



A SPECIFIC AND CROSS-FUNCTIONAL GUIDE TO INTEGRATING ACTIVISTS' MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL- BEING INTO LGBTQI ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY PROGRAMS



POUR MOI, POUR LES AUTRES

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was produced as part of the «For Myself, For Others» project (“Pour moi, pour les autres” in French, or PMPA). This project aims to improve the mental health and well-being of francophone LGBTQI activists in Central and East Africa. It started in November 2021 and ended in March 2024. This project is spearheaded by Egides (Canada), CCAP (Cameroon) and MOLI (Burundi).

PROJECT PARTNERS:

Egides is an international alliance of 210 members - civil society organisations - in 33 countries and territories of the French-speaking world, including 9 organisations in the Caribbean and 32 in Central and East Africa. Egides and its members work to facilitate the international meeting and mobilisation of French-speaking LGBTQI organisations and activists, to ensure their access to technical resources in French in order to strengthen their capacities and actions and to promote the availability of accessible funding adapted to the issues, needs and priorities of LGBTQI communities in French-speaking areas.

CCAP (Cameroon) works to promote the mental health of all LGBTQI communities and develops specific programs aimed at the most marginalised groups in its context, in particular trans people and young people. CCAP has regional and international experience of participating in various think tanks and platforms.

MOLI (Burundi) works to strengthen local community organisations in the region of Central Africa in order to create more inclusive African societies. MOLI has regional and international experience in advocacy, research, knowledge creation and capacity building.

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INTRODUCTION

Since November 2021, Egides, CCAP and MOLI have been spearheading the PMPA project, which aims to improve the mental health and well-being of French-speaking LGBTQI activists in Central and East Africa, more specifically in Cameroon (CCAP), Burundi (MOLI) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (MOLI).

The specific objectives of the PMPA project are:

- To document and raise awareness of the mental health and well-being needs of French-speaking LGBTQI activists;
- To build capacity and improve mental health and well-being practices and services for activists on the frontline of movements, and to create a practice of mutual support and caring between LGBTQI activists at regional and international level;
- To develop advocacy towards funders and international organizations for the integration of mental health as a cross-functional priority in development programs.

In order to build this project, an extensive consultation including a 23-question online survey was carried out with francophone activists - 73% from Africa and the Caribbean - and 4 focus groups with local civil societies, online and in person, bringing together 61 activists from the Caribbean, North Africa, West Africa, Central and East Africa. This collaborative process identified the underlying

hypothesis of the initiative, namely that LGBTQI activists face mental health and well-being issues specific to their activism.

To meet these needs, the project included regional research to gather data on the mental health and well-being of activists in Central and East Africa and the resources available. In addition, as part of the project, various training and awareness-raising sessions were carried out in Cameroon, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo to better equip activists and their organisations to take into consideration their mental health and well-being. Psychological support sessions were also set up in Burundi and Cameroon as part of the project. In January 2024, the first PMPA Oasis was held, a three-day face-to-face meeting with activists from Central and East Africa focusing on rest, well-being and the mental health of activists. Finally, to support taking into account the mental health and well-being of activists, the project planned to produce two guides, one for activists and another for funders.

It is from this latter perspective that this guide has been created to encourage action by funders wishing to integrate the mental health of LGBTQI+ activists into the programs they fund.



BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

According to the WHO, mental health is not simply the absence of mental disorder. It is a state of mental well-being that enables us to cope with life's challenges, to fulfil our potential, to work well, and to contribute to the life of our community (WHO, 2021).

The LGBTQI activist environment is full of risks and challenges, which could compromise the well-being and mental health of LGBTQI activists over time. This is also happening in a context where the integration of mental health remains very inadequate, both for the target populations of the various projects and for the activists themselves. As a result, these people are among the least well-equipped to take care of themselves and their peers, and among those with the least access to services tailored to their particular situation. Yet they are often called upon to develop increasingly varied services for LGBTQI people. Being on the frontline of the fight for the rights of their peers, LGBTQI activists take enormous risks, suffering violence and discrimination themselves, and are sometimes even threatened with death or actually murdered (UNITY Platform, 2021). They tend to put support for others before their own health, including their mental health. They often work selflessly, with limited resources, without a structure that enables them to optimise their performance or guarantee their well-being.

Neglect of the mental health needs of LGBTQI activists, combined with significant security challenges, creates high levels of stress. This includes the psychological fatigue of activism, the resonance of experienced trauma by being in contact with communities, the survival issues of civil society organisations, and individual uncertainties about their personal future, both socially and financially. These collective

consequences are a constant threat to the continuity and sustainability of LGBTQI movements. The crucial lack of support, harmful individual coping mechanisms and lack of recognition for their commitment discourage activists from pursuing their activism and dissuade others from getting involved. This is a crucial problem in a context of shrinking civic space in general in many countries, and in particular in French-speaking countries, which suffer from a significant lack of technical and financial resources to lead their fight.

Funders have an important role to play if they hope to increase the resources and techniques available to activists so that they can pursue their work while keeping their mental health and well-being at the heart of their considerations.



METHODOLOGY

This guide is the culmination of a data-gathering process designed to reflect the needs and inspirations of LGBTQI activists and funders alike.

As a first step, we reviewed studies and reports on the mental health of LGBTQI activists, along with the funding policies of the community's key funders. This phase led to a comparative, well-documented analysis of major global funders' development policies and the mental health and well-being needs expressed by LGBTQI activists.

In a second stage, we collected quantitative data through two questionnaires: one addressed to funders and another for activists. The subjects raised in the surveys included the state of mental health of activists within organisations, as well as areas for improvement in funders' policies.

After analysing data from the surveys, we held focus groups, during which qualitative data was collected to supplement quantitative data from the questionnaires. We organised a total of 7 focus groups in 5 countries (Cameroon, Burundi, Rwanda, DRC and Republic of Congo) with 45 LGBTQI activists. Focus groups in Cameroon took place face-to-face and the others took place online. Each focus group was comprised of 6 to 8 activists.

Data analysis from surveys and focus groups enabled a preliminary version of the guide to be drawn up. This first version was submitted to a number of funders and stakeholders for comments, in order to test and improve it. Once comments and feedback had been incorporated, the final stage was for Egides to validate the guide.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS GUIDE

Studies into the mental health needs of LGBTQI activists have highlighted an often problematic situation. While it is fairly easy for activists to be aware of this situation, it may be less obvious for funders.

Through this guide, we hope to:

1. Inspire funders on ways to contribute to improving the mental health and well-being of LGBTQI activists as part of their funding;
2. Support the willingness of certain funders to take greater account of the mental health and well-being of LGBTQI activists and help them to do so by providing proposals for action to be taken in this direction;
3. Suggest to funders in a concrete way how taking into account the mental health and well-being of LGBTQI activists is in complete alignment with their values and missions; and finally
4. To create the basis for a dialogue between LGBTQI organisations and funders to ensure that the mental health and well-being of activists is taken into account in programs to defend the rights of LGBTQI people.

This guide has been produced specifically for Central and East Africa (Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda), but we hope that it will reach a wider audience.



GUIDE STRUCTURE

This guide contains seven (7) key recommendations. Each recommendation is followed by concrete suggestions for implementation.

These recommendations are independent of each other, even though some of them may deal with the same issues. In addition, they are the result of a process of reflection that is constantly evolving and, as such, are not exhaustive.





RECOMMENDATION 1

Incorporate the mental health and well-being of LGBTQI activists into the vision of funders

Each funder has a vision – an ideal that guides its mission, policies, and activities. This vision is often stable, encompassing a broad area to which multiple programs can contribute without altering its core.

Many funders share the vision of a fully inclusive society for LGBTQI people, one where they live safely, free from violence, stigma, and discrimination, and have access to well-being resources, including mental health care. When addressing the mental health of LGBTQI communities, it is essential not to overlook the mental health of the activists working with them.

Another common vision is equality: gender equality and equality as citizens. Funders with this focus often establish programs that ensure well-being for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. In this context, funders should also prioritize the mental health of activists leading the fight for equality, especially those supporting sexually and gender-diverse communities.

Many funders, especially governments, emphasize governance, democracy and human rights. LGBTQI-related funding is often included in these programs, either at the initiative of the funder or the organizations applying for funding. Human rights funders are aware of the risks inherent in these programs and tend to prioritize the safety of their beneficiaries.

In human rights programs, documenting violence and rights violations against LGBTQI people is becoming increasingly important, with annual reports such as those from Cameroon. However, human rights defenders are often not explicitly addressed, nor are they prominently featured in the reports. While violence against activists is documented, the data is often grouped with that of other victims, making it difficult to highlight the specific risks activists face.

HIV funding for LGBTQI people remains a significant area, representing 18% of funding in the French-speaking world (GPP and EGIDES, 2023). Many funders focus on key populations like men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender individuals. Some HIV programs have integrated staff well-being initiatives, such as the COPE (Client-Oriented, Patient-Efficient) model, which centers on the needs of both clients and staff (Bradley, 1998). LGBTQI organizations in Cameroon, for instance, have received training on this concept from Care Cameroun, a funder for HIV programs.

Several funders, particularly those funding women and feminist movements, including LBO (Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer) women, implicitly extend their focus on well-being to mental health as part of the broader fight against oppression and for empowerment and resilience.



Additionally, two major donors have explicitly addressed mental health: FRIDA, with its Manifesto for Happiness, which includes human resource strategies like the four-day work week to promote mental health, and Astrea, through its Healing Justice framework. Healing Justice offers holistic responses to trauma and systemic violence, centering on collective safety and the emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental well-being of communities. When incorporated into movement strategies, these practices support both activists and communities in ensuring long-term resilience and survival.

Funders are encouraged to better understand the challenges faced by their partners, reflect on the urgency of their requests, and adjust their expectations accordingly. Flexibility and attentiveness in grant management, operations, and programs are crucial, as cited by several organizations.

Funders focusing on LGBTQI communities typically prioritize well-being or related values such as human rights, access to healthcare, gender equality, and peace and democracy. For these values to be upheld, the well-being of the activists must be included. Therefore, the mental health of LGBTQI activists should be an integral part of the programs supported by funders, as part of a holistic approach.

Funders looking to integrate the mental health and well-being of activists into their vision can do so by:

- Promoting the inclusion of LGBTQI activists' mental health as part of program impact assessments;
- Raising awareness of how hostile environments and human rights violations can affect LGBTQI mental health, particularly in relation to gender inequality;
- Emphasizing investment in LGBTQI activists' well-being as a key driver of change;
- Showcasing their commitment to LGBTQI activists' mental health at conferences and meetings to inspire other funders and strengthen their image as advocates for best practices.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Set up a fully-fledged program dedicated to the mental health of LGBTQI people, including activists

For 94% of the LGBTQI organisations surveyed as part of this mission, mental health is an activity integrated into other programs, in particular HIV or anti-violence programs. Only 6% of organisations said that mental health was a program in its own right within their organisation, and even then it was still in its infancy.

In the study on the needs of mental health activists (CCAP and EGIDES, 2022), psychological intervention was cited as the primary need by 100% of respondents, yet in practice only just over half, 59%, actually seek it. Mental health services could be poorly adapted to the needs of activists if these services are primarily oriented towards other programs, which could justify this discrepancy.

Another study conducted in Cameroon (Alternatives-Cameroun, 2020) highlighted the gap between the mental health needs of staff and the lack of services tailored to address those needs. This study involved 40 staff members from Alternatives-Cameroun, an LGBTQI identity organization based in Cameroon. It was the first initiative of its kind, aimed at assessing the physical and psychological health of staff, particularly in relation to COVID-19. The study incorporated tools designed in consultation with health professionals – nurses, doctors, psychologists, and social workers – to capture specific health parameters.

The findings revealed significant mental health issues among staff. For instance, 32 out of 40 staff members had at least mild depression, and 14 were suffering from severe depression, representing 35% of the staff. However, none of these individuals had previously sought help for their mental health challenges. This was due not only to low awareness of mental health issues but also to the fact that available services were often perceived as being geared towards people living with HIV or victims of violence. As a result, staff in need of specialized mental health services found it difficult to access appropriate care.

In the absence of adequate mental health services, activists often turn to alternative resilience strategies such as sex, dance, sports, or yoga for relief (CCAP and EGIDES, 2022). This situation is corroborated by the UBUZIMA report, which assessed the mental health of LBQ women activists in Rwanda (Iribagiza, 2020). According to the report, many activists cope through social activities, isolation, introspection, journaling, and the use of substances, including narcotics.

The lack of specific mental health programs relegates mental health to a small component of broader initiatives focused on HIV prevention or addressing gender-based violence (GBV). Consequently, there is a lack of dedicated resources to improve the mental health of LGBTQI activists. The survey indicates that funders acknowledge the importance of mental health programs and are increasing the investment required to develop them.



Funders can help strengthen mental health programs for LGBTQI activists through the following initiatives:

- Increasing funding for mental health services specifically for LGBTQI people, including activists;
- Supporting calls for projects aimed at enhancing specific mental health programs within LGBTQI organizations;
- Providing technical support to build the capacity of staff responsible for mental health services and improve the structure of these services;
- Supporting research on the mental health of LGBTQI people, including activists;
- Promoting the creation of specialized mental health centers for LGBTQI people, including activists.



RECOMMENDATION 3

Multiply funding for LGBTQI activists, particularly focused on their mental health

Addressing the mental health needs of LGBTQI activists requires, first and foremost, increased investment in these individuals. However, this presents a significant challenge given the lack of financial resources to meet such needs. In French-speaking countries, funding for LGBTQI organizations averages only \$27,175, compared to \$46,000 in English-speaking countries. Overall, funding specifically addressed to LGBTQI communities in French-speaking countries and territories account for only 1% of global funding (GPP and EGIDES, 2023).

As a result, even when activists are aware of their mental health needs, accessing appropriate care is often difficult due to the perception that mental health services come with high costs. According to data collected from focus groups, only 2 out of 29 organizations reported having projects specifically dedicated to activists. Most projects focus on the broader LGBTQI community and not on activists, who, as employees, are often not prioritized over more vulnerable members. Activists themselves state: "All projects go to community members; we do social activism to support the oppressed and stigmatized."

Nevertheless, some organizations mentioned projects that address activists' well-being. For example, in Cameroon, the Unity Platform – a collective of LGBTQI organizations – set up an emergency fund. In Rwanda, a consortium of five organizations, including Bright for Future Organization and MRA, structured a project that included a retreat for 34 activists.

Activists frequently sacrifice their own health for the benefit of their beneficiaries, seeing themselves as less vulnerable than the community members they serve. "Activists don't see themselves as beneficiaries; we forget about ourselves and focus on the community," they explain. This dynamic is exacerbated by fears that "funders may reject projects that prioritize activists' needs, viewing it as an abuse of resources, a scam, since projects are supposed to be beneficiary-oriented. Even if we know it's possible to integrate mental health, it's not so easy to trust that funders will accept it." On the flip side, 55% of funders stated they had not financed mental health projects for activists because no requests were made. This suggests a disconnect between activists' needs and their perceptions of what funders might support.

While some projects for the LGBTQI community include provisions for activists' mental health, they are often insufficient. For example, 58% of organizations indicated they had included mental health measures for activists in their projects, but in 75% of these cases, resources were inadequate. Some organizations have argued that "small budgets don't allow mental health to be taken into account." Organizations working with transgender communities noted that activities related to their mental health were often too expensive due to security concerns and logistical costs.



When asked, only 9% of funders indicated they would finance projects focused exclusively on activists' mental health. However, 82% would consider including mental health support within broader project calls, with 73% open to integrating it as a cross-functional theme and 36% as a new focus area. Despite this openness, LGBTQI activists are rarely considered among the most vulnerable groups in project applications.

The need for activist inclusion is particularly clear in times of crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, frontline healthcare workers were recognized as particularly vulnerable to the virus. Similarly, LGBTQI activists, who are known to face unique risks such as burnout (Amnesty International, 2020), should be included in mental health interventions. For example, Colibri, an organization in Bafoussam, Cameroon, integrated mental health into a helpline project. After recognizing that their staff was at risk of burnout due to high call volumes, they worked with funders to implement burnout prevention measures.

Funding directed toward improving the mental health of LGBTQI activists plays a critical role. It enables data collection on activists' mental health, provides access to mental health services, raises awareness and implements mental health policies. These measures can improve workplace relationships and help restore self-confidence among activists, giving them tools to cope with stress.

To increase support for LGBTQI activists, funders should:

- Increase calls for projects focused on the mental health and well-being of LGBTQI activists;
- Ensure that activists are systematically included as beneficiaries of projects aimed at LGBTQI communities;
- Allocate specific budget lines for organizing mental health activities for activists (e.g., retreats, workshops, sports, recreational activities, art);
- Include outcome indicators in project reports to track the well-being of activists, particularly in violence management;
- Communicate clearly with activists about the possibility of including their mental health needs in project proposals.



RECOMMENDATION 4

Incorporate the mental health and well-being of LGBTQI activists into the vision of funders

The working conditions of activists are closely linked to their mental health. The study on mental health needs (CCAP and EGIDES, 2022) highlights the importance of healthy working environments, career prospects, and investment in activists' mental well-being.

However, many funders specify which types of activities can be funded within a project, and often, the budget for staff focuses primarily on salaries. There is rarely provision for additional resources that support the overall well-being of LGBTQI activists, such as group insurance, emergency funds, leave, and other benefits. Economic insecurity is frequently cited as a significant issue for LGBTQI individuals, yet funding aimed at the economic empowerment of activists is often deprioritized. It is challenging to be an activist under precarious economic conditions, and certain budget items, like salaries and rent, are frequently underfunded, especially in the French-speaking world where LGBTQI funding is limited.

The study also highlights the heavy workloads faced by activists, with one activist from Burundi noting: «In our organization, there are few staff due to a lack of financial resources. As a result, we are always overwhelmed and stressed. When you add daily life challenges to this, it's easy to understand why our mental health is affected» (CCAP and EGIDES, 2022). Focus groups with activists from various organizations confirmed that many work long hours, driven by the belief that activists must achieve much with little resources, often prioritizing their convictions over their own well-being.

To improve the well-being of activists, substantial investments are needed, particularly in technical support, which should be considered a vital budgetary item. Some funders, such as Front Line AIDS, ISDAO, and Dignity for All, provide emergency aid to activists. However, these funds can be difficult to access due to cumbersome administrative processes. Additionally, «family» coverage in these emergency funds does not always recognize same-sex families or childless couples, a gap that must be addressed.

While many funders leave human resource management to funded organizations, they can still play a role in improving working conditions by supporting the development of better human resource structures.



This can be achieved by:

- Increasing funding for human resources;
- Supporting employee benefits (bonuses, vacations, insurance, pensions);
- Developing economic empowerment initiatives (micro-credit, income-generating activities, social enterprises);
- Encouraging the adoption of well-being policies (gender equality policies, mental health and well-being policies, anti-violence and anti-fraud policies);
- Working with organizations to develop performance indicators for human resources.



RECOMMENDATION 5

Recognize the impact of funding arrangements on the mental health of LGBTQI activists

Funding arrangements have a significant impact on the mental health and stability of LGBTQI organizations. Most funding is short-term, often lasting only a year, making it difficult for organizations to ensure long-term stability and career development for their staff. While some funders offer larger, multi-year funding, these are usually awarded to organizations with strong managerial capacities. As a result, smaller LGBTQI organizations, often less structured, miss out on major funding. This issue is particularly evident in HIV programs targeting key populations, where funds are often redistributed through intermediary organizations.

Applying for funding is not always straightforward, with language barriers and complex application processes adding to the stress. The Global Resources Report - a Francophone Perspective (EGIDES AND GPP 2023) rightly recommends more calls for proposals in French. Sometimes, the funding request itself can be particularly complex, even for modest funding over a limited period. This situation can be anxiety-inducing for LGBTQI activists, who are not always sufficiently trained to prepare funding applications.

Some funders place importance on a collective approach to project drafting. This approach aims to ensure that everyone's needs are taken into account. It aligns with the activists' need to be involved in decision-making, for the sake of their mental health. In our survey, 15% of activists did not know whether their organizations had budget lines for staff mental health, raising questions about the involvement of activists in the project design process. Funders are also interested in the sustainability of projects beyond the funding period, but the sustainability of resources is essential to achieve this. Investing in mental health could contribute to program sustainability by ensuring a balanced workforce capable of maintaining project momentum.

The visibility of projects corresponds to that of the funders, but also to the visibility of implementing partners. Communicating about the actions of the implementing organizations allows activists to be recognized for their achievements, while taking into account their safety and the effectiveness of their messaging to the public, in an often hostile context.

The gender approach aims to reduce barriers to accessing services that are linked to gender norms and to ensure equality for all individuals within the project, potentially through differentiated approaches. The gender analysis of the project helps to see how it may affect people differently depending on their particular situation within the spectrum of sexual and gender diversity. This approach makes it possible to define how to ensure, as much as possible, equal access for beneficiaries to planned activities. The gender approach thus ensures that no one is left behind and should also be considered in the mental health of activists. Therefore, all LGBTQI activists would be taken into account in their diversity, including for example



transgender activists, who tend to be less prominently considered.

About 55% of donors in our survey opted for flexibility in project implementation and for simplifying certain procedures. There are several constraints that accompany funding applications, project implementation, achieving results, reporting, and disbursing funds. These constraints can expose LGBTQI activists to a risk of burnout. Among the constraints, responsiveness in fund disbursement is an even greater challenge. A delay by one person in validating a file can lead to a delay in fund transfers. This situation, which has no impact on funders' salaries, will nevertheless result in a delay in the payment of salaries for the beneficiary organization. If this organization has no other means to cover expenses while waiting for a transfer, its work may be jeopardized, creating vulnerability situations for activists.

Funders have an interest in fostering a quality relationship and communication with their partners as part of the funding process. This communication ensures better management and allows for constant attention to the needs of activists. Good communication keeps funders regularly informed about how comfortable activists are with the implemented projects and what adjustments might be necessary.

To mitigate the negative impact of funding arrangements on the mental health of LGBTQI activists, funders could:

- Provide greater flexibility in project implementation;
- Offer longer-term, sustainable funding;
- Simplify funding application processes;
- Provide more support for operating costs;
- Adapt strategies to changing circumstances;
- Simplify and streamline reporting processes;
- Improve the speed of fund disbursement;
- Foster strong, trust-based relationships with LGBTQI activists, not based on control, taking into account their mental health and well-being;
- Outsource financial and administrative tasks while maintaining organizational autonomy;
- Prioritize locally defined project indicators.



RECOMMENDATION 6

Strengthen technical support to improve mental health and well-being of LGBTQI activists

Among surveyed organizations, 93% have already organized mental health-related activities for activists, with 58% explicitly including LGBTQI activists' mental health in their projects. However, while 100% of activists express a need for mental health services, only 59% have had access to interventions from mental health specialists (CCAP and EGIDES, 2022). This gap points to a lack of specialized psychological services.

To try and close this gap, as part of the PMPA project, psychological support sessions for activists were set up in Burundi and Cameroon. Some organizations cover the consultation fees so that activists can enjoy free sessions. At the same time, activists likely need to better understand the importance of taking care of their mental health, and service providers in this field need to continuously update their skills.

In other organizations, support groups for activists or group therapy sessions have also been implemented, including stress reduction activities, team building, or meditative activities. Some funders mentioned this type of activity in our surveys, which they organize for the benefit of their staff. Skills transfer or experience sharing could be useful here to inspire LGBTQI organizations to improve their staff's mental health through such initiatives.

Two organizations mentioned formal evaluations of the mental health of LGBTQI activists: Alternatives-Cameroun in Cameroon and NDABAGA's Sisters Organization in Rwanda, in collaboration with CAL (Coalition of African Lesbians). In the case of Alternatives-Cameroun, there was a systematic staff consultation during which psychological tests were conducted about burnout, depression and anxiety. Recommendations were then made to the evaluated staff (Alternatives-Cameroun, 2020). In Rwanda, mental health needs of activists were assessed under the lead of Iribagiza (2020). To generalize this type of initiative, technical support is needed both in community-based research and in mental health evaluation tools. Moreover, these assessments are still awaiting follow-up programs aimed at improving LGBTQI activists' mental health, hence the need for more expertise in evidence-based advocacy.

The most common activities are recreational staff gatherings designed to relax, de-stress and have fun, briefly putting work aside. These activities include recreational weekends for staff, sports sessions or sporting events, gift exchanges for end-of-year celebrations, recreational evenings, group outings, exchanges between organizations, and retreats for activists. Since these activities are often done in groups and outdoors, security can sometimes be an issue, especially for transgender individuals who may become easily targeted. Security is therefore a challenge for these activities, and venues must be as discreet as possible. For example, in Cameroon, during one of these recreational evenings, about fifty activists were arrested by law enforcement (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This highlights the need to strengthen activists' security capacity to ensure that activities meant for their well-being do not backfire. Additionally, to avoid



improvisation and routine, organizations could benefit from technical resources to enrich these recreational activities. For instance, as part of the PMPA project, a regional week focused on mental health and well-being, called L'Oasis PMPA, was organized in January 2024. It featured a list of activities that were considered very creative: hiking, board games, museum visits, all set in a traditional chieftom offering tourist attractions, blending culture and nature.

Other organizations are just beginning to discover the topic of mental health for LGBTQI activists and require support in this regard, with a focus on their specific needs.

To support LGBTQI activists' mental health, funders should:

- Provide more funding for mental health training;
- Organize mental health workshops replicable within organizations;
- Include mental health and well-being as key areas for technical support;
- Support mental health and well-being conferences and events for LGBTQI activists.



RECOMMENDATION 7

Support the recognition, protection and efficiency of LGBTQI activists

The appreciation, recognition and protection of LGBTQI activists remain complex, particularly in hostile environments where activists are often viewed as promoting unacceptable values. Human rights defenders in Africa face challenges in gaining recognition and protection, and LGBTQI activists are no exception. To effectively protect the mental health of LGBTQI activists, it is crucial to address the security challenges they face. In many countries, LGBTQI activists are subjected to severe threats and discrimination, with some being arrested or forced into exile. As a result, they operate in environments of heightened insecurity.

The status of «human rights defender» could offer activists a significant advantage by providing formal recognition to a profession that currently poses more risks than benefits. According to our survey, nearly a third of activists already hold such official status, which presents an opportunity for others to follow suit. However, it is important to explore what this status truly entails. For many, it could provide recognition and ease their interventions in the field by enhancing credibility with beneficiaries. Yet some interviewees expressed concerns that this status might also increase their exposure to danger, a sentiment echoed by a funder who described it as a double-edged sword.

LGBTQI activists are heavily involved in health programs, particularly HIV-related initiatives, and should benefit from wellness programs designed for healthcare workers. Initiatives like the COPE program, previously mentioned, are steps in this direction, with 45% of surveyed activists reporting that they had already benefited from such programs.

The right to mental health is interconnected with other fundamental freedoms, such as the right to bodily autonomy and protection from cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. Violations of these rights can severely impact mental well-being. Therefore, advocating for human rights must also include safeguarding the mental health of those defending these rights.



Funders can play a key role in improving the recognition and protection of LGBTQI activists through the following actions:

- Fund advocacy efforts for the official recognition of LGBTQI activists as human rights defenders, accompanied by tailored protection policies;
- Support advocacy for recognizing LGBTQI activists as community health workers, following the Coalition Plus initiative for recognizing Peer Educators (NOUMSI, 2024);
- Strengthen emergency funding mechanisms;
- Increase funding for safety, risk mitigation, and response measures;
- Provide ongoing support for risk assessment and management;
- Offer technical assistance to bolster the personal and organizational security of activists.



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