

RESOURCING LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX ISSUES IN CIVIL SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) issues have received increasing attention around the globe. In the first 16 years of the 21st century, countries such as Armenia, Costa Rica, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Panama, Romania and the United States have repealed sodomy laws or decriminalised homosexuality. In the same period, the number of countries allowing same-sex marriage has grown from zero to 22.¹ Countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Denmark, Ireland and Malta have passed laws making it easier for people to change legal documents in recognition of their self-determined gender identity.² In 2008, for the first time, a declaration on LGBTI rights was introduced to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. Ninety-six member states of the UN are signatories to the declaration, which condemns discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Despite these advances for LGBTI rights, there has also been a rise in discriminatory laws and violence against LGBTI people in many parts of the world. Countries such as Belize and India have recriminalised homosexuality, and extreme anti-LGBTI laws have been passed in Nigeria, Russia and Uganda. Homosexual acts are still illegal in 75 countries, including six where homosexuality is punishable by death.³ Transgender Europe's Trans Murder Monitoring Project reports that 1,933 transgender people in 64 countries were killed between January 2008 and September 2015.⁴

In every corner of the world, LGBTI activists and allies have worked to resist persecution and to advance the recognition of the rights and dignity of all people, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. These activists have organised themselves in civil society organisations (CSOs), networks and informal groups, often doing so in repressive contexts and with limited resources. In recent years, as acceptance of LGBTI people has begun to increase, a growing number of mainstream CSOs have also integrated LGBTI issues into their work.

1 'Gay Marriage Around the World', David Masci, David, Elizabeth Sciupac and Michael Lipka, Pew Research Center, June 2015, <http://pewrsr.ch/1FFnZpe>.

2 'Rights in Transition: Making Legal Recognition for Transgender People a Global Priority', Neela Ghoshal and Kyle Knight, Human Rights Watch, 2016, <http://bit.ly/1ZSywZ9>.

3 'State-Sponsored Homophobia: A World Survey of Laws: criminalisation, recognition and protection of same-sex love', Aengus Carrol and Lucas Paoli Itaborahy, May 2015, International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), <http://bit.ly/1Mstals>.

4 'Transgender Day of Remembrance 2015 – Trans Murder Monitoring Update', Transgender Europe, 9 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1T3nQ6T>.

This contribution to the 2016 CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report provides a brief overview of the current state of funding for LGBTI issues globally, drawing on recent research conducted by Funders for LGBTQ Issues and the Global Philanthropy Project (GPP), and offers four broad strategies for funders to resource LGBTI issues in civil society.

FUNDING FOR LGBTI ISSUES REMAINS SCARCE, PARTICULARLY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND EAST

Historically and into the present day, LGBTI issues have received little support from foundations, government agencies and other mainstream institutions. Even in the United States, where the LGBTI civic sector is the most extensive, foundation support for LGBTI issues has remained stable at about one quarter of one per cent of all foundation funding. It was not until 1998 that the annual US foundation funding for LGBTI issues surpassed US\$10 million.⁵

Outside the unique and relatively well-resourced LGBTI civic sector in the USA, LGBTI communities around the world are even more under-resourced. A report shortly to be released by Funders for LGBTQ Issues and GPP finds that development assistance and foundation funding for LGBTI issues outside the USA totalled approximately US\$175 million over the two year period of 2013 to 2014. The majority of this funding (53 per cent) came from foundations, most of them based in the USA and Europe, although a growing number of LGBTI funders are rooted in the global south and east. The remaining 47 per cent came from government funders in the form of development assistance and international aid. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), all development assistance funding totalled almost US\$135 billion in 2013 and more than US\$137 billion in 2014. Given that context, for every US\$100 awarded in international aid, less than four cents specifically supports LGBTI issues.

LGBTI issues are particularly under-resourced in the global south and east. Our research has found that CSOs based in the global south and east receive only about one quarter of all foundation and government funding for LGBTI issues.

IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL LGBTI CSOS

Local LGBTI CSOs play a unique and important role in advancing equality and well-being for LGBTI people. These organisations have deep first-hand knowledge of their local LGBTI communities, their needs, their challenges and their strengths. They often address a range of needs through a variety of strategies, for example, by providing HIV testing and services, working with faith leaders and others to create more tolerant spaces, advocating for policies and laws that protect LGBTI rights, and providing legal clinics and know-your-rights trainings for local community members. As a result of this work, LGBTI CSOs have established credibility and trust in LGBTI communities, reaching populations that larger, more mainstream CSOs are often unable to reach.

⁵ '40 Years of LGBTQ Philanthropy', Anthony Bowen, Funders for LGBTQ Issues, January 2012, <http://bit.ly/1DNMTTd>.

Although LGBTI CSOs fulfil many vital needs in LGBTI communities, they are chronically under-resourced, particularly in the global south and east. Most LGBTI CSOs are run entirely by volunteers or with minimal staff, and only a small fraction have sophisticated mechanisms for resource development. Leaders of LGBTI CSOs must also grapple with the very real effects of homophobia and transphobia, including violence directed at them, their organisations and their constituents. In some cases, repressive regimes prevent LGBTI CSOs from formalising their institutions, raising funds and practising the most basic right of assembly. In such challenging contexts, LGBTI CSOs provide a lifeline for vulnerable LGBTI communities as well as an authentic and indigenous voice to advocate for the need to recognise the full dignity and equality of LGBTI people.

CLOSING SPACE AND LGBTI CIVIL SOCIETY

LGBTI communities and CSOs are particularly vulnerable to the closing of space for civil society. Throughout history and across many cultural contexts, LGBTI people have often been subjected to criminalisation and violence simply for exercising their rights of assembly and association. A group with this history of marginalisation is bound to be among the most affected when repressive regimes place constraints on civil society.

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In several cases, LGBTI communities have been explicitly targeted by regimes that seek to close space for civil society. Since 2013, Algeria, Lithuania, Nigeria and Russia have all passed laws prohibiting ‘homosexual propaganda’, making it difficult, if not impossible, for LGBTI CSOs to operate without interference from the state.⁶ In these contexts and others, local LGBTI communities are often scapegoated and falsely conflated with foreign or colonial forces, further constraining LGBTI CSOs.

However, since LGBTI leaders and CSOs have been grappling with homophobia and transphobia for decades, many have already developed strategies for continuing to operate effectively even in the most repressive of contexts. Driven by dedicated volunteers and courageous activists, they are able to mobilise people and provide vital community services through informal networks and innovative mechanisms.

A forthcoming GPP report explores in depth the unique implications of closing civil society space for LGBTI communities.

THE VITAL ROLE OF LGBTI PHILANTHROPIC ENTITIES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND EAST

Just as local LGBTI CSOs are vital, so too are locally-rooted LGBTI foundations and other philanthropic entities in the global south and east. These institutions often serve as implementing partners for both government funders and private foundations, providing local knowledge and expertise as well as the capacity to build strong, sustainable and effective CSOs in their respective home regions.

⁶ ILGA, op. cit.

While locally rooted funding institutions are documented to be an effective tool for strengthening the impact of funding in many communities, they are particularly valuable in the case of LGBTI communities, given their history of marginalisation and exclusion from mainstream institutions.

LGBTI INCLUSION IN MAINSTREAM CSOS

While LGBTI-specific CSOs play a vital role, there are some needs of LGBTI communities that will ultimately have to be met by mainstream agencies and CSOs. For example, LGBTI refugees and internally displaced people are likely to require services from UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) and other agencies that respond to forced migration. It is crucial that these institutions be equipped with appropriate knowledge and competence to serve LGBTI people effectively, given that LGBTI people are more likely to face forced migration because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Similarly, mainstream human rights CSOs are positioned to amplify and lend legitimacy to efforts to advance the recognition of the rights of LGBTI people.

Increasing the LGBTI inclusiveness of mainstream CSOs complements the strengthening of LGBTI-specific CSOs. While LGBTI-specific CSOs may never attain the scale of a mainstream hospital or refugee service system, LGBTI CSOs have the knowledge and experience to offer larger service providers training, support and community linkages. Moreover, any service or advocacy effort focused on LGBTI communities will be more effective when local LGBTI communities are authentically engaged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the current context remains a challenging one for LGBTI issues, the trends described above point to several ways that funders can resource civil society to advance the rights and well-being of LGBTI communities more effectively:

- Provide core support to strengthen LGBTI CSOs at the local level, particularly in the global south and east. Since these organisations often provide a range of programmes with limited resources, even small grants for general support or core support can offer them invaluable flexibility in responding to the emerging needs of their local LGBTI communities.
- Integrate LGBTI rights into broader efforts to foster democracy and address the closing of civil society space. This may include supporting mainstream human rights organisations to integrate LGBTI issues into their work, as well as providing support for LGBTI CSOs to partner with larger democracy-building initiatives and offer them crucial expertise and experience of operating in repressive contexts.
- Support local LGBTI philanthropic entities to build sustainable funding streams for LGBTI communities in the global south and east. Long-term partnerships with these entities allow them to strengthen LGBTI civil society at the grassroots level.

- Provide support for increasing LGBTI inclusiveness and competence among mainstream CSOs, while drawing on and supporting the expertise of LGBTI-specific CSOs. Partnerships between LGBTI CSOs and mainstream service providers are a powerful combination for bringing effective interventions to scale and assuring that even the most vulnerable LGBTI communities are reached.
- Across all of the above funding strategies, philanthropic networks and other spaces for convening funders should be supported, as these provide a vital mechanism for foundations, governments and other funding institutions that are seeking to increase their impact in LGBTI communities.