

# **Struggle for Autonomy and Relevance**

Landscape Analysis of Trans\*-led and Lesbian-led  
Organising in Sub-Saharan Africa

By Mariam Armisen

The Baring Foundation

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About The Baring Foundation: The Baring Foundation is a UK-based foundation that supports civil society in the UK and Sub-Saharan Africa. Its International Development program aims to empower locally based civil society Organisations to address discrimination and disadvantage based on gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity, with a specific interest in supporting Organisations that address discrimination against lesbian and transgender individuals and communities. The Foundation currently makes grants to enhance the work of local grantmakers that fund LGBTI civil society.

# Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AWJS	American Jewish World Service
CAL	Coalition of African Lesbians
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
ED	Executive Director
FEW	Forum for the Empowerment of Women
GALS	Gays and Lesbians of Simbabwe
GATE	Global Action for Trans* Equality
GPP	Global Philanthropy Project
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ILGA	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex persons
LLH	The Norwegian LGBT Association
MSM	Men who have sex with men
MWA	Minority Women in Action
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
S.H.E.	Social, Health and Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa
UHAI EASHRI	The East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Setting the Context

The history of Organising led by lesbian and trans\* activists in Sub-Saharan Africa is as diverse as the contexts in which the work has been taking place. Numerous factors, including personal politics, local needs, regional vision and/or inspiration, and external influences, are all at play. Without attempting to trace the historical roots of lesbian-led and trans\*-led Organising nor to list the pioneers who paved the way, it is important to acknowledge the role that feminists, lesbians, and gender non-conforming individuals played in shaping the contemporary LGBTI movement in Sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa is known as the “birthplace” of LGBTI activism in its current form in Africa. What is less visible is the role feminist, lesbian, and gender non-conforming activists have played, both inside and outside South Africa, in shaping the political agendas of the LGBTI movement in its early stages.

Throughout Africa, feminist, lesbian, and gender non-conforming activists have been instrumental in creating an enabling environment for LGBTI Organising. As far back as the early nineties, Sister Namibia, a feminist organisation based in Windhoek, Namibia, and activists such as Dorothy Aken’Ova in Nigeria introduced the new discourse around identity politics, sexual rights, and bodily autonomy into their work and began to mobilise lesbians around body politics. In the process, they facilitated the creation of spaces for gay-led Organising.

For example, in response to the 1995 hate speech against gays and lesbians by the former President of Namibia, Sam Nujoma, and various other government leaders, Sister Namibia, along with a few Namibian gay activists, formed the Rainbow Project in 1997 with the support of other Southern Africa activists and GALS, the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (Ikhaxas, 2010). In West Africa, Fanny Viola founded the first gay and lesbian association in Sierra Leone in 2002, and until her rape and murder in 2004 in her own office, was the most visible lesbian activist in Sierra Leone. In post-apartheid South Africa, the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) was founded, also in 2002, by black lesbians to highlight the particular issues facing their communities.

The multiple identities of female activists, particularly as women and lesbians, informed the political activism of lesbian-led groups, which focused on challenging patriarchy,

heterosexism, and the numerous other ways in which society oppresses women. At this stage, the work mainly involved a slow process of base-building. This began in earnest when 50 feminists, lesbians, and gender non-conforming activists (who would today identify as trans men) came together in 2003 to form a Pan-African, feminist, lesbian organisation, the Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL). Over the next decade, lesbian-led groups and Organisations were formed across Sub-Saharan Africa, some as stand-alone entities and some as groups within larger feminist-led Organisations. Working at the intersection of multiple movements (feminist, women's rights, human rights, and LGBTI), lesbian-led groups and Organisations brought a radical feminist politics of sexual autonomy and choice to these movements.

In the early years, various attempts were made to define and establish collaborations between gay-led groups and Organisations and those led by lesbians. One of the first attempts took place in Johannesburg in 2004 when 55 participants from 22 LGBTI groups representing 17 countries came together to develop strategies for African LGBTI Organising at the local, sub-regional, and regional levels (Samba, 2006). These early attempts were largely framed by the need to respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic as a major health threat to gay communities. As a consequence, the risk management of the pandemic among men who have sex with men (MSM) became the main focus of the emerging LGBTI movement.

This focus created two major risks for LGBTI activism. First, the agenda from that point on tended to be driven by the politics of HIV/AIDS funding and not by the realities, needs, and politics of gender and sexuality. Second, the preoccupation with epidemiology and infection risks associated the entire LGBTI experience with disease and danger (Okech, 2015). Together, these two factors marginalised the concerns of lesbian and trans\* communities who were Organising around sexual rights and bodily autonomy. Of the many lesbian-led groups and Organisations formed in the early 2000s, very few are still active. With the exception of CAL, most are barely standing due to funding cuts, burnout, etc.

Despite this, the role of women in the African LGBTI movement has been considerable. Beginning in 2005, a cisgender woman, Liesl Theron and her then partner, a trans man, were instrumental in initiating trans\*-led Organising in South Africa and facilitating the emergence of trans\*-led Organising in other countries, especially in Southern and Eastern Africa. Trans\*-led groups and Organisations mobilised around the shared politics of challenging the tyranny of gender and sexuality norms. They focused on creating safe spaces to shape community-building and, in Southern Africa, advocating for access to health care and legal rights.

Outside South Africa, many of the first trans\*-led groups and Organisations were

founded by trans men who were actively involved in feminist and lesbian-led Organising. This was the case in Uganda, Zambia, and Botswana. More recently, from around 2011, there has been a surge in interest and support around trans\* issues and Organising. Since then, trans\*-led groups and Organisations have been trying to define their identities and build an autonomous movement. However, this has been happening in an environment dominated by the NGO model of Organising, leaving little or no space to explore alternative models, while shaping the work by funding priorities rather than the needs of communities.

The growing interest in supporting trans\* issues and trans\* Organising is a global phenomenon, not just an African one. In 2013, the American Jewish World Service (AJWS) and Global Action for Trans\* Equality (GATE) conducted the first research study on the state of trans\*-led and intersex-led Organising worldwide. The study put forward a strong case for more funding for trans\* and intersex activism, and in 2015 the first trans\* and intersex fund was established by the Global Philanthropy Project (GPP).

Against this backdrop, the Baring Foundation commissioned an exploratory research in late 2015 to better understand the distribution of trans\*-led and lesbian-led Organisations in Southern Africa, East Africa, and West Africa. The aim was to empower locally based civil-society Organisations to address discrimination and disadvantage based on gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity, with a particular interest in supporting Organisations that address discrimination against lesbian and transgender individuals and communities.

## 1.2 About This Report

This report provides a brief landscape analysis of current trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa with a focus on Eastern and Southern Africa. It is meant to provide an overview of the diversity of actors, agendas, and strategies used by trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations and the challenges and lessons learned thus far. Rather than being a comprehensive study, it presents a snapshot of trans\* and lesbian-led Organising in these regions at a particular moment in the history of the LGBTI movement in Sub-Saharan Africa. The research focused on collecting data from self-led trans\* and lesbian groups and Organisations, while acknowledging the important work and support of feminists and “general” LGBTI Organisations.

### **a. Methodology**

A qualitative research methodology combining desk research, one-on-one interviews, and a survey questionnaire were used to collect data. The questionnaire was developed as a tool to guide conversations with a diverse

audience, which included trans\*-led and lesbian-led Organisations, non-affiliated lesbian activists, funders supporting the work of trans\*-led and lesbian-led Organisations, and allies. A guided conversation provided the flexibility to engage in more organic conversations by adjusting the tool for each interviewee. The questionnaire was also adjusted for each organisation. It focused on gathering information about Organisational backgrounds and structures, political agendas, programmatic work, and histories of resource mobilisation.

The research study was conducted over a period of three weeks between late November 2015 and early January 2016. A total of 67 groups and Organisations including 20 trans\*-led and 47 lesbian-led were identified. Forty respondents from 31 groups and Organisations directly contributed data to the study – this includes 24 LGBTI groups and Organisations, 6 funding Organisations, and 1 international NGO. There was an equal mix of lesbian-led and trans\*-led groups and Organisations from 14 countries. Four activists shared their experiences as former leaders of trans\*, lesbian, or LGBTI Organisations.

## **b. Limitations and Biases**

The most significant limitation of this study was the way the research had to be conducted – primarily through Skype, phone calls, and emails rather than face-to-face contact. This limited access mainly to groups with an online presence, although poor Internet connections made even some of these interactions difficult. The time of year was another limitation. The holiday season is a very busy period for both activists and funders. This made it difficult to schedule interviews with some key informants who could have contributed additional data to the study. A third limitation was the narrow definition of trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations, which did not necessarily fit different contexts. Finally, the distinction between lesbian groups and Organisations and lesbian-led ones was not always useful. In future studies, a clearer distinction needs to be made between LGBTI groups and Organisations that happen to be led by lesbians and those that organise specifically around lesbian issues.

The report was written by a research consultant who is also an African LGBTI activist. The data comes from field interviews and desk research, but it is important to acknowledge that some of the analysis reflects the researcher's own experience as an activist.

## **c. Scope of the Report**

This report provides a landscape analysis of current trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations across the four regions and summarises key findings from the 22 self-led groups and Organisations surveyed for the research. The report is structured around these key findings and the recommendations arising

from them, but also uses quotations and case studies in an effort to bring the voices of respondents into the report and to support analysis of the survey data. It includes a few brief profiles of trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations as examples of how current activism operates on the ground.



## 2. Key Findings

This section summarises the main findings of the research with respect to the current state of trans\*-led and lesbian-led Organising in Eastern and Southern Africa, the typology of the movement, and the challenges that lie ahead.

### 2.1 The State of Trans\*-led and Lesbian-led Organising

- **Surge in trans\* issues and Organising.** In line with a global trend, the LGBTI movement in Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced a surge in interest and Organising in the past five years around trans\* issues specifically. While each group and organisation concerned with trans\* issues has emerged out of a specific set of circumstances, one common theme is a new urgency to build an autonomous, visible, trans\*-led movement. In keeping with this, some groups and Organisations have been founded to fill a perceived gap, such as the need for Organising in rural and semi-rural areas or around the sexual health and rights of trans women, some have split away from existing groups and Organisations as a result of leadership challenges or inter-personal dynamics, and others are attempts to revive existing but dormant initiatives.

An increase in donor interest and investment is also at play. In Eastern and Southern Africa (and soon in West Africa), LGBTI activist-led funds have been formed to support the movement through an activist-owned platform that can imagine and develop indigenous strategies for social change. For the first time in the movement's history, activists are involved in decision-making on resource allocation and are creating various peer-learning experiences. Globally, both private and public foundations are mobilising to address trans\* issues. In May 2015, for instance, funders and trans\* activists came together to discuss the needs of the trans\* community and how best to support the global trans\* movement financially (International Trans\* Fund Convening, 2015). These trends have contributed to the desire to create new funding streams and support the emergence of trans-led Organising.

**Struggle for relevance and visibility.** The increasing interest in trans\* issues and trans\* activism, particularly in Eastern and Southern Africa, has not been matched by increased interest in lesbian issues and Organising. A burgeoning lesbian-led movement is struggling to organise around their issues but is facing serious challenges, both because it is not linked to activists in leadership positions and because "gatekeepers" within the general LGBTI

movement have other priorities. The system of gatekeeping is not unique to the LGBTI movement, of course. As Okech (2015) notes, being “marginalised” does not necessarily mean that activists are less patriarchal or do not use power in ways that erase others. However, the reluctance to reflect on how they perpetuate binaries of gender and sexuality in their own work by groups that claim to be Organising against discrimination, marginalisation, and oppression is dismaying.

Compared to the surge of interest in trans\* issues, the study found a persistent tendency to overlook the particular issues facing lesbians and to subsume lesbian Organising into general LGBTI activism. After more than a decade of Organising, lesbian groups and Organisations have yet to experience the level of interest that newer groups and issues are now generating. In particular, funders appear to be intensely interested in understanding trans\* issues and supporting trans\* activism. A global study on trans\* and intersex Organising was conducted in 2014, as noted earlier, and in East Africa, the East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative (UHA1-EASHRI) is currently undertaking a baseline study of trans\*-led Organising in that region. A new trans\* and intersex fund is being established, while a sex worker fund already exists. Funders clearly want to support nascent trans\*-led and sex worker activism, but this does not seem to be the case for lesbian activism.

## 2.2 Current and Emerging Trends

The growth of interest in African LGBTI activism can be observed in a number of common trends across the four African regions. The most salient of these are discussed below.

- **Proliferation of new groups.** Forming an organisation appears to be the default starting point for any LGBTI activism. For example, a recent landscape analysis of LGBTI and sex worker movements in Tanzania found that 16 new LGBTI groups were formed in the country between 2008 and 2015 only to be disbanded within a few months (UHA1 EASHRI, 2015). Out of the 24 groups and Organisations surveyed for the present study, 15 were formed within the past five years and most in just the four years from 2011 to 2015. Clearly, a lot of Organising is happening, but in an environment of competition and little to no collaboration. Emerging lesbian-led groups, in particular, continue to struggle with a lack of attention and support around their issues. Many of the participants in this research reported getting very little support from general LGBTI Organisations or coalitions to enable them to start work or even begin to organise. A few respondents went so far as to question whether a movement can be said to exist when so many groups and Organisations are competing to access funding from the same shrinking pool of donors. They

argued that the resulting culture of competition hinders or even undermines true solidarity and collaboration. Whatever the cause, it appears there are few Organising links between nascent groups and more established ones and, as a result, limited political and resource synergies.

- **Broad range of groups and Organisations but few models of Organising.**

The study found a wide range of both trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations, especially in Eastern and Southern Africa, ranging from fairly well institutionalised Organisations to very small, one person-led groups. Southern Africa has some of the most institutionalised Organisations, such as Gender Dynamix, Iranti.org and S.H.E., Organising around trans\* issues and the Coalition of African Lesbians focusing on lesbian issues. The smallest trans\* and lesbian groups and Organisations tend to be found in East, Central, and West Africa.

The new generation of trans\* and lesbian groups and organisation are being formed at a time when the dominant form of social-change Organising is through NGO models. Practically all the groups and Organisations interviewed for this study have adopted these models, Organising either as community-based Organisations (CBOs) or non-profit companies (Eastern Africa), as NGOs or CBOs (Southern Africa and Anglophone West Africa), or as associations (Francophone West Africa). As a consequence, achieving legal registration as a trans\*, lesbian, or LGBTI group or organisation has become a major priority. In some countries, such as Kenya and Botswana, LGBTI groups have sued the state on the basis of freedom of association rights after being denied registration. Adopting NGO models and achieving legal registration also seem to be motivated by a desire to gain credibility for funding purposes.

Although all the lesbian and trans\*-led groups and Organisations identify as grassroots initiatives, their adoption of NGO models that require a corporate structure of governance and leadership militates against genuine grassroots engagement. The study found that, regardless of size or age, all the groups and Organisations invest considerable energy and resources toward the institutionalisation of their Organising and their work. The lack of capacity of staff, board members, and volunteers and the difficulty of recruiting qualified staff were recurrent themes in the interviews, but there was no analysis of how current models of Organising contribute to these challenges. What does it mean for trans\* and/or lesbian-led groups and Organisations to seek only formally educated staff while the majority in their communities have little access to formal education, often due to their gender identity or expression? The pursuit of institutionalised models of Organising arguably marginalises the very communities that trans\* and lesbian-led groups and Organisations were formed to support.

- **Steep learning curve.** Due to the discrimination they face in school, very

few trans\* individuals are able to access higher education. Many drop out as early as middle school. Trans\* individuals also have very limited employment options. Numerous studies have shown that, among LGBTI communities, trans\* communities have the highest rates of unemployment. The majority of trans\* activists interviewed for this study are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and are working with communities facing multiple forms of oppression. To compound the problem, activists have adopted a style of Organisational structure that requires particular managerial skills that cannot easily be found in their communities. As they move from being community organisers to leaders of Organisations, they face formidable challenges.

The study found with that, in most of the trans\*-led groups and Organisations, even in those that are fairly institutionalised, leaders are struggling to meet the administrative demands of running an organisation through the NGO model. The amount of time that needs to be spent responding to the needs of funders, designing programs to secure more funding, writing proposals and reports, evaluating programs, managing staff, and working with board members can be overwhelming. In particular, these demands gradually disconnect activists from the communities they are supposed to be serving:

*If you get money from the global fund, your organisation has to be super institutionalised. You have to get three quotes for everything; there has to be a procurement system in place; the filing system must be continuously updated, and more accountability systems put in place [..]As a result, we went from being an activist collective to only having one person in the field now – the rest of us have to be in the office, looking at paperwork and signing contracts to make sure that we comply with the grant agreements. This has been frustrating.*

Leigh Ann, S.H.E., South Africa

The pressure to institutionalise is creating a culture where activists are more concerned with learning how to run a corporate-style organisation than being actively involved in political work. Activists seem resigned to the idea that institutionalisation is the only option available to sustain the movement. What is not being discussed or acknowledged is how this culture of Organising is further marginalising trans\* and lesbian activists from a certain background – the ones with no formal education, the ones who are not fluent in English or French, and those from rural areas.

- **Deeper analysis of political work.** What is possible for the African trans\* movement given the complications that are part of it, particularly around the idea of patriarchy? And what does it mean to grow the movement under

these conditions? How does a trans woman experience patriarchy differently from a trans man or lesbian? What does trans\* feminist mean? What does lesbian feminist mean, or feminist for that matter? Where do all these struggles intersect? What does it mean for the movement that most of the trans men leaders who emerged from lesbian activism are now experiencing tensions and complications with the feminist and lesbian movements? There is little space or opportunity for activists to engage in conversations to support their thinking and reflection around how to build a politically cohesive movement with others in their communities and together.

The study found that activists are uncritically positioning themselves and Organising around particular needs that they know have available funding. Once they receive funding, very often project-based funding, activists quickly get caught up in delivering results. It then becomes difficult to engage in an analysis of their Organising in ways that bring other concerns of the communities into the frame of work. Even when groups and Organisations are able to articulate a whole range of needs facing their communities, these analyses are not necessarily translated into how they program their work or even translated into the funding they are able to access.

- **Striking a balance between the needs of communities and funder-driven agendas.** Groups and Organisations tend to get so caught up in “doing the work” that they have little or no space to have conversations around what they really want to do and how to organise around that. The fear of offending or scaring off donors by opening up and having honest conversations with them, together with the fact that the economic survival of most leaders is linked to that of their Organisations, further militates against the frank airing of problems. As a result, although groups and Organisations are usually formed to address particular, genuine needs, most of these needs remained unaddressed once the work of Organising begins.

The study found that many of the new Organising initiatives around trans\* issues focus increasingly on HIV/AIDS programming. This is particularly true for trans women-led groups and Organisations and constrains what can be envisioned for trans women-led Organising. Since funding for HIV/AIDS programming is done through the framework of key or most-at-risk populations, trans women-led groups can only access such funding from a male-bodied perspective as part of the MSM community. What that does to one's political identity as a trans woman does not require analysis.

Finally, to retain the support of benefactors, groups must compete with each other for funding by promoting only their own work, whether or not their Organising strategies are successful. This culture prevents activists from having collaborative dialogues where they can honestly share their failures

and successes (Smith, 2004).

## 2.3 Typology of Trans\*-led and Lesbian-led Groups and Organisations

This section of the report looks more closely at the data collected from the participants in this research study. It presents a typology of trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations, focusing on their locations, Organisational structures and capacities, the agendas driving their Organising, and the challenges they face in doing their work.

### 2.3.1 Map

As stated in the introduction, the data was collected mostly from Eastern and Southern Africa, the two regions that are currently the hub for trans\*-led and lesbian-led Organising in Sub-Saharan Africa. Out of the 24 groups and Organisations included in this study, 12 are based in East Africa, 10 in Southern Africa and two in West Africa. All but two were trans\*-led or lesbian-led.

As previously noted, Southern Africa has long been the hub for LGBTI Organising in Sub-Saharan Africa. All of the movements grouped together in the LGBTI acronym emerged first in South Africa. This has continued to influence the possibilities for change and set LGBTI agendas in Sub-Saharan Africa since the 1990s. However, the growth of LGBTI activism in South Africa has slowed down in the past few years due to the withdrawal of major donors from Southern Africa. Several pioneering LGBTI Organisations and groups in the region are now dormant, and most of those still active are struggling to survive.

In the meantime, East Africa, especially Kenya and Tansania, has emerged as a new hub for LGBTI Organising. Indeed, the patterns of donor interest and political work happening in these two countries, especially in Kenya, resemble those in South Africa ten years ago. Trans\* activists, in particular, are very active online, networking, building relationships, and increasing their visibility. As a result, it was fairly easy for this study to connect with East African trans\* activists through social media.

However, in both Southern Africa and East Africa, longtime lesbian-led groups and Organisations have either closed, become dormant, or are struggling to rebuild themselves. Nevertheless, as with nascent trans\* groups, the new generation of lesbian activists are also leveraging social media to increase their visibility and build communities free of geographic limitations.

In terms of LGBTI Organising, Central Africa suffers a certain geographic bias. Some countries in the region are often lumped together with East Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo), Southern Africa (Angola), or West Africa (Cameroon) and some, such as Gabon, Chad, or the Central African Republic, are seldom mentioned in activist space. There is little interest or attention from either LGBTI activists or donors in Central Africa as a separate region with its own political and cultural experience. Only in the last three years has the work of LGBTI activists in Central Africa been garnering some interest. The exception is Cameroon, where LGBTI activism has been strong for over a decade.

In West Africa, LGBTI activists have not been able to build movements across the language barriers that divide Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone countries. For example, Cape Verde is seldom mentioned in activist circles even though the country has the most progressive legislation protecting the rights of LGBTI individuals in the region. The language barrier, reinforced by the patterns of French, British, and U.S. donor support (including the presence of foundations), has strongly shaped the landscape of LGBTI Organising in West Africa. HIV prevention continues to be the dominant priority in the region, with Organising around the issue being done in such a narrow way that the issues of other groups within the LGBTI acronym are erased. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, gender non-confirming individuals formed the first association of its kind as early as the late 1990s, yet it was not until late 2015 that a new trans woman-led group emerged.

Table 1 below provides a list of trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations in the four regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. This list is based on information collected from activists who contributed to this study, from desk research, and from the researcher's own familiarity with Sub-Saharan LGBTI activism, but it does not claim to be exhaustive. It lists only countries where information was available, so the number of groups and Organisations listed may not represent the full reality of trans\* and lesbian-led Organising in the region. It should also be noted that the terms trans\*-led and lesbian-led have some limitations depending on context. Therefore, the categorisation of groups and Organisations in Table 1 does not necessarily reflect the reality of Organising on the ground.

Table 1 – Map of trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations

Country	Trans*-Led Groups And Organisations	Lesbian-Led Groups & Organisations
<b>Central Africa</b>		
<b>Cameroon</b>		AVAF Ensemble pour la lutte des libertés des entités sociales (ELLES) Lady's Cooperation Aramis
<b>Democratic Republic Of Congo (DRC)</b>		
<b>Eastern Africa</b>		
<b>Burundi</b>		
		Together for Women's Rights GYCA (Coalition Burundaise des jeunes filles contre le Sida)
<b>Kenya</b>	Jinsiangu Transgender Education and Advocacy (TEA)	Artistes for Recognition and Acceptance (AFRA) Kenya Deaf Queer Kenya Campus Ladies Association Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK) Minority Women in Action Persons Marginalised and Aggrieved (PEMA-Kenya) Voice of Women in Western Kenya (VOWECK)

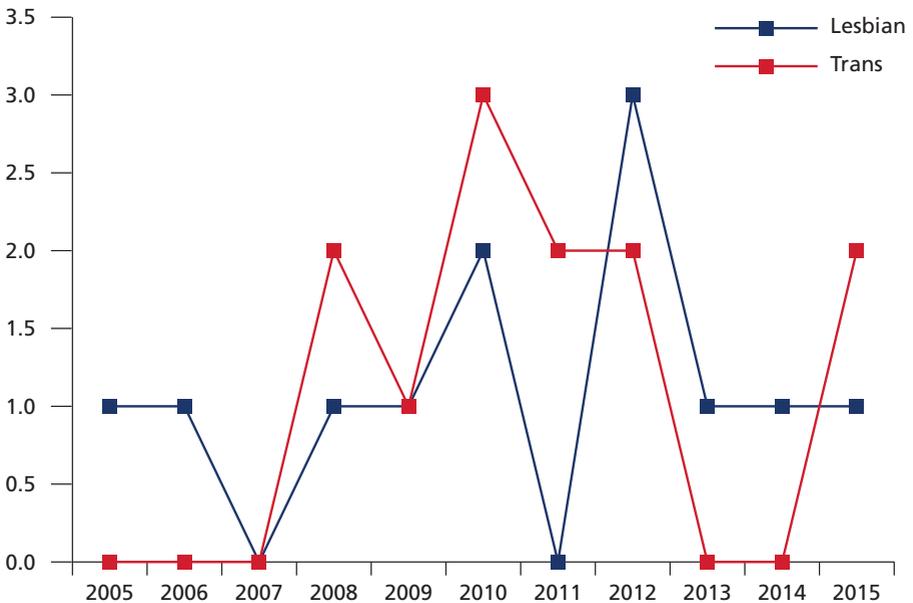
<b>Country</b>	<b>Trans*-Led Groups And Organisations</b>	<b>Lesbian-Led Groups &amp; Organisations</b>
<b>Uganda</b>	Transgender Organisation at Action for Transgender Rights Initiative (ATRi) Transgender Education Uganda (TEU) Uganda Network for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Persons (UNTGNC) Trans-Support Initiative Uganda (TSIU)	Blessed Rwensori Uganda Eastern Region Women Empowerment Organisation Crested Crane Lights Health and Rights Initiative Fem Alliance Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG)
<b>Rwanda</b>		Rights For All (RIFA)
<b>Tanzania</b>	Tanzania Community Empowerment Foundation (TACEF) House of Empowerment and Awareness in Tanzania (HEAT) Tanzania Trans Initiative (TTI)	Young Women's Solidarity Organisation
<b>Southern Africa</b>		
<b>Botswana</b>	Rainbow Identity Association (RIA)	Iris
<b>Lesotho</b>	Matrix Support Group	
<b>Namibia</b>	Wings to Transcend Namibia	Out-Right Namibia (ORN) Y-Fem

Country	Trans*-Led Groups And Organisations	Lesbian-Led Groups & Organisations
<b>South Africa</b>	Iranti.org	Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)
	Access Chapter 2	Durban Gay and Lesbian Community and Health Centre
	Gender Dynamix	HOLAAfrica!
	My Name is Rose	Luleki Siswe
	Social Health and Empowerment (Feminist Collective of Transgender and Intersex Women of Africa) (S.H.E.)	Free Gender
	Transgender Intersex Africa (TIA)	Mother tongue Project
	Rock of Hope	Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW)
	Trans Bantu Sambia (TBS)	The Lotus Identity
		Pakasipiti
		Voice of the Voiceless (VOVO)
<b>Swasiland</b>		
<b>Sambia</b>		
<b>Simbabwe</b>		

### 2.3.2 Age and Growth

Overall, 24 groups and Organisations from 14 countries participated in this study. Twenty-two were self-led, and there were an equal number of lesbian and trans\* groups and Organisations. Out of those 22 groups and Organisations, 15 were formed within the past five years and most in just the four years from 2011 to 2015. Eight (73%) of the trans\*-led groups and Organisations were founded between 2010 and 2015 and only three (27%) were formed before 2010. Five (45%) of the lesbian-led groups and Organisations were formed between 2000 and 2010, and six (55%) were founded between 2012 and 2015. Chart 1 below shows the year of formation of each group or organisation surveyed for this study.

**Chart 1 – Formation of trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups or Organisations**



This new generation of trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations is still in the initial stages of development. It is led for the most part by relatively inexperienced young leaders whose passion for change and community mobilisation is undoubted. However, many lack basic skills, including the capacity to conceptualise and program around the issues they want to address. Within this environment, new groups are proliferating, but many are not able to move past the initial stages (Armisen, 2015). Compounding leaders' inexperience, another factor hindering the growth of nascent groups and Organisations is privilege.

In most groups and Organisations, the founders and/or executive directors (EDs) enjoy certain structural privileges (tertiary educations, professional backgrounds, international connections, language skills, etc.) that most community members lack. They are then able to use their leadership positions to further enhance their privilege.

As in most social-change movements, the professionalisation of activism has created a culture where groups and Organisations led by those with the “right” background are able to access space and build connections with funders, while those led by activists with little formal education, who are not fluent in English or French, or who come from rural areas and thus lack access to certain privileged spaces struggle to mature past the nascent stage. Organisations such as S.H.E. and iranti.org, founded in 2010 and 2012 respectively, have become some of the most visible and relatively well-funded and institutionalised trans\*-led Organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa; whereas some the oldest trans\*-led Organisations, such Rainbow Identity Association in Botswana or Trans Bantu in Zambia, both founded in 2008, continue to operate at a similar level and capacity as nascent groups and Organisations.

### Case Study – Still struggling to grow: Rainbow Identity Association, Gaborone, Botswana

Rainbow Identity Association (RIA) is the first and only organisation in Botswana to focus on the needs and rights of transgender, intersex, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming individuals and communities in Botswana. RIA was formed in 2008 as a support group and registered as an organisation in 2010. As an advocacy organisation, RIA works nationally to address the challenges faced by trans\* and intersex communities in Botswana, promote their rights and access to services, and raise visibility around trans\* and intersex issues in order to minimise stigma and discrimination.

As a membership-based organisation – and to ensure that the voices of each identity within the organisation are heard – RIA is organised around five groups within the organisation: 1) trans women 2) trans men 3) gender non-conforming 4) intersex group and 5) allies (including other LGBT identities).

RIA's base-building work is done mainly through sport and recreational activities, but it continues to struggle to evolve beyond an emergent stage of development. According to the ED, confirmed by an analysis of RIA's 2013-2018 strategic plan, several factors are behind the organisation's struggle for autonomy and relevance. Influenced by feminist theory (the ED was an active member of the Coalition of African Lesbians), RIA's identity and work cannot be easily categorised. It works at the intersection of feminist and trans\* movements, but because the great majority of its members identify as gender non-conforming individuals, the organisation continues to struggle for space within both movements. Nascent trans\* movements

are Organising between the issues of trans women and trans men, while debates around trans men's access to women's spaces in the feminist movement continue to rage. In this context, and with an identity that defies neat categorisation, RIA's work is extremely underfunded compared, for example, to LEGABIBO, the main LGBT organisation in Botswana. Of the funding RIA does receive, 90 percent is project funding. This makes it difficult to invest in Organisational development or provide adequate compensation to the five staff members. Staff turnover, therefore, remains high, and the organisation is in a continuous stage of training new volunteers and staff and "starting over." In addition, RIA's leadership, including its board, is comprised of community members who are not professional organisers with established connections to funding institutions or easy access to Organising spaces.

### 2.3.3 Agendas

#### Political Agendas of Trans\*-led Groups and Organisations

*What are sexual and reproductive health rights for trans women? Is it surgery? Access to hormones? Is it safety? Is it access to employment?*

Leigh Ann, S.H.E.

There is a move toward building a broad trans\* movement, but currently the focus is much more on trying to build autonomous trans\*-led Organising at the local level. In Eastern Africa, nascent trans\*-led groups and Organisations are still figuring out how to mobilise their members, build understanding around the issues of their communities, and establish themselves as autonomous groups and Organisations. In Southern Africa, the study found some examples of ad hoc collaborations but no concerted action to build a movement around common agendas. The predominant trend the study found is that emerging trans\*-led Organising in these two regions is driven by the personal agendas of leaders. Because LGBTI activists engage in Organising mostly from a place of violation, the personal is very much political. Leaders' everyday life experiences naturally tend to drive the political agenda of many groups. While this is a powerful source of transformative leadership, it can also threaten leadership continuity and Organisational sustainability.

Activists acknowledged that the focus on base-building has not yet allowed enough space for groups to have conversations around how to build an African trans\* movement. However, this situation is evolving. The beginning of such conversations took place at the last Changing Spaces, Changing Faces (CFCS) event in Kenya in June 2015. A two-day preconference provided trans\* activists with a space to engage in conversations around building African trans\* activism and identifying common agendas. Trans women activists concluded that gender recognition was their main priority and identified the following focus points:

- Social and cultural rights

- Violence in the broadest sense: personal and structural
- Economic justice
- Access to health
- Access to justice
- Legal and social gender recognition.<sup>1</sup>

In theory, trans\*-led groups and Organisations are mobilising around the issues of violence, legal reforms, access to health and education, sex workers' rights, and defining African trans\* feminism. At group and Organisational level, however, the priorities remain deeply rooted in the personal backgrounds of the leaders. In Eastern Africa, for example, the majority of the nascent trans women's groups and Organisations are mobilising around sex work and HIV/AIDS, while the agenda around legal reform seems to have been set and driven by only one organisation in Kenya. In Southern Africa, where trans men's groups and Organisations are predominant, the focus is increasingly on legal reforms (gender recognition), access to health (gender reassignment surgery and access to hormones), and the issues of black trans\* individuals and communities. Here also, it appears that only one organisation is driving the issue of trans feminism.

Donor agendas are instrumental in determining priorities and efforts across the regions. In particular, HIV/AIDS programming and the new emphasis on policy and legal reforms are obscuring the larger goal of radical social change and driving agendas based around gender markers, provision of direct services, and reform of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) codes. Several respondents acknowledged that if they were able to apply for grants to address the real needs of their communities, their work might be very different and more diverse than it currently is.

*We are also looking at IGA [income generating activities], something that donors do not want to hear about – but really when we look at the situation on the ground, most people just want to get on with their lives and contribute to society. We never wanted to have this victim mentality. If we are just given a chance, setting up small businesses, providing micro-finances and all that, I believe we could go very very far.*

McCarthy and Toni, Jinsiangu, Kenya

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1 Notes from African Trans Women Advocacy Plan

Across the board, this study identified the following common agendas:

1. **Base-building.** Trans\* groups and Organisations are creating safe spaces to mobilise their members, engage in community awareness-raising, and increase visibility and acceptance of trans\* communities.
2. **Health.** Trans\* activists are increasingly engaging in advocacy to challenge transphobic health standards and increase appropriate access to health services for their communities. The most common health priorities for the groups surveyed were:
  - Access to hormones
  - Access to sexual and reproductive health
  - Access to gender-reaffirming surgeries
  - Therapy
  - Outreach to and education of health-care providers
  - HIV/AIDS prevention.
3. **Legal reforms.** The study found that gender recognition on identity documents and other privacy issues (gender markers), together with constitutional reform (Kenya) to include gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics as bases of non-discrimination, were among the top priorities.
4. **Access to employment.** In Eastern Africa, trans\* activists are thinking around how to promote access to employment and create self-employment opportunities for their community members.
5. **Trans\* sex workers' rights.** Trans women activists are working toward ending stigma and discrimination, advocating for fair and safe working conditions, mobilising trans\* sex workers around their rights, and raising visibility around the lived realities of trans women sex workers.

### **Political Agendas of Lesbian-led Groups and Organisations**

After more than a decade of Organising, lesbian groups and Organisations have yet to experience the level of interest that newer trans\*-led groups and issues are now generating. From funders to activists, the question “what are lesbian issues?” continues to be advanced to justify the marginalisation of lesbian issues and Organising within the broader LGBTI movement. There seems to be little interest in supporting lesbian activists to articulate their issues on their own terms.

Nevertheless, the study found that newer lesbian-led groups and Organisations seem to be using this lack of interest to their advantage in order to create space

for an analysis and articulation of their political agenda. Moreover, it appears that lesbian-led groups and Organisations are learning and experimenting with models of Organising and mobilising that reflect their particular understanding of feminist ideology. According to Neville Gabriel of The Other Foundation, the new generation of lesbian groups are no longer following the standard NGO script, but Organising instead around art collectives (AFRA-Kenya and Mother Tongue Project in South Africa), social media (HOLAAfrica! in South Africa), or grassroots collectives (Voice of the Voiceless – VOVO).

*We began the online space due the lack of space on the Internet where African queer women would be able to go online and see representations of themselves. Often what we observed was that a great number of the stories and representations of sexuality were western in nature, and although there was sometimes overlap, there was still the problem that very little material was being produced from within the African continent. We felt a strong need to archive and proliferate the stories of African women in terms of sexuality and sex and thus started the platform to invite women to tell their stories.*

Tiffany K.M. and Siphumese K. – HOLAAfrica! South Africa

Organising at the intersection of women's rights, feminism, human rights, and LGBTI rights, the work of the new generation of lesbian activists is driven by emerging issues facing their communities, but uses sexual health and reproductive rights as entry points to mobilise their communities and build bridges with other movements. Three broad agendas inform the new lesbian-led Organising: 1) sexual rights and reproductive health, 2) violence against LB women and 3) building bridges and increasing the visibility around LB issues within other movements and in society as a whole. The study found that while the activism of young lesbians is rooted in feminist ideologies, it seems that they

### Spotlight: Voice of the Voiceless – VOVO

Formed in 2013 with a mission to integrate a feminist approach to change and to challenge attitudes, beliefs, and norms that limit or exclude marginalised communities from affirming their human rights, VOVO is a feminist collective founded and led by lesbian and bisexual women and trans (LBT) persons in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. It has a core membership of ten people who are responsible for programming and administrative duties.

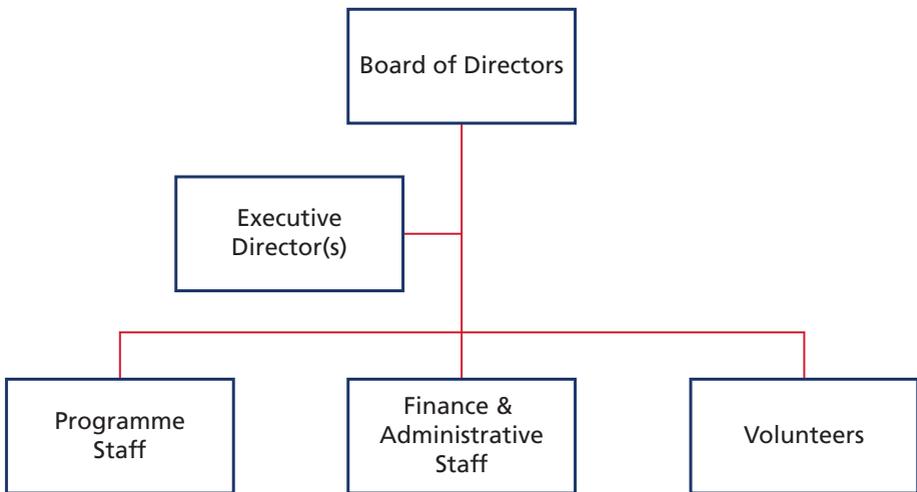
Based around a feminist ideology of challenging patriarchy, VOVO seeks to explore alternative ways to organise and build a movement. It aims in particular to increase the visibility of LBT women's issues within the LGBTI community and in the wider women's rights movement and demonstrate the intersectionality of women's struggles for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

are interrogating and actively trying to define their own understanding and practice of queer feminism.

### 2.3.4 Organisational Structure and Capacity

As previously stated, most of the trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations surveyed for this study have adopted structures based on NGO models that rely on a top-down managerial style. With the exception of a few lesbian-led collectives mentioned above, the study found that all the groups and Organisations have a similar structure (Chart 2). Some of the limitations that result from adopting the practices of this model of Organising are discussed below.

**Chart 2 – Organisational chart of most trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations**



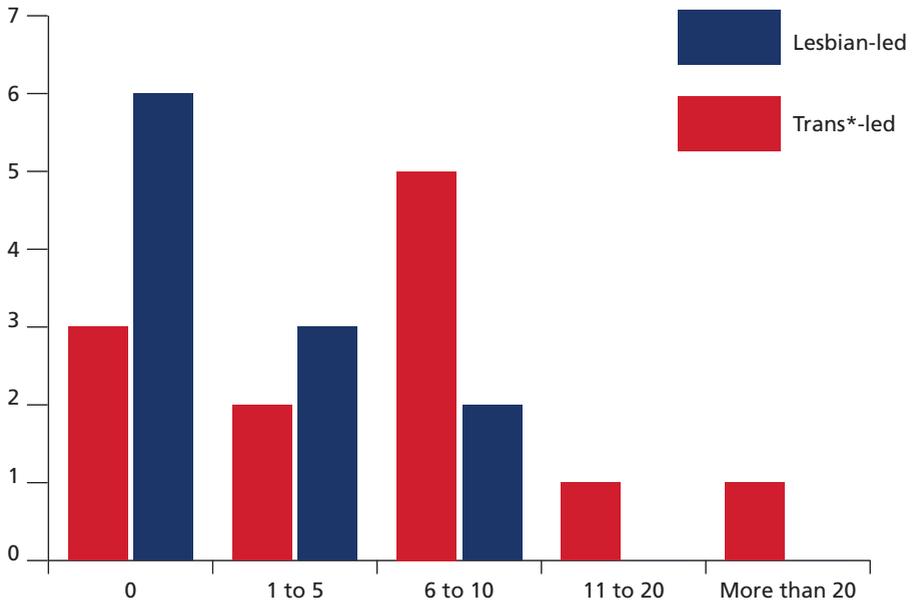
Weak and/or inactive governance. For registration purposes and/or to respond to donor expectations of corporate style decision-making structures, the nascent groups and Organisations have all adopted a model in which either a board of directors (or similar body of advisors) or a steering committee is their highest decision-making body. The study found that, on average, groups and Organisations have five board or steering committee members, most of whom are community members. Increasingly, however, board members are being sought from the academic, mainstream NGO, and even corporate sectors. Under the NGO model, boards of directors support EDs with resource mobilisation, oversee financial management, help define an organisation’s political agenda, and act as key support for the ED and staff.

Without a deeper assessment of internal capacities (both Organisational and within communities), groups and Organisations have adopted governance structures that are unfamiliar to them and their community members. EDs readily acknowledged the resulting added stress and workload that come with adopting such structures. In addition to learning how to manage an organisation as they go, the already overstretched leaders also have to learn how to work with and build a board or steering committee. When asked about the contribution of this model of decision-making, the overwhelming majority of respondents expressed frustration or even despair. Most spoke at length about the weakness and/or inertia of their boards and steering committees but without questioning the appropriateness of such governance structures for the realities of their communities and their work.

At the same time, privileged leaders are tapping into their connections by recruiting board members from the diaspora, corporate sector, academia, and mainstream NGO sectors, yet they do not acknowledge or analyse the fact that most such recruits will not be deeply connected to the communities the Organisations are working with and for. Those who enjoy structural privileges hold the power to dictate the direction of activism within a group or organisation (Sachdev, 2012), but with little collaboration or sharing taking place, neither board members or EDs of nascent groups and Organisations have opportunities to learn from others. Indeed, the culture of board development is unheard of in the movement. Recruiting staff from the community, on the other hand, may require additional resources for staff development (Eisfeld, Gunther and Shlasko, 2014).

Mismatch between staff/volunteer capacity and Organisational needs. The term paid staff tends to be used loosely within the movement. Only a handful of respondents acknowledged that their "paid staff" generally receive an allowance rather than a living wage. Fifty-five percent of lesbian-led groups and Organisations have no paid staff at all, compared to 27 percent of trans\*-led ones. Among the lesbian-led Organisations surveyed, the two with the most paid staff are both mainstream LGBTI Organisations. Thirty six percent of trans\*-led Organisations have six or more staff members, while 27 percent have either four or five. The largest has 22 paid staff members. Chart 3 below shows the number of paid staff for all 22 groups and Organisations surveyed.

**Chart 3 – Numbers of paid staff**



Except for the few lesbian collectives, all groups and Organisations surveyed have executive directors, officers (program, advocacy, finance, etc.), and volunteers. However most staff lack the educational backgrounds or professional skills to fully handle their responsibilities, a fact readily acknowledged by most of those surveyed. Trans\*-led groups and Organisations are the most disadvantaged due to the extra difficulties trans\* persons face in accessing education and employment.

Due to the type of funding (project grants) that both trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations are able to access, most respondents shared the untenable position of striving to develop their Organisational capacity with no funding to support overheads.

In order for LGBTQ groups and Organisations to develop their institutional capacity, they need funds and funding partners to support long-term growth. Funders, on the other hand, typically want to support only strong Organisations with track records of successful project implementation and demonstrated capacity to manage large grants. This situation can become a "Catch-22," with Organisations lacking the capacity to secure the funds they require to build their capacity to secure funding (Armisen, 2015).

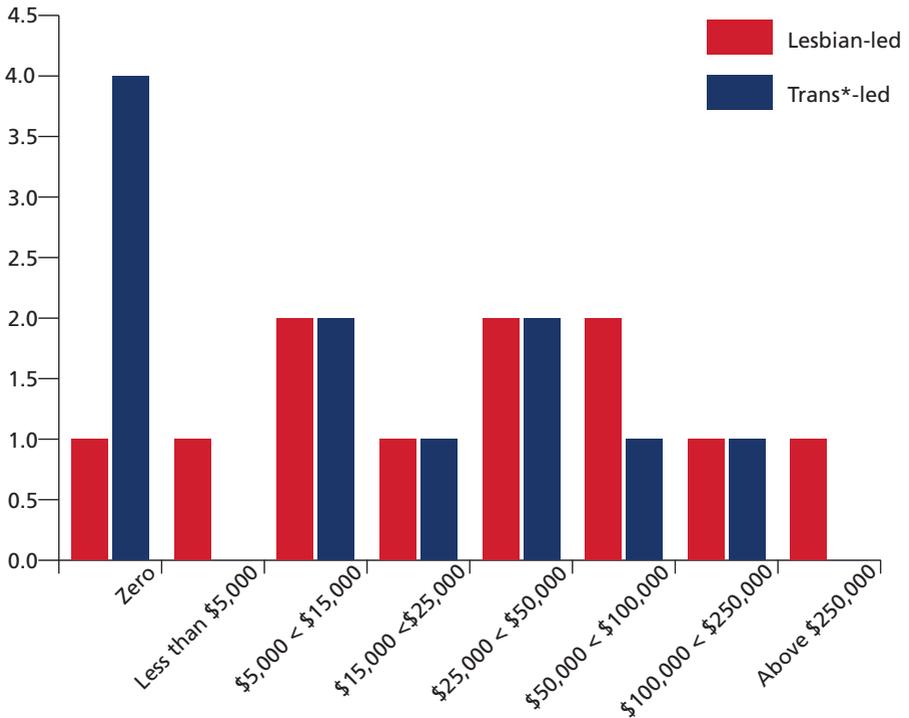
## 2.3.5 Challenges

### Under-resourced, Overstretched and Overregulated

*Groups like us give such small grants [that] I'm always amazed that anyone is able to do any real work with such small grants. It's remarkable. That being said, these groups are running from one funder to the next, trying to get small grants. Which becomes impossible – we are creating the monsters, in that the whole experience of this type of work then becomes [a matter of] trying to charm and impress the funders. (Neville Gabriel, The Other Foundation)*

The available information on funds raised in 2015 is summarised below in Chart 4. Data was forthcoming from all groups and Organisations with the exception of one lesbian-led group. The study found that, although a handful have fairly large budgets, most trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations operate with extremely limited resources.

**Chart 4 – Money raised in 2015**



The data gathered on money raised in 2015 shows that trans\*-led groups and Organisations were considerably more successful (10 out of 11) in raising funds in 2015 than lesbian-led ones (7 out of 11). On the other hand, the minimum amount raised by trans\*-led groups and Organisations was smaller (\$4,000) than that raised by lesbian-led groups and Organisations (\$7,000), but the maximum raised by a trans\*-led organisation was greater (above \$250,000) than that raised by a lesbian-led organisation (\$200,000). It should be noted that the lesbian-led organisation works on general LGBTI issues rather than lesbian issues.

All participants in this study acknowledged the difficulty of accessing core support funding. Groups estimated that about 80 percent of grants in 2015 were project grants. According to respondents, most funders allow only ten to 20 percent of project funding to be used for core support, and only after difficult negotiations. Few funders provide grants specifically for core support, but many groups and Organisations still feel the need to allocate between 30 and 40 percent of any such support they receive to programs in order to ensure their success.

*All funders want to visit your office but don't want to pay for office overheads. (Skipper, Rainbow Identity Association, Botswana)*

Unlike lesbian-led groups and Organisations, trans\*-led groups and Organisations can at least tap into HIV/AIDS funds, usually as sub-sub-grantees of bilateral funding agencies. These types of grants tend to be very small in size, yet they are overregulated, with strict, complex protocols, including multiple reporting cycles, that consume groups' time and energy.

*You have to compete with this corporate CEO and the funder's new way of doing things. Part of that whole process is that you can only have about 30 percent of your overhead in a grant; so you have to have about 8 or 10 grant proposals or grant incomes to cover all your staff and overhead and those 8 or 10 programs keep your staff so busy – funders want an interim report and a final report and you have to plan for next year so you have three or four of your staff secured. I mean it really is hectic and so you have like basically three staff in your office doing administration just to keep this business type of machine running. (Liesl Theron, former Founding ED, Gender Dynamix, South Africa)*

Both funders and EDs who were interviewed acknowledged that EDs end up spending about 90 percent of their time either researching calls for proposals, responding to proposals, or writing grant or program reports. Yet they still have to find the time to run their Organisations and implement the various small projects they manage to receive funding for.

## Navigating Leadership Transitions and Sustaining Organisational Growth

We were interested to find out how EDs develop and plan for leadership transitions, so in addition to current leaders of the 22 groups and Organisations, we interviewed four former heads of three Organisations – Minority Women in Action, Gender Dynamix, and Pan Africa ILGA. Across the board, the following challenges were identified:

- **Staff development is an urgent need but an untenable goal.** Groups and Organisations operate in an environment of financial insecurity based on one-year grants, which makes it impossible to plan or achieve staff and Organisational development. When groups and Organisations are able to compensate their staff, they usually can only provide allowances rather than salaries. As a result, the best staff often leave for more stable jobs and higher salaries elsewhere. And because most EDs go from being community organisers to organisation managers overnight, with practically no training, they have to learn everything as they go while spending 90 percent of their time trying to raise funds.

**Unsustainable modes of working.** Groups and Organisations operate in a state of constant crisis at the community and/or Organisational level. Respondents reported working seven days a week, sometimes up to 12 hours a day. Most EDs identified burnout as an emerging health hazard but said they lacked support to care for themselves and their staff. Ironically, activists are endangering their own health while working to increase their communities' access to healthcare. Liesl Theron told us that, during her time at Gender Dynamix, it took the organisation nine years before it was able to contribute 800 rands (roughly \$73 USD) towards the cheapest medical plan for its staff members. She estimated that 85 percent of staff who left the organisation left because they felt burned out. There is a growing feeling of being trapped - although they are burned out, most EDs feel they cannot leave an organisation they have dedicated years to build. They fear it will collapse without them. In any case, since their economic survival is often linked to their activism, leaving means the collapse of their own livelihood.

*We have no mechanism for coping in our Organisations. In my organisation, we started talking about health and well-being – for two weeks, on a Friday afternoon we would do like a movie and eat popcorn, just to be with one another. But by the third week, people started to drop out because this one is chasing a deadline, this other has a report due. All of the effort just went out the window, which is sad to me because we are putting our health at risk. (Leigh Ann, S.H.E.)*

Against this background, planning for leadership transitions is practically

## Moving forward after a leadership change: the case of Minority Women in Action (MWA), Nairobi, Kenya

Founded in 2006, MWA was the first lesbian and bisexual women's group in Kenya. As such, it played a key role in building LB communities in Kenya and in the formation of the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK). With a volunteer steering committee doing the bulk of its work from its inception until 2013, MWA was a leading force on LB rights in Eastern Africa and represented the issues of queer African women in international arenas. MWA was elected as the Women's Secretariat of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) in 2011.

While focusing more and more on international work, MWA struggled to create a space internally to assess the sustainability of its Organisational practice and reflect on the results of its work at the community-level. In 2013, a combination of factors brought the coordinator and several committee members to leave their positions. The organisation struggled to fill the gap and, as a result, MWA went dormant for the next two years, despite having a clear plan to elect a new steering committee to ensure continuity of leadership. It was not until May 2015 that MWA was able to hold a meeting to elect a new steering committee and begin the process of renewing the organisation.

impossible. It also comes with an added burden. To be able to step out of their position, EDs have to raise more funds to hire new leaders. This is extremely difficult, as most EDs begin to think about transitioning only after they have reached a state where they can no longer keep going. In a capitalist culture of competition, progress, and unending to-do lists, where growth is fetishised and everything is urgent, trying to push yourself into a "better" place seems like the logical, sensible thing to do. Sometimes it feels like the only thing to do because anything else feels like defeat (Stephenson, 2016).

- **Sustaining groups beyond individual leadership.** Some of those interviewed for this study have directly experienced the struggle around sustainability after a longtime ED has left a group or organisation. In their experience, several factors contribute to the ensuing crisis, regardless of whether the ED's departure was sudden or planned for:
  - Most opportunities to access leadership training remain limited to heads of groups and Organisations, so the impact of these trainings is limited. They contribute to the professional development of individual leaders rather than the development of the entire organisation, and in any case, leaders who want to exercise their newly acquired skills have no budget for new initiatives. As a result, when they leave the organisation, they take their skills with them, and the cycle begins again.

- In the current state of the LGBTI movement, the identity of most groups and Organisations is closely linked to those of their leaders, usually as founding EDs. Moreover, the dominant leadership style is an individualised type linked to an elite class of activists who have access to spaces, are able to build relationship with funders, and create visibility for themselves and their Organisations. None of the groups and Organisations surveyed has a culture of deliberately grooming new leaders from within.
- Because fundraising is mostly based on relationships with donors' program officers, new leaders who step into the shoes of former leaders face formidable challenges. They have no relationships of their own with funders and thus find it very difficult to raise funds, yet they are expected to deliver the same results as their predecessors.
- Finally, since founding EDs are deeply connected to the work of their groups and Organisations, most make huge sacrifices and contribute a great deal of unpaid labor and to establish and build their Organisations. Once they leave, it is extremely difficult to find anyone else willing to shoulder such responsibilities for inadequate compensation.

# 3. Recommendations

Be flexible about what structures to expect as funders. While most funders make the case for supporting grassroots groups, in practice a great deal of pressure is put on groups to structure themselves as NGOs, reflected in the frenzy to register, elect a board, and develop strategic plans and financial and human resource management policies. This is happening in an environment where little to no attention is given to working with groups to create Organisational structures that reflect their actual capacities and specific contexts. Throughout the research, trans\*-led groups expressed a desire for funders to accommodate groups' actual stage of development rather than demanding the types of structure and quality of performance expected of Organisations in a mature stage of development.

Be open to diversity of identities and local definitions that fit local contexts. Within LGBTI communities, there is a considerable diversity and fluidity of gender expression and identity. Many activists begin their activism identifying with one group but, in the course of their personal journey, adopt another gender identity. For example, some trans women and trans men first identify as MSM and lesbians respectively before identifying with trans\* communities. Several feminists work on gender and sexuality, particularly around lesbian issues, but do not organise as lesbian activists, while some lesbian-led Organisations have no programming for lesbian communities. While it is critical to support self-led groups and Organisations, funders should be aware of the diversity of actors engaged in work around lesbian and trans\* issues. Groups and Organisations should be evaluated using more than just the gender expressions and identities of their EDs. In particular, the diversity of the communities they serve should be considered in addition to their stated missions.

Invest in the people: facilitate the development of peer learning and peer support mechanism for leaders of Organisations. The current culture of queer Organising and funding overvalues rapid results while overlooking the human needs of those who do the work. Leaders and their groups and Organisations lack the most basic support to cope with the stress and isolation they experience. As a result, the movement is losing activists to burnout. Enabling groups and Organisations to budget for staff retreats and sabbaticals for EDs is as critical as investing in systems and structures. Working with EDs as a cohort and engaging them together to develop a peer-support mechanism will create a space where they can engage in honest reflections on the challenges of leadership, act as coaches/mentors, provide moral support to one another, and keep their energy and enthusiasm alive.

Support leadership development and plan for leadership change. Currently, queer Organising is funded in ways that showcase individual Organisational performance and celebrate individual leadership, such as through awards, yet groups and Organisations are not supported to increase their pools of skills and knowledge or to invest in leadership continuity. Leadership development requires fostering a culture of solidarity and shared ownership. Donors should play a role by engaging proactively with groups and Organisations about leadership continuity and/or change and providing support, such as through consultancies, to help groups and Organisations develop both short-term and long-term leadership transition and succession plans.

Stay engaged with groups and Organisations. Across the board, groups and Organisations confirmed how important it was for funders to maintain ongoing communication and interest in their work. Regular check-ins with funders to share progress and challenges and to identify opportunities for improvement were universally cited as good practice. Donors who engage in honest conversations with their grantees, treating them as equal partners while recognising the power dynamic, will build trust and develop deeper relationships.

Do not provide core support while expecting project results. Most grant applications and reporting forms for the small number of core support grants available to trans\*-led and lesbian-led groups and Organisations require them to include the activities they intend to implement during the grant period. This encourages groups and Organisations to allocate a percentage of much-needed funds toward projects in order to demonstrate relevance and increase the chances of a renewal grant. Unrestricted core support might also lead under-funded groups and Organisations to allocate grants less strategically. One solution might be to incorporate discussions on Organisational health into the normal due diligence of grant-making. Funders could then work with grantees to identify capacity-building needs, so that, by the time grantees receive unrestricted core support, they will appreciate the value of investing a portion of that support in Organisational development.

Do further research. In order to break the habit of subsuming lesbian Organising into general LBGTI activism and to put the case for more strategic funding of it, we need to know more, and at a more granular level, about the issues and practices of Organising led by lesbian activists. Further research on trans\*-led Organising is also necessary to understand the diversity of issues and actors driving this nascent movement. Research to map the donors and funding patterns of both movements would help rectify erroneous assumptions around funding of lesbian activism and provide hard evidence for the importance of more concerted support.

# 4. Appendix

## 4.1 Notes

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## 4.2 Lists of Groups, Organisations and other Respondents

Country	Organisation & Groups	Communities served
Burundi	Mouvement pour les libertés individuelles (MOLI)	LGBTI
Botswana	Rainbow Identity Association	Trans*, intersex & gender non-conforming individuals
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	ARAMIS	LGBTI
Kenya	Jinsiangu	Trans*, intersex & gender non-conforming individuals
	Persons Marginalised and Aggrieved (PEMA)	LGBTI
	Initiative for Equality and Nondiscrimination (INEND)	LGBTI
	Voices of Women in Western Kenya (VOWECK)	LB, rural women and girls
	Transgender Education and Advocacy	Trans*
Liberia	Lesbian and Gay Association of Liberia (LEGAL)	LGBTI
Mauritius	Collectif Arc-en-Ciel	LGBT
Namibia	Young Feminists Movement Namibia (Y-fem)	Lesbian and rural women
Uganda	Health and Rights Initiative (HRI)	LBT

<b>Country</b>	<b>Organisation &amp; Groups</b>	<b>Communities served</b>
	Transgender Education Uganda (TEU)	TI
	Uganda Network for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Persons (UNTGNC)	T and sex workers
Sierra Leone	Concerned Women Initiative	LBT
South Africa	HOOLA!Africa!	African Queer women on the continent and in the Diaspora
	Transgender and Intersex Africa (TIA)	TI
	Social Health and Empowerment (feminist collective of transgender and intersex women of Africa) (S.H.E.)	Trans*
Swasiland	Rock of Hope	LGBTI
Tanzania	House of Empowerment and Awareness in Tanzania (HEAT)	LGBTI and sex workers
	Tanzania Community Empowerment Foundation (TACEF)	T and sex workers
Sambia	Trans Bantu	Trans*
Simbabwe	Voices of Voiceless (VOVO)	LBT
	Gays and Lesbians of Simbabwe (GALS)	LGBTI

## **Foundation/Funds and International NGO**

Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice

American Jewish World Service

CoC Netherlands

Human Rights Watch

Mama Cash

UHAI-EASHRI

The Other Foundation

## **Independent Activists**

Akinyi Ocholla

Lame Olebile

Liesl Theron

Monica Tabengwa



# The Baring Foundation

60 London Wall  
London EC2M 5TQ

020 7767 1348  
[www.baringfoundation.org.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk)

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