

Faith, Sexuality and Gender Diversity in Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland



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1. Agenda for the Faith, Sexuality and Gender Diversity in Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland, Regional Meeting (WITS, September 2016)

Faith, Gender & Sexuality: Regional Study Regional Meeting 6 September 2016 Wits Club, Johannesburg	
Agenda	
8:00-8:30	Welcome & Tea
8:30-8:45	Opening
8:45-9:45	Presentation 1: Rock of Hope*
9:45-10:45	Presentation 2: Matrix*
10:45-11:00	Tea
11:00-12:00	Presentation 3: WiCDS*
12:00-13:00	Plenary Discussion
	<i>What has come out of presentations?</i>
	<i>Differences/Similarities</i>
13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00-14:30	Small group discussions
	<i>Do you want to continue engaging with religious communities?</i>
	<i>What would this engagement look like? Or include?</i>
	<i>What would you need to achieve this?</i>
14:30-16:00	Plenary discussion
16:00	Closing

***Partner Presentations**

Short recap of the dialogue hosted: what/where/when

Answer to questions:

1. What have been the most significant challenges and achievements with regards to engaging religious communities and leaders in advancing the rights sexual minorities?
2. What is the messaging from religious leaders around gender, sexuality, and sexual health?
3. How do LGBTI individuals navigate religious communities they are part of?
4. What is needed going forward in terms of advocacy around LGBTI and sexual health issues across religious communities (i.e. strategies, interventions, etc.)

2. Attendance Register for the Faith, Sexuality and Gender Diversity in Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland, Regional Meeting (WITS, September 2016)



Activity: FAITH, GENDER & SEXUALITY DIALOGUE
Venue: WITS CLUB WITS UNIVERSITY
Date: 6 SEPTEMBER 2016

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Activity: FAITH, GENDER & SEXUALITY DIALOGUE
Venue: WITS CLUB WITS UNIVERSITY
Date: 6 SEPTEMBER 2016

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3. Report from the Faith, Sexuality and Gender Diversity in Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland, Regional Meeting (WITS, 06 September 2016)



Faith, Sexuality and Gender Diversity in Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland

Aids Foundation South Africa (AFSA)
Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA)
Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS)

In partnership with
Rock of Hope (Swaziland)
Matrix (Lesotho)



Introduction

There has recently been increased interest in the intersection of faith and sexual/gender diversity in Southern Africa. In addition, there have been numerous initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue and greater understanding between faith communities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities. Recent examples of these initiatives include a panAfrican convening of queer activist and religious leaders in Pietermaritzburg in 2016, as well as dialogues in Johannesburg that convened faith communities and LGBTI community representatives. At a regional level, much LGBTI activism has become increasingly aware of the need to engage religious leaders and faith communities given the common trope of homosexuality as both unAfrican and unChristian. With this project funded by AFSA, GALA in partnership with the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS) convened a regional study on faith, gender and sexuality in the Southern African region, and involved partner organizations in Lesotho (Matrix) and Swaziland (Rock of Hope). The project aimed to shed light on the following questions:

- What have been the most significant challenges and achievements with regards to engaging religious communities and leaders in advancing the rights of sexual minorities?
- What is the messaging from religious leaders around gender, sexuality, and sexual health?
- How do LGBTI individuals navigate the religious communities they are part of?
- What is needed going forward in terms of advocacy around LGBTI and sexual health issues across religious communities (i.e. strategies, interventions, etc.)?

Method

The above questions were pursued using a participatory-action research methodology, in which partner organizations were given creative license over the dialogue event(s) they hosted, and were free to determine the format and structure of their respective dialogues with the only requirements for the dialogues being that they:

- Bring together LGBTI activists and people from religious communities (ideally, a range of religions will be represented, including traditional leaders and traditional healers)
- Have at least 25 participants
- Take place before 1 August 2016
- Address the issues that need to be reported on (as stated above)

The dialogues that were hosted by each partner country were therefore diverse in their structure and content, given the differences of our respective contexts. Finally, each partner organisation was to prepare a report based on the outcomes of their dialogue to share at the regional meeting in September, by responding to the following questions:

- What have been the most significant challenges and achievements with regards to engaging religious communities and leaders in advancing the rights of sexual minorities?
- What is the messaging from religious leaders around gender, sexuality, and sexual health?
- How do LGBTI individuals navigate the religious communities they are part of?
- What is needed going forward in terms of advocacy around LGBTI and sexual health issues across religious communities (i.e. strategies, interventions, etc.)

The reports prepared by each organization provide insight into the relationships between religious communities and queer/LGBTI activists in South Africa, Lesotho, and Swaziland, and respond to these questions. Through the dialogues hosted by each partner country and the sharing of these experiences at the September Regional Meeting, we were able to collectively reflect on the following:

- Possible new tools and processes to engage religious leaders and faith communities on LGBTI issues
- How to sensitize key religious stakeholders in Southern Africa around LGBTI issues
- Consideration of the best next steps in terms of advocacy on LGBTI rights in religion across Southern Africa
- Clarification on ways to include the religious sector in programming to support the health and well-being of LGBTI populations across Southern Africa

It is this latter set of questions that the remainder of this report focuses on by presenting the outcomes of discussion at the September Regional Meeting.

The Regional Meeting

On September 6, WiCDS and GALA hosted a convening of the three partner organisations, Matrix (Lesotho), Rock of Hope (Swaziland) and WiCDS (South Africa). Each country prepared a report and presentation based on their respective dialogues and the findings in relation to the aforementioned questions. The individual reports from the partner organisations are attached separately. In addition to bringing together the project partners from the three organizations, the meeting included SA-based theologians and religious leaders (some of whom identify as LGBTQIA+) who are allies to sexual minorities in South Africa. The presence of these allies enabled the generation of additional ideas for engaging religious communities and brought important and necessary contextual knowledge to the conversation. The meeting was facilitated by Khosi Xaba from GALA.

In this report, we focus on the content of the regional meeting and the outcomes of our discussion of the questions posed above.

1. New tools and processes to engage religious leaders and faith communities on LGBTI issues

The methodologies used to convene dialogues between religious leaders and LGBTI activists in Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa provide examples of successful endeavors to bring together these groups. While each of the dialogues asked the same questions, each took a different form that was sensitive and responsive to the different contexts. Furthermore, each dialogue had different

levels of significance for each partner. In Swaziland for example, it was the first dialogue of its kind and attracted positive media attention, whereas in Lesotho the dialogue was one of several other engagements and interventions led by Matrix to engage religious communities and leaders. In South Africa, the dialogue responded to a growing interest in the intersection of faith and sexual/gender diversity in Southern Africa in very recent times.

The dialogue hosted in Swaziland took the form of a series of engagements between Rock of Hope and religious leaders in order to build meaningful relationships, as well as to allow religious leaders the opportunity to get to know LGBTI people on an individual and personal level. Finally, the dialogue was also aimed at interrupting myths and stereotypes about sexual minorities. As Soyeze, a representative from Rock of Hope explained, the dialogue was:

“a productive learning curve for everyone. We were able to stop pastors from quoting passages that were problematic. Religious leaders actually listened to what we were saying”

The dialogue also enabled Rock of Hope and religious allies to develop strategies for the way forward. As the first dialogue of its kind in Swaziland, the method of dialogue has been incredibly successful in fostering new partnerships which themselves have since provided Rock of Hope with unprecedented access to the Ministry of Health to discuss LGBTI issues.

In Lesotho, the dialogue provided Matrix with an opportunity to have a unique three-day dialogue with religious leaders that included information sharing and storytelling, discussion, and screening of the film Pray for Bobby. Matrix reported that personal story sharing between LGBTI and faith leaders was a successful method of engagement, as was enabling religious leaders to facilitate a number of the sessions. It was reported that this method has encouraged religious leaders to take a lead in advancing advocacy work to their peers and congregations. Religious leaders who attended the dialogue volunteered to share their views and their support for LGBTI people in their communities in the form of video testimonies.





In South Africa, the event engaged academics as well as queer activists and religious leaders, giving it less of an advocacy dimension than the Swaziland project. Rather, the dialogue formed part of ongoing conversations in various spaces about faith, gender and sexuality. For many LGBTI activists in attendance, however, it was the first time that they had engaged with religious leaders and people of faith on issues of gender and sexuality.

Sensitizing of key religious stakeholders in Southern Africa around LGBTI issues

As demonstrated in the discussion above, the dialogues proved to be a successful method for sensitizing religious stakeholders around LGBTI issues. Each partner organization reported successful dialogues and different outcomes in relation to the sensitization of religious stakeholders around LGBTI issues. In South Africa, the dialogue considered the usefulness of the online Faith, Gender and Sexuality toolkit for working in religious communities. The issue of exclusion, and the negative health outcomes that intolerance around sexual and gender diversity creates for sexual minorities, emerged as a cross-cutting theme around the need to sensitize religious stakeholders. In the regional meeting, Rev. Tebogo Klaas also addressed the generational challenges of doing this work. He explained that it is important for religious leaders of the older generation to acknowledge that we are working with a new generation; a generation which is different from the one that suffered under apartheid. Specifically, he explained that the anti-apartheid struggle brought people together across religious differences through a shared focus on equality and the evil of apartheid. The context has now shifted and there is no longer a clear agenda bringing together different groups in relation to the struggle for social justice.

In Lesotho, there is a need to sensitize the religious community and LGBTI communities about one another, as there is fear on both sides as a result of a lack of understanding about one another. Mistrust amongst LGBTI activists is related to the fact that “religious leaders have used public spaces to detrimentally obliterate our LGBTI stance and space in the community”. Therefore, sensitization is imperative in Lesotho in order to stem the proliferation of damaging discourses. Furthermore, representatives from Rock of Hope explained that the dialogues emphasized the importance of having stability and cohesion in the areas of family, social life/friends, and spiritual life/guidance for individual well-being. Explaining that “we face big struggles and have been let down by the church”, Tampose Mothopeng explained that LGBTI people are left without any psychosocial support. Therefore, there is a sense of urgency in sensitizing religious leaders and communities to the issues and challenges faced by LGBTI people, something that was said could be achieved through dialogue as a powerful tool for interrupting pervasive and damaging stereotypes and stigmas.

In Swaziland, it was explained that the dialogue, “created a platform where we could discuss and engage with religious leaders on HIV, stigma and discrimination”. It was explained that a strategic decision was made to use stigma as an entry point to discussion regarding the role of the church in offering psychological support for LGBTI people, many whom have been rejected by their families. As in South Africa and Lesotho, sensitization is not only a matter of political rights, but one of psychological support and access to health and other support services for LGBTI people. Next steps in terms of advocacy for LGBTI rights with religious stakeholders and communities across Southern Africa

A variety of potential next steps were suggested as strategies to advance advocacy on LGBTI rights in relation to religious stakeholders and communities:

- Matrix is developing a documentary featuring religious leaders working to support LGBTI people in Lesotho. Matrix will also continue their ongoing work to engage religious communities.
- Rock of Hope plans to convene more dialogue sessions with religious leaders. Here it was also mentioned that the religious leaders they are working with are beginning to have conversations amongst themselves about LGBTI issues.
- WiCDs and GALA discussed the possibility of creating workshops for LGBTI activists about how to engage religious communities.
- All partners expressed a desire for a ‘train the trainer’ course for religious leaders wanting to eliminate intolerance, prejudice and stigma around LGBTI people in their communities. This suggestion emerges from the existing lack of appropriately located and skilled facilitators capable of working in this area.

Clarification on ways to include the religious sector in programming to support the health and well-being of LGBTI populations across Southern Africa

- One point that emerged consistently throughout the discussion at the September Regional Meeting was that activists should avoid the language of LGBTI identity politics, given its western connotation and Anglocentric understanding of sexual orientation and gender diversity. Relatedly, the religious leaders present emphasized that the language of ‘human rights’ also creates defensiveness amongst religious communities. It was suggested that engagements around sexual and gender diversity in religious communities should rather start at the point of ‘dignity of the human person’ and prophetic tradition.
- If religious communities and leaders are to be successfully engaged, there is a need for LGBTI people to become more literate in the languages of religious communities. In addition to training workshops, this would also involve LGBTI activists engaging with queer

and feminist theology. The creation of a basic glossary of theological terms was suggested as a resource that would be helpful for queer activists.

- The central motivation behind the dialogues was the recognition of the importance of having religious allies in the struggle against sex and gender based oppression, exclusion and violence. There is value to having spaces where people can articulate where they are at in relation to the issues, and for LGBTI people to ask religious leaders, “What do you think we are talking about when we talk about sex and gender diversity”, “What does “abomination” mean?”, “What does “sex act” mean”. Religious leaders and theologians present at the regional meeting confirmed that many religious leaders lack the space to discuss these issues.
- The religious leaders and theologians present at the regional meeting expressed the need for the development of a contextual queer theology, in that much of this literature is currently American and does not fit particularly well in this (African) context.
- It was agreed that there is a need to deconstruct the false dichotomy of “LGBTI” and “religious” communities in our work, and the notions that one cannot be queer in religious spaces, and that one cannot be religious in queer spaces. There are many LGBTI people of faith, meaning that we cannot speak of these as mutually exclusive categories.
- Reverend Tebogo Klaas provocatively suggested that we should consider using more confrontational tactics to intervene in oppressive and exclusionary theology so that religious leaders will take the messages of inclusion more seriously. He suggested, “perhaps we shouldn’t be so nice and friendly” and that “we need to be ready to engage in confrontational activities... Shock therapies using language in the church helping pastors and leaders to be freed from something that makes them oppressive.” He continued, explaining that this “would depend on who is put in place to engage in these strategies - LGBTI allies in the church who critique it of its own response to this critical issue to raise the issues.”
- There is a need for further research into faith, gender and sexuality in the region. The experience of each dialogue opened up important areas for further investigation. In Lesotho, for instance, Matrix has been doing work in faith communities for a long time but it was explained that there has yet to be visible impact in the country in terms of the reduction of intolerant views. It was discussed that this solidarity work requires research into the problem itself. As Tampose Mothopeng from Matrix explained, in their context, there is a need to understand “why is it that we have been doing all this work but there isn’t much change. We need a clear strategy for working with religious leaders who are willing to engage with us, and we need to know what is on the ground”.



Conclusion

This regional study on faith, gender and sexuality was an important initiative that generated new insights into advocacy work seeking to bring together LGBTI activists and religious stakeholders. There is great scope and need for future work in the area, and local LGBTI organizations in the region such as Matrix, Rock of Hope, GALA and WiCDS are making important inroads in their respective contexts to bring together LGBTI activists and religious stakeholders. While there is a danger in the work becoming driven by donor agendas, there is a need and desire for sensitization work to happen in religious communities where homophobic, transphobic, and sexist ideologies are perpetuated. Furthermore, recognition of the power of religious communities within the society in general, especially in Swaziland where religion and state are inseparable, creates a visible need for sensitization of religious stakeholders. It would be worthwhile pursuing some of the possible future directions and strategies discussed above, in partnership with regional organizations, religious stakeholders and allies. This study also provides an apt illustration of the usefulness of dialogue as a strategy for negotiating some of the challenges that arise in our diverse societies. Within the context of this project, at least, dialogue served as an appropriate and effective strategy for opening the lines of understanding and empathy between sexual minorities and religious leaders and communities.

3. Scribe Notes and Powerpoint Presentations from the Regional Meeting



(Notes taken by Jamil Khan, Linda Chernis and Karin Tan. The sections in black were taken by Jamil, green by Karin and blue by Linda.)

8:30 – 08:45 Opening: Finn (Notes taken by Jamil)

- The work for queer communities in social justice is happening at a regional level
- Funders are asking what's happening
- In Lesotho Matrix is doing groundbreaking work
- Rock of Hope has suffered a loss, but has managed to continue to make an impact
- Gala has archives that chart the history of same sex desires across the continent
- Discuss more challenging aspects of activism
- Religious discourses are more challenging when doing social justice work
- Many queer people are hurt by religion
- Religion has a long colonial history
- Sacred texts have been used in ways that harm the queer community
- Desire and need to come to together to see how best to engage with religious leaders and to find a sense of belonging for those of faith.
- No sector should be immune to discussing issues around oppression of LGBTI communities
- Open space, safe space for new, challenging and radical perspectives
- How best to work at intersection of faith, gender and sexuality
- Discuss where we think we should be going or could be going engaging with pastors, the bible, scripture and liturgy



Presentation 1: Rock of Hope (notes taken by Karin)

Soyez's (Tiyeta Nkosingiphile Mdluli – SM) Presentation (Notes taken in the format of Soyez's powerpoint presentation)

- The What
 - o Expressed a profound impact, as it was their first time gathering in a room of with reverends and pastors.
 - o The dialogue allowed them a platform to discuss HIV, stigma and discrimination.
 - o Religion has a huge effect on the challenges of the LGBTI community, as it is a major influence on the community's opinion. Therefore it is a strategic move to approach religious leaders to get them thinking about stigma, tolerance etc.
 - o Expressed that it was the perfect time for this discussion to happen because in Swaziland newspapers were misrepresenting the LGBTI community and
 - o There was a need to clarify what happened in LGBTI lifestyles
 - o They were able to voice their frustrations
 - o Important to speak and to listen
- The When
 - o There was a struggle with the logistics of people's different schedules
 - o There was an expectation of 20-30 different religious leaders, turnout of ± 20
 - o Invitation
- balance and shape churches and ministries – churches honoured our invitation
 - o The intention was to have the religious leaders spend a night at the hotel, but budget restraints prevented such plans.
 - o Decision was to, instead of having 10 pastors for 3 days, rather have 30 in one.
- The Where
 - o In Swaziland, the reputation of religious leaders is a big concern. They are very concerned about how they are portrayed and principles
 - o Hosted at the George Hotel, which was a somewhat neutral space. They (either side?) could be protected – common ground for both parties – accessibility without hindrance, food, provisions, etc.
- The Who
 - o "Swaziland is the Pulpit of Africa" – they contacted Christians, Islamic faith and Baha'i (25 leaders participated).
 - o There are multiple structures/levels that needed to be reached. Approached the League of Churches, The Conference of Churches, the Council of Churches.
- The How
 - o Aimed for transparency in order to prevent suspicion.
- Results
 - o Productive, learning curve
 - o Attitudes and agenda were dealt with
 - o Some pastors changed their minds
 - o Need for these dialogues.



The Dialogue

A RECAP OF THE RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN SWAZILAND

A PRESENTATION BY SOYEZ MDLULI

THE WHAT

- This was a first of its kind in the kingdom of Swaziland, a country wholly invested in the religion
- This was the ultimate opportunity for the LGBTI community to open up about their experiences with the church.
- Being raised in religious environment, we felt this was the utmost psychosocial support that the LGBTI ever so needed. And yet was not receiving

The What

- This was going to open the doors to honesty, to remove the myth surrounding what LGBTI is about. I.E demons, abomination
- This was going to finally give the LGBTI some inner peace and contentment about what the church honestly feel about us as a human race.

The When

- We had to find a suitable date for both the religious leaders and the LGBTI activist. Thus we had to move the proposed weekend, and make it be on a weekday.
- This was also true, to the expects we had lent to lead the conversation in a more professional way.
- We also contemplated on whether the dialogue should be held over night, in a hotel where we planned to have the religious leaders booked for the night, and also the activist. We compared the costs of booking overnight and having a day event.

The Where

- The dialogue was a very sensitive one and the religious leaders had to be strictly protected, from the public. The fear was having outside forces hijack the dialogue, and thus jeopardise the religious leaders standing in society.
- This had to be held in a common ground for both the religious leads and the activists. I.E it couldn't have been held in a church, or in our boardroom.
- Another point to consider was the accessibility of the venue. It had to be centred for everyone. Seeing everyone had to be able to get to and from the venue, without hindrance
- We had to make sure it had adequate food provision for everyone involved.!!!

The How

- Invitations were sent to 25 leaders ,it comprised the Baha'i faith ,Islamic faith and the Christianity
- Only pastors from the Christian community showed interest
- we addressed the invitations in a respectful and honest manner the
- The three Christian leadership structures(church forum, council of churches, league of churches) were strategically used to invite the pastors in a bid to balance the ancient and ministries churches

The Who

- Swaziland is multi religious state, that meant our scope had to be broad and inclusive.
- We had to consider their national leadership. We have three structures in the church leadership. The League of Churches, The Conference of Churches and The Council of churches. All structures we approached.

Results

- It was a productive and a learning curve for everyone
- Attitudes and secret agendas were dealt with in a tactful way
- as much as the pastors were reluctant to offer their true opinions our conversations changed their mind sets and they started pondering about what we were saying
- Rock of hope finally got them in tune in a sense that they stated that they need dialogues before they are able to speak with one voice and make a national statement on sexual and gender diversity

Melz (Melusi Siboniso Simelane - MS) Presentation: Challenges, Achievements and Navigating Religious Space and the Way Forward (Notes taken in the format of Melz's powerpoint presentation)

- Challenges

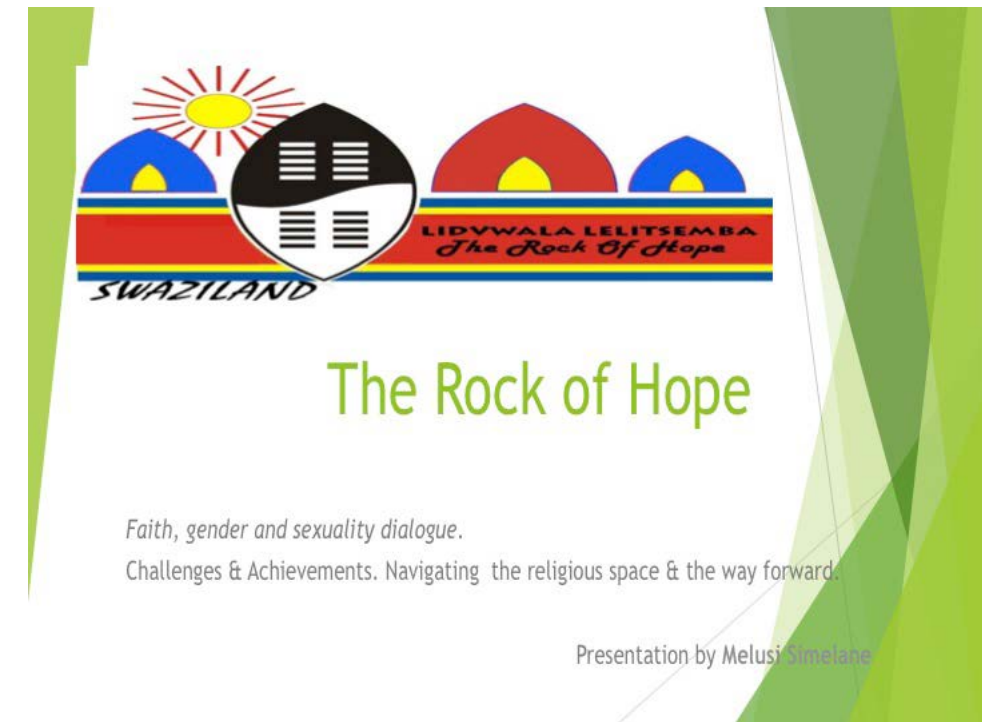
- o Swaziland is predominantly Christian and people don't necessarily have to go to church to maintain their beliefs. Morality is still very much determined by religion.
- o Culture and tradition is in line with religion. There were fears from both parties as there is a lack of clarity, each side does not know each other's problems and the fear is in the not knowing.
- o The public space – pastors and royalty are against LGBTI. They use and are able to control public space and media. This is not only specific to LGBTI issues, but also all things.
- o (Melz was advised against using the coat of arms but forgot to remove it from his powerpoint presentation)
- o The king is the absolute monarch – how can one vocalize their existence
- o Prime Minister has often dodged LGBTI issues
- o 3 structures of power were asked to assist in getting religious leaders together. Sent invitations that were said to have been sent, but none of those intended to receive an invite received one. (assuming that the operation was sabotaged, someone is lying)
 - Church forum
 - Legal council
 - ???
- o Those of the Islamic faith did not respond.

- Achievements:

- o 27 pastors attended – based on people who knew people or people they knew and talking to people
- o The chair person of the traditional church attended
- o They were able to have dialogue and openness
- o The leaders who attended agreed to assist in spreading the word/sensitizing others
- o Activists and other LGBTI people were able to share their experiences with the church.
- o The media was invited and had impressive and encouraging engagement.
- o The religious leaders/representatives did not want to acknowledge/be publicly affiliated with LGBTI, but still wanted to have further engagement.
- o Were able to shut bibles and engaged and spoke to each other as people, about life, etc.
- o Church forum is part of.... SHACO was helpful in assisting in assisting with contact with religious people
- o A prominent newspaper wanted to publish a story about LGBTI experiences.
- o Leaders acknowledge that they use the bible to oppress

- Navigating the Religious Space

- o Friends, family and spirituality is needed to navigate life and LGBTI are being let down by the church. There is a systematic exclusion because of homosexual acts. They are left without psychosocial support. There is a hope that the dialogue will help.
- o Risk is more for transgendered people.
- o Patriarchy is confused by trans people and thus results in systematic exclusion.
- o Assumed that homosexuality is the cause of divorce.
- o When LGBTI people try and create their own religious space, they are often faced with criticism, they are accused of it being a front for acts of immorality – which is a problem.

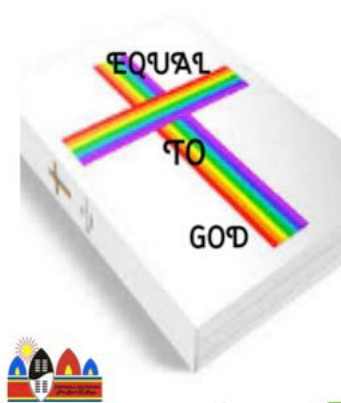


Challenges

- ▶ Swaziland is a predominantly Christian country. Societal discrimination is prevalent
- ▶ There is a collaborative consensus of zero tolerance amongst religious and traditional leaders
- ▶ There were great fears from both the LGBTI community and the religious community. This was as a result of not being clear with the content of the other.

Challenges

- ▶ They have from time to time utilized the public space (media) to detrimentally obliterate our (LGBTI) stance and space in the society.
- ▶ There is a draconian influence by religious leader in the political and societal groupings when it comes to LGBTI issues.



- ▶ All these have made it a very complicated process sending invitations to the clergymen in Swaziland.
- ▶ The leadership structure of the faith in the country wasn't forthcoming. They were deceitful in helping us invite pastors.



Challenges

- ▶ His Majesty has time and again made utterances to the effect that LGBTI issues aren't an issue at all, for Swaziland
- ▶ Prime Minister has continuously played an isolate and destroy game with LGBTI issues.



Challenges

- ▶ The Islamic faith didn't even respond to our invitation.
- ▶ The church and its power dynamics were the biggest barrier in this regard; the relationship between the church and the state.



Achievements

- ▶ We managed to invite numerous pastors to the dialogue and we had the chairperson of one of the leadership structures present.
- ▶ The dialogue itself created an avenue of open and honest conversation between Activists and clergymen.
- ▶ We made a resounding impact in both the clergymen in attendance and those who refused to attend. We received calls and texts afterwards, showing an interest in learning about what we do.
- ▶ Activist we allowed to share their experiences in the presence of the pastors.

Achievements

- ▶ Religious leader elected to hold on publicly pronouncing they are opening their arms to the LGBTI community, however, they did ask for more dialogue to understand LGBTI issues centre on.
- ▶ Leaders we very clear on the stance of the Bible, however agreed that some issues need for the logical deliberation of life as we know it, hence they elected to redress their leadership in their respective structures.

Achievements

- ▶ The media was invited & reported very impressively. They were warned against any sensationalism of the dialogue, and they listened & even contributed to the furtherance of the dialogue.



Achievements

- ▶ The church forum, parallel to the church leadership, is an embodiment in the CANGO - SHACO (Swaziland HIV/AIDS Consortium), was very supportive & was in attendance.



Achievements

- We managed to reach to a broader & more reputable group in the country. The Nation Magazine, a very reputable publication in the country, did a story, which will be published in their September issue.



Achievements

- The realisation of the error of being ignorant towards LGBTI issues was the consensus on the religious leaders part. This created an enabling environment for further dialogue.



Navigating The Religious Space



Navigating The Religious Space

- We are faced with the biggest struggle as a community, and we have been let down by the Church.
- LGBTI persons are a festival of systematic exclusion which leads to expulsion from their inhabitant spaces; mostly churches.
- LGBTI persons are left without any psychosocial support, thus the need for the dialogue, especially for the Rock of Hope.

Navigating The Religious Space

- ▶ With the patriarchal thinking amongst the church, it is more difficult for the Transgender community.
- ▶ It is hard for them to attend church and be able to express, in accordance with their gender indent.



Navigating The Religious Space

- ▶ There has been an indication, to the effect that, some divorces are a result of Coerced marriages, citing that LGBTI persons conceal their true identity and get to the point of marriage.
- ▶ There is a differing ideology in some churches, where they have the belief that 'homosexuality' is a phase, and they have put them through rehabilitative processes, which involve, exorcism styled interventions.
- ▶ Other prominent LGBTI activist, have established, like in RSA, a church of their own. However, this hasn't been much help as it receives criticism for being a front for immoralities and ungodliness.



Thuthu Magagula (TM) Presentation (no powerpoint):

- Didn't get much opportunity to find ways to move forward. What LGBTI needs is more dialogue.
 - Out of the 27 leaders who attended, only six were willing to express and engage. The rest were making statements like, "come to our church and we will pray for you."
 - Recommended strategies: further dialogue –
 - o Put the responsibility on the Rock of Hope.
 - o Include other religions
 - People denied receiving invitations despite claims that they had been delivered.
 - Christian group want to continue conversations but in isolation
 - Support to say they are willing to publically show solidarity and take action against violence.
 - There is a disconnect between activists and religious leaders.
 - Create and share resources to increase their understanding.
 - After the dialogue, there was a feeling that there was a need to create a working community.
 - 8 pastors were willing to engage.
 - 3 way-forward meetings in order to get involved.
 - Only three out of the eight said they would be willing to sensitize their followers to LGBTI issues and presence.
 - 225 churches in Swaziland – churches are the ones with power.
 - Others said it was too early for them to bring these dialogues to the public.
 - Civil Society Organization – health portfolio – 8/9 September 2016
- This is an opportunity as they have never been in a position to sit with parliament; because of religious dialogue they are now able to access a space never before entered.
- The dialogue is an entry point – there is nothing yet set in stone, but overall this exercise was a huge success.

Q&A

- o Linda Chernis (LC): Council of Churches to distribute invitations – was it deceitful?
 - A: it was learnt that to invite it is necessary to go through church bodies but invitations hadn't been received. They said they had been sent, the intended recipients claimed to not have received.
- o LC: Rock of Hope sounds religious?
 - A: No, it is just a name that is intended to build trust in the organization amongst LGBTI community
- o Nokuthula Dhladhla (ND): the Church has been quite guilty of oppression. Were there any woman pastors?
 - A: Yes, one woman pastor who was giving a presentation was very strong and opinionated (against the LGBTI cause). Someone jokingly said that according to the bible, women aren't supposed to occupy roles in leadership.
- o Q (forgot who the questioner was): what were their strategies for moving forward?
 - A: questions asking what does the bible say about women on women sex. He said it would be confusing.

Basically all conversation about the bible was agreed to be suspended. Rather talk about life and the love of god rather than details and anecdotes from the bible.

- o Vivid (V): What is the age demographic of these church leaders?
 - A: there was no standard age. They were mostly older. Only a few were under the age of thirty, most of them were above, up until around the age of 85.
- o ND: Do you know what makes these 6 or 8 people willing to engage?
 - A: Collectively they agreed that there needs to be a conversation. We suggested to have more meetings and these 6 or 8 volunteered to chat. Those that volunteered were mainly from more urban areas. They seemed more 'learned' in my sense from one on one conversations, this is my impression, they are more theological.
- o TKL: to add on Rev. Nokuthula's question: at least the process has started. Numbers can be discouraging, age difference, especially LGBTI people are generally quite young, sometimes that can be quite an obstacle. Pastors want to be addressed by other pastors. Activists also have other obstacles. Most of the time the dialogues, pastors want to hear from other pastors. Also note the language, generally it is English, be mindful of those kinds of things.
- o Teboho Klaas (TKL): I am quite impressed. It has to be about the masses, but it only takes a small number of people to spark the fire. Don't be afraid to accept your achievements. Perhaps look at a document called the Kairos Document for inspiration. It is a resource available on the internet, not very well known. It speaks about apartheid and churches. Helps to understand the institution, issues of the state of churches and their closeness to those in power. It is a useful tool to help understand those dynamics. It is about the domination of one on another. I want to know, when you say ancient churches, what do you mean?
 - A: Roman Missionary, Zionists. The Church forum is a church organization that deals with HIV in the church.



Presentation 2: Matrix (Integration of Spirituality and Sexuality in Lesotho) (Notes taken by Jamil)

1. Recap

- Matrix creates conducive environment for LGBTI to exercise their rights and encourage social development in the country
- Possibly the only LGBTI organization in Lesotho
- Tried to make workshop specific because there have been different engagements with religious leaders in previous years
- Unique because facilitated to allow people to use agency and educate themselves
- Introduce sexual gender orientation
- Politics of gender diversity
- Also aimed at addressing gender diversity, gender expression and health issues
- Need people to engage issues relating to people's health
- Lesotho leading country in HIV issues
- Facilitated film screenings
- Video played discussing relation of the church and the bible to human rights and LGBTI people
- People labeled the least, the last and the lost
- Christian community called to restore life and share life with alienated and rejected
- Persecuted and killed
- Called to stand up for the life of God and Jesus that has to be communicated to the people
- Documentary will be made to give people a chance to share their views
- Dialogue held over two days in Maseru
- Objective to engage religious leaders to invite support for health and well-being of LG-BTI community
- 10 LGBTI members and 10 religious leaders
- Prayer for Bobby – Film about LGBTI suicide due to rejection
- HIV in the faith community – Film about Phumzile - Reverend who shared her story of HIV in faith community

Achievements

- People were able to share stories individuals and religious leaders
- One who left a previous workshop was now able to listen and understand
- Some religious leaders agreed to teach inclusion in congregations
- Religious leaders took the lead to facilitate workshop
- Able to invite different religious leaders

Challenges

- Time line to invite participants
- Must not focus only on urban areas but expand to rest of the country
- More time could help to implement the project more broadly
- More dialogues could be had in the country

Highlight

- Long standing relationship with religious leaders
- LGBTI issues are silent. No law against or for LGBTI issues
- Engagement with religious leaders have been easy and open
- 10 religious leaders have constantly been supportive

- Pastor on film gives media talks
- Fellow clergy members brought along
- 9 of 10 clergy members agreed to continue to support
- Continue to preach message of love and inclusion in church
- 1 strong woman not from Maseru participating and making sure things move
- Matrix members were invited to help facilitate a retreat as a spin off of dialogue
- Evangelical church leader made a proposal for a project that gets religious leaders to do advocacy work.
- Take it to other countries
- Golden opportunity to go crazy and explore partnerships with other partners.

Questions

- Starting from a place of human rights enables amazing work to be done
- Creating template for having an orientation that is justice focused
- Commitment to be theologians in solidarity with LGBTI communities
- The idea of a journey
- There is light to be seen.
- Different religious communities in Lesotho? Make up?
- Didn't engage full spectrum of faith communities due to time
- Lesotho is believed to be Christian country
- Defining what leadership is in terms of women in church organizations who are church affiliated
- Engage parents as part of leadership
- Lay people also to be engaged
- Church leaders vs church leadership
- Identify where the power lies within faith communities
- Learning curve to understand who to engage
- Mostly the women in the church who talk and come to you directly to kick you out of the church
- Real leadership and congregational level
- Should reach the level of congregation
- Powerful thing to use movie – what is done to parents with messaging and how can we change that



OBJECTIVES

- ◉ sensitizing key religious stakeholders in Lesotho on LGBTI issues
- ◉ Developing collaborations with faith communities in promoting protection of LGBTI rights in Lesotho
- ◉ Clarifying ways to include the religious sector in programming to support the health and well- being of LGBTI populations Lesotho

DIALOGUE DISCUSSIONS

- 28 - 30 July 2016
- Maseru
- 10 LGBTI and 10 faith leaders
- 3 facilitators from NUL, Catholic Church, St Augustine's Seminar



FACILITATED FILM SCREENING

- Pray for Bobby
- HIV in the faith community

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Platform for engagement
- Personal story sharing from both LGBTT and faith leaders
- Willingness by religious leaders to take a lead in advancing advocacy work to their peers and congregations
- Facilitation by faith leaders
- Bringing together diverse leaders from different faith communities

Lecturer at St Augustans Seminar teaching Human Sexuality on the Catholic Perspective



Catholic priest, therapist, he taught courses in Theology at ST Augustine's Major Seminary and Pastoral Care and Counselling at the National University of Lesotho (NUL).

A senior lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the National University of Lesotho



CHALLENGES

- ◉ Project time line - participants invitations

WAY FORWARDS

- ◉ Have more interactions with religious leaders
- ◉ Expand the project to cover faith community leaders
- ◉ Partners should be given enough time to implement the project.
- ◉ Need to develop the in country advocacy strategies.

THANK YOU



South African Presentation at Dialogue:

Presentation given by Hayley McEwen (HM) of WiCDS. (notes taken by Linda)

- HM started off by mentioning that they had decided to use their April event (launch of the Faith, Gender and Sexuality Toolkit and Dialogue) as the South African dialogue and not hold a new event, as this would leave more money for partner organizations in Swaziland and Lesotho to hold their dialogues.
- The toolkit launched at the 11 April event resulted from a 5 day workshop held in June 2015, with activists and religious representatives from 7 African countries.
- The launch in April was a one day event with 40 participants, mostly Christian representatives, but also with some Muslim representation. Participants included some from the June workshop.

HM proceeded to give her power point presentation.

(Powerpoint Presentation Attached)

Finn Reygan (FR) of WiCDS added in some thoughts in the conclusion of the presentation:

- Networks of female activists and theologians are important – feminist theologians have a great amount of knowledge from decades of activism
- This a key moment for this type of work – there might be some pushback, but there is this emergence of queer theology, reclaiming of faith texts – this needs to be taken up by the region
- When people question why we are dealing with these issues, and ask if there are not more pressing issues such as poverty and unemployment, the answer is that those issues cannot be separated from issues of gender and sexuality – intersectionality. A complex theology is needed to deal with this.

Q & A session with HM:

Q: Khosi Xaba (KX): What did you mean by “ ‘ignore’ance ” (on the ‘Future Advocacy Strategies PowerPoint)?

A: Active denial and refusal to engage. Silencing. People are afraid to speak out because there’s no space for that. Turning a blind eye.

Q: KX: Why not use ‘denial’?

A: It’s not that people don’t know, they know, it’s there, but they don’t want to deal with it. It’s like an informed denial.

Q: TM: Who is at the centre, and who is at the margins?

A: Good question. My sense is that the head/official leadership is the centre. In positions of power in the church. The margins are those who have been excluded, and they need to challenge.

Comment: Toni Kruger (TKR) (MCC Church): There is mainline theology and those who subscribe to it in leadership and in the congregation, then you get those who question (and they are not necessarily those who were excluded), those are the ones who will engage from the margins. For example the 6 who were receptive at the Swazi dialogue.

Comment: TKL: The concept of a pastor is not a concept of power. We are shepherds, to take care. Pastors are not preachers, they are listeners. You can’t discern when you’re busy making a noise. They need to get to the margins where there is suffering, and listen, and then transpose what they hear to the spaces of power. For example, the prophet Isaiah moved between the village and the palace. That movement is critical. Do they carry with them what they heard in the village? That is the key question. Carry what is in the margins to the centre and to society. It is an issue of solidarity.



Faith, Gender & Sexuality SA Dialogue

Faith, sexuality and gender diversity in
Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland

Aids Foundation South Africa (AFSA)

Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA)

Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS)

Topics Covered in Panel Presentations

- Faith, gender & sexual diversity (Dr. Finn Reygan)
- Social Justice theology (Dr. Finn Reygan)
- Importance of engaging the faith sector, faith communities and faith leaders in dialogue around issues of gender and of sexual and gender diversity.
 - pressing need for engagement with the faith sector given the role that religion continues to play in the perpetuation of homophobia, including in Southern Africa. (Dr. Beth Mills)



The event

- April, 2016 @ Wits University
- Event doubled as the launch of Faith, Gender & Sexuality toolkit Structure
 - Panel presentation
 - Roundtable discussions with panelists
 - Ending plenary
- Attendance
 - 40 participants: mostly Christian, some Muslim participants, LGBTI/Queer activists, religious leaders from various Christian denominations.



- Critical diversity (and literacy) in the context of faith, gender and sexuality (Prof Melissa Steyn)
- Broader context of faith based organisation and efforts to collaborate for gender justice (Mr. Desmond Lesejane)
- Transformation of the faith sector from the margins, not the center (Mr. Desmond Lesejane)
- work done with Muslim communities on sexual orientation and gender identity



Health: A cross-cutting theme

- detrimental impact of homophobia on the health and well-being of sexual and gender minority populations
 - homophobic bullying in schools leads to mental health challenges among queer youth and early school leaving.
- Homophobia in faith communities generates conflict and cognitive dissonance amongst LGBTI individuals of faith; alienation
- Anger, frustration, betrayal were apparent in the dialogue as LGBTI individuals grappled with the negative affect generated by exclusion from the religious sphere.

..challenges, contd.

- Challenge of LGBTI/Queer people who remain silent in religious contexts
- Lack of policy in the area as well as a lack of leadership knowledge and capacity among religious leaders:

Many churches don't have gender policies or sexuality policies. There is a need for building capacity within leadership but there is a lack of knowledge, language and grammar to deal with these issues.



Challenges of engaging religious leaders

- General silence in faith communities on the rights of sexual minorities

One of the weaknesses of faith is that these discussions are not being had and there is silence on issues of oppression, injustice and difference.

- Commonly held belief that it was against cultural norms to speak openly about sexuality in African societies

Very few Africans speak about sex and for the majority it's taboo to speak about sexuality or personal feelings... We are trying to live as those people 2000 years ago and sexuality in African homes is still not discussed.

- deep acculturation and socialisation into heteronormativity and bias that is fostered and maintained by religious leadership

We are socialized into these structures and certain ideas are perpetuated through religious leadership.

Messaging from religious leaders around gender, sexuality and sexual health

- The importance of using a language that was accessible to the target audience, be they religious leaders or general congregants:

It's all about speaking a language that ordinary people understand. You have to go to them, where they people are. I don't think ordinary South African people are not aware of these issues, it's just that powerlessness makes people fail to act.

- LGBTI activists reiterated the need for messaging and teaching from religious leaders to go beyond literalism:

Many pastors read the bible literally and do not allow for contextual reading or understanding.

...messaging, contd.

- Religious leaders were aware of the manner in which religious texts are used differently in different contexts to oppress and deny humanity:
Certain scriptures get applied differently depending on context, culture and self-interest. Verses are found to support apartheid, slavery, HIV positive people as sinners and so on.
- Both religious and LGBTI activist delegates felt it was necessary to begin with the core facets of faith communities:
You start by focusing on doctrine, scriptures and ideologies differences between faith groups/communities
- Common value of social justice:
The right to equality is at the heart of all organised religions and LGBTI social movements: we should be able to speak the same language.

LGBTI individuals navigating religious communities

- Lack of trust between religious leaders and LGBTIQ communities
[engaging religious communities] is difficult because of the low level of trust and communication. LGBTI people don't trust church leaders and for them to engage in these spaces is not easy.
- Capacity needs to be developed for LGBTI activists in engaging faith communities:
We need to strengthen capacity for ongoing engagement with religious people who can bring change. How do we do this in vernacular languages is a challenge and we need resources to translate religious texts. At the moment language is a barrier.

Possibilities for working together

There are certain principles across religions that are common which can be a basis for working together and collaborating. Approaching it from a place of: 'What do we want to accomplish?' and 'What can we accomplish together?' is better than a starting point of doctrine or differences between religions.

-

Start with principles and then people can bring their own doctrines to that discussion.

-

We have to document the stories of those on the margins so as to be able to speak back to the centre. For example, if one woman speaks out they will kick her out of the church but if ten women speak there may be the possibility of discussing and changing.

-

Church leaders must come together and speak out on LGBTI issues side by side and to work together by building coalitions across faith and activist organisations.

...navigating religious communities, contd.

Risk of putting the added burden of change on the shoulders of LGBTI individuals in faith communities:

we are putting the burden back on the oppressed. For example, saying that women must conform to expectations and navigate their identity in a faith context in a certain way is putting that burden on women, not the church leadership and church systems. It's like having white people say black people must figure out racism or women must act in certain ways to avoid rape and sexual violence.

Necessary for faith communities themselves to also shoulder the task of change and develop appropriate theologies in so doing:

The churches and leadership must take the burden of changing the language, culture and teachings of the church to be more inclusive of gender and sexual minorities and to develop a theology of love, compassion, humanity and dignity.

Future advocacy strategies

- Need to go beyond Christianity, Christonormativity

We should be conscious of how different religions operate. For example, Christian and Islamic religion can be better or worse on issues concerning sexuality. We should understand which religion is bad and good on these issues and why.

- Need to challenge intentioned ignore-ance and contradictions in the church

People want you to conform to their standard and the teaching that we are all created in the image of God—how does the church reconcile those who are different?

- Need to challenge whiteness, patriarchy, gender hierarchies in religion

White male teaching is that God must be like me but what if we try to imagine a complex God that will encompass everyone?

-

How do you respond to faith being a place of injustice and violence? At the centre the dominant is still misogynistic and homophobic.

Strategies, contd...

- Strategies need to avoid the further marginalisation and exclusion of queer people, who are at risk of objectification and rejection:

We need to re-strategise because if you stand up in church and call out these issues you will get kicked out.

- Start on the margins and gradually entering the centre, prioritizing an engagement with scripture:

We should work from the margins, including women's groups and youth groups, so that we can organize and then come and speak to the centre combined with the study of texts and scripture.

- Strategies of change must also necessarily work with and overcome LGBTI individuals fears of speaking out about issues of LGBTI social justice and inclusion:

We need to be strategic and tactful in how we address these issues within churches because the silence happens because people are afraid of speaking.

Conclusions

- Great will and desire to engage faith sector, despite challenges
- Desire for resources and knowledge on how to engage the faith sector, across 'faith'/'queer' division
 - Need to reinterpret sacred texts such as the Bible so as to be more inclusive of previously marginalised communities.
 - Requires a recognition and acceptance in faith communities of the ways in which religion has perpetuated realities of 'othering' and silencing of dissent.

- Feminist theologians have driven the regendering of faith and recentring of women in religion. These trajectories have given impetus to the creation of queer theologies.
- Need for a radical queer theology that foregrounds the injustice of patriarchal religious spaces and can challenge theologies of exclusion.
- Critique and rebuttal of sexism & heteronormativity given the deeply intersected realities of misogyny and homophobia.
 - Intersectionality is a key lens for interrogating religious exclusion and for fostering the inclusion of LGBTI people in their faith communities.

Plenary Discussion (morning) – facilitated by Khosi Xaba (session divided between scribes)

11:25 – 11:45 = KT

11:45-12:05 = LC

12:05 – 12:25 = J

11:25 – 11:45 (KT)

KX:

- Missed the Swazi Presentation
- Help talk and consolidate the presentation to plan the next action
- Stipulates there needs to be clarity and careful how and why we use certain words – going to ask “what do you mean?” quite often

Similarities

- Intention of dialogue, not debate (TP [Tampose Mothopeng] - Lesotho)

KX: what do you mean by debate?

- Finding a point where we can come together, rather than dispute. Lack of friction. (TP – Lesotho)
- The church is moving on. Finally there is room for movement. (TKR – MCC)

KX: there is texture and mutual respect. This sounds like methodology.

- Christianity is Dominant (ND – MCC)

KX: so now we are talking about participants. Let’s talk about content.

- Leaders were willing to take the lead. “We are willing to sensitize congregations” (TP – Lesotho)
- We need to be more nuances about what we mean by who is taking the lead. We don’t necessarily have a notion of the leaders. We should locate them, are they national? (TKL – MCC)
- Someone (didn’t catch who this was): The leadership is not on a national level.
- Not sure if it is my thinking or if it is a similarity between the dialogues, but they seemed male dominated? (ND – MCC)

KX: seems like people agree.

- It could also be a failure on our part, for not finding more female religious leaders to participate. (MS – Swaziland)

KX: was it 80%? 90% male?

- I’d say about 90%. (MS – Swaziland)
- From the religious side or the activists side? (LC – GALA)
- I was asking about the religious side. (ND – MCC)
- *mentioned something about facilitation (inaudible) (Angel [Molefinyane Ariel Thoko] – AT -Lesotho):
- Not from my recollection from the SA dialogue. We had a rotating panel. (FR – WiCDS)

KX: Shared facilitation? Whereas in the other places (Lesotho and Swaziland) it was facilitated by the religious leaders?

- The health dimension, such as HIV, mental health etc. (V – gate crasher)
- Missed a section here involving Vivid and Teboho
- All three countries dealt with family and spiritual themes that LGBTI issues come from family/religion/state say it is not right and spread a message of hate. (ND – MCC)

- Lesotho and Swaziland seem to be predominantly Christian and therefore the content of the message of hate is in line with its teachings. (TP – Lesotho)
- Missed a section here dealing with the WiCDs toolkit

11:45 – 12:05 (LC)

(Continuing with similarities between groups)

- All three countries didn’t use the Bible as a point of discussion (TP – Lesotho)
- Engaging with texts is regressive, getting bogged down, rather a broader discussion around social justice (FR – WiCDS)

KX – Maybe this speaks to the point that people are ready to move on?

- We met with bishops from SADC countries around LGBTI issues, for 3 days we never opened the Bible. When you start there, conversation becomes a debate. A woman from Nigeria was saying that what has been embedded in her mind is hard to shift. My truth isn’t your truth. Therefore that is not a good place to start, but if it comes up later it’s easier to deal with (ND – MCC)
- Not going back to the Bible is why we need a queer theology. Getting too far stuck in the human rights framework is also problematic (TKR: MCC)
- When we talk about human rights and the church, some people think we want to bring politics into the church. Rather use the word dignity, rights makes some people think they are being forced to accept all sorts of things like abortion and sex work etc. (ND: MCC)

KX: Let’s keep this for the afternoon

- I’m going to use inflammatory language. Over the years of my work in this field, I don’t think either side knows what they’re talking about. Activists have no idea about religion and deeply held faith. And religious folk are uninformed about queer rights and experiences. They are speaking two languages, at loggerheads. What can we do to support both sides with the right skills, language etc.? We are at a point now where people have openness to learning. (FR: WiCDS)

KX: Was this lack of knowledge in all three countries?

- (Nods around the table)
- Lesotho – sounds like it was easier there? (HM: WiCDS)
- They don’t understand, but want to engage and learn (AT: Matrix)
- Sometimes you meet people who are willing to come, but we need to make sure we are engaging new faces. To get those who have already ‘come around’ to engage the new, and Matrix stands back. (TP: Matrix)
- Issues of texts ultimately do have to be engaged. We know there are certain texts that are used for discrimination, how do we engage with these texts? These dialogues must help us to go there. Dialogue principals help us to ground us somewhere. (He again uses Kairos Document as an example, as religious texts used to justify racism and how those had to be engaged, challenged). We’ve got to confront those texts. Start from the same premise. Texts that have been used to discriminate can also be used to affirm. We need to get ready to use text, to engage in future dialogues.

KX: In the afternoon we can explore this further.

- The problem is that queer activists generally don’t have the skills to step into that space (TKL: MCC)
- KX: How do we bring the two together?
- These dialogues lack knowledge on both sides, as Finn said, and lack honest discussion. I’ve gone to quite a few dialogues now where this is the case. For example a pastor will ask an honest question and LGBTI activists will react defensively, accuse the person

asking of being discriminatory. I was once asked why I advocate for LGBTI rights, am I a lesbian? When I replied that I was, he asked who ordained me. I realized he wasn't trying to attack; he was coming from his perspective. We compared ordination and theological training. There is a need to engage uncomfortable questions and not just react in anger. Otherwise people walk out with unanswered questions in their minds (ND: MCC)

KX: Tendency of LGBTI to be defensive and lack honesty -do others find this?

- (LC indicated to J to take over scribing)

(Jamil has actually been taking notes the whole time)

Similarities

- Intention is to facilitate dialogue not necessarily debate
- Leaders with LGBTI community were sharing the space to agree how they would work together
- Lack of friction and division
- Sharing, exchanging
- Feeling that there is suddenly room for movement
- Progressive
- Lesotho and Swaziland, Christianity is dominant
- Leaders were willing to take a lead on issues not central to them
- Swaziland – national leaders were targeted but got something else
- Leadership is not national, not most prominent but intermediate level
- Dialogues were male dominated from the religious side
- The inclusion of the sexual/mental health dynamic
- All three dealt with messaging of family, social and spiritual arenas
- All chose not to engage the bible as the tool for dialogue (engaging with texts is regressive)
- Openness to learning
- Lack of knowledge from both sides
- Facilitators are an important tool
- Dealing with real power inequality between religious leaders and LGBTI
- Tapping into power networks not able to be done before
- This is not easy, but very complex
- Introduced a glossary for orientation

Differences

- Dialogues were at different levels
- Aimed at different levels of discourse
- Relationship between host organization and those invited
- Difference in number of participants
- Difference in number of days
- A mix of religious leaders who would show solidarity and could not
- Different legal (interpretation of law) contexts
- Safety was only a concern in Swaziland, to find a secure venue, asked journalists not to bring cameras or use names, hotel was sensitized
- Swaziland event was the only one picked up by media because it was novel
- Documentation
- Swaziland had other activities related to the dialogue. Other things that emerged out of dialogue
- South Africa, theological journal published article
- Media reported from outside and some were present in the dialogue



Small group discussion

Do you want to continue engaging with religious communities?

- Yes we feel that we need more interaction and further engagement with religious communities

What would this engagement look like or include?

- Make it broader
- Mainly focusing on leaders around Maseru but expand to other areas
- Engage specifically with certain church and moving to different churches
- Engage leaders within the church instead of leadership
- Research where we need to do advocacy work. Mapping exercise.
- Which churches are still engaging discriminatory practices, focus on them.
- Near church leaders
- Easier to target the congregation
- Continue to sensitise the congregations of the 10 religious leaders who are in support
- Do research to find out from different faith leaders what their opinions are on LGBTI issues
- From there address gaps between favourable and unfavourable views in the community
- Identify agents of change within positive, supportive people
- Create a programme document on LGBTI and faith leaders that can inform expansion beyond these dialogues
- Focus on different power centers in the church, such as choir leaders

What would you need to achieve this?

- Money
- Expertise, human resources
- Help developing questionnaires
- Consultants
- Data collectors
- Voice recorders

South Africa

- Interest to continue engaging in this work
- Start problematizing the idea that religious and LGBTI communities are separate
- Churches should be awakened to their own calling
- There is no stigma in churches around HIV anymore. The process of how that came about can be used as a model to engage LGBTI issues
- Engagements should consider shock therapy and embarrassment
- TAC (Treatment Action Campaign) as a model – allies who are not a part of the community
- In SA interfaith work is different that under Apartheid where different religious communities could come together and fight a common cause
- Presence of African traditional churches

Lesotho

- Are we sure that we are addressing the right issues and the right people
- Researching on the ground
- What is the problem?
- Why are we doing this work but not change
- Focus on leaders on different levels of church
- Engage LGBTI faith people

- Explore Lesotho
- Strategically frame advocacy work
- Research – interviewing people about experiences

Swaziland

- Find a way to meet in the middle
- Go back to the drawing board to find strategies
- Consider using online toolkit
- Allies – Training of the trainers
- Finding language that is conducive to all parties
- Sensitizing the church, community outreach
- Getting a facilitator



Afternoon Plenary discussion

- Including male and female leaders on invitations to events
- Approach lay people who are leaders but not in a leadership position
- South Africa's role in setting agendas in context where their agendas are not relevant must be monitored
- Be clear from the onset of what you want to do with donors
- Be conscious of donor driven agendas and be strategic about it
- Can subvert the donor agenda
- Improving on the work done
- Working together is very important, collaborate and get more people involved
- If faced with donor driven agendas – we should close shop
- What is useful versus what is decided by funders

Closing

- Need to be something more substantive in SA
- Different regional terrain
- Psychosocial support is often absent
- Avoid the deficit model of things that don't work
- Leaving a tangible legacy
- Have to also have the difficult conversations
- Go beyond just having other dialogues
- Interventions where you speak to actual problems
- How you want to structure involvement in religious community, targeted questions
- Networking is essential
- Common language for everyone, activists also need to be sensitized to theological views church uses to substantiate
- Teach and be taught
- Reciprocity

5. Report from the Lesotho Dialogue (28-30 July 2016)



Faith, sexuality and gender diversity in Lesotho



Acknowledgements

The People's Matrix Association would like to give a special thanks to the Aids Foundation of South Africa (AFSA), Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA) and the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS) for honouring the invitation to implement this workshop, and it is through it that so many lives of LGBTIs were touched in different ways in the Integration of Spirituality and Sexuality and in the end contributing to bringing hope to LGBTI individuals who were part of the workshop.

We would also like to honour Dr. Lekholokoe Leshota, Rev. Tlali Phohlo, and Rev. Lehlohonolo Ramochele for powerful presentations and creating platform for LGBTI persons to openly share their issues of concern and clergy to engage in the continues dialogues with the LGBTI community in Lesotho. They were not only facilitators but pioneers to the workshop. They were able to turn a thought into reality. Through this abundant knowledge, they were able to steer the workshop in the right direction and made the LGBTI individuals believe that for every challenge met as LGBTIs, there is always a solution.

Project Background & Objectives

This project is funded by the Aids Foundation of South Africa (AFSA), and coordinated by Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA) and the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS). The Swaziland lead is Rock of Hope and the Lesotho lead is Matrix.

The objectives of the project are:

- Piloting of new tools and processes to engage religious leaders and faith communities on LGBTI issues
- sensitizing key religious stakeholders in Southern Africa around LGBTI issues
- determining best next steps in terms of advocacy on LGBTI rights in religion across Southern Africa
- Clarifying ways to include the religious sector in programming to support the health and well-being of LGBTI populations across Southern Africa

The Peoples Matrix Lesotho received funding from GALA in July 2016. This has been the first workshop of its kind in Lesotho to reach out to the LGBTI community and one of the prerequisites for the workshop was for The Peoples Matrix to work with LGBTI and religious leaders on integration of sexuality and spirituality. Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity was introduced to participants and religious leaders to understand sexual diversity. Sex is a biological construction whereby you're born male, female or intersex, but culturally, most intersex people in Lesotho are left behind and this kind of issues are never talked about. While gender is societal construction and it's either your masculine or feminine, but Trans people are never recognized. Society expects male to be masculine and females to be feminine and nothing else.

This was a three days workshop facilitated by theologians, lecturers and priests covering the following topics; sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE), gender diversity in the faith community, human sexuality in the faith community, HIV and AIDS in the faith community.

IDENTITY AND POLITICS

Binaries;

God	Devil
Good	Bad
Master	Slave
Culture	Nature
Spirit	Flesh

Heaven	Earth/hell
Male	Female

The topic on identity and politics was introduced by the facilitator who started with the code "When you identify yourself you're being different to others". He further explained that Identity goes along with politics of culture and religion. 'God is the spirit; he created a man and everything'. "When we talk about opposite we are creating politics, and therefore we have always used to separate things". He further explained intersectionality within patriarchy and phobias towards LGBTI persons; 'sex was done only by man to woman in the Old Testament'. He emphasised the need to understand sexuality and spirituality at that time. He went on to talk about politics and norms, where he shared the negative and positive reaction of people towards same sex and same gender relationships.

The facilitator posted a question to the participants; "Why do women kiss publicly and yet to men poses a sock?" "We call it unusual and thus shaped man not to cry because he will not be a man enough and this is what the society has created. These are all languages and politics, men are given power over women and crying as man lowers your power. To explain yourself it's a choice, but for heterosexuals it's obvious but for homosexuals you need to explain yourself and that's politics".

It was said that if God created heaven and earth, what about the planets? God created a man and a woman, what about others? All this things does not appear in the bible. Theologically all this questions need to be answered. If a person choose to identify as something else that creates politics and better than others. Therefore, politics, opposites and language creates a problem.





The importance of talking about gender and politics in our faith communities

“Everyone has a right to live, to be loved regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. It is unjust to discriminate others. Church is the place where everyone comes to talk with God, a place of comfort and hope, peace and harmony

not to be judged or discriminated against. It is also important to engage others in the church’s activities.” This was said by the LGBTI participants who shared their expertise about their faith communities. They went on to explain their reasons for not engaging within the faith community but finding comfort spaces in bars and other entertainment places. Most of them shared their experience while being rejected in the faith community because of their gender expressions and because of the negative preaching’s by the faith leaders. They also encouraged the leaders to preach inclusiveness and create a safe space in their community members.

Gender diversity in the faith community

This topic created a platform for people to engage in dialogues, there was a great confusion on what is wrong and what is right, who determines good and bad, who wrote the Bible, when and for who, who is God and what is a human being. Theological questions were set for the participants to have a better understanding. This was also a great challenge to other faith leaders who do not believe in challenging the Bible and also to those who literally interpret the Bible.

From the group discussions there was a plea for more sensitization trainings and dialogues for faith leaders on gender diversity and spirituality. This was said to be more helpful to those who are not aware of these differences because they are mostly hidden and unaccepted, this will open and pave the way for people to be tolerant with each other’s differences with the hope that this will eventually lead to acceptance, and therefore, it will empower members of LGBTIs to develop confidence and self-acceptance.



Barriers that may hinder inclusiveness of LGBTI topic in the faith communities as presented in the groups were stated as follows;

1. Religious leaders lack information with regards to gender diversity, a lot of advocacy and seminar workshops should be done more frequently.
2. Cultural, beliefs and norms were identifies as barriers that play a major role in enforcing male and female stereotypes in the faith communities and hindering gender diversity.
3. Language that is being used also creates politics, and ignorance of sexual orientation and gender identity, gender identity.
4. Interpretation of the Bible by religious leaders is one of the major issues when it comes to LGBTI issues; faith leaders interpret the Bible literally, and code the Bible where it suits them to fight LGBTI people.
5. LGBTIs should also understand their own self because this poses more challenges to people who do not even understand issues around sexual orientation and gender identity.

Solutions

The People’s Matrix should do lot of advocacy to faith based leaders, and this will help them to preach inclusiveness of gender diversity in the faith communities and this will reduce stigma and discrimination, more frequent workshops should be done to include all the communities and other stakeholders.

Matrix should not rely on funding to sensitise communities about LGBTI issues while they have partners and stakeholders to work with.

The media should be involved because they are playing a major role in the society and its very powerful, therefore, it should be a tool to be used to influence perception of people towards LGBTI persons.

HUMAN SEXUALITY

Sexual orientation

Heterosexual is an attraction between opposite sex, while homosexual is an attraction between same sex and bisexual is an attraction between both opposite and same sex. The topic was introduced for participants to understand sexual orientation and sexual act and that sex is not only about penetration but different parts of the body can also be used for pleasure.

Homosexuality orientation was described by the facilitator as a sexual inclination or attraction to the members of the same gender; this is different to homosexual activity

because it is behaviour. Sexual act performed with same gender or sex. Though he gave out the meaning of sexuality, homosexuality and homosexual orientation there was an augment with most of people who identified as homosexuals in the room. Who felt their sexual orientation was sexed yet is an attraction. On the other hand faith leaders explained homosexual orientation as a disorder and agreed that every person has disorder. God created a man and only male and female can procreate, but the question arose from the participants "how about people who cannot have children at all? Is it because they also have disorder? Where does homosexual orientation come from? What does morality say about orientation of homosexual? Catholic church is against homosexual act". "As sexual beings we should fulfil our needs. If sex is done for pleasure do other human beings care about others to be born, bottom line is, church accept everyone whether homosexual or heterosexual, but does not allow homosexual act"

According to the faith leaders, sexual penetration is the only perfect sexual act for partners to reach an orgasm. Every part of the body has its own purpose; literally some of the body part can only work for a sudden purpose but nothing else. Religiously a church has given power to lead people. The purpose of the marriage is to have children and entertainment. The church is not meant to do all the things that is why we have science, politic, etc to accomplish some of the things that a church cannot do.

Identity

Identity it's what defines a person. Gender is what is expected of you as a person to be by society. From biology the body is sexed, when it comes to hormones the body changes. The language that we speak is problematic and others can assign you positions and can lead to behave in a sudden way. Gender has two dimensions and everything that does not fall under gender is considered to be disorder or sickness. There is not singular feminism and singular masculinity. We must appreciate the differences; for instance we force people to conform to what society expected. People assigned peoples sexuality more especially in hospitals. This is because society comes so strong and they turn to say its nature.

Prolactin oxytocin bond people, it is hormonal. Masculinity can limit femininity. Society disqualifies sudden things due to norms. Fundamental morality



has something to do with being the way you are. Prescribed morality it's a measurement and this can hurt peoples who are created by God. Ethics is doing the right thing not prescribed morality, and this can destroy creation of God, we want to force people to be what they are not. People have to seek understanding. Biologically a person might be born with both male and female sex organs but society defines gender to be only masculinity or femininity, there is nothing in between. Gender issues are so complicated. **THE BIBLE IS NOT A REMEDY THAT GIVES PEOPLE ALL ANSWERS.**

FILM SCREENING AND DIALOGUE DISCUSSIONS

1. Pray for Bobby

<https://www.google.co.ls/webhp?tab=mw#q=prayer+for+bobby>

In this adaptation of a true story, devout Christian Mary Griffith (Sigourney Weaver) fights to "cure" her gay son, Bobby (Ryan Kelley). Although he tries to please his mother, Bobby cannot change his lifestyle, and his depression leads to suicide. Mary questions her faith and searches for comfort, but after the church is unable to help her cope with Bobby's death, she seeks to understand her opinions on homosexuality for herself. Eventually, Mary becomes an advocate for gay rights.

Initial release: January 21, 2009

Director: Russell Mulcahy

Adapted from: *Prayers for Bobby: A Mother's Coming to Terms with the Suicide of Her Gay Son*

Initial DVD release: December 18, 2009 (Germany)

Music composed by: Christopher Ward

The purpose of the film was to show case the impact of the negative message people receive from their faith communities, families and friends. How they can build or kill the person, the power of the language and the power of the Bibles in controlling people's lives. Sexual orientation is not something that you cannot change, and it's not a sin as stated in the Bible. Participants shared their comments after the film where they said though the film was documented long time ago in the different continent the same judgement and discrimination still happens to members of LGBTI community in their respective communities. The film helped in bringing understating to the faith leaders who voluntarily promised to take a lead in creating a safe space for LGBTI and other marginalised groups in Lesotho.

Spirituality and sexuality

Lesotho is currently experiencing one of the most serious HIV epidemics in the world, although there is evidence that the epidemic has somewhat stabilized in the past few years. The HIV prevalence rate in 2009 among Basotho aged 15-49 was 25% and in 2014, annual adult HIV incidence was 1.7% or approximately 21,000 new cases that

year¹. Projections on ART needs in 2009 were such that 117, 903 people would need treatment. In the same year the survival rate of both adults and children with HIV known to be on treatment 12 months after initiation was 80% which was an increase from 74.4% in 2007. AIDS mortality on the other hand stood at 11,000 in 2009 to 15,000 in 2014².

In order to respond to the national mandate on HIV in the respond to HIV prevalence on key populations, Matrix choose to engage the topic with different leaders and encourages leaders to create a platform for engagement on HIV related issues within their congregations, followers and communities they are leading. Within this workshop, issues pertaining to HIV in the faith community were discussed. The film by Rev. Phumzile Mabizela was used as a tool to open dialogue discussions with faith leaders.

The film follows Reverend Phumzile Mabizela on a passionate journey, engaging with religious leaders and church congregations on issues of spirituality and sexuality. As a strong willed woman, who is openly living with HIV, she promotes positive living and inclusion. Reverend Mabizela talks about spirituality and sexuality in an honest and humorous way, celebrating both as gifts from God. Through Contextual Bible Studies she challenges church leaders to re-examine their own understanding and beliefs. For her, Centres of worship need to be places of healing, which embrace diversity and challenge discrimination, especially against people living with HIV and the LGBTI community.

Reflections after the film



Sexuality is as important as spirituality. There are lot of LGBTI community who always come to church but they cannot disclose due to stigma discrimination. Religious leaders must be exposed to knowledge, so that they can change their attitude. Sexuality is big therefore; we need to create space because it is important. The film is related to what has been said; to give

religious leaders knowledge and information. Sometimes our prayers as LGBTI are silent by the leaders in the church they condemn them and this creates a lot of discrimination. Culturally as Basotho we don't talk about sex and if families can talk about these issues it will reduce the prevalence of HIV infection.

Challenges

Most of the participants came late for the workshop. And due to the weather condition, it was too cold. Since the workshop was the first of its kind. It would be beneficial to extend this benefit to other districts. Even though we managed to make it, there was a delay of funds to be transferred.

What worked well?

1. Involving some of our partners whom were worked with them before to the similar workshop has proved to be successful because they ensured sustainability in efforts made. The attendance was really positive, even though they were invited within a short time.
2. Diversity of participants with different backgrounds who came to dialogue; and understand sexual and gender diversity in the faith communities but not to condemn marginalised groups.
3. The workshop offered a platform for engagement and dialogue discussions on for LGBTI community and faith community leaders to learn and share their personal experiences on gender and sexual diversity in the faith in community. This was indeed a fruitful workshop that influenced and challenged the leaders to voluntarily take a lead in sensitizing the communities in Lesotho on issues of diversity and also to challenge the systems in their respectful institutions.
4. Unlike other workshops held prior to this workshop, documentation was organised to capture the feeling and experiences of the clergy and LGBTI community.

Recommendation/way forward

This workshop has been unique and outstanding since it was the first of its kind. In order for the initiative to have greater impact in future, it is recommended that: there is a need for the organisation to facilitate not only dialogue discussions in urban areas but should also engage those who lead the communities in the rural areas.

It is important to listen understand and have knowledge. LGBTI must not force religious leaders to understand, but should give them time and information about their issues.

Sometimes religious leaders condemn other people but behind they turn to do same things they condemn. They agreed to stop hatred to LGBTI people whom they thought were different from other people. The whole workshop changed religious leader's attitude towards LGBTI and they will encourage others to preach non-discrimination to

¹ Lesotho Demographic Health Survey - MOH 2009

² UNAIDS GAP Report 2014 – UNAIDS 2014

the congregations. The workshop was really a success, those that have attended will pursued others to speak positively about LGBTI and lot of advocacy now will be done to sensitize the community about inclusiveness. Matrix should be willing to share any materials about LGBTI that will help religious leaders to have information about their issues.

Rev. Tlali Phohlo is a Catholic priest. He is holding a PHD Degree in Pastoral Care and Counselling from the University of South Africa (UNISA). He has trained as therapist at the Institute for Therapeutic Development (ITD) in Pretoria, South Africa. Alongside pastoral ministry, Tlali has taught courses in Theology at ST Augustine's Major Seminary in Lesotho and in Pastoral Care and Counselling at the National University of Lesotho (NUL).

He has facilitated numerous workshops in gender issues in the country for various social groups. He is currently providing Counselling services to individuals, families, schools and different organizations in the country. His interest is in exploring power relations in the society.



Dr. Lekholokoe Leshota is a senior lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the National University of Lesotho. He obtained his PhD in Practical Theology, with specialization in Pastoral Therapy from the University of South Africa in 2011. He has been in the employ of the same university since 2001, teaching courses in Pastoral Counselling and Biblical Studies. His research interests are in the areas of narrative therapy and narrative ways of knowing and healing; gender issues particularly transformative masculinities and queer theologies; HIV&AIDS issues; theology and contemporary issues; Doing practical theology in Africa; Pastoral counselling in an African Context; Disability discourses and theology; Postcolonial, and postmodern ways of reading texts as well as doing contextual Bible Study with marginal and minority groups in Lesotho.

Rev. Lehlohonolo Ramochele

Lecturer at St Augustans Seminar teaching Human Sexuality on the Catholic Perspective



6. Report from the South African Dialogue (April 2016)

Faith, sexuality and gender diversity in Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland

South Africa dialogue draft report

Prepared by Dr. Finn Reygan and Haley McEwen

September 2016

Aids Foundation South Africa (AFSA)

Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA)

Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS)

Introduction

There has been greatly increased interest in the intersection of faith and sexual/gender diversity in Southern Africa in very recent times. There have been numerous initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue and greater understanding between faith communities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities. This includes a panAfrican convening of queer activist and religious leaders in Pietermaritzburg in 2016 and dialogues in Johannesburg in recent times that convened faith communities and LGBTI community representatives. At a regional level, much LGBTI activism has increasingly become aware of the need to engage religious leaders and faith communities given the common trope of homosexuality as both unAfrican and unChristian. The Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS), Sonke Gender Justice and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) also in 2016 launched a toolkit for engaging faith communities on issues of sexual and gender diversity (the toolkit can be accessed online: <http://spl.ids.ac.uk/sexuality-gender-faith>). These initiatives have foregrounded both the general lack of knowledge (as well as much misinformation) in faith communities regarding sexual and gender diversity. This ongoing process of dialogue has also highlighted the general lack of preparedness of queer activists to engage religious leaders and congregations on issues of LGBTI social justice. This skills gap includes a general reluctance or ability to use religious language, a general lack of knowledge around appropriate advocacy strategies related to religious change, and often an antipathy towards the generally patriarchal and homophobic character of many faith communities.

Given this evolving situation and the opportunities this presents for advocacy, alliance building and social justice for LGBTI individuals in a generally neglected sphere of engagement, this report presents the outcome of a recent dialogue in South Africa on the intersection of faith, sexuality and gender diversity. These fora offer opportunities, often the first of their kind, for religious leaders and queer activists to participate in respectful and safe dialogue around LGBTI inclusion in religion. What emerges from these conversations is the need for more nuanced advocacy strategies on the part of LGBTI activists as well as the desire among religious leaders to learn more about an area for which they are generally wholly unprepared.

Project background

This multicountry project was funded by the Aids Foundation of South Africa (AFSA) and coordinated by Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA) and WiCDS and the countries included in the project were Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland. In Lesotho the lead

organization is the LGBTI civil society group Matrix and in Swaziland was the Rock of Hope. The objectives of the project were:

- Piloting of new tools and processes to engage religious leaders and faith communities on LGBTI issues
- Sensitizing key religious stakeholders in Southern Africa around LGBTI issues
- Determining best next steps in terms of advocacy on LGBTI rights in religion across Southern Africa
- Clarifying ways to include the religious sector in programming to support the health and well-being of LGBTI populations across Southern Africa

In order to achieve these objectives, each partner hosted a one-day dialogue that brought together LGBTI individuals and activists with members of religious communities. Partner organisations determined the content of each dialogue and arranged all logistics and after hosting their dialogue, each partner organisation prepared a report to be shared with the other project partners. After the conclusion of the in-country dialogues the South African partners—WiCDS and GALA—will host a regional meeting at the end of the project period where representatives from partner organisations will come together and share the findings that emerged from their respective dialogues.

Partner organisations were free to determine the format and structure of their dialogues and the only requirements for the dialogues were that they:

- Bring together LGBTI activists and people from religious communities (ideally, a range of religions will be represented, including traditional leaders and traditional healers)
- Have at least 25 participants
- Take place before 1 August 2016
- Address the issues that need to be reported on

Each partner organisation was to prepare a report based on the outcomes of their dialogue responding to the following questions:

- What have been the most significant challenges and achievements with regards to engaging religious communities and leaders in advancing the rights sexual minorities?
- What is the messaging from religious leaders around gender, sexuality, and sexual health?
- How do LGBTI individuals navigate religious communities they are part of?

- What is needed going forward in terms of advocacy around LGBTI and sexual health issues across religious communities (i.e. strategies, interventions, etc.)

South Africa dialogue

The South Africa dialogue was held in the Wits Club at the University of the Witwatersrand on 11 April 2016. Methodologically it was decided that the structure would include panel presentations on core issues related to faith, sexuality and gender diversity, followed by Q&A, with roundtable discussions to conclude. The partner organisations thereby aimed to stimulate dialogue on LGBTI inclusion in faith communities as well as to provide ample opportunities for discussion and feedback in plenary. The dialogue was well attended with representation from panAfrican civil society and faith traditions. The dialogue was attended by approximately 40 delegates present for the day-long dialogue, including representatives from South African, regional and international organisations.

The dialogue (see Appendix A for the programme) was officially opened by Prof Melissa Steyn, Director of WiCDS and began with a presentation from Dr Elizabeth Mills of the Institute for Development Studies (IDS). Dr Mills highlighted the importance of engaging the faith sector, faith communities and faith leaders in dialogue around issues of gender and sexual diversity. There is a pressing need for engagement with the faith sector given the role that religion continues to play in the perpetuation of homophobia, including in Southern Africa. This was followed by a panel discussion with Dr Finn Reygan (WiCDS), Prof Steyn (WiCDS), Abu-Baker Sebeela (Sonke Gender Justice) and Desmond Lesejane (Sonke Gender Justice). Dr Reygan talked about Faith and sexual and gender diversity, and proposed a theology of social justice. Prof Steyn talked about critical diversity in the context of faith, gender and sexuality. Mr Lesejane discussed strengthening faith based organisation collaborations for gender justice, and Mr. Sebeela presented on work done with Muslim communities on sexual orientation and gender identity. The panel discussion was followed a lively Q&A with numerous questions coming from delegates covering a broad range of topics including the contestations within the 'faith space' around issues of sexuality and gender, and the fact that religion is not static and is constantly shaped by changing realities and imaginaries. Mr. Lesejane made the point that transformation and faith spaces have never happened from the centers of power within religious contexts due to affinity to power, exclusion and self-interest. It was emphasized that change has always happened from the margins.

The afternoon session consisted of a group of revolving group discussions followed by feedback in plenary. The panelists rotated among the tables at 15 minute intervals to engage delegates in conversation around pressing concerns and questions raised in the course of the dialogue. Lively and sometimes heated debate ensued around what were for some, highly sensitive topics. Findings emerging from the dialogue are presented below in

the broad thematic areas based on the core questions requested for the report, namely: What have been the most significant challenges and achievements with regards to engaging religious communities and leaders in advancing the rights sexual minorities?; What is the messaging from religious leaders around gender, sexuality, and sexual health?; How do LGBTI individuals navigate religious communities they are part of?; What is needed going forward in terms of advocacy around LGBTI and sexual health issues across religious communities (i.e. strategies, interventions, etc.). These themes are presented below supported by quotes from participants and further analysis of these themes can be found in the subsequent concluding section of the report.

One important cross-cutting theme to emerge from the dialogue was the issue of LGBTI health. The literature generally points to the detrimental impact of homophobia on the health and well-being of sexual and gender minority populations. This plays out in multiple contexts and detrimentally effects the mental and physical health of LGBTI people. This occurs across sectors such that homophobic bullying in schools leads to mental health challenges among queer youth and early school leaving. In terms of healthcare provision, the research in South Africa and globally points to the exclusionary effect of heteronormativity and homophobia on access to healthcare services by LGBTI populations. At the South Africa dialogue delegates highlighted the deleterious effect of religious homophobia on the minds and bodies of LGBTI individuals. Faith communities that were heteronormative and homophobic generated intrapsychic conflict and cognitive dissonance amongst LGBTI individuals of faith. This manifested in experiences of alienation that interrupted LGBTI individuals' ability to remain engaged with their faith community of origin and to worship in these communities. As a result feelings of anger, frustration and betrayal were apparent in the dialogue as LGBTI individuals grappled with the negative affect generated by exclusion from the religious sphere.

Challenges and achievements

Participants at the dialogue talked at length about the most significant challenges and achievements in terms of engaging religious communities and leaders in advancing the rights of sexual minorities. For example, one participant felt that there is a general silence in faith communities on these issues:

One of the weaknesses of faith is that these discussions are not being had and there is silence on issues of oppression, injustice and difference.

Participants reiterated the commonly held belief that it was against cultural norms to speak openly about sexuality in African societies:

Very few Africans speak about sex and for the majority it's taboo to speak about sexuality or personal feelings. We have a serious problem as African religions are very old and we still apply them in this century. We are trying to live as those people 2000 years ago and sexuality in African homes is still not discussed.

Given that delegates at the dialogue came from across the continent, there was a commonly expressed belief that South Africa was a much more progressive and tolerant society than others in the region:

In SA the law allows everyone but in the Nigerian context these norms are institutionalised and how do you address these issues? For example in Sudan you can't even open your mouth about these issues.

Here delegates foregrounded the challenges of doing LGBTI social justice and religious advocacy work in very different regional contexts with specific in-country challenges. Nevertheless one of the common and recurring questions among participants was the optimal way to break the cycle of injustice, particularly in relation to LGBTI people, in religion. Many participants noted the ways in which there is deep acculturation and socialisation into heteronormativity and bias that is fostered and maintained by religious leadership:

We are socialized into these structures and certain ideas are perpetuated through religious leadership.

However the challenge was not only with homophobic religious leadership but also with queer people who remained silent when they ought to speak back to power and heteroprivilege:

Why are marginalized people not speaking out in these contexts?

Delegates cited numerous challenges to the realization of LGBTI inclusion in faith communities, including a lack of policy in the area as well as a lack of leadership knowledge and capacity among religious leaders:

Many churches don't have gender policies or sexuality policies. There is a need for building capacity within leadership but there is a lack of knowledge, language and grammar to deal with these issues.

In short, delegates generally foregrounded the ongoing challenges of LGBTI inclusion in the religious sector and reiterated the novelty and sensitivities of doing such social justice

work at this time. It became apparent that this work is in the genesis phase and that both dialogue and advocacy strategy require much greater strengthening.

Messaging from religious leaders

Delegates included both LGBTI and allied activists as well as religious leadership and both tended to highlight the negative messaging from religious leaders around sexual and gender diversity. However delegates also indicated the need for a different type of activism to engage in a social justice project for sexual and gender minorities within faith communities. For example, delegates highlighted the importance of using a language that was accessible to the target audience, be they religious leaders or general congregants:

It's all about speaking a language that ordinary people understand. You have to go to them, where they people are. I don't think ordinary South African people are not aware of these issues, it's just that powerlessness makes people fail to act.

LGBTI activists reiterated the need for messaging and teaching from religious leaders to go beyond literalism:

Many pastors read the bible literally and do not allow for contextual reading or understanding.

Intersectionality was a key focus of many of the conversations in terms of race, class, gender, and in terms of sexuality and gender identity though it was repeatedly flagged by delegates that religious leaders are often wholly unprepared to engage competently and in an informed way on these issues. In particular, patriarchy, sexism and the exclusion of women were highlighted by delegates:

How can we challenge a culture that excludes both women and queer people in religion?

The sense of a necessary collective agency was also apparent in influencing religious leaderships and delegates highlighted the need for collective, community engagement on these issues:

We are a community and we need to have a set of values that are common.

Religious leaders at the dialogue argued for the centrality of scripture and religious texts in activism on these issues. They believed that an engagement with sacred texts could lead to critical engagement with the systems that oppress but that this was often a missed opportunity:

The text is at the centre of the faith but many scholars are reinterpreting the texts. There are texts that are 'counter-cultural' that get looked over, disregarded or misinterpreted.

Here, as in other fora, it became apparent that religious leadership was open to but also needed guidance on reengaging sacred texts so as to render them more inclusive. Religious leaders were aware of the manner in which religious texts are used differently in different contexts to oppress and deny humanity:

Certain scriptures get applied differently depending on context, culture and self-interest. Verses are found to support apartheid, slavery, HIV positive people as sinners and so on.

Both religious and LGBTI activist delegates felt that, in terms of capacity development and working towards a common goal, it was necessary to begin with the core facets of faith communities:

You start by focusing on doctrine, scriptures and ideologies differences between faith groups/communities

In this regard ecumenical dialogue and inter-faith unity was a possibility for engaging religious leadership and influencing their messaging on these issues:

There are certain principles across religions that are common which can be a basis for working together and collaborating. Approaching it from a place of: 'What do we want to accomplish?' and 'What can we accomplish together?' is better than a starting point of doctrine or differences between religions.

The starting point for discussion needed to be core, underlying principles (such as respect and common humanity) that could then be applied in specific religious contexts:

Start with principles and then people can bring their own doctrines to that discussion. Nevertheless hypocrisy and contradiction was often present in the messaging of religious leaders as reported by one LGBTI activist:

Many faith leaders have said: 'It's fine, don't arrest LGBTI people, be kind to them.' Others say that government should arrest LGBTI people and there should be penalties.

These inconsistencies and contradictions pointed to the lack of a core, foundational knowledge among religious leadership in relation to issues of sexual and gender diversity. The idea of the 'centre and the margins' and the dialogue between the two was a common theme in discussions with a general feeling that there were clear margins within faith communities that were often inhabited by queer people:

The margins are not people outside the church, it's people within the church who are silenced, marginalized and afraid.

It was therefore important to document these narratives as a necessary advocacy tool:

We have to document the stories of those on the margins so as to be able to speak back to the centre. For example, if one woman speaks out they will kick her out of the church but if ten women speak there may be the possibility of discussing and changing.

Therefore delegates believed that coalitions needed to happen not just among LGBTI activists and faith community members but also among religious leaders:

Church leaders must come together and speak out on LGBTI issues side by side and to work together by building coalitions across faith and activist organisations.

Overall delegates felt that the messaging of religious leadership on LGBTI issues was often contradictory and based on a general lack of information or misinformation. It was in this space of inconsistency and ignorance that opportunities arose for conscientising and for the development of coalitions.

LGBTI individuals navigating religious communities

What became apparent in the course of the dialogue were the real world challenges that LGBTI individuals face in navigating faith spaces. Anecdotal evidence and the experiences of delegates pointed to systemic and widespread collusion of faith communities in homophobia. This had a severely eroding effect on the quality of the relationship between queer communities and faith communities. In this regard one of the most significant barriers to LGBTI communities engaging faith communities was the lack of trust between the two:

I have experienced similar situations in different SADC countries. It's difficult because of the low level of trust and communication. LGBTI people don't trust church leaders and for them to engage in these spaces is not easy.

It became clear in the course of the dialogue that capacity needs to be developed for LGBTI activists in engaging faith communities, including in relation to language use:

We need to strengthen capacity for ongoing engagement with religious people who can bring change. How do we do this in vernacular languages is a challenge and we need resources to translate religious texts. At the moment language is a barrier.

One important value held in common by LGBTI groups and faith communities, that could assist in dialogue and allyship building, was social justice:

The right to equality is at the heart of all organised religions and LGBTI social movements: we should be able to speak the same language.

However given the regional focus of the dialogue one of the challenges was the ways in which different contexts have different understandings and approaches to gender and sexuality:

In some contexts you can be open and out about your sexual and gender identity but in other contexts one may have to be silent: our identities shift in different spaces and contexts.

Given the already heavy burden of societal, institutional and familial homophobia, some delegates expressed concern about what they saw as the risk of putting the added burden of change on the shoulders of LGBTI individuals in faith communities:

We have individualised the problem and we are putting the burden back on the oppressed. For example, saying that women must conform to expectations and navigate their identity in a faith context in a certain way is putting that burden on women, not the church leadership and church systems. It's like having white people say black people must figure out racism or women must act in certain ways to avoid rape and sexual violence.

Consequently delegates concurred that it was necessary for faith communities themselves to also shoulder the task of change and develop appropriate theologies in so doing:

The churches and leadership must take the burden of changing the language, culture and teachings of the church to be more inclusive of gender and sexual minorities and to develop a theology of love, compassion, humanity and dignity.

So as to bring about this change it was also necessary to see more than just the homophobia of organized religion, as widespread as this may be. Some delegates felt that there was an excessive focus on religious homophobia at the expense of other discourses:

A lot of discourse within religion focuses on homophobia but that's just one discourse. The discourse of sexuality is not just about homophobia, it also needs to include children and young people. A focus on educating youth may shift this discourse to be inclusive of broader injustices or differences.

In a similar vein LGBTI advocacy needed to avoid the risk of perpetuating binaried and exclusionary thinking:

Our language needs to be one that avoids binaries and the presumption that you're either one or the other: hetero/homo, woman/man, black/white. Dismantling language that has binary implications is important as this is where the source of power lies.

The South Africa dialogue was rich in its nuanced understanding of the challenges of transforming religious spaces, including the weaknesses in some current forms of LGBTI advocacy. This is where the space became most beneficial in its encouraging of both LGBTI advocates and religious leaders to become more critical of their respective positions.

Overall delegates were clear that the conversation required the participation of not only the oppressed and marginalized but also those in positions of privilege and power:

If you are in a position of power how do you navigate these differences and your own privilege?

Here a more nuanced analysis of power and privilege came to the fore in which both oppressed and oppressor reflect critically on their own location.

Future advocacy strategies

Delegates at the South Africa dialogue suggested numerous future advocacy strategies of relevance in both South Africa and across the region. One approach was the importance of moving beyond christonormativity to an engagement with multiple religions:

We should be conscious of how different religions operate. For example, Christian and Islamic religion can be better or worse on issues concerning sexuality. We should understand which religion is bad and good on these issues and why.

Delegates were clear that epistemologies of ignorance in organised religion needed to be challenged as they perpetuated additional oppression on already marginalised bodies and minds:

People want you to conform to their standard and the teaching that we are all created in the image of God—how does the church reconcile those who are different?

Patriarchy and misogyny was generally agreed to be rife in organised religion, as is racism, and does not reflect the truth of divinity:

White male teaching is that God must be like me but what if we try to imagine a complex God that will encompass everyone?

There was also general agreement that of all the sectors where social change is required, the religious sector offers some of the most significant challenges in relation to sexual and gender diversity:

We still have a long way to go towards changing other people's perspectives regarding sexuality, faith and religion.

A core part of this process of change and transformation would be queer exegesis and a reinterpretation of scripture:

We need to have these conversations to try and see how we can take a particular religious text and reflect different interpretations.

However to date those churches that have been transformed focus generally on issues of race and gender but rarely if ever on issues of sexual and gender diversity:

While constitutions of churches are often non-sexist, non-racist, non-discriminatory they need to be taken to task on LGBTI issues.

A core contradiction in this work is that faith communities, which should be places of solace and belonging, function as sites of exclusion and violence for sexual and gender minorities:

How do you respond to faith being a place of injustice and violence? At the centre the dominant is still misogynistic and homophobic.

As a result strategies of change need to avoid the further marginalisation and exclusion of queer people, who are particularly at risk of objectification and rejection:

We need to re-strategise because if you stand up in church and call out these issues you will get kicked out.

One possible way to avoid this ongoing and future exclusion is to engage more strategically, beginning on the margins and gradually entering the centre, prioritizing an engagement with scripture:

We should work from the margins, including women's groups and youth groups, so that we can organize and then come and speak to the centre combined with the study of texts and scripture.

Strategies of change must also necessarily work with and overcome LGBTI individuals fears of speaking out about issues of LGBTI social justice and inclusion:

We need to be strategic and tactful in how we address these issues within churches because the silence happens because people are afraid of speaking.

Here delegates spoke to real world experiences of alienation and exclusion which foregrounded the necessity of prioritizing the health, well-being and safety of LGBTI people in these spaces. There were already working examples in which marginalized groups in faith communities began to speak out:

There are examples of working with churches in the Western Cape which had women's groups tell their stories of how the church failed them or how they felt let down by the church. This led to an entire process of healing amongst women that was then presented to the leadership and involved saying that this is coming from within this community and this is what people within your church are experiencing.

Conclusion

The South African dialogue foregrounded the ways in which religion and the faith space are robustly contested by a number of marginalised constituencies and increasingly by queer communities. This process involves moments of real contestation and reinterpretation in which lies the aliveness of faith, albeit resisted by church leaders and church authorities. A core aspect of this renegotiation and contestation is queer exegesis or rather the reinterpretation of sacred texts such as the bible so as to be more inclusive of previously marginalised communities. This necessarily requires a recognition and acceptance in faith communities of the ways in which religion has perpetuated realities of 'othering' and silencing of dissent.

Feminist theologians have long led the way in the regendering of faith and recentring of women in religion. The trajectories opened up by feminist and liberatory theologies have given much impetus to the development of queer theologies in recent years. It is therefore an opportune moment, given both the effects of global capitalism on African states as well as the emergence of women's rights movements globally in recent years, for the emergence of a radical queer theology that foregrounds the inherent injustice of the patriarchal religious space as well as the need to challenge theologies of exclusion. This necessarily entails a critique and rebuttal of both sexism and heteronormativity given the deeply intersected realities of misogyny and homophobia. Intersectionality therefore becomes a key lens for interrogating religious exclusion and for fostering the inclusion of LGBTI people in their faith communities. The South Africa dialogue gave ample space for the expression of such possibilities.

**7. Report from the
Swaziland Dialogue
(10 August 2016)**

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A first of its kind in Swaziland

REPORT ON RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE ON FAITH, SEXUALITY AND GENDER DIVERSITY IN SWAZILAND

RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE REPORT

The Rock of Hope

1.Introduction

In every society there are dominant ideas about sex, gender and sexuality. The dominant idea about gender is usually that there are only two genders (the way we identify, or are told to behave), linked to only two sexes (the physical characteristics of our bodies) – male and female. This is sometimes referred to as the ‘gender binary system’.

But there are many more than two genders, and many more than two sexes. People have different gender and sexual identities that can change over the course of their lives. This two-gender system not only insists that there are only two genders, but it also harmful because it often promotes a gender conformity that sets standards as to how all people are expected to behave.

The gender and sexuality binary systems reinforce stereotypes that harm LGBTI persons in society. This expands to religious and faith bodies mostly because of the lack of a decisive stance supporting LGBTI by the different legal frameworks. This leads to faith leaders taking a stigmatizing stance which is augmented by the charade that God frowns upon homosexuality. It is a known factor that a significant number of human beings believe in the existence of a higher power to whom they look up to for spiritual guidance. Thus, faith leaders can explore opportunities to challenge harmful stereotypes and better reflect the full nature of human experience.

Swaziland, is a pre-dominantly Christian country and societal discrimination against the LGBT community is prevalent. Working with Religious leaders as an LGBTI community is a challenge as different religious and faith leaders and sects have continuously used public platforms to make statements that LGBTI persons are demons who do not deserve a place in the country. There is a collaborative spirit of zero tolerance among religious and traditional leaders on LGBTI issues and acceptance. They are strategic in terms of suggesting what is right, wrong, and acceptable or an abomination to their followers.

Alongside leaders of other faith communities, they are vested with power, authority and influence. Their pronouncements regarding sex and sexuality, for example, have been quite influential in perpetrating homophobia and intolerance towards LGTBI persons in the country. It is against this background that a conversation between LGBTI persons and faith and religious leaders was long overdue, even if it's just to iron out differences and share information as a first step to what is hopefully the beginning of a relationship that will explore necessary steps in advancing advocacy of LGBTI rights in religion in the country.

1.1 Country context

While there are no primary documents detailing the legal status of homosexuality in Swaziland, and no information on the penalties imposed, Sodomy is considered a common-law crime the country (Legal Assessment Report, 2015), a law which is wrongly used to scare off gay men. In 2005, the Government planned to include prohibitions of all male and female homosexual acts in a revised version of its Sexual Offences laws. The proposed penalties for same-sex sexual behaviour include a two-year prison sentence or a fine. However, to date the proposal has not been adopted. “Gay and lesbian relationships are not acceptable in Swaziland” Premier Sibusiso Dlamini.(2012)

Swaziland has a very small but galvanizing LGBTI civil society movement. Rock of Hope, is the largest LGBTI organization in Swaziland. We believe that Religious leaders and faith-based organizations have a crucial role to play in upholding the human rights of sexual minorities and ensuring appropriate and accessible services that are free from judgement and stigmatization. This includes eliminating homophobia, stigma and discrimination in the religious and faith sector itself so as to influence their followers to do the same. and together we can come up with new processes to engage religious and faith communities to on LGBTI issues.

1.2 PRE DIALOGUE PLANNING SESSION

In a bid to overcome challenges and fears associated with engaging religious leaders in a conversation involving LGBTI persons we held a pre dialogue planning session with seasoned activists from around the country to come up with strategies of involving them in the conversation and sensitizing them on LGBTI struggles and need for acceptance.

We devised an entry point which was to tap into their emotions and speak about love which is a major principle in faith organizations hence saying to them we actually deserve to be treated with dignity as church members and that churches should be free from stigma

and discrimination. Stigma and discrimination is a much safer entry point because we can use psychosocial support and the church as a place in which lgbti can seek counsel.

We felt having a presentation on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) and breaking down what LGBTI is would break the ice and not assume they know what we are representing but give them some information and knowledge on LGBTI existence.

We elected to concentrate on what we advocate for and to not get distracted as we anticipated their negative attitudes towards the LGBTI community. And not to get emotional but be firm and share our familiarity with the bible and be sure what we talking about. One way we felt could help in achieving that was to spark a conversation using church experiences and owners should relate them so that they can be effective.

Instead of hiding why we were inviting them we felt it would be helpful to be honest in our invitations so as to get leaders who would be able to listen to us so we can listen to them as well. Also to give them an option to invite us to sensitize church leaders who will take the knowledge back to the ground.

2. Invitations

Invitations were sent to more than 25 religious leaders including Islamic faith Baha'i faith but only pastors and elders from the Christian community showed interest. We addressed the invitation in a respectful way and went through the 3 Christian leadership structures to invite the pastors (church forum, council of churches, league of churches) This was done in a bid to Balance the Pastors in terms of having pastors from both modern Ministries and Ancient churches.

However, in the last minutes we were told our invitations were turned down and from some there were denials that they hadn't gotten the invitations altogether and we were sent from pillar to post as leaders from these structures hadn't even forward the invitation letters to the churches they represent. In the end we approached pastors and faith leaders individually by going to their churches and also engaged mobilizers to do outreach and send invitations especially in the rural areas.

2.1 Challenges

The different church structures or coordinating mechanisms (i.e. Council of Churches, Church Forum, League of Churches) are founded on diversity, both ecumenical and cultural, so it is natural that they hold different approaches to sexuality and gender identity, as they do with many other issues. In regard to this topic, the differences include strong and painful disagreements which led to some of the key prominent and vocal pastors not being invited to participate by these umbrella bodies.

There are churches and other faith communities that are not comfortable beginning a dialogue at this time, because of the culture, history, faith, laws and/or political developments in their contexts. The dialogue identified the following:

- a) Power dynamics affect our conversation: this includes colonialism, the different power structures in our churches, the relationship between our churches and the state, and between our society and the churches.
- b) There are fears and misunderstandings on both sides, which arise from not knowing each other.
- c) Points of difference arise about the relationship between sexuality and gender diversity and sin, family, human nature in the image of God, and the interpretation of the Bible.

2.2 Executive Summary

The Religious dialogue, which took place on 10th August 2016 at George Hotel - Manzini was organized by The Rock of Hope through the support from Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA) and Wits Centre for Diversity studies (WiCDS) and was the first of its kind to be hosted in Swaziland. The dialogue provided an avenue for open, inclusive exploratory discussions on religious perspectives on sexual and gender identity and health rights including the context of HIV. The one-day dialogue featured a panel of religious and faith

leaders and LGBTI activists to explore the intersections of faith and sexuality and gender diversity.

The purpose of the dialogue was solely to provide a platform to faith leaders and LGBTI activists to explore the intersections of faith and sexuality and gender diversity. From a base of human dignity and respect, to try and explore how religious and faith communities can retain faith and embrace sexual and gender diversity and possibilities of faith communities playing a role in stamping out discrimination, harassment and violence against LGBTI people. To find a common ground of all parties working together to advocate for the inclusion and acceptance of LGBTI persons in the society.

The dialogue brought together 56 participants inclusive of religious leaders and delegates from faith-based organizations, along with LGBTI activists from all 4 regions of the country. It must be noted that the religious dialogue was only attended by pastors and religious and traditional leaders who are predominantly of the Christian faith as other faiths blatantly refused to honour the dialogue invitation.

The following is a report of proceedings from the dialogue, which gathered together faith leaders from a range of traditions to dialogue on Faith, Sexuality and Gender Diversity. The dialogue includes the sharing of experience and discussion on how faith leaders can work together to challenge harmful cultural attitudes and practices related to gender diversity.

3.1 Dialogue Proceedings and Discussions

The Rock of Hope's Board Member, opening the dialogue, firstly appreciated the Religious leaders who honoured the invitation though it was not easy to facilitate the invitations through the different Christian umbrella bodies, however appreciated that finally the Religious leaders attended the dialogue. He remarked that it is high time Swaziland as a nation including the faith community accept the reality that LGTBI people are present in Swaziland and to talk openly about sexual diversities in human sexuality within the church.

The morning sessions started with a foundational presentation laying the objectives of the dialogue and the role of Rock of Hope in Swaziland (organizational background). The organizational background presentation was followed by a presentation on Sexuality, to ensure that the pastors are sensitized on the key definitions in order to understand the flow of the discussion. A comprehensive description of sexuality and sexual diversity was shared through a presentation on Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity and Expression (SOGIE). It was explained that sexual diversity is a development issue it should not be used to impede on people's rights to seeking spiritual guidance from their chosen religions and faiths as they see fit.

Religious Leaders are men of God and they preach love therefore they are expected to do their best in reaching out to those LGBTI groups. Pastors should be able to adapt to different people's problems and issues at any given time. "It is no longer a secret that we have LGBTI people and organizations in Swaziland and the faith community need to accept that, understand the complexities of humanity and sexual diversity and play their role in ensuring spiritual guidance to everyone who seeks it irrespective of their sexual orientation."

Barriers to accessing spiritual guidance and care by LGBTI people were explored to say it is difficult to grow spiritually and seek counselling from the church. This is due to negative attitudes shown towards LGBTI, a lack of knowledge and relevant help on dealing with Lgbti persons and issues as well as unsolicited beliefs that people choose to be non-heterosexual and can be changed by prayer.

These barriers can lead to adverse outcomes where you find that Lgbti people will not seek spiritual healing even though they believe in faith and religion. They will rather lie and pretend to be what they are not when undergoing counselling which results in uninformed help and advice given meaning the issues still remain unsolved.

A detailed presentation whose theme was love oriented was presented by the lead Facilitator on Faith, Sexuality and Dignity. The lead facilitator (Religious and Traditional Expert) pointed to the need for inclusion and empowerment of all to achieve resilient

societies and nations and to ensure sustainable human development. “Regardless of the religions and faiths we individually may ascribe to, our shared values of human rights can help us find a way forward on many complex issues,” she said.

The Lead Facilitator stated that it is relatively new that faith and religions have come to be used in the same sentences as human rights, and sexual and gender diversity. These connections do, however, constitute crucial human rights issues, if we are to live as ‘complete’ human beings – both in terms of gender and sexual diversity, and in terms of spiritual fulfilment and expression.

In many cases, particularly with mainstream and more traditional forms of religious practice, religious communities and practices have very often been dominated, as well as polarized, by forces from the conservative right. This has been most useful for those who wish to suppress gender, sexual and human rights. But it has also been useful for those who wish to suppress religious and spiritual diversity, and to exclude people who have more tolerant views within mainstream communities of faith.

The facilitator further stated that Evangelism and interreligious dialogue are both important, but they take place in different ways and have different purposes. Interreligious dialogue is best viewed as part of the educational ministry of the church. It involves growth, learning, and change over time. It includes learning about our non-religious neighbours so we might better understand who they are and what they need. How else will Christians be in a position to practice neighbour love? How else will they contribute to a healthy civil society in which strangers as well as friends learn to trust one another and work together toward the common good?

The willingness of Christians to dialogue with religions that are different than themselves demonstrates good will on the church’s part. It builds a “cultural atmosphere” of trust, mutual understanding, and conflict resolution. Educating Christians in the capacities of dialogue goes hand in hand with the church’s evangelical witness. If churches cannot even dialogue with those who are different than themselves, especially religious minorities, then what sort of message does this send to their neighbours? Evangelism includes embodying

the gospel, not simply winning an argument. It goes hand in hand with interreligious dialogue.

She pointed out that there is a window of opportunity to change the way that religion – all religions, in fact, – can be used with regards to gender so that religion may promote, rather than hinder, gender equality. This is what this dialogue on “Faith, Gender and Sexuality” wants to teach. God created us in his image and we are all equal, hence the purpose is not to discriminate but to try and make everybody comfortable everywhere even in church despite their sexuality.

She went on to say faith is not for a certain group of individuals but for diverse people and encouraged that we all be united in our diversity. “Let us all try to just weigh the love we have and see if it will be the same in all sexualities.”

The event discussed progressive approaches by some religious leaders towards LGBTI persons. The dominant discourse nowadays tends to present as mutually exclusive the rights of religious believers on the one hand, and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people on the other hand. Yet, every day millions of LGBT people marry their faith with a sexual orientation or gender identity different from the majority’s. Believers represent a diverse range of beliefs and feelings, sometimes very different from messages of condemnation from high religious authorities.

Speakers at this event discussed how these two fundamental aspects of human identities can be reconciled, and what lessons they hold for policy-making in the field of human rights.

3.2 DISCUSSIONS

Pastors shared that it is impossible to agree at this time that the church should take any public action on these topics due to a complex cluster of faith and political reasons. All in the dialogue affirms that any violence against anyone is unacceptable, and that we will begin by addressing this issue internally. Other pastors are perplexed and pained that, this being the case, they cannot simply begin by stating this. All during the dialogue, however,

are grateful that deeper understanding between us has already begun and wish this for the entire Christian movement.

Pastors came out to say it's not easy because we see things differently and there is a lot to be done in the counselling sector to prevent 'problems' of people becoming gays or lesbians in the future. LGBTI's appreciated that this is a complex issue because people were created differently and they didn't expect pastors to immediately grasp the information shared with them but should refrain from expecting and preaching for people to change from homosexuality. 'We have faith in religious beliefs to influence brethren's attitudes and hateful cultural beliefs. Our religion has great influence in our lives and a person cannot choose their sexual orientation but wish for support from the church.'

Some pastors said they understood and were willing to open their arms but they were in the minority compared to the ones in opposition who were loud and overpowering the supporting pastors. The opposing preachers said in as much as they could allow some LGBTI people into their churches, they would do so in order to preach to them and let them know that their lifestyle is demonic and unacceptable.

3.3 Experiences and Stories shared by LGBTI activists

The LGBTI people shared painful and heart wrenching stories about their experiences which have made them leave the church. One gay man said he used to be in the praise team of his church and a youth leader of eight branches in his church. He was outed to his pastor who called him out and told him being gay was contagious and he was stripped of all his duties and responsibilities in the church. All his church peers were later interrogated by the church association and they all backed away from him leaving him lonely and faithless. The pastor went on to preach against homosexuality every Sunday after that which pushed him out of the church and into clubs where he felt more accepted. He says, pastors and the congregation should watch what they say as their preachings are alienating LGBTI people from their religious beliefs.

In his sharing he explained that he was into drugs just because of the situation he has been through but felt like that's not what he is supposed to do as he felt like he was a born pastor and what he wants from pastors is for them to hear his story and put themselves in his shoes.

The LGBTI people were so confident, no one felt shy but they voiced out their feelings from deep within without any fear. The first two who shared their experiences were so bold beyond the word. The third one just wowed the audience and left them with their jaws hanging. Their boldness encouraged even those who may have had doubts about coming out publicly to want to stand up and share their stories. A total of 6 people ended up sharing their stories of being ostracized by the church.

Regarding that issue the pastors felt like they are being forced to accept homosexuality into church which they believe is against God's will. They thought these activists wanted to make them feel guilty for any deeds which were done to show how sensitive the issue of homosexuality in the church was. Some pastors felt like they were being forced to accept homosexuals into their churches and they made it clear that they were avoiding these people, they cannot be under the same roof with LGBTIs. Although some admitted that they did have homosexuals in their churches but most of them are in denial.

Their views were different. Some were there to mock in such a way that one ended up asking how LGBTIs have sexual intercourse but some were able to understand the purpose of the dialogue. Activists were not there to fight as they kept their calm until the end of the dialogue. Some of the pastors showed interest on what they were saying and responded by saying they had no idea on what LGBTI is so they requested that a workshop should be conducted for them to learn more.

The pastors also had the mentality of considering homosexuality as a phase that would pass. They also believed that some of the activists wanted to change from homosexuality to being straight. One of the activists touched on the issue of the church being a place where everyone would find peace and where anyone can be safe and get psychosocial support. She said, 'If I'm at church to play, you as a pastor just don't force or push me to change my ways and don't find a way to get rid of me (kick me out of church).' After this presentation the pastor seemed to understand it in a different way because they thought the activist meant

that this homosexuality 'thing' was something that would come to pass, if a homosexual person is in church she/he should be given time because they believe that the day of change would eventually come. They would only kick them out if they misbehave in the church and they would not criticize them because they do not have the solution.

They said that LGBTI are causes of divorce because in some marriages there are some people who are homosexuals but they got married only to impress their family or any other individuals around them, but it can also be that they are in denial so they get into marriage which lasts for very short time. This one said then causes divorces which they frown upon as a church.

There was still a clear failure or refusal to understand from the majority of pastors even after personal stories from LGBTI community, insisting that if a woman has ever fallen pregnant then she was "normal" and lost her way. Despite hearing different point of views from the community detailing the pressures faced by them from society to conduct themselves in a certain way, some pastors still refused to consider homosexuality a normal human sexuality.

There were still hints of patriarchal thinking within the group of pastors because even when a lesbian had not fallen pregnant but had at one point in their lives had heterosexual sexual relations they took it to mean that once more they changed their normal default setting to homosexuality because of disappointment or simple confusion. When lesbian community members offered that being lesbian in fact has nothing to do with men but is entirely centred on their attraction to women a majority of the pastors still refused to consider the thought of a woman living happily outside of a heterosexual relationship.

3.4 Messaging from Religious leaders

The participants were separated into groups and the pastors were placed in their own groups to discuss different scenarios of being confronted with LGBTI people in the church with only one LGBTI activist to keep the discussion on point. To avoid accidentally insulting anyone the pastors were at first reluctant to offer their true opinions but after a pro-LGBTI

statement by one pastor they were able to give their own opinions which were mostly negative about full acceptance of LGBTI.

The Rock of Hope would like to share that one of the most difficult areas of discussion was around the ability of the pastors to take a public stand and to share the message of love within their congregations in various ways for the rights of people marginalised because of their sexual or gender identity. Pastors stated that they need more dialogues before they are able to speak with one voice and make any national statement on sexuality and gender diversity.

One bishop said there should be class for pastors on how the world is and there should be no stigma. Everyone should be treated equally and we should love one another. If there is no love, we are against God. They shouldn't be thrown out of church or be scared of us as pastors. However, there are things we should be careful of when dealing with homosexuality which include investigating the cause of this 'behaviour'. 'Prayer can help us pastors to help these people leave their behaviour. Let's be together and fight this because it's against the Bible', he continued to say.

The bible wants people to have kids so how can the homosexuals have kids. Homosexuality is not a new thing and we should not pretend or try to impress. These people should resist this as it is something a person can overcome. It's in God's creation that people are not the same. This verse 1 Corinthians 6 verse 9 and others were quoted and they said they have a clue that activists had practised the verses. One of the activists' questions "What does the verse say about lesbians? The pastor's response was that if we want to know that we have to go deeply into the bible. It was a very big mistake for them (activists) to leave the church, the way they were treated in their churches doesn't mean that they should give up on going to church.

One pastor clarified that the principles of the bible are straight and he was not here to dictate to you on what is wrong or right. We are not here to debate or fight about homosexuality. Pastors are not called to catch people but to fish people into the church. As pastors we don't stand in front of the people in church to condemn because we have our own mistakes. God is a God to strangers but a father to Christians. There is no remedy for sin, God is just against homosexuals. 'What should I do about my feelings? One of the activists asked, people are expecting me to get married to somebody of the opposite sex what should I do?' Unfortunately, none of the pastors was able to respond to that question.

We are to go present this to our elders and we still have questions for the LGBTIs (as their fathers). We need to talk so that we can hear your views. As an LGBTI you have a right to go to any church of your choice and clarify to your pastor about your sexuality. We know that sometimes this homosexuality thing comes about when somebody was abused at home. As pastors we LGBTIs expect you to know what to do when dealing with diverse people in the church. We need your support.

As pastors we are willing to address every issue concerning the homosexuality of some of our church members. We are aware that they are some homosexuals in our churches even though they are still in the closet. If you are calm, we will be able to listen and take actions. God wants humble people. Wrong will always be wrong.

4. Recommendations and Way forward

The Christian structure is founded on unity in diversity. We experience that our churches and communities around the world are divided in their responses to sexuality and gender diversity. In this situation, the failure to dialogue and listen to one another is causing pain on all sides, but we also have resources to learn from our diversity and grow in unity.

Therefore, the pastors affirm the value of and need for dialogue on sexuality and gender diversity and our major recommendation is that the Rock of Hope continue and deepen this dialogue. To this end, the pastors recommended that:

- 1.. All levels of the Christians bodies be engaged in this process.
2. National Christian bodies discuss and decide what approach is appropriate for them in their own contexts and at the same time commit to the process of dialogue.
3. The Rock of Hope base this process of dialogue in the deeper work of discerning anew our identity, mission and vision-- "examining who we are" by creating clearer conceptual links between our core mandate and our local, national, regional, and global work.
4. Exploring the language we use to be sensitive and inclusive.

5. Explore the power imbalances within the church bodies and intersections with marginalisation on the basis of gender or sexual identities.

Some pastors raised the following recommendations and The Rock of Hope would like to share the deep calling some of the pastors have to adhere to: Show solidarity with people marginalised on the basis of their gender or sexual identity and take action against discrimination, violence and criminalisation. Advocate for basic human rights for people marginalised on the basis of gender or sexual identities such as the right to life (not to be killed) to freedom from violence, to shelter/housing, health, education, and livelihood, in the churches and in society.

Many congregations that welcome LGBT people don't talk much about LGBT issues. That's because many pastors are uncomfortable talking about sexuality in general. How can we advocate for sexual justice if we don't talk about sexuality? Hence, The Rock of Hope should create and widely share resources to increase understanding of sexuality and gender diversity. This can include:

Sharing personal stories and testimonies about diverse sexuality and gender identities in order to dispel myths and misconceptions on all sides. Information sharing on discrimination based on sexual and gender identities (especially language and terminology in different context).

5. Conclusion

The dialogue about sexual and gender diversity held was indeed ground breaking! A first of its kind in the country, it provided a platform whereby everyone present felt at home and free from any kind of intimidation. The LGBTI people were so confident, no one felt shy but they voiced out their feelings from deep within without any fear. As for the 'religious' group, one could tell that they had a secret agenda which was to preach and pray for the LGBTI people, but after the experience share, their attitudes changed altogether and some of them were so sympathetic, they fell short of admitting that they need to ask for forgiveness from God for the way they had treated the LGBTI people in the past due to lack of knowledge. Again the time factor was a problem because they wanted to know even more about sexuality.

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All in all, this dialogue has opened a chapter whereby the religious leaders who were present will know how to handle issues of sexuality in their various churches if they want to.

I want to believe that LGBTI people are satisfied with the way they handled themselves during the dialogue especially because they spoke from their hearts, fearing no one and most importantly, those present gave them all the attention and listened to them. The feedback we got from the 'religious' group shows that they actually listened and have shifted from their ignorance to a new page that is ready to learn even more about sexuality and gender diversity.

The dialogue had a notable impact in alerting the pastors the urgency of the task at hand. The dialogue has broached the contentious issue of sexual diversity and how the different religions approached homosexuality. It challenged religious leaders to recognise the need to appreciate the complexity of human sexuality and to engage in the search for more information in order to become more effective counsellors.

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Picture 1: Poster



**Picture 2: ONE OF THE DIALOGUE PARTICIPANTS SHARING THEIR
CHURCH EXPERIENCE**



Picture 3: Poster



Picture 4: Dialogue Participants



Picture 5: Newspaper Article on Religious Dialogue



Picture 6: Poster

