REACHING OUT

Introducing programme partners and participants to each other’s work, and to highlight some of the key activities done together through KP REACH in countries across Southern Africa.
I am delighted to welcome you, colleagues and friends, to the second edition of ‘Reaching Out’. As we know, securing equal rights for ‘key populations’ is vital to more equitable societies and addressing stigma and discrimination, prejudice and intolerance. It is also key to improved access to healthcare and other services that are the cornerstone of all our programmes, work and activities. The unfortunate reality is that these rights have to be fought for and often only actualise as a result of activism, commitment and individual and collective action. Positive Vibes has been accompanying and supporting these processes through its people-centred and people-driven values and methodologies as part of its visions and strategy across our region.

The community narratives woven through and highlighted in this newsletter, through the Key Correspondent stories and work of REActors in-country, demonstrate that our collective work in many countries is sometimes perilous, challenging, difficult and complex, often demanding a nuanced, multi-pronged approach. While there are several pathways activists can use, from global to local, what is of critical importance is how such work (in its broader sense) is conducted, for whom and by whom. An essential outcome for all meaningfully participating in the innovative KP REACH programme has been increasing our collective knowledge base and learning about the interconnectedness of national, regional and global level efforts towards achieving equality for ‘key populations’. This will hopefully ensure that all of us, participants, partners and practitioners, are better equipped to conduct advocacy and influencing work on these issues. Especially encouraging is the fact that this work has often provided activists with a basis to fuel strategy and identify opportunities for taking this work forward at a national level.

Many human rights activists in the sector have had to put the self ‘on hold’ in order to further the movement. There has often been enormous sacrifice of the personal. Being given the space and time to reach back and retrieve complex facets of our collective history and selves, through processes like the Meaningful Dialogue, Representation and Action planning, is invaluable in helping to move towards a better integrated self. It is inspirational and encouraging as we begin to build a positive and grounded self-concept that includes our differences, but is not exclusively focused on them. We should seek the alternative stories of resilience and power that emerge from our own personal stories and propel these into developing new personal and wider community narratives. We are energised by and sincerely hope that you agree our work here is an important, though perhaps small in the grander scheme, next step in the path to equality, equity, rights and freedom of ‘othered’ communities.

Lee Mondry
Deputy Director
Positive Vibes Trust
WHO ARE WE?

Some of our REActors and Key Correspondents (KCs) kindly agreed to share a snapshot of who they are, what they enjoy about their roles as either a REActor or KC, challenges and something most people don’t know about them.

Being a REActor made me realise there is a lot of work to be done in my country as there are many human rights violations that we do not take into consideration. LGBT+ people are dying or suffering out there, and there has to be action.

Documenting human rights violations is not as easy as we thought, it needs a brave and trained individual. Someone who is more understanding with good communication.

Challenges have been that many of the LGBT+ people I documented cases of did not initially trust me, but at the end I managed to earn it.

I enjoy being around LGBT+ people and sharing life experiences and challenges. I also enjoy documenting cases of human rights violations to see how far our country is in terms of understanding the existence of LGBT+ people in Lesotho, and earning their trust in me as a REActor.

Something interesting about me is that most of the people do not trust my effort but I always prove them wrong!

Being a KC has been eye-opening. The extent of my practical knowledge of what’s going on the ground has increased. I have learnt a lot from the experiences that have been shared with me. I am able to relate with these stories and can highlight the gaps in my day-to-day work.

Here there is a good chance to work well with my community. I have the power to contribute to creating the change I want to see. I’m also encouraged and motivated by the knowledge that I am trusted by the community.

Some of the things shared with me are traumatic. And offloading these stories told from my memory is something I sometimes struggle with. I also have limited knowledge when it comes to different styles of writing techniques as well as video editing—this has been challenging. Data is expensive in our country so being online, sending emails and uploading video links is difficult.

Something most people don’t know is that I am a very shy person although I am also quite flexible. I am a tailor and love to make clothes when I am frustrated in order to calm myself down.

Being a KC has been amazing. I have learnt a lot of new things. Among these is the interaction with members of the LGBT+ community in my country. Initially I had the wrong perception towards gender minorities because of the hostility of our country towards those in the LGBT+ community. The programme has opened me up and also offered new windows of opportunity.

I have created new working relationships with a number of people in different organisations but who are doing similar rights-based work. Apart from that, hearing about some of the hurdles faced by gender minorities encourages me to think around taking action by covering these stories. This way I do my bit to ensure that gender minorities are being accorded their full rights.

The biggest challenge has been sourcing information from sex workers and members of the LGBT+ community. Working in a hostile environment where issues of discrimination and stereotypes are rife makes this particularly difficult. In such a scenario, finding a primary source to voice their issue remains a challenge. Building trust takes time. Most people don’t know that I am shy. More shy than I would like to be.

Being a KC has offered me so many experiences. I have had time to reflect on how much torture and abuse the LGBT+ community is facing. I have sharpened my interviewing skills and learnt how to use the camera more efficiently. I have learnt about so many issues through interacting with different people.

I enjoy being able to have people share their inner most stories with me—those moments are very memorable.

It has been a challenge when people aren’t willing to share their stories. Strong stories that could have a real impact when read by our audience.

Most people don’t know that I am a Kendo instructor.
Since the last newsletter, the REAct team has been busy collating the Human Rights Violations Annual Report, which speaks to the past 18 months of implementation. Therefore, this update simply provides a case study to illustrate some of the scenarios and challenges our clients and REActors continue to face in their work, and an overall data update. The Annual Report will be distributed via email and in hard copy by December 2017.

CASE STUDY

Mosela was arrested while working one night in Maseru’s city district. One of the police officers at the station locked her in a room separate from the others and forced himself on her throughout the night. She was released in the morning, where she tried to complain to the officer in charge, but he chased her away.

How did this incident violate her human right?

- Sexual encounters between two or more individuals must be by consent. When the police officer raped Linda, he violated her right to bodily integrity, ability to live a life of dignity and to be valued as a person. Linda’s right to access justice was also denied when she was chased away by the officer in charge when she tried to lodge a complaint.
- Linda’s right to liberty was also infringed when she was arrested with no charge laid against her.

Responses provided:

Medical assistance: Linda was taken to a local hospital by a REActor for examination. She was tested for HIV and found to be negative. The medical examination revealed vaginal penetration.

Psychosocial: Linda went through a traumatic experience and was linked to a partner organisation where she is receiving ongoing psychosocial support services.

Responses not provided:

Legal response: Linda was not given proper legal advice as she decided not to report the police officer who raped her.

Solution:

Linda should be provided with proper legal advice and information about protection services to avoid any repercussions, so that she can make an informed decision with proper support, about whether to report the police officer who raped her.

What is our current data telling us?

Since December 2016, up until November 2017, 274 cases were documented, with 392 KP community members individually affected. The reason for the difference in numbers is that multiple people can be affected in one case.

The most commonly experienced human rights violations recorded by REActors include violent assault or abuse (29.64%), sexual assault (13.35%), harassment and intimidation (12.5%), and denial of health access (7.81%). Eighty (80) responses were provided and included legal (21.25%) and medical (35%) assistance, counselling (23.75%), shelter (13.75%) and assistance in reporting to police (6.25%).
Clinical members are the most common perpetrators, with 110 human rights violations attributed to this group. Malawi (25), Zambia (25), Zimbabwe (21) and Botswana (18) have the highest number of community members committing these acts. This is a grim reflection of how societal and cultural norms play a significant role in fuelling stigma and discrimination against LGBT+ communities and sex workers.

Of the documented cases, sex workers continue to experience the highest number of human rights violations. This could be attributed to the fact that most sex workers conduct their business at the same location in large numbers, generally for safety in numbers. Other groups showing high numbers of affected include gay men in Malawi (32) and lesbians in Botswana (23).

Note, the data discussed here represents only what has been collected through KP REACH, and is not a reflection of the full extent of violations that take place in each of the countries.

How are we responding?

Fifty-two (52) percent of the documented cases were responded to. Botswana, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe are showing the highest number of responses provided to survivors to date, which could be attributed to strong and systematic referral systems used by most community-based organisations in the country. REAct implementers continue to work to establish a comprehensive network of referrals to such services through strategic alliances and via the REAct Committees, which utilise the REAct data to inform programming and advocacy responses (see below).

Country-based programming and advocacy

Each country hosts a REAct Committee, who convenes quarterly to analyse and discuss the cases reported and make decisions on the human rights based programmes and advocacy initiatives which can be implemented to best respond to the problems faced by their communities.

The Zambia REAct Committee has planned actions that include partnering with key stakeholders to facilitate dialogues with health care workers and lawyers; engaging with regional police commissioners; rapid response initiatives to mitigate the current wave of homophobic and transphobic media scandalising and unethical reporting in the country, and monitoring what is happening via other organisations to ensure complementarity of support programming.

In Lesotho, an action plan for early 2018 was discussed, which would see advocacy work in the form of public gatherings and sensitisation workshops for the community, health care workers and police.

“REActors received trauma support training”

“REAct can help extend and improve the efficacy of organisations’ human rights programmes”

KEY CORRESPONDENT STORIES

The www.keycorrespondents.org website has been updated and launched, hooray! Some of the stories, videos and themes coming from our KCs across the region include:

Homophobia

Homophobia isn’t what it used to be. Why staying silence about homophobia speaks louder than words.
By Bokang Bane, Lesotho

Doing away with dominant homophobic narratives. Disproving the many theories that speak to LGBT people ‘choosing’ this life.
By Daphne Jena, Zimbabwe

The legal context

What does the Constitution have to do with it? Everyday life continues to be a struggle for LGBT+ people who can’t rely on the rule of law to protect them against discrimination.
By Melusi Simelane, South Africa

When mobilising isn’t mandated – CFCS considers. LGBT+ and sex worker communities are ostracised in most African countries. Speaking out and living free is often hindered by the law and its misapplication. A session at the Changing Faces, Changing Spaces Conference looked at how to get around this.
By Nobhongo Gxolo, South Africa

Malawi holds first gay pride. Members of the LGBT+ community confront the ultra-conservative Malawi’s capital, Lilongwe, with a message of love.
By Chimwemwe Padatha, Malawi

Health care and rights

Magical Mwachiro. How cancer taught an LGBT+ activist to fight even harder.
By Denver Kisting, Namibia

HIV is inextricably linked with human rights. The HIV-free generation will remain a myth without respect for human rights.
By Mamofuta Kale, Lesotho
In HIV prevention - united voices are heard. The local Aids conference in June this year was led by the youth - the same people facing the biggest HIV threat.
By Nomcebo Thungo, South Africa

Barriers to healthcare impenetrable for LGBT+ in Zambia. From a railway clinic, educating the community on LGBT+ health issues is as challenging as ever.
By anonymous, Zambia

Entertainment shows miss the message. Zambia’s Mosi Day of Thunder Music Festival brings a positive message for HIV prevention, but the needs of LGBT+ and sex worker communities fall on deaf ears.
By Reuben Silungwe, Zambia

Women’s rights

Dialogues of self-determination at the Autonomy Project Pop Up Market. Does living in a patriarchal society deny women the right to autonomy and self-determination? This pertinent question was explored at The Autonomy Project Pop Up Market - the first women-only event of its kind in the heart of Gaborone earlier this year.
By Mmabatho Motsamai, Botswana

On the frontier of feminist resistance. Queer women in Africa are demanding their own safe spaces.
By Zelda Mahlati, South Africa

Sex work

Criminalisation of sex work serves to objectify. A profession doesn’t determine worth, regardless of what’s stipulated in the law.
By Mamofuta Kale, Lesotho

Surviving hostility as a sex worker. Why police aren’t enforcing recent laws.
By Chimwemwe Padatha, Malawi

Gender identity

Society and gender identity need to talk. Why revisiting our precolonial past can help us better understand and accept gender identity in the future.
By Mmabatho Motsamai, Botswana

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

Some reflections from the PV team in relation to KP REACH’s implementation over the past 18 months are below:

- The value of the LLE initiative and process, which draws a direct link to PV’s ways of working and approach to working with partners, continues to be felt and gave the PV team, but more importantly the KCs and REActors, an opportunity to meet crucial in-country partners. PV’s partners have remained in contact with these external partners beyond the actual workshop connection itself, which has helped strengthen the programme’s implementation in the eight countries.

- Attendance at international and national conferences and events has helped keep programme staff, KCs and REActors abreast of current issues in the broader KP and HIV sectors, and has provided important opportunities to meet other agencies and organisations working at different levels, giving insight into their work and enabling connections to strengthen implementation but also identify potential donors to support partner work.

- The value of the REACT Committees is already evident from the first round of meetings, and the strong foundation set for these by the training, mid-term reflection and LLEs, has already started yielding positive results, with locally-driven action plans informed by the REAct data, proving the value using such community-based monitoring systems to develop evidence-driven programming and advocacy efforts.

The changing faces, Changing Spaces Conference, Kenya

LOOKING AHEAD

The PV KP REACH team are looking forward to the initiatives reflected upon above and their associated benefits being strengthened and taken forward in the final year of implementation, as well as specifics, such as promoting the www.keycorrespondents.org website and the M&C Saatchi media campaign, the sharing of a documentation and data analysis toolkit and the continuation of core activities over the course of the year.

To share a story idea, an update or to give feedback, please email us on: support@keycorrespondents.org