



Resilience and Resistance: Safeguarding LGBTQ+ Rights in Times of Crises

Thursday, July 21st 2023

As part of our ChatSRHR series at Women Deliver 2023 in Kigali, Rwanda, AmplifyChange was pleased to host representatives from **UHAI EASHRI** and **ISDAO** to discuss the current state of LGBTI rights and activism in Africa and what the movement needs during this time of uncertainty and aggression.

The session opened with a recognition that unlike the other ChatSRHR sessions that were filmed and able to be fully shared afterwards, due to insecurity and risk around LGBTI rights, it was not possible to do the same with this session. While taking up space is crucial in challenging times, even so-called 'safe' spaces contain unknowns that create additional precautions to be taken when discussing LGBTI rights and issues.

Key takeaways from the discussion are below:

1. The LGBTI community has the right to just be 'mediocre'

- The terms 'resilience' and 'resistance' are often seen as positive things – but in reality, the community are tired of having to expend their energy and efforts on being resilient and needing to resist.
- It often takes two steps forward just to move 10 steps backwards in frontline activism. Being able to go about their daily lives and exist with the ability to 'be boring', is what is desired.



2. The evolution of SRHR advocacy should centre queer joy, pleasure, and liberation

- The ability to talk about sexual and reproductive health and rights shows that the community is standing on the shoulder of giants and those who fought for LGBTI activists to get to this point – but we need to evolve what LGBTI SRHR activism looks like.
- Currently, when positioning SRHR advocacy, the main approach is to mirror the tactics of the opposition. However, when using their narratives to move advocacy forward, it removes creativity from activism.
- Centring queer joy and pleasure actively works against the systems that be. It is often difficult to address wellbeing after ‘resilience’ and ‘resistance’; vicarious trauma is ever present in the work. We must acknowledge that mental wellbeing and sexual wellbeing go hand-in-hand.
- How do we support activists who are processing their own trauma while supporting others and how can we share care with those who are fighting on the frontlines?
- Reframing safety and security – we must work from a place of pleasure and not from a place of fear.

3. We need to interrogate the ‘SRHR’ that we are advocating for

- SRHR advocacy has always centred on the pathological, healthcare side. There needs to be reflection on how we look at SRHR as inclusive – i.e., how do we change the existing narrative of SRHR into something more holistic.
- When we talk about crisis, there is a broad spectrum – terrorism, poverty, climate crises, displacement – and LGBTI rights are compounded by these crises on top of SRHR. Often the crisis is not always known or acknowledged – it needs to be defined by the people who are living it. So when we talk about SRHR advocacy, it needs to go beyond healthcare and into the compounding factors that are limiting the rights of individuals.
- We should reframe the conversation of SRHR into human rights more broadly and contextualise what we mean by comprehensive SRHR. How we often approach SRHR advocacy now is more of a ‘band aid’ than addressing the core issues.
- We need to build up the resources to support LGBTI communities living in insecurity and take into account the intersecting factors that limit access such as age, economics, and location.



4. We need to learn from others – sometimes those who we least expect

- Intersectional movement building is crucial to addressing LGBTI rights. There is so much to learn from other movements – such as abortion rights movements.
- In this respect, the opposition does a great job of bringing a diverse range of people with diverse agendas together under one umbrella. How can we learn from this approach?
- Opposition monitoring will make this more effective.

5. We need to engage new and innovative narratives to counter the opposition

- Learning from the successes of other movements in terms of how to communicate the change that needs to be made.
- Better training on strategic communications could support activists in crafting successful messaging.

6. Donors and partners need to listen to what activists need

- When defining what support is available, flexibility is key. Funding in particular should be responsive and flexible to changes – we need to accept that advocacy is to ‘learn fast, fail fast’.
- Making funds available quickly is important to ensure that activists can respond to constantly evolving situations efficiently.
- Moving away from the idea of ‘justification’ of funds would help make the funding more effective through simplifying proposal and reporting processes. Ask the question – who/what are we collecting this information for?
- Donors and allies can play a role in showing the intersection of LGBTI rights with other key issues and advocate to other donors and decision-makers about how the best way to support the movement.