

A woman with her hair pulled back, wearing a black sleeveless dress, stands on a stone ledge with her back to the camera. She is looking out over a vast, misty landscape featuring a large waterfall cascading down a cliff face. The scene is captured in a soft, slightly hazy light, possibly during dawn or dusk. The woman's hands are resting on the ledge behind her.

if I were a boy

INSIGHTS INTO THE *lifeworlds* OF LESBIAN, BISEXUAL
AND OTHER QUEER WOMEN IN NORTHERN UGANDA

If I were a boy
Even just for a day
I'd roll out of bed in the morning
And throw on what I wanted and go
Drink beer with the guys
And chase after girls
I'd kick it with who I wanted
And I'd never get confronted for it
'Cause they'd stick up for me

If I were a boy
I think I could understand
How it feels to love a girl
I swear I'd be a better man
I'd listen to her
'Cause I know how it hurts
When you lose the one you wanted
'Cause he's taken you for granted
And everything you had got destroyed

If I were a boy
I would turn off my phone
Tell everyone it's broken
So they'd think that I was sleeping alone

I'd put myself first
And make the rules as I go
'Cause I know that she'd be faithful
Waiting for me to come home

if I were a boy

If I Were a Boy lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group, BMG Rights Management US, LLC

Artist | Beyoncé
Album | I am...Sasha Fierce
Songwriters | Brittany Jean Carlson; Tobias Gad
Columbia, 2008

if I were a boy

insights into the *lifeworlds* of lesbian, bisexual and other queer-identifying women in Northern Uganda

Developed by Positive Vibes, with support of the
VOICE: Learning from Innovation mechanism

Compiled, edited and formatted for Positive Vibes by
Lee Mondry and Ricardo Walters | February 2018

In 2017, Positive Vibes implemented the *Learning From Innovation* project (LFI), supported by the VOICE mechanism, an initiative of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, administered by Hivos and Oxfam Novib.

The VOICE grant enabled Positive Vibes to *test and scale new approaches* with a focus on *human-centered innovations* that are *context-specific*. Of particular interest and priority was work undertaken to support, develop and amplify the voice of marginalized populations.

The LFI took the form of a one-year Participatory Action Research process in Uganda, in parallel to the implementation of The LILO Project, a partnership between Positive Vibes and LGBT Denmark. LILO is a participatory methodology and workshop experience designed along psychosocial, counselling and group facilitation principles to create a safe space for personalization, increased self-awareness and enhanced self-efficacy.

Through the LFI, Positive Vibes accompanied communities of LGBT people to design a process for joint learning, and to learn together: about programming, about implementation strategy, about the relevance and meaning of Positive Vibes' core ways of thinking and ways of working, and about the unique lived experience – the lifeworlds – of sexual and gender minorities in rural East Africa.

The learning from the LFI – generated collaboratively by a number of contributors across academic, activist, programming and community sectors – is captured in a series of Knowledge Products: *“Coming to Voice”*.

Acronyms

CBO	Community-based Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
KP	Key Populations
LBQ	Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer (women)
LFI	Learning from Innovation
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
LILO	Looking In, Looking Out
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MSM	Men who have sex with men
NGO	Non-government organisation
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PLHIV	People living with HIV
PrEP	Pre-exposure prophylaxis
PV	Positive Vibes
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SGM	Sexual and Gender minorities
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics

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WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

For more information about the *Learning from Innovation* project – its methods and process – or to access more detailed source material generated from Field Visits and Technical Reference Group interactions, or for copies of other volumes in the “*Coming to Voice*” series of publications, please contact LEE MONDRY at lee@positivevibes.org.

Introduction

This Knowledge Product is one of six publications in the series '*Coming to Voice*'.

The series has been generated by Positive Vibes through the *Learning from Innovation (LFI)* project, a one-year research and learning exercise, supported by the VOICE mechanism during 2017.

VOICE is an initiative by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, administered by a consortium between Hivos and Oxfam Novib. Through the Voice mechanism, Positive Vibes has accessed the 'Innovate and Learn Grant', available to groups and organisations to test and scale new approaches with a focus on human-centred innovations that are context-specific. Of particular interest and priority was work undertaken to support, develop and amplify the voice of marginalized populations.

Positive Vibes is a Namibian-registered trust, operating nationally since 2008 and in the broader-SADC region since 2012. By 2018, Positive Vibes has extended its programmatic footprint to encompass Southern, East, West and Central Africa and is exploring opportunities for partnership in the MENA region. PV has historically been grounded in the solidarity movement especially in relation to the liberation and independence of politically oppressed peoples. Its conviction is rooted in the philosophy of Paulo Freire, particularly the concept of conscientisation through which marginalised people come to critical awareness of the environment around them and are stirred to act for change and freedom. PV focuses on capacity strengthening – of human capacity and organisational systems – applied through a range of participatory methods with CBOs, NGOs and networks active in the areas of HIV, health and human rights.

Positive Vibes is not a research institution. It does, however, pride itself on being a learning organisation, learning systematically from its process and the

¹ LILO – *Looking In; Looking Out* – is Positive Vibes' flagship participatory methodology, delivered as a suite of distinct multi-day workshops. Each workshop is customised to a specific audience, with the primary aims to sensitise, to raise awareness and to elevate consciousness. A secondary benefit of many of the workshops is increased interpersonal capability: communication, negotiation, conflict resolution. Common across all workshops is Positive Vibes' emphasis on personalisation.

In its East Africa programmes, in Uganda and Tanzania, Positive Vibes implements *LILO Identity*, with its partner, LGBT Denmark, in a project funded by Danida through CISU (Civil Society in Development).

outcomes of that process in order to evolve, innovate and deepen its practice. In collaboration with its partner LGBT Denmark and local LGBT organisations, PV utilised the VOICE grant to learn from the implementation of LILO¹ in Uganda. Participant demographic data – generated from pre and post workshop questionnaires – gave insight into who was being reached by LILO; into who was responding to invitations to attend the workshop; into ages, sexuality and gender identities of participants; into opinions, attitudes, knowledge and perceptions around sexual orientation and gender; and into experiences with stigma, discrimination and marginalisation.

This data became the primary material around which the LFI took its initial shape and direction. Analysis and interpretation of that data by LGBT community members in Uganda determined other branches of interest and learning, including a focus on the lived experience – the lifeworlds – of queer-identifying women in rural Northern Uganda, and of transgender men and women in Mbale in the East of the country.

The *Learning from Innovation (LFI)* project took the form of a non-routine Participatory Action Research Process. This approach to learning alongside communities, from local action – close to where the action happens, and close to when the action happens – was a good fit for PV's rights-based values and built participation and voice into the outworking of the Voice grant itself; direct participation of those traditionally excluded was at the cornerstone of the method. Communities participated in reviewing their own data, in interpreting that data, in sense-making, in constructing meaning, and then in determining direction for subsequent learning.

The process unfolded in three stages before the development of the *Coming to Voice* series of publications to document the process and learning outcomes.

LILO Identity works with LGBT people, responding to high levels of self-stigma and minority stress in that population. Through a variety of approaches and disciplines, including positive psychology and narrative therapy, the process works with individuals and groups to raise awareness of the self, to reclaim and reframe personal narrative, and promote self-acceptance.

In Uganda, LILO Identity workshops were delivered by trained local facilitators to approximately 100 LGBT people in seven locations in Central, East, North and West Nile Uganda, including Kampala, Arua, Gulu, Mbale, Mbarara, Fort Portal and Masaka.

1. A pre-process stage, during which time local partners in Uganda were briefed on the concept of the LFI, and their interest in working together was explored and confirmed.
2. A collaborative design stage, where teammates from Positive Vibes, LGBT DK and local Ugandan partner organisations, Queer Youth Uganda (QYU) and Health and Rights Initiative (HRI), discussed Learning Questions, and co-designed data collection instruments.
3. Two learning cycles (July and October 2017) during the course of the one-year project, during which time two sets of Reference Groups convened:
 - a. A Uganda-based field process, engaging LGBT teammates drawn from local implementing partners QYU (based in Kampala, and working predominantly in the Central, West and East regions of Uganda) and HRI (based in Lira, working predominantly in the North and Western regions). These processes are typically phenomenological in character and approach, drawing from and surfacing the lived experience of LGBT people within the Ugandan context, and exploring how those experiences are perceived and interpreted by the communities themselves in their specific contexts.
 - b. A South Africa-based Technical Review Group, composed largely of representatives of PV, LGBT DK and the HSRC² who have interest, experience and responsibility for design, programme implementation and strategy. This group applies a technical and methodological lens to the data generated from the field to consider the implications of

what is being learned from LILO on the implementation science³ of the methodology.

In July 2017, Cycle One of the LFI saw teams convene in Kampala, in Lira, and in Mbale to review, interpret and discuss data generated from LILO workshops. By the end of each review meeting, a small number of priority-interest themes emerged, identified by the communities themselves as important, and worthwhile for possible exploration and learning in the subsequent cycle.

Cycle Two aimed to generate learning around two such themes as identified by members of the Ugandan LGBT community:

- In Arua (West Nile/Northern region), exploring the multiple layers of discrimination and oppression experienced by LBQ women.
- In Mbale (Eastern region), exploring the lived experience of trans-diverse people within society and within the LGBT community.

Cycle Two followed a different format to Cycle One. Whereas Cycle One analysed graphs to broadly identify patterns and themes and questions, Cycle Two sought to explore the human stories within each specific theme that are illustrations of exclusion and marginalization, and at the same time stories of resilience and strength. The process followed a narrative approach: meeting with individuals in each location to listen to, to appreciate, and to capture their personal story. And to reflect together on the meanings and implications of those stories.

² The Human Sciences Research Council is a South African-based academic research institution. Through its Human and Social Development Programme and the Genders and Sexualities in Africa Working Group, the HSRC partnered with Positive Vibes during the LFI, for joint learning in the field, for joint reflection on the partnerships possible between academia and civil society, for mutual learning around participatory research methodologies, and to develop a contextual and conceptual analysis of LILO in East Africa.

³ Implementation science is the study of methods that influence the integration of evidence-based interventions into practice settings. <http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/medicalschoo/progr/ams/crisp/about/Pages/About-Dissemination-and-Implementation-Science.aspx>

We speak often of science with reference to various disciplines: physical sciences; chemical sciences; financial and accounting sciences; medical sciences. As such, these disciplines speak to facts, to systems, to causal relationships. They speak to catalysts and reactions, conditions and methods, apparatus. There is a predictableness to the action and the outcome and product of that action. The application of these sciences extends beyond artfulness or intuition or some idiosyncratic skill.

The same might be said for the discipline of Implementation Science. Traditionally, those who do programming in development work perceive some need, then devise some intervention to respond to that need. Often the response is intuitive: to do what is possible to do, and what makes sense to do without available capacity and resources, and within the parameters of a unique project. Implementation is matched with healthy doses of aspiration and hopefulness that the outcomes of intervention will, over time, confirm the initial intuition.

By the time of the LFI, Positive Vibes has been implementing LILO and LILO-based programming for several years; intensively so across a range of environments and applications. Sufficient learning has been amassed for there to be something considerably less ethereal about how that programming is applied: a more systematic application with predictable results because certain effects are triggered by certain causes; the organisation understands what conditions are necessary for good results, what methods are necessary to achieve those results under certain conditions, and how those methods may need to change for different conditions in order to maintain the same causal effect.

This is systematic, and disciplined. There is a science to the implementation of this kind of programming.

Lifeworlds

During Cycle One of the LFI in Uganda, participants gathered in two locations to review data gathered through LILO pre and post workshop questionnaires, from approximately 100 LILO participants in seven locations around Uganda. This data had been analysed into graphs for interpretation and discussion.

Reflection on the Cycle One data had a notably sobering effect on participants. They were curious and moved, this strong emotional response becoming the convictional motivation through which they determined direction for focus and process in Cycle Two.

- As the group gathered from Northern Uganda and the West Nile region in Lira, they were troubled to note the high concentration of MSM in LILO workshops around the country and, contrastingly, the low levels of participation in these workshops by women.
- As a group convened from Western and Eastern Uganda in Mbale, they were challenged by the disproportionate levels of stigma, discrimination, exclusion, isolation and marginalisation experienced by transgender men and women, becoming conscious of the transphobia that exists even amongst gay and bisexual men, and lesbian and bisexual women.

Ironically, not dissimilar to general society, cisgender men appeared privileged amongst LGBT people, and within LGBT programming. Whilst the stigma and persecution of gay and bisexual men were not diminished or invalidated by LFI participants, it was recognised that queer women and trans people were somehow less well understood within the LGBT-sector itself. For a variety of reasons, queer women and trans people were – sometimes consciously, but often unintentionally and inadvertently – marginalised. Cycle One LFI participants were keen to gain a deeper understanding of the reality of life for people in these populations, to better understand their lived experience in the day to day.

To enter more fully into their *lifeworlds*.

The natural and physical sciences offer a set of objective rules to explain how the world works. But everyday life – the mundane, the ordinary, the personal – is subjective. For each individual, the world registers on the senses in different ways. It is perceived, filtered, experienced through a unique set of lenses that connect the

individual with the social, and the practical with the perceptual. Life – as it is experienced by each person, and in relation to others– is constructed, as is its meaning. Fascinatingly, each person inhabits a space that is their unique *lifeworld*, the realm of their lived experience, the place in which and the way in which they interface with the world around them, and experience its impact on them.

Programming that is person-centred requires a sensitivity and appreciation of these *lifeworlds*. Work amongst those who experience marginalisation requires that these *lifeworlds* are not only recognised in and through the work, but validated. How people experience the world around them matters. How they perceive the world around them describes their reality, and how they think about that reality for themselves and others.

The stories that follow offer a privileged insight into a facet of the *lifeworlds* of nine lesbian, bisexual or queer-identifying women in Arua. Arua is a town and commercial centre in the West Nile region of Northern Uganda, in close proximity to the borders of South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Each story has been generated by community members – locally based teammates who participated as part of the LFI – who spent time with women who volunteered to meet and share their story. The entry-point to each person was local relationship, not programme; in fact, most women had not participated in a LILO workshop. Each volunteer has generously given her permission to have her story retold – in order that others may better understand – and to have a non-identifying image attached to that story.

These nine stories are hardly representative of all lesbian or bisexual women in Uganda. Or even of all queer women in Arua. They are nine unique stories, set in a specific time and place. But, they are illustrative. And, as the LFI invited teammates to reflect on the impact of these encounters and the meaning contained in each human story, they were stimulated to apply those meanings to their own experience, and frame observations, implications and key lessons. These insights are interspersed between the stories, and deepen the analysis of how marginalisation is expressed, encountered and experienced by lesbian, bisexual and other queer-identifying women in this context.

'We can't sit down there...these heels can't go in that sand...'

And just like that, within our first moments of meeting, we know who this young woman is: smart, funny, sassy, spirited. I tell her I think so and enquire about her age. Her response is quick and sharp. *"Don't you know a gentleman never asks a lady to reveal such things?"* She smiles a cheeky, knowing smile, as we settle into conversation that feels easy, comfortable; the familiarity of friends.

Sharon* is 24, raised from early childhood by her grandmother after losing both parents. They are close: *"She means everything to me"*. And yet, Sharon has a secret not even her closest family knows.

"No, my mum doesn't know. She is very religious, a Roman Catholic. No one knows until today; I have only told one other person. Not friends, not family. And being found out is my biggest fear. I'm so afraid I won't tell anyone. I would lose everyone: my mum; my friends. They would just refuse to associate."

Sharon is bisexual. Educated in a same sex boarding school, she remembers girls with boyfriends. But not her.

"I wondered if I was too short for the boys; too talkative. But it didn't bother me. I was fine...until I met Jane. She came to our school from another school. We developed a friendship – spent our time together, sat in class together – that became something more. It was good. And somehow this was easier in a same sex boarding school. After school, we stayed in touch for a while, but our lives went in different directions."*

"I had my first boyfriend when I went to college. That was also good. I began to realise I was really on that

side: not straight. For me it is important to be happy. That's all. Doesn't matter the sex of who I'm with. If they make me happy, that's what matters.

"But I never told anyone. I can't. Not here, not in Arua. People here are very conservative. They have such traditional views. They don't

understand. They won't understand. Sometimes I joke with my friends just to see their reactions. Like testing them. And I realise I can't tell them honestly."

Sharon lives with the weight of expectations that, at 24, a woman in society should be with someone, engaged, married, to a man, starting a family. Getting a man to support you, to pay for your education. And her present boyfriend is a testament to that pressure.

"It's not working. I keep trying to think of reasons to break up. If I could I'd leave him. If I had the money, I'd run – leave the country, only come back to visit. I'm with him to appease my mum; he is also Catholic and very religious. I see his reaction to LGBT stories in the news. He wouldn't understand. He wouldn't get violent or aggressive, although maybe that would be better. Better to be beaten; physical wounds heal. Emotional ones are deeper and never do. He'd talk about it; he'd tell everyone. There would be so much hate."

Fear looms large in this conversation, as does pressure to conform. Acceptability means mobility in this society; and being acceptable is heavily coded: men and women know their place, and act out the roles that have been defined for them.

"Sexuality isn't a small thing. It's not just something on the side. For us Africans – here in Uganda – it controls everything. You can't be a politician if you are gay. You can't get a job if people know you're a lesbian; they think you will try to sleep with all the women. You can't be a leader unless you have a family: people want to see how you manage your home. So many people get married – even if they are gay – but they are not happy. But if they don't...they can get nowhere"

Sharon's optimism and hopefulness are tempered by resigned realism.

"If only the government would pass a law – not only pass it but act on it – that would simply protect people in this community, to keep them safe. But this is Uganda."

"I wish people would just mind their own business. It doesn't concern you so why would you want to interfere? Why would you want someone to be in a marriage that was not happy and then breaks up? Why is that your business?"

"There are so many people who will never get to meet people like we did today, to talk like this and share their experience. It's like being healed. In places like this, in these rural places, they are there. They are down there alone. Not safe. Afraid."

** not her real name*



Visibility is
VULNERABILITY.

Invisibility is
ERASURE.

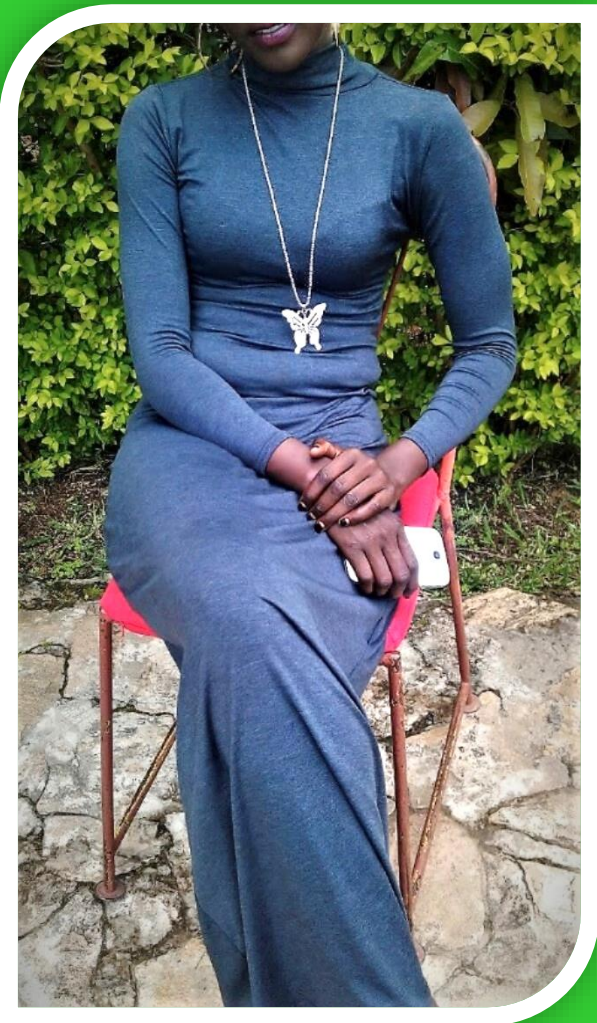
What are
we
learning?

Trans people experience stigma and marginalisation because of their visibility. Their non-conforming physical appearance, gender presentation and gender expression make them conspicuous and noticeable in a society uneasy with difference and diversity.

By contrast, lesbian, bisexual and queer women experience marginalisation because of their **invisibility**. Safety, security, status and standing – social, financial, physical, reputational – pivot on heteronormativity. To “pass” – to blend in – is to be safe.

But also to be invisibilised.

The *lifeworlds* of LBQ women in Arua are profoundly coloured by these conflicts and tensions at the heart of every essential choice, and many other seemingly pedestrian decisions: friends; recreation; attending a workshop. To reluctantly embrace the erasure that offers safety and stability but leads to isolation and withdrawal. Or to risk exposure and discovery that could lead to devastating loss for the opportunity to connect, to be validated, to be seen for who they fully are.



As the morning sun climbed towards the top of the sky, we settled down at the Hilltop Hotel, enjoying the chattering monkeys and the scenic 360-degree view of Arua town below us as we waited for Baati*.

She arrived, fifteen minutes later, looking happy but exhausted. We need not have rushed to get here, we realized: her three-month old baby had kept her busy at home, and it took her a while to ease into our conversation, knowing very well that she would be called any minute to go back home and attend to her little girl.

Light introductions and some laughter helped to ease her nervousness, and we chatted about her baby. It helped that one of our team – Lou* – was also pregnant at the time, giving us

something common to talk about in the beginning. Before long, we found ourselves talking about Baati's life as a woman living since birth in Arua town.

Her concern and worry about the challenges of life were clear as she shared her story.

"My dear, things are not easy. I don't even know where to start from. Things are not easy, but what else can I do about it? I wish I was a man."

We waited in the silence of that pause as she seemed to be reflecting on deep thoughts before she continued.

"If I was a man, I could be able to get away with anything here, easily."

Baati shared how her husband has put her through hell, abusing her emotionally and psychologically: cheating on her with several women in search for a male child since Baati has only given him girl children. Many other women have dropped children at her doorstep claiming they belonged to her husband. This is devastating for her since she her life is put at risk, especially her health. But, she feels she needs to provide a male child to obtain the respect of her husband and the people of her community.

"I have done all what a woman can give to a man. Everything without hesitation, including my body against my will. But it's all not enough"

These moments are painful for her – she avoids looking at us – and we are moved by her emotion, even as she continues her story. Baati feels betrayed by her husband. She had put much trust in him, and love, at a cost to herself. She is attracted to women, but has given that up for him.

Each time she feels attracted to another woman, she drills down those feelings, pushes them aside. She is, herself, just a woman and, in this region, a woman can only command respect when she marries a man and has children of her own. She is willing to endure the abuse.

**not her real name*

Diversity is COMPLEX. Language is LIMITED.

What are
we
learning?

“LGBT” has become a familiar term in certain sectors and circles. It may be a helpful composite identity around which human rights activists might organise. It may be a useful acronym for certain political reasons.

But, the language has limitations for work that deals with diversity, that engages people whose *lifeworlds are unique, complex and intricate*. It passively operates on the untroubled assumption of acceptably homogenous community – of similarity; of sameness – on the narrow basis of sexual and gender identity when, in fact, people perceive their world and experience that world significantly differently.

Even within a small sample in the small, rural North Ugandan border town of Arua, women who identify as lesbian, bisexual or queer have a remarkably diverse spectrum of experience with and perception of fear, marginalisation, discrimination, inequality and exclusion, and with power, facility and resources – their own, and that of others around them. From lawyers, politicians and businesspeople to young students and unemployed housewives with little formal education. Life is nuanced.

Language is also limited in the way that specific terminology – “LGBT”, for instance – has its origin in *specific cultural and linguistic contexts* that are not necessarily, or automatically, universally transferable. Language shapes meaning and the ways that concepts are interpreted within various cultures. African sexualities, how they are conceived and spoken about, indigenously – in, for instance, rural Northern Uganda – may, presumably, be significantly different to what is commonly framed in a Western, English paradigm.

Certain popular language is unquestionably convenient. Left unchallenged, however, language and terminology can frame an oversimplified, one dimensional construct that reduces the rich, multifaceted, complex *lifeworlds* of individuals within their unique environments to something less real, but more easily manageable to external actors, in itself an act of marginalisation and invisibilisation.

We arrive late for our appointment with Bahati*, who is early, waiting for us to arrive. And yet, when we arrive at the White Castle Hotel she greets us with a sparkling smile on her face. The kind of smile that belongs on someone without a lot of baggage.

After only a short introduction, we seem acquainted and she interacts as if we have all met before. As if we haven't only just met as strangers.

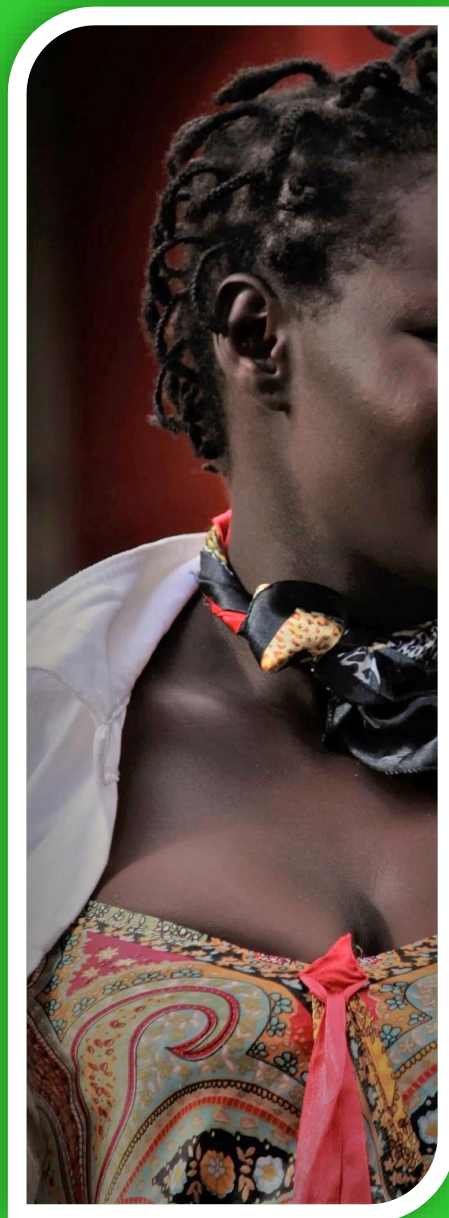
Bahati is 22-years old and has lived most of her high school life in Kampala. She loves clubbing and played netball at school. She is hopeful she will join university in the new year.

Returning to Arua after spending a long time in Kampala has not been too hard for her. But Kampala was not without incident. In high school, she was suspended for two weeks when the school administration suspected her of being a lesbian and having a relationship with her closest friend. At the time she denied it, but her deep affection towards this girlfriend is obvious to us as she shares more of her story.

Life in Kampala is easier for queer women compared to Arua. And while she feels that everybody should be given the privilege to do what they feel is right for them regardless of their gender, Bahati's family, for example, has standards and expectations for behavior.

"In my family, nobody is just allowed to do whatever they feel is good for them regardless of their persons gender. I can't just judge or

discriminate against someone just because of their sexual orientation"



Her voice reveals a tension in her we had not noticed before, and she begins to talk about her marriage.

Bahati struggles with her sexual life, and to manage the deep feelings she expresses for her female friends against the expectations of family and society. She feels agitated sleeping with her husband as she is always thinking he comes to her from sleeping with another woman. But she fears to say no to her husband; he may think she is having an affair with someone else. And losing her marriage means losing support for herself and losing her children.

Despite her frustration and struggle, she has to hang in there. Being someone's wife gets her respect in the community. And to her mind, her options are limited now. Even if she left her husband, she'd not get married again.

"Could you marry a woman with two kids? They tell us when we leave the family home to go to our marital home 'lka mu agua 'bo yani ipa itesi ko wala. Iri clori nia kiki'.

Once you get married you need to make a large ring and sit on it and no matter what happens you just have to tolerate it and flag them off like nothing happened."

Her easy, sparkling smile seems strained now. Like it hurts her to keep up the appearance while telling this painful story. Her husband expects her to have more children, even though she doesn't want to. But, if she doesn't, he will accuse her of wanting to keep young – saving her body – for other men.

As we escort her to get her boda boda home, Bahati feels that the only thing that might save her is financial independence. But even this is difficult as her husband stands in her way.

He doesn't believe in women working.

**not her real name*

In this society,
one matters if one is
A MAN.

Or if one is a
**FUNCTION OF
A MAN.**

What are
we
learning?

Patriarchy is intricately and inextricably woven through the complex tapestry of life for women in Arua, irrespective of their sexual orientation. That centrality and supremacy of men – in power, in authority, in value – is institutionalised through a range of interrelated processes of socialisation – many overt and explicit; many subtle – to reinforce the subordinate role of women; to control them; to restrict their choices; to suppress their power and agency.

For women, social status and respect are achieved through marriage to a man and an appropriate, acceptable and productive domestic life. Marriage is a source of family honour for the parents of a girl-child and, invariably, wealth: to be unmarried is to bring shame on the family; to leave a marriage is to place a burden of repayment on the family.

Patriarchy is normalised in this society, to legitimise the commodification of women, and the instrumentalization of women's bodies. To direct and limit their choices about reproduction, about employment, about financial independence, about sexuality so that each of these are pleasing, acceptable and useful to men and, more, the society built around them.

Even amongst sexual and gender minorities, sexual and reproductive healthcare services are designed to reach gay and bisexual men, who are perceived to be at greater risk and vulnerability to HIV. Few services exist for lesbian and bisexual women; they are barely acknowledged at all. Nor is this surprising: they are invisible.

In this society, one matters if one is a man, or a function of a man -- a wife, a girlfriend, a mother.

Charlie strolls towards the restaurant where we have been waiting for her to arrive, and as we exchange greetings – handshakes and hugs – she relaxes, going from quick, deliberate strides to easier, jauntier steps. Here in the gardens of this small resort, amongst the carefully pruned trees and manicured lawns, it is easy to forget that just beyond its walls is a rural village.

We sit around a table under a gazebo near the river, and begin to chat about life in Arua, life for women and, specifically, life for queer women. Charlie is an interesting woman, humble and unassuming. A few minutes into chatting, though, it becomes clear she is highly educated, independent and relatively wealthy. Her boyish charm and easy laugh make her seem unreserved, but there is a coolness beneath that relaxed exterior. It makes sense when we hear she is a lawyer; she is used to making others around her feel at ease without giving away too much of herself.

Charlie relocated to Arua three years before when a work opportunity arose. The youngest of five children, she left her family behind in Kampala but often makes the long seven-hour bus trip back to the city to visit home.

Charlie identifies as a lesbian and exclusively dates women. She is reserved about her romantic interests but shared that she was currently on a break from her partner; they had been arguing a lot lately – her partner had a habit of saying hurtful things when they fought – and she preferred less conflict. They would re-evaluate their relationship soon, and she was fine with getting back together and fixing things or breaking up for good.

She speaks fondly of her family, and it's clear they are close. Making the journey home once a month is her way of staying connected. She misses her mum a lot. Despite their closeness, she has not really come out to her mum about her sexuality, although she has been tip-toeing around the idea. She has told her sister-in-law, who has liberal views and is close to Charlie. She seemed unphased by the confession, telling Charlie she had long suspected her of liking women, but respected her enough to let her decide when to talk about it. Encouraged by that response, she came out to her brother. Although he did not react negatively and their relationship remained unchanged, he has never acknowledged her sexuality and pretends she has never told him anything about it.



Like most queer 'closeted' women, Charlie is frequently asked uncomfortable questions about marriage and children, especially at family gatherings. She either jokes that she will get married once one of her older single relatives gets married first, or she points out unhappy married couples as warnings against marriage and why it should be avoided altogether.

There is immense pressure placed on African women to get married and have children; to claim their 'womanhood' But Charlie is confident and defiant that she will not consider being married to bow to family and social pressure. *"No. Never. Definitely not!"*

Charlie feels queer women in Arua have life somewhat better than those who live in Kampala. In Arua, women hide more, whereas women in Kampala are more likely to be open about their sexuality which exposes them to discrimination and violence. It is an interesting way of thinking: hiding may make life safer and easier, but does denying your true self make life better?

As our conversation draws to a close, Charlie talks about her hopes and dreams for queer women in Arua, and those living elsewhere in Uganda. She wants these women to have more agency; to stop expecting donors and NGOs to hand them things and fix their lives. She stresses the importance of staying in school so that women have more options that allow them to become independent. People who identify as LGBT have an obligation to be role models and position themselves in roles which afford them power and authority so that the negative stereotypes associated with the LGBT community can be broken.

In the moments that follow our conversation, we cannot help think back to stories we've heard from other queer women in Arua, and the realities they face – simply as rural women – that makes education and advancement so very difficult. But Charlie's story illustrates that there are many different types of women living in Arua. It is a powerful reminder to us not to lump all women with all their varied complexities into the neat LBQ acronym we so easily and thoughtlessly apply.

**not her real name*

Many lesbian, bisexual and queer-identifying women in Arua are **IN HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS.**

What are we learning?

Many wish they were not. Most would prefer not to be, and constantly think about possible ways to leave those relationships. Some suspect their husbands and boyfriends of having concurrent relationships with other women. But, they do not feel free to leave. In a patriarchal society, **being associated with maleness equates to social currency and standing for women** whose gender marginalises them in their society. And a heterosexual relationship provides a helpful cover to preserve invisibility for lesbian and bisexual women.

Only moments before meeting our small two-person team, Eunice* became hesitant. Although we had made an appointment with her, she had some nervousness and uncertainty; understandable considering she had never met us before. But, she trusted her local contact who had brokered this conversation between us and, after a short conversation with him, she felt persuaded to meet.

It is a beautiful sunny Thursday morning when we welcome Eunice to sit with us in the tranquil gardens of the White Castle hotel. As we introduce ourselves to one another, we realize the importance of reassuring her that we come in good faith and mean no harm. And, as we mention our own 'queerness' and 'gayness', she seems to become more at ease.

A little reserved and with small stature, Eunice is a joyous character with a warm smile. As we relax into conversation, she begins sharing her experience of living as a queer woman in Arua district in the north of Uganda.

Eunice is the mother of five-year old boy; a single mother now, since separating from her son's father. Aware of her queerness – her feelings towards other women – for a long time before her son was born, her relationship with a man was one of, almost, duress; she succumbed to pressure from her family. But the

relationship did not last long, ending after only a short time.

That separation was not well received by her family. Through the leadership of

her brother, the family called a clan meeting, threatening to flog her. Fortunately, that threat did not come to be; instead, Eunice was disowned. It is a story she tells us with a heavy heart, the memories of those events still fresh.

After her disownment, she moved from Arua with her son and proceeded to Kampala where, for two years, she stayed with a friend, hiding from her relatives and other members of her clan, until it felt safe for her to return and reestablish herself in Arua town.

Back in town, she found a house for herself and her son, and kept in touch with her friends for support. One friend, Maureen, formed a special relationship with Eunice. She speaks fondly of her, intimating that Maureen is the only person she knows closely, who visits her in her home. They have become support to each other, and share about personal things – even matters about their health.

Eunice is no longer in touch with the father of her child. As time progressed, she cut ties with him, despite the support he offered her. That support always came with conditions; with demands for sexual favours. She reacts strongly as she tells us this part of her story. *"Fuck that shit!"*, she emphasizes, insisting on maintaining her job in order to support her son and herself.

Since that time, Eunice has stayed true to living her queer life on her terms.

Despite all she's been through, Eunice seems to be relatively happy. Her experience has left her resilient and hopeful, determined to fight for her own happiness and peaceful state of being.

"To others like me, going through the similar experience, take heart. Have no fear. Live your life on your terms. Don't be afraid to come out and meet with other people who are like you."

She hopes to relocate to another country at some point in her life, where she can be freely express herself, and have better economic opportunities.

As we exchange goodbyes, she thanks us for taking time to talk to her. It is a warm moment, and we feel – in a way – heavy that our time is coming to an end.

**not her real name*



Lesbian, bisexual and queer-identifying women in Arua experience **MARGINALISATION** across multiple, interlinked **AXES OF OPPRESSION.**

What are
we
learning?

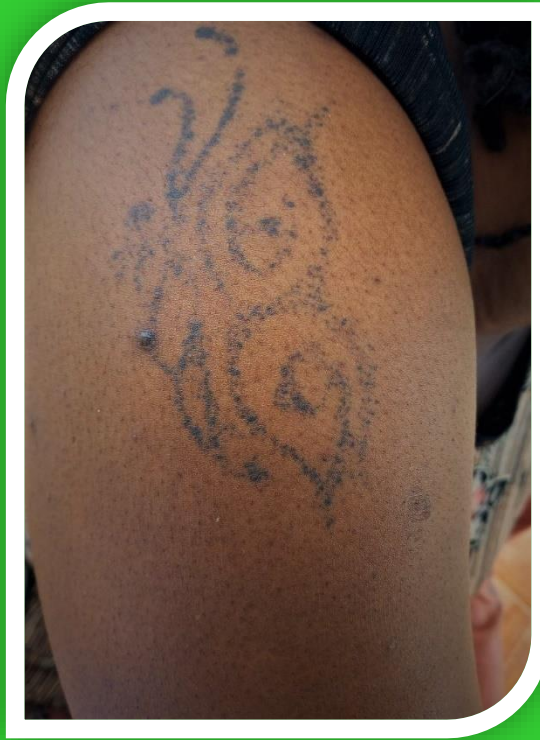
Intersectionality – the overlapping of multiple oppressed identities – adds to the complexity and intricacy of the *lifeworlds* of lesbian, bisexual and queer women in Arua. It is not their sexuality that leads, singly or in isolation, to their experience of marginalisation. In each person, that sexuality interacts with other qualities and experiences, to reinforce and amplify marginalisation, disparities in power and inequality in societies where hierarchies of rank and privilege have been constructed.

For women in Arua, these co-factors might include race; rurality; their minority ethnicity in the post-war North of that country. More specifically, wealth and education confer a degree of privilege, power, choice and agency that are significantly less available to women who are not financially independent, although education and wealth are not a guarantee of voice or agency.

In Arua, genderism and sexism – the subordinate place of women relative to a societally defined and traditionally embedded supremacy of men – are two particularly powerful axes of oppression with potentially greater impact and influence than heterosexism, although these certainly interact together. Women experience oppression in many forms, primarily because of their womanhood.

Janice* is the type of woman who – when she walks into a room – people stop to look at. She sits down at our table, holding her fashionable oversized handbag close to her during our conversation.

As our conversation begins, she tells us excitedly that she has recently started working – a job all her own – but, when we express congratulations, she seems almost embarrassed.



She keeps her two groups of friends separate. She met her queer friends through a friend who runs the WERAIN organisation in Arua. Without him, she and other women she now knows would not have met and become friends. She would have been totally alone. Apart from her sister – who, even though they are very close and share everything, was shocked and surprised – and her queer friends, no one knows she is bisexual. She cannot think about telling her three brothers; they would reject her and be mean to her.

“My money is probably only like pocket money to you but at least now I don’t have to ask anyone for airtime and I have money to get a boda boda to town whenever I want. Do you know what it feels like to have to ask your parents for money to buy sanitary towels when you are 25?”

Janice lives at home with her parents and her siblings, choosing to return to Arua after completing her studies in Kampala. Her mother was the third of her father’s three wives, and the only wife who did not leave him like the others chose to.

Life in Arua may be peaceful, but it is also hard for women.

“Women are expected to work harder than men because men here are lazy.”

Janice is bisexual and has had both male and female partners. Her last relationship with a man ended because she became involved with a woman. Not wanting her partner to find out, and unsure how he would react, she broke up with him instead. She was afraid he might reject her. Or become violent towards her. Or worse: hurt her by spreading rumours about her.

She laughs out loud as we ask about whether she has spoken with her parents.

“I don’t think that they would reject or disown me I won’t ever take a chance by telling them so long as I am dependent on them.”

Janice’s dream is independence: to have her own place, a nice car and enough money...lots of money! She wants to be a business woman in charge of her own life, without anyone telling her what to do or how to live. Not tied down to any man, or woman.

She does, however, really want a child. When the time is right, and when she has a good career and money, she wants to find a man, get pregnant, and then raise the child on her own.

As we conclude our conversation, she shares a thought for women like her:

“Women, especially queer women, need to stop being so hard on themselves and other women. Your loving men, women or nobody is no one’s business so don’t let other people hurt you or make you feel bad because of how God made you!”

*not her real name

In a setting like Arua, a lesbian, bisexual or queer woman is **UNLIKELY TO ATTEND** a workshop on SOGIESC.

What are
we
learning?

The likelihood that a lesbian, bisexual or queer-identifying woman in Arua – or a similar environment and context – will **attend a workshop on SOGIESC is low**, even though she might strongly wish to. Her participation is, perhaps, more likely if she is younger, but increasingly unlikely after marriage and motherhood. The choice to attend weighs the opportunity to engage and connect against the possibility of being recognised (by a friend or neighbour), exposed and “outed”. In most cases, there is too much at stake, too much to lose.

The *lifeworlds* of many lesbian, bisexual or queer women in Arua are tinged by significant levels of psychological stress. Anticipated fear and anxiety about the potential for multiple loss should she be discovered – friends, family, children, household; a high sense of isolation that comes from low visibility and a sense of disconnection from other queer women; high vigilance and secrecy to mitigate the risk of disclosure and discovery. And the ever-present pressure and responsibility to not bring dishonour on her family.

Ironically, echoing how patriarchy and intersectionality have come to be normalised in society, it is also less likely that women in settings like Arua will be invited to workshops by locally based facilitators who, themselves, identify as gay, bisexual or lesbian. Preference is likely to be given to gay or bisexual men who will be more confident and animated participants, better educated and able to engage with content than might women, and more likely to complete a multi-day workshop without being called away to attend to domestic responsibilities.

Nancy* sat down at our table, strumming her long red acrylic nails on the table. She is full of personality and attitude, ordering a juice from a waiter before waving him off dismissively to continue our conversation.

Nancy grew up in a small village not too far from Arua, moving to Arua a few years ago to set up a tavern and clothing shop. Proudly, she invited us to visit, offering us our first drink on the house. From her trendy hairstyle, clothes, jewelry and freshly done manicure it seemed that business was booming!

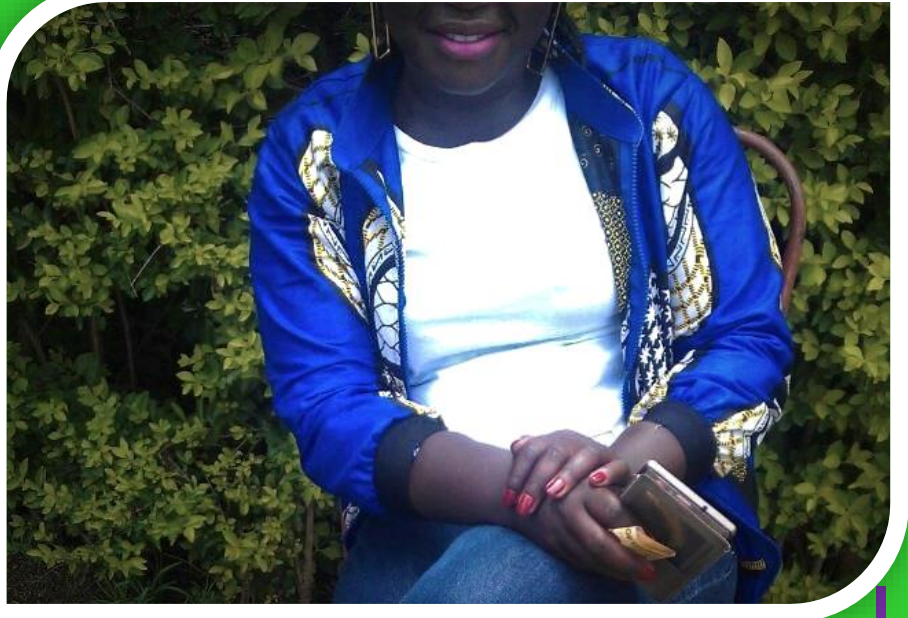
Leaving home to start a life by herself in a new town was not difficult. Her siblings had done the same and were now scattered across Uganda doing their own thing. Her parents had no objections to her moving, either. Besides, Nancy assures us, she is 25 years old and can do whatever she likes. Independence and privacy are important to her. She tells us, with a cheeky smile:

“It’s nice to live alone. You can do what you want, see who you want, do anything you want and no one will ever know!”

Nancy shares that she is bisexual, although she has never experimented with a female partner. Shrugging her shoulders, she tells us that maybe she might in future but, although she has had feelings towards women, she hasn’t met anyone she really wanted to connect with yet.

Growing up, Nancy didn’t understand the feelings she felt because she liked boys and girls the same: only some of them, not all of them, and not all of them all the time. She does not remember knowing anyone in her village who was gay.

Her fiancé lives in another town. They have been together for quite a long time and she intends on



getting married to him, having children and having a nice life. But she is not quite ready for all that just yet. She laughs when we ask whether her fiancé knows she is bisexual.

“Obviously no! Why would I tell him that?”

Nancy’s sexuality is her secret. She has two sets of friends – “...straight ones, and ones like me” – that she keeps separate, preferring it that way. It’s easier.

She doesn’t know many LBQ women here, and none who are open about their sexuality. Those women she did know tended to be safe because they kept their identities hidden and just acted like other women. They got married and had children; life was not easy or hard for them: just “normal”. This did not concern her as much as other things: her risk of HIV, for instance, if she chose to have different partners. She had heard about PREP, but this was usually only offered to men.

“People think women don’t need protection but then we get blamed for spreading HIV when we get infected! Women always get forgotten about.”

Her dream for women in Arua is that they stop thinking that they can’t do anything.

“You can do anything. It might not be the same thing that another woman does, but in life there are always choices.”

**not her real name*

At organising level, **FRAGMENTATION AND LOW SOLIDARITY** characterise the feminist discourse

What are
we
learning?

Marginalisation and isolationism can come from unlikely and unanticipated sources.

Ironically, in yet another echo of intersectionality, heterosexism is an axis of oppression, marginalisation and exclusion for lesbian, bisexual and queer women within the broader feminist movement in Uganda, where one might expect greater solidarity around experiences common to women.

Despite the fact that women collectively, irrespective of their sexuality, experience sexism and violence in society, conservatism and traditionalism persist in the feminist sector, where homosexuality is – arguably, inaccurately – deemed to be “*not our culture*”, “*unAfrican*” and “*against our religion*”. The mainstream feminist movement also expresses concern that associating with the cause and interests of queer women compromises the credibility and efforts of heterosexual feminists in a patriarchal society and reduces their potential for success.

Butch lesbians and trans men are especially excluded and marginalised, accused of misogyny, of hating women by rejecting a form of femininity, or of trying to be men.

On a fine sunny Thursday afternoon, we arrive in Kasambya in Arua to meet Patu*. She meets us at the stop where our boda-boda drops us, all smiles, and we walk together to a friends' house where she is babysitting that friend's one-month old baby girl.

Patu is welcoming and hospitable, offering us refreshing cold water as we enter the two-bedroom home. It is cool inside despite the heat of the day and, as we talk, we take turns soothing the baby.

Patu is a bubbly and joyful woman, 40 years old and medium height. Congolese by nationality, she moved to Arua fifteen years ago, and continues to travel between Congo and Arua for business and to visit family. Since coming to Arua, she has become an ardent supporter of the ruling NRM party, involving herself in mobilizing youth for the NRM in the region. The President of Uganda was due to visit Arua the day after our meeting, and she was excited that he would be meeting the youth of Arua, an event for which she was in the forefront of organizing. Her excitement mixed with optimism and hopefulness, that conversations with the President might earn her a spot with influence in Arua.

As an 'out' bisexual woman, Patu is a member of WERAIN, an organisation based in Arua that advocates for the rights of LGBT people and sex workers. She has attended many of the organisation's activities. She talks to us about her sixteen-year relationship with her boyfriend.

Patu's boyfriend identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual man. He is aware of her bisexuality, and supportive of her, and offered to join WERAIN with her to work alongside her. He maintains that her sexual orientation doesn't bother him, and that he would be bothered instead were she unfaithful to him with anyone, be it of the same or the opposite sex. Over the period of their relationship, they have arrived at a level of understanding of each other that is enviable and admirable. She appreciates how that has helped her come to terms with and embrace her sexuality and take pride in it. She believes that she has been able to talk to LBQ woman in Arua and give

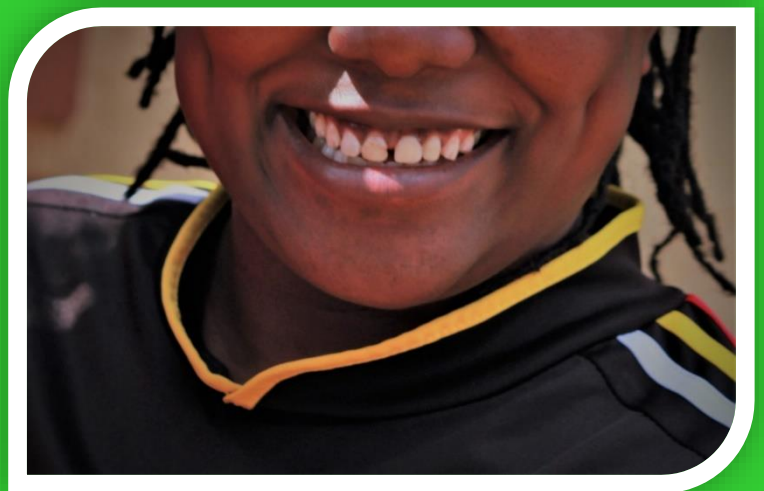
counsel because she is in a good space in her own relationship.

Together with her boyfriend, she has a son and they all live happily in the same home.

The local neighborhood does not know that she is bisexual. She believes that being in a heterosexual relationship provides her some level of security that other lesbian, bisexual or queer women in Arua are not privileged with. She feels deeply that one of the greatest concerns for LBQ women – and, to some extent, all gender and sexual minorities – in Arua is the insecurity that stems from being outed or from attempting to live one's queer life openly.

Her appeal to WERAIN, SMUG and the entire LGBTI community in Uganda is to endeavor to provide legal aid to *kuchus* [LGBTI people] in Arua who daily face discrimination and live in fear of arrest.

"Lugbara as people are very conservative and with a violent temper. Any security incident can escalate so fast to a police case. Their religious and cultural convictions have a lot to contribute too. At least a paralegal should be trained and assigned to the great West Nile region to monitor and report these cases."



Patu has vision for her future.

"Looking forward, I want to advance my political hold in Arua. I love NRM and believe that it is time I took my political quest to another level. I will not let my sexuality stop me."

**not her real name*



COMING TO VOICE

What are we learning that has relevance for promoting the voice of the marginalized in the world?

1. **No one is voiceless.**
Everyone has something to say, something worthwhile, some truth of their own – from the power of their own experience – that has meaning and value. Everyone has a personal story, and a narrative that reflects how they perceive the world, and how they experience the world. Story is voice, and in that personal narrative lies power.
2. **Marginalisation does not remove voice.**
Nor does it extinguish it. Instead, through the exercise of power and privilege, marginalisation excludes people from spaces and opportunities where that voice can be recognised and expressed and appreciated. Extreme marginalisation – resulting through persecution and violence or threats to safety – suppresses voice, but it does not remove it. No one is voiceless.
3. **People are the experts of their own lives.**
Each person lives their lives within a rich tapestry of personal experience and perception that interfaces with a sophisticated, complex, intricate social, cultural and traditional environment. Communities are not homogenous and, in order to do good work amongst those who are marginalised – whose voices are often suppressed – it is valuable and necessary to tune into their personal *lifeworlds*, to find their voice and story, to understand how life works in that space.
4. **The human spirit is resilient.**
Despite environments where power and privilege work to silence voice, to erase story – to suppress – people on the margins do not quickly give in to

despair, as if they have abandoned all hope. Even in harsh conditions, people are capable of a remarkable optimism – hopefulness, vision, yearning and believing for a future better than what they are presently experiencing – that sustains them in life.

5. **Coming to voice may be more significant and powerful than expressing voice.**

In a human rights sector driven towards a particular kind of strategic activism and advocacy, where communities are mobilised and power is confronted, there are steps – *stages* – before people in marginalised communities can speak truth to power.

Before people can *express voice* to respond to their external environment, there is a process through which they must *come to voice*; to construct their own narrative to themselves about themselves within their internal environment. To be both author and reader of their personal story. To become conscious – aware – of their *lifeworld* and the forces and factors within and without that act to limit, control, suppress or exclude

Learning how to think and speak *about* power may be a significant step before raising voice to speak *to* power. Coming to voice within is a prerequisite to expressing voice and may include making choices for oneself to not engage that external environment.

6. **Coming to voice – a process of development and maturation in people, especially those who are marginalised – can be actively supported through a number of processes and practices:**

- **PERSONALISATION**
doing the internal psychological, emotional and cognitive work of looking in, looking back, looking out, looking forward; identifying the *lifeworld* and the environment in which it is located.
- **PARTICIPATION**
opportunities for people to legitimately and authentically engage in processes and with material that is about them, that belongs to them, that affects them, and to speak to that material – to interpret it, to give it meaning.
- **ACCOMPANIMENT**
in suppressive environments especially, people sustain their will and energy and confidence for movement and response when they are

consistently, intimately, appropriately accompanied by supportive “others” who believe in and affirm their human capacity to make their own responses in their own time and commit in some way to walking alongside in solidarity.

- **FACILITATION**
a way of working with individuals and communities defined by “enablement” rather than “intervention”; not unlike the ethics of counselling, facilitation seeks to stimulate and support the unveiling of strengths in people and communities to make a response in their own lives, instead of prescribing or providing solutions, assuming people are unable or deficient.

7. Organisations may need to adapt their own ways of thinking and working, to consciously dismantle their own power that inadvertently marginalises those with lesser power.

If people are the subjects of their own response – with the energy and ability to choose a way of being in life and in the world, that is good for them at the time; if they are the protagonists, the lead actors, in their own story – and, if coming to voice within is a fundamental stage towards expressing voice without, then such beliefs, values and principles have important implications for organisations that wish to support and programme with communities to unveil, promote and amplify the voice of those who are marginalised:

- a. to facilitate, protect, defend, promote spaces for authentic and legitimate participation by communities.

- b. to respect the capability, insight, intuition and sensitivity of local communities to say what things mean, and to make choices about direction; to lead.
- c. that respecting the leadership of communities does not mean organisations abdicate or abandon communities. Accompaniment means participation – to learn, to appreciate, to acknowledge, to support, to encourage, to celebrate – in the space where one does not lead.
- d. to support the inner work of personalisation within individuals and collectives where coming to voice is a healthy foundation for movement.
- e. to design programme in a way that is sensitive and considered of the local realities of people and places – their *lifeworlds* -- and to do so with communities so as not to presume or usurp local knowledge and expertise; or to implement activities that compromise the privacy, dignity or safety of people at the margins.
- f. to facilitate, rather than intervene.

It's one o' clock in the afternoon on a hot, hazy afternoon in Arua when we meet Tara* at a local hotel.

We arrive to find her there, waiting calmly in a quiet, shaded place under some trees, far removed from the other hotel patrons. Our location is well suited for a moment like this; she has chosen this setting for our conversation.

Tara is a beautiful young woman, with her own individual style: fashionable spectacles, stylish watch, colourful hair. She is half Lugbara and half Muganda, with two siblings and 10 other step brothers and sisters.



She speaks quietly as our conversation slowly begins. Gently, carefully, unrushed. The first-born girl to her mother, she was sent to school to be educated. After graduation, it was expected of her to commit to a man and get married. But Tara's story played out differently.

At university in Kampala, at 22 years old, she discovered herself to be a lesbian. Now, four years later, she still struggles to deal with her sexuality.

"At university, I dated a couple of boys. My boyfriend used to ask whether he can spend the night in my room at the university but instead I used to hang out with a lot of girls and this made it not possible for him to. This was always my strategy."

Through a good friend, Tara was introduced to other lesbian women in Kampala, and this helped her gather

hope and encouragement. But after completing her university education, she came back to Arua where she found a job well suited to her new qualification. And her social life changed dramatically, from friendships to isolation.

"I have many female friends that I could hang out with but for my security, I mostly stay with the male friends I have here because Arua is not an easy and safe place to be free in. I have not gone out at night to hang out with my friends because I fear that I will do something that will compromise my security and identity. Arua is a small town. Anything you do can easily spread around and cause problems."

Tara has been back in Arua for more than two years now, but – apart from work – she spends most of her time alone.

"In my free times and weekends, I stay in my room at home and watch movies."

She feels her mother's expectation that, as her first-born girl, she be married the way any "normal" African women should be. She knows her mother is waiting for her to introduce a man to the family. And this is a heavy burden for her.

"If I had a good job somewhere or if I had a lot of money, I would settle somewhere very far away from Arua, or even Uganda. Somewhere where it is okay for me to get into a relationship with my girlfriend, where it is just okay to hold hands, to go out shopping at the mall without anyone raising an eyebrow or saying anything."

Tara hopes that, in the near future, the government of Uganda will come up with by-laws that will protect the sexual and gender minorities in Uganda and punish those who will violate other people's rights.

"I want to be optimistic that the people of Arua will one day come of age and let others like us who are sexual minorities be who they are and make life easy for everyone."

**not her real name*

Contributors

The *Learning from Innovation* (LFI) project was, consciously, an exercise in joint learning, shaped to forefront the values of participation and collaboration in research, in programme design and development, in influencing work, and in community engagement.

Positive Vibes is proud to acknowledge, with gratitude, the contributions of the following people to the process, outcomes and products of the LFI.

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