

Blueprint for enhancing safety and security of LGBTQ+ organizations.

Background

Given the rising risks of surveillance, harassment, and legal persecution, implementing structured security measures is essential for LGBTQ+ organizations to continue their vital work in advocacy, health services, and human rights protection. By adopting these best practices, LGBTQ+ organizations can safeguard their operations, empower their communities, and build a sustainable framework for long-term security and advocacy. This blueprint summarizes key findings and recommendations from a comprehensive needs assessment focusing on five LGBTQ+ organizations: ISHTAR MSM (Kenya), Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), LGBT+ Rights Ghana, Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), and LAMBDA (Mozambique). It was drawn from the review of existing literature, direct observations during consultative visits where key informant and focus group interviews were also conducted. It outlines strategies to enhance their operational resilience in challenging socio-political environments characterized by legal restrictions and societal stigma, and limited funding.

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Immediate actions (0–6 Months)

Physical Security Enhancements:

- **Upgrade security infrastructure:** Install/Upgrade biometric access controls, functional CCTV systems with backup storage, and reinforce perimeter security with electric fencing, motion sensor lighting, and secure entry points.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Conduct security drills for staff, focusing on evacuation procedures and safe room protocols. Establish safe houses for temporary relocation during high-risk periods.

Legal Defense and Advocacy Initiatives:

- **Rapid Legal Response:** Establish rapid-response legal teams or partnerships with legal aid organizations to provide immediate support in cases of arrests or legal harassment.
- **Documentation and Reporting:** Standardize processes for documenting human rights violations (harassment, arrests, legal threats) to build an evidence base for advocacy and legal defense.

Digital Security Measures:

- **Secure Communication:** Transition to encrypted communication platforms like Signal and ProtonMail. Implement multi-factor authentication (MFA) for all organizational accounts. Adopt a creative approach on social media posts without diluting the essence of the intended.
- **Cybersecurity Training:** Conduct immediate training for staff on basic digital security best practices, emphasizing secure data handling, strong password management, and phishing attack identification.

Mid-Term Actions (6–12 Months)

Digital Security Audits and Compliance:

- **Comprehensive Audits:** Conduct cybersecurity audits to identify vulnerabilities in digital infrastructure, including data encryption compliance and cloud storage security assessments.
- **Policy Development:** Develop and implement formal digital security policies to guide staff on secure online behavior, data protection, and communication protocols.

Capacity Building and Training:

- **Security Management Training:** Implement training programs on security management, focusing on incident reporting, risk assessment, and situational awareness.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Initiate pilot projects for shared cybersecurity tools and resources, focusing on threat detection and data management.

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Long-Term Actions (12–24 Months)

Advocacy for Legal Reforms:

· **Strategic Litigation:** Engage in strategic litigation, supported by international legal experts, to challenge discriminatory laws.

· **Shadow Reporting:** Develop shadow reports to present at international human rights review mechanisms, focusing on the impact of discriminatory laws and socio-political hostility.

Institutionalized Monitoring and Evaluation:

· **M&E Frameworks:** Implement M&E frameworks to track progress on security measures, advocacy outcomes, and capacity-building initiatives. This includes regular data collection, reporting, and feedback mechanisms.

· **Impact Assessments:** Conduct impact assessments every six months to evaluate the effectiveness of security interventions and adapt strategies as needed.

· **Capacity Building:** Implement ongoing training programs on physical and digital security, legal awareness, advocacy, and crisis management. Prioritize mental health support for staff and community members.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Track progress using KPIs aligned with physical security, digital security, legal resilience, organizational capacity, and regional collaboration objectives. Examples include the percentage of offices equipped with biometric access controls, the number of staff trained in cybersecurity best practices, and the number of successful legal challenges or policy changes influenced by advocacy efforts.

Sustainable Resource Mobilization:

· **Funding Diversification:** Expand funding portfolios by targeting international donors, exploring grant writing, and crowdfunding opportunities. Organizations should secure their own office spaces to mitigate evictions and facilitate security enhancements.

· **Endowment Funds:** Establish endowment funds to ensure long-term financial sustainability.

Cross-Cutting Themes

· **Regional Collaboration:** Establish a formal regional LGBTQ+ security network for knowledge sharing, joint training, and coordinated advocacy. This includes developing a shared platform for digital security tools, emergency response protocols, and regional emergency protection funds.

· **Stakeholder Engagement:** Foster strategic partnerships with legal aid organizations, international human rights bodies, technology providers, and supportive media outlets. Engage in community sensitization programs to reduce stigma and foster inclusivity.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Establish robust monitoring mechanisms, including monthly progress reports, quarterly M&E reviews, and biannual stakeholder consultations.

Conduct annual impact assessments to evaluate the overall effectiveness of interventions. Implement risk management and contingency plans to address potential challenges.

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This blueprint provides a roadmap for strengthening the resilience of LGBTQ+ organizations in East and Southern Africa. It calls for a collaborative approach, leveraging regional networks and international support, to build a safer and more enabling environment for these vital organizations to continue their critical work.