

GAYS AND LESBIANS OF ZIMBABWE (GALZ)

Launched in 2011, and funded by the Government of the Netherlands, Bridging the Gaps is a programme for key populations. It focuses on securing the health and human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, including men who have sex with men; people who use drugs; sex workers of all genders and people living with HIV. The programme is implemented in 15 countries by nine Alliance partners: Aidsfonds; AFEW International; COC Netherlands; MPact Global Action for Gay Men's Health and Rights; Global Network of People Living with HIV; the Global Network of Sex Work Projects; International Network of People Who Use Drugs; International Treatment Preparedness Coalition; and Mainline. Zimbabwe is one of the focus countries for the programme and, between 2011 and 2019, Bridging the Gaps supported Gays and Lesbians Zimbabwe (GALZ). GALZ is a country-wide LGBT network operating within a complex and challenging country context. Homosexuality is criminalised. There is also strong political and socio-cultural intolerance of homosexuality and sexual diversity. Violent repression is common.





The Bridging the Gaps programme aims to contribute to ending the AIDS epidemic among key populations by 2030 through the achievement of three long-term goals. The first is a strengthened civil society that holds governments to account. The second is the increased fulfilment of key populations' human rights. The third is improved Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and fewer HIV transmissions. Civil society is at the heart of improving the health and rights of key populations, so strengthening civil society is a cornerstone of the programme. Starting in 2017, the Health Economics and HIV and AIDS Research Division (HEARD), based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa, partnered with Aidsfonds to conduct research on capacity development within the Bridging the Gaps programme. The research, which took place from 2018-2019, aimed to identify the capacity development interventions which increase the effectiveness and impact of the work of civil society organisations and networks to achieve the Bridging the Gaps goals.

Part of the research design involved the preparation of case studies for four BtG partners. GALZ was one of the BtG country partners selected for the development of a case study, partly because of its significant achievements in Zimbabwe on

behalf of LGBT people, and in relation to the programme's long-term goals. The researchers used a participatory approach called outcome harvesting to collect data for the case studies. This engaged GALZ's staff, beneficiaries and strategic partners to identify their most significant results or achievements over the period of programme support. It also examined how capacity development support had contributed to success. These results were confirmed through document reviews and key informant interviews with GALZ staff and individuals outside the organisation. Research findings were presented and validated in a workshop held in May 2019 in which GALZ staff and representatives from its partners and supporters participated.

Six key results emerged from the outcomes harvesting process. These were deemed by the GALZ team to be the most significant achievements over the 2016-2018 period. They were also deemed to be the best examples of how GALZ continuously acquires and applies new knowledge and skills, systems and processes. The examples showed how GALZ continually develops its capacity for bringing about change for itself and on behalf of its members and other LGBTI-focused organisations in Zimbabwe. The six outcomes were:

Outcomes

- By 2018, GALZ was supporting 22 LGBTI Affinity Groups in every region of the country. These are locally established networks of LGBTI individuals. GALZ empowered the groups' members to understand and advocate for their health and rights in communities. At least three groups went on to become independent, community-focussed, LGBTI-led organisations.
- Starting in 2017, GALZ made a strategic shift to prioritise advocacy. It also slowly began to change how it supports access to services for LGBTI people. This was partly done by letting other LGBTI partners and allies gradually take up this role. Many of the organisations doing this were mentored by GALZ throughout their development, some even being led by former GALZ staff members.
- In 2018, GALZ signed its first ever Global Fund funding agreement to develop three Drop-In Centres (DICs). These centres provide community mobilisation and empowerment. They also open up access to health services and psychosocial support for LGBTI individuals. Previously, GALZ had been left out from such opportunities because it was considered by many (including those managing Global Fund resources in Zimbabwe) to be an 'illegal' body because it supports LGBTI communities.
- In 2017, GALZ convened the first meeting of the LGBTI Sector Forum, a national coordinating mechanism for LGBTI organisations. This move sent a strong signal to the wider health sector in the country that LGBTI voices had now emerged independently as a self-coordinating sector.
- The National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan III 2015-2018 was revised to address gaps and priorities for programming for MSM and transgender populations. This was the first formal recognition in a national policy document of these groups' HIV-related health and rights. GALZ played a leading role in securing this recognition.
- In June 2018, following the election of a new President in Zimbabwe, GALZ met with the leadership of ZANU-PF. This is the dominant political party in the country since its independence in 1980. At the meeting, the parties discussed the situation of LGBTI people in Zimbabwe. Previously, the party had refused any communications or dealings with the organisation. The meeting ended with ZANU-PF officials committing to look into the issues of hate speech and other human rights violations pre-, during and post-elections. ZANU-PF members used to use violence and homophobia to attack LGBTI communities under the guise of ridding the country of corrupt (white) foreign influences on Zimbabwe's traditional cultural and moral values.

The six outcomes are extensive. They capture all aspects of the organisation's mission and identity. They show how the learning and development opportunities for GALZ were considerable, spanning those involving LGBTI people in communities to those unfolding at the national level through GALZ's interactions with important stakeholders and decision-makers. GALZ has made significant strides in facilitating community development through its Affinity Group model, which is supported by the Bridging the Gaps programme. These self-evolving networks have become platforms for empowering LGBTI communities to be aware of their rights to demand and access services. GALZ has trained Affinity Group members on key issues relevant in a hostile legal, socio-cultural and political environ-

ment. These issues include legal and human rights literacy and safety and security. This has helped to build connected networks of individuals in communities that are aware of their rights and who are empowered to be meaningfully engaged on issues of concern to them.

GALZ is one of the oldest LGBT organisations in Southern Africa; it was founded more than three decades ago. As such, the outcomes related to organisational capacity speak to an accumulated strength: a reflection of capacity development initiatives over a long period, which have influenced its work in championing the interests of its membership. This involves strengthening internal processes. That in turn influences better programming and

effective interactions with the environment. Other outcomes spoke to the organisation's capacity to interact with allies and stakeholders with a strong sense of legitimacy. It was able to secure new partnerships and new opportunities for advancing its strategic objectives. The convening of the LGBTI Sector Forum was a particularly good example of this strength.

Finally, a critical component of GALZ's capacity, its power and agency, is how it can act to change the environment. This includes taking part in planning processes, such as those for the review of HIV plans and policies or the development of new ones, as well as GALZ's participation on committees and technical working groups. It has worked at the national and local levels to bring about change in knowledge, attitudes, practices and beliefs of important stakeholders or 'duty bearers'. That includes the police, local authorities, health care workers in the public sector, local and national level politicians and other government officials, media practitioners and religious leaders, among others.

The analysis of the outcomes generally revealed how GALZ, as a mature and stable organisation within the Zimbabwean landscape for LGBTI issues, has acquired considerable ability and agency to bring about change. That's particularly true

at the present time when important shifts are happening in the operating environment. GALZ's efforts to continually strengthen the LGBTI movement for the country should be noted. It shares its considerable capacity with newer entities as well as using its credibility and legitimacy to convene allies and stakeholders and to set up new mechanisms for collaboration and solidarity.

The analysis also suggests some issues for GALZ to consider, particularly with regard to future directions. It has rightfully taken on the task of focusing more directly on addressing 'structural' barriers to the fulfilment of the health and rights of LGBTI people in Zimbabwe. But these issues are considerable and raise the question of how well GALZ is prepared and equipped to succeed. GALZ has been able to seize opportunities as they arise and turn them to the advantage of the LGBTI movement. However, what lies ahead is for the organisation to find the means to proactively create the necessary opportunities for strategic change. This is extremely challenging in the complex context of GALZ's work in Zimbabwe. It raises the question of how GALZ intends to continue to evolve--how to 're-wire' itself for this challenge. It must-build on past achievements while at the same time seeking to continue to evolve as a responsive leader to unite and strengthen the LGBTI movement in Zimbabwe.

