laws and court procedures further worsens the situation for LGBTQI individuals and those advocating for their rights.

There is limited legal recourse for anyone who suffers human rights violations. LGBTQI persons have endured state neglect over time and there is huge reluctance for State officials to provide support to people who are even perceived to be LGBTQI persons in light of the current legal landscape.

Political context

The Nigerian National Assembly is seen as an influential force, although it encounters challenges and institutional weaknesses due to its large size, allegations of corruption, and informal, inherited structures. In recent years, its 'successes' include the passing of the Same.

Socio-economic context

Nigerian society is generally hostile to persons perceived to be LGBTQI, especially to those who do not have any form of privilege, such as financial independence or robust family ties. Members of the LGBTQI community continue to face arbitrary arrests, targeted harassment, abuse, torture, extortion, and blackmail. These abuses are perpetrated by both state and non-state actors. The Nigerian police routinely blackmails and extorts LGBTQI people if, for example, upon a random search, a dating app such as Grindr is discovered on their mobile devices. Non-state actors also include family, friends, and strangers who entrap and resort to *kito*[1] to catfish, entrap, blackmail, and extort their victims.

A significant number of LGBTQI persons are employed informally or are self-employed and were working jobs directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Research conducted at the beginning of the lockdown period reveals some of the challenges faced by the LGBTQI community: rise in unemployment, loss of accommodation, depression, and other forms of mental illnesses. Many LGBTQI folks worked tenuous jobs that were terminated when the employers could not pay their staff salaries. Some folks who lived with their parents and/or homophobic family members faced eviction or mental health challenges due to regular exposure to abuse.

LGBTQI persons are often denied job opportunities based on their sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. Women perceived as masculine and men perceived as feminine suffer more in this regard as their physical presentation may prevent them from accessing opportunities. They are also sometimes discriminated against within the community at large as their peers do not freely associate with them.

---

1   Nigerian slang referring to the act of pretending to be part of the LGBTQI community on dating apps or social media to lure other LGBTQI persons and blackmail them.

State of the movement

According to some of the respondents; positive developments have been seen in the LGBTQI movement since 2016. For example, the number of LGBTQI organizations responding to the needs of the community increased, as well as the visibility and representation of subgroups of the LGBTQI community. A handful of mainstream organizations now include LGBTQI persons in their service delivery. When it comes to public health and HIV/AIDS management, key populations, which include men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women, still receive international donor support.

However, there is limited capacity within the movement, which poses a huge challenge for movement building.

When it comes to project implementation, it is a mixed bag, as there are several LGBTQI-led organizations across the country. Organizations, donors, and technical partners are starting to take a more expansive approach in an attempt to be more inclusive in service provision. 10 years ago, most LGBTQI organizations were only working on health-related issues, largely focused on HIV/AIDS.

Organizers who fell under the 'key populations' got the lion's share of funding, and it was difficult for other subgroups to get their needs addressed. More diversified funding streams have since helped build a movement beyond HIV/AIDS. Advocacy, empowerment, and capacity-building programs have enabled the community to explore new approaches, such as integrating faith with LGBTQI organizing and incorporating gender-based violence prevention into LGBTQI advocacy efforts.

In leadership, conversations around intergenerational power transfer are ongoing, though they can be challenging and occasionally intense. Younger people are establishing their organizations to gain independence from older generations who may have more entrenched or traditional approaches. This shift enables them to take on leadership roles in organizations that are better positioned for new forms of advocacy, while also fostering relationships with diverse donors and technical partners. Additionally, some leaders have willingly stepped aside, allowing others to assume organizational leadership roles. A further positive development is the improved access to funding compared to pre-2016 levels.

The movement faces challenges such as in-fighting, unhealthy competition, and the ongoing struggle for resources, despite increased support from allies and partners for LGBTQI causes in Nigeria since 2016. Visibility has grown, but so have arrests and harassment from law enforcement, with LGBTQI individuals and their spaces increasingly targeted and infringed upon.

Despite the hostile legal environment, several partners and donors are actively working to train individuals to provide essential services to the community in an LGBTQI-friendly and non-discriminatory way. Key populations, including MSM, play an active role in size estimations conducted by organizations like the Global Fund[2] in collaboration with relevant government agencies. LGBTQI individuals are often well-represented in technical working groups, and UNAIDS, along with other partners, has worked diligently to ensure the representation and inclusion of LGBTQI community members in discussions concerning the community.

The current profile of organizations and activists

Since 2016, the LGBTQI movement in Nigeria has seen significant growth, with an increase in both organizations and visible activists. Over 30 youth-led organizations focusing on LBQ (Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer), GBQ (Gay, Bisexual, Queer), or Transgender communities are now active. These new organizations are also expanding organizing beyond major cities like Lagos and Abuja, fostering more inclusion within the broader LGBTQI community—especially for the transgender community, which now has greater autonomy in addressing its specific needs. While this progress marks an important milestone, visibility gaps remain, with only one intersex organization active, indicating that the intersex movement is still in its early stages compared to others.

"The movement is still far from being aware of the people; and priorities of intersex persons, [and…] more education [opportunities…] need […] to be created so that people will be aware of the challenges intersex people face."

– respondent from an intersex organization

---

2   The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, also known as the Global Fund, is a global partnership aiming at investing funds to eventually eradicate the 3 deadliest infectious diseases.

Challenges faced by LGBTQI people, activists, and organizations

- Funding for LGBTQI organizing remains limited, with most available resources directed toward HIV prevention among gay, bisexual, and other MSM, often managed by NGOs that are not LGBTQI-led or specifically focused. Other funding sources for the movement tend to be inflexible, limiting organizations' and activists' ability to address core needs, strengthen systems, and build capacity. Additionally, demanding application processes often make accessing this funding even more challenging.

- Furthermore, there is a lack of core funding support for LGBTQI organizations to strengthen their organizational capacity and achieve longevity.

- The movement faces a struggle for relevance between older and newer generations of activists and organizations.

- Ethnic/tribal discrimination persists within the LGBTQI community, with opportunities often shared based on geographic origin or ethnic affiliation, excluding other activists and organizations.

- The priorities of donors and mainstream partners often do not align with the actual needs of the LGBTQI movement.

- Opportunities for sustained support for new and emerging organizations are limited, as most donors prefer partnering with organizations they have prior experience with and that have demonstrated the capacity to manage grants effectively.

- Cultivating self-esteem is challenging for LGBTQI individuals, especially when loved ones show a lack of understanding and acceptance. This can increase the risk of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

- LGBTQI individuals face limited access to employment, personal safety, security, and non-discriminatory healthcare

- Few safe houses and safe spaces are available for LGBTQI individuals, particularly those displaced from their homes or communities. Existing spaces often operate with tight budgets and under sub-optimal conditions, limiting their ability to provide sufficient security. This funding shortfall has, unfortunately, led to incidents of attacks and raids in the past.

- The hostile legal environment fuels active persecution of individuals based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity by both state and non-state actors. This is exacerbated by a lack of legal protections and recourse from the State, leaving LGBTQI individuals vulnerable. As a result, many face ongoing threats to their safety, including rape, physical assault, intimate partner violence, online bullying, and abuse from family members.

Approaches & strategies used

Between 2016 and 2021, tremendous progress has been made. Numerous donors have strengthened LGBTQI organizations by building capacity and developing frontline activists' leadership, enabling them to play pivotal roles within the movement. This support has helped activists understand diverse issues strategically, addressing them technically without compromising the cause, and has led to a growing number of organizations and activists dedicated to LGBTQI issues. Additionally, a range of funding opportunities now supports human rights activities beyond public health interventions, enabling LGBTQI activists to engage on platforms within mainstream and donor spaces, and effectively advocate for LGBTQI needs at these levels.

The number of LGBTQI-led organizations has grown significantly, with communities now leading and serving their own interests. Unlike the pre-2016 landscape, where mainstream organizations often made decisions on behalf of LGBTQI individuals, the community is now actively involved in designing, planning, and implementing its interventions. This shift towards self-leadership is proving effective.

The LGBTQI community is increasingly integrated into numerous local, regional, and global networks, and the number of One Stop Shops (OSS) has grown. These centers provide essential healthcare, legal aid, and support services for LGBTQI individuals, ensuring dignity and respect. Collaboration with government agencies has also been instrumental in addressing challenges, as the community now participates in technical working groups with the Population Council, the National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA), the Ministry of Health, and the National Human Rights Commission. This increased visibility helps facilitate work with government structures to address systemic issues. However, this progress does not mean that community members are free from prejudice and discrimination.

Collaboration & networking

Collaboration among LGBTQI organizations in Nigeria remains limited, though there are some promising synergies, particularly between LBQ and transgender-focused organizations. The intersex organization is also working collaboratively with an emerging bisexual-focused group. Additionally, some collaborations are driven by donor requirements, as certain funders mandate that sub-group-specific organizations unite to access funding or other support.

The rule of law forms the foundation of all our activities as citizens, providing opportunities to challenge laws and policies through legal frameworks at regional, national, and state levels, as well as through international mechanisms, leveraging various treaties and covenants. LGBTQI individuals have significant opportunities to use the democratic system to make demands and hold the government accountable for its campaign promises. Additionally, vibrant mainstream civil society organizations across the country offer collaborative platforms for sustained advocacy efforts.

Technical support needs

LGBTQI organizations still face limitations in technical expertise, with a noticeable gap between older and newer organizations.

Established LGBTQI organizations often have several guiding policies in place, which has enhanced their overall performance.

Some key technical and organizational gaps include:

- The limited leadership skills in the LGBTQI community.

- The lack of expertise in organizational management and program implementation especially among in and emerging organizations.

- A limited knowledge of fundraising strategies and an over-reliance on internal funds or familiar external partners and funders.

- A need for secure office spaces, as organization offices are vulnerable to attacks and raids by state actors and non-state actors.

- The lack of paid human resources and an over-reliance on unpaid volunteer work.

Funding landscape

Availability and accessibility of funding

Funding available to the Nigerian LGBTQI community remains largely tied to initiatives focused on HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and more recently, COVID-19. LGBTQI organizations that do not offer sexual and reproductive health and rights interventions are often excluded from this funding pool.

Established organizations report having consistent funders who regularly support their activities, while emerging organizations and activists often lack awareness of available funding opportunities and how to access them. As a result, these groups frequently rely on internal fundraising or self-fund their activities.

Unmet or Under-Prioritized Needs

1. Building confidence within the community to step into leadership roles and actively drive the movement.
2. Engaging stakeholders to strengthen allyship for the LGBTQI community.
3. Transgender and intersex individuals need to be at the forefront of their movement, with greater emphasis on raising awareness about their communities' specific needs and priorities.
4. Leadership training for LGBTQI organizational leaders to enhance efficiency and sustainability.

5. Conducting a needs assessment to identify key skills for community members to develop.
6. Increased access to formal education by LGBTQI youths, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels.
7. Holistic safety and security for LGBTQI persons.

Funding challenges

The LGBTQI movement in Nigeria faces several key funding challenges:

1. Daunting Proposal Requirements: Funding applications often require extensive proposals, which limit the ability to fully convey the needs of LGBTQI communities.
2. Gatekeeping: Access to donors supporting the region is often restricted, particularly for emerging organizations.
3. Limited Visibility: Safety concerns hinder visibility, making it difficult for funders to discover new organizations, despite the significant risks they take in maintaining an online presence.
4. Lack of Information: Many organizations and activists are unaware of available funding opportunities.

Recommendations

1. **Create a Funding Information Platform**: Establish a platform where LGBTQI organizations and activists can easily access funding information, resources, and updates.

2. **Provide Capacity-Building Opportunities**: Offer resource mobilization and grant-writing training for emerging organizations and activists to strengthen their ability to secure funding.

3. **Encourage Collaborative Programs**: Funders and technical partners should promote collaboration between established and emerging organizations through initiatives like exchange programs and sharing best practices.

4. **Conduct Needs Assessments**: Funders should assess the specific needs of any movement they intend to support to ensure funds are directed toward high-priority areas.

5. **Support Skill Acquisition and Empowerment Programs**: Allocate funding to programs that build skills and provide economic empowerment opportunities within the LGBTQI community.

6. **Fund Safe Spaces and Housing**: Prioritize funding for secure spaces and housing solutions that offer safety and refuge for LGBTQI individuals.

7. **Focus on Human Rights Initiatives**: Channel resources toward human rights activities that combat stigma, discrimination, and violence against LGBTQI persons, promoting positive social outcomes.

8. **Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement**: Engage stakeholders, especially political, religious, and traditional leaders, to foster allyship and understanding.

9. **Promote Family and Community Awareness**: Support awareness-raising efforts with families and communities to reduce the risk of stigma, discrimination, abuse, and eviction faced by LGBTQI individuals within their homes.

References

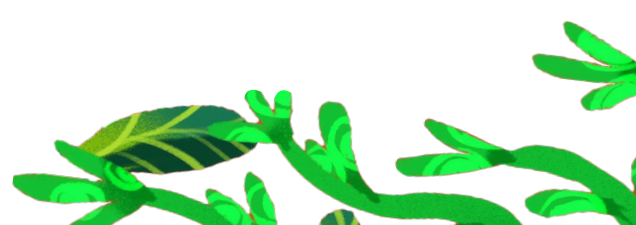Armisen, M. (2016). *We Exist: Mapping LGBTQ Organizing in West Africa* (p. 36). ISDAO. https://www.isdao.org/we-exist/

Criminal Code Act, (1916) (testimony of Federal Republic of Nigeria). https://jurist.ng/download/act/criminal_code_act.pdf

Penal Code (Northern States) Federal Provisions Act (No. 25 of 1960), (1960) (testimony of Federal Republic of Nigeria).

Same Sex (Marriage) Prohibition Act, National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) (testimony of Salisu Abubakar Maikasuwa). https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/52f4d9cc4.pdf

Supplementary references

The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERs). (2019). *Violations Report based on Real or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Nigeria.* https://theinitiativeforequalrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2019-Human-Rights-Violations-Reports-Based-on-SOGI.pdf

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.

- www.isdao.org
- initiativeSankofa
- initiative_sankofa
- ISDAOSankofa
- info@isdao.org