

THE EFFECTS OF THE RELIGIOUS ANTI-RIGHTS MOVEMENT ON LGBTIQ+ PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA



*The Global Interfaith Network For People of All Sexes,
Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions
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LIST OF ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

AHA - Anti-Homosexuality Act
CNN - Cable News Network
CSW - Commission on the Status of Women
FARUG - Freedom and Roam Uganda
FFP - Feminist Foreign Policy
FGD - Focus Group Discussion
GALCK - Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya
GIN - Global Interfaith Network
ILGA - International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association
IPV - Intimate Partner Violence
LGBTIQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and others
NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation
NGLHRC - National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (Kenya)
SOGIE - Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression
SMUG - Sexual Minorities Uganda
SRHR - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SSMPA - Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act
TIERS - The Initiative for Equal Rights (Nigeria)
U.S. - United States
UN - United Nations

INTRODUCTION

Religious beliefs, dominantly Christianity have historically been used to rationalise, sanitise and even put into law the continuous human rights violations against LGBTIQ+ people. Over the last decade, we have witnessed the strengthening of this use of religion as a justification, this has taken root in not just social spaces but also has been the reasoning for further strengthening systematic and structural archaic laws, that ensure the discrimination, violence, stigma, criminalisation, and other punitive measures in legal systems that affect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people in almost all facets of their lives.¹

In most cases, these laws are derived from colonial structures that were superimposed on countries as foreign occupiers stripped them of their cultural practices, beliefs and identity. It is no coincidence that the current rise in violence against queer people on the African continent coincides with an increase in the visibility of conservative political alignments propagated by religious fundamentalism. These ideologies pose a threat to minority groups and civic space around the world, and more so in the Global South. For years many believed that these were the residual effects of colonisation due to the Western rule and imposed laws that had been adopted by countries pre-independence and that these factors informed the extremely polarising ways in which our community faith leaders would choose to interpret and teach spiritual scripture; but over the last few decades we have seen a change in the landscape and it has been evident that these efforts are not random and/or rooted in an African ideology, in fact it has become evident that these efforts are part of an ideology that is perpetuated by well-funded, well-researched, religious fundamentalists said to be based in the United States of America, among other European countries. These groups actively fight against, LGBTIQ+ rights, Women's rights, disability rights and Children's rights globally, including rights to freedom, to marriage, to safe abortion, to access contraceptives and all forms of comprehensive sexual education in schools.

¹ Michael J. Perry, 'Human Rights in the Constitutional Law of the United States,' 41 U.C. Davis L. Rev. 1805 (2008).

METHODOLOGY

This research focused on Four Countries, Uganda, Kenya, Burundi and Nigeria. The criteria for selection initially required East African countries, however, it was decided that given the strategic role Nigeria has played on the continent for the anti-rights movement work, and its position as one of the places they experienced their first successes, the country had to be included if the research was to be coherent and in-depth.

Nigeria was the first African country in which the global anti-rights movement made big gains with the introduction (in 2008) and passing of the SSMPA in 2014. It is thus important to analyse the impact of the movement on that society as it was the initial entry point and is one of the few in which the law has remained on the books despite several attempts to challenge it. Uganda has been the site of increasing activity by anti-rights movements since the early 2000s and the first Anti- Homosexuality Bill was tabled in 2009, shortly after the tabling of SSMPA in Nigeria and has continued to be a hotbed of activity with activists continuing to challenge various iterations of that initial law as well as the social and political impact of anti-rights groups.

In Uganda, president Museveni in 2023 assented to a cruel anti-homosexuality Act and the Courts have erroneously found that the law, except for a few sections which they struck down, is constitutional.

Kenya is witnessing an increase in the activity of anti-rights groups following the election of a new government in 2022 that looks poised to align itself with religious extremist ideologies as well as Western conservative actors.

Burundi remains an under-studied country when it comes to the work of the anti-rights movement in the continent. This can be attributed to many factors including the lack of language diversity in literature documenting this phenomenon on the continent.

Most of the available literature says little about the situation there, and yet activists and communities are working hard to promote the wellbeing of LGBTIQ citizens despite a challenging political environment which many indicated is being negatively influenced by events in other East African countries, particularly Uganda.

Aside from the desk review of literature on the topic, the research included interviews with individual informants and organisations working in these countries in order to get a more humanised analysis of the impact and also to understand how activists are pushing back against continued attempts by governments and their foreign influencers to

criminalise and exterminate LGBTIQ citizens. The information we sought revolved around the Key Research Question:

What are the effects of the religious anti-rights movement on LGBTIQ+ people's access to human rights in Africa? including the right to life and security, freedom of movement, privacy, non-discrimination, and the right to participate fully as a member of society, to name a few.

APPROACH

Primary data analysis was done in the form of a desktop research exercise undertaken by the researcher who compiled a literature review that collates some of the available literature and evidence, mapping the work and impact of anti-rights movements in Africa.

In person consultations and networking to identify suitable informants was done at key events such as the Changing Faces, Changing Spaces conference in Botswana and the Pan African ILGA Conference in Mauritius. Many of the consultations that happened over the internet were based on connections made through interactions at these gatherings.

The consultant developed a format for one-on-one key informant interviews which were conducted with stakeholders from Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya and Burundi. These one-on-one key informant face to face interviews were all conducted via Zoom for the respondents from Kenya and Burundi as the researcher was unable to travel to these places due to resource constraints. In Uganda and Nigeria, all interviews were in person, and took the format of Focus Group Discussions that were attended by members of the LGBTIQ community and other stakeholders.

In Uganda, we benefited from the opportunity to hold a two-hour session on the impact of the Anti-Rights Movement with a room of over 50 LBQ and GNC folks.

The insights shared by all participants were deep and thoughtful and have greatly enriched this research.

In selecting the interviewees/informants, purposive sampling was employed whereby we used both the snowball and cherry-picking method to identify the informants. Some were already familiar to us through GIN's Network, others were introduced to us by people who knew them.

The interviews with informants were most helpful for broadening our understanding of the different contexts in each country, but also in attempting to cultivate a continent wide analysis of the impact of the anti-rights movement on the lives of LGBTIQ Africans.

The terms “LGBTIQ” and “Queer” are used interchangeably in this report to describe persons who identify as Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, intersex or do not conform to the gender identity assigned to them at birth. This usage is based on what has been widely adopted within African LGBTIQ communities and the manner in which the two terms were used by the interviewees.

The approach chosen keeps the communities and individuals affected at the heart of the project, as the research explores and unpacks issues that are sensitive, that require the utmost care be taken of the holders of these narratives.

Sub Research Questions

1. Are there any actual or perceived religious movements within your country that are advocating for laws, policies or violence of any form against LGBTIQ+ individuals?
2. Do you know any of the organisations, state actors or individuals that are directly connected to this movement? How are they connected? Where is the funding coming from?
3. Have groups or individuals that are perceived to have religious beliefs promoted criminalisation of LGBTIQ+ individuals for their Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression (?) or Sex Characteristics? Has this informed or enforced any legal interventions of public policy? Has this impacted on the social inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people in your country? How?
4. What narratives are these actors using in your country’s context?



PART 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Western Religious fundamentalist organising against LGBTIQ rights advancements on the African continent has been observed and documented in various sectors across nations. The influence of western religious fundamentalist and conservative right wing elements has been noted in whipping up anti-gay sentiments and influencing the introduction of Anti-gay laws in countries like Uganda, Nigeria, and more recently in Ghana.

The literature has broadly captured the phenomenon since the early 2000s, documenting how resistance to human rights advancements on the African continent and globally, particularly those rights and freedoms relating to women's bodily autonomy and sexual and bodily autonomy of people in general, has coalesced into a global "anti-gender ideology" movement, heavily supported by right wing western/American conservative groups.

"The term 'gender ideology' which these groups have adopted to describe all progressive ideals seeks to delegitimise anyone making visible, and challenging, gender inequality and the division of people into two presumably stable and opposite genders, expected to desire one another, as driven by ideology, not facts."²

Homoantagonism/ homophobic nationalism paradox

One of the more powerful tools of the anti-gender movement on the continent has been the propaganda of the "true African." Of the proper African history and heritage and way of being. A way that the "primitive African" lived, one that was closer to nature and therefore "God's design". This "true African" is being polluted by modernisation through western ideology and practices that they are adopting from the "western gay agenda." In this sense, homophobia has been weaponised as a tool of identity making and nation building through resistance to imperialism and westernised ideas of sexuality and gender identity.

This argument, though easily dismantled, and which has been severally debunked by historians and legal theorists alike³, continues to sustain the African anti-LGBTIQ rights movements in their efforts to spread hate and is replayed all over the continent whenever the topic of LGBTIQ inclusion arises. The idea is that African LGBTIQ people have learned this ungodly behaviour from depraved whites and are now trying to impose it on our communities in the name of human rights, similar to the

² Unholy Alliances

³ African Feminisms

way things were imposed on us and our ancestors at colonisation.

Adomako uses the framework of Heteronationalism to analyse the events leading up to the passing of the anti-gay law in Ghana, noting that “Heterosexualising Ghana by repressing (LGBTIQ activists) and community is thereby framed as a necessary step towards securing Ghanaian national sovereignty (and security) against the identified (neo) colonial forces.”⁴

Resistance to western imperialism and all its elements harkens back to the independence struggles which were fought bitterly on the continent. It’s not difficult to unite Africans, disappointed in their post-colonial reality, against individuals cast as agents of imperialism.

This perception has not been helped by the fact that the outcry of global LGBTIQ communities against persecution is often most vocally addressed by Western governments and bilateral organisations, who frequently overlook other human rights violations. The response often involves actions such as imposing sanctions and other restrictions on African leaders perceived as complicit in this persecution. Recently, it was reported that the Speaker of Uganda’s Parliament and MP Asuman Basalirwa, who proposed the most recent law, had their U.S. visas withdrawn. A similar concern regarding the withdrawal of visas and travel privileges to certain Western countries has also been observed among Ghanaian parliamentarians. Additionally, sanctions imposed by the World Bank and other international institutions often involve the withdrawal of aid and funding, which can inadvertently harm marginalised communities and even work counterproductively against LGBTIQ communities in these regions.

Actions such as this which may be helpful, are easily turned on their head and used by these politicians in their hetero-nationalist project, with LGBTIQ people once again being painted as the darlings of the west.

This approach of sanctions and funding withdrawal can have unintended effects on other marginalised communities. For instance, in Tanzania, the withdrawal of international funding has impacted critical areas like girls’ access to education, limiting resources and opportunities for vulnerable groups. Additionally, when financial support for sectors like militarization is paused or redirected, it can destabilise protective measures that often, albeit problematically, shield the current government rather than the people, potentially worsening the environment for activists and marginalised populations.

⁴ Kwako Adomako, “An Overwhelming Consensus? How Moral Panics about Sexual and Gender Diversity Help Reshape Local Traditions in Ghana,” *Politique africaine* 2022/4 (n° 168), available at <https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2022-4-page-75.htm>

Nonetheless, this is not to say that activists are constrained in the strategies and approaches they choose to pursue in the fight for rights and freedoms. Our freedom is urgent! Indeed, some LGBTIQ activists in Uganda are currently advocating for strategies like blacklisting politicians and urging international NGOs and bilateral organisations to reconsider their support for African governments involved in escalating violations against LGBTIQ people. These methods, including calls to halt funding and impose sanctions on homophobic state actors, reflect the active and diverse tactics that LGBTIQ activists are employing to counter discrimination and demand accountability.

The concept of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) aims to promote global gender equality, human rights, and inclusion. However, in many homophobic countries, this policy can feel distant from the lived realities of queer individuals. As stated, "Africans resonate with the denunciation of homosexuality as a postcolonial plot; their homophobia is as much an expression of resistance to the west as a statement about human sexuality."⁵

This framing allows anti-LGBTIQ sentiment to persist under the guise of resisting Western influence, complicating the ability of international policies to meaningfully support queer communities.

Ironically, the real beneficiaries of Western support often appear to be the African politicians and religious leaders who uphold and enforce homophobic laws. Despite the discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ communities in countries like Uganda, Nigeria, and Ghana, these nations continue to receive substantial aid and support from Western governments, with trade and infrastructure partnerships uninterrupted. Such alliances expose a dissonance within FFP, where the same Western entities that fund projects for gender equality and human rights simultaneously support regimes that actively undermine the rights of queer individuals.

For LGBTIQ activists, this raises questions about FFP's true impact in hostile environments. While FFP theoretically upholds marginalised voices, its coexistence with ongoing Western alliances with homophobic regimes often translates into continued harm for queer communities. If FFP is to fulfil its ideals, these contradictions need addressing so that it does not inadvertently sustain the very systems of oppression it seeks to dismantle.

⁵ Kapya Kaoma, "Globalising Culture Wars, US Conservatives, African Churches and Homophobia," Full text available at <https://www.arcusfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/Globalizing-the-Culture-Wars.pdf>, accessed January 2024

Big Brother gives and takes with both hands

And yet quite unsurprisingly, the biggest peddlers of this myth are often African leaders who rely on this characterisation of the pursuit of freedom and inclusion by minority Africans (responding to oppression imposed and perfected under the auspices of colonial anti-sodomy laws, left behind by the same colonial masters). African politicians and others pursuing populist ends have clung onto this outrageous and untrue distillation of the anti-gender ideology and rely upon it to mobilise populations against minoritised people.

It has further been found and revealed that the politicians and clergymen who support these laws are often recipients of large sums of funding from western philanthropists and Christian organisations.⁶

They speak openly about their connections with western churches and individuals,⁷ and have done so for years, while putting a target on the backs of LGBTIQ Africans with homophobic laws and policies, and fostering social environments that deny queer Africans the chance at any kind of life. It's quite strange to witness and be on the receiving end of.

Following the money

Kapya Kaoma in early warnings about western religious groups (particularly American evangelical) activities funding churches to adopt and spread homophobic viewpoints, called on activists and allies to “follow the money”.⁸ He spotlighted a number of groups whose funding was ultimately funnelled towards promoting/ spreading a conservative religious agenda in Africa through the Washington DC based Institute for Religion and Democracy whose ultimate goal was to destabilise and take over the leadership of the US mainline church.⁹

Over the years, these groups have morphed, with new faces joining the anti-rights agenda and creating and recruiting new allies to advance their agenda of hate on the continent.

One of the more prominent contemporary faces of organised and well-funded homophobia/ transphobia globally (conservative ideology in general) is Sharon Slater¹⁰ of Family Watch International, a group whose

⁶ American filmmaker Roger Ross Williams, tracked the movements and activities of American missionaries from the International House of Prayer, an American founded church with branches all over the world. His observations ended up in the film “God Loves Uganda”. In that film, Ugandan MP David Bahati states that “When we said no to homosexuality, the donations from western churches multiplied by 3.” Minute 46:35 of Film available on Youtube

⁷ David Bahati and Ssempe, You Tube video

⁸ Globalising Culture Wars, Kapya Kaoma, Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Haley McEwan, The (Geo)politics of Gender and Sexuality Diversity in a Multipolar World: Reading African Anti-

mission seems to be the financing and fuelling of propaganda intended to discourage sexual and gender diversity. This group, based in the United States of America brings together some new and old political and religious actors on the continent like the Anglican church in Uganda and Nigeria, politicians, judges and religious leaders across the continent, who are treated to fully funded trips and other kinds of support to attend conferences at which this propaganda is disseminated.¹¹

Researchers and journalists have continued to follow the money and have made some findings that have been shocking and dismaying to LGBTIQ rights activists on the continent. The same western governments that have for years publicly stood in solidarity with African LGBTIQ people appear to also be funding Christian and other groups that are in opposition of LGBTIQ rights on the continent. A CNN report found direct links between funding from the United States of America, UK, Italy and Germany and churches and individual who took public homophobic stances in support of the introduction of the anti-gay bill in Ghana.¹² There were similar links found in Uganda.¹³ It appears that western governments that have long portrayed themselves as progressive allies of LGBTIQ Africans, are financially supporting churches, organisations and individuals who are actively fuelling the flames of homophobia and transphobia on the continent.

Big Brother gives and takes with both hands

Haley McEwen notes the ways in which anti-gender ideology stances are shaping global geopolitics and altering the formations through which African governments are cooperating with European, Asian and other allies. New global alliances are being formed on the basis of a more “lax” approach to morality around fundamental human rights and justice. Societies, in which the people who are.

This is a somewhat blanket adoption of a western centric characterisation of what are essentially economic ties.

The powers who previously colonised Africa are not necessarily worried about “human rights” so much as about their continued ability to profit from and exploit African nations and communities.

Genderisms beyond the Transatlantic, *Politique africaine* 2022/4 (n° 168), pages 95 à 113, available at https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2022-4-page-95.htm?u=59192c53-9a1f-4452-bd44-9f4e86b65372&WT.tsrc=email&WT.mc_id=crn-ar-POLAF_168

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Claire Provost and Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah, “Exclusive: Millions in Western aid flowed to churches in Ghana despite years of campaigning against LGBTIQ+ rights,” available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/13/africa/us-europe-aid-lgbtqi-ghana-churches-investigation-as-equals-intl-cmd-dg/index.html>, accessed 23 October, 2023

¹³ David McKenzie and Sara Dean, “Activists link US nonprofit to anti-LGBTQ laws in Africa. The group says it’s only

The pattern

In 2009, Ugandan politician and Member of Parliament, David Bahati, proposed an anti-homosexuality bill intended to criminalise and punish homosexuality in Uganda with the death penalty. He quickly whipped up a band of politicians, Christian clergy, and Muslim clerics claiming that not only was the bill intended to safeguard religious values provided by the Bible and Quran, but also to protect the traditional African family against the “unnatural” Western gay agenda. Given that the law was proposed after a wave of LGBTIQ inclusive legislation in the United States of American and European countries like France, they made the case that Africans were now having these behaviours and the acceptance of those who adopt them imposed on us.¹⁴

The trajectory of anti-LGBTIQ legislation in several African countries reflects a longstanding trend. In Nigeria, a Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) was initially proposed in 2006 and, after years of debate, was passed in 2013. This law criminalized same-sex relationships and imposed penalties on anyone who supports or funds LGBTIQ rights. Uganda has similarly grappled with anti-LGBTIQ legislation: a 2014 version of the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) initially passed but was struck down by the courts due to procedural flaws.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Uganda introduced an updated AHA in 2023, which, despite opposition, was assented to by the president in June 2023. Although this law is now under judicial review, recent rulings by Uganda’s Constitutional Court upheld most of its provisions, including harsh penalties for consensual same-sex acts and death penalties for “aggravated homosexuality,” while removing only a few clauses.

In Ghana, a proposed anti-LGBTIQ bill—encouraged by religious and cultural leaders—has also passed through parliament and is awaiting the president’s signature. If signed, it will formalise significant restrictions on LGBTIQ rights and impose penalties on individuals and organisations promoting or supporting these rights.¹⁶ This recent court ruling marks a substantial shift in Ghana’s official stance on LGBTIQ rights, signalling a further consolidation of anti-rights movements across the continent and highlighting the broader implications for freedoms and protections available to queer individuals in Ghana and beyond.¹⁷

promoting ‘family values,’ available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/12/18/africa/anti-lgbtq-laws-uganda-kenya-ghana/index.html>, accessed 25th January, 2024

¹⁴ Kapya Kaoma, *Ibid*

¹⁵ Amnesty International, 2024. Uganda: Court fails to repeal callous anti-LGBTI law, puts people at risk. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org> [Accessed 3 April 2024].

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, 2024. Uganda: Court Upholds Anti-Homosexuality Act. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org> [Accessed 4 April 2024].

¹⁷ Judiciary of Uganda, 2024. Constitutional Court pronounces itself on the Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023 of Uganda. Available at: <https://www.judiciary.go.ug> [Accessed 3 April 2024].

The literature discloses a pattern across the continent highlighted in how things played out in Nigeria, Uganda and Ghana prior to, and up to the proposal/ passage of these laws.

This pattern often plays out through quickly whipped up coalitions, to table bills with a clear agenda to undermine the human rights of women and queer people. The bills get passed, are challenged in court and ultimately declared unconstitutional, only for the laws to be reintroduced with different language but the same aim.

The agenda of disruption and co-optation exposed earlier by Kapyra Kaoma, and others are unfolding according to plan. Activists and movements are kept busy challenging popularly debunked fallacies and living in a constant state of anxiety and fear as frenzies and moral panics, while theoretically explainable and analysable, play out in the lives of queer people every day.



PART 3: RESEARCH FINDINGS

NIGERIA

Nigeria has the largest Christian population in Africa and has been the site of various interreligious and inter-ethnic group clashes since the creation of the state. As a former British colony, Nigeria inherited the criminal laws and social mores of Victorian England, and the society remains highly conservative. Nigeria was the first country in which the anti-rights movement witnessed some big gains. Following the ordination of Bishop Gene Robinson, an openly gay Episcopalian priest, many churches in the US left and formed the Anglican Church in North America. The ACNA aligned itself with Anglican churches in Nigeria and Uganda who were the loudest protestors against the inclusion of gay clergy. The Anglican church in Nigeria has played a role in buttressing several of these anti-gay US based churches and also as a base for their propaganda and organising on the continent. As such, it is no surprise that the first impacts of the anti-rights movement on the continent were felt in Nigeria in the early 2000s.

In 2006, the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Bill was tabled before the Nigerian senate. The Bill was the culmination of a number of public actions taken by political leaders, clergy and churches, among others. The most prominent impact of the anti-rights movement's organising was felt in the passing of the SSMPA in January 2014.

Nigeria was the first African country to table and then pass new Anti-Gay legislation, the SSMPA, which remains on the law books to-date despite efforts by LGBTIQ activists and allies to get it repealed. The agitations for the passing of the bill began in 2007/8.

It was the first public onslaught on LGBTIQ rights engineered by right wing forces that took hold. Conversations soon spread to Uganda.

The impact of the work of the anti-rights movement on LGBTIQ people in Nigeria cannot be downplayed. The first Anglophone African country to re-criminalise homosexuality, and same sex marriage, a thing LGBTIQ Nigerians insist they have never agitated for at any point.¹⁸ In the lead up to the tabling of the SSMPA, there was a deliberate effort to discredit and denigrate LGBTIQ Nigerians before the public, through the spread of misinformation and Christian propaganda intended to turn the society against them and propel the law through the senate. In the period between the tabling of the law in 2007/8 and its passing in 2014, the anti-rights movement ramped up its work in Nigeria and across the

¹⁸ Lagos Focus Group Discussion, 21st August, 2023

continent. Over the years, the propaganda and messaging has become a lot more streamlined as the anti-rights movement has grown across the continent.

Direct impact on lives of LGBTIQ people and organisations

The passing of the SSMPA and the continued operations of the anti-rights movement in Nigeria has had a profound impact on the lives of individual LGBTIQ Nigerians, as well as on the ability of LGBTIQ organisations to work towards advancing LGBTIQ rights in the country:

Insistence on a “natural” way of doing things

One of the anti-rights talking points is the assertion that to be LGBTIQ is “unnatural”, because God created human beings as female and male and so heterosexuality is our natural inclination. According to respondents this has expanded beyond hatred of LGBTIQ people into an insistence on the “natural way of doing things” within Nigerian society.¹⁹ Women must give birth naturally regardless of complications, some are rejecting modern medicine including treatments like blood transfusions as “unnatural”. This has of course led to many preventable deaths.

Increased violence against LGBTIQ Nigerians in all spheres of life

This violence happens in homes, schools, on the street, at work places, clubs and in all spaces that LGBTIQ Nigerians occupy. Police are known to raid particular establishments once it becomes obvious that they are frequented by queer people. They arbitrarily arrest, humiliate and detain revellers.²⁰ There have been growing cases of children being disowned by families²¹ on account of their LGBTIQ identity, getting kicked out of school, and being brutalised while in schools and homes. People are outed in tabloids and on Blogs, putting their lives and employment at risk.²²

Technology facilitated sexual violence against the LGBTIQ community was also noted in both Lagos and Abuja FGDs as being on the rise. They call it Kito which is what happens when anonymous strangers catfish/

¹⁹ FGD in Lagos, 21st August 2023

²⁰ Lagos and Abuja cases as described by respondents

²¹ One respondent in Abuja narrated their personal story of being disowned by family once their queerness was discovered

²² Respondents in both Abuja and Lagos noted that very many people remain in the closet in order to protect their livelihood

lure, especially gay men, with promises of sexual favours only to attack, rob, humiliate and out them.

Conversion practices

A report produced by the Initiative for Equal Rights in Nigeria notes that “conversion practices through religious rituals, texts, leaders and institutions are the most common, most pervasive and most invasive forms of SOGIE change efforts in Nigeria. In fact, these form the background for the belief in the need to force “change” of non-conforming sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.”²³ This sentiment was echoed during Focus Group Discussions in both Abuja and Lagos by participants from all over the country. Different religious groups are all united against LGBTIQ and other progressive sexual rights. Respondents pointed out instances of queer individuals being taken to deliverance churches and prayer mountains in ori oke.²⁴

Respondents also noted rising rates of suicide and self-harm among queer people driven by religious leaders. “There’s a lot of Hypocrisy in religious spaces and everyone falls in line because they don’t want to be singled out as rebels or promoters of a contrary ideology.”²⁵

Increased cost of queer life and organising

Organisations are spending more because of security concerns whether it is in work or social spaces. Respondents in Lagos talked about having to rely on friends and allies within the army just to throw a party. Queer people in general have to spend more money on security and end up spending more money to get into spaces where safety is ensured.

Access to justice

People are afraid to report cases to police even when they have a legitimate case of violation because they are scared of being further victimised by the police. Intimate partner violence (IPV) cases in queer relationships are on the rise and go unreported because people would rather handle them privately than deal with the police.

Collaborations with other movements impacted

The work of the anti-rights movement has turned queer Nigerians and

²³ The Nature, Extent and Impacts of Conversion Practices in Nigeria, the Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS), report available at https://theinitiativeforequalrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/The_Nature_Extent_and_Impacts_of_Conversion_Practices_in_Nigeria_Web.pdf accessed 12th January, 2024

²⁴ Lagos FGD on 21st August, 2023

²⁵ Ibid

their issues into “Persona non grata” in many human rights spaces, where their issues should be front and centre. Even organisations and movements that would be the natural allies of queer Nigerians will distance themselves in order to protect themselves from being perceived as controversial. They are weakened by the law and ignorance as one respondent in Abuja noted. “Allies are non-existent except when money is involved.” The issue of allies who are only supportive in private but abandoned LGBTIQ movements when push comes to shove was raised across all the countries that took part in this research. In Abuja where representatives from mainstream feminist organising were present for the FGD, some members present stated that feminist movements tend to include LBQ women in their proposals when seeking funding but then remove them when they meet with government and other stakeholders.²⁶ Respondents also noted how the Nigeria Human rights Commission exploits experiences of queer people to get funds and yet continues to marginalise queer Nigerians and their issues.²⁷

²⁶ This assertion led to quite a bit of back and forth but most participants in the room agreed that it was right. Allies use LGBTIQ people’s struggles to acquire funds but don’t want to stand with them when things get tough

²⁷ Respondent also stated that groups like Nigeria human Rights Commission are more likely to respond to pressure from foreign allies like the European Union other than actually listening to LGBTIQ Nigerians

UGANDA

The LGBTIQ movement in Uganda has been active and somewhat visible since the 1990s. Formally registered groups started to crop up in 2004 with the registration of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) and Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG), the oldest LBQ organisation in Africa and individuals like Victor Mukasa, Sandra Ntebi, Kasha Jaqueline, DJ Rachel, Pepe Onziema, David Kato were already visible and active in the social and political sphere. In 2009 Uganda's first anti-homosexuality act was tabled, just one year after the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) was first tabled before the senate in Nigeria.

The tabling of this bill was preceded by intense mobilising and spreading of propaganda by local religious and political leaders, who were receiving support from American evangelical Christian groups. Some of these American evangelical groups had been established in Uganda since the born-again revivals of the early 90s. The Anglican church in Uganda had also recently broken off ties²⁸ from the church of England over difference arising from the ordination of an openly gay bishop in the USA.

In fact, the Ugandan Anglican church has become the host of several anti-gay American churches that disagree with the church of England particularly on issues concerning sexual rights and women's bodily autonomy.

Like Nigeria, Uganda was colonised by the British who imported criminal and civil laws that were heavily influenced by Victorian Christian morality.

Beyond the passing of this law and broader political and social impacts, the work of the anti-rights movement continues to impact the lives of LGBTIQ Ugandans in small and big ways. Conversations with queer Ugandans revealed shifts in their personal, professional and other lives that had to be made in response to the anti-gay panic whipped up by Martin Ssempe, Kadaga, Asuman Basalirwa, Amongi, among others.

Monopolising religion and spirituality

This is one of the most fundamental ways in which the anti-rights movement has affected the lives of LGBTIQ Ugandans according to the individuals who participated in FGDs. The importance of spiritual fulfilment to one's ability to self-actualise cannot be underestimated.

²⁸ Uganda Cuts Ties with Gay Bishop, available at <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1256867/uganda-cuts-ties-gay-bishop> (accessed 29/11/2023)

Religious practices are also a source of belonging through shared rituals and religious identity.

Uganda is a very religious country, meaning most people are raised within some sort of religious tradition. As was noted in the Focus Group Discussion²⁹ religious and spiritual spaces and celebrations are an important part of belonging for any Ugandan. Anti-queer bigots have managed to monopolise religion and spirituality in the eyes of the masses. The idea of an old white God who hates women and homosexuals has been deeply entrenched in recent years by a well-resourced and coordinated cohort of religious and political leaders. While parliaments pass laws declaring queer people illegal, the pastors show porn in churches to “educate” people on what homosexuals do in their bedrooms,³⁰ the imams are organising street marches to celebrate the violation of LGBTIQ human rights and declare what abomination queer people are.

An early strategy of organisations like St. Pauls and FARUG was to train religious leaders on matters concerning inclusion and acceptance of LGBTIQ Ugandans, and the inter-religious council went ahead to invite LGBTIQ organisations to come and train them during collaborations around HIV/ AIDS sensitization and policy. Some fear that these opportunities were taken to gather information which was then shared in service of drafting a law that constricts the lives of LGBTIQ Ugandans most effectively.

Respondents noted that these religious leaders “infiltrated” and used LGBTIQ activists and organisations by inviting them to conduct trainings on LGBTIQ issues and also attending trainings organised to raise awareness around inclusion in HIV/ AIDS service provision by queer organisations, only to turn around and use what they learnt against queer Ugandans.³¹ Churches and mosques and religious spaces have become spaces for spreading hatred and ignorance against queer Ugandans. And yet queer Ugandans continue to seek spiritual communion and spaces to practise their religion together. Even those who were raised in the church have experienced ostracism from their churches, or had to denounce their queer identities and lives in order to continue to be accepted in these spaces.³²

Respondents shared stories of dress codes imposed at churches and being explicitly asked not to return to particular places of worship.

²⁹ Conversation with FARUG held 15th August 2023

³⁰ Pastor Martin Ssempe shows gay porn in Church https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUHkQ9vP_IA

³¹ Conversation held 15th August 2023

³² Top Ugandan Gay Activist Renounces Homosexuality, available at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/top-ugandan-gay-activist-renounces-homosexuality-1771150>, accessed 22nd January, 2024

A lot of organising has grown around the creation of spiritual spaces that are LGBTIQ run and attended, but also in attempts to queer theology as it is taught in Ugandan churches and spaces.

LGBTIQ Ugandans have been kicked out of churches they had considered spiritual homes for years, and churches have become centres of conversion practices and the making of outrageous claims about LGBTIQ Ugandans.

Conversion Practices on the Rise

Outright International's Report on the global reach of conversion therapy notes that these practices are driven mainly by religion and family.³³ This tracks in Uganda where activists reported a rise in conversion practices as the anti-rights movement's influence has grown. Parents are sending their children to rehabilitation centres which are usually church owned, to "pray the gay away" or in most cases, "traumatise the gay away". Even government owned mental health institutions are being used as centres of conversion by parents who consider being gay a mental illness.³⁴ Unfortunately some LGBTIQ Ugandans have succumbed to pressure from their families and voluntarily submitted themselves to "treatments" and prayers intended to cure them from homosexuality.

Housing Insecurity

Housing security has become an even graver concern for LGBTIQ organisations and individuals with each iteration of the anti-Homosexuality Bill. The most recent one, passed in June 2023 whose constitutionality was upheld by the courts³⁵, initially included a clause that criminalises any landlord who rents property to a person knowing they are a homosexual.³⁶ This clause was one of those found to be unconstitutional by the court, however the damage has already been done. Evictions from homes were already a problem LGBTIQ Ugandans were facing, but that clause and the publicity around it led to evictions of many queer Ugandans from their homes, even by long term landlords with whom they had established strong and cordial relationships. Freedom and Roam Uganda, an LBQ organisation was evicted from its office space of over 18 years by a landlord who admitted to them that he could not take the pressure from his neighbours and "others"

³³ Report Available at https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/092523_Outright_Conversion2023%20%281%29.pdf, accessed January 2024

³⁴ Conversation held 15th August 2023

³⁵ Uganda Constitutional Court declines to block anti-gay law but sees rights infringed, 3rd April 2024, available at <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/uganda-top-court-declines-to-block-anti-lgbtq-law-4577192>, accessed 16th April, 2024

³⁶ Uganda anti Homosexuality Bill text available at <https://www.jurist.org/news/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2023/03/Anti-Homosexuality-Bill-2023.pdf> accessed September 13th 2023

anymore.³⁷ It has also increased cases of exploitation of queer tenants with exorbitant rents and arbitrary requirements imposed on them before they are able to rent property. Queer Ugandans are also facing increased intimidation from neighbours and other people they share space with.³⁸

Violence and unsafety

Safe spaces are disappearing as the spotlight has been put on queer people everywhere. Particularly in Kampala there are places like bars and other hangout spots that have notably been queer friendly where patrons are becoming hostile.

Technology facilitated violence against LGBTIQ Ugandans is also on the rise.³⁹ Social media has been a prominent tool of the anti-rights movement particularly Facebook, Twitter and Tik Tok where they spread anti-gay propaganda. Cases of homophobic mobs being set on queer Ugandans who are visible on social media increased around the time the law was passed.⁴⁰

This insecurity has also increased the cost of queer life and organising as organisations have to take extra measures to ensure security which are often expensive. These measures include hiring more exclusive venues for physical meetings, and extra personnel to manage security, as well as improving security for physical offices and homes.

Divisions within the movement

Respondents noted that many groups and activists who have historically been allies to the LGBTIQ movement in Uganda seem to be developing cold feet following the passing of the law, especially given how broadly the law defines the offence of “promotion” and the already precarious position Ugandan NGOs are in because of the new NGO Regulations. Some sex workers are distancing themselves from the queer movement,⁴¹ and many allies are choosing to maintain some distance to avoid direct exposure to backlash as well. LGBTIQ organisations and workers are being frozen out of previously welcoming spaces and collaborative projects⁴² because their inclusion increases risk for all involved.

³⁷ Conversation at Uganda Lesbian Forum, 3rd November 2023

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Focus Group Discussion at Her Internet on 18th August 2023

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Conversation on 15th August 2023

⁴² FGD at Her Internet

Family Exclusion/disownment to avoid backlash

Many queer people are reporting being abandoned by families who are afraid of being victimised by a law that requires them to report any family member that is known to be a homosexual. Queer Ugandans are once again left destitute and without social support. Even platonic relationships have been disrupted as people are afraid to be seen openly associating with people who appear “too gay.”⁴³ Creating community is made even more difficult because of the public disdain heaped on queer Ugandans. Families would rather exclude their LGBTIQ children than face retaliation from the community.

⁴³ Ibid

KENYA

Also a former British colony, Kenya post-independence has appeared to be a progressive democracy with previous governments claiming that LGBTIQ rights were not a serious enough issue to be bothered about. The country has a thriving LGBTIQ Rights movement and the courts have over the years handed down progressive decisions affirming and protecting the rights of trans Kenyans to have their names changed on legal documents, the rights of LGBTIQ people to form and register associations, and most recently the national census included a column counting intersex people. These gains have been hard fought by a movement that maintains a vigilant eye out for any attempts to roll back on their human rights.

The country possesses an active LGBTIQ movement that has made several gains over the years, however the advent of a new government led by William Samoei Ruto has changed things a bit.

The new government appears to have adopted a strong conservative Christian stance and is invested in maintaining and promoting it through the alliances they are forming and various statements made in the media. Recently, the President and First Lady of Kenya welcomed popular and widely discredited faith healer, Benny Hinn, into Kenya with much fanfare and miracle prayer and healing.⁴⁴

It is undeniable though, that the movement for LGBTIQ rights in Kenya has existed and made gains for a long time.

On the legal mobilising and social advocacy front, Kenyans have excelled in advocating for themselves and standing in solidarity with movements all over the continent.

The #Repeal162 effort has brought hope and community to all LGBTIQ Africans.

The Anti rights movement in Kenya initially seemed to be scattered with one or two well-known proponents (Kanjama etc). As the anti-rights movement has spread its tentacles across the continent, Kenyan politicians have been seen getting invited to and attending conferences such as the Family Protection Conference held at Entebbe in 2023.⁴⁵

Over the years, this movement has actively spread within society into churches, and have relied on moments when the LGBTIQ movement has

⁴⁴ Benny Hinn invited by Rachel Ruto for government-sponsored crusade," available at <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/entertainment/news/article/2001481929/benny-hinn-invited-by-rachel-ruto-for-government-sponsored-crusade>, accessed

⁴⁵ Interview with Kenya HRD2

made significant gains e.g. winning a case in court, to mobilise backlash and strengthen the support for their hateful causes.

One respondent noted that after the ruling on 24th February when the Supreme Court directed that the National gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) should be registered in its name because the constitutional right to free expression extends to all Kenyan citizens including the LGBTIQ, there was a spate of protests in Mombasa, Kilifi, Lamu and in Kwale county.⁴⁶

Beyond Nairobi County, the anti-rights movement in Western Kenya has infiltrated the education system and is most active in schools through chaplaincies that push for a biased Christian religious education and Christian Union clubs in which their anti-gay propaganda is pushed onto children.⁴⁷ As a result, expulsions of children suspected of being LGBTIQ are on the rise. Although LGBTIQ organisations have taken steps to reach out to and sensitise religious leaders, many are too afraid to speak out when needed.

One informant stated, “our strategies are no secret to them, they are developing counter-strategies based on the information we have shared and the ways in which we attempt to support each other in public.”

Impact on the movement and individuals:

High Levels of stress, paranoia, and panic among queer Kenyans

One respondent termed this “minority stress”⁴⁸ whereby LGBTIQ Kenyans are under stress from the constant public disdain, humiliation and hostility from the government, religious leaders, and society at large. This has contributed to high rates of alcohol and drug abuse within Kenyan LGBTIQ communities, as well as intimate partner violence and other forms of interpersonal conflict as LGBTIQ Kenyans lash out at those closest to them. Sometimes intra movement problems can seem more daunting than the actual monsters we are fighting.

As the anti-rights actors come together, we seem to be moving farther away from each other.

⁴⁶ Interview with Kenyan HRD 5

⁴⁷ Interview with Kenya HRD 6

⁴⁸ Kenya HRD 5

Increased violence against LGBTIQ Kenyans

Kenyan LGBTIQ activists are reporting a rise in cases of violence against members of the community. The most recent is the case of murder of Sheila Lumumba, a young lesbian which was just concluded with a conviction of the perpetrators.⁴⁹ There have been other cases that have not received that same public outcry.⁵⁰ Aside from the distress and anguish that these cases cause, they also increase fear within the community causing more people to stay closeted or return to the closet.

Organisations like NGLHRC and GALCK+ receive many reports of cases of lesbophobic rape condoned by families and churches, kidnapping of queer people by their families, coercive surgery on intersex people, especially children.

Access to education

The misconceptions spread by anti-rights actors about how LGBTIQ people are predators and hypersexual and abnormal has impacted the way queer children are viewed and treated in Kenyan society. LGBTIQ children are denied access to education because of humiliating practices in schools as well as discriminatory government policy. There are several cases of queer children being tortured, expelled, and removed from school premises, or being targeted by predatory teachers.⁵¹ Recently, the Cabinet Secretary for Education made a statement to the effect that LGBTIQ children should not be allowed in boarding schools.⁵²

Conversion practices

GALCK+ report on Conversion practices in Kenya notes that the “relationship between anti-LGBTIQ U.S. groups and Kenyan religious leaders is important because it is from this premise that conversion therapy programs began to gain more traction and prominence and potentially more dissemination in Kenya.⁵³ Anti-LGBTIQ US Groups have collaborated with Kenyan religious leaders and politicians since the early 2000s. This collaboration has involved the promotion and spreading of widely debunked theories about how people can be “cured”

⁴⁹ Murder of non-binary Lesbian Sentenced to Jail, available at <https://www.mambaonline.com/2023/12/21/kenya-murderer-of-non-binary-lesbian-sheila-lumumba-sentenced-to-jail/>, accessed on 28th February, 2024

⁵⁰ Kenya HRD1 disclosed to the researcher two other cases, one involving a lesbian couple in Nakuru that got followed home by police, arrested, and arbitrarily detained, and the other involving another lesbian couple on Thika Road who were reported to police by one of their sisters and subsequently detained and tortured.

⁵¹ Interview with Kenya HRD1 *ibid*

⁵² CS Magoha on gay students, available at <https://www.citizen.digital/news/cs-magoha-on-gay-students-im-not-against-homosexuals-but-they-should-be-day-scholars-n292417>, accessed 28th February 2024

⁵³ Shame is not a cure: so called conversion therapy practices in Kenya,P.10, available at <https://www.galck.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Shame-is-not-a-cure-doc-3.pdf>, accessed 28th Feb 2024

of homosexuality pushed by “ex gay” individuals and groups that have been widely discredited in the United states.⁵⁴ This has not prevented them from taking root in Kenya though, especially with the support of government officials which is currently increasing. Many queer Kenyans have been subjected to conversion practices and attempts to cure them of homosexuality, even within spaces that were previously presumed to be allies working to support LGBTIQ communities.⁵⁵ The Anglican church in Western Kenya is very active in anti-LGBTIQ organising, and well known for organising Christian Youth camps in which conversion practices are rampant.⁵⁶ The negative impact of conversion practices cannot be overstated. The shame it relies on to inspire changed behaviour destroys the mental health of victims, and many have been driven to self-harm, and in extreme cases to suicide.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ LVCT has been noted as a space where conversion “therapy” was offered to queer people despite their credentials as an unbiased service provider

⁵⁶ Interview with Kenya HRD5

⁵⁷ Interview with Kenya HRD1

BURUNDI

In Burundi, a new criminal code signed into law in 2009 criminalised same sex sexual acts⁵⁸ for the first time in the country's history, making them punishable by imprisonment for at least 2 years. This was done in April 2009 at the peak of conversations in neighbouring Uganda around the then newly proposed Anti homosexuality Bill. Burundian political leaders have not been different from their counterparts in other parts of the continent, adopting anti-LGBTIQ rhetoric all the way to the highest ranking politicians. Both the previous and current president have been instrumental in stoking hatred against LGBTIQ Burundians, comparing them to animals and saying they should be stoned to death.⁵⁹

Although the law has been in force for years, respondents noted that it was not enforced often except at periods when conversations in the region heated up, hence prompting their leaders to make statements attacking queer Burundians. Most recently, events in Uganda from 2022 to 2023 seem to have triggered a renewed interest and public attacks by political leaders against the community, particularly by the president, Evariste Ndayishimye.

The anti-rights movement continues to target and recruit religious and political leaders all over the continent as their impact snowballs from one country to the next.

Impact:

Access to Education

"In school, rumours of one being LGBTIQ could get you expelled, making it almost impossible for you to join any other school."⁶⁰ This discrimination against LGBTIQ children in accessing education continues to affect life outcomes as community members are overwhelmingly less educated than the wider population. Similar myths are perpetrated whereby, LGBTIQ children are demonised and made out to be a danger to other children in schools.

⁵⁸ "Burundi: Repeal Law Criminalising Homosexual Conduct," Joint Statement by Human rights NGOs working in Burundi and on the continent, Available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/04/24/burundi-repeal-law-criminalizing-homosexual-conduct>, accessed 11th April, 2024

⁵⁹ Clémentine de Montjoye, "Burundi President Stokes Fear Among LGBT People. Comments Risk Fueling Violence and Discrimination," Available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/19/burundi-president-stokes-fear-among-lgbt-people>, accessed 11th April, 2024

⁶⁰ Interview with Burundi HRD 1 on 5th October, 2023

Lack of legal protection

LGBTIQ Burundians have trouble accessing protection of the law and continue to be ostracised and mistreated not just by family but even by law enforcement. Police have previously raided offices and homes of people suspected of being LGBTIQ leading to widespread fear and a restructuring of how organisations do their work. Organisations with upcountry offices have had to shut them down in fear of a spill over of violence from what is currently happening in Uganda.⁶¹

Many are unwilling to keep risking exposure under such precarious circumstance.

⁶¹ Ibid

KEY EMERGING ISSUES ACROSS CONTEXTS

Conversion practices

These are on the rise across contexts, largely fuelled by the misconception that being LGBTIQ is “unnatural” and “abominable”. Many LGBTIQ people are subjected to conversion practices by their families, churches and many subject themselves to it voluntarily. The rise of conversion practices as the work of the anti-rights movement has spread was noted in all countries included in this research.

The impact of social media

This is a growing issue across the globe. Social media is the site of education and radicalisation for many, and a space in which many are brainwashed with intel and anti-rights ideology. Tech- assisted violence against LGBTIQ people is on the rise as people flock to share their lives and struggles on social media apps thereby exposing themselves to scrutiny by the greater public. Similarly, dating apps that are frequented by LGBTIQ people continue to be used by homophobes and other bigots to surveil and blackmail LGBTIQ Africans. Grindr took interest in this and encourages users to take certain steps to reduce chances of being victimised in this manner.

Queer tax?

Across several African countries, LGBTIQ individuals face unique and steep costs—what some term a “queer tax”—to exist safely in their communities. Research participants from Nigeria to Burundi highlighted the societal hostility toward LGBTIQ people, often manifesting as violence from both state and non-state actors. This hostility makes it challenging to live freely, with many queer Africans facing additional financial and emotional burdens simply to navigate daily life. In places like Kisumu, Kenya, one respondent described the costs associated with staying safe and maintaining acceptance: high rents, security expenses, and, at times, financially supporting family members to secure conditional acceptance. “Being queer is very expensive,” they observed.

Additionally, the coordinated and well-funded anti-rights movements that have emerged in recent years have driven up the cost of organising for LGBTIQ rights groups, which now have to allocate more resources toward security measures. Anti-rights groups not only apply pressure through political and social channels but have also reportedly incentivised individuals within the queer community to “convert” or provide insider information on the LGBTIQ rights movement. These dynamics collectively increase financial and psychological costs for both

individuals and organisations dedicated to advancing LGBTIQ rights across the continent.

Role of Philanthropy

As always in African activist spaces, conversations always return to funding, and the various weaknesses of donors and the NGO mode of organising that has proliferated within LGBTIQ movements on the continent. How has philanthropy impacted the rise in anti-rights ideology on the continent and the growth of LGBTIQ movements on the continent?

For starters, LGBTIQ led organisations continue to be underfunded and receive the smaller percentages of budgets reserved by donors to support “Human Rights” work in Africa.

The frustration of watching the same information over and over and seeing very small changes on the continent. In fact, it seems that the opposition continues to access more and more resources and get stronger in spreading their agenda. Given this, African queer communities appear to be surrounded and undefended. This research focused on the resilient communities and individuals that continue to challenge the agenda of the anti-rights movement in various ways and it is evident that this resilience is challenged by a lack of resources.



PART 4: RESISTANCE

LGBTIQ Africans have not taken the attacks on their humanity and dignity lying down. Organisations and individuals are resisting the worst impacts of the anti-rights movement in commendable ways.

Activists have come together nationally, regionally, and continentally to respond to some of the biggest challenges, and to protect themselves while continuing to advocate for human rights and inclusion.

Strategic organising by LGBTIQ groups

Groups in Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya and Burundi have adopted more strategic ways of organising, very much impacted by security concerns stemming from an understanding of just how hostile the environments they are operating in can get. “We cannot remain divided in the face of such a well organised and well-resourced enemy.”⁶²

This has entailed seeking out allyship and more collaboration within the movement as well as with other mainstream and “acceptable” movements such as the disability justice and women’s rights movements. One respondent shared that in Bono state (North East) LGBTIQ organisations have used the strategy of working on mainstream women’s rights issues as well in order to buy acceptance.⁶³ Provision of SRHR services kind of shifting conversation towards more acceptance⁶⁴

LGBTIQ organisations and activists are alive to the dangers of working in silos. As one Kenyan activist put it, being faced with just how well organised and resourced the anti-rights movement is “has also forced the movement to work together because the enemy appears so much stronger and better coordinated. We keep fighting fires on every front because the anti-rights movements are so much better funded and coordinated than we are. We’ve learnt to live in this precarity.”⁶⁵

Spiritual Sanctuary

The work of the anti-rights movement has turned many religious places into hostile territory for LGBTIQ Africans. Yet religion and spirituality remain important aspects of a fully actualised human life. Movements that are invested in advocating for LGBTIQ people to live holistic and fulfilled lives cannot ignore this aspect, given how it impacts the Faith

⁶² Interview with Kenya HRD3

⁶³ Abuja FGD

⁶⁴ Lagos FGD

⁶⁵ Interview with Kenya HRD 3

spiritual, mental and therefore physical health of LGBTIQ people. The movements in the research countries have responded to this need within their communities by finding ways to provide the spiritual sanctuary that so many seek.

In Uganda, as the strength and influence of anti-rights movements has grown over the years, the movement has witnessed an influx of multi-religious/ interfaith organisations, churches and collectives set up and run by LGBTIQ Ugandans.⁶⁶

Faith based organising is growing across the continent with new organisations being formed that provide safe spaces to participate in worship and religious communion without the judgement and fundamentalist propaganda peddled in mainstream religious spaces. Groups like Women of Faith in Action, Faithful catholic souls and Wawa Aba have come up and part of their work includes nuancing theology and turning away from the idea of a vengeful and bigoted God, to one who is feminist and embraces all people.⁶⁷

Similarly, in Kenya, faith based organising is growing stronger as religious queer Kenyans seek spaces where they can commune and worship without fear of being traumatised. Groups like Cosmopolitan Affirming Churches among others have come up to serve the LGBTIQ community's spiritual needs.⁶⁸

The spiritual violence meted out on LGBTIQ Nigerians and other minoritised groups as a result of the anti-rights movements propaganda and rhetoric also means religious spaces have become increasingly hostile to LGBTIQ people and any progressive theology, leaving queer and minoritised Nigerians out in the cold.

One beautiful, if unexpected, outcome of the ways in which the anti-rights movement have pushed queer Nigerians from religious spaces, is a resurgence of active practising of traditional spirituality. Some are turning back to the indigenous belief systems and practices in an attempt to reclaim African values of generosity, diversity and community.⁶⁹

Challenging Religious stereotypes

In all the countries included in the research, it is clear that LGBTIQ movements are doing the work of sensitization of religious leaders with varied results. As reported by respondents in Uganda, organisations have

⁶⁶ Conversation with FARUG team 15th August 2023

⁶⁷ For a comprehensive list of these faith-based groups in Uganda please see glossary

⁶⁸ Conversation Kenya HRD4

⁶⁹ Abuja FGD 23rd August 2023

invested time and resources into training religious leaders on inclusion and gone as far as inviting them into spaces for this purpose. However, few religious leaders with any kind of influence have accepted. Similarly in Kenya, a lot of resources have been sunk into training religious leaders, however, this does not always mean that they will speak out on LGBTIQ issues. Respondents spoke of shifting the focus from training religious leaders, and channelling more energy towards challenging religious misconceptions and these very religious leaders who shape public opinion.⁷⁰ This sentiment was expressed during one of the FGD in Uganda as well, where many participants felt that religious leaders they previously trained had betrayed their trust by turning around and using the very knowledge and information they shared to attack LGBTIQ people in their churches and nationally advocate for a homophobic law to be passed.⁷¹ How can the hard fought resources of LGBTIQ movements be redirected towards a more productive engagement with religion and religious dogma, beyond attempts to influence individual religious leaders?

Strategic Litigation

This is being done across the board in all the countries. The courts of law have long been considered an unbiased arbiter of disputes involving human rights violations and a safe tool for holding governments accountable for discrimination against certain citizens. In Kenya they are litigating against conversion practices, for decriminalisation of same sex relations and for registration of LGBTIQ organisations and associations. In Uganda litigation against the recently passed anti-homosexuality Act continues as the plaintiffs stated that the court's decision to uphold the law will be challenged all the way to the Supreme Court, the highest court in the land.

⁷⁰ Kenya HRD5

⁷¹ FARUG FGD August 15th 2023

CONCLUSION

The anti-rights movements' agenda has proliferated across the African continent through a network of well-funded organisations, religious, political leaders and other foot soldiers who have overseen the passage of anti-lgbtqi laws, discrimination against LGBTIQ children and adults in all spheres of life, as well as direct violence including murder against Africans perceived as LGBTIQ. The LGBTIQ communities in Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Nigeria have witnessed the worst impacts of this anti-rights agenda both on individual LGBTIQ persons, and on the ability of their movements to organise and agitate for human rights and freedom, as documented in the findings of this research. The spiritual and social bereavement that the anti-rights propaganda has imposed on LGBTIQ Africans continues to negatively impact our ability to live full and dignified lives, as they insist that not only is queer identity abominable, it is also unAfrican and a sin against God.

LGBTIQ Africans have utilised the limited resources available to their movements to do the work of challenging this propaganda and the laws, policies and social mistreatment that has arisen from it. However, because LGBTIQ organising work remains severely underfunded, at least in comparison to the large sums that the anti-rights actors have access to, activists continue to lament having to fight on several fronts against a better coordinated and resourced enemy. This disparity is further compounded by the positive social regard that many of these anti-rights actors continue to enjoy within our societies.

It is important for donors to not only support direct legal and strategic challenges against the anti-rights movement, but also to spotlight and provide resources for the internal facing work around the protection of the spiritual and mental well-being of LGBTIQ communities in Africa.

As highlighted in the findings, LGBTIQ movements have seen a rise in faith-based organising that counters anti-rights rhetoric and provides essential spiritual support for LGBTIQ Africans, addressing an often-overlooked need. This approach has a profoundly positive effect on mental health and community resilience, equipping LGBTIQ individuals to advocate more effectively. Notable examples include campaigns such as the "Global Interfaith Network's Dialogue for Dignity," which brings together religious leaders and LGBTIQ activists to challenge homophobic interpretations of scripture and promote inclusivity. Another impactful initiative is Kenya's "Inclusivity Ministry," where faith leaders provide pastoral care to queer congregants, enhancing their sense of acceptance and community.

Similarly, South Africa's House of Rainbow has led powerful workshops that blend faith and LGBTIQ advocacy, helping individuals reconcile their sexuality with spirituality, which has fostered notable mental health benefits. These spaces not only counter the isolation LGBTIQ individuals

often face but also help create informed, spiritually grounded advocates who can effectively mobilise for policy changes and social acceptance. As demonstrated by these campaigns, building and supporting faith-based LGBTIQ spaces is essential for creating a spiritually healthy, resilient community capable of sustained advocacy.

Furthermore, a resurgence of African spirituality among LGBTIQ Africans as reported in Nigeria seems to be a most rational and appropriate response to the weaponising of mainstream western/ Abrahamic religious traditions against LGBTIQ Africans. It's necessary to explore these spiritualities and their potential as a tool in not just providing community, but also challenging the anti-rights propaganda about what is or isn't African.

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