

ISDA



GONDAL

Our 2025 Annual Report





Research and Narrative Team: Obehioye Otaigbe, Aaliyah O. Ibrahim

Editorial and Creative Direction: Malaika Aryee-Boi, Phidelia Imiegha, Aamowi Longdon, Steffie Kueviakoe, Stéphane Simporté, B. Caroline Kouassiaman

Translation: Akey Fabrice Looky

Graphic Design and Illustrations: Studio We Are Stories

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction Weaving a Web of Solidarity	05
II.	Still Here ISDAO Voices on 2025	08
III.	Art as Survival Reflecting on Creative Advocacy	13
IV.	The RESPOND Fund as Communal Care	16
V.	In One Room Voices from the First Regional Forum	18
VI.	What Trans Organizing Taught Us in 2025 Verbs to Live By	22
VII.	Love No Dey Finish Celebrating Love Alliance	24
VIII.	Our Grants	27
IX.	Publication Spotlight	32
X.	Our Finances	34
XI.	We Are Grateful	35



I. INTRODUCTION

Weaving a Web of Solidarity

In 2025, movements and organizations across West Africa faced funding cuts, intensifying criminalization, and escalating digital violence. These conditions changed how people organized, cared for one another, and imagined liberation together. Our annual report begins from that terrain and offers a web of solidarity. In the spirit of the word ‘GONDAL’, which means solidarity in Fulfulde or Pulaar, the language spoken by the Fulani ethnic group, our 2025 report traces how solidarities are built and sustained across different contexts.

Throughout this report, we define solidarity as a lived practice of mutual recognition, collective action, and shared commitment to liberation. This distinguishes solidarity from support, which may be offered without shared stakes, may be episodic, and may even be withdrawn when conditions change. Solidarity, by contrast, implies enduring

alignment and an investment in one another’s freedom that is not contingent on funding cycles or institutional recognition. This distinction makes our 2025 report unique.

Structured through conversations among partners, this report deliberately brought together stakeholders from different countries into dialogue.

The process itself was intended to practice solidarity through respectful engagement and mutual learning across borders. Each conversation traced where solidarity was present or absent, what forms it took, and how it could be propagated—from how movements exchange information to how they take risks together and care for those most exposed to harm. In this way, our 2025 annual report aims not only to show how solidarity is assembled in different sites but also to point toward more liberatory futures for all, advancing our mission of a just and inclusive West Africa.



Some highlights from our 2025:

Funding our movements

In 2025, we committed over \$3.3 million USD across our grant portfolios, a 12.65% increase from the previous year. Through these grants, we deepened our commitment to LGBTIQ-led organizations in the region by providing multi-year funding of up to 3 years, enabling organizations and groups to strengthen and sustain their impact. Based on recommendations from ISDAO's regional Activist Grant Making Panel, we strengthened our strategic funding approach to support coordinated, country-level responses amid significant regional shifts. This has enabled movements to rebuild solidarity, strengthen security and community well-being, and respond to hostile legislation.

\$ 3.3M

USD ACROSS OUR
GRANT PORTFOLIOS

12.65%

INCREASE FROM 2024

Our ears to the ground

As part of our annual pre-grant site visits, our team visited more than 70 partners across nine countries, meeting the activists and community organizations at the heart of our vibrant movements. We also conducted several learning and partnership-building visits across three countries, engaging with partner organizations, allied groups, networks, and key movement actors to gain direct insight into urgent needs, movement priorities, and funding gaps.

70+

PARTNERS



9

COUNTRIES



The final year of the Love Alliance

With the Love Alliance initiative coming to a close, ISDAO convened Learning Forums that brought together partners funded throughout the initiative, from LGBTQI, Sex Worker, and People Who Use Drugs (PWUD) movements in Burkina Faso and Nigeria. The forums provided an opportunity for partners to reflect on the initiative's impact and to explore ways to sustain and build on the progress achieved.

In Burkina Faso, the partners articulated a shared vision under the theme,

“Love Never Stops.”

In Nigeria, partners expressed their collective commitment through a manifesto, declaring,

“Love no dey finish, together we run.”

Creating movement-centered spaces

We also convened ISDAO's first regional grantee forum, bringing together more than 50 partners from across the sub-region to share experiences, learn from one another, and define collective priorities. This gathering

was held at a timely moment, one marked by rapidly shifting legal, political, social, and security contexts. Insights and strategies from this space will be published in a report later this year.

50+

PARTNERS



Supporting advocacy and knowledge production

We supported the meaningful participation of West African activists in international advocacy, learning, and networking spaces, including the EGIDES International conference in Montreal, the Pan Africa ILGA Regional Conference in South Africa, the UN CSW69, and the NGO CSW forum in New York. We also produced key resources, such as the Doundou Country Reports and Creating the Future We Want, that capture important data, stories, and strategic insights from the movement.

II. STILL HERE

ISDAO Voices on 2025

Caroline Kouassiaman, ISDAO's Executive Director, Igor Koffi, Finance Officer, and Marian Nwaokolo, a member of the Activist Grant Making Panel (AGMP), sat down for a conversation on the work of ISDAO in 2025.

What did it mean to be doing this work from inside ISDAO, in a year when everything the institution supports was under attack?

MARIAN:

"I can't even begin to describe 2025. It was filled with so much uncertainty, so much fear. And imagine that kind of pressure going into the grant-making space, sitting where I had power to make decisions on how communities get funded, knowing everything happening on the ground, and knowing that ISDAO cannot fund everybody. It's such a difficult space to be in. But it has also been a call for feminist grant-making organizations to go back to the drawing board and look at how they can redistribute power so that the people they fund have a say in how money moves. And what I have seen is that solidarity used to come from a place of projects. Now, almost everybody is seeing: we are all we have. People are building relationships and partnering with each other on their own, beyond the projects, because of what has happened."

CAROLINE:

"2025 feels like there were so many different things that I need just to try to picture it. It felt like a person being pulled in so many directions, somebody holding on to your shirt, your trousers, your arms. As people were getting news about the cancellation of other sources of funding, as one of the few funders funding the community in its breadth across the region, there was so much expectation on ISDAO, expectation to fill gaps that there was just no way we could fill. And how do we do that equitably, across nine countries, with the resources we have? We are an organization led by activists, across all of our bodies, so the realities our partners are facing, we experience those same things as staff. It was a year of pressure, of uncertainty, of stress. It was a hard year."

IGOR:

"We started 2025 with a lot of trauma: the law adopted in Mali, in Burkina Faso, the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, the restriction of funds. Despite all these challenges, ISDAO was able to comfort our partners, to assure them that we are here. Solidarity is a value and a principle of action in Africa. When someone is facing a challenge, the whole community stands up, whether it's financial, moral support, or just being there for the person, and ISDAO plays that role. And there is also the Respond Fund. It's true that the fund is given to a specific organization, but the fund doesn't belong to the organization. It belongs to the community in the country."

How did the panel stay grounded, deciding who gets support in a year when everyone needed it?

MARIAN:

“There are values that guide us. We are feminists doing participatory grant-making: fund the people most affected, fund those most at the margins. Even within a marginalized movement, you have further disenfranchised people, and you prioritize them. But you may set priorities before you enter the room, and then, I remember it, we were in the room when [the parliament of] Ghana passed the bill. You get a message two minutes after, and there and then you have to decide that this country needs more attention, more resources. How do we re-channel? You cannot fund everybody, to be honest. But we always have our values at the back of our minds, and we have the cause at heart.”

CAROLINE:

“One of the biggest paradoxes of last year: we had the largest budget for our regional grant-making that we have ever had. The largest. And we still had to say no to people. We still had to make cuts on the last day. In a place where people are shutting down, we still have resources we can get to communities, and that’s something to celebrate. And still, on the last day of the panel, we were over budget and had to go back and prioritize. When Igor was speaking, I was thinking about ISDAO as a boat in the middle of the ocean with a storm around it. We absolutely got rocked by the waves. There’s water that splashed over. But at the end of 2025, despite a very difficult year, we’re still standing. The boat was a little bit rocky, but the boat was still there.”





What did duty of care look like, practically, inside the organization?

MARIAN:

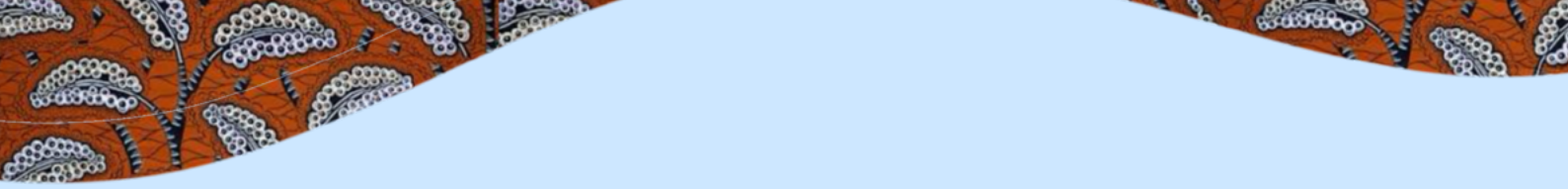
“Core funding is care funding. For many groups in the movement, there is a trauma response from other grant-makers’ expectations; that capitalist thinking that you must always be doing something. When you tell grantee partners to apply for core funding, there’s that fear: it’s going to look like I’m not doing anything. So we educate activists: when ISDAO issues a call, you can prioritize core funding. Because what is care? If a funder gives me money for projects but we cannot pay salaries, cannot buy electricity for the office, and we are just burnt out, where does that leave activists? And we prioritize wellness in allocation. In 2025, it was only logical to prioritize organizations that were saying: I’m tired of fighting; we just want to be okay; we just want to look out for each other; we just want to dance. That should be fine as well. We will not all carry placards. It’s an ecosystem: the frontliners, the storytellers, those who organize balls. People should be allowed to just be merry and spend time as a community.”

IGOR:

“We organized honest conversations. We knew the year started on the wrong note. You have community pressure on one side and organizational pressure on the other, and it reached a point where we needed additional support to reduce the workload. It really helped us focus on our well-being.”

CAROLINE:

“It’s a work in progress. We’ve been good at realizing we can’t do it all on our own. We have integrated wellness support into both of our most recent staff retreats, with external facilitation, creating space for care, and working to institutionalize it in our policies, our practices, and how we relate to each other. And last year we were able to go deeper, to understand what issues are underneath the surface when people are stretched, and how we collectively support each other.”



What did the year's shifts teach the organization?

MARIAN:

"I'll give a clear example. There was an organization that worked with the community for years on HIV prevention and care, and we saw them change sides and show us their fangs, going from humanizing people to saying they want to rehabilitate these same people they had worked with for so long. We had organizations working with these people for years without realizing the enemy had always been inside the room. It was eye-opening. And in the grant-making room, we saw proposals from mainstream organizations using queer lingo, and there were keen eyes: no, you are not a member of the community. It was a learning curve, to be much more attentive, much more protective, and to gatekeep our spaces as much as we should."

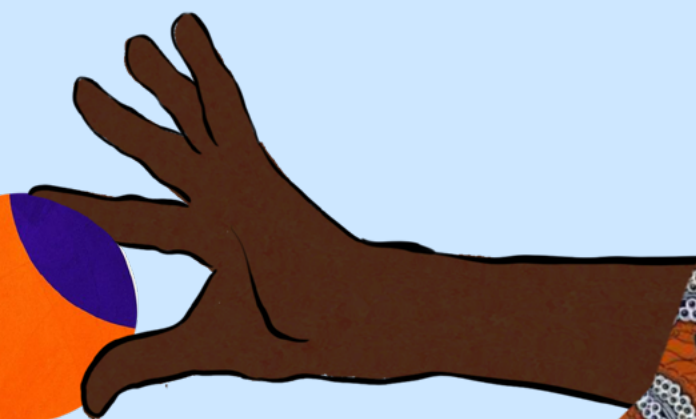
IGOR:

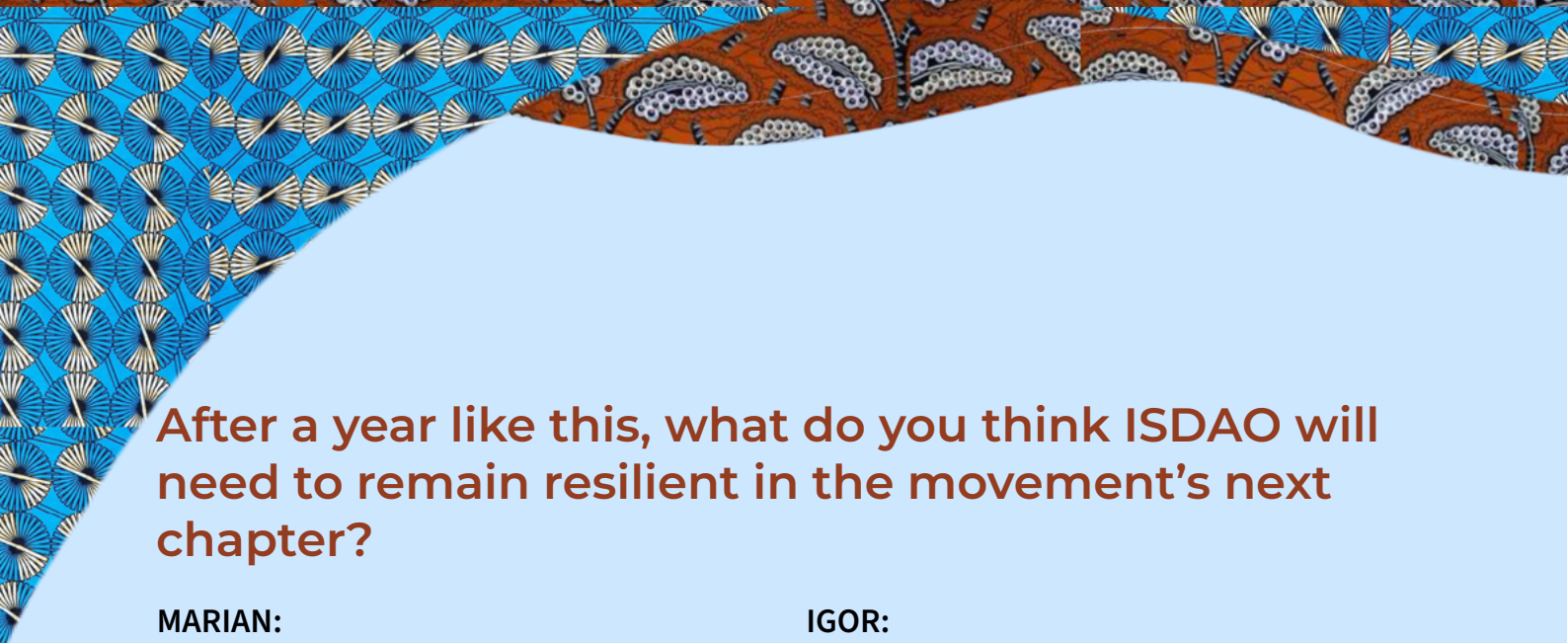
"Nothing is granted. Things can change from today to tomorrow. And the question is: who is with us? There were people we considered part of the community who, at the end of the day, changed sides. It was as if someone was stabbing you in the back. There are those who come because they want to support the community, and there are people who come

just because they want income. We need to be able to make that distinction. That was a lesson we learned the hard way."

CAROLINE:

"That we need to be agile and to see where the hard lines are. One donor wanted every condition and restriction they placed on ISDAO passed on to our partners. We said we couldn't do that, and we negotiated instead. That work is on us as funders. It's not on grantee partners; it's not on the movement to figure those things out. And we have had to navigate visibility. Our website is vibrant; you see people's faces, but we had requests from people saying it's not safe for my picture to be there anymore. Visibility has become a risk, a liability. For the first time, more than half of the country reports we produced last year could not be made publicly available; they are only available upon request. Five years ago, that wasn't the case. How do we still represent who we are while safeguarding and protecting? Situations are evolving so much that what was possible in one country last year is not the same this year. Last year reinforced the need to keep listening to what partners are saying, and adapt on that basis."





After a year like this, what do you think ISDAO will need to remain resilient in the movement's next chapter?

MARIAN:

"ISDAO already holds a lot of responsibility. I would say: hold yourselves kindly. You cannot solve the world's problems; you cannot fund the entire continent. So, in the corner where you are, continue what you have been doing and continue to care for yourselves. Because who is asking ISDAO how they are? ISDAO is always asking grantee partners, "How are you impacted? How does this affect you?" But their jobs are on the line as well. Nobody saw 2025 coming. So, hold yourselves with much more kindness, and never think you are not doing enough, because you are bridging so many gaps."

IGOR:

"We need partners to have honest conversations with us. Not the needs you mention to please the donor, but what you really need to implement your activities. Sometimes they have the answers, but they are used to the donor telling them what to do. We don't want a position of power where we tell them what to do. We want the ideas to come directly from the community, so that we, as donors, can support what they want to do."

Looking ahead to ISDAO's next season, what did you learn in 2025 that will shape where you go next?

CAROLINE:

"At almost every staff retreat I ask: what are we taking off our plates, what are we saying no to? And there's never anything. I think we have to say no more often, and be realistic about what we can do. And we have to continue to integrate celebration, joy, and care into the work; it's easy to focus only on everything that's happening, and it weighs you down. We also have to continue to get multi-year, core, flexible support from our donors, because that is what enables us to provide multi-year, core, and flexible support to our grantee-partners. **Ultimately, I believe the job of philanthropy should be to work ourselves out of a job. If philanthropy is having the impact we want, we shouldn't need to exist.** ISDAO needs to continue to exist for now, but our goal isn't building the organization for perpetuity. It's ensuring the movements have the resources to do this work."

III. ART AS SURVIVAL

Reflecting on Creative Advocacy

What can art do in a time of crisis?

In a year when the platforms that amplify queer voices were also used to hunt them down, when funding cuts challenged organizations and new laws made gathering dangerous, art and creativity in West Africa opened doors.

At ISDAO, the Asanka Creative Initiatives Fund supports individual activists to implement creative advocacy projects. In 2025, 156 individual activists submitted concept notes for the fund, of which **17 received grants totaling \$133,875 USD**. The gap between those who submitted proposals and those we

were able to fund shows that creative ideas are abundant across the region and that more resources are needed to sustain them.

What follows are two conversations among ISDAO grantee-partners who, through the Asanka Creative Initiatives Fund and Regional Grants, have turned to art and creativity in their advocacy. One is with a filmmaker in Abuja, documenting what family acceptance looks like, and the other is between an artist and an organizer, finding each other across countries and languages.



Rachel's beam of hope

What will my family think of me? How will I be perceived? How will I be treated?

These are questions many queer Nigerians carry with them.

Rachel Anietie, a filmmaker from Nigeria, says people run before they find out the answer. They leave home before the verdict, never giving their families a chance to respond. In a country whose laws criminalize their existence and where 2025 arrived as one long stretch of 'gbas gbos,' her word for the year's attacks and struggles, the fear that drives queer Nigerians to leave before asking questions is not irrational. Rather, it is a reasonable reaction to conditions of injustice, even though it also costs every acceptance that might have happened but was never risked. This is the door Rachel decided to open with a camera. *There Is Love at Home*, her first documentary, made possible by the Asanka Fund, gathers the stories of LGBTQI Nigerians who came out to their families and were met with love, acceptance, and protection. She is deliberate about what the film is meant to be. She knows it is not a claim that every family will embrace their child. Rather, it is proof that some do, and her film is for those still standing on the near side of the question, hoping to watch someone cross before they decide whether to cross themselves.

“A lot of us do not have the primary protectors that every human being should have in their biological family. So, this project is like a beam of hope... I believe that if they know that there could be light at the end of the tunnel, it could spark joy in this movement.”

– Rachel

Art lets people enter places and emotions that are otherwise closed off to them. A young person who cannot survive the real conversation with their mother can sit in the dark and watch someone else have it, feel everything the encounter holds—grief, terror, the possibility of tenderness—and walk out intact, carrying the knowledge that the room they fear has more than one exit. Rachel puts it simply: art is a place where you come and be yourself, and there is no perfect way to be yourself. A film asks little of its viewers except presence, which is why, as a tool, it can reach people that formal advocacy might never touch.

Mosylam and MUM's vantage points

Their conversation happened across a great distance.

MUM is a queer artist and communicator who received the Asanka Fund while in Benin. **Mosylam** is a non-binary activist working with LGBTQI communities under regimes that have legislated against their existence.

What they both immediately agreed on is what art does for people who cannot speak. MUM knows this from his own experience.

As a queer person, he could not speak about who he was. Art was where he could exist without judgment, be the person he wanted to be, and feel no fear of being outed. Years of advocacy had to run under the table, because organizations were unwilling to touch queer issues openly in a region where that was dangerous.

The Asanka Fund deepened MUM's efforts, so for the first time, his advocacy could be carried out openly and belong to the people

it was about. Colours of Resistance gathered queer migrants and refugees in Benin, people carrying the double burden of persecution and displacement. Because MUM knew that asking people to surface their stories could cost them something, he worked with a psychologist to safeguard participants and with an artist to compile testimonies from hairdressers, painters—and many others who make things with their hands—and then turned it into a book.

The book traveled where its authors could not. It went as part of an advocacy letter to the ministries of interior, justice, and health, to UNHCR, to embassies and consulates in Benin, and, eventually through MUM's positioning abroad, to stakeholders beyond West Africa. In one case, days after a National Commission responsible for refugees received it, a representative called MUM. He had never known, he said, that people were going through these kinds of situations.

“A work of art never dies. Even once the artist passes away, the work of art will remain.”

– MUM

Mosylam recognized this power of art from another side of the same struggle. This year, supported by ISDAO's regional grant, their organization ran sessions on building self-esteem for LBQ and trans women who have been taught to hold none, alongside vocational training, helping young people gain qualifications and economic footing in a society that shuts them out of both.

Furthermore, in documentation sessions, young people who had survived family rejection, assault, and arbitrary arrest were handed paper and asked to put down what they could not say. What participants reported afterward was relief. Burdens carried since childhood were finally set down in a community context. Art became an instrument of care, representing the emotional dimension of solidarity.

Mosylam also stated plainly why creative advocacy matters in a country where traditional advocacy is hard, and allies are harder to find. Raising the community's questions in public risks a person's life. However, a drawing can enter a mind where an argument cannot. People can look at art and see the violence the community lives without the reflex of refusal that raw facts might trigger. When a community partner saw the participants' drawings and offered an exhibition, the work reached a wider public than any statement the organization could have made safely.



IV. THE RESPOND FUND AS COMMUNAL CARE

The RESPOND Fund is a safety and security top-up fund added to ISDAO's regional and Love Alliance grants, primarily intended to help organizations respond to crises and emergencies within their communities. However, organizations are encouraged to adopt a solidarity-based approach to reach beyond their membership and immediate community, sometimes by pooling resources and establishing communal funds to respond

to situations that broadly affect the community or movement at the local or national level.

Syb directs ABN, a feminist organization, and Dr Lix coordinates IKSô, a community health organization. A year after some of Burkina Faso's hardest months for activists, they retrace how a movement learned to hold itself.

Before 2024

Organizations knew each other's names and little more.

Dr Lix: "We were organizations working in isolation. We could hear the name of some association without really knowing what they were doing."

2024

ISDAO's strategic funds bring seven organizations into a consortium. The trust that everything will later depend on is built here.

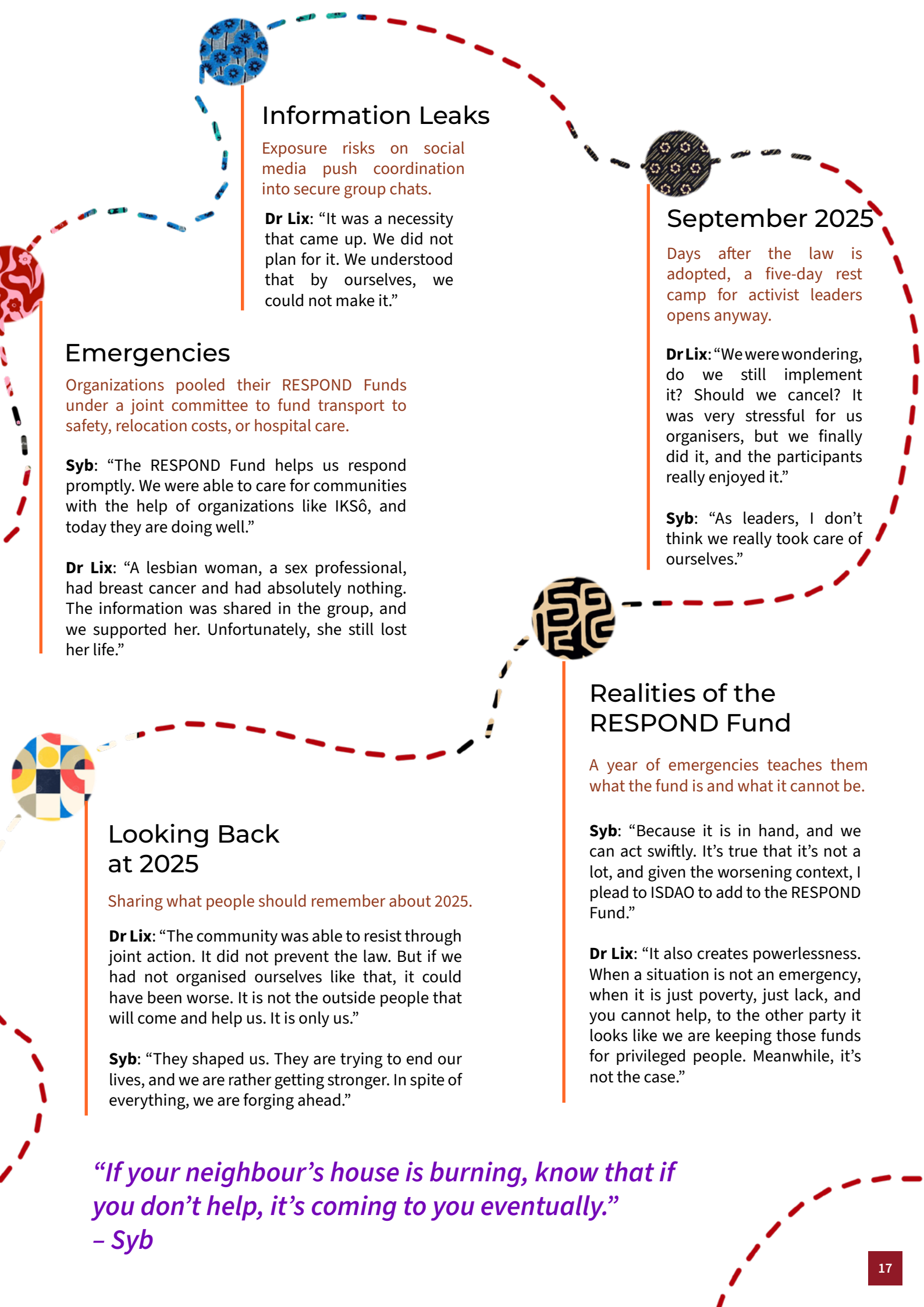
Dr Lix: "From then on, we started trusting each other. We kept that communication channel, so when there are emergencies, we reach each other and see what resources each organization has."

Syb: "There is also the mutual respect that we have. That strengthens the trust."

The 2025 Bill

A bill penalizing homosexuality advances. Attacks and displacement begin before the ink dries, and the consortium joins a national dialogue to counter the bill.

Dr Lix: "There were physical attacks and psychological attacks, destruction of goods, leading activists to leave the country or stop their activities altogether."



Information Leaks

Exposure risks on social media push coordination into secure group chats.

Dr Lix: “It was a necessity that came up. We did not plan for it. We understood that by ourselves, we could not make it.”

Emergencies

Organizations pooled their RESPOND Funds under a joint committee to fund transport to safety, relocation costs, or hospital care.

Syb: “The RESPOND Fund helps us respond promptly. We were able to care for communities with the help of organizations like IKSô, and today they are doing well.”

Dr Lix: “A lesbian woman, a sex professional, had breast cancer and had absolutely nothing. The information was shared in the group, and we supported her. Unfortunately, she still lost her life.”

September 2025

Days after the law is adopted, a five-day rest camp for activist leaders opens anyway.

Dr Lix: “We were wondering, do we still implement it? Should we cancel? It was very stressful for us organisers, but we finally did it, and the participants really enjoyed it.”

Syb: “As leaders, I don’t think we really took care of ourselves.”

Realities of the RESPOND Fund

A year of emergencies teaches them what the fund is and what it cannot be.

Syb: “Because it is in hand, and we can act swiftly. It’s true that it’s not a lot, and given the worsening context, I plead to ISDAO to add to the RESPOND Fund.”

Dr Lix: “It also creates powerlessness. When a situation is not an emergency, when it is just poverty, just lack, and you cannot help, to the other party it looks like we are keeping those funds for privileged people. Meanwhile, it’s not the case.”

Looking Back at 2025

Sharing what people should remember about 2025.

Dr Lix: “The community was able to resist through joint action. It did not prevent the law. But if we had not organised ourselves like that, it could have been worse. It is not the outside people that will come and help us. It is only us.”

Syb: “They shaped us. They are trying to end our lives, and we are rather getting stronger. In spite of everything, we are forging ahead.”

“If your neighbour’s house is burning, know that if you don’t help, it’s coming to you eventually.”

– Syb

V. IN ONE ROOM

Voices from the First Regional Forum

In 2025, ISDAO convened its first Regional Forum, bringing partners from across its focal countries together in one space for several days. Present were organizations both large and emerging, as well as independent activists from Anglophone and Francophone West Africa. Many of these organizations and individuals were meeting each other for the first time.

Three people who were at the forum sat down together to talk about what it meant: SA, a feminist and queer activist leading an organization in Senegal; Clement Mensah Frimpong, executive director of the Center for Youth Empowerment Health and Rights in Ghana; and Raymond Adadjisso, ISDAO's policy and advocacy officer. What follows is an excerpt from their conversation, edited and abridged for clarity and length.

This was the first time ISDAO brought its partners together in one space. What were you expecting when you walked in?

CLEMENT:

This was the first of its kind in West Africa. There hasn't been any open space where human rights defenders or queer activists from different and diverse backgrounds come together to share ideas, to explore the dynamics and the weaknesses, and identify the opportunities they have in terms of collaboration. We are all in the same thing. With the anti-queer rhetoric transiting from one country to another, what I was expecting was that the movement would rally together, and that we could explore how best we can counter it, and how best we can fit that into our programming.

RAYMOND:

I was expecting that space to be an exchange space for Anglophone and Francophone activists, including the diversity of their communities, to really take stock of what is happening in various countries and go back with more regional ideas of their movement, their fight, and their priorities. I spent the week seeing people trying to go beyond the limits of languages, countries, and communities to really understand each other.



Was there a moment during the forum that has stayed with you since?

SA:

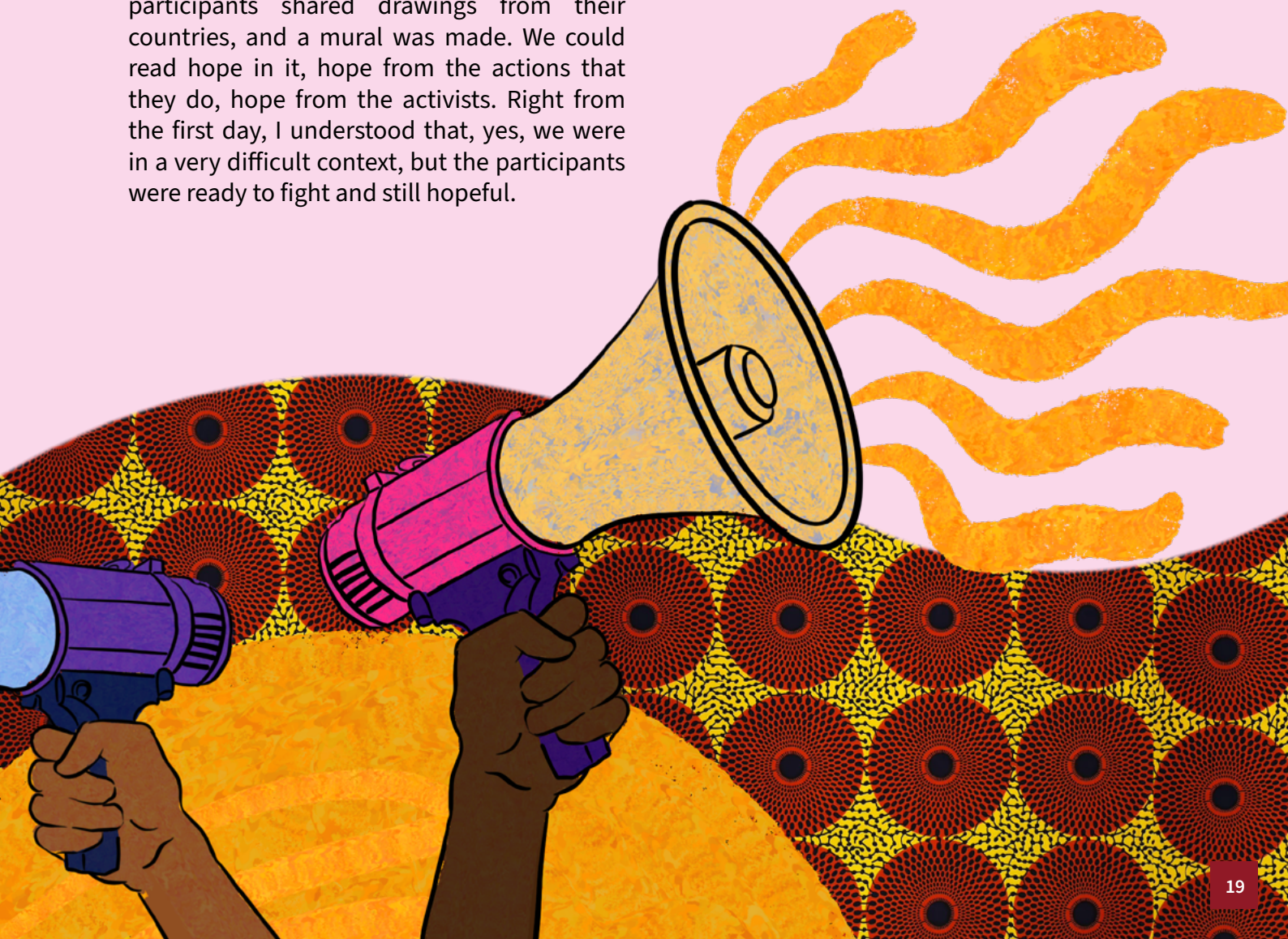
What really stayed with me is that there was no linguistic barrier at the forum. In Senegal, we speak mostly Wolof, the local language. At first, I was afraid to speak in French or make mistakes. However, they allowed me to speak in Wolof, in my local language, and it was translated. I did not think that in those types of spaces we could speak our local language and that people would appreciate it and give us a space for that.

CLEMENT:

What I really appreciated was when the participants shared drawings from their countries, and a mural was made. We could read hope in it, hope from the actions that they do, hope from the activists. Right from the first day, I understood that, yes, we were in a very difficult context, but the participants were ready to fight and still hopeful.

RAYMOND:

There were some people that we were always communicating with via email. We were just curious to know who they are. We met them there, having conversations together, being in the same space. That kind of reflection and community belonging is one of the things that stays with me. And as a young and emerging organization, coming from one of the underserved regions in Ghana, when I received the mail, I was like, aaah. We were thinking that such opportunities only exist for activists who have been in the system for a very long time. It was such a joyous moment. I celebrated it with my team



What did being in the same room with other grantee-partners make possible that could not have happened anywhere else?

SA:

This type of space gives unique opportunities for direct exchange, experience sharing, and also strategic dialogue. It allowed me to present the realities of my country, realities that I would not be able to discuss with other people otherwise. I was able to strengthen my leadership capacity and meet other people who share the same objectives and commitment.

You see partners' realities every day from inside ISDAO. What did it feel like to see everyone together?

RAYMOND:

To convene more than forty people over several days, some traveling for the very first time, it was one of the biggest convenings we have organized, the first bringing together all nine ISDAO focal countries, and not just organizations but independent activists too. It was a feeling of pride. But it was also how we put faces on the movement. It shows you that the commitment is real, as well as the challenges. When we hear participants talking about the challenges in Benin, and it's almost the same in Ghana and Nigeria, for once we see the same narrative, the same experience, as well as the joy. I remember the Ivorians singing, and the Ghanaians and Nigerians, and people from Liberia, starting to dance. We played Nigerian songs, and everyone knew the lyrics. I really saw what a community looks like. We were one, in one space.



Even through the hardest moments of 2025, what still gives you hope?

CLEMENT:

Although the opposition is rising from one country to another, and human rights and democracy are under attack, activists actively show up every day. They show up, they give their services, they seek justice. The total erasure the opposition wants is not going to work. In Ghana, before the bill, there were not up to twenty organizations working for the community. After the introduction of the bill, there has been an increase, even in remote areas, and we are more than fifty. That clearly tells us that we are forming an army, and definitely one day we will get there.

RAYMOND:

We were around together one Friday evening, dancing in a public space in a country with a criminalizing law. We knew that the police could have arrested us at any time. However, the people were feeling joyful because they were able to meet together. We went out, we danced, and we partied. What gives me joy is the people who are making the community. As long as there will be people in that community, the fight will never end. Some are stepping back, but young ones are coming, more determined, more committed activists. The hope is in ourselves.

SA:

What gives me hope is knowing that, in spite of our different contexts and the challenges we face, there is hope, and together we are still learning to support each other and build a more inclusive, more sustainable future for each and every one of us. In spite of the anti-gender laws, in spite of the difficulties we live with, we stand with one another, and we will always try to support each other.

Is there anything else from the first Regional Forum that you would like to share?

RAYMOND:

I hope the forum never loses its human side. When we were conceiving this program, it was the partners who really conceived that space. They decided what to do and how to do it, and facilitated all the sessions. They used their experiences to feed that forum. I would not want the forum to lose that human touch as it develops. There is a need to listen to partners, allow them to share their experiences, and recommend solutions.

VI. WHAT TRANS ORGANIZING TAUGHT US IN 2025

Verbs to Live By

Kimou and TA already knew each other. They met at ISDAO's regional convening, and their acquaintance grew into a friendship. So, when they came together again for a conversation, their exchange was built on pre-existing trust.

Kimou is the director of Droit à la Différence (DADI), an organization in Côte d'Ivoire; and TA is the director of a network of trans-led organizations in a country that cannot be named for safety and security reasons.

What follows is what these two organizations know about serving their communities, told in the verbs they live by.

Preparing

Asked whether 2025 heightened the risk to his community, TA says it did not, given the approaches they use. Trans communities have been marginalized for so long that safety is a system they inhabit. Both organizations run standing security practices that include risk-assessment committees before gatherings, digital security training for peers, news verification before the community reacts, and moving work to remote when the environment demands it. In a year that devastated better-resourced institutions, these organizations had to deal with the weather they were already familiar with.

Covering

When a same-sex bill was introduced last year, a seventeen-member coalition, including LGBTI organizations and allied organizations, moved through partner institutions and allied channels to reach the speaker. The message was carried by those who could safely carry it. Feminist and LBQ organizations do the same work in both countries, organizing in front while the trans communities remain, in TA's words, under. Furthermore, when stop-work orders threatened treatment access, trans beneficiaries were enrolled under broader population categories so that they could continue having access to medications.

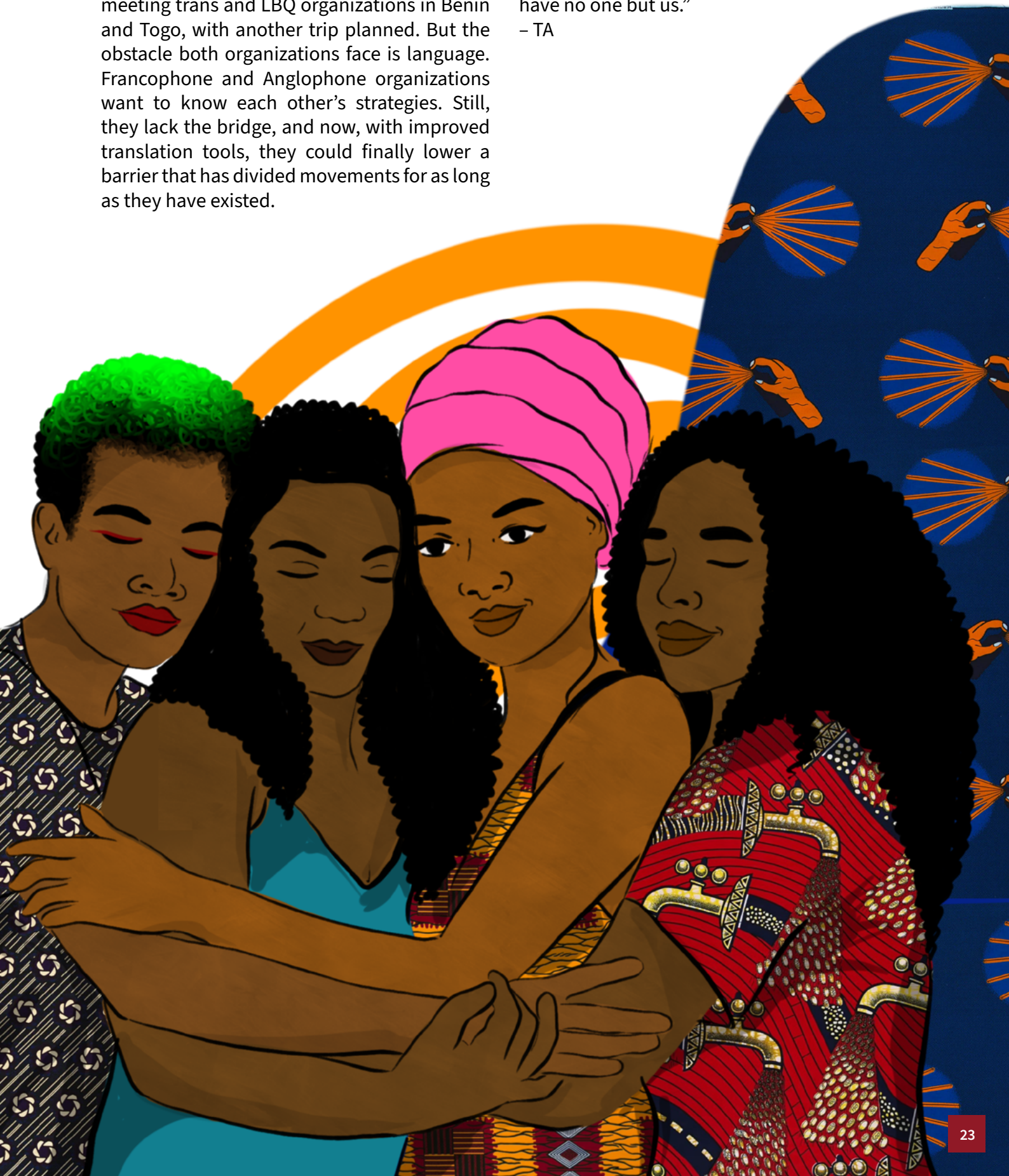
Crossing

The connections these organizations want across borders are being built with what they have on hand. After the regional convening, Kimou's team traveled the sub-region, meeting trans and LBQ organizations in Benin and Togo, with another trip planned. But the obstacle both organizations face is language. Francophone and Anglophone organizations want to know each other's strategies. Still, they lack the bridge, and now, with improved translation tools, they could finally lower a barrier that has divided movements for as long as they have existed.

Believing

"Love and family. We have no one else but us. Despite the cuts, the stop-work orders, the love was there. We still used to find time to catch up with everyone. It just shows that we have no one but us."

– TA



VII. LOVE NO DEY FINISH

Celebrating Love Alliance

Through the Love Alliance, ISDAO supported organizations led by LGBTQI, Sex Worker, and People Who Use Drugs communities in Burkina Faso and Nigeria. Grants were awarded by Local Activist Grant Making Panels in both countries, ensuring that the power to make funding decisions remained with the communities.

When asked about the funding landscape before 2022, when the Love Alliance began, two activists leading Sex Worker organizations in Nigeria and Burkina Faso used identical words: small grants that arrive with instructions.

Love Alliance inverted this arrangement, and both leaders identified this inversion as the defining feature of these grants, which deliver impact through flexibility. Funded organizations designed their own initiatives to address the gaps they had themselves mapped. Sex workers collected data and analyzed the laws that discriminated against them, eventually reaching an international journal. Community advocates walked into government ministries and came out with recognition in a state health insurance scheme that now counts sex workers among its beneficiaries.

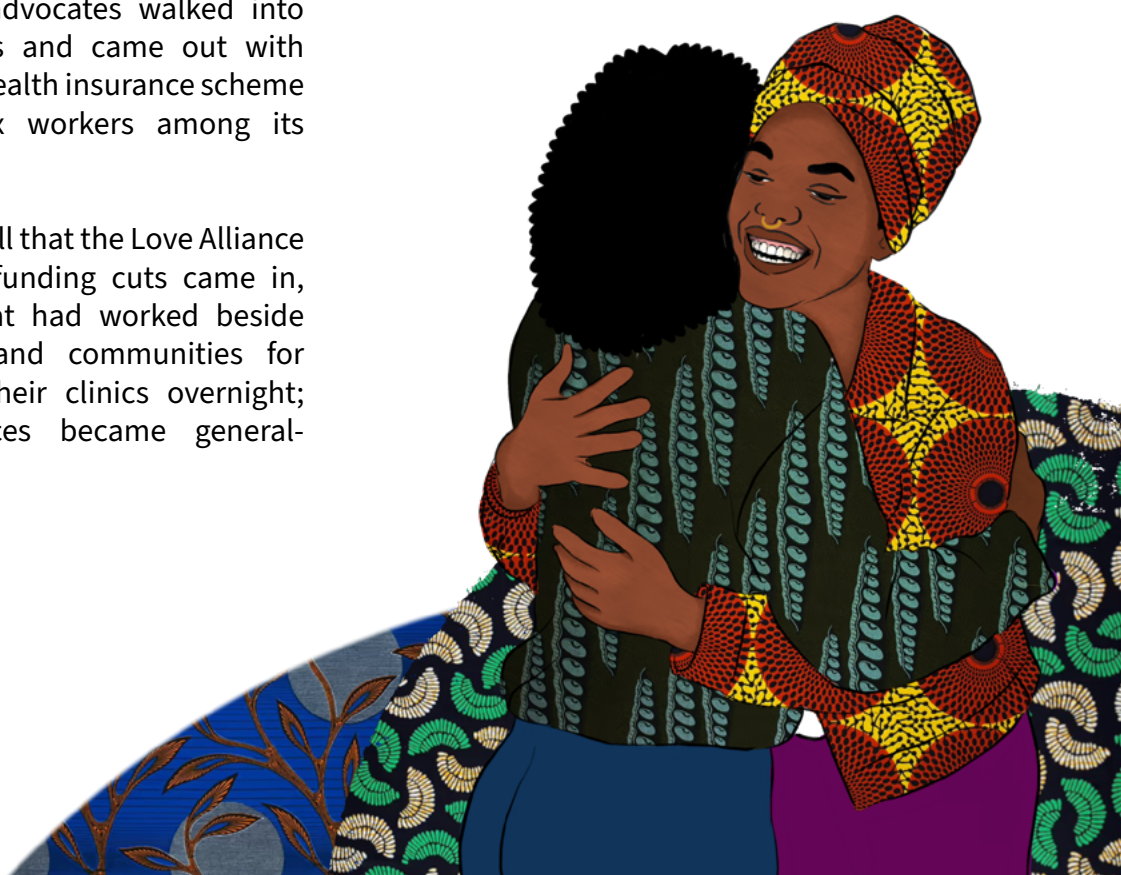
However, 2025 tested all that the Love Alliance stood for. When the funding cuts came in, technical partners that had worked beside these organizations and communities for years re-designated their clinics overnight; key-population services became general-population services.

As the Love Alliance came to a close in 2025, ISDAO convened two country-level learning forums that brought the funded partners from the LGBTQI, sex worker, and PWUD movements together to reflect on what the initiative had built and how to carry it forward.

Partners in both countries closed out with their declaration for the future, built on the lessons from the shared experience of the Love Alliance.

In Burkina Faso, the partners gathered around a shared vision under the theme **“Love Never Stops”**.

In Nigeria, they wrote it as a manifesto, in the language that movements live on: **“Love no dey finish, together we run”**.



Love Alliance grantee-partners

Side by Side

Vena

Nigeria

The Love Alliance ended, and I would say it is a mixed feeling, because the capacities were already starting to generate fruits, and this is the period where these seeds need to start bearing them. The communities are already empowered, and they have seen within themselves: we can do it. I remember one of them at a dissemination meeting saying, I can never believe I can have a conversation with the government and the government will make a change. I always believed it was a waste of time. And the person is already hoping to see herself doing more. We were working on domesticating the anti-stigma law, for HIV and SRHR service provision in the state. We pushed it to the House of Assembly, and that is where we were when the funding ended.

Gloria

Burkina Faso

Before, we were working all over the place, not organised at all, small grants here and there. They will tell us what to do. We had no choice. Thanks to the Love Alliance, we were able to have a headquarters and furnish our office. Every month we would meet with the community to discuss their needs, to do experience sharing, capacity building on human rights, on their self-esteem. When it comes to the meeting, it is without taboo. It is our safe space. We are ourselves, without judgement, because we work in a context in which we can't express ourselves, but when we get together, we are free.

Love Alliance grantee-partners

Side by Side

Vena

Nigeria

But 2025, regardless of the ups and downs, was a period of solidarity for the community. Some of the people we were feeling were our competitors, it dawned on all of us that we actually need ourselves at this moment. There was a high surge of security issues, arrests, transgender people being killed. People who never had safe houses activated safe houses, even when we were not prepared for it. We developed within our networks who to call in each state. We now have community members working as parapsychologists, doing counselling within the grassroots, just to keep everybody in check, to make sure we don't lose out on so many things. We have been very intentional in ensuring that none of those initiatives dies off, because we are the owners of this initiative, and I think that is even what drives it more.

Gloria

Burkina Faso

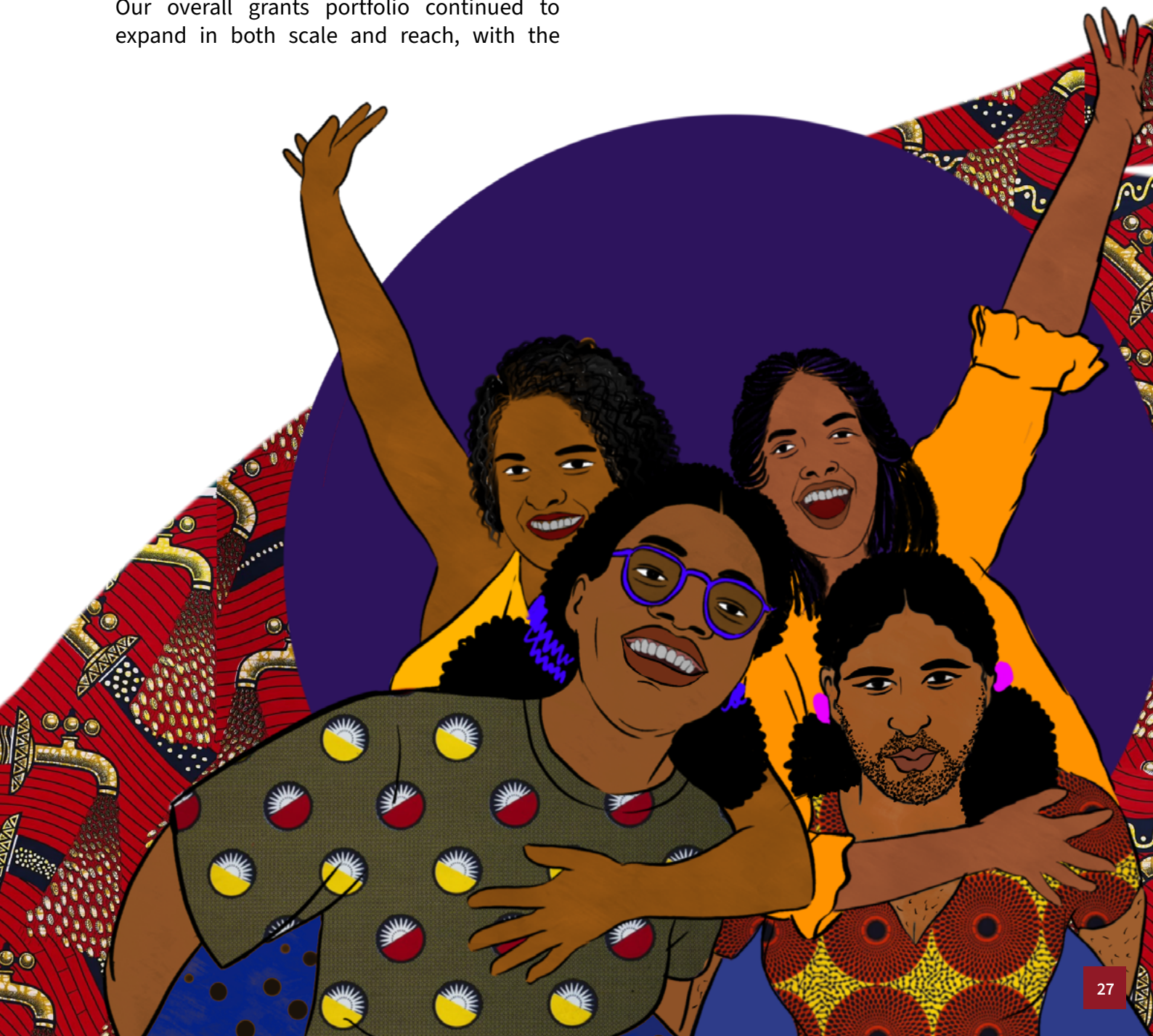
Right now, it is difficult here. Many activists left the country. The few that are still in the country are hiding; colleagues can't even go out anymore. Every single day we are persecuted. We are not safe. We avoid public spaces, and we communicate using Signal. We had a small group on alert, made up of leaders, and if there is any news, we share it in that group, and the leaders communicate it to their communities. We were reduced to small activities to avoid drawing attention to ourselves. And with the end of the Love Alliance, we can't meet like before. Each one is left to themselves. It is a loss to us. But the association was lucky to have a new partner, and that was still thanks to the Love Alliance, because to integrate that network you needed at least one grant of 5,000 dollars, and I had access to that thanks to the Love Alliance. It is not as considerable, but it still helps us to keep going.

VIII. OUR GRANTS

In 2025, ISDAO awarded 111 grants, disbursing around 3.3 million U.S. Dollars across our grant portfolios: Regional grants, Love Alliance grants, Strategic grants, Resilience grants, Asanka, and In-Touch funds. This represents a 12.65% increase in the total amount committed to grants, compared to 2024, reflecting our continued investment in strengthening LGBTQI movements across West Africa.

Our overall grants portfolio continued to expand in both scale and reach, with the

Regional Grants portfolio receiving its largest allocation to date. This growth reflects both the increasing demand for flexible, community-centered funding and ISDAO's commitment to ensuring that LGBTQI-led organizations, networks, and activists have the resources they need to respond to evolving challenges, sustain their work, and advance long-term movement priorities.



Regional Grants

ISDAO's Regional Grants are our flagship annual grantmaking portfolio, awarded through an open call for proposals to LGBTQI-led groups, organizations, and networks from across our nine focal countries. Grants are selected by our Activist Grant Making Panel (AGMP), ensuring that funding decisions are guided by activists with deep knowledge of the movement's priorities and realities.

In 2025, 17 Regional Grants were awarded to partners receiving ISDAO funding for the first time, expanding our reach to new organizations and emerging movement actors. ISDAO also achieved a 69% renewal rate for Regional Grants, reflecting strong partner retention and sustained relationships with organizations previously supported through the participatory grantmaking process. Together, these demonstrate ISDAO's commitment to both expanding access to funding and sustaining long-term partnerships that strengthen LGBTQI movements across the region.

In addition to their approved grant amount, each organization receives a \$1,000 USD top-up for each year of their grant through ISDAO's RESPOND fund. The RESPOND fund enables organizations to provide rapid, flexible support to address urgent safety, security, and community emergencies. Grantee-partners also received an additional yearly \$1,500 top-up to support organizational capacity building and strengthening.

Highlights:

- We received 188 eligible applications with requests totalling USD 5,760,002
- The AGMP pre-approved 56 grant applications worth 1,799,633 (excluding RESPOND Fund and capacity building top-ups)
- 55 grants worth \$2,048,573 were awarded (including the RESPOND Fund and capacity building top-ups). These grants went to organizations and groups led by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI) people.

188

ELIGIBLE
APPLICATIONS

56

AGMP PRE-APPROVED
APPLICATIONS

55

GRANTS AWARDED

45%

of the grants went to organizations/groups working in francophone countries.

31%

of the grants went to **new grantee-partners** not previously funded by ISDAO

69%

went to **previously funded ISDAO grantee-partners**



Regional Grants Breakdown by Country:

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE APPLICATIONS	NUMBER OF GRANTS AWARDED
Bénin	25	5
Burkina Faso	8	2
Côte d'Ivoire	13	6
Ghana	25	10
Liberia	8	5
Mali	4	3
Senegal	10	6
Nigeria	85	14
Togo	5	3
Regional Orgs	5	1
Total	188	55

Love Alliance Grants

Through the Love Alliance initiative, ISDAO supported the development of stronger, more inclusive movements advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Burkina Faso and Nigeria by funding groups and organizations led by LGBTQI persons, Sex Workers, and People Who Use Drugs. Grants under this initiative were awarded through our country-specific Local Activist Grant Making Panels (LAGMPs) in both countries, ensuring that funding decisions are grounded in community knowledge and priorities.

As 2025 marked the final year of the Love Alliance Initiative, ISDAO took a deliberate approach to investing the remaining resources. Rather than launching a new call for proposals, we focused on strengthening collaborative movement-building among Sex Worker and People Who Use Drugs communities. This approach created space for these communities to consolidate existing partnerships, build on the momentum of ongoing collective efforts, and strengthen the relationships and strategies needed to sustain their advocacy beyond the Love Alliance.

Highlights:

\$171,758

TOTAL FUNDING COMMITTED
TO NIGERIA

\$100,000

TOTAL FUNDING COMMITTED TO
BURKINA FASO

\$30,000

TOTAL FUNDING COMMITTED TO
SUB-REGIONAL INITIATIVES

Asanka Fund

The Asanka Creative Initiatives Fund was established to support innovative advocacy projects that harness creative mediums including film, literature, photography, radio, visual arts, digital campaigns, and other artistic expressions to advance the rights of LGBTQI communities across our focal countries. What sets Asanka apart is its intentional focus on individual activists.

The Fund currently provides grants exclusively to LGBTQI individuals pursuing creative advocacy initiatives, making it one of the few funding mechanisms in the region that directly recognizes resources and invests in the creative vision of individual activists.

Highlights:

156

ELIGIBLE CONCEPT
NOTES WERE RECEIVED
FROM INDIVIDUAL
ACTIVISTS

17

GRANTS WERE
AWARDED, WORTH
USD 133,875.00



Strategic and Resilience Grant

ISDAO's Strategic and Resilience grants support initiatives outside our core grantmaking portfolios that align closely with our broader mission and movement priorities. They provide flexible funding for timely and strategic opportunities that strengthen movements, respond to emerging priorities, and foster regional solidarity.

These grants are not awarded through open calls for proposals. Instead, they are identified and approved through an internal process informed by ISDAO's ongoing engagement with movements, continuous analysis of the regional landscape, and assessment of emerging needs and opportunities.

Highlights:

STRATEGIC GRANTS

21 grants worth USD 861,326 were awarded including 9 joint movement grants to support collective organizing of current grantee partners at the country level.

RESILIENCE GRANTS

5 grants worth USD 26,500 were awarded

In-Touch Fund

The In-Touch Fund supports the ongoing communications efforts of both current and former ISDAO grantee partners. It is designed for groups and organizations with established communications departments or programs, as well as those implementing initiatives where communications is central to achieving their objectives.

By investing in strategic communications, the fund helps ensure that partners have the capacity to amplify their work, share their stories, engage their communities, and strengthen the visibility and impact of their advocacy.

Highlights:

3 PARTNERS WERE INVITED TO APPLY

3 GRANTS WERE AWARDED, WORTH USD 15,000

IX. PUBLICATION SPOTLIGHT

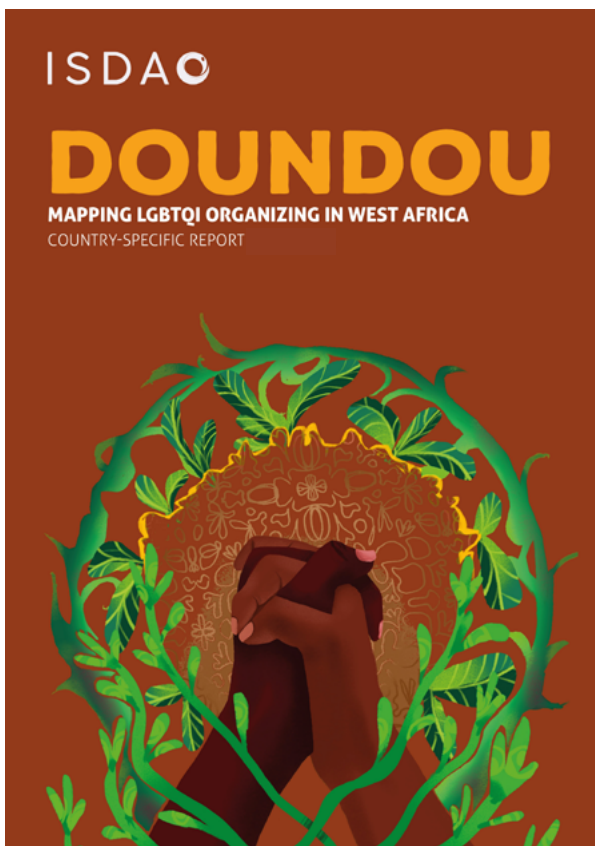
Doundou

Mapping the Movement, Country by Country

(February 2025)

ISDAO published nine country-specific Doundou reports, covering Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo. Each report maps the LGBTQI movement in its country, examining the social, political, economic, and security landscapes alongside an assessment of the current state of funding.

Together, they form the most comprehensive picture yet assembled of movements across ISDAO's focal countries, a baseline for the region's organizing at a moment when the ground is shifting fast. In keeping with the security context, some country reports are publicly available, and others are shared upon request.



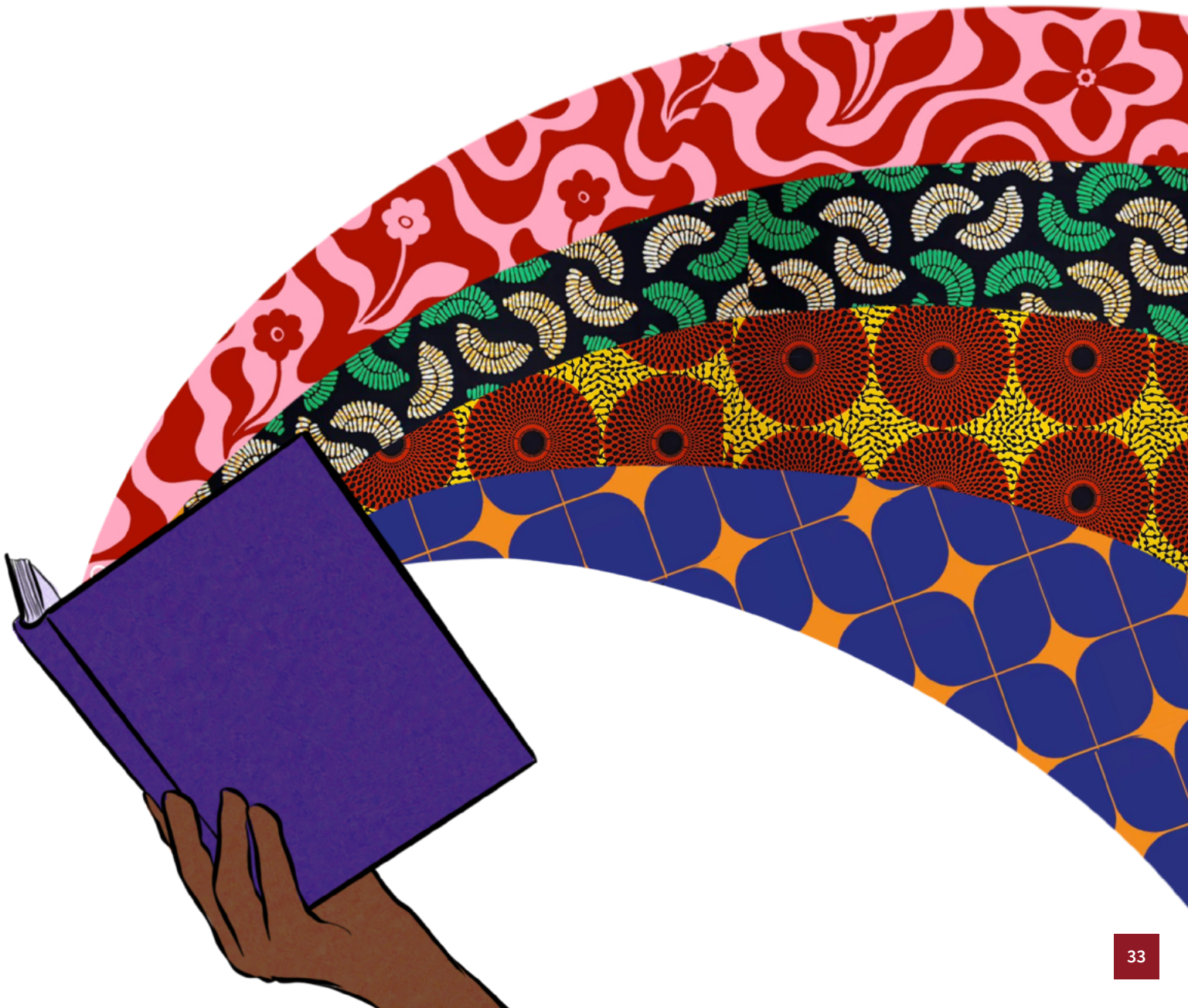
Creating the Future We Want

LBQ+ Movement Building in West Africa

(June 2025)

Born from a 2024 convening of West African LBQ+ activists, this report captures the stories, strategies, and dreams shared in that space and offers powerful recommendations to strengthen LBQ+ organizing across the region.

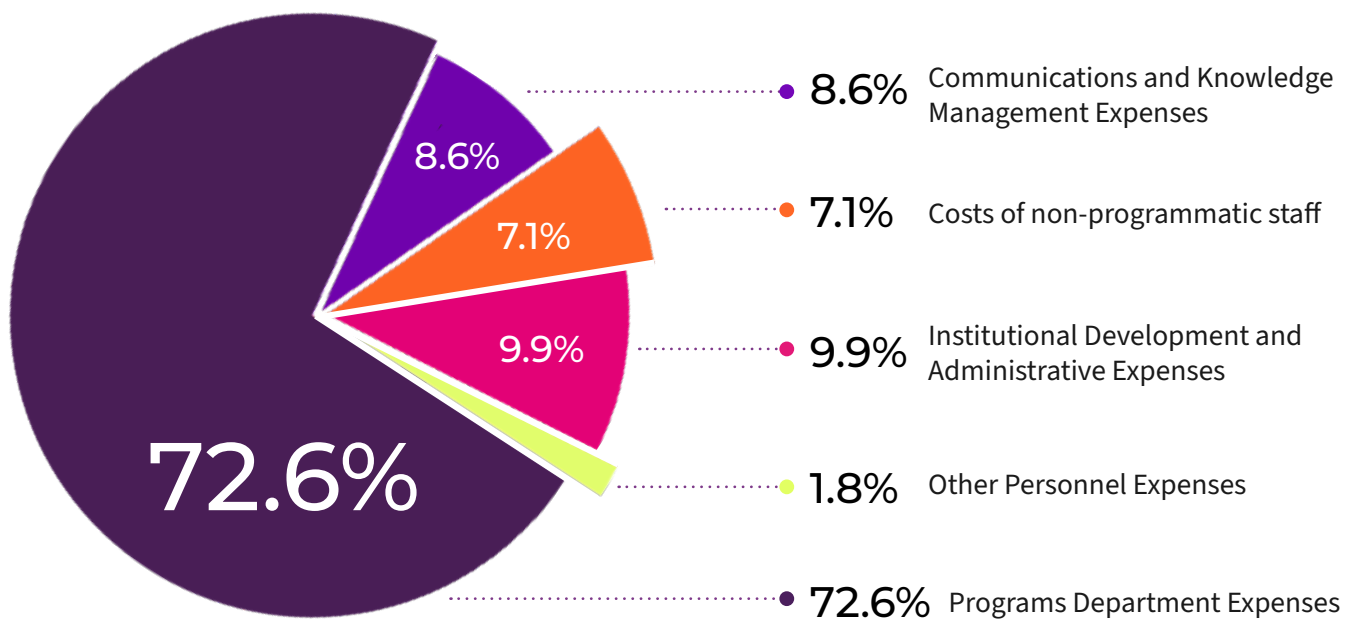
These publications are available on [ISDAO's website](#).



X. OUR FINANCES

ISDAO 2025 Expenditures

EXPENDITURES	2025 Total (USD)
Programs Department Expenses (including grants, grantmaking costs, direct staff)	\$ 4,434,467
Communications and Knowledge Management Expenses (including activities and direct staff)	\$ 525,979
Costs of non-programmatic staff	\$ 431,971
Institutional Development and Administrative Expenses	\$ 607,698
Other Personnel Expenses	\$ 108,380
TOTAL	\$ 6,108,495

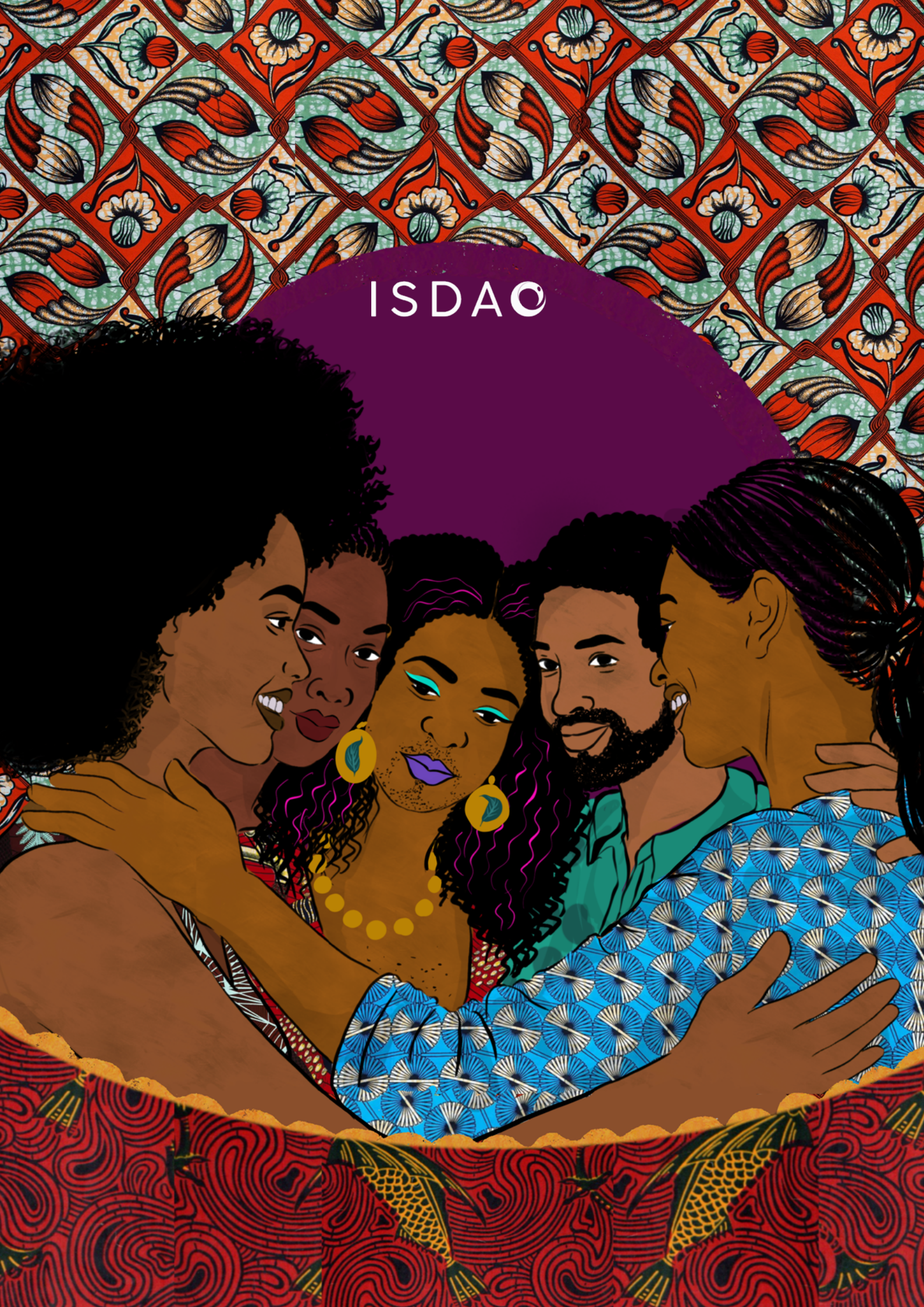


XI. WE ARE GRATEFUL

Our work is made possible through the invaluable support of our funders.



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



ISDAO