

# **Speaking with Care**

**A Manual to Prevent, Mitigate, and Counter Hate  
Speech Targeting Sexual and Gender Minorities  
in East Africa**

Edited by Brian Pellot

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# Acknowledgements

This manual stems from a workshop the Rafto Foundation for Human Rights and Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) convened with 15 people in Nairobi in June 2017 on how hate speech affects sexual and gender minorities. Discussions revealed the unique and powerful role personal narratives can play in enhancing empathy for marginalized communities and demonstrated some of the real and lasting harms hate speech can inflict. Our time together highlighted the important role religious belief plays in motivating people of faith to care for and protect sexual and gender minorities as equal members of our communities.

Faith leaders at our gathering communicated a shared understanding that all persons — regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression — should be respected. They embraced the notion that God affirms all forms of selfless love and emphasized the special duty society shares to protect and care for those who suffer from hate speech, violence, harassment, or exclusion. Ultimately, participants agreed that sexual and gender minorities should enjoy the same fundamental rights all humans deserve including freedom of expression, association, religion, and belief.

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*The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of its authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Sexual Minorities Uganda or the Rafto Foundation for Human Rights.*

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# Foreword

This manual explores the dangerous effects of hate speech and discrimination directed at sexual and gender minorities in East Africa, specifically in Kenya and Uganda. It presents guidance and strategies to identify, prevent, mitigate, and counter hate speech based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions and to promote human rights.

Our target audience is not the sexual and gender minorities most directly and negatively impacted by such hatred (though they too will likely find use for this guide), but rather the friends, families, faith leaders, and wider community who surround them — critical allies who share a civic duty to uphold universal human rights and a moral duty to protect fellow citizens from the harms of hate speech.

Despite attempts to deny or erase their existence, sexual and gender minorities live at all levels and in all realms of our societies. Teachers have a duty to their pupils, religious leaders to their congregations, journalists to their audiences, health workers to their patients, social workers to their clients, police officers to their wards, parents to their children, and neighbours to their neighbours — a duty to respect dignity, to champion equality, and to fight for the basic rights of all people regardless of who they love, what they wear, or how they identify.

Our basic humanity requires us to serve as guardians to those in need. Societies that ostracize, marginalize and discriminate against minority members fail the community as a whole. We must act as our brothers' and sisters' keepers to ensure our communal welfare, lest we repeat some of history's gravest mistakes.

German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller's poem "[First they came...](#)", written about the Nazis' rise to power and subsequent slaughter of millions of people, offers a cautionary tale of the atrocities that can unfold when good people stay silent and fail to defend those in need.

*First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out —  
Because I was not a socialist.*

*Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out —  
Because I was not a trade unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out —  
Because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me.*

As Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu said at the height of apartheid, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

We hope you use this manual to speak out against hate speech and to champion the human rights of sexual and gender minorities in your communities and of all marginalized people around the world.

Brian Pellot, Editor  
Cape Town, South Africa  
December 2018

# Introduction to Hate Speech

Sometimes hate speech merely reinforces unpleasant stereotypes. When tensions are high, when simmering hatred boils over, it can contribute to evils far worse.

In 1994, Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines used hate-filled broadcasts to exacerbate Rwanda's genocide. By the end of the conflict, up to 1 million people were dead and millions more displaced. During the 2007 election in Kenya, bloggers and social media users labelled opponents "snakes", "maggots" and "vultures." More than 1,200 people were massacred in the melee that followed. In October 2010, a Ugandan tabloid published an article with the headline "100 PICTURES OF UGANDA'S TOP HOMOS LEAK" alongside the caption "Hang Them". Three months later, sexual and gender minorities rights activist David Kato was murdered.

In East Africa and in many regions of the world, unscrupulous journalists, politicians, religious leaders, and other prominent public figures use homophobic and transphobic hate speech to rally public support around a common perceived enemy — sexual and gender minorities — distracting citizens from other economic, political, or social concerns. By branding same-sex attraction and gender non-conformity as unAfrican, ungodly, sinful, amoral, illegal, or unacceptable, these populist leaders create scapegoats out of already vulnerable minorities, putting them at increased risk of discrimination, persecution, and attack.

It's clear that hate speech can lead to violence, but what constitutes hate speech, and how do we balance a universal right to freedom of expression with a real need to prevent the spread of dangerous rhetoric?

## What Constitutes Hate Speech?

Hate speech is not clearly defined in international human rights law but usually includes all forms of expression that spread, incite, promote, or justify hatred or intolerance that threatens social peace.

[Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) broadly defines hate speech as any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence. Other definitions include ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. Some countries outlaw speech intended to and likely to provoke imminent lawless action — a very high threshold. The legal bar is much lower in other countries, resulting in bans on homophobia, racism, blasphemy, religious defamation, and a range of other speech and thought crimes.

Hate speech typically denigrates people on the basis of their individual or group identities. Rather than judging what people do, hate speech condemns who they are. It includes the words that come out of a person's mouth but also writing, body language, displays, and other forms of communication that disparage marginalized or protected groups. Legal discrepancies and local sensitivities mean that the same words or gestures might be considered discriminatory, hateful, offensive, dangerous, libellous, blasphemous, treasonous, seditious, or perfectly acceptable in different countries and contexts.

Intent matters, but sometimes hatred or disgust towards a group is so entrenched in society that seemingly good people perpetuate hate speech that incites violence or discrimination without realizing what they are doing or pausing to consider the consequences. If someone calls you an animal and threatens to kill you for who you love, that's hate speech. If someone says you are amoral, ungodly, or sinful for who you love or how you identify, it may not necessarily constitute hate speech, but it likely contributes to a climate that oppresses and harms you and others like you in your community. Legality aside, we have a moral obligation to prevent, mitigate, and counter hate speech whenever possible.

As demonstrated in this chapter's opening examples from Rwanda, Kenya, and Uganda, hate speech often exacerbates existing hostilities and intolerance. If "unpleasant stereotypes" are smouldering embers of hatred in a community, one strong wind — a flurry of dehumanizing hate speech during a particularly tense time — can ignite the flames of atrocity.

[ILGA-Europe](#), a regional group of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, offers the following insight about why it is important to focus on hate crime and hate speech against LGBTQI+ people:

*"In general, hate crime and hate speech aim to undermine the dignity and value of a human being belonging to a particular social group. On a wider scale, it sends a negative message to LGBTQI+ communities, their supporters and the rest of the society. It implies that a particular social group does not deserve recognition, respect, and equality and tries to legitimize attacks on members of that group."*

## **Five-Point Test to Identify and Respond to Hate Speech**

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, the Ethical Journalism Network created a [five-point test for journalists](#) to use to identify hate speech. As human rights defenders, we can use a similar test to monitor and respond to hate speech in our communities.

### **1. The position or status of the speaker**

If a prominent figure in your community, perhaps a religious leader or politician, makes hateful, false, or malicious proclamations, those statements should be publicly scrutinized and corrected



using a platform of equal reach. If a private person — maybe a friend, neighbour, or family member — expresses hatred towards sexual or gender minorities or other marginalized groups in a small private setting, you may wish to speak to them privately about how such expressions contribute to a climate of hatred that brings real harm to people in your community. We must be cognizant of the power dynamics that shape our every interaction and relationship. Parents, siblings, teachers, employers, nurses, landlords, and other community members may not be public figures or hold much authority in society-at-large, but at the personal level, they can hold great power over LGBTQI+ people, the abuse of which can cause devastating effects.

## **2. The reach of the speech**

Limited off-colour remarks in private can contribute to an environment of hostility and intolerance, but such conversations are unlikely to produce much immediate harm. That changes if hateful remarks are repeatedly or widely broadcast for all to see, a good indicator that the speaker may be trying to deliberately promote hostility. Are social media companies, local media outlets, political parties, or houses of worship providing platforms for hate speech in your community? With great reach comes great responsibility. The same is true on a smaller scale among tight-knit communities. If a teacher spreads hate speech about sexual and gender minorities in the classroom, any actual or suspected LGBTQI+ students will likely face more bullying and harassment. A priest spreading hate speech from the pulpit may incite similar harm for LGBTQI+ congregants.

## **3. The objectives of the speech**

Try to determine whether speech is deliberately designed to denigrate the rights of minorities or to exclude or marginalize their participation in society. If so, and if such hate speech is subject to legal sanctions in your country, you may wish to contact the relevant authorities. Additionally or alternatively, you could publicly condemn the speech and encourage the speaker to use more respectful language. If you suspect the hate speech was unintentional, or that whoever was responsible for it may be open-minded enough to change their tune, reach out to that person and start a dialogue.

## **4. The content and form of speech**

Prominent figures' public remarks can become dangerous when they incite violence or intensify hatred. Some speakers take a fire and brimstone approach, pounding on the podium and screaming and flailing until their voices go hoarse. Others are more subdued and insidious. Listen to what the speaker says, but also listen for any hidden messages the audience might hear based on tone, inside references, or euphemisms.

## **5. The economic, social, and political climate**

Hateful speech targeting sexual and gender minorities can become particularly harmful amid economic, social, and political strife where insecurity and instability reign supreme. Consider the broader context in which hateful speech emerges, and remember that seemingly innocent speech can become dangerous depending on the context.

## Five-Point Test to Identify Dangerous Speech

One step beyond hate speech, “dangerous speech” has the capacity to catalyse violence among different groups. Susan Benesch, who heads the Dangerous Speech Project, says the most dangerous speech acts occur when the following [five factors](#) are maximized:

1. The speaker is powerful and has a high degree of influence over the audience
2. The audience has grievances and fear that the speaker can cultivate
3. The speech act is understood as a call to violence
4. There exists a social or historical context propitious for violence, for any of a variety of reasons, including long-standing competition between groups for resources, lack of efforts to solve grievances, or previous episodes of violence
5. There exists a means of dissemination that is influential in itself, for example because it is the sole or primary source of news for the relevant audience

Keep these two five-point tests in mind as you read through the rest of this manual, as you watch religious leaders on the pulpit, as you listen to politicians at rallies, and as you scan newspaper and tabloid headlines. They can help you sort unpleasant stereotypes from imminently dangerous hate speech, allowing you to prioritize your responses and save lives.

# LGBTQI+ History and Hate Speech in Kenya and Uganda

Cultural taboos, religious edicts, social hostilities, legal prohibitions, and media censorship have long conspired to oppress sexual and gender minorities in East Africa and around the world. International human rights law, especially its equality and non-discrimination principles, should in theory protect sexual and gender minorities from persecution. Unfortunately, negative public attitudes and discriminatory criminal laws often stand in the way.

This chapter examines a few of the many pre-colonial examples of sexual and gender diversity that disprove false assertions that such realities are “unAfrican”. We then take a closer look at colonial-era “sodomy” laws, the language of which still lingers in penal codes that prohibit same-sex sexual activity in East Africa and around the world. Dennis Wamala from Icebreakers Uganda outlines some of the legal, religious, and cultural sources of hate speech and discrimination that negatively affect media coverage of LGBTQI+ people and their equal access to healthcare. We end with 10 examples of how homophobia and transphobia harm everyone in society and why everyone should be motivated to stop such hatred.

## Pre-Colonial Sexual and Gender Diversity

“There is no homosexuality in Africa!” is a common refrain among conservative politicians, religious leaders, and lay people. It is often accompanied by the similarly false assertion that homosexuality is a Western import imposed upon or adopted by African populations.

In reality, colonization and missionization unleashed today’s mostly negative attitudes about same-sex sexual activity on the continent. Before, during, and after colonialism, scholars have documented a rich history of diverse African peoples engaging in same-sex sexual relations.

We know little about whether matters of sexuality were discussed openly, privately, or within peer circles before colonization shifted local mores. This likely varied among Africa’s diverse clans, tribes, communities, and cultures, but sexual and gender diversity was certainly discussed in the pre-colonial days. Claims that homosexuality was imported to the African continent are patently false, and such propaganda attempts to erase lived realities and identities that cannot be denied.

An example of sexuality existing in the public arena during Africa’s pre-colonial era can be seen in erotic songs and dance moves that have existed since time immemorial. Gender diversity was also displayed through costumes worn during certain occasions and rituals. Most African communities passed knowledge through oral narration, metaphors, and proverbs. Given the

centrality of sexuality in most communities, it can be assumed that such matters were discussed and transmitted in a similar manner.

The influences of colonialism and the Abrahamic faiths, namely Islam and Christianity, likely contributed to an erosion of language used to discuss sexuality in some African communities, compounded by a lack of written records to preserve such knowledge and specific terminology. This does not negate the existence of indigenous coded or spoken words used to discuss matters of sexuality and gender diversity. In their 1998 book *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands*, Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe list some of the indigenous words used to discuss homosexuality and gender diversity across Africa in the pre-colonial and colonial era. These include *mumemke* (*mume*=man, *mke*=woman), which appeared in the first Swahili-English dictionary in 1882, *shoga* (male homosexual or friend), *mugawe* (Meru men who wore women's clothes and sometimes married men), and *inzili* (intersex people in Kenya and Tanzania).

In a [December 2018 op-ed](#) for News24, Gerbrandt van Heerden, a researcher at the South African Institute of Race Relations (IRR), also cites historical evidence of sexual and gender minorities across Africa before and during colonialism;

*“An early researcher in Africa, John Weeks, reported in 1909 that sodomy between men was quite common among the Bangala of the Congo and was ‘regarded without shame’.*

*“Homosexuality was commonplace among unmarried Tutsi and Hutu men in Rwanda, while lesbian relationships were common among the Nandi of Kenya, and basically universal among unmarried Akan women of Ghana. In the Langi tribe of northern Uganda, people who were born intersex or who were regarded as impotent would be labelled as a third gender known as mudoko dako. Mudoko dako people were legally and socially allowed to marry a man or woman and acquired either traditional male or female roles.*

*“Studies and observations in Tanzania also warrant the view that homosexuality is not foreign to Africa or to Tanzania in particular. It has been recorded that samesex practices were said to be common among Nyakyusa men prior to marriage in the mid-1930s.”*

## Colonialism's Lingering Legacy

The laws against “unnatural offences” that remain in our penal codes today stem from the introduction of anti-sodomy laws in British protectorates in the 1800s. A [2008 report from Human Rights Watch](#) traces these laws' origins and lingering effects.

The “unnatural offences” provision was modelled on the Parliament of England's Buggery Act of 1533 and formalized in Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860. The text reads:

*Unnatural offences: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.*

The law was designed to “correct and Christianize ‘native’ custom” but also to “protect” British soldiers and colonial administrators from acquiring “special Oriental vices” and to prevent military camps from becoming “replicas of Sodom and Gomorrah.” The law’s language soon spread to British colonies around the world.

Such language is clearly linked to Christian theological understandings prevalent across Europe at the time that asserted sex was solely for reproduction. Because the law lacked provisions around such factors as age and consent, consensual homosexual relationships among adults became legally indistinguishable from sexual offences such as rape and paedophilia.

Prudish attitudes around sexuality were also influenced during the Victorian era when sex was widely silenced, repressed, and associated with sin. Non-reproductive forms of sexuality were labelled “perverse” at the time largely because they did not increase labour capacity or contribute to economic goals. According to French philosopher Michel Foucault, disciplines such as demography, biology, medicine, psychiatry, ethics, pedagogy, and political criticism were developed in part to control sexuality and to label certain behaviours as “abnormal” or “unnatural”.

This context shines light on how puritanical religiosity and the policing of sexuality constructed systems and structures that continue to institutionalize homophobia and transphobia today. Many Africans still think and speak of matters of sexuality and gender diversity in the same way moral crusaders did in centuries past.

For example, the common but false contention that homosexuality is “unnatural” seems to disregard nature entirely. Researchers have [documented same-sex sexual behaviour](#) among countless animal species. Studies on the biology of homosexuality increasingly show that it is not a “lifestyle choice” but rather a [perfectly natural sexual orientation for about eight percent](#) of the global population. Twin studies show that homosexuality often runs in families. From a biological perspective, all human characteristics and inclinations are equally natural.

## **Ongoing Sources of Discrimination**

Using clear facts to refute false claims that homosexuality is “unAfrican” and “unnatural” is important, but as is true of all fears, homophobia is also rooted in emotions. In this section, Dennis Wamala, Director of programs at Icebreakers Uganda, describes several sources of hate speech and discrimination that negatively impact LGBTQI+ people in Uganda and across East Africa. These sources are elaborated at length in subsequent chapters.

*Icebreakers is a support organization for all LGBTQI+ Ugandans, especially those who face loneliness or isolation due to their sexuality. Part of the group's mission is to speak out for community members who are bullied, abused, or hated because of their sexual orientation.*

## Legal

As of 2018, same-sex sexual acts are still illegal in 34 African countries including Kenya and Uganda. According to Kenya's Penal Code Section 162 on "unnatural offences":

*"any person who has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature; or permits a male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature, is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for fourteen years."*

Although the Kenya Human Rights Commission has reported that few convictions are made under the Penal Code, police harassment of LGBTQI+ people is common and includes trumped up charges, holding arrested persons without charge, and requests for bribes and favours. Many individuals who experience these injustices say they are unable to safely report the inappropriate behaviour of government officials or expect any remedy if they do.

Uganda's laws prohibiting homosexual activity were first established under British colonial rule in the 19th century and enshrined in the [Penal Code Act of 1950](#), which remains in effect today. They include:

*Section 145: Unnatural offences.*

*Any person who—*

*(a) has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature;  
(b) has carnal knowledge of an animal; or  
(c) permits a male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her  
against the order of nature,  
commits an offence and is liable to imprisonment for life.*

Section 145 is the primary justification police use to arrest suspected LGBTQI+ persons.

Section 146 prohibits "attempts" to commit offences specified in Section 145 with liability of up to seven years imprisonment. Police, work colleagues, neighbours, enemies, and other opportunistic people sometimes use this section to blackmail LGBTQI+ people.

*Section 148: Indecent practices.*

*Any person who, whether in public or in private, commits any act of gross indecency with another person or procures another person to commit any act of gross indecency with him or her or attempts to procure the commission of*

*any such act by any person with himself or herself or with another person, whether in public or in private, commits an offence and is liable to imprisonment for seven years.*

“Gross indecency” is never defined in the Penal Code, leaving this section dangerously open to homophobic and transphobic interpretations.

Despite these harsh laws, Uganda’s courts sometimes rule in favour of LGBTQI+ people. To assist in this regard, Icebreakers Uganda has partnered with the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) and Chapter 4, a local civil liberties organization, to provide legal representation at police and court hearings for all reported cases of LGBTQI+ people whose rights have been violated.

In 2008, the High Court ruled that government officials had violated the rights of LGBTQI+ activists Victor Juliet Mukasa and Yvonne Oyo when they raided Musaka’s home, seized documents without a search warrant, and illegally arrested and violated Oyo. In their ruling, the Court declared that Ugandan constitutional rights apply to all Ugandans, regardless of whether they are homosexual or transgender.

In 2010, the Court ruled that the Rolling Stone tabloid had violated the fundamental rights of people it outed in its “100 PICTURES OF UGANDA’S TOP HOMOS LEAK; Hang Them” cover story.

In 2014, the Constitutional Court annulled the Anti-Homosexuality Act for having passed without the requisite quorum, offering human rights relief on procedural grounds.

However, in 2012, the Uganda Registration Services Bureau refused to register SMUG as an organization under Uganda law, violating SMUG members’ freedom of association, expression, and right to equal protection of the law, among other rights guaranteed in the constitution. The positive court results referred to above gives us hope in Sexual Minorities Uganda’s ongoing case against URSB.

It’s important to note that laws prohibiting consensual same-sex sexual activity among adults, however unjust, do not criminalize sexual or gender *identity*. Given that sexual orientation and gender are innate, someone can *identify* as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender without ever participating in illegal acts or activities. Even if they do, most sexual acts are performed in private beyond the government’s gaze and are unlikely to be registered and prosecuted. While critical, this distinction between illegal *acts* and legal *identities* offers little solace to the majority of LGBTQI+ people who face extrajudicial discrimination and abuse not for what they do but for who they are.

## Religion

Arab traders brought Islam and European missionaries brought Christianity to present day Uganda in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, around 85 percent of Ugandans align with Christianity and 14 percent with Islam. About 39 percent of Ugandans are Roman Catholic, 32 percent Anglican (Church of Uganda) and 11 percent Pentecostal, according to data from the most recent national census in 2014. Kenya's religious demographics are similar with about 85 percent of residents identifying as Christian and 10 percent as Muslim.

Along with their holy books, the first Muslims and Christians to reach East Africa also brought hostility and intolerance towards sexual and gender diversity. Clergy and laity have continued to propagate homophobia and transphobia, often implying that the supposed sins of LGBTQI+ people are worse than others found in the Bible and the Quran. In homophobic sermons and public statements, some religious leaders call for imprisonment, death, or other harsh punishments for LGBTQI+ people. As a result, many LGBTQI+ people live in fear and remain closeted. Some have been subjected to violent pseudoscientific "conversion therapy" or spiritual deliverance sessions, ostensibly carried out to make same-sex attracted people heterosexual. Such practices have been widely debunked as ineffective and banned in several countries for the psychological and sometimes physical damage they cause. Deliverance or "exorcism" attempts often involve rebukes and prayers to "heal" or "cure" the victim, who is sometimes beat or touched inappropriately. The threat or aftereffects of such interventions push many LGBTQI+ people to stop attending their houses of worship, to flee their homes and communities, or to seek asylum in other countries where they hope their human rights will be protected.

## Community

Many politicians and prominent figures speak out against homosexuality and mobilize the public to shun sexual and gender minorities. This has created an atmosphere so tense that being LGBTQI+ is extremely risky. Reports of LGBTQI+ people being threatened in their neighbourhoods by boda boda drivers or being attacked by mobs because of the way they dress are a common result of such rhetoric. We have also seen landlords evict residents they suspect to be LGBTQI+. Others have lost their jobs or been disowned by former friends and family.

## Media

Uganda's tabloid and news media outlets are regularly hostile towards LGBTQI+ people, spreading stigma, discrimination and hate. Icebreakers Uganda has been featured in articles that allege to expose us as "promoters" of homosexuality in Uganda. Many activists' names, photos, and residential addresses have been published in tabloids, putting these individuals' lives at stake.



## Healthcare

LGBTQI+ people face incredible stigma when trying to access healthcare. Transgender individuals are especially targeted. Healthcare should be accessed in a place where one is comfortable, but for most sexual and gender minorities, going to medical centres attracts unwanted attention. Nurses and doctors may LGBTQI+ patients as specimens to be gawked at, poked, and prodded. Or they may chastise them, using Biblical verses to highlight their alleged sins. To avoid such ridicule, some sexual and gender minorities opt to self-medicate, a dangerous trade-off that can cost them their lives. To remedy this, Icebreakers Uganda and the Most At Risk Populations Initiative have opened a clinic specifically for LGBTQI+ people in the north-central Mulago neighbourhood of Kampala. This clinic provides free services to more than 70 LGBTQI+ patients per week. It represents a small but important start that is saving the lives of people who might otherwise be left without medical care.

## How We're REActing to Discrimination

The Rights Evidence Action (REAct) project was started in 2014 to address some of these sources of hate speech and discrimination in Uganda. REAct supports documentation of and response to human rights violations against LGBTQI+ people in the country. When cases are reported, our officers respond appropriately. This might involve bailing an individual out of jail, hiring legal representation, paying medical bills, or relocating them to safety. Other times, funds are provided to effect response and improve the capacity of local rights organizations to provide services and help to the LGBTQI+ communities they serve. REAct has a team of seven members supporting rapid response efforts to save lives.

## How Homophobia and Transphobia Harm Our Societies

Shortly after Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Law passed in 2014, lawyer and academic Joe Oloka Onyango offered the following remarks during a public lecture at Makerere University. He titled the piece *Of Mice and Farmer's Wives: Unveiling the Broader Picture behind Recent Legislation in Uganda*:

"There is an old African story about the mouse who found a trap in the farmer's house, and how she went to various animals on the farm (including the chicken, the goat and the cow) informing them of the news and asking them to assist her to deal with this new enemy.

Each of them told her it was not their business; the very next night, the farmer's wife was bitten by a snake caught by the trap.

Each of the animals the mouse had consulted – except the mouse for whom the trap was originally intended – was eventually slaughtered by the farmer: first the chicken to provide soup to nourish the farmer's wife; then the goat to cater for the relatives, friends and in-laws who came to visit the ailing wife; and finally the cow, who was sacrificed to cater for the mourners who came for the *lumbe* (last funeral rites)."

This local parable touches on some of the same ideas explored in Martin Niemöller's "[First they came...](#)" poem. It warns of the real dangers that can arise when we stay silent and fail to defend neighbours and community members in need.

In a connected society, homophobia and transphobia don't just hurt LGBTQI+ people. Here are 10 ways everyone can be affected by such targeted hatred.

1. Homophobia and transphobia encourage men to act "macho" and women to act "feminine". Such strict adherence to sex and gender binaries limits our individuality and freedom of expression.
2. Homophobia and transphobia encourage straight people to act aggressively towards LGBTQI+ people, filling their hearts with hatred and discrimination instead of love and compassion.
3. Homophobia and transphobia make it harder to form close friendships with someone of the same sex, lest that friendship be confused for romance.
4. Homophobia and transphobia strain community relationships, breaking up families and friendships.
5. Homophobia and transphobia can encourage young people to become sexually active before they are ready in order to "prove" their heterosexuality. This can result in emotional trauma, unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections.
6. Homophobia and transphobia prevent vital information on sex and sexuality from being taught in schools. Without this information, youth are put at a greater risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.
7. Homophobia and transphobia are used to justify discrimination against heterosexual and cisgender people who merely "appear to be gay."
8. Homophobia and transphobia make it hard for heterosexual and cisgender people to be friends with LGBTQI+ people, as such friendships sometimes draw scrutiny.
9. Homophobia and transphobia, along with racism, sexism, and classism, perpetuate the scourge of HIV/AIDS by limiting access to healthcare.
10. Homophobia and transphobia erect barriers for educated, creative, and ambitious LGBTQI+ members of our community, limiting their opportunities to contribute and improve society for everyone's benefit.

# African Faith Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Diversity

In East Africa, as in many parts of the world, religious leaders have tremendous influence over public perceptions surrounding sexual and gender minorities. In their 2015 report “[Different Ways of Doing Violence: Sexuality, Religion, and Public Health in the Lives of Same-Gender-Loving Men in Kenya](#),” John Blevins and Peter Irungu highlight this influence and explain how religious leaders’ teachings are consistently invoked in the perception and treatment of LGBTQI+ persons. Pastor and human rights activist Kapya John Kaoma has also shown how religious leaders’ interpretations of the Bible shape public debates around sexual orientation in Kenya. The same is true of the Quran in Muslim-majority communities.

This chapter offers inclusive and affirming faith perspectives on sexual and gender diversity from around the continent. We encourage you to take a closer look at the scripture cited below and to discuss passages with members of your faith or belief community and friends who follow other traditions.

## Christian Perspectives

When Gene Robinson became the first priest in an openly gay relationship to be consecrated a bishop in the U.S. Episcopal (Anglican) Church in 2003, a bishop from the Anglican Church of Nigeria asked, “How can the Americans do this and still claim to be following the Bible? How do they begin such a conversation?”

The Rev. Ecclesia de Lange, an ordained minister of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), has an answer. She has been involved with Inclusive and Affirming Ministries since 2014 and currently serves as IAM’s director.

In their booklet “[The Bible and Homosexuality](#),” Inclusive and Affirming Ministries contextually engages with eight Biblical passages that refer directly or indirectly to homosexuality. To read the full text of these passages, see:

- The Creation story as narrated in Genesis 1–3
- The Sodom narrative in Genesis 19: 1–26
- Judges 19
- Leviticus 18:22
- Leviticus 20:13
- Romans 1:26–27
- Corinthians 6:9–10

- Timothy 1:10

Many Christians believe these passages condemn homosexuality as a sin, but IAM cautions against reading Bible verses too literally and in isolation:

*“One cannot randomly choose isolated verses as if they represent God’s command to us today. We must interpret and understand the Bible, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, within the Biblical context as well as our own context. The big challenge therefore is: How do we read the Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit?”*

To do this, IAM suggests that readers strive to understand: 1) the cultural contexts in which the Bible’s authors lived, 2) how specific verses fit into larger passages and the Bible’s overall message, and 3) how verses can be read with contemporary context.

On the issue of homosexuality, IAM warns of several potholes readers should avoid stumbling into when reading the Bible. These include:

1. Isolating specific verses from their broader meanings or context.
2. Inconsistently applying the literal method by regarding certain verses as eternal truths while ignoring other verses that bear similar style.
3. Using isolated texts to prove your own point of view. No text ‘speaks’ on its own.
4. Relying on translations of the Bible that introduce ahistorical prejudices or misconceptions.
5. Falling back on moralism and prescriptiveness or categorizing certain sexual sins as worse than the sin of judgement.

*“It is irresponsible and unscientific to interpret isolated verses in the Bible literally or in a fundamentalist way. The Bible says absolutely nothing about, nor does it condemn, a committed, loving and faithful homosexual relationship as we know it today.”*

Let’s take a closer look at one passage. Romans 1:26-27 New International Version (NIV) reads:

*Because of this, God gave them [sinful humanity] over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

Bishop Gene Robinson [provides necessary historical context](#) to understand these words:

*“We have to understand that the notion of a homosexual sexual orientation is a notion that’s only about 125 years old...That is to say, St. Paul was talking about people that he understood to be heterosexual engaging in same-sex acts...It never occurred to anyone in ancient times that*

*a certain minority of us would be born being affectionally [sic] oriented to people of the same sex. So it did seem like [going] against their nature to be doing so...St. Paul was condemning the practice of his times, in which older men sexually used younger boys.”*

This passage and Bishop Robinson's interpretation make clear the importance of context. Many Christians believe the Bible exists to reveal Christ and his salvific work, and that it contains divine guidance for human conduct, but blindly following its literal word does not make someone a “good Christian”. Most readers pick and choose what they wish to follow, making it suit their own needs and beliefs. Even Jesus rejected many of the dogmatic “Bible-believing” people of his day — Pharisees, Sadducees, doctors of the law. It was some of these leaders who quoted their Bible to justify crucifying him. As we’ve seen time and again, quoting Bible verses without considering their proper context can bring more harm than good.

To be Christian is to follow Christ’s example of tolerance, patience, charity, humility, kindness, and love. Remind yourself and your community of this by referencing the following passages:

- John 3:17 — “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”
- John 13:34 — “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”
- Colossians 3:13 — “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”
- 1 Peter 4:8 — “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”
- Psalms 133:1 — “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!”
- Matthew 7:12 — “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

*All translations from the New International Version.*

## Uganda’s LGBTQI+ and Ally Christian Faith Leaders Say God’s Love is Unconditional

*The following [story](#) by journalist Ambrose Barigye introduces us to five LGBTQI+ and ally Christian faith leaders in Uganda.*

KAMPALA—Religion is at the core of many African societies, including those that cite faith and culture to condemn sexual and gender minorities as unAfrican, ungodly and unnatural.

In Uganda, despite stigma and legal prohibitions, the gender and sexual minority movement has grown into a formidable force fighting for the realization of equality for all citizens. This fight has been met by strong resistance from most religious leaders and anti-LGBTQI+ advocates who

argue that same-sex relations are a threat to traditional African family values and that they deserve no place in the predominantly Christian nation.

Homophobic ideas have united different religious sects, political parties, and the general public. Muslim, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal, and leaders of traditional religions have joined forces to fight against equal rights for LGBTQI+ people and have preached sermons that describe homosexuality as an evil practice among unholy people who need spiritual and sacred cleansing.

Such rhetoric has led some religious LGBTQI+ Ugandans and their straight allies to denounce or abandon their faiths while others work to spiritually nourish their peers.

Here we profile leaders and allies of the Ugandan LGBTQI+ community who have kept their faith when religious leaders disowned them.

### **Brian Byamukama**



Brian Byamukama is a pastor at Bethany Baptist Church in Mbale district, Eastern Uganda, and a human rights defender who works on LGBTQI+ issues. He is the founder and Executive Director of Rural Movement Initiative (RUMI), an organization protecting marginalized people in Mbale district. Brian is an out bisexual man married to a woman, with whom he has one daughter.

Brian says the persecution of fellow LGBTQI+ Ugandans prompted him to come out as a human rights advocate. He believes that many LGBTQI+ Ugandans have run away from their faith communities because they are seldom given a platform to speak or defend alternative interpretations of Biblical verses used to condemn them.

Brian believes there is no fundamental difference between heterosexual and homosexual relationships as long as both are built on love. According to this preacher, God doesn't focus on gender or sexuality but rather on the human being.

Being a religious leader and open advocate for the rights of sexual minorities has not always been easy for Brian.

“[Uganda] has become a dumping site for hate propaganda from the West. That is why most religious fundamentalists have brought their anti-gay gospel to Africa. These [fundamentalists] do not solely hold the blame. Our systems also are partly to blame for allowing people like Scott Lively to come and sow their seeds of hate in our country, pushing for the persecution of LGBTQI+ people,” he said.

Scott Lively, president of Abiding Truth Ministries in California, has advanced anti-gay agendas in different countries around the world, including Uganda.

Brian also notes the effect of Ugandan mainstream media’s negative reporting on LGBTQI+ issues and advises media outlets to embrace a fair and balanced approach rather than relying on sensational reporting of already marginalized people.

“Let us spread the word of God without divisionism because salvation is by grace and we have to understand that we are diverse and that God is the only judge.”

### **Rev. Patrick Leuben Mukajanga**



Rev. Patrick Leuben Mukajanga is the founder and executive director of Saint Paul’s Voice Centre of Uganda (SPAVOC), a Christian-based NGO that partners with local and international organizations to fight against the discrimination of LGBTQI+ people in Uganda. Patrick is an out gay advocate for the rights of sexual minorities and a Christian who has dedicated his life to preaching the gospel of love to those that feel abandoned because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Many religious leaders in Uganda condemn same-sex relationships as evil. This has been witnessed during various religious “crusades” in which pastors and other evangelicals call upon



the general public to fight sexual minorities with all their might because they believe they contradict African family values. Patrick advises these leaders to preach the gospel of inclusiveness and to leave judgment to God. For his work, Patrick was awarded the Makwan Prize for Human Rights in 2013.

Patrick said he has been ostracized and attacked by angry residents of his home district of Ibanda in western Uganda and threatened and arrested by police on charges of promoting homosexuality.

“Because of the nature of my work and my openness while advocating for the rights of LGBTQI+ people, I have suffered many forms of discrimination from my immediate neighbours. I have kept strong despite these challenges,” he said.

Patrick believes that God loves all his creations and that all humans deserve equal and fair treatment in society, despite their differences.

### **Diana Sydney Bakuraira**



Diane Sydney Bakuraira, better known as “Didi Baks” in the Ugandan LGBTQI+ community, is an out lesbian woman, a trained paralegal and administrative officer at the Kampala-based NGO Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG).

Born and raised in a Christian family, she was taught that God loves us despite our sins. Although religious persecution of sexual minorities has caused her to question her faith at times, she believes that only God can judge us.

Diane uses social media platforms including WhatsApp and Facebook to share scriptures of encouragement with her followers and to encourage them not to lose hope in the face of persecution. She does the same offline at LGBTQI+ community gatherings.

She believes these messages of hope have impacted many LGBTQI+ lives. On a recent trip to the U.S., a friend told Diane that her messages on social media had encouraged her to return to church to try to reconcile her sexuality and her faith.



In 2007, Diane left her old house of worship in Kampala because of the pastor's hate sermons. She then moved from church to church in search of an all-inclusive space and finally found Rubaga Miracle Centre in Kampala, which preaches against discrimination and focuses on love.

"The best way for these religious leaders to understand LGBTQI+ people is to first of all get in touch with them, understand who they are, their background, and then approach them with a gospel of love, not hate. Before you change your attitude towards something you must first understand why you have that very attitude. They need to first understand the LGBTQI+ community and find a way of preaching to them the appropriate message of love depending on different interpretations of the Bible."

Diane believes that religious leaders who disown sexual and gender minorities often do so because they selectively and wrongly interpret verses of the Bible. She says such verses from Leviticus and Deuteronomy make LGBTQI+ people feel guilty and unwanted, yet the Bible is meant to encourage us to love one another. She encourages preachers to embrace diversity in their churches and to make an effort to understand their congregations.

"However much the world does not understand me, my God does, and he is the only person who will judge me and the only one who holds the truth and the answers. So, for me to keep in touch with my faith is quite important as a Christian."

Diane encourages LGBTQI+ people to find churches where they feel spiritually comfortable and to not always focus on hate speech or they will become demoralized. She advises religious leaders to embrace peace and love and tells the public not to judge, persecute or discriminate against LGBTQI+ people, encouraging them to research sexuality and gender identity.

### **Pastor Samson Turinawe**



Pastor Samson Turinawe is the founder and director of Universal Love Ministries, a charity based in Kampala that preaches for the inclusion of LGBTQI+ persons. After his graduation from Life Bible school in 2005, Turinawe ministered in a Pentecostal church as a youth pastor in Bushenyi, western Uganda. By 2006, his congregants started openly discussing sexual minorities, and the church that he was administering started expelling suspected LGBTQI+ members.

Convinced that these members should be heard and understood rather than banished, he stood in their defence and eventually parted ways with the church.

“It is not right to chase away someone that is seeking the righteousness of God, because we are all God’s children,” Samson says he told church officials. “My church responded by saying that they can’t tolerate this and that I am a dangerous person and that they can’t allow me to continue administering in their church because I am promoting homosexuality.”

His own banishment from the church inspired Samson to create a space where sexual minorities would be free to express themselves without prejudice and where he could educate religious leaders about the gospel of love, tolerance, and acceptance of sexual minorities.

Thus was born Universal Love Ministries, which educates religious leaders on gender identity, sex orientation, and spirituality. Samson believes most preachers who spread messages of intolerance towards LGBTQI+ people do so because they lack knowledge about them and that these sensitization programs can help them learn more about SSOGIE issues.

Samson also educates religious leaders on how to contextually interpret the Bible in ways that respect all people. While some leaders are willing to learn more about sexuality and gender identity and have responded positively to such messages and techniques, others refuse to listen.

“We believe that if these religious leaders are sensitized about these issues and understand them, they will be able to make informed decisions.”

Because of his work with LGBTQI+ people, Samson has faced discrimination and been called a sinner and a pastor gone astray, often by other pastors. He believes religious leaders who use the Bible to persecute sexual minorities are teaching their own gospel but not the one that Jesus taught.

“We see Jesus identifying with every person, we see Jesus teaching love, but we don’t see Jesus teaching to discriminate, and so those using [the Bible] to condemn and persecute LGBTQI+ people have gone astray. You are not going to heaven because of your sexual orientation or who you hold hands with. You are going to heaven because you are God’s child and because of his grace. God loves every person.”

## **Bishop Christopher Senyonjo**



Bishop Christopher Senyonjo is a retired Anglican Bishop in the Church of Uganda who has dedicated his life to defending marginalized people, especially LGBTQI+ Ugandans, through counselling and spiritual refurbishment programs. He is the founder of St. Paul's Reconciliation and Equality Centre (SPREC), which aims to build bridges between Ugandan society and its LGBTQI+ minorities.

His open declaration of support for sexual minorities, which many peers consider “ungodly”, prompted the Anglican Church to bar him. Nevertheless, his important work continues. Senyonjo believes God loves all his creatures without discrimination, and that this is evidenced in Jesus’ gospel of loving one another.

Senyonjo worked tirelessly to combat Uganda’s infamous Anti-Homosexuality bill.

“The only problem we have is a lack of education, and some people are not willing to learn and understand deeply the concept of sexuality and gender identity. Once people embrace and research more about these issues, homophobia will be eliminated gradually in society.”

Bishop Senyonjo believes God’s love does not segregate and that LGBTQI+ people should be given space to express themselves in their churches rather than being fenced off or excluded for being different.

## **Muslim Perspectives**

Muhsin Hendricks is a Cape Town-based Islamic scholar with a background in Classical Arabic and Islamic Sciences. He is an imam (religious leader) by profession and also a human rights activist who focuses on sexual orientation and gender identity within Islam. Muhsin is the

founder of Al-Fitrah Foundation and The Inner Circle, the world's largest formal organization that supports Muslims who have been marginalized because of their sexual orientations or gender identities and expressions.

Muhsin says homosexuality and gender diversity have existed within predominantly Muslim societies since before Islam's inception more than 1,400 years ago. He cites the example of the mukhannathun, a social group mentioned in ancient ahadith and sunan, among whom sexual and gender non-conforming activities and expressions were prevalent. Some mukhannathun were castrated and worked as servants in Muslim homes.

Although lesbianism has been present throughout the history of Islam, it has often been ignored or undocumented due to patriarchal notions that sex must involve penile penetration.

Numerous homoerotic and homoromantic paintings and poetry emerged during the early centuries of Islam from such luminaries as Abu Nawas, Caliph Muhammad al-Amin, Omar Khayyam, Rumi, Ibn al-Farid, and Hafez.

Under the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, which ruled after the Prophet Muhammad's death until about 1258, Muhsin says there is no record of poets being punished for their published sexual opinions and statements, or even for their sexual activities.

Muhsin says a contemporary conflict between queer narratives and orthodox Islam leaves many queer Muslims with cognitive dissonance and low levels of self-esteem when trying to reconcile their sexual orientations or gender identities with their faiths.

"This cognitive dissonance, coupled with blatant rejection from orthodox Muslim communities, has led many queer Muslims to negotiate this dilemma between sexuality and spirituality through assuming dual identities, drug and alcohol abuse, irresponsible sexual behaviour, apostasy, and even suicide," he said.

Barring the Hanafi school of Islamic thought, Muhsin says mainstream Sunni and Shi'a scholars agree that homosexuality falls under adultery and should be punished under Islamic law. In 2007, the Muslim Judicial Council of South Africa declared that any Muslim who accepts homosexuality should be considered an apostate.

"The Quran is written in a poetic form, leaving it open to evolving and varied interpretations. Quranic interpretation has to constantly evolve as humanity evolves, otherwise it becomes a dead book. Unfortunately, Muslims have 'preserved' the Quran to such an extent that alternative interpretations of it have been discouraged and marginalized," he said.

Muhsin says there are verses in the Quran that are broad enough in meaning and interpretation to acknowledge human diversity and to include sexual identities and gender expressions that go beyond traditional male and female binaries.

Muslims who condemn homosexuality often reference the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The story is described throughout the Quran with much the same detail as is found in the Bible. Inclusive and Affirming Ministries' contextual arguments therefore apply equally well when interpreting the Quran.

Ishmael Bahati, Director at Persons Marginalised and Aggrieved (PEMA) in Mombasa, Kenya, cites the following Quranic passage, which address hate speech and diversity. The English translations of the original Arabic come from Sahih International, as republished at Quran.com.

*Surah Al-Hujurat (49:11)*

*"O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent - then it is those who are the wrongdoers."*

In his book [\*Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims\*](#), author Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle uses an example from the life of the fourth caliph Imam 'Ali to remind us that the Quran's words are meaningless without human interpretation:

*"Imam 'Ali faced Khariji rebels who insisted that he simply 'apply' the Quran's judgment without interpretation. In that situation of armed conflict, Imam 'Ali gathered the people and brought out a copy of the Quran and as he touched the book he exclaimed, O Quran, speak to the people! The people gathered around 'Ali, saying, 'O 'Ali, do you mock us? It is only paper and ink and it is we [human beings] who speak on its behalf.' To this, 'Ali stated, 'The Quran is written in straight lines between two covers. It needs proper interpreters, and the interpreters are human beings.'"*

When people use scripture to justify perpetuating hatred or committing atrocities "in the name of religion", they are choosing to hate rather than seeking alternative interpretations or passages that justify love, acceptance, and inclusion. When religious people convince themselves they are on the "right path" and that only one true and correct path exists, they often end up judging and discriminating against people who hold equally valid but different beliefs or identities.

The following Quranic verses warn against oppressing the most vulnerable and marginalized members of our communities:

*Surah Al-Anfal (8:66)*

*"Now, Allah has lightened [the hardship] for you, and He knows that among you is weakness. So if there are from you one hundred [who are] steadfast, they will overcome two hundred. And if there are among you a thousand, they will overcome two thousand by permission of Allah. And Allah is with the steadfast."*

*Surah An-Nisa (4:75)*

*And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed among men, women, and children who say, "Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Yourself a helper?"*

*Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13)*

*"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted."*

*Surah Ash-Shuraa (42:8)*

*"And if Allah willed, He could have made them [of] one religion, but He admits whom He wills into His mercy. And the wrongdoers have not any protector or helper."*

## **Traditional African Religions Perspectives**

Pharie Sefali is a traditional healer and executive committee member of Ubambo Lwam Luvuyo LGBTQI+ Traditional Healers Forum in South Africa.

Pharie describes traditional healing as more cosmology than religion and says that traditional healers (also called sangomas) serve as the medium through which physical, psychological, spiritual, and ancestral worlds are connected.

LGBTQI+ sangomas are often considered anomalous and out of line with African ancestral beliefs. In some rural communities, families of LGBTQI+ individuals organize ceremonies with traditional healers in hopes that ancestors will change their loved one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Groups like the Traditional Healers Forum advocate for the social and institutional rights of LGBTQI+ traditional healers. The forum educates sangomas and society at large about issues surrounding sexuality and spirituality. Pharie describes the forum as a safe space for people to talk more openly about their sexuality and to challenge beliefs that LGBTQI+ people cannot be sangomas.

Pharie interviewed fellow LGBTQI+ sangomas at a workshop for a [2015 article that originally appeared in GroundUp](#).

*Sindiswa Tafeni told the workshop that being lesbian in the township was hard enough, and being a lesbian sangoma was even harder because of the attitude of other sangomas.*

*“It’s hard to get clients because communities and straight healers speak badly of you. If you go to a traditional ceremony where you meet other healers, they have an attitude of mockery and say that you are faking the healing gift and that being lesbian shows that your ancestors are angry at you,” said Tafeni.*

*Nokuthula Mbete, a traditional healer and pastor, said some parents assumed that a child who disclosed that he or she was gay or lesbian was “bewitched” and that the family had been cursed. The children were sent to traditional healers “to reverse the curse and heal the child from the homophobic disease.”*

*“People take homosexuality as something that can be solved, fixed or cured. I work with youth every day. Some get suicidal because their parents are giving them traditional medicine to cure the homosexual ‘disease’. So even sangomas have to be educated about sexuality, and we have to change their stereotype mindset,” Mbete said.*

## Strength Through Adversity: Vignettes of LGBTQI+ Discrimination in Uganda

*Dr. Stella Nyanzi is a Ugandan human rights activist, writer, academic and former fellow at the Makerere University Institute of Social Research.*

In this chapter, Dr. Nyanzi presents a collection of real case studies and narratives that reveal the ugly effects of hate speech, discrimination, and outright violence LGBTQI+ people face every day in Uganda. At church, in offices, at school, in the street, at the market, among family members, on the sports field, in hospitals, at police stations, and in their own homes, sexual and gender minorities are unjustly persecuted and assaulted merely for being themselves. Several of these vignettes contain vile and explicit homophobic and transphobic hate speech. Reader discretion is advised.

*Some names and details in the below accounts have been changed to protect individuals’ privacy and safety.*

### **Dismissed From Work After a Public Media Outing**

Rudy worked as an administrator for a busy Kampala courier firm. Given Uganda’s high unemployment rate, she appreciated the salary, benefits, and status she earned at a job she cherished. It ensured financial independence from parents and relatives who opposed her lesbian relationships. The job also allowed Rudy to type, print, photocopy, and assemble personal documents at work, an opportunity she used to sustain day-to-day operations for a

local lesbian support group. Despite being respected and liked by colleague, Rudy never revealed that she is a lesbian to workmates or employers for fear of how they might react.

Rudy says she has been attracted to and involved in sexual relationships with females since childhood. She was expelled from one secondary school when parents of a classmate reported her for allegedly “teaching their daughter homosexuality.” At college, Rudy was in several short-term and longer-term relationships with women. Over time, she mastered the skill of hiding her sexual orientation and her involvement in grassroots activism for lesbians’ rights from people whom she did not trust.

So Rudy was shocked by the sudden public disclosure of her identity and activism one morning in 2010. When the local tabloid *Rolling Stone* released Rudy’s full name, photo, and identifying information, along with the details of other people alleged to be homosexual, her job security was shattered. Family members phoned and blamed her for “tarnishing” their family name and reputation. Her subordinates at work isolated her and made her the centre of office gossip. That afternoon, Rudy received a short termination letter expelling her from her job with immediate effect. Although the letter provided no reason for termination, her line manager handed her a copy of the tabloid in which her photo was printed. In big bold letters, the story headline screamed: “100 PICTURES OF UGANDA’S TOP HOMOS LEAK; We Shall Recruit 1000,000 Innocent Kids By 2012 - Homos; Parents Now Face Heart-breaks As Homos Raid Schools; Hang Them”.

This headline, which called for the hanging of at least 100 Ugandans, terrified Rudy and haunted her dreams for months. Not only did *Rolling Stone* forcefully expose Rudy’s sexual orientation, it also incited violence among readers towards people the story falsely alleged were raiding schools and endangering children. Such obvious hints of conflation between paedophilia and homosexuality are common tropes used to incite fear and distrust towards LGBTQI+ people. Although Rudy encountered hate speech prior to and after this incident, this was the most dangerous outing, and it forced her out of a job she loved.

## **Transgender Women Insulted in a Crowded Market**

Walking with frail Abigail and her friend Keemy through the crowded Bwaise Market offered a disturbing lesson in the homophobic and transphobic hate speech transgender women in Kampala face constantly. Earlier in the day, Keemy had telephoned me insisting she needed my help in convincing Abigail to go to a health facility. Keemy was worried her HIV-positive friend would die on her sickbed in the flat she shared with two female sex workers. When I arrived at Abigail’s house in the Makerere Kikoni neighbourhood, I was struck by the distress in Keemy’s face. I opened the curtains of Abigail’s shared bedroom. She shielded her eyes with a weak arm, exposing her beautifully manicured fingers. I was shocked at how emaciated her body had become since a fortnight ago when I last interviewed her for my research. Her big eyes popped



out of her dehydrated face. Her sunken cheeks were hollow. Her lips were cracked. Her room smelled of sepsis.

After brief salutations, Abigail revealed she had lost the will to continue living. She could no longer earn money from sex work and was unable to buy food. The sores on her genitals had multiplied, and she was suffering from painful urethral discharge. I gave her some juice to wash down her antiretroviral therapy and other medications. I convinced her to come with me to a nearby private clinic Keemy recommended. Although she was weak, dizzy, and limping from pain, she agreed to share a boda boda with Keemy. We travelled a short distance to the crowded Bwaise Market where the private clinic was located. Upon arrival, Keemy and I had to support Abigail on her limp from the motorcycle taxi stop to the clinic.

It immediately became clear that the traders in Bwaise Market knew Abigail and Keemy well. As soon as they spotted us, they began shouting insults at my transgender friends.

“Look at these two confused mad men who plait their hair as if they are women!” shouted a man selling soap bars.

“Instead of doing earnest jobs like us who hustle, those two are just fucked in the buttocks for money like women *malaya* (prostitutes)!” shouted a man selling brightly coloured plastic crockery.

“Eh, don’t tell me that their butts are opened like Fuso lorry trucks,” shouted a vendor of matoke banana bunches.

“Don’t you see how that one is limping like that? The buttocks must have been torn by a lover,” the crockery seller replied.

“The mother is to be pitied for having a son who is both a homosexual and a *malaya*,” a second-hand sports shoe seller lamented.

“You are calling me a *malaya*, did you ever pay me to have sex with you?” Abigail shouted back at the market traders who mocked her.

“You homosexual *malaya*, you are now very ill because of your immoral behaviours, which are going to kill you soon,” the crockery seller shouted.

“Abigail, ignore those haters for now. Let us focus on getting to the doctor,” Keemy advised as we climbed the cement steps that led to the reception area of a small gloomy health facility.

Although I had been conducting long-term anthropological research among LGBTQI+ individuals in rural and urban Uganda, this was the first time I directly witnessed the virulent insults, name-calling and transphobic and homophobic hate speech my respondents reported in

interviews. I was shocked that my two transgender research participants and friends were being verbally violated in a crowded public space without any provocation on their part. All they did was show up in this busy market, and suddenly the insults began. Their apparent transgression of strict binary gender norms made these transgender women easy targets of terrible, pathologizing insults. They were publicly shamed and emasculated for engaging in receptive anal sex, and their mothers projected as pitiable. On that day, and on every day, hate speech wished death upon my transgender friends.

## **Denied Employment for Being Effeminate**

Charlie volunteers for a local LGBTQI+ support organization. Despite holding a prestigious university degree in hotel management, the 24-year-old lacks formal employment. For three years, he searched in vain for a job in the hospitality industry. Although he was often shortlisted and invited for interviews at prestigious hostels, restaurants, and bars around Kampala, he suspects his effeminate personality barred him from getting hired by both heterosexual and homosexual employers.

“People on interview panels look at me and they make assumptions based on my effeminate ways. It is not my fault that my arms are limp and soft like a woman’s. It is not my fault that when I walk my body sways elegantly like a woman’s body. That is how God made me,” Charlie said.

“Judgment in employment interviews doesn’t stop with homophobic heterosexuals. It stretches to even our own LGBTQI+ community. I’ve lost count of the number of times I’ve been asked whether I’m a top or a bottom during job interviews. It really annoys me. I’m not seeking a job in sex work. I’m looking for a job in hotel management,” he explained.

## **Member of Parliament Threatens to Hang His Own Son**

Hate speech against LGBTQI+ people in Uganda comes from all levels of society, including from people occupying powerful public offices. David Bahati introduced the Anti-Homosexuality Bill to Parliament in October 2009, but he is hardly the only Member of Parliament to have made dangerous public statements about sexual and gender minorities in recent years.

Prominent among them is Odonga Otto, the MP for Aruu County in Acholi sub-region in northern Uganda. Otto is a member of the main opposition party Forum for Democratic Change (FDC). This supposed family man publicly declared in 2010 he would hang his own son if he ever came out as gay, affirming Otto’s strong support for death penalty provisions proposed in the initial Anti-Homosexuality Bill. This statement was made during a [stakeholders’ gathering on “Human Rights and Sexual Orientation: Interrogating Homophobia”](#) organized by the Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law in February 2010. After a moving keynote address by Professor Makau W. Mutua, then dean at the University at Buffalo School of Law and former chairman of the Kenya Human Rights Commission, Odonga Otto spoke up during the Q&A session.

“Allowing gays and lesbians to be alive in our lifetime in Uganda will not happen,” [he said](#). “Gays should suffer death not only by hanging but also by stoning at a public marketplace. Human rights are not sacrosanct. Private parts do not belong in the anus. We will not accept this kind of deviant behaviour in our society.”

Shocked by this display of fear and hatred for homosexuals, Mutua pressed the legislator.

“I am baffled by the kind of hatred you spew against gay people, including your desire to be a hangman. Would you apply to be a hangman if the person to be hanged were your son?” [Mutua asked](#).

Otto nodded in affirmation.

In addition to being a legislator, Otto is a lawyer with Oyulu Odonga-Otto & Co. Advocates, the firm he leads with his wife Juliet Oyulu. Despite assumptions we wish were true, Otto shows that high levels of education, prestigious employment as a lawyer, a stable source of income, serving as an elected official, representing an opposition party, and identifying as a “family man” do not stop people from publicly expressing hate speech against LGBTQI+ people.

## **Homophobic Pastor Drives LGBTQI+ Christians From the Pews**

Pastor James liked to fashion his sermons from popular news headlines in Ugandan media. In 2009, amid fractious public debate around death penalty provisions proposed in the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, he built his sermons on Bible scripture he said address same-sex sexual relations. He told congregants about how God destroyed Sodom after men in the city wanted to rape two angels they presumed were men who were staying at Lot’s house. Pastor James emphasized two verses as “proof” of homosexual desires in Sodom:

*Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.” - Genesis 19:4-5 New International Version*

Pastor James also preached New Testament scriptures he said condemn behaviours prophesied for the “end times”, when evil would multiply on earth. His favourite passages were Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:9-10, and Jude 7:

*Because of this, God gave them [sinful humanity] over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men*

*committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. - Romans 1:26-27 New International Version (NIV)*

*Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men[a] nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. - 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 New International Version (NIV)*

*We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practising homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine - 1 Timothy 1:9-10 New International Version (NIV)*

*In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. Jude 7 New International Version (NIV)*

After his passionate sermons, Pastor James always made an altar call, inviting members of the congregation to rise and walk to the altar to become born again in the name of Jesus Christ. He specifically added a call for anyone “involved in homosexuality” to come forward for salvation followed by special prayers for deliverance “from the end time demons of Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Unknown to Pastor James, at least five members of the choir who led the congregation in his church were gay men. Two were ex-lovers. All five met regularly at social events, workshops, or conferences organized in safe spaces by local LGBTQI+ support organizations. When Pastor James’s homophobic sermons intensified, these Christians stopped attending church.

“I was tired of being made to feel unnecessarily guilty. I believe God created me like this,” one of them explained.

“The hatred and fear mongering spread about people like me was disgusting. I felt as though the pastor was attacking me personally. It was as though he was sending the congregation to point me out for cleansing and deliverance,” another said.

“Deliverance from homosexuality does not work. I received a lot of deliverance and healing prayers from different pastors, but then the desire for my fellow men always came back to me. So I stopped seeking deliverance. I kept going back to the church because I enjoyed the choir ministry of leading praise and worship. It was when Pastor James brought those ex-gay people to testify about their total healing from homosexuality that I stopped going to church because I knew them so well. They must have been paid to give such testimonies,” a third said.

Had Pastor James and his congregation considered the cultural contexts in which the Bible's authors lived, how these verses fit into larger passages and the Bible's overall message, and how verses can be read with contemporary context (as Inclusive and Affirming Ministries advises), they may have reached a place of empathy, love, and respect for their choir leaders rather than driving them away and silencing the music that once brought them joy and strengthened their community.

## **“Eat Da Poo Poo” – Pastor Martin Ssempea’s Homophobic Absurdity Porn**

To demonstrate the extent — and sometimes the absurdity — of religious homophobia in Uganda, we reluctantly reproduce the following excerpts of presentations by Pastor Martin Ssempea, chairman of the so-called National Task Force Against Homosexuality in Uganda. His sermons offer a mix of ridiculous fiction and pornography. The irony of showing congregants gay porn to demonstrate its supposed danger is not lost on us.

*We are making legislation to make sure that sodomy and homosexuality never sees the light of legality in this land of the part of Africa. I've taken time to do a little research to know what homosexuals do in the privacy of their bedroom. One of the thing they do is called anal licking, where a man's anus is licked, like this, by the other person. Like ice cream. And then what happens, even poo-poo comes out. The other poo-poo's out. And then they eat the poo-poo. The other one they do, is they have a sex practice called fisting where they insert their hand into the other man's hand and it goes into the anus all the way, and it is so painful they have to take drugs. But they enjoy it. Now if we have any children, please step out. This is a parental guidance moment. That child can be moved out. So, I've done research. This is what they do: Number one, you can see a man here having sucked the other person's rectum and the other person is poo-pooing, and this one is eating the poo-poo all over the place. Tell me, when you have a law against homosexuality do you say accept eating poo-poo? I mean look at these guys here. Bishop. Aaaah, stagafiliza. Huh? Hajat? We do not want this sickness. This is sick, and it's therefore deviant; we do not want it.*

*Now, they start off by touching each other's genitals and smearing each other. Then this one smears the poo-poo all over the other person's face. As if that is not enough he puts the hand deeper. As Africans we want to ask Barack Obama to explain to us, is this what he wants to bring to Africa? As a human right to eat the poo-poo of our children?*

## **Banned From Teaching Minors**

When Mr. Lubega was at Teacher Training College, rumours flew that he was gay. Although he never told anyone this, he never denied the allegations. Some colleagues just assumed he was a “late bloomer.”

For his teaching practice, he was posted to an all-boys boarding school founded and run by Catholic missionaries. During his second month at the school, a student reported Lubega to the headmaster for allegedly touching him inappropriately. Lubega firmly denied the allegations. School officials immediately transferred Lubega back to the Ministry of Education on forced leave and referred the student for counselling.

The District Education Officer summoned Lubega for a disciplinary hearing during which a panel of five public officials accused him of “teaching children homosexuality.” They threatened to withdraw his name from the teachers’ register and delete his name from the government pay roll for teachers working in public schools. They also barred him from interacting with students younger than 18. He was soon accused of spreading the “gay agenda” among minors in Uganda and forbidden from teaching ever again.

“The members of that disciplinary committee called me an ‘agent of homosexuality’ who was spreading ‘the vice’ to school children. They said I was a danger to children and that people like me should be kept away from innocent under-age students. They made it sound as though I had an infection I was spreading to children,” Lubega explained.

Despite his dreams of teaching mathematics, Lubega now stocks goods at a supermarket to make ends meet.

## **Stoned and Insulted at Home**

Suzy and Clarissa were still sleeping in their double bed when stones started falling onto the roof of their bungalow.

“Is someone knocking on the gate?” Clarissa asked in a hushed tone.

“At 6:22 a.m.? Who would be knocking like a mad person this early in the morning?” Suzy replied.

The two lovers looked at each other in questioning silence. That silence was broken by the sudden screech of what sounded like bicycle tyres braking.

“Park the wheelbarrow here!” a rough voice commanded.

“Let’s throw all these rocks and stones on those homos so that they know that we are serious, that Uganda says no to homosexuality,” another young voice responded.

“Foul lesbians!” A man yelled as a stone hit the roof.

“Dirty whores!” Another shouted as he hurled a stone.

“Homos! Uganda says no to homosexuality!” A rock hit the roof and rolled down.

“Sodomites, go back to Sodom!”

“Lazy lesbians, you are losers!” Another man shouted as his stone missed the roof but hit the kitchen window.

The insults accompanying each stone continued for nearly an hour. The two lovers hid under their bed. They were terrified. Suzy cried. Clarissa felt too helpless to respond at all. At one point, she prayed softly for God’s protection from their assailants. The uncertainty of not knowing what their attackers had in mind for them was unsettling.

Unable to make a phone call for fear of being heard, Clarissa sent a text message to the LGBTQI+ hotline her close friend managed. She notified him of the violent attack, but there was no immediate response.

Eventually, the insults and stones stopped. The wheelbarrow disappeared. Suzy and Clarissa remained under their bed, uncertain what their assailants were planning next. When the friend who managed the LGBTQI+ hotline called them to open the gate, they breathed a sigh of relief. He reassured them that he was in his car parked outside and that the coast was finally clear.

## **Arson and Threats**

Fahad received an urgent phone call at work. His neighbour had seen smoke coming from inside Fahad’s one-roomed house and had noticed that the front door was slightly ajar, a broken padlock lying on the veranda.

Fear overcame Fahad. He begged his boss at the printery to give him the morning off and rushed home. The 30-minute boda boda ride seemed to last forever. He found a small crowd gathered outside his house. The Local Council I (LCI) chairman was there along with the landlord and some of Fahad’s neighbours. They seemed to be waiting for his arrival before entering his house.

A thick plume of smoke was billowing from inside. He pushed open the front door to find his whole life’s property alight.

His clothes hanging on nails along the wall. His bed net and mattress. His window shades and the long curtain that partitioned his bed from the sitting area. His music system and television. His chair cushions. His glossy pictures and posters on the walls. Everything he owned was engulfed in flames.

“Water! Somebody bring water and help me put out the fire!” Fahad cried.

The crowd dispersed. In a few minutes, his neighbours returned with jerrycans, buckets, and basins filled with water to douse the flames. More people arrived with more and more water. The fire was eventually extinguished, but the damage was done.

Later, as Fahad moved his property to clean the room, he found a note taped onto the back of his front door.

“Move, bum-driller! Stop polluting our residence. Go away, you homo!” it said.

The note confirmed his worst fears. He had been receiving anonymous threatening letters warning him to either stop bringing male partners to his house or to move to a different residence outside the neighbourhood. In recent weeks, anonymous callers who disguised their voices and concealed their phone numbers had started leaving similar threats.

“You are a disgusting homosexual who is polluting our area. If you want to continue living here, stop bringing those faggots to your house,” the calls threatened Fahad.

He was shaken to the core. All his property, which had taken him years of hard work to acquire, was reduced to rubble and ash in a flash. With his front door lock broken, Fahad was too scared to sleep in the charred remains of his home that night, terrified the homophobes might return to harm him. He spent the night at a friend’s house.

As he lay awake in bed that night, he made a plan. He would go to the police to report the incident and make a statement. He would notify the local LGBTQI+ support organizations that he had been victim to a hate crime. He would seek a temporary safe house for gay men who faced threats, and support to help him relocate. He would do whatever it took to rebuild his life. But he wouldn’t sleep. At least not tonight.

## **Family Outcast and Long Lectures**

Freddie was excited to return to his grandparents’ home for the family reunion they hosted every 10 years. The last time he attended, he was a gangly teenager. His beard had barely begun to grow. Now 26, he owned a business in Kampala and was actively involved with local advocacy teams fighting against the proposed Anti-Homosexuality Bill. Some close family members knew about his activism because his name and photos were often published in national media reports about human rights defenders working for LGBTQI+ equality in the country. Some relatives had asked him to explain his activism in recent years. He usually told them LGBTQI+ issues were part of his broader work as a human rights advocate.



When he arrived at the reunion in the early evening, he was delighted to find his grandparents' sitting room packed with aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews who had travelled from different countries and towns to attend the important family gathering. Greetings and hugs were happily exchanged.

"And you, when are you introducing your fiancée or girlfriend to us?" Uncle Peter asked Freddie.

"Uh huh! Answer that important question," Aunt Jolly responded, clapping.

"Does this man have a girlfriend? Haven't you seen him running around in beautiful expensive suits with those human rights activists who are fighting for the right to be homosexuals?" Aunt Elizabeth asked critically, as though Freddie were not in the room.

"Eh-eh! Are you now a homosexual?" Freddie's grandmother asked him directly.

All eyes in the crowded sitting room turned to look at him, awash in awkward silence. Freddie felt small. He wished the ground would swallow him. The room was suddenly very hot. His tie threatened to choke him. He felt a panic attack coming on. He loudly cleared his throat as he tried to think of an adequate response to his grandmother's invasive question.

"We do not want *ebitingwa* (homosexuals) in our family. It is terrible for a whole man to be a fuckable person. It is better to die than to be *ebitingwa*. You must find a good Christian woman to marry and then bear children with her to extend our family line. You must bear strong sons who will carry your seeds into the generations after you," his grandmother said.

"Yes, you must start getting children soon. Your poor father died too young to get other sons. As an only child, you must give him grandsons to extend his name and lineage into the far future. It is your godly calling to multiply and extend your father's name," Uncle Peter said.

Freddie stared silently down at his shoes. This was going to be a long weekend...

## **Intersex Child Teased and Bullied at School**

From the first day she joined boarding primary school, classmates stared at Alpha whenever she went out to bathe. Unlike older pupils who enjoyed private bathrooms in their senior dormitories, younger children bathed outside in the open grass fields adjacent to their junior dormitories. On that first day, Alpha noticed a few older girls openly staring at her genitalia. What started as a few stares quickly grew to crowds of pupils coming to gawk at Alpha's "strange genitals".

"He-she must be a witch. See that protrusion just above his-her thing. We should cut it off," one girl whispered.

“That definitely does not look like a normal person. Is she a girl or is he a boy?” another wondered aloud.

“Does he-she pass urine from the top organ like a boy or from the one below like us girls?” another asked.

Alpha was used to name-calling, insults, taunting, and teasing. Some children even drew mocking pictures of her atypical genitalia. Yet she still did not understand why her private parts so perturbed and intrigued other pupils. After murmurs and gossip reached the dormitory matrons, teachers, and administrators, a staff meeting was held. To accommodate discomfort among other students, it was decided that Alpha should bathe in the sickbay’s private bathroom. She was thankful for this new level of privacy.

But when parents of pupils heard about Alpha’s intersex condition, some stormed the school with insensitive questions, concerns, and complaints:

*“Won’t this child rape our children when he-she grows older?”*

*“Doesn’t he-she get morning erections when he-she wakes up? If he-she gets morning erections, won’t he-she one day get aroused by our daughters who share the bathrooms and dormitories with him-her?”*

*“What disease does that child suffer from? Won’t she spread the disease to our children who live with her?”*

*“Is there no cure through surgery for this abnormality? Can concerned parents fundraise to help the parents of this child solve this problem? How will she perform her reproductive functions if she grows up like this?”*

Unsure of how best to handle this onslaught of question, school administrators invited Alpha’s parents to a meeting. Her father, a medical doctor, explained that his daughter’s condition was neither abnormal nor infectious. Instead, he explained she had a hormonal imbalance at conception that resulted in ambiguous genitalia. Alpha was born intersex. Rather than surgically intervening at birth, Alpha’s parents had chosen not to unnecessarily interrupt their healthy infant’s life. Her father had decided to preserve Alpha’s right to choose whether to later undergo cosmetic surgery to more closely align with whatever gender identity she formed in adulthood. Having thoroughly explained the situation to staff, Alpha’s father was invited to address the annual Parents and Teachers Association meeting and provide basic facts and realities about what it means to be intersex. This helped clear up some of the other parents’ worst fears and misconceptions and helped them accept Alpha as any other student in the school.

## **Expelled From School for “Lesbian-Like” Tendencies**

Collette has been expelled from over 10 schools and colleges. As a young teenager, she was accused of having “lesbian-like” tendencies and not fitting in well with other girls. School administrators, teachers, and students have repeatedly accused her of engaging in sexual relationships with female students and chastised her for failing to conform to the feminine behaviours and social etiquette that were taught. They criticized her for climbing trees, fighting “like a boy”, tearing up dolls, and damaging other toys. They disapproved of her insistence on wearing trousers whenever she was not wearing school uniform. They teased her about her “boyish” gait. They were dismayed that, in spite of their efforts, Collette was a tomboy.

At the first all-female boarding primary school she attended, two girls fought for her love, but the teachers punished Collette. During investigations and counselling sessions with the two girls, teachers confiscated love letters and gifts they said Collette had given them. One of the girls said she and Collette had often shared a bath together and touched each other romantically. The second girl, who said she had never had sex with Collette, became jealous when she found Collette bathing with the first.

Teachers and administrators feared Collette would “spoil” weak-willed students by teaching them “how to be lesbians”. She was indefinitely suspended from the prestigious boarding school, the first of many to expel her for being a “bad influence” on other students.

## **Raped to “Correct” Her**

RahmanIssa works as an assistant at one of the many carpentry workshops in Kawempe, an industrial area of Kampala. Although the work is hard and dependent on commission made from woodwork sales, RahmanIssa, who is a transgender man and uses they/them/their pronouns, is happy with the job. Not only does the demanding work necessitate wearing trousers, a T-shirt, and a baseball cap (their attire of choice), it is also very accepting of people who do not necessarily conform to society’s expectations of gender expression.

“Although I am a tomboy, this work accepts people just like me. In fact, many of my male colleagues appreciate that I am tougher than most of them. I can lift chairs, stools, table tops, planks of timber – just like any man out there,” RahmanIssa said, lifting a heavy armchair to illustrate their point.

RahmanIssa decided to look for a job that accepted or at least tolerated atypical gender expressions after four men raped them, a transphobic crime the men alleged would “punish a woman who was pretending to be a man”.

“This will teach you that you are just another woman,” one of the men declared during the rape.

“You can never be a man, never be a man, never be a man,” another repeated during the attack.

“All women who pretend to be men must be taught a lesson. Every female thing is ruled by a male thing!” another said.

Before the traumatic experience, RahmanIssa was carefree and earned money doing odd jobs in a local market.

“Sometimes I peeled matoke, sweet potatoes, and cassava for food sellers. Sometimes I ferried plates of food from sellers to customers at stalls spread throughout the market. Sometimes I hawked plastic carrier bags or helped wealthy buyers carry their shopping from the market to their parked cars. Whatever work I could get, I did,” RahmanIssa explained.

On evenings and weekends, RahmanIssa performed in a drag show organized by LGBTQI+ youth from neighbouring slum areas. While most of the performers were drag queens who mimed local and foreign songs by female superstars, RahmanIssa always mimed songs by popular local male singers. For their drag king performance, they sported a casual look, donning jeans, a T-shirt, a jacket, a backwards baseball cap, and sneakers. They always danced with the drag queens, performing moves typically reserved for males in Ugandan society. On the catwalk, during fashion shows and beauty pageants, RahmanIssa always modelled men’s clothing. Some observers mistook them for a young male model.

The so-called “corrective rape” disoriented RahmanIssa to the point of questioning their lifelong masculine gender expression. They could not reconcile their “Tommy-Boy” nature with the toxic masculinity of the men who raped them. This violence contradicted the sort of masculine examples RahmanIssa had admired. Long after delivering the baby RahmanIssa conceived during the rape, they adopted a combination of their father’s and grandfather’s first names as a reminder that not all men were violent. RahmanIssa christened their baby with a new name, and themselves with a new identity.

## **Fondled Inappropriately by Police Officers**

Justine is a transgender man who had long fought for equal rights for LGBTQI+ people in Uganda. Part of this work involved public media appearances to present facts and perspectives about LGBTQI+ issues. He often participated in intense debates opposite prominent homophobic and transphobic leaders in the country. Many of these talk shows, panel discussions, and public debates were broadcast live on both television and radio and circulated widely on social media.

With such media exposure, Justine became widely known as one of the few public figures in Uganda to advocate for the rights of LGBTQI+ people. Unfortunately, this public spotlight

increased Justine's vulnerability as a target for homophobic and transphobic hate speech and crimes. While Justine's close friends and family accepted his gender identity, many strangers who knew about his work denied it as outrageous. Among them were police officers who worked along the route he used to commute to work. They routinely arrested Justine, trying to break his spirit. Charges levied against him shifted from "being idle and disorderly" to "being a public nuisance" to "being rogue and vagabond."

"Are you a man or a woman?" police officers often asked Justine during arrests.

"I am a transgender man," Justine always responded, proceeding to explain what it meant.

"No. You are just a confused person. What is this transgender nonsense? You think you are in Europe?" the police officers would ask.

To determine Justine's "true gender", or just to humiliate him, they would order him to undress for examination and fondle his genitalia. They inserted their fingers, sticks, or other probes into his vagina to emphasize his female genitalia. They confiscated the material Justine packed at the front of his underwear to enhance his masculine crotch. During detention, Justine was always confined in all-female cells, negating his masculine gender identity.

To overcome this unnecessary intrusion and police harassment, Justine underwent hormonal therapies, sex reassignment surgery, and legally changed his name.

## **Forced Anal Testing**

When police officers raided the house, they found seven young men watching gay pornography in the sitting room. They were all arrested and accused of "promoting homosexuality". At 17 years old, Charles was the youngest arrested. He remembers being shirtless because it was hot that afternoon.

"The policemen ordered us to go outside. As we were standing there in a line, one policeman hit me with a cane and ordered me to go back inside the house and dress. He wondered how I could be 'naked' in a house full of only men who were watching a blue (pornographic) movie. That is how the story that the others were 'teaching me homosexuality' started," he recalls.

The policemen confiscated DVDs, CDs and books that contained homosexual themes. Some of the booklets that were confiscated discussed safe sex for gay men. They also confiscated two photo albums of gay social events that had taken place. Charles narrates the shame he felt being transferred to the police station:

*"The policemen did not have handcuffs. Instead, they tied us up using ropes usually used to tie cows or goats to trees when grazing. They tied our hands together. They also tied the ropes*

*around our waists, binding us together and making it difficult for us to escape. We were then marched through the trading centre as they told onlookers that we are homosexuals. People left their shops to come and see what we looked like. Local news reporters took photographs and asked the policemen questions about us. A small crowd of school children followed us and mocked us for being homosexuals. It was very shameful.”*

At the police station, the shaming and name-calling continued. Police officers recording each suspect's statement and then mocked and lectured them about the “vice of homosexuality”. Rather than calling them by their names, they were addressed using derogatory slang.

After statements were taken, the seven men were ordered to undergo medical examinations by the police doctor. Each suspect entered his small office alone. There were two other police officers in the office, one woman taking notes and one man observing. After asking for each person's name and age, the police doctor asked about their sexual history. Charles remembers being asked whether he was homosexual, how many times he had had sex, who his sexual partners were, whether he used condoms, how he obtained condoms, and how he started having sex with other men. Following these intrusive questions, the police doctor ordered Charles to remove his trousers and underwear, bend over, face the wall, and expose his buttocks to the nurse. Without warning, the doctor inserted a finger into Charles's anus. He was shocked by the pain. The doctor inserted a second finger into Charles. When he winced with pain, the observing officer interjected.

“Stop pretending to be in pain. How can you fail to take just two fingers, yet you take up fellow men through your back passage?” he asked, mockingly.

Charles was shocked to learn that all the young men with whom he was arrested were subjected to this forced anal testing at the police station, and surprised that the police doctor expected all gay men to have enlarged anal passages.

## **No Longer a Coach**

A coach's uniform hangs on her wall. Winnie no longer wears it. Although it carries memories of a career that once promised victory for female basketball in Uganda, it also brings painful reminders of when she was falsely accused of “recruiting” children into homosexuality.

Like other female sports teams in Uganda, Winnie's was the target of homophobic smear campaigns. Several of her teammates were accused of being “predatory lesbians” who “introduced weaker players” into same-sex relationships. As a muscular woman, Winnie was never spared this homophobic shaming, her name and photo often appearing in public media.

Newspaper reports and radio broadcasts accusing Winnie and her teammates of “recruiting” other players into homosexuality were always harsh, vilifying, degrading, and dehumanizing.

The women were described as butch, men-haters, hairy feminists, mannish, manly, scary, ugly ball crashers, and hermaphrodites. Targeted players feared the effect these accusations might have on their reputations, family relationships, employment opportunities, tenancy agreements, and status at school.

As coach, Winnie believed it was her duty to protect and strengthen her players' reputations. She vehemently defended them against proposed interrogations and investigations by the team's managers. She also defended her players in meetings with other basketball coaches. She always denied that players were teaching each other about homosexuality on the court.

But when one of her former lesbian lovers demanded 3 million Ugandan shillings (~\$800 USD) to destroy photos that proved their romantic involvement and threatened to expose her in public media, Winnie sensed trouble ahead. Knowing the extent of her ex-lover's greediness and capability for vengeance, the coach borrowed money from a credit scheme. Against the advice of her close friends, she yielded to the extortion to protect her reputation, on which she believed the credibility of her team members relied. She paid for her ex-lover's silence, but it wasn't enough.

Six months later, the ex-lover demanded more money. Shocked and hurt by this audacity, Winnie got drunk and went to the ex-lover's home where she beat her up. Police intervened and arrested Winnie, taking the ex-lover to hospital. After two days in police custody, Winnie was released on bond – the money for which had been collected through contributions from the players and management of her basketball team. All charges brought against Winnie were dropped.

The story was reported in local tabloids, and she was committed to a substance abuse rehabilitation program at Butabika Hospital in Kampala. On completing the program, she avoided stressful situations that might trigger a relapse.

After much reflection, Winnie resigned from coaching. She hung up her uniform on the wall of her one-roomed house and applied for a job as a fitness instructor at a gym and spa where she has worked ever since.

## **Stares at the Clinic**

Peter was suffering from intense pain after anal sex with a well-endowed partner. He noticed blood stains on his underwear. He was too self-conscious and embarrassed to seek professional help. Rather than go to hospital, he tried to self-medicate. He asked his friend Martin to buy him painkillers and antibiotics from a nearby drug store. Despite completing the full round of medication, Peter's pain intensified. A burning sensation prevented him from sitting down. He lay in bed on his abdomen. Passing stool was so painful he cried. He stopped eating solid foods and stayed at home.

Five days after the incident, when Martin checked up on Peter, he discovered the unhealthy stench of pus. Martin forced his friend to get out bed, change his clothes, and go to a private clinic in the city. Peter was in too much pain to sit on a boda boda, so Martin paid for a special hire taxi so Peter could lie across the backseat on his abdomen.

The nurse at the clinic's reception desk was kind and motherly, but Peter was still too embarrassed to tell her the true nature of his ailment. He claimed instead that he was suffering from severe back aches. She booked him to see the general physician rather than a specialist who would have been more appropriate to address Peter's real condition.

The general physician was a fatherly man. Peter told him he had slid and hurt his buttocks falling in the bathroom. He was too ashamed to reveal he had been hurt during anal sex.

Upon examining Peter's body, the general physician discovered severe sepsis and inflammation in his rectal passage. The wounded area needed urgent treatment. He referred Peter to a dressing room managed by two nurses.

"Eh young man, where do you have a wound?" The large nurse asked as Peter limped into the dressing room.

"Let us see your prescription card," the thin nurse said as she took the doctor's notes from Peter.

She silently read the doctor's prescription and frowned. She stared at Peter, who was still standing in the small room. She handed over the doctor's notes to the large nurse.

"He is one of the rim-riders," the thin nurse announced with a sneer.

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"Eh-eh! Jesus Christ! We are now getting more and more of those cases," the large nurse responded.

"Remove your trousers and underwear, and then sit up on the bed," the thin nurse said putting on gloves.

Peter felt small. He wanted to run away but remembered all the money Martin had already spent on the doctor's consultation fees and slowly disrobed.

"But how can a handsome man like you leave all the beautiful young girls around and then go to another man? What happened to you?" the thin nurse asked as she prepared the dressing materials and equipment.

Peter remained silent. He climbed onto the narrow bed and lay on his abdomen.



"Is it the money they pay you that takes you there?" the large nurse asked as she gently slapped Peter's exposed buttocks.

"How much money did the man who wounded you pay you? Was it enough to pay for this treatment and the medicine that you are going to receive?" the thin nurse asked as she parted his buttocks.

"Ooooh, Jesus. Save our children," the large nurse gasped.

Peter shifted with pain on the narrow bed.

"Be still and let me work," the thin nurse instructed.

She proceeded to wipe the wounded area with cotton dipped in cold antiseptic. Peter winced and bit his lower lip. He closed his eyes and silently started counting down from 1,000 to distract himself from the embarrassment and the pain.

"Why didn't you think of your poor parents before getting into your promiscuous homosexual life?" the large nurse asked. "What does your poor mother think about your affairs with men? Do your parents know what you do?"

"No," Peter said softly.

"You see? You are too ashamed of your sinful ways to proudly share them with your parents. Why do you allow the devil to build his workshop in your body, young man? Why do you allow the devil to use your body to spread the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah?" the large nurse continued.

"Look at all this thick pus," the thin nurse exclaimed as she gently pressed the inflamed area. "Pus is a sign of rot! Homosexuality is a sign of rottenness. It is not only against God's divine plan for human beings, but it is also a sign of immorality practiced by a degenerating society. Homosexuals are rotten because they just copy every rotten mannerism from white people. Homosexuality is not for us Africans. You see how you are now getting illnesses in your private body parts? It is because you are using your body in a wrong way. You are using your body for unnatural practices. The anus is for defecating. The anus is an exit, not an entrance," the large nurse continued with her lecture.

Peter continued to silently count down. He bit harder on his lip. He kept his eyes closed. He felt a mixture of shame, pain, and relief as the thin nurse continued to clean and press the pus out of his body.

"What does it cost you to gain the whole world and lose your soul?" the thin nurse asked Peter.

He remained silent.

"It does not matter how much money you gain from selling your body to those homosexuals, you cannot enter heaven if you practice homosexuality in this lifetime," the thin nurse said.

At that moment, the large nurse motioned three other nurses into the small room. They stood over Peter's exposed body.

"Imagine such a handsome young man trading his body for homosexual money," the large nurse said.

"I had to come and see for myself what the buttocks of a homosexual man really look like," one of the new nurses said with a laugh.

"Is his manhood as developed as other men's, or is it small and underdeveloped?" another asked.

"Imagine, he told the general physician that he fell in the bathroom and hurt himself. But what sort of bathroom can create tears and bruises right inside the middle of the buttocks?" the large nurse asked rhetorically.

"His rim was ridden by a rim-rider!" another squealed.

"It is true that the wage of sin is death. Now our young men are paying with their buttocks because they prefer homosexuality to the natural way of having sex," the large nurse said.

"The rim-riders are finishing our children because of poverty," the thin nurse said as she finished dressing Peter's wound.

"The rim-riders use their money to entice our poor children! When they wave their homosexual dollars and homosexual pounds before our poor children, there is no way the children can refuse to yield to the temptation. They see the homosexual money and put their buttocks up for sale. That is why I supported the death penalty in the anti-homosexuality law. It is the only way to stop this vice from spreading. You catch a homosexual man in the act, he goes to court and is served the death penalty. That way, they would stop spreading homosexuality to our innocent children like this young man here," the large nurse said.

Two more nurses came into the claustrophobic dressing room.

"We have come to see the homosexual," one of them announced.

"He is lying here on the dressing table. Come and see for yourselves," the large nurse said.

Peter had never felt more embarrassed and exposed. The nurses' lies cut deeper than his wounds. He squeezed his eyes tighter and bit down harder, waiting for the horror to end.

## **Ashamed Mother Disowns Her Son**

Martha gave her son Patrick an ultimatum. He could choose his "homosexual lifestyle" or he could choose her continued presence, love, and support in his life.

As an "outside wife" to Solomon, Martha already blamed herself for being a "homewrecker". When she conceived Patrick, she knew Solomon was married to another woman and that they had four sons and a daughter together. But she believed Solomon when he told her that he loved her. Solomon never left his first wife, but he did provide for Patrick throughout primary and secondary school. That support vanished when newspapers reported that Patrick and 12 other students had been expelled from their final year of boarding school for homosexual behaviour. Solomon barred Patrick from returning home unless he promised to stop "engaging in homosexuality".

During the long vacation that followed his expulsion, Patrick got a job waiting tables at a busy restaurant and bar in Kampala. He lived at his mother's house with a new stepfather and two younger half brothers. His job required him to work late hours, particularly on weekends, so he was seldom at home when his family went to sleep.

Patrick revelled in this newfound freedom, meeting partners for parties, drinks, and sometimes sex after work. He learned it was easy to meet other gay men on social platforms like Gaydar, where he always used a pseudonym. Patrick hid his night-time activities from his family. No matter where Saturday night took him, he always drove his mother and half brothers to their Pentecostal church on Sunday morning where he served as an usher.

When the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) national results were eventually released, Patrick had excelled and was admitted into university on government sponsorship to study medicine. Martha held a special thanksgiving service where church leaders and the congregation praised God and Martha for Patrick's success.

Martha was so proud of her son she went on a shopping spree to help start his new life as a university student. Solomon continued to reject Patrick.

Unlike other students who rented private hostels close to the university, Patrick's government scholarship gave him free accommodation at a residence halls. During his freshman year, students reported Patrick for allegedly bringing a gay partner into the hall. The hall custodian sent both Patrick and Martha a warning letter and summoned them for a cautionary meeting.

During the meeting, Patrick denied the allegations, insisting that other students were lying about him because they were jealous of his free lodging at the prestigious hall.

Later at a nearby restaurant, Martha had a private chat with her son. She cried bitterly, telling him the reports had broken her heart. She told Patrick she was ashamed and regretted birthing and raising a gay son. She would rather be barren. She told him she was afraid to have him in the same house as her much younger sons because he might “introduce the boys into homosexual behaviour”. She threatened to write him off as dead rather than continue being mother to a homosexual. It was during this attack that she asked him to either deny being gay or to deny being her son. She gave him an ultimatum between her motherhood or his sexuality and identity. After a long silence, Patrick stood up and walked away from his mother. He walked out of that restaurant and out of her life.

Patrick never spoke to his mother again. When he graduated from medical school last year, Martha was not invited.

# The Snake Has Entered the Milk Gourd: LGBTQI+ Discrimination in Kenya

Marie Ramtu, Programmes Officer at the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions, brings us the following true story of a family and community struggling to accept the son, brother, neighbour, and friend they love after he comes out as gay.

As you read this case study, imagine yourself in each person's shoes at each step of the journey. What thoughts would run through your mind and how might you react amid similar circumstances?

*Some names and details have been changed to protect individuals' privacy and safety.*

## Case Study

Richard is 62 years old. He lives in the Kenyan port city of Kisumu with his wife and seven children. When he was 28 years old, Richard says he was "saved" and called to minister.

He quit his job as a mechanic and began preaching the gospel full-time. Richard is now pastor to 40 congregants, including his wife and children, at a Charismatic Pentecostal Church. When he started preaching, his beliefs and sermons on family and sexuality were conservative and narrow-minded. He used misinterpretations of the Bible to tell worshippers that homosexuality was impermissible and that gay people would never enter heaven. Fortunately for someone he loved, his beliefs would later change.

One day several years ago, one of Richard's daughters told him that Jackson, his fifth son, was part of a "bad" group.

"He is either homo or gay. The boys who he walks with, one is a gay and the other one is a homo. I think there is something disturbing him, that is why he is part of that group," she told her father.

Richard asked her to investigate further and to let him know if Jackson was indeed part of this "bad" group. Two months later she confirmed the rumours and told Richard that the boys were "sleeping together."

In his late adolescence, whispers about Jackson's sexuality had begun to spread. It was just when he was completing high school that his sister outed him to their father.

Richard and his wife were enraged at the news and chased Jackson from their home, disowning him from the family. Richard feared he had brought sin into the home. His wife, angry and in disbelief, claimed this “thing” (homosexuality) was not in their *boma* (line of ancestry). Jackson’s siblings abandoned him.

Richard went so far as to destroy Jackson’s *simba*, his traditional hut in the village. This signified to the community that he had disowned his son. When neighbours asked what prompted this, Richard skirted around the truth, telling them that Jackson had become “stubborn” and that he did not want him to have a hut on the family compound. Only when friends approached him privately would Richard elaborate on the situation, but never in much detail.

Jackson spoke in similarly broad strokes when asked why Richard destroyed his house, merely saying that he had offended his father, a story neighbours accepted. In Luo culture, a father can destroy his son’s hut under such circumstances or if an irreconcilable conflict causes the father to ostracize his son from the family compound.

Through the grapevine, four women from Richard’s congregation pieced together details and learned what had really happened. Fearing negative consequences from his bishop supervisor if the information were to leak, Richard asked them to keep quiet.

To help manage the situation, Richard approached Osei, a bishop and friend who ran a nearby school. Richard thought Osei may be able to help because he had experience addressing homosexuality among students. Osei introduced Richard to a local LGBTQI+ organization, and Richard started researching information on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions (SSOGIE).

In 2015, Osei invited Richard to attend a national seminar for faith leaders on SSOIE issues in Limuru, a town on the outskirts of Nairobi. Church World Service, a faith-based organization that runs a safe space program for SSOIE minorities, hosted the seminar. The aim of the program was to create inclusive spaces within faith communities for persecuted sexual and gender minorities. The seminar brought together clergy and members of LGBTQI+ civil society groups to exchange experiences and ideas about how to make faith communities more welcoming to LGBTQI+ people.

At the seminar, Richard heard from other participants how literal Biblical misinterpretations had brought pain and suffering to LGBTQI+ people they knew and loved. Through lessons on contextual Bible study, he learned how to formulate and deliver sermons that are more inclusive and welcoming to sexual and gender minorities. Listening to harrowing experiences from members of Kenya’s LGBTQI+ community helped Richard understand how Jackson had likely suffered from ostracization. Richard also started to unpack his own struggles as the father of a gay son. For the first time, he decided to publicly share his story. This marked a turning point for Richard and the beginning of a slow healing and reconciliatory process with Jackson.

With seminar participants gathered around, Richard introduced himself as a pastor and the father of a gay son.

“This boy has really disturbed me,” Richard said. “This ‘thing’ started when he was in Form 3. After he did Form 4, this ‘thing’ came out openly. I was very angry. We chased him from home. We did not want to see him again. He had brought sin into our home.”

In a longer telling, Richard used the Luo phrase “*thoulodenjeko*” to describe the event.

“It is Luo for ‘the snake has entered the milk gourd,’” he explained. “The gourd is my family, and the snake symbolizes trouble, in this case Jackson.”

One of the participants inquired about Jackson’s whereabouts.

“Bishop Osei, a friend of mine who invited me here, has been instrumental in helping me understand what is going on. He has also spoken to my entire family about accepting Jackson as he is. In spite of this, Jackson is still restless. He hardly stays home. He moves from town to town. He stays for one and half months then goes away.”

Another participant asked if Richard knew what was causing Jackson’s restlessness. Richard said he suspected it might be due in part to his economic situation, as Jackson had been moving around to find sustainable work. When he did pass through Kisumu, Jackson preferred to stay with his friends, but he was still in touch with his father.

“Do you know of any other parents who have queer children, and do you communicate with them?” another participant asked. Richard said he did not feel confident enough to initiate conversations with the parents of Jackson’s friends, given how taboo the topic of homosexuality remains in his community.

“Before your son, had you met other queer persons?” a different participant asked. Richard said he knew one person many years ago who may have been transgender, but that person had since died. Had he known what he knows now when they were still alive, now that he has a gay son, he said he would have treated that person better.

Another participant wondered aloud how Richard plans to respond when community members ask why Jackson has not yet married a woman, as is expected in the local culture. Two of Richard’s children, who live in his rural home, are already married with children of their own. Richard said that because Jackson lives in the urban area, he may be spared such questions, as neighbours will assume Jackson cannot get married until he is financially stable and settled.

Richard was also asked his thoughts on provisions of Kenya’s Penal Code that criminalize same-sex sexual activity. He said it is too punitive and that continued denial of gender and sexual diversity only hurts people.

“The Presbyterian Church knows, the Anglicans know, the Catholics know [that homosexuality exists]. Even if the government is against it, what can they do? Even some persons in leadership positions are queer, though they publicly deny it. This is something that cannot be wished away,” he said.

“I have learned that mine is not a unique situation,” Richard concluded. “From this conference, I also have learned how to positively interact with queer persons to make them feel comfortable and let them know that they should not feel alone. I wish for my son to be economically empowered and happy. I also wish that he could remain in Kisumu so I am able to provide him with the needed psychosocial support.”

The seminar participants applauded. Some approached Richard, commending his courage and offering words of comfort.

Upon returning home, Richard shared with his family members what he had learned. He also shared the experience with the four women from his congregation who had kept his secret. He made his sermons more welcoming to queer people and assigned a point person in the church to handle personal private matters with greater tolerance and confidentiality.

Richard allowed Jackson to rebuild his cottage hut as a sign of acceptance and reconciliation, and Jackson’s siblings no longer antagonize him.

## Conclusion

From this real case study, we see the challenges a family and community may encounter when they learn that a loved one is LGBTQI+. They may feel shocked, angry, or afraid. They may try to deny that sexual and gender diversity exists in their lineage or altogether. Or they may come together, affirm their love for that individual, and go on to champion equal rights for LGBTQI+ people. For many families and communities, acceptance is a long process with stops at each of these stages. Together, we can help others arrive where Richard did, in a place of love and support for his son and for the wider community.

As we know, sexual and gender diversity transcend cultures and continents. People who falsely claim that homosexuality is “unAfrican, ungodly, and unnatural” speak from a place of fear or hatred. In doing so, they deny and try to erase the beauty inherent in human diversity.

In a [2010 op-ed in the Washington Post](#), Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu equated discrimination against LGBTQI+ people with the horrors of Nazi Germany and apartheid-era South Africa.



*“Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people are part of so many families. They are part of the human family. They are part of God’s family. And of course they are part of the African family. But a wave of hate is spreading across my beloved continent. People are again being denied their fundamental rights and freedoms. Men have been falsely charged and imprisoned in Senegal, and health services for these men and their community have suffered. In Malawi, men have been jailed and humiliated for expressing their partnerships with other men. Just this month, mobs in Mtwapa Township, Kenya, attacked men they suspected of being gay. Kenyan religious leaders, I am ashamed to say, threatened an HIV clinic there for providing counselling services to all members of that community, because the clerics wanted gay men excluded.”*

To combat such hatred, we need more religious leaders like Archbishop Tutu and Richard to speak up and offer support to LGBTQI+ Christians and non-Christians alike.

As we see in Richard’s case, families may struggle to address taboos around sexual and gender diversity. They may choose to ostracise someone they love rather than to accept them and risk a blow to their reputations from narrow-minded community members around them.

In his analogy, “the snake has entered the milk gourd,” Richard initially thought that to remove the snake (Jackson and his supposed sin), he must destroy the gourd (his family). By disowning Jackson and smashing the proverbial gourd, the milk inside — that nourishing source of family love — began to seep out and spoil. Richard’s training helped him reconsider his position and patch the gourd before it was too late. Ultimately, Richard realized he must love his son for who he is. In doing so and in sharing his story, Richard has helped raise awareness and train other families and faith leaders how to replace hate speech and discrimination with love for LGBTQI+ people.

## **Analysis**

*Esther Mombo, an associate professor in the theology department at St. Paul’s University in Limuru, Kenya, offers the following analysis of this case study. Professor Mombo teaches church history, theologies from women’s perspectives, and interfaith courses and writes on women’s issues, evangelism, HIV/AIDS, and Christian-Muslim relations.*

The story of Richard and his son Jackson demonstrates how cultural beliefs and their symbolisms interplay. Given the dominance of heteronormativity in his community, it is no wonder that Richard expected Jackson to subscribe to prevalent sexual norms. Having possibly known a transgender person earlier in life did little to cushion the shock and anger Richard felt upon discovering Jackson’s sexual orientation. Richard’s reaction brings to mind early

responses when the HIV/AIDS epidemic spread across Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. At the time, it was widely considered a disease of “others,” not as something that could hit so close to home.

The negative and ambiguous language Jackson’s sister used to out him (part of a “bad” group, “he is either homo or gay,” “there is something disturbing him”) reveals her negative attitudes toward homosexuality and demonstrates the real linguistic challenge of finding accurate and affirming native terms for LGBTQI+ issues in indigenous African languages. She never clarifies her distinction between “homo or gay,” though in her mind the difference likely has something to do with penetrative and receptive roles performed during some forms of homosexual male sex. Her assertion that something is “disturbing” Jackson reflects false medical assumptions that homosexuality is a mental disease or something that can and needs to be “cured.” It is this kind of thinking that sometimes pushes LGBTQI+ people to seek or accept dangerous, ineffective, and unnecessary “conversion” therapies.

Negative attitudes towards homosexuality are also reflected in the anger that led Richard and his wife to chase Jackson from their home. The declaration by Richard’s wife that “*this thing*” is not in their line of ancestry shows her denial that queer people exist and an urgency to disassociate from something she fears and does not understand. The vague language Richard uses when explaining to his rural community why he destroyed Jackson’s hut and disowned him reveals the shame and embarrassment he initially feels for having a gay son. We understand the difference between rural and urban cultural attitudes around marriage when Richard takes relief in the fact that Jackson resides in an urban area, meaning he likely won’t face the same pressure to get married that adults living in rural areas face. Similarly, Richard assumes he will be spared from questions about why Jackson has not given him grandchildren.

Richard uses the phrase *thoulodenjeko* — “the snake has entered the milk gourd” — to explain his dilemma. What should one do when a snake enters a milk gourd? Should one pour out the milk and bear the loss? Or should one kill the snake in the gourd with poison or by hammering the gourd and risk losing both gourd and milk? As much as Richard believed Jackson’s supposed sin of being gay metaphorically represented an evil snake, he struggled to find a solution. He thought he risked losing Jackson, his family, his community, his congregation, or some combination of these important people from his life.

The social and cultural dilemma Richard faced was exacerbated by Kenya’s laws that criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity and by widespread ignorance around sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions (SSOGIE). We can assume that the situation might have unfolded more positively from the start if such laws did not exist or if Richard and his family had prior knowledge, understanding, and empathy towards LGBTQI+ people and issues. Now that you have relived the rocky road Jackson and Richard’s entire community endured, we hope you use what they learned to help forge a smoother path towards love and acceptance for sexual and gender minorities in your own communities.

# What's at Stake? Analysing Dangerous LGBTQI+ Media Coverage

In East Africa, sexual and gender minorities remain disadvantaged, stigmatized, and excluded from many aspects of economic, political, and social life. Alarming levels of discrimination, prejudice, and violence make LGBTQI+ people particularly vulnerable to human rights violations.

One of the most powerful tools to perpetuate or alleviate these negative effects is traditional media. Journalists working for online and print newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and other popular platforms are often highly respected and considered credible, giving them immense influence over their audiences. Those who follow basic ethical principles of their profession can contribute to the accurate portrayal of marginalized minorities, give LGBTQI+ people the opportunity to speak in their own words, and help replace dehumanizing stereotypes and dangerous myths with nuanced and accurate portrayals of lived realities. Those who fail to do so can escalate tensions and amplify dangerous hate speech, putting entire communities at risk.

To ensure truth and accuracy, journalists must learn about the topics they cover. To achieve independence, they must limit the influence of interested parties that try to shape their work. To foster fairness and impartiality, they should interview and seek input from a diverse range of relevant stakeholders, most importantly the individuals and communities being covered. To safeguard humanity, they should recognize and strive to reduce any potential harm that their reporting may bring upon vulnerable individuals and communities. To ensure accountability to readers, they need to humbly acknowledge and correct past mistakes in our reporting.

As human rights defenders, it's important you know how journalists and the news media work so that you can hold them to account. In this chapter, we'll take a closer look at the state of regional media coverage of LGBTQI+ issues in Uganda, Kenya, and Malawi; help you spot eight common reporting pitfalls that can lead to dangerous and problematic coverage; and review some of the real-life harm that unprofessional media coverage can bring about for sexual and gender minorities with examples from Uganda. Once you've reflected on these lessons, the next chapter will teach you how to "flip the script" and combat anti-LGBTQI+ hate speech using both traditional media and social media platforms.

## Tips for Spotting Problematic Media Coverage

As we've seen throughout this guide, sloppy or sensational reporting on sensitive issues can cause real harm to vulnerable communities, harm that can lead to discrimination and violence.

Keep an eye out for these eight reporting pitfalls that can lead to dangerous and problematic coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and communities.

## 1. Isolated outliers speak for entire communities

[\*“Men made me a lesbian after raping me three times” - The Standard, Kenya, 17 January 2013\*](#)

In this story from Nairobi, a lesbian attributes her sexual orientation to sexual violence. Few sexual minorities would agree with this parallel, but absent any other voices in the article, the subject’s controversial claim stands as authoritative testimony. While the subject is certainly entitled to her belief and opinion, her voice should be balanced by a range of opinions and testimonies so that readers are not left to falsely believe that sexual violence dictates sexual orientation.

## 2. Uninformed “experts” are given false credibility

[\*“Is there anything like a gay gene?” - Daily Nation, Kenya, 23 April 2013\*](#)

In a column called “Medical Clinic,” written by a medical doctor, the author quotes his former professor’s false and misguided views about homosexuality:

*In his opinion, the majority of men attracted to other men were not necessarily born gay. They do not have the characteristic ‘gay’ look, and it would be difficult to tell such from a ‘straight’ chap. “So how do they become gay?” he questioned.*

*“Men are indoctrinated into a gay lifestyle at an early age when they are impressionable,” he explained. “This is usually by a friend or older boys. However, the stimulation of the prostrate [sic] is what makes them seek out men time and time again. This eventually develops into a lifestyle.”*

The above statements, presented as medical fact, are nonsensical. So is the article’s excerpt, which reads, “Is homosexuality genetic or is it a learned behaviour bordering on addiction? All medical indicators point to personal choice and conditioning rather than genes.”

When quoting doctors, lawyers, psychologists, academics, and other “expert” sources who hold controversial, unconventional, or patently false views, journalists should beware of lending them undue authority and credibility.

## 3. Images or details of LGBTQI+ people are published without their consent

[\*“Lesbian pastor v church” - The Cape Times, South Africa, 22 May 2013\*](#)

Although the text of this story was ethically sound, the massive photo that accompanied it on the front page of Cape Town's most widely circulated newspaper was problematic. The minister profiled was out to friends, family, and colleagues, but her wife was not. The front-page photo of the married couple smiling side-by-side was published without the subjects' consent, a legally defensible decision given that it was taken in a public place, but one that raises ethical concerns and created real problems for the minister's wife, who was outed against her will.

When photographing or covering sensitive SSOGIE issues, journalists should confirm that sources know what will be done with the material produced and that they consent to being quoted or featured. If you hear of LGBTQI+ people in your community being outed in public media against their will and suspect the journalist did so unintentionally, you may wish to contact them or their news outlet to explain and emphasize how such editorial decisions put LGBTQI+ people in danger.

#### 4. LGBTQI+ people are exploited for salacious clickbait

[\*"I Got Three Grindr Dates in an Hour in the Olympic Village" - The Daily Beast, Brazil, 11 August 2016\*](#)

In this article from the Rio Olympics, a straight reporter used the queer social network app Grindr to chat with athletes — some of them closeted and from countries where coming out can be dangerous — and published potentially identifiable details about them. This practice, sometimes called Grindr-baiting, is intrusive and unethical. SSOGIE minorities should not be exploited for sensational or salacious entertainment coverage.

#### 5. Journalists have not done their research

[\*"House to address matter of intersex people" - Daily Nation, Kenya, 10 October 2016\*](#)

While this author's seemingly objective approach to covering intersex issues is admirable, his ignorance of the subject matter and misuse of terminology do more to confuse than inform the reader.

The author characterizes intersex people as "victims" who "suffer" from a "rare gender disorder," a "gender identity disorder that makes it difficult to determine whether they are male or female at birth, though their gender becomes apparent as they grow."

The author quotes "expert opinion" as saying, "the victims have both female and male sexual organs at birth, both poorly formed." He quotes an MP as saying, "an intersex person requires at least four chromosome tests to determine their gender" and implies that "corrective surgery" is required.

The author's victimizing language, muddling of gender and biological sex, and reliance on false information from "expert" sources shows that he hasn't done his homework. The absence of any intersex voices in the piece may shed some light on these oversights. If you see similar coverage, you may wish to reach out to the journalists and news outlets responsible, politely providing them with relevant sources and research they can use to inform rather than confuse their audiences with misrepresentations and falsehoods.

## 6. Vilifying stereotypes go unchallenged

["Homosexuality finds room in the office" - The Standard, Kenya, 23 October 2009](#)

Sources journalists interview sometimes say outlandish things about LGBTQI+ people. Take a look at the quotes in this story about workplace SSOGIE issues in Kenya:

*"I think we should not shun gays unduly so long as they do not embark on a recruitment drive in the workplace. Their lifestyle should remain private, and they have a right to it just like anybody else," said a lecturer at Egerton University.*

*Mr Nelson Njema, an accountant with an oil firm, says being gay is just like being impotent or a hermaphrodite.*

*He says gays and lesbians have the right to workplace benefits and respect like anybody else. Do you turn away people from the workplace on account of physical disability that does not in any way affect their productivity? He poses.*

*But Mr Anthony Wainaina, a secondary school teacher, differs. He has no patience with gay mannerisms. "They dye and plait their hair and manicure their hands at the expense of doing any real work," he says.*

*He quotes the Bible, terming homosexuality as the most serious transgression next to murder.*

These false notions that SSOGIE minorities go on sexual recruitment drives, that being gay is a disability, and that gay people are too distracted grooming themselves in the office to get any work done are frankly ridiculous. They would seem almost humorous if such stereotypical beliefs were not so widely and genuinely held. Journalists have a duty to challenge sources who parrot vilifying stereotypes. If such quotes are somehow deemed newsworthy, they should be contextualized and balanced with alternative opinions that more closely reflect reality. If you see stereotypes go unchallenged, contact the journalist who produced the story and help them sort myths from realities using this guide and your own knowledge.

## 7. Bogus surveys and statistics are cited

[“Nkurunziza furious as Senate rejects anti-gay law” - The East African, Burundi, 28 March 2009](#)

This article makes numerous reference to “the roughly 400 gay people living in Burundi,” a country of more than 10 million people, without ever citing a source. Statistics concerning sexual orientation and gender identity are extremely unreliable given that such data must be self-reported, often in societies where homosexuality is stigmatized or unlawful. That being said, the proportion of sexual minorities among Burundi’s general population is certainly above .004% if surveys from other parts of the world provide any guidance. Be sceptical of any SSOGIE statistics you come across, and always check the source if one is listed.

## 8. Journalists pander to their audience’s fears

[“I’m your dad, he’s your papa” - Daily Nation, Kenya, 22 May 2012](#)

Society’s biases and prejudices around SSOGIE issues often stem from ignorance or misinformation. Journalists have a duty to inform their audiences, not to prey on their fears. Consider the following introduction to a story about a Kenyan National Human Rights Commission report that recommended the decriminalization of homosexuality and same-sex marriage:

*Picture 21st Century Kenya as a country where same-sex marriages are legal. A man falls head over heels and marries a “bearded sister.” As time goes by, the couple takes to the children’s department over that small matter of adopting a future voter.*

*The child duly goes to school where the couple dutifully attend visiting and Parent’s Days. One is daddy, the other the “male mother.” Now imagine the child filling forms with spaces for “Father’s and Mother’s” names. Picture too, trying to introduce them in a social gathering.*

*This is not far-fetched.*

The unnamed author’s fear mongering and use of invented terminology to introduce a news report is irresponsible, unprofessional, and unethical. Such framing does a disservice to readers and should be called out and corrected.

## Regional Media Scoping Study

In October 2018, Taboom Media’s founding director and editor of this guide Brian Pellot conducted a media scan of 150 local news clips that addressed LGBTQI+ issues in Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, and Botswana. The comprehensive (but by no means exhaustive) scan included online and print text stories and accompanying photos with a few radio and TV stories in the mix, all published between January 2017 and June 2018.

After extensive coding that factored in coverage tone and source statement tone, it became clear that news media coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and communities was the best in South Africa, followed by Botswana, Malawi, Kenya, and Uganda, in that order.

Uganda was the only country to feature a majority of source statements that were negative in tone. It also had the fewest stories by far that were positive or neutral in coverage tone. Unlike in Kenya and Uganda, where most stories lacked LGBTQI+ sources and focused on “homosexuality” as some abstract boogeyman, most stories from South Africa and Botswana humanized LGBTQI+ people by acknowledging their existence, (safely) listing their names, and amplifying their voices.

Below we discuss insight gleaned from media coverage in Uganda, Kenya, and Malawi.

## Kenya

Selly Thiam, Founder and Executive Producer at [None on Record](#) in Nairobi, says she has seen a significant increase in positive or neutral news media coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and communities in Kenya in recent years. She acknowledges that media misgendering of trans individuals persists but says pro-LGBTQI+ public statements and actions by political leaders, faith leaders, and influencers are increasing.

Despite this progress, too few stories include LGBTQI+ voices. Unlike in many West African countries where few LGBTQI+ people would go on record or make themselves available to journalists, Kenya’s activist community is generally well organized and vocal, making their absence as sources in these clips noteworthy and disappointing.

As in Uganda (but to a lesser extent in Kenya), several stories focus on “homosexuality” as an abstract negative concept rather than as an integral part of people’s lives and identities. In several stories about trans and intersex issues, the authors’ and sources’ intentions seem positive/affirming but the overall effect is negative because terms are inaccurately defined and realities mischaracterized, further confusing readers. Additional reporting pitfalls include misgendering and fearmongering, rampant among both authors and sources.

Kenya’s media clips are among the most sensational of countries surveyed, as demonstrated by the following headlines: “With all these gay guys, who will marry our girls? Luo elders,” “Gay teacher held for ‘luring students,’” “Signs that your daughter is actually a lesbian living in the closet,” “Shock at Kitale school as 19 pupils engage in homosexuality,” “Gayism is slowly but surely getting tolerated at the Kenyan coast, rather grudgingly,” “Uproar as homosexuality spreads across Kisumu”.

Several sources, including President Kenyatta and religious leaders, repeat tired tropes about LGBTQI+ issues being unAfrican, a Western import, non-existent in Kenya, unchristian, unnatural, a mental illness, or assert that people can be “lured” or “recruited” into homosexuality.



Some of these notions are reinforced by inappropriate stock photos, many of which featuring unidentified white models, accompanying each clip.

## Kenya media clip examples

[“With all these gay guys, who will marry our girls? Luo elders” - Standard Media, 20 April 2018](#)

This is one of the worst articles, from any country, in the entire media scan. The source statements are uniformly demonizing and perpetuate dangerous myths. Between the author’s text and sources’ statements, discriminatory language abounds. The sources’ obsession with men who have sex with men (no mention or concern about women who have sex with women) shows how women’s romantic and sexual lives are still often an afterthought, as they were when Kenya’s Penal Code was drafted.

[“Gay rights matter, we’re all equal” - The Star, 5 March 2018](#)

This is an excellent, well-argued commentary piece written by the mother of a lesbian. It dismantles stereotypes and uses affirming language to emphasize love, humanity, and equality. It is powerful and persuasive, the best piece from Kenya in this sample.

[“Uproar as homosexuality spreads across Kisumu” - Standard Media, 15 April 2018](#)

This story presents an interesting case in that it gives ample voice to MSM/gay men, but many of the men quoted are described in ways that perpetuate dangerous myths (that sexual abuse determines sexual orientation, etc.) It is a heavily sourced story but could use a stronger activist voice. The author’s bias is very clear, and the story paints a picture of MSM/gay men as purely sexual and disease-ridden beings. Stating that the “number of youth being recruited into homosexuality is on the rise” is one of many false problematic phrases.

## Malawi

Gift Trapence, Programs Manager for the [Centre for the Development of People \(CEDEP\)](#), a Malawian NGO that works on sexual health and human rights of minority groups, described the state of LGBTQI+ news media reporting in his country as follows:

*“We are still facing negative reporting in the media due to lack of knowledge on LGBT issues. We have very few religious, traditional, and political leaders who champion or who are able to support LGBT issues. We need to train and empower more champions who can stand up openly to challenge homophobia and support the protection of LGBT persons.”*

The media clips analysed in this study support Trapence’s assertion that journalists in Malawi fall short when reporting on transgender issues. Among the five countries surveyed, Malawi’s trans reporting is consistently the worst, misgendering sources and reinforcing dangerous stereotypes that trans people are “impersonators, performing, deceptive, fake.” Three clips

about a transgender woman sex worker who was arrested demonstrate extremely unethical reporting, most evident in the photographs used.

Of the five countries surveyed, Malawi's coverage is the most focused on religion. While some sources, including the Malawi Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected with HIV and AIDS (MANERELA+) and Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Secretary General Rev. Alex Maulana issue mostly positive statements, in other stories, too much weight is given to homophobic religious leaders.

## Malawi media clip examples

[\*"MANERELA faults Malawi Police over arrest of man posing as woman" - Nyasa Times, 20 July 2017\*](#)

The shirtless "perp" photo of a transgender woman, is egregious, undignifying, and dangerous considering attitudes towards LGBTQI+ people in Malawi. Listing the specific village where she is from (and perhaps still lived at the time) is also dangerous. The author deliberately misgenders this transgender woman ("man posing as woman", "man alleged to have been pretending to be a female prostitute"). A reference to police officers laughing at her genitals is particularly demeaning and unprofessional. This story violates serious journalism ethics.

[\*"New door for at-risk men" - The Nation, 6 October 2017\*](#)

This is a very humanizing story that provides voice to men who have sex with men (MSM), allowing them to express their own concerns and the challenges they face seeking healthcare. It includes relevant ally voices and provides the public service journalism element of informing readers who may need CEDEP's services where they can find clinics. There are a few minor phrasing issues (gay, MSM, and homosexual being used interchangeably as synonyms despite subtle differences, and use of the phrase "risky sex web"), but, overall, this is an excellent piece.

[\*"Malawi police arrest man suspected of being gay in Mzuzu, charged with 'gross indecency'" - Nyasa Times, 25 April 2018\*](#)

This article is dangerous. The entire second half of the piece gives platform to the Muslim Association of Malawi's view that gay people should be condemned to death, and this idea is not challenged with counter opinions. While an unnamed rights activist is rightly quoted saying "Homosexuality is not illegal in Malawi" (identity is not illegal, just same-sex sexual activity, and mostly just among men/males), insufficient voice is given to alternative affirming perspectives.

## Uganda

Frank Mugisha, Executive Director of [Sexual Minorities Uganda \(SMUG\)](#), says he has seen an increase in neutral and positive news media coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and communities in the past two years, but also an increase in negative coverage, including more misgendering of trans people. Public statements and actions by political leaders, faith leaders, and influencers

are increasingly recognizing power and leadership among LGBTQI+ advocates and their allies, but this is not necessarily a good thing, as opponents continue to weaponize the perceived western roots of this power, denying and undermining Ugandan activists' agency and autonomy.

From among the five countries surveyed, Uganda had the fewest stories featuring LGBTQI+ sources and the most that contained discriminatory, stereotypical, sensational, moralizing, marginalizing, or misgendering language. Ugandan media clips were unique among other countries in that a majority address "homosexuality" as an almost purely abstract concept without reference to actual people, which is extremely dehumanizing.

Most of the Uganda articles focus on government efforts to restrict or erase SSOGIE issues in schools, prisons, and public life, and focus more on HIV than clips from other countries. Many contain false and dangerous misconceptions about homosexuality. These clips feature many examples of gross journalistic negligence, letting ridiculous or easily disprovable source statements go unchallenged. By failing to offer alternative voices and failing to properly factcheck or attribute sources' dubious statements, those statements are given more credibility than they deserve.

Many of the Ugandan headlines studied are sensational and clearly inaccurate or at odds with the story text that follows. Such headlines include: "Gay sex-for-food rocks prisons," "Gay sex between prisons staff shocks Byabashaija," "School is no longer the place for innocents," "Rights activists are agents of the devil - Papal Nuncio," "Row erupts over purchase of Shs3b sex lubricants for homosexuals," "I'm trapped in a woman's body," "Panic as 40 MPs get pro-gay magazines in mail boxes," "Suspected homosexual activist wanted."

Statements from religious leaders are worse in Uganda than other countries surveyed, partly because story authors rarely balance them with affirming voices that challenge their hatred. Notable examples of such statements come from Church of Uganda Archbishop Stanley Ntagali and Archbishop Michael August Blume, who was the Vatican's representative to Uganda but is originally from the U.S. Both men characterize homosexuality as unchristian, evil, witchcraft, the work of the devil.

## Uganda media clip examples

[\*"MPs want anti-homosexuality bill re-introduced in Parliament" - NTVUganda, 11 April 2018\*](#)

This video without any journalistic narration features several members of parliament spewing homophobic hatred in their calls for Uganda's anti-homosexuality bill to be reintroduced. The video is wholly negative and dehumanizing, featuring zero affirming voices. Discriminatory quotes from MPs include: "homosexuality is unnatural, inhuman;" "as long as you cannot give us children, remember God has given us the responsibility to be the factory;" "it's uncouth, unacceptable, unthinkable, unwarranted, uncalled for, unAfrican;" "we must stand firm for who

we are;" young MP: "our generation is against this vice of homosexuality;" "we'll do a roll call, we'll see those who are going to hide, and we'll expose them."

["I'm trapped in a woman's body" - Daily Monitor, 10 July 2017](#)

The author of this story is blatantly transphobic and insists on misgendering her source yet does give that source a significant platform to express some of the many challenges he has faced. The piece is simultaneously humanizing (due to source statements) and demonizing (due to the author's awful tone). This story and its aftereffects demonstrate the serious consequences that can follow when a source's safety is not respected. The author says the source prefers not to use his full name, but the author lists it multiple times, along with the neighbourhood where he lived. After this story was published, the source was kidnapped and later rescued. Even if he did consent to having his photo taken and gave the author his full name, considering the climate in Uganda, a responsible journalist would have confirmed multiple times with the source that he wanted these details published, explaining the context and potential dangers. Given that the author seems oblivious to trans issues, it is doubtful such conversations ever occurred.

["Panic as 40 MPs get pro-gay magazines in mail boxes" - Observer, 16 July 2017](#)

This story recounts a perfect publicity stunt orchestrated by the Ugandan LGBTQI+ community publication Kuchu Times. The story essentially serves as a free press release, alerting readers that the Bombastic magazine exists and that a new issue is being circulated. The author is measured and provides more information about Kuchu Times and Bombastic than some writers might. The author uses a slightly sensational tone and describes someone as a "pro-homosexuality activist," which is a slightly odd mischaracterization. The source quotes, especially the closing one, make the outraged parties look petty.

## **A Closer Look at Uganda**

In Uganda today, hate speech is one of the worst vectors of intolerance and homophobia. Mainstream news media and tabloids continue to publish homophobic and transphobic hate speech that haunts sexual and gender minorities and leads to real harm. Infamous examples include the local tabloid Rolling Stone's "[100 PICTURES OF UGANDA'S TOP HOMOS LEAK](#)" cover with the caption "Hang Them" in 2010, Red Pepper's "[EXPOSED! Uganda's 200 Top Homos Named](#)" cover article in 2014, and an online publication's "Top Kampala Homos and Lesbians Exposed" article in late-2018. These dangerous and sensational public media outings have exacerbated an environment of stigma and discrimination and led to queer Ugandans being physically and verbally attacked, evicted from their residences, fired from their jobs, rejected by friends and families, and forced to seek asylum.

Similar dangerous rhetoric is increasingly popping up on social media platforms including Facebook, where hatred and propaganda targeting LGBTQI+ people can spread like wildfire. In many communities in East Africa, particularly in more affluent urban settings, online social media platforms have overtaken traditional media channels including print, television, and radio

as the most influential means of delivering information. More than 30 percent of Ugandans use the Internet, many via mobile phones. Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Instagram, Viber, YouTube, Skype, and Imo are all popular means of disseminating information. These platforms allow users to produce and distribute content, provided they accept the companies' terms of use or community standard. These regulations are often designed to curb hate speech, but their actual effectiveness varies from platform to platform.

One of the many online threats sexual and gender minorities in Uganda face is doxxing, the practice of maliciously posting sensitive information including phone numbers and addresses of private people on public fora. This is sometimes accompanied by calls for the general public to attack them, a clear example of dangerous speech.

When hate speech pervades both traditional media and social media, it jumps between platforms, quickly growing more unruly and unmanageable and amplifying false and dehumanizing stereotypes about sexual and gender minorities. Examples of common falsehoods that have long appeared in traditional media include that LGBTQI+ people are paid by the West to import “unAfrican” homosexuality and destroy African traditions, that they are all rich and live lavish lives in upscale areas of Kampala, that they are paedophiles who recruit children into homosexuality, and that they brought HIV/AIDS to Uganda. These mischaracterizations are false but can become dangerous when people believe them to be true.

LGBTQI+ Ugandans who spend any amount of time online know that such misrepresentations and hate speech are repeated on social media. Even when a widely respected news agency like The Daily Monitor or The Observer publishes a neutral or somewhat positive story about the LGBTQI+ community, the comments below it are often filled with homophobic and transphobic hate speech. Examples of real comments include: “God hates homos, if I ever meet one of them, I will cut off his head”; “they are copying cultures from the west and trying to bring them here, but we Africans won’t tolerate these evil acts”; “if animals can’t do such a thing, how can a man in his senses mate with a fellow man?”; “God should save us these ugly creatures”.

Such demonizing and dehumanizing comments contribute to a hostile environment for LGBTQI+ persons and encourage many to live in the shadows and on the margins of society or to conform to heteronormative expectations that deny their truths. Homophobic and transphobic hate speech have no doubt contributed to an increase in health issues, attacks, and other horrors LGBTQI+ Ugandans face. Below we outline some of these and other lingering effects of homophobic and transphobic hate speech in traditional and on social media.

## Stigma, Discrimination, Depression, Substance Abuse, and HIV/AIDS

LGBTQI+ people who are the targets of media hate speech face enormous stigma and discrimination. This can foster inferiority complexes, low self-esteem, and depression. Some community members turn to drugs to alleviate the pain or as a coping mechanism after rejection

from friends and families. Substance abuse has become an enormous problem, especially for transgender Ugandans, and too few counsellors are trained or equipped to handle the specific stigma and mental health issues LGBTQI+ people face.

Stigma also contributes to high rates of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections among LGBTQI+ Ugandans, as many shy away from sexual health services due to widespread discrimination in the local healthcare industry. HIV rates among men who have sex with men (MSM) are twice that of the general population at latest count. A [2017 study of MSM in Kampala](#) reported high-risk behaviours including unprotected anal sex, selling sex, having multiple steady partners, and having multiple casual partners. 40 percent of men surveyed had experienced homophobic abuse, and 45 percent had experienced suicidal thoughts.

## Unlawful Evictions

Many sexual and gender minorities in Uganda have been evicted unlawfully by their landlords after being outed in tabloids or on social media as LGBTQI+. These landlords often explicitly say they refuse to “tolerate homosexuals” in their rental properties. Some victims are then chased away from their villages by local leaders or community members who claim they will be bad influences on children or might try to “recruit” the youth. LGBTQI+ people are thus left homeless or in precarious living conditions, often in unfamiliar new communities far from home.

## Lengthy, Torturous, and Arbitrary Arrests

Police sometimes collaborate with extortionists to arbitrarily arrest and raid the homes of LGBTQI+ victims of hate speech and public media outings. These blatant assaults on civil liberties are often turned into new media stories to further name and shame victims. Upon arrest, some men suspected of having sex with other men are subjected to forced anal tests, a humiliating and medically inaccurate invasion of privacy ostensibly used to “prove” homosexual conduct. To make matters worse, most of these arbitrarily arrested people are detained beyond 48 hours, the maximum legal limit before which Uganda’s Constitution stipulates arrested or detained persons should be brought to court.

According to the [2016 Uganda Report of Violations Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#) compiled by Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum - Uganda (HRAPF), 54 percent of the 171 violations documented that year were perpetrated by non-state actors. This shows that while the Uganda Police Force and other government entities are guilty of carrying out many abuses, they are by no means alone in perpetuating social injustices.

## Fear and Retreat from Activism

Between 2009, when MP David Bahati introduced the Anti-Homosexuality Bill with a death penalty clause, and 2013 when it passed with a lesser life imprisonment provision, LGBTQI+ Ugandans came out in record numbers to fight the draconian proposal. Petitions were made, meetings were held, and awareness and sensitization campaigns were conducted by local and international human rights groups in an attempt to defeat the bill's passage. Despite these best efforts, Parliament passed the bill in December 2013, and President Museveni signed it into law in February 2014. The Constitutional Court ruled the Act invalid on procedural grounds in August 2014, but in traditional and online media, the damage was already done.

For years, tabloids exploited international and national debate around the bill as an easy excuse to amplify their hateful coverage of LGBTQI+ Ugandans, outing many people against their will. This period was the most trying moment for Uganda's LGBTQI+ community in recent memory. The Anti-Homosexuality Act, though it remained law for just five months, robbed community members of their dignity and freedom. Many sexual and gender minorities went into hiding and avoided social spaces like bars where they used to meet. Sexual and gender minority rights NGOs closed their offices for fear of police raids and vigilante violence, and some LGBTQI+ people fled Uganda to seek asylum abroad. Although the short-lived law was damaging in itself, sensationalized media reporting brought the greatest danger by stoking hatred and fear.

## Physical and Verbal Attacks

Traditional and social media hate speech against LGBTQI+ Ugandans often results in physical and verbal attacks. Transgender women, who many Ugandans mistake as the face of homosexuality, often get the worst of it. In 2014, when President Museveni signed the Anti-Homosexuality Act into law, we witnessed a rise in the number of registered cases of transgender women being attacked in public places. Most of these women had received hateful and threatening messages and comments on their Facebook posts ahead of the attacks. In October 2015, Transgender Equality Uganda (TEU) reported that five transgender women and TEU members were attacked and beaten in Kampala in a single week.

Much of the hateful rhetoric ("God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve", etc.) and propaganda that fuels homophobic and transphobic attacks in Uganda can be traced back to religious fundamentalists from North America and Europe. One prominent importer of this hatred was U.S. preacher Scott Lively, whose travels to Uganda are thought to have influenced MP David Bahati's first draft of the now infamous so-called "Kill the Gays bill" in 2009.

## Community Media Outlet Kuchu Times Flips the Script

The creation of Uganda's first LGBTQI+ media house "Kuchu Times Media Group" in 2014 has empowered the community to create and publish its own narrative and to directly combat some of the homophobic and transphobic coverage we find so prevalent across traditional and social media platforms. Kuchu Times has helped fill a critical gap that was missing in Uganda's

LGBTQI+ advocacy movement — the ability to tell our own stories in our own voices. The media group's publications, especially Bombastic Magazine, are critical tools that help raise public awareness about the daily lived realities of ordinary LGBTQI+ Ugandans. Compassionate faith leaders, parents, and other allies have learned a great deal about sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions from stories published on [KuchuTimes.com](http://KuchuTimes.com) and in other formats. We attribute some reduction in sensationalized reporting by various tabloids to Kuchu Times's reporting.

Taking inspiration from Kuchu Times, the next chapter looks at what you can do to prevent, mitigate, and counter anti-LGBTQI+ hate speech using both traditional media and social media platforms.

## Media Engagement Strategies to Combat Anti-LGBTQI+ Hate Speech

Just as Kuchu Times has used media to advance the rights of LGBTQI+ Ugandans and to help shape positive narratives about sexual and gender minorities in the public sphere, so can you.

This chapter is designed to help human rights defenders identify the audiences you aim to reach, frame messages that resonate, craft and tell your own compelling stories with confidence, communicate through news media effectively, and use social media platforms to amplify your messages' impact and reach new audiences.

Read this chapter on your own and then share it with a friend or colleague. As you go through each section, think about how you would tailor the advice to your own context and your own media communication goals.

The best way to master these skills is to practice them. In front of a mirror, and then in front of a friend, tell your story of how you came to defend the dignity and human rights of sexual and gender minorities. Practice mock interviews with one another, switching between the role of journalist and human rights defender until you can confidently navigate both friendly and hostile exchanges. Dip your toes into social media with a few inclusive and affirming tweets or Facebook posts.

Your ability to create positive change is immense. Your voice is powerful. Let it be heard.

*The following tips have been adapted from Taboom Media's and GLAAD's media engagement tools.*



## Identifying Your Audience

Before you speak out as a human rights defender, it's important to identify who you are trying to reach. We can break our potential audiences into three categories.

Allies: These are human rights defenders like you. They are accepting of sexual and gender diversity, understand the issues at stake, and are committed to advancing equality. When you speak to allies, you're preaching to the choir.

Resisters: These are people who are strongly opposed to LGBTQI+ equality. They are set in their beliefs and unlikely to be persuaded by facts or stories that make a case for acceptance and inclusion of sexual and gender minorities. Speaking to most resisters is like speaking to a brick wall.

Movable Middle: Most often these are the people you should work hardest to engage. People in the "movable middle" want to do right by others but may not understand the discrimination and persecution sexual and gender minorities face. Your goal is to turn these people into allies who respect and defend human rights.

When identifying your specific target audience, it's useful to think of one person you know well who sits in the movable middle. Maybe it's your best friend at church who loves your lesbian daughter just the way she is but doesn't understand the struggles she faces. Maybe it's your local councillor who says she champions fundamental human rights but has never met a LGBTQI+ person. Maybe it's your neighbour the landlord who is debating whether or not to evict a good tenant just because they were outed in a tabloid as transgender.

People in the movable middle can be persuaded by fear, but they can also be persuaded by love and humanity. When speaking to a journalist, pretend you are speaking directly to your movable middle and craft your message to resonate with that person. You are not speaking *to* the media, but *through* the media.

## Framing Your Message

*What* you say matters as much as *how* you say it. Framing is how you say something and make an issue relevant to a particular audience.

You can think of the message as a gift and the frame as wrapping paper. If you give someone a gift wrapped in dirty wet newspaper, the wrapping sends its own (not very nice) message that may distract or alter the recipient's opinion of whatever gift is inside.

Effective frames: speak to your target audience's core values; have a reasonable tone; use affirming language; stand *for* rather than *against* something; stick to facts; break down stereotypes; and build bridges with audiences.

Ineffective frames: use combative language; invalidate the audience's feelings by treating resisters or other people disrespectfully; repeat opponents' messages without a clear strategy for doing so; or confuse the audience with excessive jargon or acronyms.

If you say, "Gays need to stop acting like second class citizens and fight back against the crazy religious leaders who keep talking shit about them," you may alienate potential allies in the movable middle who bristle against language they consider combative or crass.

If you say, "the local LGBTQI+ community will be hosting a SSOGIE forum to talk about MSM and WSW HIV/AIDS prevention v.a.v. the SDGs," your audience may drown in alphabet soup or confuse all those acronyms for a foreign language.

In framing your message, strive to emphasize that LGBTQI+ people share the same values, hopes, and beliefs we all do. They are our neighbours, co-workers, friends, and family members who contribute positively to our community. While laws, statistics, and policies are important, audiences will best remember personal stories that evoke emotional connections. Illustrate concrete harms sexual and gender minorities face rather than just focusing on abstract human rights principles that should be upheld. Try to tap into your audiences' shared values of fairness, love, commitment, and equality, and emphasize how those values apply to LGBTQI+ people and their lives.

One of the most effective things you can do as an ally is to share your own story of the journey to support. Make it clear that existing laws do not adequately protect LGBTQI+ people by focusing on a few meaningful and personal injustices people you know have experienced due to their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expressions. Such examples can help you build a case for improving dangerous laws and help you calm people's fears or concerns.

## **Telling Your Story**

As Dr. Stella Nyanzi's vignettes from Uganda make clear, personal stories are powerful tools that can help your audience understand the full weight of how hate speech and discrimination negatively affect LGBTQI+ people's lives. Stories provide emotional access points to reach your audience. They transform abstract human rights arguments into visceral experiences that can linger with people for a lifetime. They help your message stick and allow you to frame or reframe entire narratives, debates, and discussions.

In order for a story to be effective, it must be authentic, and it must be personal. As an ally, your most powerful story may be your journey to support LGBTQI+ equality. This story will likely

include the stories of sexual and gender minorities who have made an impact on your life. If you plan to include other people's stories as part your own, make sure they consent and understand any ramifications that could follow. Ask whether they would like you to use their real names or if they have a preferred pseudonym, clearly explaining any potential dangers of using their real name.

Before telling your story and those of LGBTQI+ people who have impacted your life, it's important to set some boundaries. Decide in advance what information you will or will not share, including names, medical issues, SSOGIE status, relationship status, HIV status, any struggles with depression, suicide, substance abuse, experiences with sex work, etc.

The most memorable stories include specific personal details and are succinct. Humour (when appropriate) can help diffuse tension and keep your audience calm, and a few statistics can add credibility. Effective stories make personal experiences universal by emphasizing shared values. To really get your message across, you may wish to tie your story to a goal and to end with a moral that draws a clear conclusion for your audience.

Practice makes perfect, so tell your story in front of a mirror and share it with few friends for feedback. Practice until you feel confident telling your story in front of a new audience, but not so much that it feels scripted and loses its authenticity. The more personal and intimate your story feels to an audience, the stronger your message of inclusion and acceptance will resonate.

## **Communicating Through News Media**

In order to use the news media to your advantage, it's important to understand how media outlets and individual journalists work.

Most news media outlets are businesses that are at least partially motivated by sales or website traffic. As "gatekeepers", publishers, editors, and individual journalists decide which topics are worth reporting on and which should be ignored. These decisions should ideally be motivated by a genuine evaluation of "newsworthiness" (timeliness, relevance, impact, prominence, etc.), but they can also be influenced by social taboos, government sensitivities, or financial concerns.

The news industry moves quickly. Journalists are often overworked and operating on tight budgets and tighter deadlines. This time pressure leads to debates being oversimplified and complex issues being painted as two-sided or black and white.

It's important to note that few journalists choose the majority of stories they cover. Stories are usually assigned by editors, who typically write the headline, choose the photos or visuals, and may make substantial changes to the story itself. This means that journalists who cover LGBTQI+ issues may know little about the community and may have strong biases for or against equality. Good journalists should still produce impartial and factual stories regardless of

their own beliefs, but this is not guaranteed. It also means that even if a journalist writes an excellent story, a sloppy or biased editor may still butcher the content or slap on an offensive headline or photo that the journalist would never have chosen. Keeping these realities in mind should help you navigate the diverse cast of news professionals you will encounter when communicating with and through traditional news media.

## **Establishing Credibility and Pitching Coverage**

A “pitch” briefly suggests an idea or angle for a story that a reporter can build and develop. Journalists pitch stories they hope to cover to editors, but many of those story ideas come from pitches trusted sources make to them. To help turn your pitch into a published story, it’s important to first establish credibility with journalists.

Start by making a list of journalists and news outlets in your community who already cover LGBTQI+ or related issues (such as sexual health and reproductive rights, courts, religion) in neutral or positive ways. Reach out to them via phone, email, social media, or in person. Introduce yourself, your organization if you represent one, and briefly mention a few story ideas you could help them cover. As you know, journalists are busy, so you need to make a clear and strong case for why they should spend some of their precious limited time speaking with you.

Once you’ve piqued their interest or established a line of communication, offer yourself as a reliable resource. This might mean sending them background briefings on a particular set of issues they seem most interested in covering or that you think most merit coverage, referring them to relevant people or organizations who can provide additional affirming perspectives on LGBTQI+ issues, or providing useful pitches.

When crafting your perfect pitch, make it interesting and engaging so that it stands out to busy reporters. Provide specific supporting facts, names, details, and other contacts the journalist can reach for more information. When possible, give advanced notice. Pitching and writing a story takes time. A journalist might drop everything to cover breaking news but probably not to cover today’s community event you’ve been planning for months but only just told them about now.

If you pitch a story in person or by phone and are expert enough to speak about it, have talking points ready and be prepared to be interviewed on the spot. If you send email pitches or press releases, include written quotes a journalist can easily copy and paste into a story. Be ready to provide photos and background information, and respond as quickly as you can with accurate information when journalists come back to you with clarifying or follow-up questions.

As you pitch, keep track of your progress. Who published a story you suggested? Who included a quote from you or someone you suggested? If a reporter rejects your pitch, politely ask what LGBTQI+-related stories they might like to work on in the future and follow up with relevant ideas as they arise. You can pitch via email, phone, WhatsApp, Facebook, press release, or any

number of channels. Just be respectful of professional boundaries, and use whatever methods each journalist tells you they prefer.

## **Preparing for a Media Interview**

You've worked for months building relationships with journalists and pitching them relevant stories that will shine positive light or help raise the visibility of issues facing sexual and gender minorities in your community. Your phone rings with an interview request from an unknown journalist. Not so fast! Before you agree to be interviewed, ask your own set of questions:

- Which outlet or publication are you producing this story for?
- What is your deadline?
- What is the format? Print, online, radio, TV?
- How long will the interview take? What topics will be covered?
- Can I have questions ahead of time? By email? (Don't be too pushy on this, journalists often hate this request).
- Are you interviewing anyone else? If so, whom?
- If the interview is on TV or radio, will there be an audience? Will they ask questions?

If caught unprepared, say you'll call them back about doing the interview, and do so as soon as you can. But first, do some research to determine:

- Who reads or watches the media outlet?
- How has this outlet covered LGBTQI+ issues in the past?
- What is the usual tone/style of this particular journalist? Look for previous stories they have produced and check publicly accessible social media channels such as Twitter.

If after your research you agree to do the interview:

- Keep in mind that anyone might see or read it.
- Don't trust "off the record".
- Remember there is no guarantee that your words won't be taken out of context.
- Know your stock answer for questions you are certain to be asked.
- Practice your key talking points.
- Memorize an opening statement and use it after the first question ("Let me start out by saying...").

During the interview:

- Smile and be warm.
- If asked a multiple-part question, pick which part(s) you want to answer.
- Speak as if the audience already agrees with you. "I'm sure most people would agree..."

- Don't speculate. If you're not sure how to answer a question, pivot back your main point. "I don't want to speculate about that, but what I do know is..."
- Be honest. If you don't know something, say so.
- End the interview by flagging your most critical message.
- If you stumble, take a breath, start over, and restate things more clearly.
- Gently correct problematic questions or phrases.
- Kindly correct misrepresentations and factual errors.
- Talk about one or two important things rather than trying to cover everything.
- Move the conversation from the questions that are asked to the pre-planned points you want to make. In doing so, answer the questions you wish they had asked.

A few interview tactics to keep in mind:

- Bridging - Link the question that is asked to one of your talking points. When the first question is asked, bridge to your most important talking point: "The real issue is..."
- Flagging - Highlight a component of your talking points by calling attention to it: "The most important thing to remember is..."
- Hooking - Steer the interview by dangling a hook. End your answer by leading to the next question: "But that isn't the only important part of this program..."
- Correcting - Answer problematic questions with short answers or by saying, "A lot of people have that misconception but..."

After the interview:

- Ask when the story is expected to appear and ask the journalist to send you the link.
- Always invite the reporter to call you for more information or clarification.
- Watch out for problematic headlines, photos, or misrepresentations of your quotes.
- If the story was good, thank the journalist and keep them updated as the issue evolves.
- If the story was mediocre, thank the journalist and offer them constructive feedback and advice.
- If the story was dangerous or problematic, respond quickly, assertively, and respectfully with constructive feedback and any necessary edits or actions.
- Keep a record of the story for future reference.
- Ask a friend to help you objectively evaluate your own performance.

## **Communicating Through Social Media**

As any Twitter user can attest, social media has inverted how we make sense of the world. In the golden age of traditional news media, facts were king. Today, personal and emotional opinions often carry more weight and influence.

What people see on social media can strongly shape their opinions and beliefs. As vocal human rights defenders, we should enter these spaces knowingly and deliberately. Using social media effectively can amplify our messages of inclusion and acceptance and serve as a counterweight to the flurry of hate speech that appears on these platforms and that brings real harm to sexual and gender minorities.

Three of the most prominent and influential social media platforms you will encounter are Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Facebook is often the most personal of the three platforms and is best used to address your existing community, which likely includes many people in the “movable middle”. Twitter is public by default and can feel more like broadcasting your message in 280 characters to the entire world. While that might sound impressive, if you don’t have a large or select following, your message will likely get lost amid the 500 million tweets that are sent around the world each day. Instagram, owned by Facebook, is the most visual platform of the three. Most Instagram accounts are public, and photos and videos are highly curated. Instagram can be used effectively to tell “stories” a feature that can cross-post to Facebook.

If you’re not already using these platforms, don’t fret. The last thing you want to do is overwhelm yourself (or your audience). Choose one or two that best suit your communication goals. Given different limitations and expectations across each platform, it’s best to create customized content for each channel you use rather than pushing the same general message out across them all, so only sign up for what you can handle. Each platform has its own rules, community guidelines, norms, and algorithms. Spend some time observing how other people are using the platform you are interested in and try to behave accordingly.

On all three platforms, Facebook and Instagram especially, it’s important to engage with other users. Do so online with the same respect you might in person. On Facebook, engage with friends or followers in the comments section below any thoughts, photos, or articles you post. You can comment all you like, but only post original content at most several times per day. If you want to post more frequently than that, Twitter might be your platform of choice. There you can post short ideas, headlines, comments, and links to relevant topics or current events. Many tweets link to external news articles and sources. Including a relevant image with each message is sure to attract more eyeballs and clicks. Journalists are some of the most prominent users on Twitter, so this can be a useful way to get your message out to key people who have the power to amplify it. Hashtags (#), used on all the three channels, help users follow specific topics or events. Geotags can let users know where you are. Only use this function when safe to do so.

Social media is called “social” for a reason. Use some of the framing and storytelling techniques outlined above to broadcast the most compelling message you can, and stick around for the conversation, asking questions and responding to comments that merit attention. If you’re speaking from a personal account, or even on behalf of an organization, be personal in your approach and be direct in your intentions. If you want a specific outcome, like for people to share your post or to watch your interview, don’t be shy in asking for it.

Reporting and calling out homophobic and transphobic hate speech on social media platforms and in the comments sections of online news outlets can prompt companies to remove it, thus mitigating its negative effects. If offensive and abusive social media users fail to comply with most companies' terms of use or community standards, their accounts may be deactivated.

In addition to reporting offensive or abusive users, you can counter their messages of hate with messages of love or inclusion. If you see someone write something negative or dangerous targeting a marginalized community online, consider chiming in with positivity and acceptance. It's important for LGBTQI+ people and other social media users to know that allies and human rights defenders exist, and that hate speech is unacceptable.

## **Stopping Anti-LGBTQI+ Hate Speech in its Tracks**

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation's [Welcoming Schools](#) project suggests quick responses and techniques teachers and caring adults can use to stop children from making anti-LGBTQI+ comments. As a human rights defender, you can use similar tactics to combat homophobic and transphobic hate speech online and in your local community.

*The following classroom recommendations have been adapted to suit a more general audience.*

### **Stop It ...**

If someone uses "gay" as a synonym for "bad" or uses more profane anti-LGBTQI+ hate speech, try a quick and simple response to help them reconsider their choice of words:

- "Do you know what that means?"
- "Even if you didn't mean to offend, it's not okay to use LGBTQI+ terminology disrespectfully to mean something is bad or worthy of ridicule."
- "Using that word to tease someone is harassment and is unacceptable."
- "It is never okay to say, 'you act like a girl (or look like a boy)' as a put-down."

### **Don't Ignore It ...**

- Almost any response is better than ignoring the situation. You may not know exactly what to say, but you must stop the harassment because it will not go away on its own.
- Ignoring name-calling and hurtful teasing allows it to continue and possibly get worse.
- If no one intervenes, people get the message there is nothing wrong with hate speech.

### **Educate ...**

- If you have the time and opportunity to educate immediately, do so. If not, make time later.



- If you hear homophobic or transphobic phrases, make sure people know what the words mean and know why it is hurtful to use such comments as put-downs.
- Be clear that using LGBTQI+ words in negative ways is disrespectful.
- Be prepared to provide accurate information.

## Be Proactive ...

- Develop an environment of respect and caring, and use inclusive language.
- Establish clear policies against hurtful teasing and bullying in your classroom, workplace, or house of worship. Ensure that all members of the community understand the policies and why they are important.
- Develop the capacity of friends and colleagues to be allies that stand up for people who are harassed.

# Sorting Sexual and Gender Myths from Realities

Sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SSOGIE) are often considered taboo topics. When we shy away from discussing such important issues, we become complicit in efforts to deny the existence of diversity. Moreover, we allow sensational stereotypes and dangerous myths to go unchecked and unchallenged.

For sexual and gender minorities, our embarrassed or “polite” silence can contribute to inequality, human rights violations, privacy violations, gender-based violence, physical and sexual violence, stigma, arrest, unlawful detention, prosecution, denial of autonomy over sexual health choices, removal of children from parental custody, housing discrimination, employment discrimination, educational discrimination, healthcare discrimination, mental health issues, suicide attempts, homelessness...the list goes on.

As humans and guardians, we have a responsibility to discuss and help debunk mythical falsehoods about marginalized communities and to help others sort fact from fiction.

Below you’ll find a mix of common tropes and truths about sexual and gender minorities. Cover the right column with your hand or a piece of paper and read each statement on the left from top to bottom, revealing and distinguishing myths from realities as you go.

*The following table was inspired by and partially adapted from guides produced by Gay and Lesbian Memory in Africa (GALA) and Taboom Media.*

STATEMENT	MYTH VS. REALITY
People can change their sexual orientation through prayer	<b>Myth:</b> Sexual orientation is an individual's innate and enduring romantic, sexual, and/or emotional attraction to other people with regards to their sex and/or gender. Prayer will not change it. So-called conversion therapy, deliverance, and exorcism attempts are ineffective and can be physically and psychologically damaging. As such, they have been banned in many parts of the world.
LGBTQI+ people are capable of having healthy, long-term relationships	<b>Reality:</b> Many sexual and gender minorities have been happily partnered for decades.

Sexual and gender minorities often face higher rates of violence and discrimination than the general population	<b>Reality:</b> See other sections of this guide for some of the disturbing persecution LGBTQI+ people face merely for who they love or how they identify. Consult local human rights groups and reliable authorities for statistics.
Every society has sexual and gender minorities	<b>Reality:</b> Just as every society has left-handed people, every society has sexual and gender diversity. Research has shown that intersex conditions, homosexuality, and gender nonconformity are universal realities. They are not confined to certain races, ethnicities, or geographic borders.
Same-sex attraction is caused by witchcraft and evil spirits	<b>Myth:</b> Exorcism and deliverance attempts are ineffective and dangerous. Remind local faith leaders of the physical and psychological harm these practices cause.
Gay men are more likely to abuse children	<b>Myth:</b> This disparaging myth has been widely disproved. Consult credible local and international statistics.
Not all congregations are against homosexuality	<b>Reality:</b> See the African Faith Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Diversity chapter of this guide for examples of inclusive and affirming congregations and faith leaders.
Homosexuality is a mental disorder	<b>Myth:</b> Major international mental health organizations have long agreed that homosexuality is not a mental disorder.
People are LGBTQI+ because they were abused as children	<b>Myth:</b> Speak with a diverse range of LGBTQI+ people in your community. Some may have been abused as children, as is true of the general population, but most will say their identities and expressions are not a result of childhood abuse.
If a lesbian has sex with a man she will be “cured”	<b>Myth:</b> Same-sex attraction is not a mental disorder that needs to be “cured,” and sexual orientation is enduring. So-called “corrective rapes” of lesbians are serious criminal violations of human rights.
Scientists still don’t know what causes a person’s sexual orientation	<b>Reality:</b> Theories abound, but none have been decisively proven.

Children of same-sex parents will grow up to be same-sex attracted	<b>Myth:</b> In countries where child adoption by same-sex parents is legal, research has shown that those children are not more likely to be gay than the general population. Sexual orientation is innate and enduring, not a result of one's upbringing.
Sexual and gender minorities are celebrated in some African traditions	<b>Reality:</b> For examples, see the 2015 book <i>Boldly Queer: African Perspectives on Same-Sex Sexuality and Gender Diversity</i> , available for free online at <a href="http://hivos.org">hivos.org</a> .
There are indigenous African words for sexual and gender minorities	<b>Reality:</b> <i>Mumemke</i> , <i>shoga</i> , <i>mugawe</i> , and <i>inzili</i> are a few examples from East Africa. <i>Talasi</i> , <i>unongayindoda</i> , and <i>umjendevu</i> are a few from South Africa. Ask your community for local indigenous terms.
You can't tell a person's sexual orientation just by looking at them	<b>Reality:</b> Gender expression can be displayed, but sexual orientation is innate and cannot be determined merely by looking at a person.
A transgender woman is a woman	<b>Reality:</b> The words "woman" and "man" refer to a person's gender identity, while "male" and "female" refer to biological sex. If a transgender person identifies as a woman, she is a woman regardless of biological sex, sexual orientation or gender expression.
Same-sex relationships always have 'male' and 'female' roles	<b>Myth:</b> This is not true, and many LGBTQI+ people consider the premise offensive.
People become queer from hanging out with other queer people	<b>Myth:</b> Sexual and gender diversity is not contagious.

# Key LGBTQI+ Terminology

When engaging with the LGBTQI+ community, it's important to familiarize yourself with the relevant terminology that tends to come up in conversations about sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions (SSOGIE). Knowing that LGBTQI+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and more (+) is just the tip of the iceberg. Not every SSOIE minority chooses to use these terms and labels. Rather than trying to fit people you meet into particular identity categories, allow them to use their own vocabulary, and describe them accordingly in your interactions.

[Church World Service](#), a cooperative ministry that aims to promote peace and social justice, offered some of the following definitions in its guide for faith actors working with sexual and gender nonconforming forced migrants in Kenya. Though not exhaustive, this is a good introductory list to get you started. It has been adapted and greatly expanded for this guide.

**Ally:** A term for human rights defenders who are supportive of LGBTQI+ people, communities, and/or social movements but do not themselves identify as LGBTQI+. Most allies identify as cisgender and/or heterosexual.

**Bi/Homo/Intersex/Trans/Queer-phobia:** Emotional disgust, fear, anger, and/or discomfort felt or expressed towards people who don't conform to certain societal expectations around sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions. Biphobia, Homophobia, Intersexphobia, Transphobia, and Queerphobia are human-made constructs often fed by political, religious, legal, and pseudo-medical justifications.

**Bisexual:** A binary term for someone who is sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to both males and females or men and women. The term "pansexual" is more inclusive and expansive than "bisexual" (see definition below).

**Cisgender:** a person whose gender identity and/or expressions mostly align with societal expectations associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Coming out:** The process of identifying to oneself and to others in accordance with one's sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

**Female:** A biological sex assignment based on characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals. Females typically have XX chromosomes, a vagina and ovaries, and lower levels of testosterone than males, among other sex characteristics.

**Feminine:** Gender attributes, behaviours, and roles typically associated with girls and women. Such attributes can vary greatly across time and culture.

**Gay:** Describes a person who is sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to people of the same sex or gender. This means males or men who are attracted to other males or men, or females or women who are attracted to other females or women. The word "gay" can refer to any homosexual person, but mostly it refers to homosexual men.

**Gender:** Socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society associates with men and women.

**Gender expressions:** How individuals present their relationships with masculinity and/or femininity through external characteristics and behaviour. This can include dress, mannerisms, grooming, speech patterns, and social interactions, among many other traits.

**Gender identity:** Refers to a person's innate, deeply felt psychological identification as man, woman, or another category. This may or may not correspond with the sex a person was assigned at birth.

**Genderqueer:** Behaviours or gender identities/expressions that do not match typically masculine or feminine gender norms. Terms similar to "genderqueer", all with different meanings, include gender diverse, gender nonconforming, gender non-binary, pangender, third gender, genderfree, and gender variant. These terms emphasize that gender can be non-binary or non-fixed.

**Gender Dysphoria:** Distress or discomfort people may experience if their gender identities or expressions do not align with societal expectations.

**Gender Fluid:** Someone who identifies with multiple genders, or who has fluctuating gender identities.

**Gender Minorities:** People who do not conform to societally expected binary gender norms in terms of expressions or identities around masculinity and femininity.

**Heterosexism:** Promoting heterosexuality as superior, "natural" or "normal", or assuming that all people are heterosexual.

**Heterosexual/Straight:** Someone whose predominant attraction is to the "opposite" sex or gender (in a binary system).

**Homosexual:** Someone whose predominant attraction is to the same sex or gender.

**In the Closet:** Being secretive about one's sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. Also referred to as "closeted."

**Intersex:** A biological sex assignment based on characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals. Intersex falls between typical definitions of male and female.

**LGBTQI+:** Acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and more (+).

**Lesbian:** A female or woman who is sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to other females or women.

**Male:** A biological sex assignment based on characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals. Males typically have XY chromosomes, a penis and testes, and higher levels of testosterone than females, among other sex characteristics.

**Man:** A person who identifies as a man, regardless of sex or gender expressions.

**Masculine:** Gender attributes, behaviours, and roles typically associated with boys and men. Such attributes can vary greatly across time and culture.

**MSM:** Men (or males) who have sex with men (or males). They may or may not identify as gay or bisexual.

**Pansexual:** Sexual, romantic, or emotional attraction towards people regardless of their sex or gender identity. The term "pansexual" is more inclusive and expansive than "bisexual", which by definition perpetuates gender and sex binaries.

**Queer:** This is an umbrella term that is used by many sexual and gender minorities to describe themselves. Many value its inclusiveness in terms of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions. "Queer" was once considered derogatory but has been "reclaimed" in many LGBTQI+ communities. Only use this term when the sexual and gender minorities you're engaging with use it, and when doing so is clearly not offensive.

**Questioning:** The process of seeking information and support when uncertain of one's sex, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity.

**Safe space:** A positive environment that enables all persons, including sexual and gender minorities, to be free to express themselves without fear of discrimination or violation of their rights and dignity. Individual actions and reactions are key in upholding or violating a safe space. Safe spaces are sometimes ridiculed or thought to stifle critical inquiry. They are created to do the opposite, to ensure that everyone present can participate in the conversation without risk of systematic or aggressive attacks.

**Sex:** Assignment at birth as male, female, or intersex based upon biological and physiological characteristics.

**Sex reassignment surgery:** The surgical procedures by which some transgender people's sexual characteristics (physical appearances and/or functions) are altered to more closely align with sexual characteristics commonly associated with their gender identities.

**Sexual minorities:** Refers to persons who are oriented towards or who engage in sexual activities that would not typically be considered exclusively heterosexual, and individuals who do not fall into the binary sex categories of male or female.

**Sexual orientation:** The preferred term used when referring to an individual's innate romantic, sexual, and/or emotional attraction to other people, with regards to sex and/or gender. "Heterosexual," "bisexual", "pansexual", and "homosexual" are all examples of sexual orientations. A person's sexual orientation is distinct from a person's gender identity and expressions.

**Sexual preference:** Indicates sexual desires that are more individual and fluid than sexual orientation. Someone may have a sexual preference for people with certain physical characteristics, or they may prefer certain sexual practices. Do not refer to someone's innate sexual orientation as a "preference".

**"Sodomy" laws:** Laws that prohibit consensual sexual acts among consenting adults. Such acts are seldom fully defined but can include anal and oral sex, even among heterosexual people. Sodomy laws are most often used to target men who have sex with men, but also apply to women in many jurisdictions.

**SSOGIE/SOGIE/SOGI:** Acronyms used to refer to Sex, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expressions.

**Transgender:** Umbrella term for a person whose gender identity or expressions differ from societal expectations based on the sex that person was assigned at birth.

**Transition:** The process of altering one's sex and/or gender. This may or may not include medical and other physical alterations or changing legal documents.

**Woman:** A person who identifies as a woman, regardless of sex or gender expressions.

**WSW:** Women (or females) who have sex with women (or females). They may not identify as lesbian or bisexual.



# Conclusion

Our goal in this manual has been to equip and empower human rights defenders to prevent, mitigate, and counter anti-LGBTQI+ hate speech wherever they hear or see it. This is no small ask and no small task.

Speaking up for marginalized communities requires incredible bravery. Friends may ridicule you, religious leaders may chastise you, police may harass you, family may disown you, and colleagues may question your motives. Whatever comes, remember that you have a duty to yourself and to your community to do what is right. We hope that means speaking your truth, championing social justice, and working to ensure that everyone enjoys equal rights.

Sexual and gender minorities face disproportionate hate speech and discrimination, but as the stories in this manual make clear, many have found enormous strength through adversity. As human rights defenders and guardians, you have the power to help amplify that strength and channel it into positive change through your caring love.

We hope this guide has sparked ideas for how you can best support sexual and gender minorities and challenge homophobic and transphobic hate speech. Teachers, politicians, religious leaders, journalists, health workers, police officers, parents, and other community leaders all have unique roles to play, if we choose to accept them. We can't afford not to.

Every day, members of our communities are being insulted, humiliated, disowned, expelled from school, arrested, fired, denied employment, attacked, raped, and murdered for who they love or how they identify. We can't in good conscience stay silent.

Speak up and speak out against hate speech. Do so with your mind, body, and heart. When you tire, remember the words of 18th century cleric and theologian John Wesley:

*Do all the good you can,  
By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can.*

Our lives and our futures depend on it.

# Resource Guide

## Additional Resources and Readings

ILGA's annual [State Sponsored Homophobia Report](#) documents sexual orientation laws around the world.

The [2016 ILGA-RIWI Global Attitudes Survey on LGBTI People](#) surveyed nearly 100,000 people online in 65 countries, nine of which are in Africa.

[“The Global Divide on Homosexuality”](#) is a 2013 Pew Research Center report on global attitudes to homosexuality in 39 countries. On the question, “Should Society Accept Homosexuality,” a majority of people said “No” in the six African countries surveyed, namely South Africa (61% “No”), Kenya (90%), Uganda (96%), Ghana (96%), Senegal (96%), and Nigeria (98%). The survey found that acceptance of homosexuality is most widespread in countries where religion is less central to people’s lives.

[“Violence Based on Perceived or Real Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Africa”](#) is a 2013 report compiled by African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMSHeR) and the Coalition of African Lesbians. The report documents different forms of violence, factors fuelling violence, and the impacts of violence on LGBTI individuals in Africa. It is available in English and French.

[“Canaries in the Coal Mines: An Analysis of Spaces for LGBTI Activism in Southern Africa”](#) is a 2016 report by The Other Foundation that assesses the depth and nature of social exclusion of LGBTI people and analyses how LGBTI groups are organizing to transform that reality in Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

[“Criminalising Homosexuality and Understanding the Right to Manifest Religion”](#) (2016) is a briefing note by the Human Dignity Trust that discusses how religion and criminalisation of homosexuality are connected around the world. The note includes statements by religious leaders from a diversity of faiths on LGBTI issues.

[“Breaking the Silence: Criminalisation of Lesbians and Bisexual Women and its Impacts”](#) (2016) is a report by the Human Dignity Trust that documents the history of laws criminalizing consensual sexual intimacy between women, and the homophobia anti-LGBT criminal laws foster and perpetuate against lesbians and bisexual women in particular.

The [summary report](#) from “Homophobia and the Churches in Africa: A Dialogue” synthesizes a two-day conference held in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, in April 2016. You can watch video recordings of each session [here](#).

The ILGA-Europe magazine’s [Winter 2015/16 edition](#) on reconciling sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and religion features a section on the right to freedom of religion or belief and its intersection with other rights.

“[Silenced Voices, Threatened Lives](#)” is a 2015 report documenting the impact of Nigeria’s 2014 Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Law on freedom of expression. The report was written by the PEN American Center, PEN Nigeria, and the Leitner Center for International Law and Justice at Fordham Law School in New York City.

“[Dipolelo Tsa Rona — Our Stories](#)” is a collection of personal essays published in 2016 by Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of Botswana (LeGaBiBo).

Taboom Media’s [reporting series on the intersection of LGBTQI+ rights and religion in Sub-Saharan Africa](#) features dozens of stories that address religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression in more than 20 countries on the continent.

Watch [Quorum](#), a 2015 video series from the Daily Beast featuring LGBT activists from the Global South.

Watch [God Loves Uganda](#), a 2013 film that documents the connection between North American evangelicalism and homophobia in Uganda. The documentary is available on Netflix.

Watch [African Pride](#), a 2014 film that documents how black lesbians and allied activists are rallying to stop homophobic violence in South Africa’s townships. Contact filmmaker Laura Fletcher to request access to the full film ([laura.backstory@gmail.com](mailto:laura.backstory@gmail.com)).

Read “[Out in Africa](#)” by Aryn Baker in TIME, June 4, 2015. Baker’s story documents the harm caused to Uganda’s LGBT community at the hands of American evangelicals and sensational media reporting.

The United Nations’ [Free & Equal Campaign](#) posts several [fact sheets](#) on LGBTI rights and equality including FAQs, international human rights law, and specific information on criminalization, violence, refuge, and asylum.

[ProjektHope’s Guidebook to Reporting Gender and Sexuality](#) (2015) offers practical advice for journalists reporting on LGBTI issues in Nigeria. It includes sections on understanding gender and sexuality in the African context and their implications for public health.

Inclusive and Affirming Ministries' [training booklet on the Bible and homosexuality](#) analyses and interprets eight passages of scripture often cited as pertaining to homosexuality.

"[Where Do We Go for Justice?](#)", a 2015 report by the civil rights organization Chapter Four Uganda, documents abuse of the rights of sexual minorities in Uganda's criminal justice system.

Read Security in-a-Box's [guide to digital security for the LGBTI community in Sub-Saharan Africa](#). The guide's tips are equally relevant for journalists reporting on the community.

Amnesty International has [information and resources about LGBT rights](#) on its website.

The U.K. Department for International Development's [Faith, Gender and Sexuality Toolkit](#) includes sections on sexuality & gender diversity, culture, tradition and faith.

Watch [Moderating Religious Hatred Online](#), a September 2014 Google Hangout panel featuring media professionals from across the world debating and discussing how best to moderate online comments when religious hatred and intolerance come into play.

Watch [Unpacking hate speech](#), a March 2012 video featuring Susan Benesch, director of the Dangerous Speech Project; Agnès Callamard, former executive director of Article 19; and Nazila Ghanea, a lecturer in international human rights law at the University of Oxford. They examine the pros and cons of the First Amendment in the U.S. vs. hate speech legislation in Europe.

Read [Combating Online Hate Speech](#) (2014), a series of 12 stories on religious tolerance and combating hate speech online. The stories, produced in late 2014 with support from Google, address hate speech in the U.S., Myanmar, France, Germany, the U.K., Kenya, and Malaysia.

Read [From incitement to self-censorship: the media in the Kenyan elections of 2007 and 2013](#) (February 2014), in which Free Speech Debate looks at the media's role in two Kenyan elections and argues that peace and critical media coverage should not be mutually exclusive.

Read [When does hate speech become dangerous speech? Consider Kenya and Rwanda](#) (April 2013), in which Free Speech Debate explores vital questions about the connections between words and violence in light of Kenyan broadcaster Joshua Arap Sang's trial.

Read [Why hate speech should not be banned](#) (April 2012), in which writer Kenan Malik argues that restrictions on hate speech are not a means of tackling bigotry but of rebranding often obnoxious ideas or arguments as immoral.

Read [The harms of hate speech legislation](#) (March 2012), in which free speech lawyer Ivan Hare argues that hate speech legislation chills freedom of expression more than it protects vulnerable minorities.

Read [The harm of hate speech](#) (March 2012), in which Jeremy Waldron, professor of social and political theory at Oxford University, argues the case for legislation against hate speech.

Read [A Clash of Cultures: Hate Speech, Taboos, Blasphemy and the Role of News Media](#) (October 2013), a 2013 report by the Center for International Media Assistance that addresses conflicts between free expression and speech that can be considered offensive, online and offline.

Read [Tackling Manifestations of Collective Religious Hatred](#) (December 2013), in which former U.N. special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Heiner Bielefeldt makes several recommendations for tackling manifestations of collective religious hatred, focusing on the root causes of such hatred and aggravating political factors.

Read [GLAAD Media Reference Guide, 10th edition](#), which advocates for fair, accurate, and inclusive media coverage of LGBT individuals and hate crimes perpetrated against them. It also discusses relevant hate crime laws in the U.S.

Read ARTICLE 19's [Hate Speech Explained toolkit](#), which provides a guide to identifying hate speech and how to effectively counter it, while protecting the rights to freedom of expression and equality. It responds to a growing demand for clear guidance on identifying hate speech, and for responding to the challenges "hate speech" pose, within a human rights framework.

Read "[Covering Sexual and Gender Minorities & Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Reporting Guide for Journalists](#)", which includes a resource and source guide to assist journalists as they report on these sensitive topics.

## Additional Sources

### Eastern Africa

[UHAI-EASHRI](#): UHAI-EASHRI, the East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative, is an indigenous activist fund based in Nairobi, Kenya. It provides flexible, accessible resources to support civil society activism around issues of sexuality, health, and human rights in the East African region (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi) with a specific focus on the rights of sexual minorities. UHAI has an archive of LGBTI media clippings going back to 2008. Contact: [info@uhai-eashri.org](mailto:info@uhai-eashri.org), +254 20 2330050.

[Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya \(GALCK\)](#): GALCK acts as an umbrella organization for six LGBTI organizations in Kenya: Minority Women in Action, Ishtar MSM, Tea and Gay Kenya, PEMA Kenya, and Afra Kenya. Its mission is to defend the interests and rights of LGBTI organizations and their members, including their health rights. In 2016, GALCK produced the media toolkit *SOGIE 101 for the Kenyan Media Professional*. Contact: [info@galck.org](mailto:info@galck.org), +254 20 2426060.

[Neela Ghoshal](#): Neela Ghoshal is a researcher at Human Rights Watch. She joined HRW's LGBT Rights Division in 2012 after five years in the Africa Division, where she covered human rights issues in Burundi and Kenya, including political repression, police abuse, justice sector reform, and transitional justice. As LGBT rights researcher, Ghoshal is currently conducting research on rights abuses affecting sexual and gender minorities and other marginalized groups in several African countries, including Tanzania and Cameroon. Contact: [ghoshan@hrw.org](mailto:ghoshan@hrw.org), +254 20 220 8105.

[None on Record](#): None on Record is a media organization based in Nairobi, Kenya, that collects the stories of LGBTI Africans and produces media content on LGBTI rights. Contact: [questions@noneonrecord.com](mailto:questions@noneonrecord.com).

**Selly Thiam**: Selly Thiam is a journalist and oral historian whose work has appeared on NPR, PBS and in the New York Times. She was a producer for the Storycorps Oral History Project, PBS' Learning Matters and a Carnegie Fellow at the ABC News Investigative Unit. She is the founder and Executive Director of None on Record, an African LGBT digital media organization. Contact: [selly@noneonrecord.com](mailto:selly@noneonrecord.com).

[National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission](#): NGLHRC is a Kenyan organization that provides legal aid to advance equality and inclusion of LGBTQI persons. Contact: [info@nglhrc.com](mailto:info@nglhrc.com), +254 20 4400525.

[David Kuria](#): In 2013, David Kuria became Kenya's first openly gay politician to seek office. He writes regularly about LGBTI issues and heads the Kuria Foundation for Social Enterprise, which aims to enhance social inclusion by contributing technical and financial resources to socially excluded persons and groups. Contact: [info@kuriafoundation.or.ke](mailto:info@kuriafoundation.or.ke), +254 721360365.

[Human Rights Network for Journalists - Uganda](#): HRNJ works to enhance human rights by defending and building the capacities of journalists in Uganda from its office in Kampala. HRNJ researches, monitors, and documents attacks and threats aimed at journalists, as well as abuses of press freedom in Uganda. They also offer legal support to journalists who need these services because of their work. Contact: [coordinator@hrnjuganda.org](mailto:coordinator@hrnjuganda.org), +256 414 667 627, +256-414-272934.

[Spectrum Uganda](#): Spectrum Uganda, based in Kampala, offers support to promote a healthy and empowered community of men who have sex with men (MSM) in Uganda. Contact: [info@spectrumuganda.net](mailto:info@spectrumuganda.net), +256 800100040.

[Icebreakers Uganda](#): Icebreakers Uganda is a nonprofit support organization for LGBT people in Uganda. It focuses on sexual health, sexual health rights advocacy, community mobilization, and HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention for all LGBT people. Contact: +256 704 449988.

[Bishop Christopher Senyonjo](#): Bishop Dr. Christopher Senyonjo is a retired Anglican Bishop in the Church of Uganda who founded St. Paul's Reconciliation and Equality Centre (SPREC) to reconcile tension among straight and LGBTI persons. He has become one of the leading LGBTI voices as a straight ally for LGBTI people in Uganda and the world. Contact: +256 31 2514537.

[Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum \(HRAPF\)](#): HRAPF is an NGO based in Kampala, Uganda, whose mission is to promote respect and observance of human rights for marginalized groups, including LGBTI persons. Contact: [info@hrapf.org](mailto:info@hrapf.org), +256 414 530683.

[Kuchu Times](#): Kuchu Times is a media organization based in Kampala, Uganda, that aims to provide a voice for Africa's LGBTI community. Contact: [info@kuchutimes.com](mailto:info@kuchutimes.com).

[Sexual Minorities Uganda](#): SMUG is an umbrella non-governmental organization based in Kampala, Uganda that advocates for the protection and promotion of human rights of LGBT Ugandans. Contact: [info@sexualminoritiesuganda.com](mailto:info@sexualminoritiesuganda.com), +256 39 2174432.

[Freedom & Roam Uganda](#): FARUG is a Ugandan organization that works to stop harassment and discrimination against LGBTI people. Contact: [info@faruganda.org](mailto:info@faruganda.org), +256 392 176977.

[African Centre for Media Excellence](#): ACME is a Uganda-based organization that strives to improve professionalism in the media. They have worked to improve reporting on LGBTI issues and religion in local media. Contact: [info@acme-ug.org](mailto:info@acme-ug.org), +256 393 202351.

[LGBTI Sey](#): LGBTI Sey works to provide an open, safe, inclusive space and community committed to challenging sexism, genderism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and heterosexism in the Seychelles. Contact: [lgbtisey@gmail.com](mailto:lgbtisey@gmail.com).

[Centre for the Development of People](#): CEDEP is an organization based in Malawi that works with media and religious leaders to defend the welfare of marginalized communities, including prisoners, sex workers, and LGBTI people. Contact Gift Trapence: [directorcedep@yahoo.com](mailto:directorcedep@yahoo.com).

[LGBT VOICE](#): LGBT VOICE is an LGBT rights organization working to advance equality, diversity, education, and justice in Tanzania. Contact via the website.

[Geofrey Mashala](#): Geofrey Mashala is the founder of AMKA Empowerment Organization, a community-based group in Tanzania that works on human rights, empowerment, and health issues of LGBTIQ people. Contact: [amkaempowerment@gmail.com](mailto:amkaempowerment@gmail.com).

[Afdhere Jama](#): Afdhere Jama is an American writer and filmmaker of Somali origin. He wrote the book *Being Queer and Somali: LGBT Somalis at Home and Abroad*. Contact: [afdhere@gmail.com](mailto:afdhere@gmail.com).

[Young Queer Alliance](#) empowers young LGBTI people in Mauritius to promote equality. Contact [info@youngqueeralliance.com](mailto:info@youngqueeralliance.com), +230 5807 3829.

## Southern Africa

[Inclusive and Affirming Ministries](#) (IAM): IAM, based in Cape Town, works as a catalyst for full inclusion of LGBTI people within mainstream churches in Southern Africa and for the celebration of diversity within religious contexts. IAM raises awareness of diversity regarding sexual orientation and faith interpretation, encouraging people to re-examine their beliefs and attitude towards homosexuality and engage in dialogue in affirming and inclusive ways. Contact: [info@iam.org.za](mailto:info@iam.org.za), +27 (0)21 975 8142.

[Al-Fitrah Foundation](#): Al-Fitrah Foundation, based in Cape Town, provides support to Muslims who are marginalized based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. The organization strives to raise consciousness around gender and sexual diversity by engaging faith and beliefs and to encourage collaboration with queer members of the local, national and international Muslim community. Contact: [operations@al-fitrah.org.za](mailto:operations@al-fitrah.org.za), +27 21 761 0037.

[Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action \(GALA\)](#): GALA is a centre for LGBTI culture and education based in Johannesburg. Its mission is to act as a catalyst for the production, preservation and dissemination of knowledge on the history, culture and contemporary experiences of LGBTI



people in Africa. GALA's archival collections can be viewed by appointment. Contact archivist Linda Chernis: [linda.chernis@wits.ac.za](mailto:linda.chernis@wits.ac.za), +27 11 717 4239.

[Triangle Project](#): Triangle Project is a non-profit human rights organisation based in Cape Town that offers professional services to ensure the full realization of constitutional and human rights for LGBTI persons, their partners and families. They offer sexual health clinics, counselling, support groups, a helpline, public education and training services, community outreach, and a library. Contact: [info@triangle.org.za](mailto:info@triangle.org.za), +27 81 257 6693.

[Gender DynamiX](#): Gender DynamiX, based in Cape Town, works towards the realisation of all human rights of transgender and gender diverse people within and beyond the borders of South Africa. Contact: [info@genderdynamix.org.za](mailto:info@genderdynamix.org.za), +27 (0) 21 447 4797.

[Sonke Gender Justice](#): Sonke Gender Justice works across Africa to strengthen government, civil society and citizen capacity to promote gender equality, prevent domestic and sexual violence, and reduce the spread and impact of HIV and AIDS. It has offices in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Mpumalanga, South Africa. Sonke works closely with a range of organisations and individuals including women's rights organisations, social movements, trade unions, government departments, sports associations, faith-based organisations, media organisations, university research, units and human rights advocates. Contact: [info@genderjustice.org.za](mailto:info@genderjustice.org.za), +27 21 423 7088.

[African Men for Sexual Health and Rights \(AMShEr\)](#): The African Men for Sexual Health and Rights is a coalition of 18 LGBT/MSM (men who have sex with men)-led organisations across sub-Saharan Africa that works to address the disproportionate effect of HIV/AIDS on MSM and LGBT individuals; to redress the human rights violations these populations face on the continent; and to increase the visibility of LGBT individuals and their issues. Contact [info@amsher.org](mailto:info@amsher.org), +27 11 242 6800

[Sex Workers Education & Advocacy Taskforce \(SWEAT\)](#): SWEAT is South Africa's leading sex worker rights organization working on advocacy, human rights defence and mobilization from its head office in Cape Town. SWEAT works closely with LGBTI rights groups across South Africa. Contact: +21 21 448 7875.

[Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria](#): The Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria in South Africa works towards human rights education in Africa, a greater awareness of human rights, the wide dissemination of publications on human rights in Africa, and the improvement of the rights of women, people living with HIV, indigenous peoples, sexual minorities and other disadvantaged or marginalised persons or groups across the continent. Contact: [chr@up.ac.za](mailto:chr@up.ac.za), +27 12 420 3810 / +27 12 420 3034.

[Irant-org](#): Iranti-org is a queer human rights visual media organization based in Johannesburg. Iranti-org works within a human rights framework to build local partnerships and movements that

use media as a platform for lobbying, advocacy and educational interventions across Africa. It aims to serve as an archive of queer memory in ways that destabilize numerous modes of discrimination based on gender, sexuality and sexual orientation. Contact:

[getinfo@iranti-org.co.za](mailto:getinfo@iranti-org.co.za), +27 11 339 1476, +27 11 339 1468.

**The Other Foundation**: The Other Foundation is an African trust that advances equality and freedom in Southern Africa with a particular focus on sexual orientation and gender identity. It gathers support to defend and advance the human rights and social inclusion of LGBTI people and offers support to groups in ways that enables them to work effectively for lasting change, recognizing the particular dynamics of race, poverty, inequality, sex, national origin, heritage, and politics in the region. Contact: [info@theotherfoundation.org](mailto:info@theotherfoundation.org), +27 72 011 6536.

**Heinrich Böll Foundation Southern Africa**: The Heinrich Böll Foundation's office in Cape Town works to advance gender and sexual equality in South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. The foundation partners with key civil society actors as well as public and religious thought leaders to challenge homophobic policies, legislations and attitudes. Contact Human Rights Program Manager Paula Assubuji: [Paula.Assubuji@za.boell.org](mailto:Paula.Assubuji@za.boell.org), [info@za.boell.org](mailto:info@za.boell.org), +27 21 461 62 66.

**Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA)**: Based in Johannesburg, OSISA is committed to deepening democracy, protecting human rights and enhancing good governance in the Southern Africa. OSISA's vision is to promote and sustain the ideals, values, institutions and practices of open society, with the aim of establishing vibrant and tolerant southern African democracies in which people, free from material and other deprivation, understand their rights and responsibilities and participate actively in all spheres of life. Contact LGBTI Program Manager Ian Southey-Swartz: [ians@osisa.org](mailto:ians@osisa.org), +27 11 587 5000.

**Southern Africa Litigation Centre**: The Southern Africa Litigation Centre's LGBT and Sex Worker Rights Programme works to end discrimination and mistreatment faced by people who identify as such throughout Southern Africa. Contact: [enquiries@salc.org.za](mailto:enquiries@salc.org.za), +27 10 596 8538.

**Coalition of African Lesbians**: The Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL) is a regional network of organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa committed to advancing freedom, justice and bodily autonomy for all women on the African continent and beyond. It is based in Johannesburg. Contact: [info@cal.org.za](mailto:info@cal.org.za), +27 11 403 0007/0158/0114.

**Women's Leadership Centre**: The Women's Leadership Centre in Windhoek, Namibia, promotes women's writing and other forms of personal and creative expression as a form of resistance to discrimination and oppression embedded in patriarchal cultures and society, with the aim of developing indigenous feminist activism in Namibia. Contact Liz: [info@wlc-namibia.org](mailto:info@wlc-namibia.org), +264 61 221106.

**Tulinam**: Tulinam is Inclusive and Affirming Ministries' Namibian partner organization. Contact Madelene: [madelene.isaacks@gmail.com](mailto:madelene.isaacks@gmail.com), +264 8169 47699.

[Out-Right Namibia](#): ORN, based in Windhoek, Namibia, is an LGBTI, MSM (men who have sex with men), WSW (women who have sex with women) human rights organization that offers psychological counselling and support groups for survivors of gender-based violence, holds conferences and workshops, and raises awareness of issues affecting the LGBTI community. Contact: +264 61 237329, [outrightnamibia@gmail.com](mailto:outrightnamibia@gmail.com).

[Rights Not Rescue](#): Rights Not Rescue, based in Windhoek, Namibia, has outreach programs that target sex workers and LGBTI people. They offer counselling, lobbying, advocacy and home-based care. Contact: [naoxamub@yahoo.com](mailto:naoxamub@yahoo.com), +264 8120 68240.

[Positive Vibes](#): Positive Vibes's Namibia office, based in Windhoek works to ensure that LGBTI people are empowered to respond effectively to discrimination and health challenges. Contact: +264 61 245 5556, [info@postivevibes.org](mailto:info@postivevibes.org).

[GALZ](#): GALZ was founded in 1990 to serve the needs and interests of LGBTI people in Zimbabwe and to push for social tolerance of sexual minorities and the repeal of homophobic legislation. It is Zimbabwe's leading LGBTI organization. Contact Samuel in Harare at [progs@galz.co](mailto:progs@galz.co), +263 4741736, +263 4740614. Contact Teddy in Bulawayo at [teddy@galz.co](mailto:teddy@galz.co).

[LeGaBiBo](#): LeGaBiBo (The Lesbians, Gays & Bisexuals of Botswana) is the most prominent LGBTI organization in Botswana. Contact Bradley: [dblfortuin@gmail.com](mailto:dblfortuin@gmail.com), +267 316 74 25.

[Botswana Network on Ethics, Law and HIV/AIDS](#): BONELA is a non-governmental organization (NGO) formally established in 2001 to support human rights initiatives in the area of HIV/AIDS and to protect and promote the rights of all people affected by HIV/AIDS. Contact: +267 393 2516, [bonela@bonela.org](mailto:bonela@bonela.org).

[LAMBDA Association Mozambique](#): LAMBDA works to ensure the economic, political and social rights of LGBT citizens in Mozambique. Contact on [Facebook](#): +258 21304816.

[Juliet Mphande](#): Juliet Mphande is a human rights, media and peace activist in Zambia who started the LGBTI group Friends of Rainka. Contact via [LinkedIn](#).

Pharie Sefali: Pharie Sefali is a journalist and activist based in Cape Town who has written about gay and lesbian sangomas or traditional healers. Contact: [phariesefali@gmail.com](mailto:phariesefali@gmail.com).

## Western Africa

[Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre](#): ARSRC, based in Lagos, Nigeria, aims to promote more informed and affirming public dialogue on human sexuality and to contribute to positive changes in the emerging field of sexuality in Africa, by creating mechanisms for learning at the regional level. Contact: [info@arsrc.org](mailto:info@arsrc.org), +234 1 7919307.

[The Initiative for Equal Rights](#): The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERs) is a Lagos-based NGO that works to protect and promote the human rights of sexual minorities nationally and regionally. Contact: [info@initiative4equality.org](mailto:info@initiative4equality.org), +234 8125549015.

[NoStringsNg](#): NoStringsNg.com is a Nigerian advocacy media platform for LGBTIQ news and information. Its aim is to debunk negative stereotypes in mainstream media against the Nigerian LGBTIQ community. Contact Mike (pseudonym): [info@nostringsng.com](mailto:info@nostringsng.com).

[Bisi Alimi Foundation](#): The Bisi Alimi Foundation promotes and advocates for equal opportunity and social inclusion of LGBT people in Nigeria. Contact: [bisi@bisialimi.com](mailto:bisi@bisialimi.com), [info@bisialimifoundation.org](mailto:info@bisialimifoundation.org).

[Article 19 Dakar](#): Article 19 is a British human rights organization that focuses on the defence and promotion of freedom of expression and freedom of information. Article 19 has an office in Dakar, Senegal. Contact Fatou: [fatouj@article19.org](mailto:fatouj@article19.org), [westafrica@article19.org](mailto:westafrica@article19.org), +221 33 869 03 22.

[Human Right Advocacy Centre](#): The Human Rights Advocacy Centre (HRAC) is a not-for-profit, independent, non-partisan, research and advocacy organization set up to advance and protect human rights in Ghana. Contact George Owoo: +233 302 768 733, +233 266 191 054.

[Solace Initiative](#): Solace Initiative, an organization based in Accra, Ghana, trains paralegals to defend the rights of LGBT people in the country. Contact via Twitter.

[Liberia Women Empowerment Network](#): The Liberia Women Empowerment Network focuses on women and girls living and or affected by HIV/AIDS in Liberia. They also work with local LGBTI groups. Contact: [liwen\\_liwen@yahoo.com](mailto:liwen_liwen@yahoo.com), +231-888465042, +231-886133299.

[Benin Synergies Plus \(BESYP\)](#): BESYP is an organization based in Cotonou, Benin, that advocates for the rights of key populations that have the highest risk of contracting and transmitting HIV, including female sex workers and men who have sex with men (MSM). Contact: +229 67 18 11 81.

## Central Africa

[Associação Íris Angola](#): Associação Íris Angola is an LGBTI rights group based in Luanda, Angola. Contact: [carlos.irisangola@gmail.com](mailto:carlos.irisangola@gmail.com), +244 937439100.

[La Voix des Sans-Voix](#): La Voix des Sans-Voix, which translates into English as “The Voice of the Voiceless,” is a human rights group based in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Contact: [info@vsv-rdc.org](mailto:info@vsv-rdc.org), +243 995 814 266.

[Rainbow Sunrise Mapambazuko](#) (RSM): Rainbow Sunrise Mapambazuko, based in the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, facilitates education, coordination, and outreach to those who identify as LGBTI and networks with other organizations to build respect for LGBTI rights in the region. Contact: [rainbow.mapambazuko@gmail.com](mailto:rainbow.mapambazuko@gmail.com).

[Ligue Centrafricaine des Droits de l'Homme \(LCDH\)](#): The Central African Republic League of Human Rights, based in the capital of Bangui, advances human rights in the country. Contact: [tiangaye@hotmail.com](mailto:tiangaye@hotmail.com), +236 72 28 54 58.

[Alternatives Cameroun](#): Alternatives Cameroun, based in Douala, Cameroon, works on sexual minority rights in the country. Contact Yves: [guyphoide@yahoo.fr](mailto:guyphoide@yahoo.fr), +237 698 48 26 14.

## Pan-Africa and International

[International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association](#) (ILGA): ILGA is a worldwide federation of 1,200 member organisations from 125 countries that campaign for LGBTI rights. Contact Andre du Plessis or Daniele Paletta: [andreduplessis@ilga.org](mailto:andreduplessis@ilga.org), [daniele@ilga.org](mailto:daniele@ilga.org), +41 227313254.

[Pan Africa ILGA \(PAI\)](#): PAI is a federation of organizations in Africa that work to improve human rights based on sexual orientation and gender identity expression (SOGIE). It is based in Johannesburg. Contact: [admin@panafricailga.org](mailto:admin@panafricailga.org), +27 11 339 1473, +27 72 196 8743.

[Global Interfaith Network for People of All Sexes, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression \(GIN-SSOGIE\)](#): GIN-SSOGIE, based in South Africa, aims to promote interfaith dialogue and to strengthen LGBTI voices within religious institutions and structures. They provide resources, training, and collective programmes to help individuals and organisations engage in meaningful, constructive dialogue with religious leaders and to advocate at the regional and international level for dignity and rights. Contact: [ginssojie@gmail.com](mailto:ginssojie@gmail.com).

[Alturi](#): Alturi is an online hub for news, stories, and advocacy that aims to educate and engage individual supporters who want to help improve the lives of LGBTI people worldwide. Contact: [info@alturi.org](mailto:info@alturi.org), +1 424 272-5924.

[OutRight Action International](#): OutRight (formerly known as International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission) is a US-based INGO that addresses human rights violations

against LGBTI people. They have an office in Johannesburg that works on Sub-Saharan LGBTI rights. Contact the New York headquarters: [hello@outrightinternational.org](mailto:hello@outrightinternational.org), +1 212 430 6054.

**American Jewish World Service:** American Jewish World Service is an international development and human rights organization headquartered in New York City. AJWS supports women, girls and LGBT people, as they organize to end discrimination, stop violence and live with dignity, safety and health. Contact Javid Syed on the Sexual Health and Rights Team: [ajws@ajws.org](mailto:ajws@ajws.org), [jsyed@ajws.org](mailto:jsyed@ajws.org), +1 212 792 2900, +1 800 889 7146, +1 212 792 2930.

**Arcus Foundation:** The Arcus Foundation is a charitable foundation focused on issues related to LGBT rights, social justice and conservation. Contact Program Officer Erica Lim: [elim@arcusfoundation.org](mailto:elim@arcusfoundation.org), +1 212 488 3000.

**Human Dignity Trust:** The Human Dignity Trust is a legal charity based in London that supports those who want to challenge anti-gay laws wherever they exist in the world. They support local activists and their lawyers to uphold international human rights law, including a person's right to dignity, equality and privacy. Contact former Executive Director Téa Braun: [teabraun@humandignitytrust.org](mailto:teabraun@humandignitytrust.org), +44 20 7419 3770.

**Kaleidoscope Trust:** The Kaleidoscope Trust, based in London, works to uphold the human rights of LGBT people in the Commonwealth and beyond where individuals are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Contact: [info@kaleidoscopetrust.com](mailto:info@kaleidoscopetrust.com), +44 20 8133 6460.

**Gill Foundation:** The Gill Foundation is one of the United States' leading funders of efforts to secure full equality for LGBT people. Contact Sara Santos: [SaraS@gillfoundation.org](mailto:SaraS@gillfoundation.org), [info@gillfoundation.org](mailto:info@gillfoundation.org), +1 303 292 4455, +1 888 530 4455.

**Fund for Global Human Rights:** The Fund for Global Human Rights. The Fund has made recent grants to groups working on LGBTI rights in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Contact John Kabia and Tony Tate: [jkabia@globalhumanrights.org](mailto:jkabia@globalhumanrights.org), [ttate@globalhumanrights.org](mailto:ttate@globalhumanrights.org), [info@globalhumanrights.org](mailto:info@globalhumanrights.org), +1 202 347 7488.

**ARC International:** ARC International, based in Geneva, Switzerland, advances LGBT rights and facilitates strategic planning around LGBT issues internationally, strengthening global networks, and enhancing access to United Nations mechanisms. They have played a key role in the development of the Yogyakarta Principles on the application of International Human Rights Law in relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. Contact Kim Vance and Arvind Narrain: [kim@arc-international.net](mailto:kim@arc-international.net), [arvind@arc-international.net](mailto:arvind@arc-international.net).

**Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice:** The Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice works exclusively to advance LGBTQI human rights around the globe. The Foundation supports grantee partners in the U.S. and internationally and works for racial, economic, social, and



gender justice so that everyone can live freely, without fear, and with dignity. Contact Director of Programs Sarah Gunther: [sgunther@astraeafoundation.org](mailto:sgunther@astraeafoundation.org), +1 917 930 8509.

[The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries](#): The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries aims to support religious teachers and laity in moving towards a theology of radical inclusivity led by an equally radical social ministry, reaching to the furthest margins of society to serve all in need without prejudice and discrimination. Contact Bishop Joseph Tolton: [jtolton@blurcommunications.com](mailto:jtolton@blurcommunications.com), +1 415 861 6130.

[The Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa](#): The Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa, based in Johannesburg, is a Pan-African and feminist led initiative that aims to contribute to the development of jurisprudence on sexual rights and women's human rights on the continent by providing expertise on strategic litigation. Contact: +27 11 338 9024.

[House Of Rainbow](#): House Of Rainbow Fellowship is an inclusive, welcoming and affirming religious community to all people, including sexual minorities and marginalised people, based in the U.K. It was founded in London by the Rev. Rowland Jide Macaulay, an openly gay African theologian. Contact: [jide@houseofrainbow.org](mailto:jide@houseofrainbow.org), +44 7507 510357.

[African Gender Institute](#): The African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town is a teaching, learning and research institute which focuses on issues of gender and development on the African continent. The AGI has delivered innovative integrated outcomes on gender justice, sexuality and human rights, peace and conflict studies and capacity building in relation to gender and women's studies knowledges. Contact Jane Bennett: [jane.bennett@uct.ac.za](mailto:jane.bennett@uct.ac.za), +27 21 650 2970.

[Church World Service](#): CWS works to create a safe space for LGBTI persons, providing both resettlement for LGBTI refugees and protection to those still facing the fear of persecution. CWS currently works with LGBTI communities in both Africa and the United States in order to safeguard the human rights of all persecuted persons and provide services that address the needs of the LGBTI community, engaging faith communities to achieve impact. Contact Marie Ramtu in Nairobi: [MRamtu@cwsafrica.org](mailto:MRamtu@cwsafrica.org), +254 20 444 0150.

[Fabrice Houdart](#): Fabrice Houdart is human rights officer at OHCHR New York who works on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. His team leads the [United Nation's Free & Equal campaign](#) to promote global LGBTI rights. Contact: [houdart@un.org](mailto:houdart@un.org), +1 202 250 1356, +1 212 963 1816.

[Joel Bedos](#): Joel Bedos is executive director at the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia & Biphobia (IDAHOT). The annual day is observed on May 17 to draw the attention of policymakers, opinion leaders, social movements, the public and the media to the violence and discrimination experienced by LGBTI people internationally. Contact: [joelbedos@gmail.com](mailto:joelbedos@gmail.com).

[Tiffany Mugo](#): Tiffany Mugo is the co-founder and curator of HOLA Africa, a pan Africanist online hub that aims to share the stories of Africa's queer female community and increase the digital visibility of queer African women. Contact: [tiffanymugo@gmail.com](mailto:tiffanymugo@gmail.com).

[Colin Stewart](#): Colin Stewart runs the "[Erasing 76 Crimes](#)" blog, which focuses on the human toll of more than 70 countries' anti-LGBTI laws and local struggles to repeal them. Contact: [stewacster@gmail.com](mailto:stewacster@gmail.com), [76crimes@gmail.com](mailto:76crimes@gmail.com).

[John Marnell](#) is the publishing and communications officer at Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA) in Johannesburg and is often based in Melbourne, Australia. He has trained journalists from across Sub-Saharan Africa how to better report on LGBTI issues. Contact: [john\\_marnell@hotmail.com](mailto:john_marnell@hotmail.com).

[Shawn M. Gaylord](#): Shawn M. Gaylord leads [Human Rights First](#)'s initiative to combat violence against LGBTI people globally. Contact: [GaylordS@humanrightsfirst.org](mailto:GaylordS@humanrightsfirst.org), [PlummerC@humanrightsfirst.org](mailto:PlummerC@humanrightsfirst.org), +1 202 370 3310.

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[Michael Heflin](#): Michael Heflin is the director of equality for the Open Society Human Rights Initiative, which advocates to promote justice, equality, and participation of all, including [LGBTI individuals and communities](#). Contact: [michael.heflin@opensocietyfoundations.org](mailto:michael.heflin@opensocietyfoundations.org), +1 212 548 0600.

[Mindy Michels](#): Mindy Michels manages Freedom House's Dignity for All LGBTI Assistance Program from Washington, D.C. Dignity for All provides emergency assistance; security, opportunity, and advocacy rapid response grants (SOAR grants); and security assessment and training to human rights defenders and civil society organizations under threat or attack due to their work for LGBTI human rights. Contact: [Michels@freedomhouse.org](mailto:Michels@freedomhouse.org), +1 202 296 5101.

## Hate Speech-Specific

[Index on Censorship](#): Index on Censorship is a campaigning and publishing organization based in London that focuses on freedom of expression. The organization regularly [reports on hate speech](#). Contact: Chief Executive Jodie Ginsberg, [jodie@indexoncensorship.org](mailto:jodie@indexoncensorship.org), +44 20 7260 2660.



[Article 19](#): Article 19 is a London-based human rights organization that focuses on freedom of expression. The organization has [offices around the world](#) and a [section of its website](#) addresses hate speech. Contact: [info@article19.org](mailto:info@article19.org), +44 20 7324 2500.

[Free Speech Debate](#): Free Speech Debate, based at the University of Oxford, has produced more than 70 articles, videos and discussion pieces that specifically [address hate speech](#). Contact: Timothy Garton Ash, [timothy.gartonash@sant.ox.ac.uk](mailto:timothy.gartonash@sant.ox.ac.uk), +44 1865 280793.

[Hrant Dink Foundation](#): The Hrant Dink Foundation has run the [Media Watch on Hate Speech project](#) since 2009 to counter racist and discriminatory discourse in Turkish press. Contact: [info@hrantdink.org](mailto:info@hrantdink.org), +90 212 2403361.

[Freedom of Expression Institute](#): The Freedom of Expression Institute was established in 1994 to protect and foster the right to freedom of expression in South Africa. Contact: Sheniece Linderboom: [legal@fxi.org.za](mailto:legal@fxi.org.za), +27 11482 1913.

[IFEX](#): IFEX is a Toronto-based network of global organizations connected by a shared commitment to defend and promote freedom of expression as a fundamental human right. Sort its [nearly 100 members](#) by region or by using the map on the network's website. Contact: [media@ifex.org](mailto:media@ifex.org), [campaigns@ifex.org](mailto:campaigns@ifex.org), +1 416 515 9622.

[The Ethical Journalism Network](#): The Ethical Journalism Network is a London-based global campaign promoting good governance and ethical conduct in media. EJN's [member organizations](#) can speak about hate speech in their respective countries of focus. Contact: [aidanpatrickwhite@gmail.com](mailto:aidanpatrickwhite@gmail.com), +44 7946 291511.

[Media Diversity Institute](#): The Media Diversity Institute works internationally to encourage and facilitate responsible media coverage of diversity. It aims to prevent the media from intentionally or unintentionally spreading prejudice, intolerance and hatred that can lead to social tensions, disputes and violent conflict. MDI encourages instead fair, accurate, inclusive and sensitive media coverage in order to promote understanding between different groups and cultures. Offices are in London; New York; Cairo; and Belgrade, Serbia. Contact: [info@media-diversity.org](mailto:info@media-diversity.org), +44 20 7255 2473.

[The Sentinel Project](#): The Sentinel Project, based in Toronto, works on early warning systems to prevent genocide. Its project [Hatebase](#) was built to help government agencies, NGOs, research organizations and other philanthropic individuals and groups use hate speech as a predictor for regional violence. The Sentinel Project focuses on these issues in Myanmar (Burma), Iran,

Kenya, Kyrgyzstan and Sri Lanka. Contact Chris Tuckwood, [chris@thesentinelproject.org](mailto:chris@thesentinelproject.org), +1 647 222 8821.

[Dangerous Speech Project](#): The Dangerous Speech Project works to prevent violence by diminishing the harmful effects of inflammatory public speech without harming freedom of expression. The project's [Dangerous Speech Framework](#) uses five contextual factors for systematically estimating which speech is dangerous and how dangerous it is. Focus countries include Canada, Kenya, Myanmar (Burma), Nigeria, Sri Lanka and the U.S. Contact: Susan Benesch, [susan.benesch@gmail.com](mailto:susan.benesch@gmail.com), +1 202 885-1611.

[Agnès Callamard](#): Dr. Agnès Callamard is director of the Global Freedom of Expression Project at Columbia University in New York City and former executive director of Article 19 in London. Contact: [globalfreespeech@columbia.edu](mailto:globalfreespeech@columbia.edu).

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[Jeremy Waldron](#): Jeremy Waldron is a professor of law and philosophy. He wrote [The Harm in Hate Speech](#), in which he argues that hate speech should be regulated to protect and respect vulnerable minorities. Contact: [jeremy.waldron@nyu.edu](mailto:jeremy.waldron@nyu.edu), +1-212-998-6573.

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# Contributor Biographies

**Barigye Ambrose** is a Ugandan journalist, fixer, translator, and human rights activist. He worked as field director and reporter for Kuchu Times Media Group, a Ugandan news platform that focuses on LGBTI issues and publishes the annual Bombastic Magazine. He is a certified community peer educator on gender and sexual minority health issues. Before joining Kuchu Times, he served as administrative officer for Spectrum Uganda Initiatives.

**Ishmael Bahati** is director at Persons Marginalised and Aggrieved (PEMA) in Mombasa. The mission of PEMA Kenya is to champion the inclusion of gender and sexual minorities by providing space for advocacy, networking and capacity building. PEMA strives to build an empowered society that embraces justice, equity, and diversity.

**Esther Mombo** is an associate professor in the theology department at St. Paul's University in Limuru, Kenya. She teaches church history and theologies from women's perspectives and interfaith courses and writes on women's issues, evangelism, HIV/AIDS, Christian-Muslim relations, and poverty in Africa. She works closely with the Programme for Christian and Muslim relations in Africa and is a member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

**Dr. Stella Nyanzi** is a Ugandan human rights activist, writer, academic, and former fellow at the Makerere University Institute of Social Research. She has been a leading voice in Uganda on women's and LGBTQI+ rights. Among other things, she has advocated for the need to provide free sanitary pads to schoolgirls.

**Brian Pellot** is Taboom Media's co-founding director and a journalist, editor, trainer, fundraiser, and consultant for international NGOs and media outlets. He is based in Cape Town and speaks regularly about LGBTQI+ rights and religion at media and human rights conferences around the world. Before Taboom, Brian served as Religion News Service's director of global strategy, as Index on Censorship's digital policy advisor, and as Free Speech Debate's online editor.

**Marie Ramtu** is programmes officer at the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI). She is the primary focal point person for NANHRI's SOGIE Project. She has years of experience on project management and advocacy for persons persecuted because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in International Relations.

**Dennis Wamala** is director of programs at Icebreakers Uganda and a human rights activist who is passionate about the lives, livelihoods, and health of LGBTI people around the world. In Uganda and beyond, Wamala is known for his experience in LGBTI human rights and access to healthcare issues, particularly for men who have sex with men (MSM), an area of expertise he has brought to several local and international projects.