



Lawyers Alert

SNAP-SHOT OF LAWYERS ALERT'S LGBTIQ RIGHTS WORK IN NIGERIA

BACKGROUND

In 2013 Nigeria passed a same sex prohibition act which prohibits all forms of same sex relationships and advocacy for same including the registration of any association or club with such objectives. The implication of the passage of this law was an enhanced crackdown on the LGBTI community by security agencies and intolerance from the general populace.

Prior to 2013 even though laws existed prohibiting same sex relationships, it was largely a live and let live attitude from the larger society toward the LGBTIQ community. From the passage of the law to date however, community members have suffered various forms of discrimination with the attendant economic disempowerment and restricted access to resources, justice and services.

OUR WORK

Lawyers Alert work within this space has been to address these issues in largely four ways:

1) Legal literacy

We empower the community with the knowledge of rights through trainings, online campaign, and the distribution of educational and informational materials. The aim is to sensitize the community on their rights, to enable the challenge of these rights when violated. Given the sparse number of lawyers attending to LGBTIQ issues in Nigeria, we also train paralegals within the community to provide legal first aid once the services of a lawyer are required and such services are inaccessible owing to challenges of distance or availability.

2) Free Legal Representation

Given the incessant arrests of community members since the passage of the law, Lawyers Alert provides free legal services ranging from legal advice, preparation of documents and representations in court to community members in need of such services. There have been over 3918 legal incidents requiring services of lawyers

in the last 7 years and LA has provided support in over 612 of these incidents. We are also involved in strategic impact litigation towards protecting the rights of the LGBTIQ. LA for instance, is part of efforts in court to repeal the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act.

3) Monitoring and Documentation of Rights Violations

There has always been a gap in data of human rights violations of the LGBTIQ community. This has greatly hampered advocacy, especially data as to types and quantum of human rights violations on citizens. In the last 2 years we have monitored and documented human rights violations of the LGBTIQ community and published the Data. Our documentation is carried out via our online tool LaDock, which when inputted with data, analyses according to age, location, type, evidencing trends etc.

4) Movement Building

Owing to LA's leadership within the community, we are building a movement of LGBTIQ rights activists and actors, who are making the case at various levels not only for the repeal of anti LGBTIQ laws and policies but also non-discrimination, tolerance and respect for the rights of community members. In the course of this, we have encountered a host of rural and hard to reach LGBTIQ community members and grassroots organizations, whose situation have been exacerbated by the pandemic. We are currently in the process, amidst challenges of especially the internet, to link them with mainstream LGBTIQ organizations for purposes of networking, sharing of information, resources and support.

RESULTS OF OUR WORK

LA is currently providing scientific data on human rights violations of the LGBTIQ community in Nigeria, to aid advocacy on LGBTIQ rights. This data is also for informed and tailored interventions by other stakeholders. The data provided is filling a huge gap in terms of knowledge and information.

LA has offered free legal services to about 1008 community members, enhancing their access to justice and services. We have trained 300 paralegals across the country to support community members where there are no lawyers. Alongside UNAIDS, we facilitated the establishment of the Coalition of Lawyers for Human Rights (COLAHR, a group of lawyers across the country providing free legal services thereby enhancing access to justice).

Capacity of over 32 core LGBTIQ groups in Nigeria has been enhanced with over 5000 persons being beneficiary of our legal literacy services.

In the wake of the pandemic, we set up secure platforms for community members to reach us and share their information confidentially. This was key owing to the lockdown and militarization of the civic space. This is ongoing.

CHALLENGES

One challenge that we have encountered, especially with the pandemic, is the total lock-out of community members suffering discrimination in rural areas and at the grassroots in its most naked form. While we are making efforts to bring them into the movement, it has been a difficult process given their total economic disempowerment (food and shelter) and denial of access to health services, including IT challenges.

There is also the need for an actual state of facts on LGBTIQ violations occurring within the pandemic. Monitoring and Documentation of rights abuses of community members including the trends is critical. This is important not just for lessons going forward but also to provide tailored interventions given the huge number of violations associate with vulnerability at this period.

The courts are also another layer of distortions given the slow pace of trial and the bias against community members by the judges. The judiciary should be sensitized in making the courts friendlier.

These and many more are some of the challenges that, going forward, we intend to meet.

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