



# PARTNERS IN Pride



Impact Report 2023  
*20 Years of Resistance*



August 2023



the Stephen Lewis  
FOUNDATION

20  
Years



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*We are driven by the conviction that we are part of a larger story of global human rights, and we will not give up until we have built the future we deserve.*

– Frank Mugisha  
Executive Director of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG)





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# Thank you for your support

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This year the Stephen Lewis Foundation is celebrating our 20th anniversary. For two decades we have journeyed together and championed a different approach to international development. We can all be proud of our collective efforts to centre the expertise and context of the human rights champions and communities most affected by HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.

The last year has been a difficult one for our LGBTIQ partner organizations. Widespread discrimination, pervasive stigma, and barriers to social and legal support have led to human rights violations and exacerbated the impacts of HIV on LGBTIQ communities. We cannot thank you enough for your solidarity and support for activists working to champion the health and human rights of LGBTIQ individuals. Together, we have uplifted voices, fostered understanding, and advocated for change.

With your support, the Partners in Pride Campaign aspires to raise \$1 million per year to allow our LGBTIQ partners to continue to provide life-saving programs and to fight for the right to exist free from stigma, discrimination, and criminalization.

UNAIDS has reported that in sub-Saharan Africa, 27 per cent of transgender women said they were too afraid to use health care services and that severe criminal penalties for same-sex sexual relations were associated with an almost 5 times greater risk of HIV transmission among gay men and other men who have sex with men compared with places without such laws<sup>1</sup>. LGBTIQ individuals are disproportionately affected by the HIV epidemic and in the fight to end AIDS, they cannot be overlooked.

Your allyship and support is critical. You've shown up in solidarity, whether in support of our emergency appeal to help LGBTIQ organizations and activists who are under imminent threat, or as part of our International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersex discrimination, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) or Pride Month campaigns.

Your belief in the mission of the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) fuels our determination to continue fighting for a world where everyone can be healthy and live with dignity, respect, and equal opportunities. Thank you for being a Partner in Pride.

Please enjoy a recap of the inspiring impact of your contributions to Partners in Pride.

In solidarity,



**Meg French**  
Executive Director  
Stephen Lewis Foundation



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2023/global-aids-update-2023>

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# Charity of Choice for Pride Toronto

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This year, the SLF was chosen as one of two charities honoured by Pride Toronto as their Charity of Choice. Alongside Friends of Ruby, who provide well-being support for queer youth in Toronto, the SLF was chosen for its outstanding commitment, vital support, and contributions to 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.

Pride Toronto is one of the largest Pride celebrations in the world and takes place in late June. An estimated 3 million people took part in Pride activities throughout the week and over 200,000 marched in the parade.

On Pride Festival weekend, the SLF hosted a booth at the Toronto Pride StreetFair. Our amazing volunteers, including members of the SLF's Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, helped spread awareness about the Partners in Pride Campaign and the work of our partners. They encouraged 2SLGBTQIA+ communities and allies to stand in global solidarity.



Henry Victor Digolo, Men Against AIDS Youth Group (MAAYGO), Elizabeth Mutinda (SLF), and Peter Njane, Ishtar MSM, celebrate Pride.



This year, we were also joined by several of the SLF's LGBTIQ partner organizations who were chosen by Pride Toronto as part of the International Honoured Group and others who came to Toronto to join the event. Partners included **Allan Nsubuga** and **Frank Mugisha**, Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), **Ali Karume** and **Salum Abdalla Abdalla**, Bridge Initiative Organization (BIO), **Ssenfuka Joanita Warry** (Biggie), Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG), **Andrew Luswata Brant Seremba**, Icebreakers Uganda (IBU), **John Mathenge Mukaburu**, Health Options for Young Men On HIV, AIDS & STIs (HOYMAS), **Peter Njane**, Ishtar MSM, **Henry Victor Digolo**, Men Against AIDS Youth Group (MAAYGO).

Together we led this year's march alongside volunteers and friends of the SLF, proudly carrying the Transgender Pride flag at a time when transgender and gender non-conforming individuals face record levels of violence and discrimination worldwide.

Pride Week in Toronto has been bringing communities and allies together in celebration and protest since 1972 and we were proud to be a part of this year's event.

The SLF took part in the Pride Flag raising ceremony at Toronto City Hall.



# Bridge Initiative Organization (BIO) — Human Rights Defenders

In Tanzania, divisive anti-LGBTIQ laws, coupled with rampant institutional and societal homophobia, make HIV prevention, outreach, and medical support for LGBTIQ individuals especially difficult. Openly accessing sexual health services for LGBTIQ people, including people affected by HIV, can have life-altering and life-threatening consequences.

A recent poll showed that only 10 per cent of Tanzanians would be tolerant of someone with a different sexual orientation, which is among the lowest levels in Africa<sup>2</sup>. Members of Tanzanian LGBTIQ communities face targeted persecution at an alarming rate with incidents of murder and physical violence among the serious crimes perpetrated against them.

Many human rights defenders including BIO, an SLF partner, have continued their work amidst these volatile conditions. BIO is determined to build a secure space for LGBTIQ individuals to access safe-sex resources, HIV testing and professional mental health counselling. To that end, they have created an online app that can support LGBTIQ individuals to privately and anonymously access sexual health information, identify LGBTIQ-friendly clinics, and access other important and potentially life-saving resources.

Putting themselves at risk of violence, BIO staff also conduct multiple health outreach programs a year to inform, test, and support communities affected by the HIV epidemic. They also support LGBTIQ people who are living with HIV with mental health care, home-based care, and palliative care.

Anti-LGBTIQ policies in Tanzania have been strategically aimed at disassembling specialized health services for LGBTIQ people, making the work BIO is doing critically important.

In addition to providing vital medical support, BIO has been engaged in advocacy with key governmental bodies in Tanzania with the aim of meeting the global target to end AIDS as public health threat by 2030. Tanzania has one of the highest HIV transmission rates in Africa, ranking in the top 15 countries with an estimated 1.7 million individuals or 4.7 per cent of the population living with HIV, and for men who have sex with men, the rate is even higher at 8.4 per cent. In 2022, about 22,000 people died of AIDS-related illnesses<sup>3</sup>.

As increasingly heinous laws are introduced in neighbouring Uganda and Kenya, the call for a further crackdown on LGBTIQ rights in Tanzania grows. As a result, BIO has had to map out safe spaces for LGBTIQ individuals fleeing violence and persecution. They have also been forced to decentralize their own operations, moving services away from their main office to reduce the risk of violence and harassment for clients accessing their services.

Your support for Partners in Pride helps the SLF respond to the immediate and emerging needs of BIO and the communities it serves. Thank you for being a part of this life-saving and life-changing work.

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*It is important for every human being to live freely from stigma and discrimination... We are scared to live our life because of the attitude, prejudice, laws and religion that tells us we have to live this way and not [any other] way.*

– Salum Abdalla Abdalla



<sup>2</sup><https://www.afrobarometer.org/articles/public-opinion-and-tolerance-of-homosexuality/#:~:text=The%20Afrobarometer%20data%20show%20that,tolerance%20in%20Namibia%20is%20consistent.>

<sup>3</sup>The Path that ends AIDS; 2023 UNAIDS Global AIDS Update.



# The Right to Health and Healing Project

In communities where homophobia and transphobia are rampant, the strain on the mental health and well-being of LGBTIQ activists and leaders is intense. They put their safety on the line every day, and sometimes their lives, to advocate for an equitable future for themselves and their communities. In so doing, they face both vicarious and direct trauma that affect their ability to cope both in a professional capacity and in their personal lives.

It is in this context that the SLF launched The Right to Health and Healing project. An initiative funded by Global Affairs Canada through Equitas, and long-time supporter Doug Stollery, it addresses the urgent need for mental health and well-being support for leaders working in six SLF-funded LGBTIQ organizations in Kenya and Uganda.

The participating organizations, FARUG, HAPA-Kenya, HOYMAS, IBU, MAAYGO, and SMUG focus on workplace policies and practices that promote a supportive and inclusive environment, team-building activities and retreats, mental health services and stress management training.

Addressing stress and burnout among staff has become a priority to ensure the long-term sustainability of the organizations' efforts in meeting both community and staff needs. These endeavors have played a pivotal role in fostering open conversations about mental health, reducing stigma, and encouraging individuals to seek help and support when needed.



In this second year of the project, they have developed training materials and curricula for staff and peer educators to support the sustainability of the program. The focus is on psychosocial counselling, crisis intervention, and empowering staff to advocate for support for LGBTIQ mental health issues in the community, while continuing to emphasize the importance of caring for the mental health and well-being of their own staff members.

However, amid the progress, the project has faced challenges arising from the intensifying anti-LGBTIQ climate in both Kenya and Uganda. Recent events, such as the passing of an anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda and the push by parliamentarians for a similar bill in Kenya, have led to increased homophobia and transphobia, threats, violence, legislative restrictions, and government surveillance.

In the third year, the project will continue its vital work, adapting activities to navigate the changing landscape and continuing to offer essential mental health and well-being supports.

Despite the challenges, the resilience and unwavering commitment of project participants remain a beacon of hope, inspiring positive change and empowering LGBTIQ individuals to pursue healthy and fulfilling lives in the face of oppression. With ongoing dedication and collaboration, The Right to Health and Healing project is making a lasting impact by transforming mental health support and breaking barriers for communities disproportionately affected by the HIV epidemic.



Photo Credit: Sofi Lugemwa, Uganda



Photo Credit: FARUG, Uganda



Photo Credit: FARUG, Uganda



# Your Impact

The SLF supports 13 LGBTIQ-led organizations in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. Over the past year, with the support of donors like you, they have reached thousands of LGBTIQ people with life-saving and life-changing programs.

Over **117,000** people with health and well-being services



Over **91,000** people with HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health services



Over **84,000** people with support to protect them from violence



Over **212,000** people in education, awareness raising, and human rights-based programmatic initiatives



The SLF's funding model, which includes support for core resources and capacity building, is critical to the sustainability of our LGBTIQ partners. Over the past year:

**93%**

of our LGBTIQ partners indicated that our support for capacity building is the only funding they received or that it supports a unique area not supported by another funder.

**63%**

of our LGBTIQ partners indicated that our support for core costs, like rent, overhead, and salaries, is the only funding they received or that it supports a unique area not supported by another funder.

Your continued support enables our partners to make meaningful contributions in their communities.

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# Partner Spotlights

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## Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG) - UGANDA



FARUG mobilizes and supports lesbian, bisexual, and queer women to defend human rights and equality for all women. In operation for two decades, it is one of the first organizations in Uganda to engage in advocacy and lobbying to shift social norms, change policy, and confront homophobia and discrimination in public and private arenas.

FARUG also provides shelter, food, and means of economic independence to women who have faced violence and discrimination from their families and in their day-to-day lives, including women who are living with HIV.

This year, FARUG was evicted from their office in Kampala, where they had been operating for five years. The eviction was a direct result of Uganda's discriminatory Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023, and the dangerous increase in intolerance and hate targeting LGBTIQ individuals and their allies that has followed.

Despite these circumstances, some of FARUG's work over the last year has included:

- Supporting over 800 LBQ women
- Providing people living with HIV who are on ART with a monthly stipend to help meet their nutritional needs and to pay for transport to get their medicines. This has helped support adherence to their treatment.
- Running a toll-free line where women are free to call to report cases of violence against them. This is supported by a full-time legal aid desk managed by a trained community paralegal who specifically handles cases of LBQ women in the community.

## Health Development Initiative (HDI) - RWANDA



HDI bridges gaps causing inequity in health care for LGBTIQ communities and drug users in the context of the HIV epidemic. To improve stigma-free access to care, HDI supports clients in HIV prevention and treatment as well as mental health interventions through professional and peer support. They provide drug addiction counselling and prevention services to LGBTIQ clients.

In 2005, a group of Rwandan physicians working in health facilities and communities across the country founded HDI. They shared a commitment to improve health for underserved communities within and outside of the healthcare system through an advocacy and human rights-based approach. The organization works with key populations in addressing substance abuse and HIV transmission and works closely and inclusively with the LGBTIQ community to bridge the gap of inequity in accessing healthcare.

Some of the achievements of the past year include:

- Providing 2,789 LGBT persons with vital integrated drug addiction counselling and HIV related services.
- Documenting cases of human rights violations against the LGBT community through its self-help groups and counseling services. This information will be used to inform the development of a shadow report to be submitted to the UN as part of the Universal Periodic Review of Rwanda's human rights record.
- Collaborating with the Ministry of Justice to improve the understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity by the country's security operations.



## Mamboleo Peer Empowerment Group (MPEG) - KENYA



MPEG is the only member of galck+ (formerly known as the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya) currently serving LGBTIQ communities in central Kenya. Through community outreach, the organization, founded in 2010, is raising awareness around HIV and STIs, providing mental health services and referrals, and increasing access to vital care, including HIV prevention and testing in rural areas.

Through advocacy and programming, MPEG targets barriers to well-being faced by men who have sex with men and male sex workers in rural Kenya. MPEG programming promotes self-acceptance, economic empowerment, and stigma-free access to necessary resources and supports. Despite the hostile environment created by Kenya's homophobic legislation and normalized intolerance, MPEG continues to build the movement for LGBTIQ liberation.

In the past year, MPEG's work has included:

- Reaching 3091 individuals with HIV and STI services including PEP and PrEP services, ART services, and condom and lubricant distribution along with mental health screening and referrals, GBV interventions, and alcohol and drugs use interventions.
- Engaging 84 peer educators and 6 outreach workers.
- Reporting and supporting 43 cases of gender-based violence.
- Providing ART support for people living with HIV, ensuring 90% are currently adhering to their treatment protocol.

## Rainbow Sunrise Mapambazuko (RSM) - DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO



RSM advocates for sexual rights and respect for LGBTIQ communities. Founded in 2010 to address rampant violence, discrimination, and human rights violations in Bukavu, defending LGBTIQ rights remains central to RSM's work today.

With a focus on HIV literacy, prevention, and access to HIV treatment, RSM peer educators and advocates are highly active in community outreach. Through mobile testing and in-person presence at LGBTIQ venues and events, a weekly radio show, and health centre advocacy visits to educate staff around LGBTIQ sexual health and rights, RSM reaches and supports clients who may otherwise fall through the gaps in the national health care system and HIV response.

This year, RSM's work has included:

- Running a safe centre for LGBTIQ individuals which is vital for providing mental health and sexual health support to those in need. At this centre, they can openly discuss their lives, learn about HIV and AIDS and STIs, and access free prevention and care services.
- Reaching 363 LGBTIQ people through outreach efforts with HIV and STI education, and screening 154 people and distributing 24 880 condoms along with 10 900 lubricating gels.

# More and Better Funding for LGBTIQ-led Organizations

Supporting LGBTIQ-led organizations to make a meaningful difference in their communities requires more and better funding. That is, as a global community, we need to get more funding into the hands of community-led LGBTIQ organizations and we need to make sure that this funding is flexible, long term, and free of onerous requirements.

This is already how Partners in Pride works. And now we are drawing on our 20 years of experience at the Stephen Lewis Foundation along with our partners' expertise to advocate within the international development world, among human rights funders, and to the Government of Canada to push to decolonize funding practices, strengthen support for community-led organizations, and shift power into the hands of communities.

## Here's a glance at our advocacy in action:

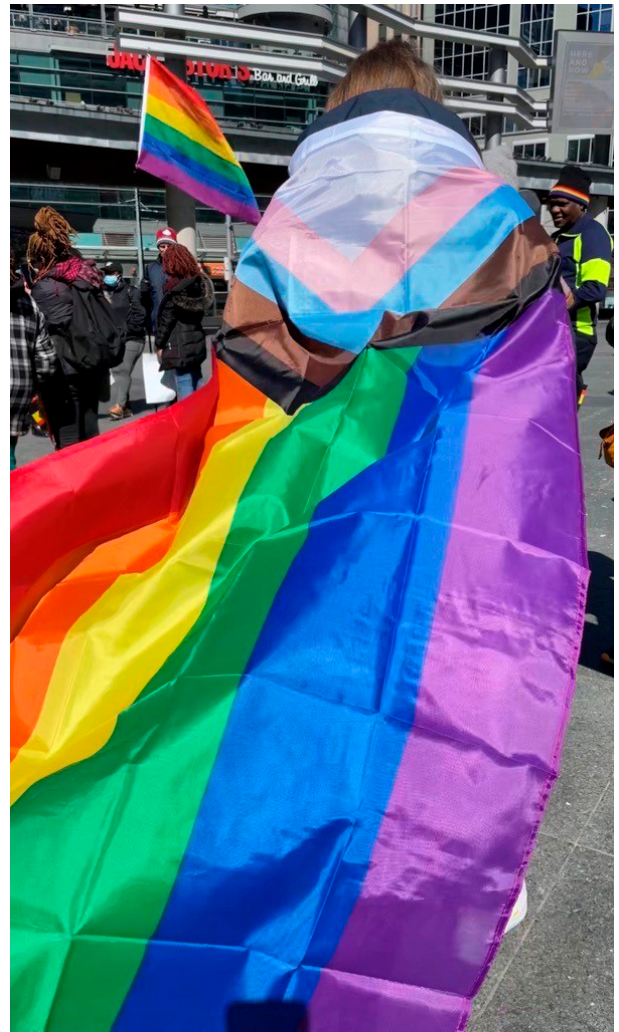
▶ We collaborated with the Equality Fund to design and lead a workshop on “Feminist Funding Approaches and Decolonizing Funding Models” at the Dignity Network Canada Roundtable Meetings in November 2022. More than 60 participants from civil society and the Canadian government attended our session.

▶ Along with other members of Dignity Network Canada who have LGBTIQ partners in sub-Saharan Africa, we participated in a consultation with the Pan-Africa branch at Global Affairs Canada about their plan for LGBTIQ funding. During the consultation and in a follow-up letter, we urged the government to prioritize funding through local organizations in the regions and to ensure the funding responds to community priorities, is responsive to humanitarian crises, can reach unregistered groups, and doesn't involve onerous reporting requirements.

▶ We published an essay in *The Philanthropist* about how to shift funds and power to community-led organizations. The piece drew on input from several of our partners, including one of our LGBTIQ partner – HOYMAS.







▶ We hosted a meeting with organizations in Canada working on international HIV issues to discuss with Ugandan colleagues the potential impact of the Anti-Homosexuality Act on HIV responses and the types of solidarity most needed.

▶ We continue to reach out through various channels, including social media and our networks, to ensure other funders recognize the importance of being as flexible as possible with their funding to LGBTIQ and allied organizations in sub-Saharan Africa.

▶ We are working closely with Dignity Network Canada's member organizations to amplify the voices of Ugandan human rights defenders in response to the Anti-Homosexuality Act. In the days after the bill was passed, we supported a briefing for members of the Canadian government, co-drafted a sign-on letter for Canadian civil society organizations, and issued public statements condemning the law and calling for action.

# World AIDS Day - December 1st

Every year, the Stephen Lewis Foundation observes World AIDS Day in honour of the lives lost to AIDS.

UNAIDS reports that 40.4 million people have died from AIDS-related illnesses since the start of the epidemic and 630,000 people died from AIDS-related illnesses in 2022 alone<sup>4</sup>.



This year, we were privileged to be joined by visiting LGBTIQ partners for a commemorative candlelight vigil.

This year, the SLF's annual World AIDS Day panel discussion was on Blackness, queerness, and stigma, and explored the experiences in Toronto, Canada, and in countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Panelists included two of our partners, John Mathenge Mukaburu from HOYMAS and Andrew Luswata Brant Seremba from IBU, and two community activists from Toronto, King Louboutin, a coordinator of male sex work programs at the AIDS Committee of Toronto, and Keysha Miller, a coordinator of transgender and non-binary youth services at the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention. Both King and Keysha are members of the Toronto Kiki Ballroom Alliance, a youth-led grassroots organization that brings the ballroom artform and a sense of community to Black and other racialized LGBTIQ+ young people in Toronto.

The audience was treated to a compelling discussion on the intersectionality of being queer and Black, and the increased complexity of supporting Black people and people of colour in communities disproportionately affected by HIV. You can watch the discussion [here](#).

[Sign up for our newsletter](#) so you don't miss any upcoming SLF Pride Talks.

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*With access to healthcare, barriers are often associated with maltreatment and malpractice. However, the impact to community is broader; because of stigma it shows up in other areas like access to housing, financial support and psychosocial supports.*

– King Louboutin



Your continued support makes it possible for the SLF to partner with organizations in Canada who are committed to global solidarity with our partners in sub-Saharan Africa to shed light on the inequities that fuel the HIV epidemic in queer and Black communities around the world.

<sup>4</sup>The Path that ends AIDS; 2023 UNAIDS Global AIDS Update.



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# IDAHOBIT Pride Talks

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International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersex discrimination, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) is observed on May 17 each year and SLF marks this day with a Pride Talks panel. This year, the SLF hosted *United for Change: Youth Leaders in Conversation*. The Pride Talk brought together a group of youth activists who are making a powerful and transformational impact in their communities. The panelists included Daudi Mutuku, peer educator at SLF partner organization MPEG, Shamin Muhammed Jr., founder of LetsStopAIDS, Jazmine Carter, model and activist with Toronto Kiki Ballroom Alliance, and Elise Roopchan, content creator at It Gets Better Canada.

The panelists shared their personal experiences as youth activists and the future they hope to build despite the rise in hate against 2SLGBTQIA+ communities around the world. During the conversation, they urged the broader community to acknowledge the capacity of youth and their ability to drive meaningful change. You can watch the discussion [here](#).



*When folks talk about youth, they're only focussed on who youth will become someday and not on the expertise that youth bring from their own lived experiences and from their engagement in the world.*

– Shamin Mohamed Jr.  
Founder of LetsStopAIDS



Empowering youth is an important pillar of the work for many of the SLF's partners serving LGBTIQ communities. Your generous support and unwavering solidarity allow us to continue to amplify the voices of these young leaders who are vibrant and promising and are building momentum for this global movement.



# Pride at Work

This year, we proudly joined Pride at Work Canada as a Community Partner. Pride at Work is an organization that helps private, public, and non-profit employers celebrate staff and create safer, more inclusive workplaces that recognize the skills of 2SLGBTQIA+ employees.

As part of this new partnership, Pride at Work hosted a networking event in Toronto where they spotlighted the SLF and our LGBTIQ partners with their corporate partner community.

Ssenfuka Joanita Warry (Biggie), the executive director of FARUG, spoke at the event about the recent rise in hostility and attacks on LGBTIQ individuals in Uganda since the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023. She talked about mob justice and how it has worsened conditions for LGBTIQ individuals and increased barriers for LGBTIQ organizations to function safely. Biggie was introduced by Alan Kuriakose, an SLF fundraising coordinator, who also emphasized the necessity and urgency of SLF partners' work and the need for flexible funding for community-led organizations.



Marit Stiles, MPP and leader of Ontario NDP, extended her solidarity to the SLF and our partners in sub-Saharan Africa.



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## 20 More Years of Resistance

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This year the Stephen Lewis Foundation is celebrating 20 years of championing health and human rights with community-led organizations to end AIDS. Our partnerships with LGBTIQ-led organizations have shown us what continuous dedication to centring lived experiences can do to transform care and effect meaningful policy change. Through their work, our partners are reclaiming the human rights and dignity that all humanity deserves irrespective of gender and sexual identity.

We are grateful you have chosen to be a part of this work and have joined in solidarity with Stephen Lewis' vision to put resources in the hands of communities in sub-Saharan Africa who are ending AIDS on their own terms, using their own methodologies, which are proven to work in their own context.

Your generosity has allowed the SLF to continue to support our LGBTIQ partners through these troubling times. Our unwavering commitment to human rights and equity is fueled by your love and support. If you haven't done so already you can grow your impact by signing up as a monthly donor or making a one-time gift. Your gifts ensure uninterrupted life-saving services for LGBTIQ communities who fight for their safety and security every day.

With community-led organizations at the helm, the future of LGBTIQ activism and the movement to end colonial systems fuelling the HIV epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa is in great hands — what a powerful and hopeful resistance.

Thank you!



Thank you for your ongoing  
solidarity and support.

Together we are cutting the  
AIDS pandemic off at its roots.

Donate  
Today



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