Impact of Anti-Gender Opposition on TGD and LGBTQI Movements

Africa Report

2023

GATE

About GATE

GATE is an international advocacy organization working towards justice and equality for trans, gender diverse and intersex communities. Rooted in our movements, we work collaboratively with strategic partners at the global level to provide knowledge, resources and access to international institutions and processes. Our vision is a world free from human rights violations based on gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. Our strategy is to transform the landscape of global advocacy, knowledge creation and resource distribution through critical inclusion of trans, gender diverse and intersex movements at all levels of political, legal, and socio-economic processes.

Find out more about GATE by visiting www.gate.ngo

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Glossary

AG

Anti-gender: The anti-gender movement is an international movement which opposes what it refers to as "gender ideology", "gender theory", or "genderism" (Kováts, Eszter, 2016)

BIPOC

Black, Indigenous and People of Color

Centrist

Someone who supports the center of the range of political opinions

Far-Right

Includes "persons or groups who hold extreme nationalist, xenophobic, racist, religious fundamentalist, or other reactionary views"

Gender-Critical

Believing that sex is a fact of biology that cannot be changed, and doubting the idea of gender identity (a person's feeling of being male, female, or another identity, especially when this is different from the sex they were assigned at birth)

Left-Wing

Political parties, groups or people who believe that wealth and power should be shared among all parts of society

LGBTQI

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Intersex

LGR

Legal gender recognition

Mixed

The group's ideological stances are not homogenous; they are mixed between left-wing and right-wing stances

PWDs

Persons with disabilities

Right-Wing

Political parties, groups or people that have traditional opinions, and who believe in low taxes, the private ownership of property and industry, and less aid to the poor

TGD

Trans and gender diverse

TGDI

Trans, gender diverse, and intersex

Trans-Exclusionary Radical "Feminists" / TERFs

A radical wing of feminism that rejects the assertion that trans women are women, the inclusion of trans women in women's spaces, and trans rights. (The word "Feminists" has been placed in quotation marks to highlight how the TERF movement does not subscribe to the generally accepted definition of feminism, which is a movement primarily about gender equality).

Contents

Analysis of Survey Data

Introduction

For a general introduction to the Survey completed by respondents, including positionality, data collection methods, and who took part in the Survey, please refer to the **Global Report**.

The next few pages provide an analysis of the Survey data for the Africa region, followed by a breakdown of the data by country.

AG Actors

In the Africa region, respondents report that some AG groups are government actors, and some AG group members are part of the governments themselves. Some AG groups are represented as political parties and have seats in electable bodies (i.e., parliaments). Respondents categorize these groups as mixed on the political ideology spectrum, but some are right- or left-wing in their political ideological stances. The lack of proper investigation of alleged crimes committed by AG actors is a huge challenge, according to respondents.

AG groups have targeted the following groups in the past year:

Group	Count
LGBTQI people	6
TGD people	6
Intersex people	4
Migrants	2
Cis women	1
Ethnic and racial minorities	1
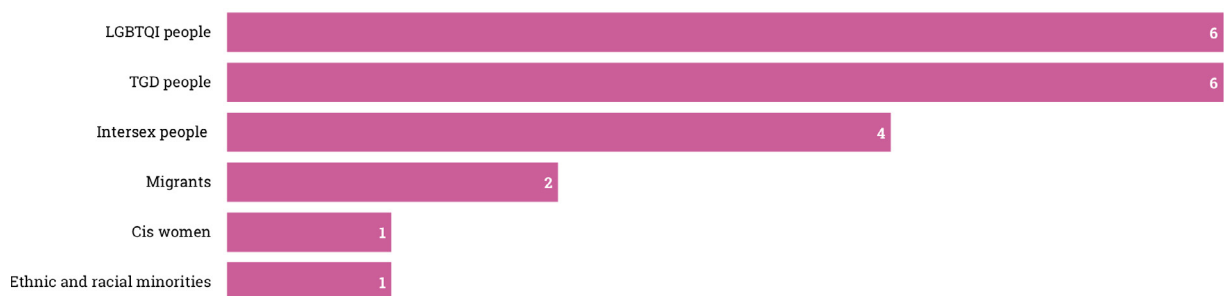
AG actors focus on sex education, sex work, freedom of expression, "family values", and "western ideas" in public communication to spread and gain support for their agenda. These focuses strengthen the AG agenda as its support base grows.

In the past year, have these groups been growing stronger in terms of the following:

Category	Value
Number of people supporting their social media	3
Ability to shape political decisions / impact policies	2
Funding	2
Number of people participating in their events	2
Other (Media presence)	1
Political connections	1
Don't know	1
Prefer not to answer	1
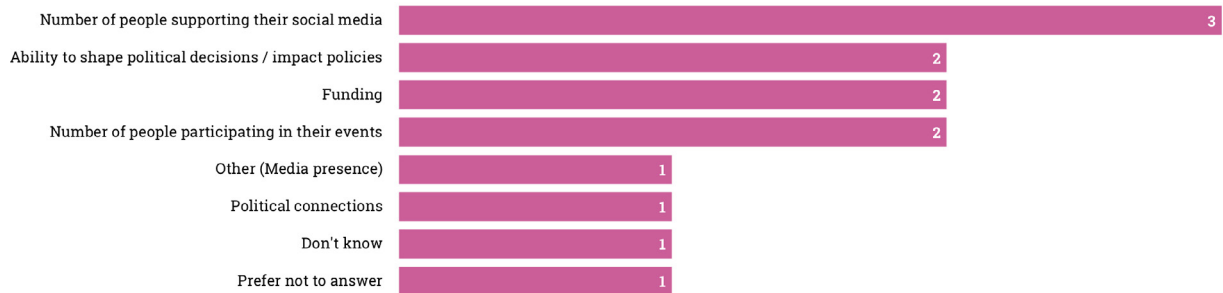
Impact on TGD/LGBTQI Communities

Most respondents believe that the human rights situation for TGD communities in Africa has not changed in the past year, or that it has been worsening in their contexts.

In the past year, the situation for TGD groups has:

Category	Value
Not changed	3
Worsened	2
Improved	1
Don't know	0

Respondents report that their organizations/collectives receive verbal abuse, which is frequently coordinated between various AG actors. Physical abuse also occurs and is sometimes coordinated between various AG actors. In most cases, the authorities were not notified about these attacks. Respondents indicate that threats against them and their organizations/collectives mostly take place on social networks.

In the past year, have you or your organization/collective experienced verbal attacks by AG groups or someone else as a result of AG narratives?

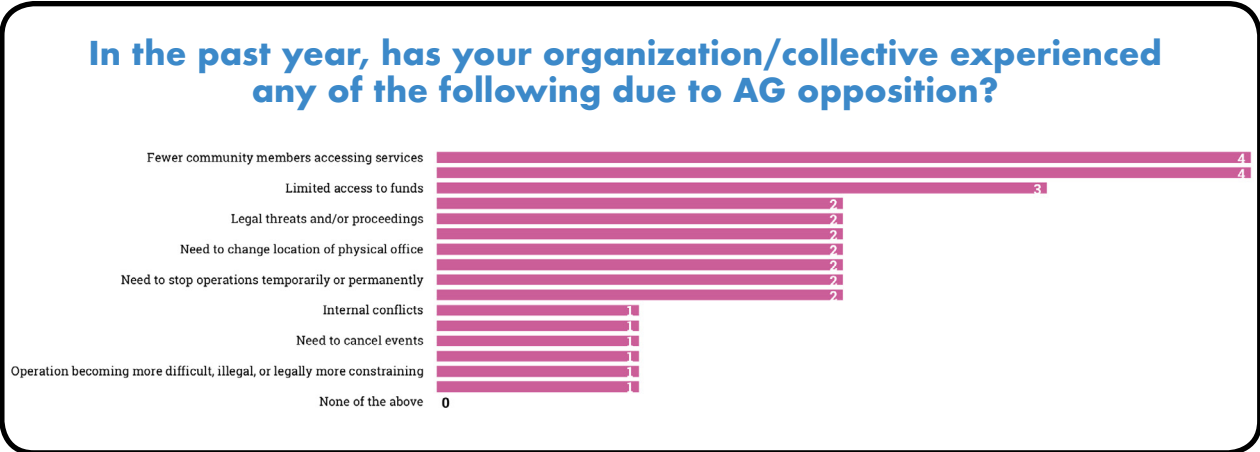| Category	Value
Yes	5
No	0
Don't know	0
Prefer not to answer	0

In the past year, have you or your organization/collective experienced physical attacks by AG groups or someone else as a result of AG narratives?

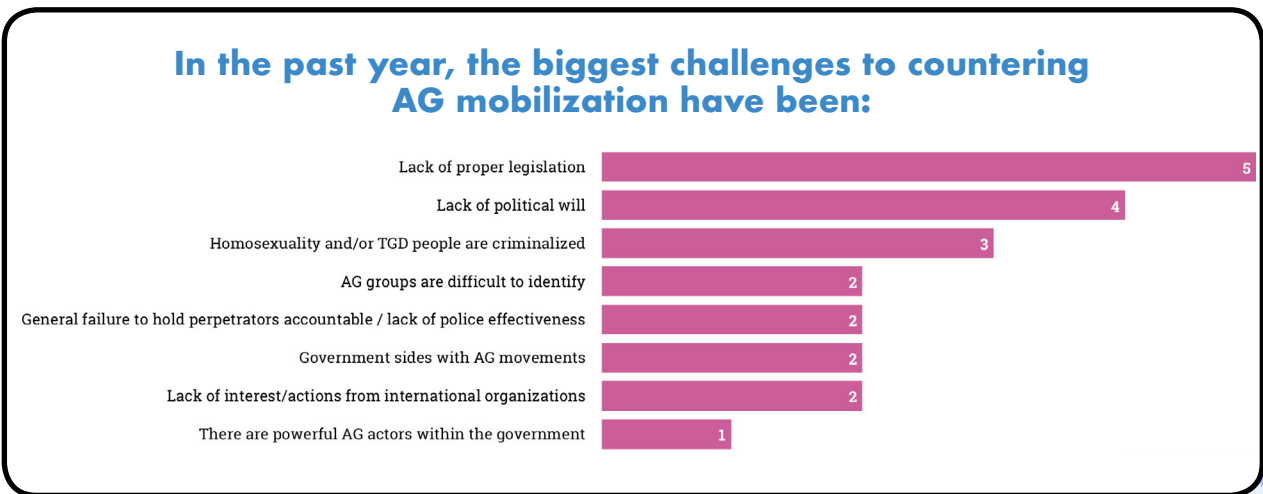| Category	Value
Yes	2
No	2
Prefer not to answer	1
Don't know	0

According to respondents, AG opposition results in the following serious challenges to TGD/LGBTQI and wider human rights activism: psycho-emotional stress and/or burnout experienced by activists, as well as fewer community members accessing services are the leading issues. Besides these, the most significant problem activists face is limited access to funds, which puts constraints on their ability to fight for equality.

In the past year, has your organization/collective experienced any of the following due to AG opposition?

Fewer community members accessing services	4
	4
Limited access to funds	3
Legal threats and/or proceedings	2
	2
Need to change location of physical office	2
	2
Need to stop operations temporarily or permanently	2
	2
Internal conflicts	1
Need to cancel events	1
	1
Operation becoming more difficult, illegal, or legally more constraining	1
	1
None of the above	0

According to respondents, AG actors have managed to influence policies and legal developments impacting TGD communities in Africa in the past year.
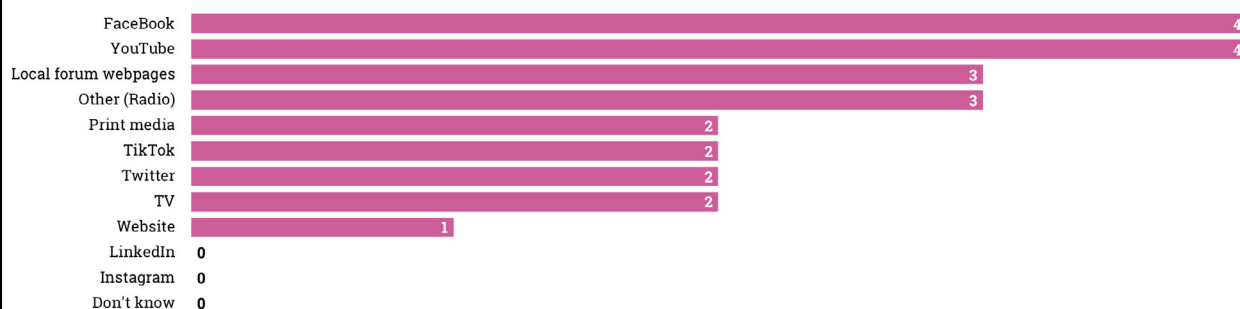
Respondents believe that lack of proper legislation and political will are the main barriers to countering AG opposition in their contexts. In several contexts, homosexuality and/or TGD people are criminalized, which also hinders activists from counteracting AG opposition. This can be explained by the fact that in several contexts, governments side with AG actors.

In the past year, the biggest challenges to countering AG mobilization have been:

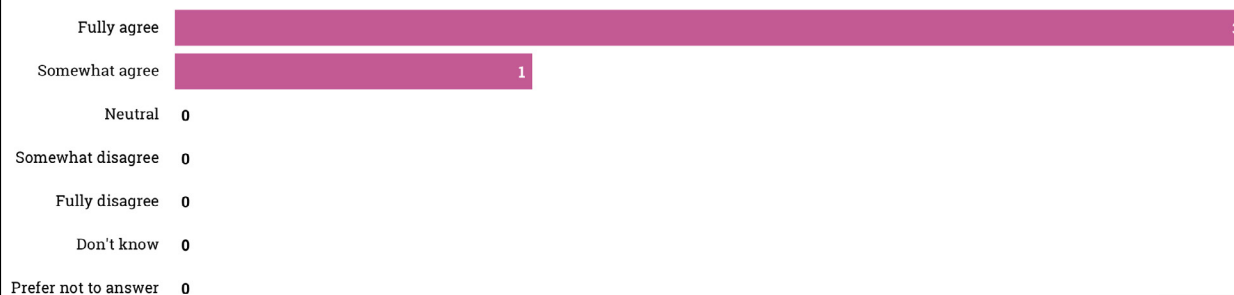|	
Lack of proper legislation	5
Lack of political will	4
Homosexuality and/or TGD people are criminalized	3
AG groups are difficult to identify	2
General failure to hold perpetrators accountable / lack of police effectiveness	2
Government sides with AG movements	2
Lack of interest/actions from international organizations	2
There are powerful AG actors within the government	1

Role of the Media

Respondents indicate that AG groups engage in the creation and spread of fake, misleading, and harmful news relating to TGD communities, using FaceBook, Twitter, YouTube, radio, and local forum webpages to spread and gain support for their agenda.

Media channels used most by AG groups in the past year

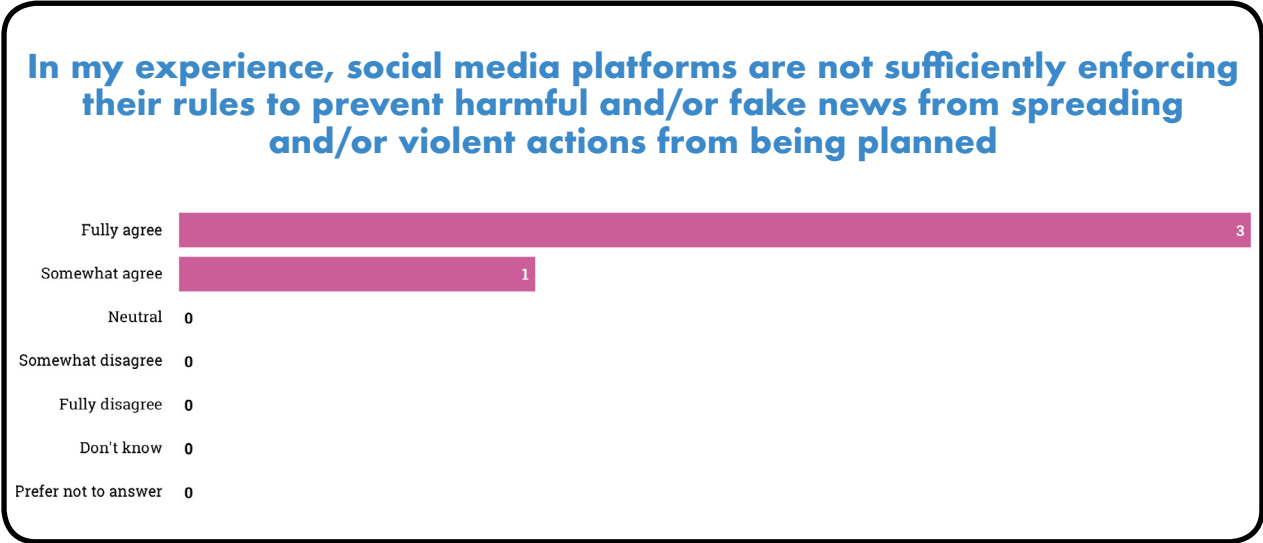| Channel	Value
FaceBook	4
YouTube	4
Local forum webpages	3
Other (Radio)	3
Print media	2
TikTok	2
Twitter	2
TV	2
Website	1
LinkedIn	0
Instagram	0
Don't know	0

Respondents' experiences show that social media platforms are the main sources of AG opposition, including mobilization, and these platforms enable homophobic and transphobic hate to spread by not sufficiently implementing rules to protect their users by removing false, misleading, and harmful information, or other harmful activities from their platforms.

In my experience, social media platforms are the primary means for AG mobilization

Response	Value
Fully agree	3
Somewhat agree	1
Neutral	0
Somewhat disagree	0
Fully disagree	0
Don't know	0
Prefer not to answer	0

In most cases, the social media posts of AG actors don't get reported, and when they are reported, reports mostly get ignored, and content rarely gets taken down.

In my experience, social media platforms are not sufficiently enforcing their rules to prevent harmful and/or fake news from spreading and/or violent actions from being planned

Fully agree	3
Somewhat agree	1
Neutral	0
Somewhat disagree	0
Fully disagree	0
Don't know	0
Prefer not to answer	0

On the other end of the spectrum, human rights posts related to TGD communities sometimes get blocked as social media platforms label them as "political".

The pages that follow provide a breakdown of the data from the Africa region by country.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

AG Actors

According to the respondent, the DRC government rarely investigates alleged crimes committed by AG groups. AG actors are not political parties. They receive funding but this information is not made public, or is hidden. They target ethnic/racial minorities and TGD/LGBTQI communities. They are categorized as left-wing on the political ideology spectrum. Information relating to their coordination or engagement in violence was not reported in the Survey.

The respondent indicates that AG groups have been growing in terms of the number of people supporting their social media, funding, and ability to shape political decisions and/or impact policies in the past year. Local law agencies seem to be supportive of AG actors and groups. The respondent names lack of proper legislation, lack of interest/actions from international organizations, and the criminalization of homosexuality and/or TGD people as the major barriers to counteracting AG opposition.

Impact on TGD/LGBTQI Communities

In the respondent's view, the situation for TGD/LGBTQI groups has not changed in the DRC in the past year. The respondent states that verbal attacks happen:

> "Street, churches and traditional leader often persecute LGBTQI in the Democratic Republic of Congo."

These threats are coordinated between various AG actors. Harassment, physical attacks, and threats coordinated between various AG groups were also reported to police. In none of the cases was an investigation opened by the authorities, due to a lack of proper legislation.

Due to AG opposition, the collective affiliated with the respondent has experienced limited access to funds, fewer community members accessing services, and the need to stop operations temporarily or permanently.

Role of the Media

AG actors in the DRC engage in the creation and spread of false information relating to TGD communities using FaceBook and YouTube as the platforms used to communicate with their audiences. The respondent fully agrees that the social media platforms are the primary means for AG mobilization, and somewhat agrees that the social media platforms are not sufficiently enforcing their rules to prevent harmful and/or fake news from spreading, and/or violent actions from being planned.

South Africa

AG Actors

Alleged crimes committed by AG groups in South Africa sometimes remain uninvestigated, according to the TGD organization respondent (first respondent), who states that

> "While a small number of government officials have made anti-gender statements, the government is by and large more supportive of gender-affirming CSOs. The anti-gender movement gains impetus from outside the country, it is felt, and the government does not take their threat seriously."

The human rights organization respondent (second respondent) says,

> "A very small party in Parliament, the African Christian Democratic Party, opposes 'gender ideology', same-sex marriage, abortion, and vaccinations. The top three largest parties in Parliament are all quite progressive in those areas to various degrees. The voters who support all of these parties are, however, typically more anti-LGBTQI."

The first respondent reports that AG actors mostly target LGBTQI, TGD, intersex, and migrant groups:

> "A majority of victims of hate crimes are people of colour living in poverty, but this is not a 'minority' in the South African context. A majority of the anti-gender debate as it would be recognized in the global north (academics, op-eds in the media, issues of school and sport and Healthcare etc) seems to take place within a white middle-class bubble."

According to the second respondent,

"Physical violence (hate crimes) appears to be sporadic and disorganized. The actual anti-gender advocates are focused on policy/law reform and 'changing hearts and minds' via social media and analog media. There have not to my knowledge been explicit instances of incitement to violence by these groups in the media, but I believe that they are fanning the flames by framing LGBTQI people as dangerous or perverse or sick. The media and government do not seem to take this notion seriously, as their actions have rarely crossed the line of the law."

This respondent also says that

"While there is a lot of backlash in black communities to LGBT+ people being 'un-African' or 'Satanic', the anti-gender movement in particular focuses on 'protecting children', 'freedom of thought and speech', 'fairness in sport', 'women's rights / sex-based rights' and 'science vs emotions'. Essentially, the arguments we see in places like the US and UK are transplanted verbatim into the South African discourse. Almost all of the most prominent anti-gender advocates and groups have a religious spin to them (be it Christianity, Judaism, or Islam) but they appear to downplay the religious element of it in favour of gaining wider support by focusing on legislation, children, and science – things that people of different faiths or no faith can all identify with."

Respondents categorize AG actors in South Africa as mixed or right-wing on the political ideology spectrum. No information about their coordination is known by respondents.

In terms of AG actors becoming stronger, a respondent says,

"I cannot tell with any certainty whether they are getting stronger in any of the above categories, but I believe they probably are. At the very least I know for a fact that they are becoming louder and more prominent in the media and online. Whether their support is growing or not, they are becoming bolder and more prominent in the digital, print and broadcast landscape."

The main barriers mentioned by respondents to countering AG opposition are a lack of proper legislation, lack of political will, general failure to hold perpetrators accountable / lack of police effectiveness, and AG groups being difficult to identify.

Impact on TGD/LGBTQI Communities

One respondent believes that the situation for TGD rights in South Africa has not changed, while the other reports that it has been improving in the past year.

Respondents have experienced AG attacks in the past year. One respondent stated,

"I don't know if there has been anything coordinated against the organisation, but some snarky social media comments here and there (typical stuff about 'groomers' and such). I personally have received a few attacks, though as an individual trans person rather than a representative of an organisation. There have been occasions where on FaceBook or such I'd make a comment on an article supporting trans rights and equality, or respond to a transphobe, and a swarm of clearly organised transphobes would mass-report all my posts to get the FaceBook AI to take them down, and laugh-react at photos of me. It would be like an unending swarm of wasps had descended upon me leaving me no choice but to run because there are too many of them to respond to each in kind. It has led me to keep my FaceBook posts open to just my friends where previously I was very proud of being an 'open book'."

The other respondent states that verbal attacks take place on social media:

"Predominantly on social media when one publishes articles. My photo has been shared in an anti-trans groups page and derogatory terms used. FaceBook did not want to remove it".

These incidents were not reported to authorities because of a lack of trust between TGD/LGBTQI community members and the police:

"I did not report to the authorities as nothing would have come of it. Even physical hate crimes take forever to be investigated and rarely see justice. Online harassment would not be taken seriously."

No physical attacks or threats were reported in the Survey by the respondents.

Respondents report the following impact on their organizations as resulting from AG opposition in South Africa: fewer advocacy opportunities, a limited ability to reach decision-makers, less ability to implement long-term strategy and a need to modify their strategies to respond to attacks, fewer community members accessing services, and psycho-emotional stress and/or burnout experienced by staff/volunteers/board.

Respondents were unsure whether AG actors influenced any policy developments in the past year:

> "I cannot say with any certainty that this is the result of anti-gender movements, but a policy on trans inclusion in schools was watered down to a set of guidelines for LGBTQI inclusion broadly, the department of home affairs has adopted a slightly more cumbersome process to apply for gender marker change, talks on having nonbinary gender markers seem to have stalled, and a bill on child welfare had provisions banning IGM removed (to be revisited later in a yet-to-be drafted bill)."

Role of the Media

TV, print media, FaceBook, and Twitter were named as the main communication channels used by AG actors in South Africa. One incident was reported to the social media platform by a respondent, but the content was not taken down.

In terms of the overall assessment of the role of social media, the respondent (the other respondent skipped these questions) fully agrees that social media platforms are the primary means for AG mobilization, and that social media platforms are not sufficiently enforcing their rules to prevent harmful and/or fake news from spreading and/or violent actions from being planned.

Uganda

AG Actors

Respondents report that some AG actors in Uganda are in government (MPs and ministers), that AG actors have coordinated communication with each other, and that the government rarely investigates alleged crimes committed by these actors. Moreover, respondents claim that the government financially supports AG actors. 1 Respondent states that the government is the main AG actor in the country. AG actors target cis women, migrants, religious minorities, LGBTQI, TGD, and intersex communities, and use sex education, "family values", and "western ideas" as their main discursive topics to spread and gain support for their agenda. Respondents report that AG groups are growing in terms of the number of people supporting them on social media, and more people are participating in their events and providing them with more funding, political power, and connections, thereby increasing their ability to impact policies.

The main barriers mentioned by respondents to counteracting AG opposition are lack of proper legislation, homosexuality being criminalized, the government being one of the key AG actors, lack of interest from international organizations, and the general failure to hold perpetrators accountable.

Impact on TGD/LGBTQI Communities

2 Respondents believe that the human rights situation for TGD communities in Uganda is worsening in their country, while 1 respondent states that the situation has not changed in the past year.

According to respondents, TGD activists have experienced verbal attacks in Uganda in the past year. Certain minority collectives have closed, and others were denied registration. Respondents report receiving threats to close their organization with accusations of promoting homosexuality.

1 Respondent states,

> "The ministry of foreign affairs responsible for the registration of our organization has been selective when it comes to registering LGBT organizations. This has drastically affected the work done by LGBT organizations."

These incidents were not reported to authorities, since respondents did not believe that these incidents would be investigated, due to a lack of political will. These attacks were coordinated between different AG actors. Some attacks have been reported to police but were never investigated due to a lack of proper legislation, and a lack of political will.

Respondents also report that they experience physical attacks. 1 Respondent indicates that

> "Some of our members were physically attacked and assaulted after being found with their partner."

1 Respondent reported the case to the authorities, while another did not. The reported case was opened by authorities, but was never fully investigated.

According to respondents, the most significant challenges experienced by TGD organizations as a result of AG opposition are the following: psycho-emotional stress and/or burnout experienced by staff/volunteers/board, physical harm to staff/volunteers/board, the need to relocate staff/board/volunteers due to threats, fewer community members accessing services, and the need to change the physical location of their offices. 1 Respondent also reports the following challenges: need to change legal status, need to stop operations temporarily or permanently, need to cancel events, fewer advocacy opportunities / limited ability to reach decision-makers, limited opportunities to involve allies in activities, less ability to implement long-term strategy and a need to modify strategy in order to respond to attacks, internal conflicts, and legal threats and/or proceedings.

In the last year, according to respondents, AG actors have not influenced any policy that targets the TGD community in Uganda.

Role of the Media

Respondents indicate that AG actors actively engage in creating and spreading false information about TGD communities in Uganda, and mostly use local forum webpages and FaceBook, followed by TV and print media, Twitter, and webpages to communicate with their audiences. Respondents fully (2) or somewhat (1) agree that social media platforms are the main mobilization means for AG actors, and fully agree that these platforms are not sufficiently enforcing their community safety rules to prevent harmful and/or fake news from spreading, and/or violent actions from being planned. In the Survey, respondents did not report any pro-human rights posts being blocked on any social media platforms.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions and recommendations are based on the most common global trends revealed by the Survey.

The assessment from the majority of respondents that the human rights situation for TGD communities has worsened in the past year should be a cause for alarm for activists, policy-makers, and donors. This alarming reality that the Survey brings to light demands that there should be more of an investment in TGD activism in terms of creating more awareness and more critical knowledge about AG opposition.

Building on this knowledge, analyzing existing activist approaches would help to critically rethink activist strategies in order for them to be more effective. The efficacy of activist approaches and strategies ideally need to include other parties: there need to be more discussions and collaborations between donors, policy-makers, TGD activists, and other socially progressive actors in order to understand the factors contributing to the success of AG actors, and to develop joint strategies to counteract the growth and impact of the AG movement. For example, as AG actors are globally weaponizing concepts like "family values", sex education, abortion, children's protection, and "Western ideas", more critical knowledge is needed to understand how these concepts can be reclaimed through redefining them outside of a cis-heteronormative lens. and how the public communication coming out of activist circles can be improved upon in order to counteract the skewed perceptions that these AG narratives create and foster.

Moreover, as AG actors have successfully managed to position TGD communities and their rights against the women's/feminist agenda in several contexts, further specific knowledge needs to be created around this topic and more discussions between TGD and feminist movements need to take place in order to clarify that this is a false dichotomy manufactured by the AG movement, and that the principles, values, aims and goals that govern the TGD human rights movement are the same as those that underpin the feminist/women's movement.

Another aspect that the Survey highlights is the leading challenge experienced by activists resulting from the AG opposition – that of the psycho-emotional well-being of activists. Political discussions at the highest level need to include an awareness of this challenge, as well as ways to prevent and/or mitigate it. Undoubtedly, donors need to invest more in the safety, security, and psycho-emotional well-being of activists. Without this investment, the tendency of activists to leave activism may grow, which would pose a serious threat to the TGD movements, and human rights activism in general.

Pursuant to this, the security and safety of activists and organizations need to be prioritized in funding models as well as in high-political discussions because, otherwise, a growing number of community members may no longer be able to access the services provided by TGD/LGBTQI organizations, which would leave these members in even more vulnerable situations, especially when it comes to life-saving services related to HIV, psycho-emotional support, and other medical, social, and legal assistances. For many, lack of access to these services means vulnerability and exposure to HIV and other health-related issues, homelessness, violence, incarceration, and even death.

Another issue highlighted by the Survey is that due to AG opposition, advocacy opportunities for TGD activists are becoming increasingly limited, and activists have less capacity to reach decision-makers themselves. Therefore, beyond the financial investment in advocacy, donor institutions themselves need to proactively invest in enabling and facilitating discussions between activists and decision-makers, as donors and other institutions have relatively more power to reach decision-makers.

Activists, donors, and policy-makers also need to invest more political attention and resources into international and national policies and legislation that tackle the disinformation and radicalization of the AG movement, as the Survey revealed the main barriers to counteracting AG opposition to be the lack of political will, lack of proper legislation, and general failure to hold perpetrators accountable / lack of police effectiveness,

Finally, as the Survey showed, social media is the main domain enabling AG discourses to flourish and mobilization to take place. Donors need to support activist communication efforts more and activists need to be more invested in effective public communication. This requires more knowledge and resources for effective messaging (including message testing), understanding social opinions and factors contributing to radicalization, and utilization of more diverse

communication channels. Most importantly, social media platforms need to be held accountable. More and more effective regulations and policies are needed to force social media platforms to enforce higher safety and ethics standards on their platforms, ensuring that they do not enable disinformation that leads to social conflict and violence. Due to the transnational nature of social media platforms, discussions and policy efforts targeted at them are needed at the international level.

Summary of Recommendations

Donors

1. In funding portfolios, prioritize projects aimed at:

    a. producing more critical knowledge on AG opposition, factors contributing to radicalization, and effective strategies for counteracting it,

    b. increasing the capacity of activists and organizations, as well as their safety, security, and well-being,

    c. producing effective and wide-reaching communication,

    d. building intersectional cross-movement alliances, and

    e. tackling disinformation and radicalization.

2. Beyond funding advocacy projects, proactively leverage positions of power to facilitate discussions between activists and decision-makers.

3. Provide flexible funding to adequately respond to emerging issues and increase core funding opportunities.

Decision-makers

1. Increase the participation of TGD communities in consultations for policy making – not only on issues that specifically impact TGD communities, but on all social issues.

2. Invest in understanding the factors contributing to anti-democratic radicalization, and conflicts operating in local contexts.

3. In consultation with various progressive/emancipatory and socially vulnerable groups, create or improve policies that address disinformation and anti-democratic radicalization.

Activists

1. Mobilize new resources and invest the existing ones in improving the understanding of the factors contributing to radicalization, the nature of AG opposition, and strategies on how to effectively counteract it.

2. Mobilize new resources and invest the existing ones in effective communication, both in terms of the content and the channels to reach as many audiences as possible.

3. Mobilize new resources and invest the existing ones in the safety, security, and well-being of the staff, board, and volunteers of the org–anization.

4. Liaise with social media platforms or organizations who can provide support in reaching out to social media to address disinformation.

5. Focus energies on building alliances and solidarity with other socially progressive and emancipatory movements, especially among feminist groups.

GATE