



Embracing
Intersectionality
for Health Equity
& Justice



Decolonising the narrative on queerness(es) in Africa

*A decolonised approach to understanding the realities, needs
and aspirations of LGBTQ+ communities in the Global South.*



FAWE Forum for African Women Educationalists
Forum des éducatrices africaines



INTRODUCTION

The colonial project was a series of engineered apocalyptic events and a source of severe and complex long-term trauma for the many diverse communities in the global majority world. Described by some as bold and daring in its establishment of the current world system it engulfed entire geographies and erased from current memory vital parts of the identity of indigenous groups. A large part of the recent challenges faced by communities in global south contexts is rooted in the hangover and crossover of colonial legislature, practices and norms which contribute to the suffering of vulnerable sections of society such as LGBTQ+ communities. In order to work towards a truly feminist approach to development work, there needs to be radically bold and daring actions of courage to practically and sustainably change the dynamics of power that are embedded in foreign aid. The dramatic rise of the anti-rights and anti-gender movement calls for a moment of critical reflection on the current ways of working within SRHR and development as a whole, and a creative re-imagining of the ways of engagement with local communities in the era of misinformation and the global poly-crisis.

“Imagine a world where Africa was self-reliant and self-determining.”

zethu Matebeni

The Make Way programme seeks to employ intersectional feminist coherence across all its policies, putting feminist and queer organisations at the forefront of change, being an ally in unboxing the history of the language and programmatic approaches to LGBTQ+, and reshaping and decolonizing funding and accountability structures to create more equal and dignified relationships of collaboration with partners from the global majority.

DECOLONISING THE NARRATIVE ON QUEERNESS(ES) IN AFRICA

In November 2023, the Make Way programme hosted a panel discussion about this topic during the Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy Conference (SFFP): “Make Way for Decolonising the Narrative on Queerness(es) in Africa”. This session brought together a diverse team of African experts in youth activism, academia, policy and theology who are all part of the immense cultural wealth of the LGBTQ+ community across the continent. Panellists included Reverend Adera Godfrey Owino (pastor, Cosmopolitan Affirming Church (CAC), Professor zethu Matebeni (South Africa Research Chair in Sexualities, Genders & Queer Studies University of Fort Hare, visiting Professor Women’s Gender & Sexualities Studies Department Yale University), Quinter Obiero (founder Equal Voices Organisation) and Monica Tabengwa (Policy Specialist, Inclusive Governance Initiative Project, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Africa).

CONTEXTUAL PLACEMENT

The Make Way programme operates in East and Southern Africa, where we see a growing trend of LGBTQ+ rights being challenged with a revisiting of colonial anti-LGBTQ+ laws and the growth of a vocal and influential anti-gender movement. In our analysis of the risks involved in

working with LGBTQ+ communities, who form a part of our wider approach to all vulnerable groups; we took a moment to critically reflect on our role as NGOs working in this space. We considered how we as NGOs can inadvertently contribute to the hostilities between communities and governments around what constitutes queerness, while acknowledging that the LGBTQ+ community has a longer history on the continent than the current tone of “development” work being rolled out by non-state actors, NGOs and civil society. This panel discussion creates the beginnings of our intersectional, contextual, historical and linguistic

*‘Be bold, be daring, have courage:
Feminist is a label you should deserve.’*

analysis that will inform our Africa-facing advocacy approach to LGBTQ+ communities who are part of the vulnerable communities we serve in East and Southern Africa.

Do you want to see the experts discussing queerness(es) in Africa? Check out [this video](#).

The key take aways below are based on the lessons from panellists, participants and organisers during this session.

KEY TAKE AWAYS FOR NGOS & CSOS

“Religion and culture are made to be what they are for. They are made to confer power and privilege, but also to assign powerlessness and otherness. It is possible to make them something different – a force that promotes equality, dignity and flourishing a life for all people everywhere.”

Reverend Adera

- » Due to the importance and significance of religion in Africa, as in many contexts globally, be intentional about telling and sharing stories of religious counter-mobilizations such as the Cosmopolitan Affirming Church (CAC) in Nairobi and local, regional and global networks of religious allies.
- » Create spaces where queer Africans from various countries and backgrounds can lead and explore indigenous expressions of queerness, with the aim to reclaim language and ways of existing within community that were lost through colonialism and neo-colonialism and move beyond the Global North's LGBTQ+ framework.
- » Ensure that funding specifically aimed at queer Africans is holistic (rather than focused only on SRHR) and flows through organisations that are founded and led by queer Africans and center the voices and needs of queer Africans in all their diversity, backgrounds, age ranges, and geographies.

- » Analyse through an intersectional lens the power and privilege that comes with being a donor / holding the money and what effect this has on the recipients of funding, the organisations through which the money is dispersed and the staff of global north and global majority organisations.
- » Ensure that all individuals working within the Global North funding landscape receive sufficient cultural awareness training.
- » Foster learning and sharing around alternative ways of accountability and risk management to ensure a true re- distribution of power.
- » Investigate and end funding provided to anti- LGBTQ/gender/rights movements.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS & DONORS

“Power imbalances within the donor funding landscape go beyond monetary transfers, they also show up in the individuals who roll out programmes and their internalised prejudices which can derail previously well-thought-out projects.”

Monica Tabengwa

1. **Rights:** Put local LGBTQ+ and feminist organizations in the lead as preferred partner to challenge, repeal and amend homophobic laws and to decriminalize queer identities. To do so, provide long- term flexible and direct funding which provides the opportunity to maintain lobby efforts to change legislature. So dare to take risks, be bold and flexible and put your money where your mouth is: feminist is a label you should deserve.
2. **Representation:** Allow space within development grants for more indigenous forms of expression and identifications that are less reliant on the western LGBTQ+ framing. Prioritise the self- identification, co- creation and localisation of projects which target indigenous issues as stated by communities. So: don't box groups unnecessarily. Don't create silo's if they're not there. And align to local narratives and terminology.
3. **Resources:** There must be sufficient resources to implement a feminist foreign policy, so budget cuts are a no go. Instead create possibilities for other forms of accountability such as grounded accountability and indigenous self- determination that are less restrictive. So: be bold, be daring, be a donor with courage and allow uncertainty. You can't control everything, and you shouldn't want to.
4. **Reality check:** Offer support for research and academic programs that seek to produce counter narratives from African socio- cultural and religious perspectives. For governments: Be coherent. Don't just assume, but consult, confirm and codevelop with local actors. And embed queerness and feminism not just in aid, but in the entire FP.

MEET THE EXPERTS



REVEREND ADERA

Reverend Adera is a theologian, ordained minister in the Anglican church of Kenya, and a pastor serving at the Cosmopolitan Affirming Church in Nairobi, an inclusive faith community in Kenya that openly welcomes LGBTQI people. His research interest is in the intersection of Theology, Gender and Sexuality.



ZETHU MATEBENI

South African Research Chair in Sexualities, Genders & Queer Studies and Professor of Sociology and African queer studies, zethu is instrumental in developing African queer theory and queering decolonisation efforts in higher education.



QUINTER OBIERO

A committed member of the Make Way Youth Panel Kenya, Quinter actively engages in creating awareness, advocating for policy change and empowering marginalised communities. Quinter is the founder of Equal Voices, working with queer persons in rural areas.



MONICA TABENGWA

Monica Tabengwa is a human rights lawyer, activist and feminist from Botswana. She works as Policy Specialist with the Inclusive Governance Initiative project at United Nations Development Programme Africa.

ABOUT MAKE WAY

Make Way aims to break down barriers to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) by promoting the use of an intersectional lens. This means looking at the effects of overlapping forms of vulnerabilities, for example those relating to gender, religion, ability, ethnicity or social status. Applying this lens uncovers power dynamics plus interrelated and systemic barriers that prevent minoritised people, especially youth, from realising their SRHR. We develop innovative tools for intersectional SRHR advocacy. And we work with other civil society organisations to push for the structural changes that break the barriers minoritised young people experience.

Make Way has six core partners who strengthen each other with their specific areas of expertise: [Akina Mama wa Afrika](#), [The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians – Kenya](#), [Forum for African Women Educationalists](#), [Liliane Foundation](#), [VSO Netherlands](#) and [Wemos](#). We work in partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Together, we implement Make Way in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, the (Eastern and Southern) African region and at a global level.



To learn more about decolonising queerness(es) in Africa and find a video with discussions by our experts and a list of recommended reading, visit <https://www.make-way.org/resources/queernesses-in-africa/>.