



PROMOTING HUMANISM AMONG GRASS ROOT LGBTI PERSONS IN MBARARA CITY-UGANDA

REPORT 2022

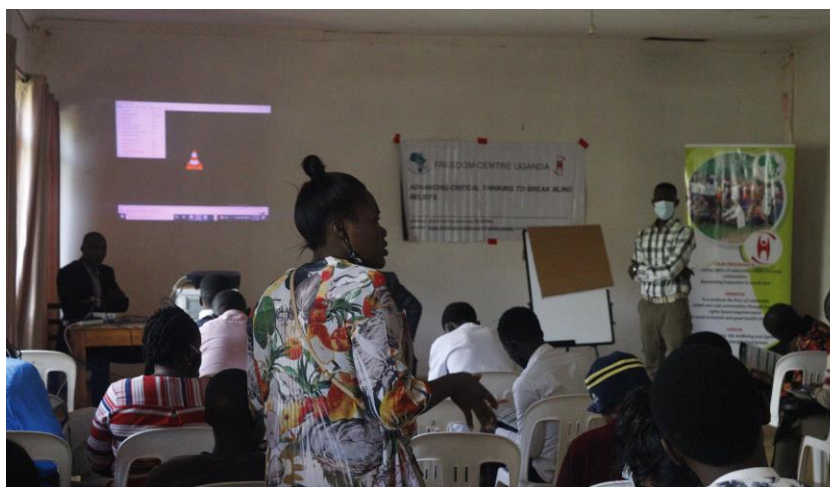


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APPRECIATTION

We are grateful to Humanist International for unending support given to freedom centre-Uganda, HI members and associates. Without your continued support this report and the project would not have been possible.

As a Humanist organization, Freedom Centre-Uganda pledges to continue spreading the word about Humanism and Human rights in western Uganda and this cannot be achieved without working with individual Humanists and Humanist institutions locally, regionally and globally.

Appreciation also goes to all grass root LGBTI individuals who gave in their precious time to effectively participate in developing this report and participate in the project. Without your full participation this report wouldn't be possible.

Appreciation also goes to Freedom Centre-Uganda staff who worked hard to develop this report so that it can be shared widely.

We also want to recognize all other Humanist organizations, groups and individual for the wonderful work you are doing in promotion Humanism, Atheism, secularism and free thinking in the world.

FREEDOM CENTRE-UGANDA

Freedom Centre-Uganda is a not for profit organization that was established in 2018 by a group of Humanists, free thinkers and human rights defenders in Mbarara city-Uganda (East Africa).

FC-Uganda aims at promoting humanistic rights, freedom of conscience, democratic freedoms and holistic right based community development initiative for wellbeing and harmonization of society. Freedom Centre's programs are well aligned with Humanist global agenda in attainment of conducive environment that facilitates full human potentials.

FC-Uganda envisions that Promoting humanism values and democratic freedoms that allow for free speech, freedom of conscience, freedom of inquiry and open society will facilitate the free flow of information and ideas that is important in a developing democratic society.

Goal

A society where individual universal human rights are granted

Mission statement

To Mobilize and organize Humanists to connect, have sense of belonging and amplify their voices and rights through capacity building, advocacy, awareness and improving livelihoods in western Uganda.

Objectives

To promote Humanist values and democratic freedoms that allow for free speech, freedom of conscience and freedom of inquiry

To promote and support Humanist human rights defenders in their work

To promote good governance and influence policy on building of a more humane society

To promote holistic and right based community development initiatives

FC activities:

- *FC-Uganda primarily offers assistance through trainings and building capacity of its Humanist members*
- *Net working to build stronger voices and partnerships*
- *Organize open dialogues and seminars/Humanist café*
- *Engage in income generating activities to improve livelihoods among humanists*
- *Conduct Research, Publication and distribution of Humanist IEC materials to promote Humanism*
- *Humanism awareness*

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Project title: Promoting Humanism among grass root LGBTI persons in Mbarara city

This project was implemented in Mbarara city south western Uganda from April 2021-December 2021 targeting 100 grass root LGBTI persons.

The Project was about building capacity of grass root LGBTI persons to strengthen their understanding of Humanism as an inclusive stance, promote critical thinking or scientific and evidence based information, the right to freedom of religion or belief and increase Humanist membership at Freedom Centre-Uganda. This amplified LGBTI voices and agency to gain control of their lives and belief and motivate self-advocacy to fight long-life discrimination by the religious community due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and belief, and gain responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

By the end of the project, LGBTI persons were able to understand and appreciate Humanism, to join the Humanist community, exchange ideas, promote the humanist philosophy and values, and work together to achieve full social and civil equality of LGBTI persons.

The Project's main objective was to build capacity of grass root LGBTI persons that have been discriminated in the religious realm, to improve their understanding of Humanism as an alternative deity, human rights (freedom of religion), improve their critical thinking skills and increase Humanist membership.

Freedom Centre-Uganda achieved these objectives through conducting Humanism, human rights and critical thinking trainings, and developing a report on LGBTI religious beliefs and Humanism to increase knowledge sharing among global Humanist community.

How the project meets the criteria of the grant program

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Why this project?

From consultations with LGBTI community in Mbarara city, we discovered that majority of grass root LGBTI persons, compared to the general Ugandan population, have no or are likely to have no religious affiliation, much less likely to be affiliated with a Christian denomination and more likely to be affiliated with a non-Christian religion, and yet they have no alternative belief system to the traditional religions. Their disaffiliation with the religion is because these religious centers on the effect of church policies and doctrine, have historically been disapproving of non-heterosexual love and relations fueling systematic discrimination and demonization of LGBTI persons, also LGBT individuals feel less welcome in many congregations whose church doctrine, church policy, or ministers or parishioners condemn same-sex relations, and for the same reasons being less likely to adopt religion into their own daily lives and beliefs.

All this left majority of LGBTI people living in belief self-doubt and were always confused of religion and humanity which has affected their social and spiritual wellbeing and furthering structural discrimination, social stigma, and isolation.

Freedom Centre-Uganda therefore, was to promote Humanism among 100 grass root LGBTI persons in Mbarara city with a view that they would appreciate and join global Humanism. This was to be achieved through building capacity of grass root LGBTI persons to increase their awareness and understanding of Humanism as an inclusive stance, human rights and critical thinking. We believe that once grass root LGBTI persons fully understand Humanism, they will join the Humanist family thus increasing membership at Freedom Centre-Uganda and globally.

INTERVENTIONS THAT WERE UNDERTAKEN

Activity 1: We organized comprehensive training workshop on Humanism

Output 1 We Trained 100 grass root LGBTI persons in Humanism

Activity 2: We organized comprehensive training workshop training on Human rights

Output 2: We trained 100 grass root LGBTI persons in human rights

Activity 3: We Designed, printed and distributed Humanism and human rights informative posters, fliers and stickers.

Output 3: We Distributed 1000 Informative information education and communication materials to LGBTI persons and to the general public.

Activity 4: We organized a meeting to recruit and orient grass root LGBTI persons into

Humanism

Output 4: We enrolled and oriented 80-100 grass root LGBTI persons into Humanism

Activity 5: We wrote and shared comprehensive report on LGBTI religious beliefs and Humanism

Output 5: We will publish and share a report with Humanist community on LGBTI religious beliefs and Humanism

LGBTI AND THE LAW IN UGANDA

The majority of the population in Uganda does not recognise LGBTI persons as entitled to the same rights as everyone else. There is a belief that the law does not protect LGBTI persons and that the rights recognised in the Constitution do not apply to LGBTI persons, and that LGBTI rights are not human rights. This belief is based on the absence of a provision in the Constitution that expressly recognises LGBTI rights as being protected by the Constitution, and also on the constitutional provisions prohibiting same sex marriages, the Penal Code provisions criminalising same sex relations and on laws that exclude LGBTI persons from accessing redress in certain circumstances.

This belief is only partly based on reality. It is true to the extent that there are no specific positive laws protecting LGBTI persons, but instead there are criminal laws that criminalise same sex relations and laws that have the effect of excluding LGBTI persons. Indeed because of the non-express protection and the criminal laws, LGBTI persons have in practice been stopped from enjoying rights, which are available to everyone else. The violations of human rights that have been documented include: the right to privacy; right to freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment; right to freedom of association; and the right to freedom of expression. It is the position of Rwizi-network that the criminalisation of same sex relations does not and cannot translate into criminalisation of individuals.

However, even within this limited environment, there are basic protections that are embedded in the Constitution and in other laws of Uganda, which protect the rights of all persons. The position of the courts at the moment is that the rights in the Constitution apply to everyone including LGBTI persons, and they can only be limited to the same extent as the rights of all other persons. Also except where there are specific restrictions in the laws for LGBTI persons, they are supposed to enjoy the same rights as everyone else. The only right that is clearly denied to LGBTI persons in the Constitution is the right to marry. Otherwise similar specific limitations would have been included if the intention was to deny LGBTI persons the other rights.

ABOUT THE LGBTI RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND HUMANISM REPORT:

Freedom Centre-Uganda had intensive engagement with the grass root LGBTI community from which we developed this report on LGBTI religious beliefs and Humanism at the end of the project to highlight lived experiences of grass root LGBTI persons and traditional religious beliefs and Humanism with a view that specific issues in this report might be lessons to and among the global Humanist community and also be used to raise awareness on a global scale or at an academic level the issues or challenges facing LGBTI person in western Uganda and Uganda as whole.

This report may also inspire other humanists around the world to replicate our interventions targeting promotion of Humanism among grass root LGBTI groups in their countries.

RESPONSE ON LGBTI RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND HUMANISM

We conducted a survey using focus group discussions and administered questioners. The responses from grass root LGBTI persons were captured to inform this report. The questions and responses have been highlighted below.

1

From the question

Have you ever been in a religious congregation and a preacher utters statements that attack your personality?

Response;

"Most of the time i listen to a radio, pastors are always saying the LGBTI people are agents of the devil and supported by devils advocates".

"One time was in church and the pastor quoted in the bible revelation 3:1 that homosexuality is not good for human beings and is agents of illuminate".

"I was once told to repent and leave same sex acts".

"One time a reverend came with a video attacking LGBT community I felt out of place".

"Some pastors say gay people are not accomplished by God and that God doesn't want them"

"Religious people think and say gay people are not people like them so they will not go to heaven".

"One pastor asserted that gay people are the indication of the world coming to an end"

"My walking postures for example walking like a woman changed because whenever was church the whole congregation could start looking at me and felt shy which made me dislike to go back to church"

2

From the question

How did you feel after such statements?

Response

"I was traumatized",

"I felt bad",

"Self-discriminated",

"I felt like the pastor hates her job"

"I felt guilty and out of place",

"I was uncomfortable and very annoyed with the utterances"

"I felt like not going back to church anymore"

"I thought i will be going to hell when I die".

3

From the question

*Did the discriminatory statement affect your religious beliefs? **How?***

Response

"I thought that religion was not real"

"i never changed my beliefs but changed the ways and values and created the hatred".

"We never went back to church",

"We felt as if we were abandoned by religion so no need to believe in it"

"I tried to change my body behavior and talking to continue going to the mosque to keep my beliefs"

"I started Self judgments and blame because what nature had made me inside"

4

From the question

*Has the whole experience discouraged you from attending religious congregations?
If yes,
How have you been living your spiritual life? ie living without a religious community*

Response

"Some of us go back to church with an attitude of I don't care".

"We go there because Jesus says you come to the way you are".

"I go because God didn't make mistakes"

"Some of us backslide because we became spiritually weak and never went back and we have lived without religion"

"Some of us decided to pray on our own without going to the mosques".

5

From the question

*Do you think one can live without
belonging to a particular religion?
Out of the 100% of participants in
the group*

Response

70% answered yes

30 % answered no.

Would like to join a non-religious community?
Out of the 100% of participants in the group

Response

73.3% answered yes

20.7% answered no

*6% answered they
don't know*

LESSONS LEARNT

- 1) LGBTI person are greatly discriminated in the religious community and this has greatly affected their religious beliefs and the practice has subjected them to live in self isolation.
- 2) LGBTI persons live in religious self denial and think they are outcasts in the eyes of the most high
- 3) Majority of grass root LGBTI persons are not aware of the possibility of living a non-religious life.
- 4) Some of the LGBTI persons in Uganda have the desire to start their own worshipping centres where they can exercise their right to religion and fulfill their spiritual desires.
- 5) Poverty and lack of education among grass root LGBTI persons has greatly

RECOMMENDATION

- *Organized Humanists should target engaging and supporting grassroots LGBTI person to discover non-religious life stances existing to ease the burden of religious discrimination, isolation and self hate.*
- *There in a great need of establishing Humanist educational institutions that will target religious discriminated groups in society*
- *There is a need to popularize Humanism and other non-religious life stance in the world targeting mostly developing countries*

CONCLUSION

Grass root LGBTI persons in Uganda continue to be discriminated, isolated, hated and harassed in religious spheres like it is elsewhere. The uniqueness with grass root LGBTI in developing countries like Uganda is that majority don't know that they can live happily without religion. They live a life full of self-denial, self-doubt, contemplating how they will end up in hell after death. This has been exacerbated by increased poverty, illiteracy and lack organization which limits their capacities to live a life of fulfillment. Efforts should be put to empower grass root LGBTI persons in developing countries like Uganda to embrace Humanism and other non-religious belief systems.

