

ISDAO

A Light Shining in the Darkness

Our 2024 Annual Report





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Introduction

2024 was full of contradictions. It was a year that saw the emergence of serious political and structural threats and deep uncertainties. Yet it also featured celebrations, victories, and continued expressions of joy.

In 2024, LGBTQI communities across West Africa faced increasing waves of criminalization and violence aimed at eroding their human and gender rights. Because of this, many of our partners were victims of physical and digital attacks, which had serious repercussions on their organizing, their mental health, and well-being. Disruptions in regional power, internet, and banking systems - including damaged deep-sea fiber optic cables that caused internet outages in 13 countries - often impacted our work.

However, our commitment to strengthening our partners and their communities never wavered.

Last year, we disbursed 104 grants across multiple portfolios, committing over 3 million U.S. Dollars to organizations, groups, and activists who are driving meaningful change in their communities. We created several strategic spaces, including a bilingual West African LBQ+ Convening, where activists could strategize, reflect, and strengthen their activism across the region.

We organized and funded joint initiatives, particularly under the framework of the Love Alliance in Nigeria and Burkina Faso, that helped strengthen collaboration within the movements. We collaborated with the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), the Doria Feminist Fund, Purposeful, and the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) to establish the Komboa Consortium, an initiative that supports African feminist movements facing attacks from anti-rights and anti-gender coalitions.

In addition, we supported movements led by LGBTQI people, sex workers, and people who use drugs by facilitating their participation in key advocacy spaces such as CSW68, the 2024 AIDS Conference, the ILGA World Conference, and the AWID Forum. Our team also visited over 70 partners in nine countries to meet the people at the heart of our movement.

Internally, we focused on building a supportive and sustainable organization by expanding our size and diversity. We welcomed new members to our staff team, our activist grant-making panel, and our Governance Board.

2024 was a uniquely challenging year, from an organizational standpoint. This report will reflect on what we learned, the moments of resilience that carried us through, and the bright spots that give us hope, while reaffirming our solidarity and collective strength.

Even as a veil of darkness seems to be descending over many of the established systems and orders that we have known, our vision of a just and inclusive West Africa – a region free from violence and discrimination – remains. This vision is a stubborn light of hope shining through the cracks of a broken world, and it will guide us to find solutions and resilience in the face of overwhelming odds.

A Year of Living Dangerously

Exploring the challenges we faced in 2024 and their impact on our work and our people

When our Executive Director, Caroline Kouassiaman, thinks about 2024, the words: “difficult, difficult, difficult, challenge, challenge, challenge,” come to mind. But, as she is quick to point out, that wasn’t the whole story of the year.

Last year, even as ISDAO struggled with both internal and external challenges, we remained committed to our core mission to channel more resources to LGBTQI movements in West Africa, paying particular attention to the historical gaps and inequities in the region’s funding landscape.

Our primary external challenge was the explosion in attacks and threats against LGBTQI communities by anti-rights and anti-gender actors, even in countries like Côte d’Ivoire that had been historically considered to be progressive and safe. Movement partners in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Ghana faced violence, harassment, and mass arrests as new criminalizing laws were proposed or signed in.

We managed to keep up with the corresponding rise in demand for resources and funding, but it left many of us feeling exhausted and stretched thin.

“It felt like a year of people being in rapid action because it was just one thing, after another, after another,” said ISDAO’s Director of Program, Olumide Femi Makanjuola.

It was especially difficult for our staff members who are based in the region, the majority of whom also identify as part of the LGBTQI+ community, noted Kouassiaman.

“What’s happening around us, what’s happening to our partners, is also happening to us,” she said.

The push to pass anti-LGBT legislation in Ghana hit us especially hard: Ghana is our primary headquarters.

Kouassiaman remembers when she heard the news that Ghana’s parliament had passed the bill:

“We were in the middle of our decision-making meeting with our Activist Grant Making Panel in March. It was a Wednesday. We were in Togo. ... You can imagine how that rocked the room. Two of our panel members, who were from Ghana, were getting calls nonstop. And of course, everybody was worried and stressed out.

The Ghanaian president ultimately declined to ratify the bill. However, Fabrice Looky, who supports ISDAO as an interpreter and translator, noted that had it been immediately signed into law, ISDAO would have been rendered illegal as an organization, leaving consultants like him floundering.

“Working with ISDAO is part of our livelihood; this is how we earn a living,” he said. “We’re regularly working with ISDAO throughout the year on several different projects. And so, of course, as a consultant, you start worrying, ‘what does that mean for me?’”

In March 2024, we experienced two major challenges nearly simultaneously: our primary bank in Ghana saw its foreign currency license suspended by the government, and an unexpected damage to deep-sea fiber optic cables resulted in internet and mobile cell service outages in six countries across West Africa. With less than a week's notice, we were informed that our bank would temporarily be unable to process foreign currency transactions. Suddenly, we — a funding organisation whose primary role is to disburse resources across the region — found ourselves unable to make any transactions outside the Ghanaian Cedi. The situation was especially dire as our LBQ+ Convening was due to be held in early April, just a few weeks away.

■ *“We had to develop strategies very quickly,”*

recalled Kouassiaman, with a laugh. This was where our commitment to collaboration and participatory leadership saved the day. We reached out to three of our sister organizations across the region, who agreed to facilitate fund transfers on our behalf, ensuring we could continue making necessary payments.

At the same time, the widespread loss of internet services across the region forced us to reschedule our planned CSW68 virtual side event and affected our staff's capacity to work online. This was especially challenging, as we are a remote organization with staff spread across nine countries.

Though these external challenges made daily working conditions difficult, our staff navigated much of the chaos with remarkable resilience. In interviews for this report, most team members cited the threats facing themselves and their communities within their local contexts as far more impactful than any difficulties encountered in the course of their work.

We believe this speaks not only to the incredible strength of our people but also to the effectiveness of our leadership model — one that prioritizes creating affirming spaces where people can come together to think, plan, and act. While strategic discussions took place at the leadership level, everyone was encouraged to contribute ideas on how to navigate the crisis. This inclusive approach allowed us to strategize more creatively and adopt more innovative solutions, which staff members deeply valued and appreciated.

■ *“While you're potentially worried that something might happen to you, or your job is jeopardized, it feels empowering to know that you get to have a say in what happens to the organization,” said Looky.*

We are proud that we did more than simply navigate the multiple crises we faced — a situation Kouassiaman described as **“a bit of a shaking of the foundation.”**

■ *“Within ISDAO, we've been able to respond to crises in ways that felt deeply necessary,” she said. “We're not perfect, but I think we're doing a great job working towards that future that we want to build.”*

Braving the Storms

A look at the anti- LGBTQI violence and legislation in Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire

In Mali and Burkina Faso, anti-democratic populists used false narratives about “African values” to dehumanize LGBTQI+ people and justify discriminatory laws against them. The Ghanaian parliament passed a controversial anti-LBGTQI+ bill, though it did not become law. And in Côte d'Ivoire, once considered a haven for its relative progressiveness, accusations of alleged child sexual assault were weaponized to stoke homophobic violence against the LGBTQ community. All in 2024.

To outside observers, such a surge of violent backlash sweeping across four countries in one year may seem like spontaneous expressions of popular sentiment, but it is not. Instead, it is the result of an organized coalition of anti-rights actors who have been relentlessly working to undermine gender and sexuality justice across the continent – and indeed, around the world.

Coordinated anti-rights campaigns have long stoked homophobic attitudes and behaviour in the public sphere to push against the growing visibility of LGBTQI+ movements in the region. A key moment in this shift occurred in Ghana in February when an anti-LBGTQI bill, which had been floating through Parliament since 2021, was reintroduced.

For years, the bill, which sought to impose wide-ranging restrictions on LGBTQI+ persons and their rights, was a political yardstick used to measure which party or politician was more “liberal” than the other, noted Lariba, an activist and the Executive Director of an organization working towards the safety and inclusion of LBQT and GNC Muslims in Ghana. The bill was finally approved with bipartisan support.

However, then-President Nana Akufo-Addo declined to sign it into law before he left office, citing questions about the bill's constitutionality.

Despite not becoming law, the introduction of the bill led to increased homophobic rhetoric in public, the media, and online, as well as violence, such as sexual and physical assault, blackmail, and police harassment directed at LGBTQ people across Ghana.

“We run a hotline, which operates within the 16 regions of Ghana, with 31 hotline operators,” said Lariba. “We receive daily cases from the different regions, and there have been rising emergencies. For instance, people being displaced from their homes, family, or relatives, instigating corrective rape.”

Activists have reacted to the bill by conducting wide-scale awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns among potential allies and parents of LGBTQI children, using the bill’s proposals as entry points for engagement.

In August, Burkina Faso’s military regime, led by junta leader Capt. Ibrahim Traoré signed off on new laws that deem “homosexuality and associated practices” as punishable offenses, for the first time in the nation’s history. His rule has also been characterized by populist rhetoric that weaponizes anti-colonial and Pan-Africanist language to suppress dissent and scapegoat marginalized groups.

“It’s distracting people so that they can be maintained under control while the real issues are being hidden,”

said Stéphane Simporé, ISDAO’s Director of Communications and Knowledge Management.

“My question is, are LGBTQI people responsible for the load shedding or the lack of water? Even terrorism, is it the responsibility or the fault of LGBTQI people? I don’t think so.”

The military rulers in Mali adopted a similar populist tactic when the country’s National Transition Commission voted on a new penal code in October, inserting two articles that criminalized homosexuality.

But, as ISDAO’s Programme Officer, Alassane, notes, the articles only vaguely refer to “indecent and immorality, whether in private or in public,” leaving open the possibility that anything could be used as grounds for the denunciation and arrest of individuals.

“It means that organizations, associations, supporters – any structure that provides direct support to LGBTQI people – are also criminalized under this law,” said Traoré.

These laws have contributed to a spike in arbitrary arrests and detentions, as well as physical assaults on anyone suspected of being part of the LGBTQI+ community, based solely on their appearance or gender expression. Though such persecution is not new, they are a dangerous expansion in a political climate where government crackdowns on political opposition, the media, and civil society are common.

Perhaps the most startling case was the swell of homophobic violence in Côte d'Ivoire, which began in August 2024 and lasted until November. Long considered one of the most liberal countries in West Africa, the violence caught even longtime movement activists in the country unaware.

This particular wave was sparked by an online hate campaign led by a homophobic evangelical pastor, Makosso Camille, who targeted “woubis,” and “leles,” local terms for gay, lesbian, and transgender people. Makosso accused the community of engaging in pedophilia and spread false claims that members were responsible for the spread of monkeypox in the country.

When unsubstantiated rumors of a sexual assault on a 15-year-old minor began making the rounds online, Makosso and other influencers seized on the story to accuse queer men of being the perpetrators.

Much of the violence took place in working-class neighborhoods in Abidjan, such as Yopougon, but the political capital, Yamoussoukro, was not spared. Local activists recorded over 30 incidents of violence in August alone.

TMD is a director and project coordinator at a trans feminist organization in Côte d'Ivoire. She believes the issue goes beyond moral concerns, however. She points out that hatred has been an easy way for online anti-rights actors such as Makosso to transform themselves into local leaders, especially among young people.

“It began with the issue of pedo-criminality,” she noted. “But because we’re in an election period right now, the opposition wants to focus on this sensitive issue, which, according to them, is a matter of morals and customs. They think it will be well received by the Ivorian population, so why not use it to achieve another goal?”

ISDAO worked to mobilize resources to support the organizations and activists at the forefront of these onslaughts, including providing safety and emergency funds. We helped to arrange access to psychosocial and medical aid, and, in some cases, engaged with social media platforms like TikTok and Meta to help protect activists who were being targeted by hate speech.



For the activists caught in the middle of the storm, it has felt like stepping 20 years back in time as they have watched years of advocacy and alliance-building seem to vanish. Many have been forced to go into hiding following vicious revelations of their identities online.

“You feel like you are tired, and nobody is there to hold you because everybody is bleeding on each other,” said Lariba. “We are all tired.”

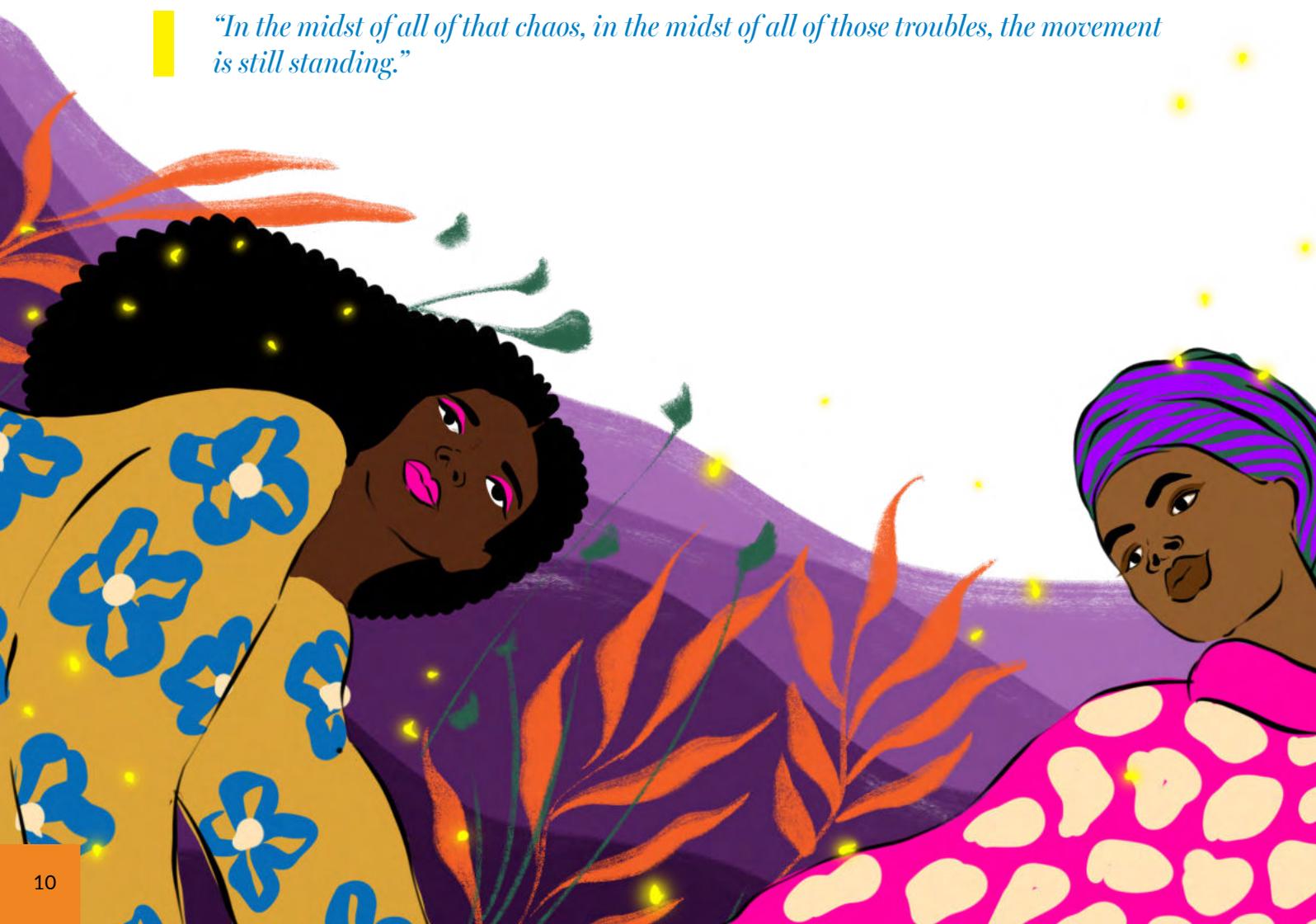
Weathering these storms has resulted in a more introspective movement, said Simporé, one where activists are less concerned with global activism and more focused on grassroots concerns such as safety, protection, and education around sexual and mental health.

ISDAO’s Director of Programmes, Olumide Femi Makanjuola, agrees that the movement is not just focused on changing national laws. Smaller-scale programming, such as ensuring that gay men in Northern Nigeria are empowered with skills or that police officers in Senegal understand the issues facing LGBTQI communities, may not have an impact beyond the spaces where they are implemented, but are deeply important as they solidify the movement.

“Change in our movement doesn’t happen overnight. They come from generations of work,” said Makanjuola. “Our movement is not static; it is a movement that keeps moving. It keeps growing. We’re here today as a result of the work that has been done across the region in the last 20 years.”

He paused before adding:

“In the midst of all of that chaos, in the midst of all of those troubles, the movement is still standing.”



Introducing Komboa - An African Feminist Consortium

Inspired by African feminist values of sisterhood, solidarity, and mutual aid, the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest (ISDAO), Purposeful, Doria Feminist Fund, and Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) joined forces and resources to create Komboa ("Liberate" in Swahili), a feminist consortium that supports communities threatened by the rise of anti-rights and anti-gender movements

Komboa is a consortium of African feminist funds, whose programmes and resources are focused on African organisations that work to empower women, girls, and gender-expansive people. The initiative is informed by the knowledge and expertise of African feminists and adapts our collectivist and collaborative approaches, as well as our commitment to decolonizing leadership, to support threatened communities and advance gender justice on the continent. Our collective mission is to resource and strengthen feminist resistance, movements, and collectives across Africa, enabling them to be resilient to the attacks from anti-rights movements.

Through the consortium, ISDAO has been able to expand grantmaking, support the participation of feminist activists in key spaces such as the AWID International Forum, and is undertaking an extensive research initiative to look at the impact of anti-rights and anti-gender movements on LGBTQI and sex workers communities across West Africa.

In December 2024, the Komboa consortium hosted a strategy session at the AWID International Forum, exploring the various ways African feminists are resisting the growing anti-rights movement in Africa and ways to protect the Maputo Protocol.



Back to Life at the West African LBQ+ Convening

A look at the key moments, experiences, insights, and significance of ISDAO's 2024 LBQ+ Convening

In April 2024, ISDAO hosted 28 LBQ+ activists from 9 countries across West Africa for our first-ever bilingual LBQ+ Convening. The four-day event gathered activists, creatives, and movement leaders on a warm beachfront in Assinie, Côte d'Ivoire, to learn from and connect with each other. Together, they reflected on the current state of their communities and worked to envision a bolder, stronger, and better-resourced movement that would advance LBQ+ rights over the next five years.

The convening was the brainchild of ISDAO's Director of Programs, Olumide Femi Makanjuola, a longtime activist who, in 2019, recognized the need for a bilingual space for LBQ+ activists and began working with Caroline Kouassiaman, ISDAO's Executive Director, to develop and fundraise for it. They drew from ISDAO's years of participating in spaces organized by others, such as the 2019 Global Feminist LBQ Women's* Conference, as well as our experiences hosting partners' forums in our focal countries.

ISDAO tapped Dr. Rita Nketiah, a research consultant specializing in feminist movement-building and philanthropy, to be the lead consultant for the convening and to develop its scope and programming. The result was: *Creating the Future We Want: LBQ+ Movement-Building in West Africa*, an event that went beyond the scope of a typical conference. It was a much-needed strategic learning space exclusively for the LBQ+ community.

LBQ+ people have the unique experience of being invisibilized in both the women's rights movement space as well as in the LGBTQI+ movement space, noted Nketiah. LGBTQI funders often wrongly assume that LBQ+ communities are being supported by feminist funders, who also assume that LBQ+ movements are being resourced by LGBTQI+ funders. This results in a resource gap for LBQ+ activists.

To further complicate matters, larger LGBTQI activist spaces tend to be dominated by cisgender gay men-led organisations whose groups have benefited from the long history of health provision funding for HIV and AIDS. All of this has led to a disparity in the resources and infrastructure available for LBQ organizing.

Keen to not replicate these structures, Nketiah recruited a dedicated advisory team of LBQ+ activists, including Dr. Larissa Kojoué, Marie-Jo Tra, Nataka Gmakagni, and Sheba Akpokli, to shape the vision and structure of the event and ensure that it reflected the lived realities of queer women in the region.

She notes in her report that: “More than advisors, these activists were co-creators, fostering a sense of collective ownership that empowered participants to shape and sustain the movement beyond the convening itself.”

Nketiah and the advisory working group wanted participants who could provide a diversity of regional experiences and viewpoints. They were particularly interested in a mix of new voices who were powerfully contributing to the goals of the movement, but who weren't necessarily in traditional activism, and seasoned organizers with deep movement knowledge.

“We didn't want it to be all the usual suspects, all the heads of organizations who are always in these spaces,” said Kouassiaman. “We wanted independent activists to also be part of this.”

The group eventually curated a list of 2-3 participants from each of the nine focal countries to ensure balanced and equitable representation.

“Making sure that people were the right fit, that they were actually available, and could contribute to the space – that took a bit of time,” said Nketiah.

The logistics of arranging flights, sorting visas, and providing interpretation across the two major languages of the region – French and English were one of the biggest challenges for the working group. However, they were able to create a space where, over four transformative days, participants could dream, connect, and access collective care through a series of interactive workshops, panels, and discussions.

Day one focused on “Building Connections, Connecting Our Lives” as participants committed to developing connections and reflection on their personal activist journeys. Day two was titled “Learning and Reflection: Understanding the Organizing Landscape.” Participants spent time learning about the various challenges they faced in their communities and movements, unpacking key issues such as employment barriers, family expectations, economic survival, education, safety, and gender-based violence.

On day three, titled “Our Dreamspace: Conceptualizing the Future We Want”, participants engaged in a powerful visioning exercise that explored what a thriving regional LBQ+ movement ecosystem could look like in the near future.

“The space was quite experimental, and so there were a lot of things changing on the fly,” admitted Nketiah.

In one instance, during a “digging deeper session,” attendees were tasked with focusing on key issues affecting LBQ communities, and it emerged that safety and security are huge concerns for the activists. In response, the working group developed a session where participants could share their experiences, as well as tips and strategies for staying safe, both as activist organizers and as LBQ+ people navigating society.

Movement activism has always been intensive on the people at its heart, noted Makanjuola, particularly on women. With this in mind, the working group integrated wellness and healing into all aspects of the event.

Each morning began with yoga, breathwork, and meditation – mindfulness sessions led by Dr. Toyin Ajao, a restorative healing practitioner known as Moon Goddess in healing spaces. She also offered one-on-one psychosocial support for participants, allowing them to process, restore, and care for themselves throughout the event.

The last day of the convening was dedicated to Rest and Restoration. Ajao began by pulling cards from a “rest deck,” which held inspirational quotes on the importance of respite for movement building. She then guided participants through expressive letter-writing exercises, emotional check-ins, and healing circles. The day ended with a joyous dance circle during which attendees danced to songs they’d previously chosen – songs that they each felt reflected their country’s ancestral spirit.

In a regional climate where daily life as an LBQ+ person is ever more precarious, spaces like the convening – that are safe, that foster community and connection – are critical to the movement, said Kouassiaman.

“The mere act of sitting in a room, conference space, or even a beach together, sharing space can conjure a bold and defiant resistance to those who say we should not exist,” Nketiah wrote in her report on the event. “Gathering reminds us that we exist, that we can and do see ourselves reflected in each other, and that our lives are possible.”

Ultimately, the convening was a place where both organizers and attendees could take a moment to breathe life into themselves and each other. And then go forward to build a world that is freer, just, and safer for everyone.

“In five years, I would like to see more convenings like this at the country level, across the region, and in Africa. The LBQ movement is legally recognized, and LBQ lives are protected. They have legal rights and can occupy spaces where we can create futures.” - Jemm, a convening participant, envisions the future of the LBQ+ movement.

Our New Governance Board

In 2023, we launched a public call to establish ISDAO's first permanent Governance Board. After an extensive and thoughtful selection process led by an activist selection committee, we welcomed three inspiring West African activists.

This Board takes over from the Interim Governance Body, which has provided oversight and strategic guidance for ISDAO since 2017, and marks an exciting milestone in our journey as an organization. They bring a wealth of expertise in organizational governance and leadership, as well as movement strengthening and advocacy across national, regional, and global platforms.

Orneill Latiyah Co-Chair

Latiyah is a 28-year-old trans feminist activist, born and raised in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. She has chaired the African Queer Youth Initiative (AQYI) board and is an advisor for the FRIDA Global Advisory Committee, and she is an outgoing board member of Global Action for Trans Equality (GATE).

She is the founder of the Association Transgenres et Droits, with over 10 years of commitment to the LGBTI communities, and the trans community in particular. She brings a wealth of experience spanning five years spent working with various organizations, such as Human Rights and Gender Officer for the West African Network of People Living with HIV, a 2022-2023 Outright UN Rights and Religion Fellow, and more recently, a UN Program Advisor to the Outright International team.

Latiyah holds a degree in mining, geology, oil, and environmental studies and is deeply passionate about gender equality, human rights, and social justice.

Robert Akoto Amofo Co-Chair

Robert Amofo is an expert in governance, leadership, and organizational development with a strong commitment to human rights advocacy. Robert serves as the Advocacy Manager at Pan Africa ILGA, where he spearheads global and regional advocacy strategies.

Robert holds a Master of Philosophy in Human Rights and Democratization in Africa from the University of Pretoria, South Africa, and a Bachelor of Arts in English and Information Studies from the University of Ghana. Robert is also certified by Coach Masters Academy as a coach and by the Learning and Performance Institute (LPI) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) as a trainer and facilitator.

He provides strategic consulting to global philanthropic and nonprofit organizations, guiding them through organizational change management, leadership transitions, and crisis management. His leadership experience spans several prominent organizations, including his role as Country Director for Amnesty International Ghana from 2018 to 2021.

Marie-Josiane Tra

Secretary

Marie-Jo is a feminist activist who resides in Côte d'Ivoire. In addition to being the Program and Project Officer for Initiative Tilé, an LBQ organization, Marie-Jo runs Radio Tilé and hosts "Arc-en-ciel MAG," an information, awareness-raising, and advocacy talk show.

Marie-Jo is a founding member and coordinator of the Réseau Ivoirien des Femmes LBQ (RIF-LBQ - Ivorian LBQ Women's Network), as well as the Regional Coordinator for Francophone Africa for Outright International's LBQ Connect program.

Marie-Jo holds a master's degree in law, with a focus on Judicial Careers, and is the co-author of a short story collection titled "Thérapies sans Conversions" and the comic strip "Trahié par la vie: l'Exilé."



Our Grants

In 2024, we awarded 104 grants totaling over three million U.S. Dollars across our grant portfolios, including our Regional grants, Love Alliance grants, Strategic grants, Resilience grants, and the Asanka and In-Touch funds. This was a nearly 20 percent increase from the previous year.

Though we awarded fewer grants than in 2023, we disbursed larger amounts per grant, effectively pushing more funding into potentially higher-impact grants. In addition, improvements to our software and payment systems meant grantee partners received their funds as soon as possible, with fewer delays in disbursement.

Regional Grants

ISDAO's Regional Grants are awarded by our Activist Grant Making Panel (AGMP) to LGBTQI-led groups, organizations, and networks in our nine focal countries through an open call for proposals.

Organizations that receive our regional grants also receive an additional \$1,000 USD to support urgent needs, called the RESPOND Fund. These funds are intended for crisis response and can be used for safety, security, and community emergencies. As part of our ongoing explorations on how to best support our grantee partners, each organization was awarded an extra \$1,500 USD specifically to support organizational strengthening and development.

Highlights:

We received
185 eligible applications
with requests totaling
\$3,116,748.34 USD

The AGMP pre-approved
40 grant applications
totaling
\$670,102.95 USD

51.2% of grants
went to organizations and groups specifically led by and focused on LBQ women, trans, and intersex people

57.5% of grants
went to organizations/groups working in francophone countries

72.5% of grants
awarded were to previously funded partners



Regional Grants Breakdown by Country:

Country	Number of eligible applications	Number of Grants approved by the AGMP
Bénin	36	10
Burkina Faso	15	3
Côte d'Ivoire	21	4
Ghana	15	6
Liberia	6	4
Mali	5	2
Senegal	6	3
Nigeria	76	7
Togo	4	1
Regional Organizations	1	0
Total:	185	40

Love Alliance Grants

Through the Love Alliance Initiative, ISDAO supports and strengthens movements that advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights. The grants are awarded by two Local Activist Grant Making Panels (LAGMP) and specifically fund groups and organizations led by LGBTQI persons, Sex Workers, and People Who Use Drugs in Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

Since the launch of the initiative in 2021, we have awarded 186 grants to organizations, networks, and consortia in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and across the broader West African sub-region. In 2022 and 2023, our LAGMPs awarded several multi-year grants that will extend until September 2025, allowing partners to operate more sustainably and make a lasting impact on their communities.

However, with 2025 being the final year of the initiative, we made the decision not to launch an open call for proposals in October 2024. Instead, we allocated the available resources to support and strengthen collaborative movement-building within the Sex Worker and People Who Use Drugs communities, empowering them to build on existing momentum and deepen their collective efforts.

Highlights:

Following the call for proposals in 2023, we received

132 eligible applications

with requests totaling

\$6,056,591 USD

The LAGMPs approved

33 grants

12 in Burkina Faso and 21 in Nigeria.

The 12 grants in Burkina Faso totaled

\$544,998 USD,

while the 21 in Nigeria totaled

\$920,628 USD

In addition, we made three strategic grants, two in Nigeria and one in Burkina Faso, totaling

\$214,600 USD

We also supported four sub-regional initiatives with a total of

\$199,085 USD

In total, we disbursed

\$1,879,311 USD

through Love Alliance grants.

Asanka Fund

The Asanka Creative Initiatives Fund was created in 2021 to support individuals and organizations in exploring innovative, experimental approaches to advocacy and movement-building. During the first three cycles, we awarded 30 Asanka grants to organizations and individual activists, supporting diverse projects, including podcasts, theater, film festivals, documentaries, films, music, and visual art.

Although the third-cycle grants were awarded in 2024, we did not launch a call for concept notes for a fourth cycle that year. The third cycle marked the end of Asanka's pilot phase, prompting reflection on the fund's future direction. As a result, in 2024, we made a few key changes: the fund is now designated exclusively for individual activists, and the maximum grant amount was increased to match current economic realities.

These changes reflect our ongoing commitment to providing LGBTQI activists with a dedicated fund responsive to their unique needs and creative advocacy efforts. A call for concept notes for the fourth cycle was issued in early 2025.

Highlights from the third cycle:

We received
104 eligible concept notes,
51 from individuals and 53 from
organizations.

We awarded nine grants totalling
\$45,000 USD
to four individual activists and
five organizations.

In-Touch Fund

The In-Touch Fund is designed to support the ongoing communications work of current and past ISDAO grantee partner groups and organizations. It specifically targets those with established communications departments, programs, activities, or areas of focus where communications are integral to their planned work. Through this funding, ISDAO aims to enhance the communications efforts of grantee partners who already have existing communications plans and structures.

Highlights

Following our pre-grants partner site visits, based on the identification of needs and recommendations by ISDAO staff, we invited 10 partners to apply and awarded nine grants totaling
\$45,000 USD

Strategic and Resilience Grants

ISDAO’s Strategic and Resilience grants support initiatives outside our main grant portfolios that align closely with our broader mission. These grants allow us to fund timely, relevant work that strengthens movements, responds to emerging needs, or advances regional solidarity.

These non-competitive grants are not awarded through open calls for applications. Instead, they are identified and selected internally, based on ISDAO’s ongoing observations and analysis of emerging needs within the movement.

In 2024, strategic grants supported activities such as:

- Expanding the participation of West African activists in key regional and international conferences and advocacy spaces.
- Enabling joint movement activities – collaborative in-country actions led by multiple organizations working together toward shared goals.
- Providing targeted training sessions for grantee partners, informed by identified capacity-strengthening needs
- Advancing linguistic justice by funding interpretation and translation in key strategic spaces to ensure inclusive participation.

Highlights:

We awarded
11 Strategic Grants,
totaling
\$265,303 USD

We awarded
1 Resilience Grant,
totaling
\$5,000 USD



The Spaces and Places

As part of our commitment to strengthening queer feminist movements in West Africa, ISDAO engages with key regional and global advocacy spaces and supports our partners in accessing and influencing these spaces on their terms.

Our approach enables movement actors, especially those most impacted by systemic oppression, to shape narratives, share lived experiences, and influence the spaces where policy and funding decisions are made.

NGO CSW68 11-22 March 2024, New York, USA

The NGO Forum of the Commission on the Status of Women (NGO CSW) is the civil society arm of the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

In 2024, ISDAO took part in the forum for the second time, hosting parallel virtual and in-person sessions. Our sessions provided unique opportunities for West African LGBTQI activists to learn, share, and network with other activists and stakeholders on issues of gender equality and the rights of LGBTQ+ persons.

Other Spaces

- ✦ Black Feminist Forum/Black Feminists In Philanthropy (February 2024, Barbados)
- ✦ Ford Foundation panel: “Financing a gender justice infrastructure to counter anti-gender ideology and anti-rights movements” (March 2024, U.S.A)
- ✦ Guest lecture: Advanced Course on African Women’s Human Rights (May 2024, South Africa)
- ✦ Dignity Roundtables and GPP philanthropic advocacy engagement with Global Affairs Canada (May 2024, Canada)
- ✦ Consultation on LGBTIQ Inclusion in Humanitarian Action (September 2024, U.S.A)
- ✦ Cooperation Canada International Futures Festival + GAC meetings with Equality Fund (October 2024, Canada)
- ✦ Building new solidarities stakeholder consultation, DRL/Global Equality Fund (November 2024, South Africa)
- ✦ Global LGBTI Funding Summit (November 2024, South Africa)



Session #1

“Maputo Protocol @ 20: Making the case for African LGBTQ women”,

an in-person panel discussion in New York, featured four rights defenders from Liberia, Uganda, Nigeria, and Kenya. The discussion highlighted the limitations affecting the application of the Maputo Protocol for LGBTQ and intersex people, and ways to use the protocol to advocate for African women in all their diversity.

Session #2

“Reclaiming African Values: Deconstructing False Narratives about Feminism, SRHR, LGBTQ Women and Intersex Persons’ Rights and their Non-alignment with ‘African Values’” tackled the misuse of the term ‘African Values’ to restrict the rights of LGBTQ+ and intersex people. The panel featured rights defenders from Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, and Senegal, engaged in an interactive discussion, challenging the idea that LGBTQ+ and intersex rights contradict “African Values.” Held virtually, this session ensured participation from West African communities and partners who were not able to attend the CSW in person.

AIDS 2024 Conference

22-26 July 2024, Munich, Germany

The AIDS Conference is the world’s largest conference on HIV and AIDS, and sits uniquely at the intersection of science, advocacy, and human rights. We supported the meaningful participation of our partners in the conference, from poster presentations to strategic dialogues on community leadership in the HIV response. Some partners showcased their work, while others engaged in demonstrations in the community village, calling for the decriminalization of sex work and protesting restrictive visa policies that exclude activists from the Global South. These spaces fostered solidarity, exchange, and learning among movements across regions.

Together with our Love Alliance consortium partners, we convened a community booth and hosted a satellite session titled *“Putting Communities First to Shape the HIV Agenda”*, where we reflected on our collective experiences in advancing community-led responses. The session offered a space to share critical insights and strategies on how grassroots leadership can drive the global HIV agenda, drawing from the practical lessons, challenges, and innovations that have emerged through our work in the Love Alliance.

Despite the conference’s theme, *“Put People First”*, linguistic accessibility remained a significant barrier, with English language dominating sessions and interpretation tools falling short for French-speaking participants. This reinforced the need for more linguistic justice and inclusion in such spaces. Still, AIDS2024 served as a strategic platform for ISDAO and its partners to affirm their place in the global HIV and human rights conversation, advocating for approaches rooted in self-determination, equity, and lived experience.

ILGA World Conference

11-15 November 2024, Cape Town, South Africa

The ILGA World Conference is the largest global gathering of LGBTQI changemakers, and ISDAO supported several grantee partners from West Africa to attend. Featuring over 1,450 delegates from more than 100 countries, the event was an important opportunity for our partners to network with other activists and movement actors, and to learn, share experiences, and build organizational capacity.

AWID International Forum

2-5 December 2024, Bangkok, Thailand

Our presence at the 2024 AWID Forum was a meaningful opportunity to connect with global feminist movements and deepen our collective work. Under the theme “Rising Together: Connect, Heal, Thrive,” we gathered with thousands of feminist movement builders and changemakers from around the world to reflect, learn, and strategize.

We supported the participation of young feminists and LGBTQI activists from francophone West Africa, ensuring their voices and experiences were represented in key conversations. Our two in-person sessions explored bold strategies for resisting anti-gender forces and rethinking philanthropy to strengthen support for individual activists. These discussions highlighted both the challenges and the power of our movements, offering space for shared insight and solidarity.



Publication Spotlight: Tasiri

ISDAO Grant Impact Assessment Report (2019 - 2021)

In 2022, ISDAO commissioned an independent external evaluation to provide an objective and comprehensive analysis of the impact of its grantmaking between 2019 and 2021. The resulting report, *Tasiri*, was published in 2024. *Tasiri* explores the outcomes of ISDAO's flexible, activist-led funding across LGBTQI movements in nine West African countries and incorporates feedback from grantee partners, peer funders, and movement allies.

The report showed significant growth in the movement since the launch of ISDAO's grantmaking. Grantee partners shared that ISDAO's flexible and trust-based approach enabled them to respond directly to community needs, strengthen internal structures, and expand their impact. Many highlighted that ISDAO was their first funder, and appreciated the deliberate focus on underrepresented voices, particularly LBQ+ groups, trans and intersex-led organizations, and grassroots collectives.



“ISDAO allowed us to dream and define our own priorities. We felt seen and trusted.” – Grantee Partner

Partners also highlighted ISDAO's commitment to linguistic justice through its bilingual approach, which helped foster greater inclusion of Francophone communities in regional conversations. At the same time, they pointed to ongoing challenges such as limited collaboration between organizations, security risks, and the need for more targeted capacity-strengthening support.

Our Key Learnings from *Tasiri*

- **Flexible, activist-led grantmaking is effective**
ISDAO's approach to flexible, participatory grantmaking has empowered LGBTQI movements to define their priorities, build internal structures, and respond to the specific needs of their communities. Many grantee partners emphasized that being able to use funds according to their real needs is crucial for organizational development and sustainability.
- **Core and emergency funding enables stability and resilience**
Access to unrestricted and emergency funds has allowed organizations to cover operational costs, secure office spaces, respond to crises, and maintain safe spaces. This funding has been especially impactful for grassroots and first-time grantee partners.
- **Investing in underfunded groups shifts power and expands inclusion**
ISDAO's prioritization of underrepresented identities (e.g., trans, intersex, LBQ+ women, and groups in Francophone countries) has helped expand visibility and leadership within the movement. These groups reported increased presence and influence in advocacy and organizing spaces.

“They [ISDAO] make sure the minority of the minority get access to funds and opportunities to grow.” — Grantee Partner

- **Movement cohesion and collaboration are growing, but need continued support**

LGBTQI groups and organizations are working together more and building stronger connections within and across countries. However, collaboration is still difficult in some contexts, often because of competition over limited funding, lack of trust between groups, and an absence of shared spaces to meet and plan together. Movements need continued support to build relationships, strengthen solidarity, and work more collectively.

- **Security, stigma, and socio-economic divides are persistent obstacles**

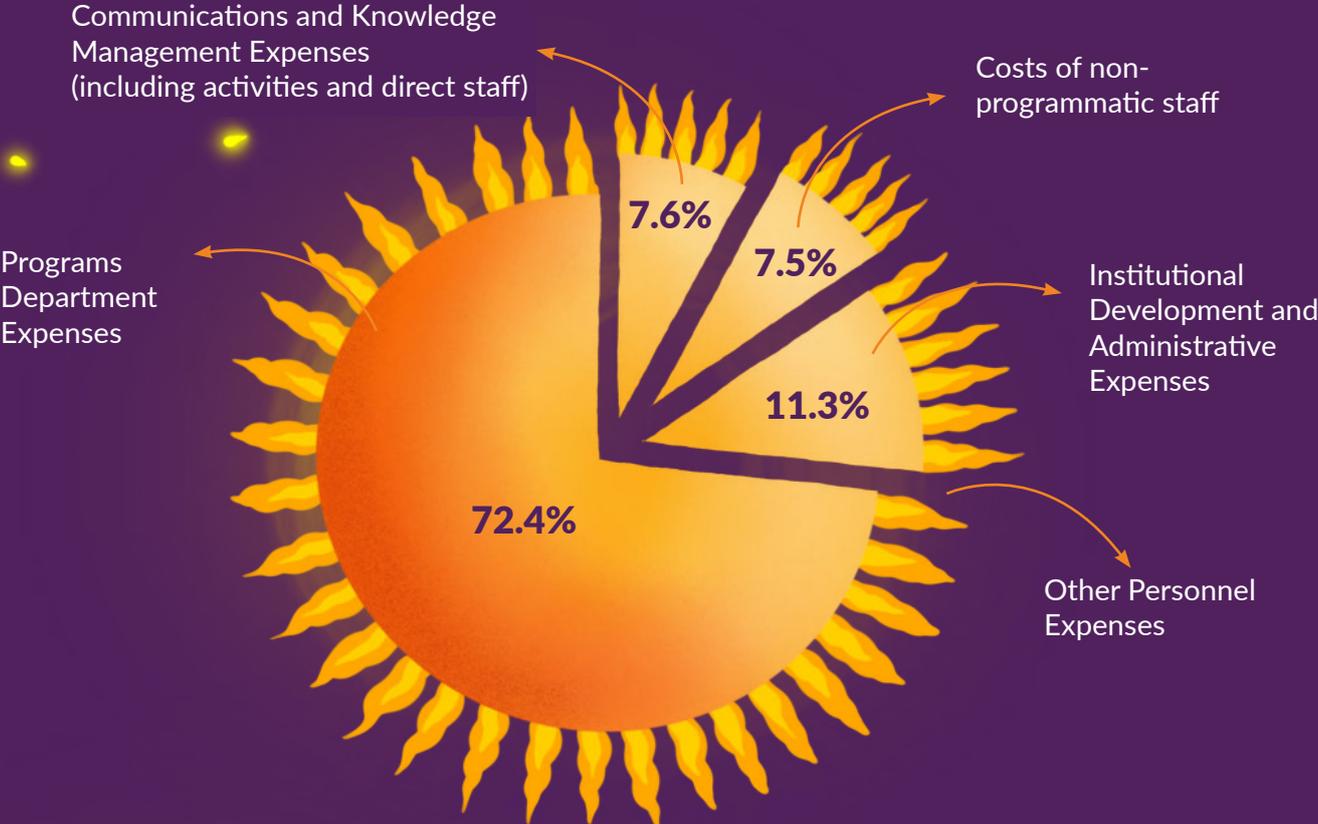
Despite some progress made, LGBTQI communities across West Africa continue to face state repression, religious fundamentalism, lack of access to justice, and socioeconomic barriers. Continued investment in safety, digital security, wellness, and grassroots organizing is essential for communities to thrive.



Our Finances

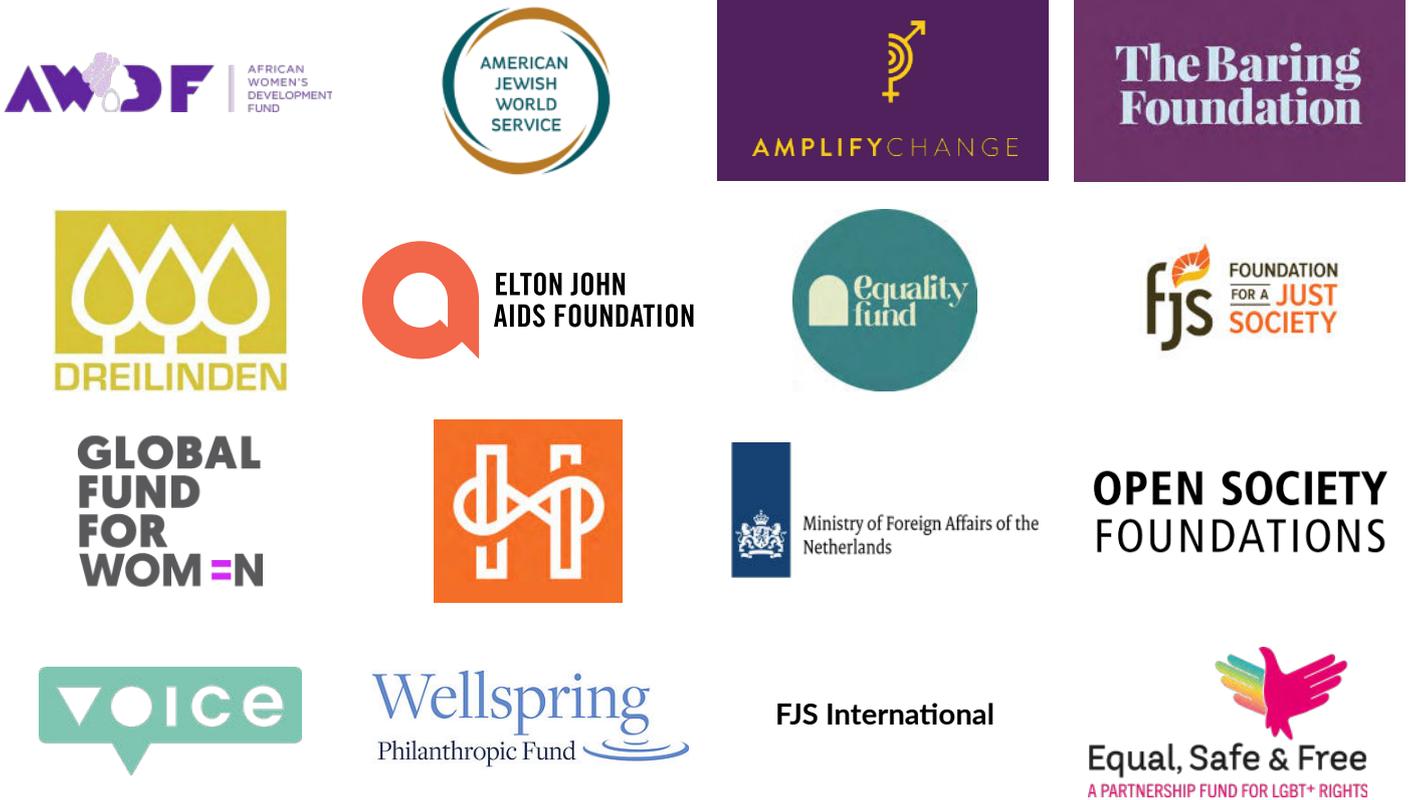
ISDAO'S 2024 Expenditures

Expenditure	2024 Total (USD)
Programs Department Expenses (including grants, grantmaking costs, direct staff)	\$ 3,796,834.08
Communications and Knowledge Management Expenses (including activities and direct staff)	\$ 398,019.89
Costs of non-programmatic staff	\$ 391,549.59
Institutional Development and Administrative Expenses	\$ 590,451.72
Other Personnel Expenses	\$ 64,748.02
Total	\$ 5,241,603



We Are Grateful

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Other Supporting Partners



We deeply appreciate all the individuals, organizations, legal entities, and technical supporters who contributed to ISDAO in various capacities throughout the year.



Credits:

Author: Chinelo Onwualu

Editing and Additional Writing: B. Caroline Kouassi Aman, Stéphane Simporé, Phidelia Imiegha, Steffie Kueviakoe

Translation: Akey Fabrice Looky

Graphic Design and Illustrations:

Studio We are Stories

Graphic Direction: Stéphane Simporé, Phidelia Imiegha



ISDAOSankofa



www.isdao.org



InitiativeSankofa



info@isdao.org



Initiative_Sankofa

