

CASE STUDY OF THE  
**ASANKA  
PILOT FUND**



**Creativity**  
IN ACTION,

THE  
**Movement**  
IN MOTION!

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## Acknowledgments

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We are incredibly grateful to you all.

- **Virginie A**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

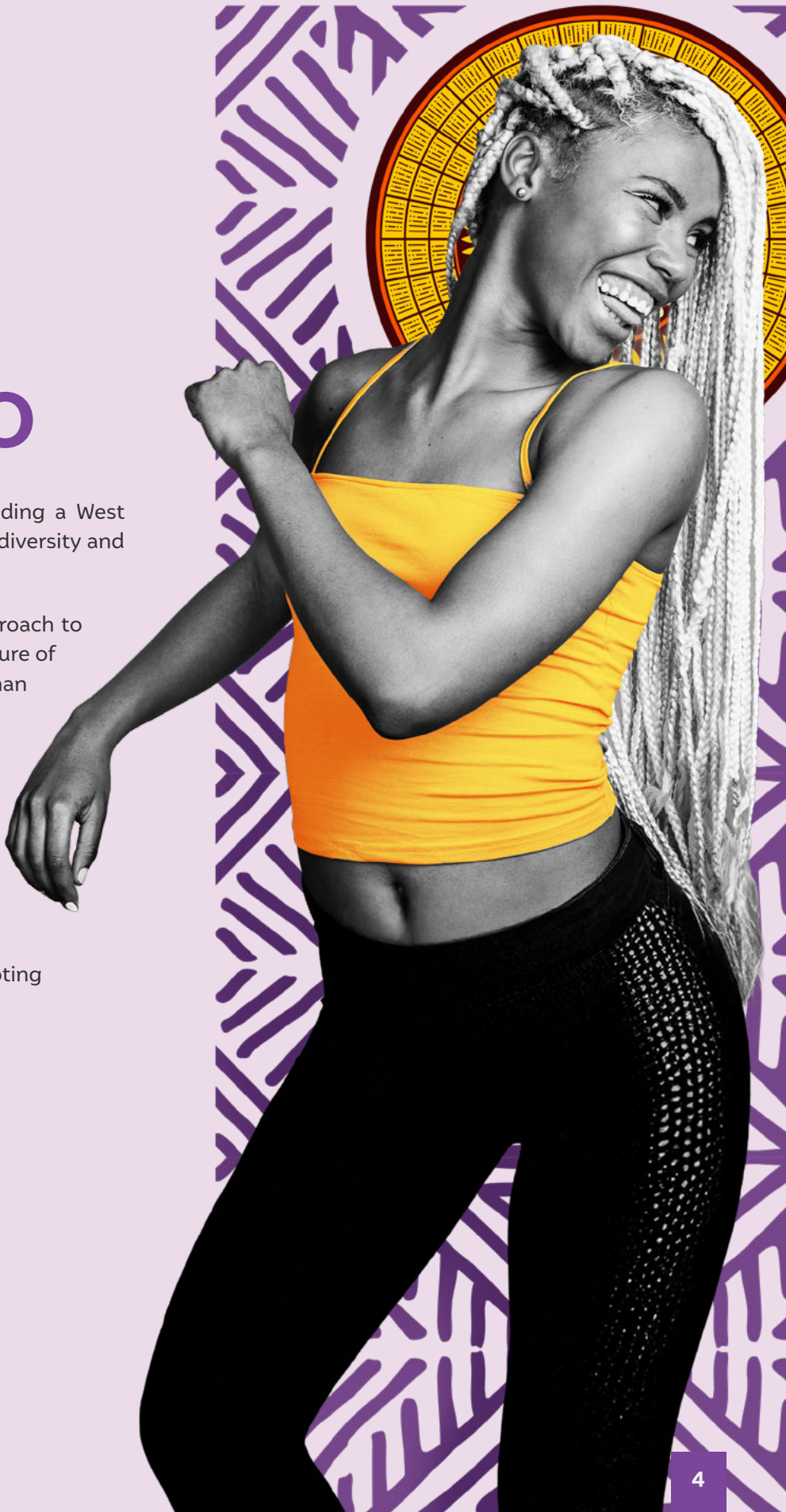
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	<b>03</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>06</b>
I. Asanka: Portrait of an Innovative Fund	07
II. Overview of the Creative Initiatives	09
III. Impact of Creative Initiatives on the LGBTQI Movement	12
IV. Dissemination	15
V. Implementation Challenges	17
VI. Analysis for Philanthropic Advocacy	18
VII. Recommendations for ISDAO	20
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>25</b>

# About ISDAO

[ISDAO](#) is an activist fund dedicated to building a West African movement that advocates for sexual diversity and rights.

It aims to achieve this through a flexible approach to grant-making and the strengthening of a culture of philanthropy committed to promoting human rights and social justice.

It envisions an equitable and inclusive West Africa, free from all forms of violence and discrimination. Therefore, its approach to advancing LGBTQI rights in the subregion is guided by increasing and diversifying available resources, considering the realities of the region, adopting a flexible approach to grant-making, and promoting advocacy for social change.



# Introduction

Africa's LGBTQI movement has been remarkably resilient and vocal on issues of social justice. Despite the rise of cultural and religious fundamentalist movements, activists from various LGBTQI movements strive to organize at community level, strengthen the broader movement, and conduct advocacy work. In a funding landscape struggling with limited resources, in countries with increasingly hostile socio-political contexts, new forms of resistance and advocacy are emerging. Recognizing that there are very few resources dedicated to creative expression as a tool for movement building and advocacy within the LGBTQI movement, Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest launched the Asanka fund in 2021, solely dedicated to supporting activist-led creative initiatives in the subregion.

The primary objective of the Asanka pilot fund is to support unconventional forms of activism, with a particular focus on artistic expression and creation aimed at raising awareness, mobilizing action, and building LGBTQI movements. Designed for LGBTQI groups and organizations as well as individual LGBTQI activists from the nine ISDAO focal countries and the West African diaspora, the Asanka pilot funded, during its first grant cycle supported twelve (12) creative initiatives from six (6) different countries, ranging from film production to the creation and facilitation of creative spaces. Upon completion of the pilot phase, lasting three (3) funding cycles, a review of the implementation and impact of the Asanka on the LGBTQI movement would be required. Therefore, between the end of the first cycle and the beginning of the second, the decision was made to document the learning and experiences of our grantee partners.



This case study aims to highlight the various initiatives that received funding and to better understand the grantees' experiences. Indeed, between the movement's growing visibility, the strengthening of community ties, and society's gradual awareness of LGBTQI issues, the creative initiatives implemented as part of the pilot fund have led to results that will benefit the LGBTQI movement in the region in the long term. However, it is also important to underline the challenges encountered throughout the implementation process to outline potential avenues for improvement to the Asanka grantmaking and support processes.

As such, the recommendations and aspirations expressed by fund recipients in this report focus on areas for improvement to increase the fund's impact on the broader LGBTQI movement in the subregion.

# I. Asanka: Portrait of an Innovative Fund

The Asanka pilot fund takes its name from the **Asanka**, a traditional cooking utensil used by the Akan people of West Africa. Made of clay or wood, it is used to mix ingredients when cooking stews, for example. Much like this utensil, which contributes to culinary diversity and embodies a culture of sharing and community, the Asanka pilot fund intends to act as a vessel for inspiration and creativity in support of LGBTQI advocacy in the West African subregion. Its introduction in 2021 marks the first time West Africa has ever accessed grants specifically dedicated to less conventional forms of LGBTQI activism, namely creative initiatives. These initiatives are defined as any *"initiative undertaken by LGBTQI groups/ organizations or individual LGBTQI activists to support LGBTQI activism in at least one of the ISDAO focus countries."* The eligibility criteria communicated to activists were as follows:

- \* Be an LGBTQI organization or group that works in at least one of the nine ISDAO focus countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo).
- \* Be an LGBTQI activist or group of activists based in West Africa or within the West African diaspora, whose work is connected to the local LGBTQI movement in the subregion and/or involves local partners.

LGBTQI activists from West Africa and its diaspora were invited to submit their proposals for creative initiatives through a three-week open call for proposals. Most Asanka grantees report having learned about the funding opportunity either through organizations that had a working relationship with or that were familiar with ISDAO, or through ISDAO's own communication



channels, including social media and newsletters. Following a participatory grant-making process, twelve (12) initiatives were funded, spanning six (6) of the nine (9) ISDAO focus countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal. During this pilot cycle, grants ranged from USD 3,000 to USD 5,000.

Feedback from beneficiaries during the pilot phase was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting Asanka as a highly valuable initiative with strong potential to strengthen the LGBTQI movement in the subregion. Three features were consistently emphasized: the fund's flexibility, its innovative focus, and its inclusive approach.

Furthermore, the Asanka fund has been praised for its innovative nature with respect to the region's LGBTQI movement. Its deliberate focus on creativity has enabled grantees to address needs that are often difficult to support through conventional funding mechanisms. Thanks to Asanka, grantees had the opportunity to explore self-expression, externalize their pain, and freely voice their feelings in settings where survival is paramount and healing and care are often neglected.

The flexible nature of the Asanka fund, in line with ISDAO's values and operating principles, was reflected both in the streamlined application process and in ISDAO's adaptability in the face of the challenges experienced by the grantee partners during implementation. Several beneficiaries did indeed report operational difficulties that affected project timelines, leading to delays in delivery.

*"The Asanka fund is different from many other grants because it provides individual activists with a platform and the resources to implement [creative] projects.*

*It creates space for creative ideas—ideas that are more focused on storytelling and art."*

*—Grantee activist, Nigeria*

For other stakeholders, Asanka represents an opportunity to explore and amplify the creative potential of activists in the subregion by challenging the limitations of more conventional forms of LGBTQI activism.





*"Asanka is an innovative way to explore the potential of activists in Africa."*

— Grantee organization, Nigeria

Grantee partners also acknowledged the grant's inclusive nature, open to supporting individual activists who remain significantly under-resourced within the West African LGBTQI movement. And while individual activists accounted for only 25% of the pilot fund's grant recipients, their participation was widely welcomed, especially in a context where many in the region feel as though donors do not recognise individual forms of activism enough.

*"For me, this is an inclusive grant that allows people who have not had the opportunity to implement their ideas to do so."*

— Grantee organization, Nigeria

Beyond its flexibility, innovation, and inclusivity, grant recipients emphasized the importance of recognizing creativity as a legitimate and effective tool for LGBTQI activism in West Africa. In this regard, they called for stronger acknowledgment and support of creative approaches as a means of advancing the movement.

# II. Overview of the Creative Initiatives

Among the initiatives supported under Asanka, film productions dominated, with four documentaries and one short film. There were three literary productions, including a collection of poems, an anthology, and a comic book. Two spaces for creative expression were also created in Ghana and Senegal: a film festival and an art therapy workshop, respectively. Finally, photography and podcasting were also among the supported initiatives under this pilot fund. A summary of each creative initiative is presented below.

**Dear Mr. Okafor**, is a short film about corrective rape produced by the International Center for Advocacy on Right to Health (ICARH) based in Nigeria. By recounting the experiences of LGBTQI survivors of corrective rape, the film highlights the negative psychological impact of this violation on members of the LGBTQI community. Designed as an advocacy tool for the protection of community members in Nigeria and the enforcement of their rights, the film has been screened to members of the community in the country as well as to certain external stakeholders.

**Artistic expression to break down clichés and build a new awareness among LGBTI women and girls (L'expression artistique pour déconstruire les clichés et construire une conscience nouvelle chez les femmes et jeunes filles LGBTI)** was the theme of the art therapy workshop organized by a Senegalese LGBTI organization. The activity was an opportunity to create a space for discussion and free speech around the violence and stigma attendees encountered in the world.

**Gnonnou Akoounka**, meaning “fighters (women)” in the Fon language, is a documentary produced by the LGBTQ organization “Alliance des Femmes

*Battantes.*” It aims to raise awareness of the experiences and difficulties faced by LGBTQ single mothers in Benin so that their needs are better considered in community programs.

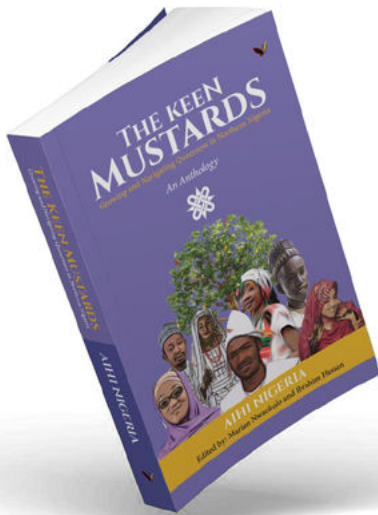
**In between sexes** is a documentary shot by Intersex Nigeria (organization). It summarizes the difficulties faced by intersex people in Nigeria and aims to lift the stigma surrounding intersex people. It also serves as a tool to advocate greater consideration of intersex people's needs.

**Joyful Resistance: A Queer Film Festival** is the theme of the film festival organized by Drama Queens (organization) in Ghana to promote a space dedicated to sharing and discussing African queer film productions.

**Moussow Ka Koumakann**, or “The Voice of Women” in the Dioula language, is an anthology of poems compiled following a writing workshop organized for trans people in Burkina Faso. Led by Transgenders Burkina Faso (organization), the project resulted in the publication of the poems in written format as well their audio recording in Mooré, Dioula, and French to help them reach a wider audience within the community.

**My biology, my truth** is a documentary produced by Intersex Ghana/Key Watch Ghana (organization). In this film, five intersex individuals from Ghana recount their experiences as intersex people within their families and society.





**The Keen Mustards: Growing and Navigating Queerness in Northern Nigeria** is an anthology chronicling the journeys of LGBTQI activists working in or originating from northern Nigeria. Produced by Achievers Improved Health Initiative or AIHI (organization), the anthology, released at a launch event, aims to increase the visibility of community members and contribute to their acceptance in society.

**The Red Flags Project**, an illustrated book produced by Doose (individual activist), focuses on the experiences of LGBTQI women that are sex workers (FSW) and drug users. By exploring the different forms of discrimination they encounter and distributing the book to community organizations, the author advocates for a more intersectional approach to the needs of LGBTQI women in community programs.



**Trahie par la vie : L'exilé (Betrayed by Life: The Exile)** is a comic book based on real events that traces the journey of a queer person from Côte d'Ivoire who was forced to emigrate illegally to Italy due to the many challenges they faced in their country. The author of this work Marie Jo (individual activist) chose this format to express herself on the theme of violence and the role it may play in the illegal emigration of sexual and gender minorities.



**The Pride Diaries** is a podcast, produced by Rain Bow (individual activist), which explores the lives of LGBTQ people in Nigeria. The Asanka grant supported the production of the podcast's third season.

**We Exist** is a three-part documentary produced by One Love Sisters Ghana (organization). The series focused on the experiences of queer people in contemporary Ghanaian society, the multiple forms of resistance employed by members of the community in the face of a hostile society, and the history of queer culture in Ghana.

# TABLE 1: Overview of initiatives funded by the Asanka pilot fund

Title	Author	Genre	Country
Dear Mr. Okafor	ICARH	Short film	NIGERIA
Déconstruire les clichés et construire une conscience nouvelle chez les femmes et jeunes filles LGBTI	A Senegalese LGBTI organization	Art therapy workshop	SENEGAL
Gnonnou Akoounka	Alliance des Femmes Battantes	Documentary	BENIN
In between sexes	Intersex Nigeria	Documentary	NIGERIA
Joyful Resistance: A Queer Film Festival	Drama Queens	Film Festival	GHANA
Moussow Ka Koumakann	Transgenders Burkina Faso	Poetry Collection	BURKINA FASO
My biology my truth	Intersex Ghana/Key Watch Ghana	Documentary	GHANA
The Pride Diaries	Rain Bow	Podcast	NIGERIA
The Red Flags Project	Doose	Illustrated book	NIGERIA
The Keen Mustards— Growing and navigating queerness in northern Nigeria	Achievers Improved Health Initiative (AIHI)	Anthology	NIGERIA
Trahie par la vie : l'exilé	Marie Jo	Comic book	CÔTE D'IVOIRE
We Exist Storytelling on queer existence in Ga land Joyful resistance Activist	One Love Sisters Ghana	Documentary series	GHANA

# III. Impact of Creative Initiatives on the LGBTQI Movement

In light of the results achieved thanks to the grantee partners' creative initiatives, Asanka could have a significant and long-lasting impact on the LGBTQI movement across the region. This impact can be summarized in four key outcomes: increased visibility for LGBTQI communities, enhanced solidarity, and stronger community ties within LGBTQI communities, new forms of activism, and in some cases, increased public awareness of issues affecting the community.

For example, the photo book titled *"The Red Flags Project"* has shed light on the harsh realities faced by LGBTQI women who are sex workers, drug users, and living with disabilities. By highlighting the multiple and intersecting forms of violence experienced by these women, it becomes a powerful tool for advocacy, a plea for their inclusion in movement programmatic work in Nigeria and the need for an intersectional approach to LGBTQI activism. As the author so aptly put it, *"the photo book has served to raise significant awareness among LGBTQI+ activists, stakeholders, and other human rights advocates on the importance of intersectional programming and interventions. It has helped everyone understand that, to achieve human rights for all, no one should be left behind."* (Grantee partner, Nigeria)

In northern Nigeria, the organization behind the anthology, *The Keen Mustards*, observed a change in public perception towards community members, particularly trans people. Indeed, the publication and promotion of this anthology have increased the visibility of community members in a part of the country where LGBTQI activism is saddled with social and religious obstacles.

As one of the authors rightly pointed out, this visibility should not be confused with social acceptance. Nonetheless, a decrease in discrimination and violence has been noted in this part of the country. Another impact of this project has been to boost the confidence and self-esteem of community members, especially trans people, who are becoming increasingly comfortable being themselves and expressing themselves.

*"The anthology has changed the general population's perception of homosexuality... We are now more visible and can make people understand that our sexuality is not limited to that... we can contribute to the economy."*

— AIHI, Nigeria



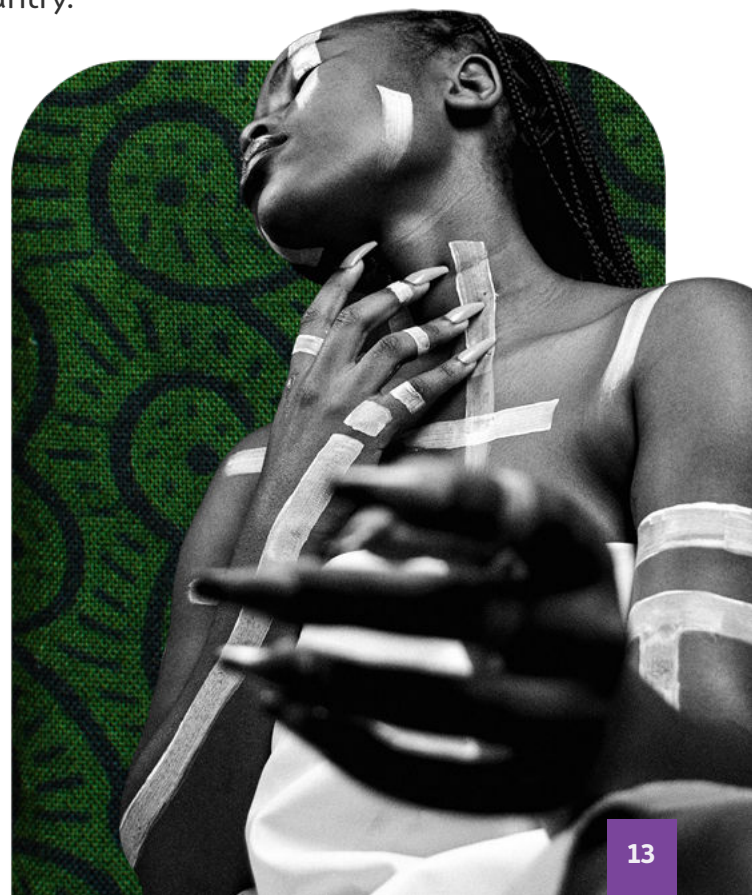
Similarly, in Ghana, increased visibility of intersex issues following the release of the documentary *My Biology, My Truth* made it possible for Intersex Ghana/Key Watch Ghana to become a nationally trusted resource on intersex-related issues. For others, visibility has resulted in networking and funding opportunities, as illustrated by this feedback from a representative of KIRAAY in Senegal: *"The works created during the art therapy activity were disseminated throughout the movement in the country and the region, which has increased the visibility of our organization. It has even sparked the interest of potential donors, who have reached out to us about working together."*

Where strengthening community ties is concerned, the fund's grantees report several positive outcomes. In Senegal, art therapy sessions for LGBTQ individuals gave participants the opportunity to speak openly about the distressing situations they face, thereby fostering solidarity and sisterhood. Similarly, in Burkina Faso, a creative writing workshop for trans people, followed by the publication of an anthology of poems entitled *"Moussow Ka Koumakann"*, had an immediate impact on participants' writing skills and self-esteem. Furthermore, and somewhat unexpectedly, the collection has attracted significant interest from LGBTQI groups in Burkina Faso, specifically in Bobo-Dioulasso, who are considering incorporating it into their art therapy and wellness activities. In addition, a selection of poems has been featured in podcasts as a way of promoting the collection on a wider scale.

In Ghana, the Joyful Resistance film festival was organized to showcase the important cinematic work produced by community members and to foster conversations among participants, which had the effect of strengthening community ties in a difficult political context. Indeed, one of the organizers notes that, beyond promoting African queer film productions, the festival has

contributed significantly to developing a better understanding of one another. She explains, *"Many people found their own little community during the festival. Participants were able to gain different perspectives and have conversations with those whose lives were portrayed in the films, which helped bring the community together. Community is very important because life is difficult."* Indeed, as exclusively queer spaces are becoming increasingly difficult to create in Ghana due to mounting socio-political tensions towards the community, the creation of such a space for sharing has been beneficial and has allowed participants to bond and reconnect.

Moreover, grant recipients have expressed cautious optimism about the impact of creative initiatives on public awareness and openness. For example, a representative of Key Watch Ghana said that the documentary *My Biology, My Truth* has fostered a better understanding of the challenges faced by intersex people and their families, both within the LGBTQI movement and among the general population. Indeed, the documentary is now being used as an advocacy tool on behalf of intersex people across the country.



*"This documentary gives us an audience, allows us to set a precedent... and really helps us in our advocacy work in Ghana."*

—Key Watch Ghana, Ghana

While the advocacy process is not without its challenges, the ambition behind the documentary by Key Watch Ghana, as with all other initiatives supported by the fund, is to contribute to a more open-minded society, where the needs of the LGBTQI community are better understood. A participant's uplifting feedback following a screening event with political stakeholders illustrates this point:

*"We live alongside intersex people, and it pains me to know that our actions may have caused them significant suffering."*

—A participant at the screening -  
Key Watch Ghana, Ghana

Using creative initiatives for advocacy is not limited to Ghana. In Côte d'Ivoire, the comic book *Trahie par la vie : L'exilé* (Betrayed by Life: The Exile), developed as a means of raising awareness and advocating for sexual and gender minorities, was presented to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for consideration in a campaign on illegal migration. Thus, beyond simply expressing and archiving our experiences, the artistic initiatives supported by the Asanka fund may have a significant ripple effect on advocacy efforts as they offer opportunities for networking beyond the LGBTQ+ community.

In general, although it is not yet possible to measure the long-term effects of the various initiatives, it is interesting to note that the Asanka fund has contributed to strengthening the LGBTQI movement in West Africa on two levels.

At the personal level, we can note the opportunities for expression, liberation, and interaction that these initiatives have fostered for both participants and organizers. At the community level, we can note the physical, emotional, psychological, and even political spaces that these initiatives have helped create in different countries.

**Amid a socio-political context where the shrinking civic space and an increasingly limited scope of action for LGBTQI activists are undermined by the rise of anti-gender rhetoric, this pilot fund has yielded significant immediate results. The fact that creative initiatives are helping to raise the profile of communities and strengthen community spirit, even in the face of challenges, is a sure sign of the regional movement's resilience and persistence.**



## IV. Dissemination

Broadly speaking, grantees used a variety of approaches to disseminate their creative material. For example, Transgenders Burkina printed one hundred copies of their poetry collection *Moussow Ka Koumakann*, which they distributed free of charge among the trans community in Bobo-Dioulasso. However, this dissemination remained limited to this community and this city alone. The collection is yet to be shared within the broader LGBTQI community in Burkina Faso, and beyond. Although the partner plans to distribute it more widely through podcasts adaptations of the poems, this initiative has not yet been implemented.

Key Watch's documentary *My Biology, My Truth* has been screened in several venues for the LGBTQI community in Ghana and beyond, including at the CFCS VII Conference in Botswana. The documentary is also available online on YouTube and the organization continues to engage communities and partners through this documentary in all spaces where they could be present. They have expressed a desire to have the documentary subtitled in French to make it accessible to French-speaking communities but have been unable to do so due to a lack of resources.

Although *The Red Flags Project* initiative in Nigeria has helped to highlight the intersecting forms of violence experienced by LBQTI sex workers with disabilities, the grantee partner would have liked to disseminate it even more widely to continue raising awareness on issues of intersectionality within activism. Given limited resources, she is using the power of social media to continue sharing her work.

In short, several partners expressed ambitions to widely disseminate their work or creative



production. The lack of resources, combined with restrictions on civic space for advocacy in some countries, makes dissemination difficult.

*"I had planned to print large quantities of the comic book, for a wide distribution to all (LGBTQI) NGOs in Côte d'Ivoire, but I ran out of resources to do so. While I was working on the project, some of the costs that had been initially budgeted increased, which was really upsetting..."*

*"My only concern then was to complete [and deliver] the project so that the donor wouldn't think I had misappropriated the funds."*

— Marie-Jo, Côte d'Ivoire

Given the limitations mentioned above, social media remains the only channel for funded partners to disseminate their creative work, outside of brief presentations for LGBTQI movement actors.



# V. Implementation Challenges

In West Africa, the LGBTQI movement is facing many challenges on its quest for social justice. Asanka grantees have encountered several obstacles while implementing their creative projects. These include an increasingly hostile socio-political climate, which has led to a rise in violence against community members and a substantial shrinking of activist spaces in the countries affected. In Ghana and Senegal, harsher anti-LGBT bills were introduced in 2021. In Nigeria, this repression took shape with the SSMPA<sup>1</sup> being passed in 2014. In the face of this upsurge in violence, both physical and psychological, community members naturally find themselves living in fear, in a state of heightened alert, and, in some cases, compelled to isolate themselves and withdraw from participating in movement activities. One of the authors of *The Keen Mustard* anthology explains: *"Due to religion and culture in the north of the country, some activists categorically refused to share their stories when we reached out to them [about the anthology] because they were afraid that it would get them in trouble."*

Since the safety of community members is a critical concern for many creative initiatives, activists took several measures to strengthen security and alleviate participants' fears. In northern Nigeria, for example, AIHI pledged to strengthen confidentiality and privacy measures for contributors to the anthology by, among other things, securely storing registration files, developing consent forms, and communicating clearly about how data collected as part of the project would be used. These steps helped ease the concerns of the participants and resulted in securing 20 of the 40 interviews initially planned as part of the anthology.

In the case of other Asanka grantee partners, challenges encountered were related to the actual project implementation. Some activists reported administrative challenges with their fiscal host. It should be noted that a mandatory condition for making a grant to an individual activist is that they must have a fiscal host.

Other grantees expressed difficulties in collaborating with external implementation partners. One beneficiary from Côte d'Ivoire reports: *"Some service providers did not want to be associated with the LGBTQI community and did not want to work with me."* In Ghana, similar reluctance from service providers was also noted: *"We had to change the date [of the festival] several times because we couldn't find a venue to host it. And when we found a venue, they ended up kicking us out the first day, even though we had been as transparent as possible about the work we were doing."*

Regardless of the various challenges encountered, a few factors positively impacted project implementation. Examples include: ISDAO's flexibility in addressing the various challenges faced by activists, a supportive community environment for activists in need of assistance in challenging times, and the security precautions taken by activists to ensure that planned activities run smoothly.



<sup>1</sup> SSMPA : Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act: Law prohibiting same sex marriage.

# VI. Analysis for Philanthropic Advocacy

Asanka's pilot fund is a real departure from traditional models of community organizing, thanks to its novel approach to funding. Through the projects carried out by grantee organizations and activists, the fund shows that a different form of activism is not only possible within the West African LGBTQI movement but beyond it as well. Grantee partners have proven, through the quality and originality of their works, that they can devise innovative and creative projects, provided donors recognize them as legitimate and deserving of their support. The Asanka fund also breaks new ground by overcoming a prevailing reluctance of the philanthropic sector to finance individual activists. As with any grant-making process, the issue of accountability remains a challenge. During the pilot phase, ISDAO confirmed this observation, having to identify some limitations and take corrective measures thanks to its internal accountability mechanisms. However, these challenges must not overshadow the quality and relevance of projects implemented by grantees, both organizations and individuals. Their work reinforces ISDAO's belief that supporting creative activism is crucial to enriching queer narratives and to bolstering advocacy strategies. Nevertheless, some reflections remain regarding the West African and diasporic context, where queer/LGBTQI artistic expressions are increasingly visible and diverse: paintings, graffiti art, choreography, audiovisual content creation for social media, etc. These art forms portray the realities and identities of queer people, yet their creators do not always identify as LGBTQI activists or queer people and are not necessarily connected to community activism networks<sup>2</sup>.



2 [Elladj Lincy Deloumeaux, Afro Paint Artist, showing in Abidjan](#)



Even so, these artistic works bring a refreshing, insightful, and comforting perspective to a movement that is often marked by violence at the societal and community levels.

Through its support to individual activists, ISDAO currently favors initiatives that clearly demonstrate collaborative efforts within the local and regional LGBTQI movements. Yet doesn't this approach undermine the very spirit of change that ISDAO embodies itself? Wouldn't funders, ISDAO included, gain from acknowledging digital artists and content creators—even those without direct ties to the movement—as contributors who, through their creative work, help raise awareness and visibility for the movement's struggles?

These questions warrant in-depth consideration within ISDAO's governance board as well as in philanthropic forums.

Lastly, it is worth noting that ISDAO remains to date, the only funder in the subregion that supports individual activists' creative endeavors, with often limited resources. Other donors funding the West African LGBTQI movement would do well to follow suit and commit to financing creative activism and artistic expression that positively highlights the lives of LGBTQI people, even when the artists do not openly identify as queer—whether for safety reasons or out of personal choice.

Such a pledge would show that there are many ways to advocate for change, while recognizing art and creativity as essential tools for expression, documentation, and awareness-raising within the West African LGBTQI movement.

# VII. Recommendations for ISDAO

The Asanka pilot fund has proven its relevance, its potential, and its strategic value for West Africa's LGBTQI movement. The partners agree that making the fund permanent and strengthening its impact is necessary, given the various initiatives supported and how activists and community organizations have used the fund.

To facilitate ease of reading and implementation, the recommendations below have been structured around specific themes.

## RECOMMENDATION 1:

*Institutionalize Asanka as a sustainable funding mechanism for creative advocacy initiatives.*

Our grantee partners view Asanka as a significant advancement in the regional philanthropic landscape. They have advocated for Asanka's continuation, recognizing the initiative's potential in supporting alternative forms of activism and in fostering new advocacy frameworks and spaces.

## RECOMMENDATION 2:

*Introduce alternative application formats (audio, video, hybrid formats).*

While ISDAO's flexibility is appreciated, the partners recommend expanding the types of submission formats to make the process more accessible to a wider range of activists who may have different levels of skills and abilities, including those who may struggle with a written format.



### **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

*Provide more structured support during the application phase*

Some partners have expressed difficulties in understanding the selection criteria and filling out the forms. Increased support, including simpler guidelines and clarification sessions, would help reduce recurring misunderstandings as to the scope and objectives of the Asanka fund.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4:**

*Allow organizations previously funded by ISDAO to apply to the Asanka fund.*

Given Asanka's specific focus on creativity, this would allow these organizations to explore innovative forms of activism and strengthen their existing advocacy strategies.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5:**

*Increase the grant amounts to support larger-scale projects.*

### **RECOMMENDATION 6:**

*Offer more flexibility in terms of disbursements (payments in tranches).*

These changes will enable more ambitious projects to be implemented, reflecting the operational preferences of some partners.

### **RECOMMENDATION 7:**

*Create a specific support mechanism for individual activists, particularly in terms of financial management and reporting.*

Several activists reported encountering difficulties related to administrative and financial requirements due to the limited expert support available outside of formal organizations.



### **RECOMMENDATION 8:**

*Facilitate spaces to foster engagement between grant recipients and potential applicants.*

These spaces would allow for best practices, challenges, and lessons learned to be shared while ensuring better understanding of the Asanka fund's objectives and expectations by future applicants.

### **RECOMMENDATION 9:**

*Establish a mechanism dedicated to the dissemination and promotion of creative productions funded by Asanka.*

Although dissemination plans are part of the proposals submitted, resources remain limited. As a regional philanthropic leader, ISDAO could play a significant role in facilitating partners' access to advocacy and education spaces, as well as to different dissemination channels.

### **RECOMMENDATION 10:**

*Create a complementary fund dedicated to legal education and strategic litigation.*

Partners reported a significant capacity gap when using national, regional, and international legal mechanisms. Such a fund would strengthen the movement's capacity in a sustainable manner while addressing a strategic gap in the support ecosystem.



# Conclusion

The feedback provided by Asanka beneficiaries offers interesting insights for donors seeking to better support the West African LGBTQI movement. Indeed, the Asanka fund not only confirms the movement's interest in less conventional forms of advocacy—through artistic and creative expression—but also demonstrates the need to scale up grants to the LGBTQI+ movement in the region and diversify the areas funded. As the only LGBTQI fund in West Africa focused on creativity, Asanka fills a significant gap in an area that still receives little support from donors: LGBTQI creative expression.

Thus, a key takeaway from this process is the importance for movement funders to pay close attention and listen to the communities they support. Many beneficiaries appreciated the flexibility afforded by the Asanka pilot fund, as well as the opportunities it presented to the activists. The wide range of initiatives implemented not only reflects both the diverse needs and priorities of LGBTQI communities in the subregion; it also highlights different approaches to the challenges at hand.

One final observation regarding this pilot grant initiative is how underrepresented French-speaking countries were across the initiatives supported. Out of twelve (12) grantees, only four (4) were from Francophone countries. While the lack of representation of the French-speaking LGBTQI activist community in the regional LGBTQI movement has been a major concern for both donors and activists themselves, this finding may prompt donors to consider more proactive and targeted approaches to resourcing the movement. For example, focused outreach to underserved countries, coupled with more sustained support for applicants and beneficiaries, could be explored as potential responses to the low rate of applications originating from French-

speaking countries. In the meantime, LGBTQI activists in the subregion remain hopeful that Asanka's successes and lessons learned will serve as a lever to increase the resources and funding routed to the West African LGBTQI movement.

Prior to 2021, the lack or even absence of resources for non-traditional forms of advocacy posed a major challenge within the LGBTQI movement in West Africa. Asanka grantees recognize that this pilot fund could be a gateway to promoting creativity in social justice and LGBTQI movements in the subregion. The various achievements of the pilot fund's beneficiaries attest to the power of creativity as an advocacy tool.

If there is one thing the launch of Asanka has proven, it is that creative and alternative forms of advocacy deserve as much attention within our movement as do traditional forms of activism.



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# ISDAO

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