

The Journey of Resilience: Challenges Faced by the LGBTIQ Community in Uganda since 2020

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Feb. 2025



The LGBTIQ community in Uganda has faced countless challenges over the years, with each phase seeming tougher than the last. Since 2020, the struggle for survival and dignity has only deepened, bringing with it a host of difficulties that have tested our resilience as a community and as an organization.

The COVID-19 Pandemic: Isolation and Vulnerability

The onset of COVID-19 in 2020 was a devastating blow to the LGBTIQ community. The pandemic exacerbated the vulnerability of many community members who were already living on the margins of society. Lockdowns and movement restrictions meant limited access to health services, especially for those living with HIV, who faced severe challenges in accessing essential medication and care. Mental health issues, food insecurity, and homelessness became rampant as many lost their livelihoods and found themselves cut off from support networks.

Mbarara Rise Foundation worked tirelessly to fill these gaps, but the needs far outweighed the resources available. We witnessed firsthand the deepening crisis, with many left without lifesaving HIV treatment and basic necessities.

The Reintroduction of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in 2023: Escalating Fear and Persecution

Just as we began to recover from the pandemic's impact, the reintroduction of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in 2023 brought another wave of challenges. This legislation reignited fear, stigma, and persecution against the LGBTIQ community. Community members were forced to go into hiding once again, afraid to access services or even be seen in public spaces.

For organizations like ours, the bill has made our work even more difficult and dangerous. Providing support and protection to our community has become a constant battle against legal and social constraints. The hostile environment has limited our reach and placed many at risk of violence, arrest, and discrimination.

The Impact of Funding Cuts: A Lifeline Severed

Another devastating blow came with the reduction and eventual halting of aid from the Trump administration. This cut had far-reaching consequences for LGBTIQ-focused programs, particularly those aimed at health services. Approximately 80% of our programs were directly affected, leading to critical shortages in funding for HIV prevention and care services.

The impact has been especially severe for those living with HIV. Many community members now struggle to access HIV drug refills, leaving them vulnerable to treatment interruptions and serious health complications. Without consistent support, the gains made in HIV treatment and care are quickly being lost, and we're seeing a rise in preventable health crises.

A Tough Road Ahead: Preparing for the Future

Since 2020, the road for the LGBTIQ community in Uganda has been extraordinarily tough. From the isolation and despair of the pandemic to the renewed legal persecution under the Anti-Homosexuality Bill and the withdrawal of critical funding, we have endured countless setbacks.

Looking ahead, the 2026 general elections bring yet another layer of uncertainty. Political transitions in Uganda have historically been accompanied by heightened tension, increased crackdowns on vulnerable communities, and restricted civil liberties. As we approach this critical period, we anticipate new challenges that may further limit our operations and jeopardize the safety and well-being of the LGBTIQ community.

Despite all of this, Mbarara Rise Foundation remains steadfast. We are determined to push forward, to continue fighting for our community, and to build a future where every person can live freely and with dignity. The resilience and courage of the LGBTIQ community inspire us daily, and we will not stop until we see meaningful change.

Together, we will weather this storm, just as we have before and we will emerge stronger.

Staying Alive!