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The project "At Human Rights Defenders' side in Uganda – At HRDs' side"
co-financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

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EAST AND
HORN OF
AFRICA
HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS
PROJECT
(EHAHRDP)



HUMAN
RIGHTS
DEFENDERS
UGANDA



Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| 1. The context | 5 |
| 2. The discrimination and violence of women and LGBTI between political rhetoric and social control | 6 |
| 2.1 The rhetoric of the defence of “Africanity” | 7 |
| 2.2 What do we mean by “Africanness”? | 8 |
| 2.3 Homophobia as a means of social control: comparison with the theory proposed by Gusman and Viola | 10 |
| 2.3.1 The colonial period and the construction of the gay subject | 11 |
| 2.3.2 Political manipulation of sexuality | 11 |
| 2.3.3 “Sexual control” and the construction of sexuality as a “social problem” | 12 |
| 2.3.4 Homophobia as a mean of social control..... | 13 |
| 3. Freedom and right of expression for human rights defenders and associations | 15 |
| 3.1 The restriction of freedom for women HRD and LGBTI in their private and public life | 15 |
| 3.2 The restriction of freedom of speech in public life | 16 |
| 3.3 Media and social media for the dissemination of women’s and LGBT rights | 18 |
| 4. Recommendations | 19 |
| 4.1 About the role of international and regional organisations..... | 20 |
| 4.2 About the roles of international organisations | 21 |
| 4.3 About the role of local communities | 21 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 23 |

Introduction

The project “At Human Rights Defenders' side in Uganda – At HRDs' side” co-financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is promoted by Soleterre- Strategie di Pace ONLUS together with East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP), which has the objective to strengthen capacities of human rights defenders – particularly those who are committed to the promotion and protection of human rights for women, LGBT people and their organisations. Since March 2015 there have been ongoing actions to promote the mechanism of protection that have been adopted on to an international level to support the development of civil society organisations and to make them independent through defending democracy, human rights and to strengthen their role as subjects of change.

An International Verification Mission within the scope of the project’s activity was implemented by Soleterre – Strategie di Pace Onlus between the 1st and the 12th of May 2016 with the following objectives:

- To attain a deeper understanding on the structural causes related mainly to local cultural context of discrimination and violence against women and LGBTI and to contribute to the development of a local approach of intervention while maintaining the international standards of human rights protection;
- To analyse how the local context and most of all the laws like POMA (Public Order Management Act), the Anti-pornography Act, the NGO Bill influence the right of expression and associations of human rights defenders to the point to have to adopt international protection mechanisms in order to guarantee their security to exercise their rights;
- To propose points of emphasis and suggest recommendations that respond to the main challenges during the mission in Uganda.

This document is the result of the mission and work of bibliographical research about socio-cultural matters. The objective was not so much to give a picture of the political situation and the challenges that the human rights defenders have to face in Uganda. There has already been some deep and important work done on these issues by the two partners involved in the project with the output of a report published in 2015 “*The situation of human rights defenders in Uganda*”. The objective is to give a critical interpretation of the complexity about the social phenomenon around discrimination of women and LGBTI, based on reflections revealed in interviews made during the mission but also taking into consideration the country’s history and the social development of the last years from a socio-anthropological point of view.

The mission consisted of a team of 3 persons:

- Valentina Valfrè, expert in human rights and equal opportunities, responsible of the area of rights and participation in Soleterre;
- Cristina Cornelli, Project Head Office and health area in Soleterre;
- Alice Coffin, journalist and activist of French ONG - LES DEGOMMEUSES, expert of women rights and LGBTI groups issues.

The international verification mission (IVM) was projected in collaboration with local staff of Soleterre whose project manager is Grazia Paoleri and together with Chiara Lainati M&V Specialist of Soleterre, who afterwards supervised the writing of the report.

The agenda of the mission was developed to find defenders of women and LGBTI rights in both the capital (Central Region) and in the Northern Region of the country. It is from these two widely different territories

that we derived some points of view based on these specific experiences: in the Capital this kind of work is already developed, there has been a creation of important local networks with ties on an international level with organisations having similar missions. Meanwhile in the Northern Region of Uganda the phenomenon is more recent, being an area that not so long ago was involved in civil war and where survival was the main goal. Because of this it was important for the project to collect different points of view which could restore a more integrated vision about the actual situation. Therefore there have been people found who have participated in the project (as beneficiaries but also as stakeholders) and subjects that also play an active role in these issues within Uganda and are also well known abroad.

As well as representatives of local organisations, the mission has also encountered representatives of international organisations that have contributed to relate the issue in the political and international interventions sphere: the Italian Embassy and the Delegation of European Union.

The mission interviewed 14 people that have devised a very interesting framework about the ways and context in which human rights defenders of women and LGBTI operate in Uganda.

On behalf of all the members of the mission and the partners in the project, we would like to thank all the interviewed persons for their willingness to talk and share with the team even on a more personal level.

1. The context

In the thirty year reign of President Museveni as the leader of the ruling party (National Resistance Movement – NRM which has been in power since 1986), the freedom of expression has been considerably limited by an authoritarian government which has discouraged and hampered the growth and development of political and social participation of citizens and also of organisations and human rights defenders. Although the president has formally committed to the fight against corruption and the protection of human rights, the past actions and recent legislative guidelines seem to contradict the commitment.

In particular the best known legislative measures that have influenced the freedom of expression and the association of civil society are the following:

- Public Order Management Act (POMA) (2013): has been signed to regulate public meetings but according to more recurrent opinion between the defenders, it has been promulgated ahead of elections of 2016 to limit the political participation of the civil society on elections and to give more power to the police to control public reunions etc.;
- Anti-pornography Act (2014): has been promulgated in February 2014 and as well as the first one, is offered to an arbitrary interpretation with consequence of discretionary and abuse applications. The law threatens the individual freedom and had a very strong impact mainly on the freedom of women and LGBTI, around which well rooted public speeches were built in cultures and local powers that have contributed and strengthen the impact of law;
- Non Governmental Organization Bill (2015): in April 2015, when the public discussion strongly focused on the importance of free and transparent elections of the president and the government of 2016, there was another very controversial law published that has further limited the freedom of expression of local and international associations.

These legislative measures have interested all the civil society but have particularly touched women, LGBTI people and their defenders. From the report published in 2015 from the partners of the project *“The situation of the human rights defenders in Uganda”* emerges a significant political manipulation of the population’s fears that spin on decay of prerequisite cultural model of “African morality and purity” regarding gender identity and sexual orientation, often opposed to the occidental one, considered corrupted.

The IVM has asked the interlocutors in Uganda to deepen their insight in cultural mechanism that are behind these rhetoric, by analysing the role of the religion and “African and occidental culture” (often named and opposed to these rhetoric), the relation between occidental countries and the country, as well as local powers and how these discussions limit the freedom of speech and expression.

From this work emerges the complexity of representatives and ideas even between the human rights defenders themselves that seemed useful to be framed towards a long-term perspective. Several defenders have referred to the pre-colonial period, colonialism, and to local cultures to explain the origin of certain standards and cultural tradition but the impression is that there is a difficulty to place them in history and to see the culture as something that changes and evolves in time. It seems that there is a lack of narrative capacity to tell about the facts arisen from inside. The risk that several defenders warn before is to represent the phenomena and to claim the rights with the same rigid rhetoric and opposing proposals of national power but also of institutions and international NGOs.

The origin of social events is a lot more complex, the country has passed through different historical periods that have brought profound transformations of local culture: the pre-colonial period, the colonialism, the independence and subsequent periods in which different powers have come and gone with more than

twenty years of civil war for the North, they all have contributed to the social and cultural development that must be necessarily read in its complexity.

2. The discrimination and violence of women and LGBTI people between political rhetoric and social control

It's mainly in the last 10 years in Uganda where the limitation of freedom has been worsening and has affected the sexual minorities of the country. Although there is a lot of legislative measures that have contributed in this process, the one that have had the biggest impact on national and international level is the Anti-Homosexuality Act even if later was annulled. In fact the law in all its processes proposed in 2009, promulgated at the end of 2013 and then annulled by the Constitutional Court in August 2014, has detonated a large media and public discourse about the subject of "homosexuality". In the draft provision between different measures we happened to foresee the life sentence for "aggravated homosexuality" or to legitimise the obligation of denunciation with a sentence to be served in the contrary case. The attention of media has contributed to nourish the social stigma, fomenting attitudes of hate and violence even before the first promulgation of the law. In fact there has been repetitive cases of denunciation of "homosexuality" that have endangered individual freedom not just only from the privacy point of view but also from the freedom of movement point of view from fear of reprisals (the case of the Rolling Stones magazine in 2010), until the murder of activist David Kato in 2011.

Even now the situation doesn't seem to be any better as the testimonies collected by IVM show. In fact the greatest threats come from non-state actors starting from the Churches (as explained below) and most of all from the local population. The interviewed testimonies during the IVM have underlined the extreme difficulty they found in performing activities that may be considered by the majority as "normal" and certainly not dangerous, as going for shopping or taking a taxi. These simple actions that take part of everyone's daily life mean to the members of LGBTI a risk to be insulted, assaulted, even lynched by the crowd just for the fact of being accused of "homosexuality" (one of the interviewed told us *"if a man rapes a young virgin woman it's considered as less serious compared to a man having a sexual relationship with another man"*). The visibility of a human rights defender can represent a defence against a repressive action by the state where as discrimination is by the non-state actors through exposure, mainly media, where their own sexual identity is declared publicly and therefore subjects the victims to "moral judgement" of "common people".

This stigmatising approach of the phenomenon seems to have found a strong uniformity between powerful environments of media, politics and religion of the country which has insisted on "true values and true African morals" opposing them to those morals that are considered to be corrupt and imported from the occident and consequently large sections of the population that were involved and took sides.

On an international level Uganda has become the symbol of so-called "African homophobia", strengthening a stereotypical and contradictory opposition between an Africa that is denying the sexual rights and an Occident promoting the same rights.

All previous notions and issues discussed so far have been initiated into a country where there has been ample ammunition to support this kind of rhetoric which has been used in the past and the present at a legislative and customary level to favour the political and socio-economic subordination of the women.

Despite the fact Uganda is signatory of fundamental international protocols which guarantee human and women rights (as for example the African Charter of Human and People's Rights), in fact the national legislation doesn't seem to be receptive but on the contrary inadequate and in contrast with established principles in these international protocols. This reflects for example in regulated and customary rules of marriage in family life, where the woman is excluded from the properties and inheritance and is often victim of domestic violence. As it happens in all contemporary societies – starting from the occidental ones – the patriarchal culture is strongly rooted and have distant origins; in this sense a very interesting declaration appears by of one of the IVM's respondent which supports how *“the culture can be the base of discrimination but can also represent a protective factor depending on how it evolves”*. For example, the IVM has been told that the African Charter affirms that traditional practices such as female genital mutilations or the dowry for the marriage of the bride or even the phenomenon of child brides are opposed to the principle of equality between man and woman - as well as violating the rights of women and that the culture must be modified to be able to change these practices, helping to insert questions and arguments normally considered as taboo to public discussion, those that can't be talked about publicly because they have something to do with sexuality which is considered as private. On the other hand *“there's a definition of gender-stereotype that is common in the whole region which hints that a man is “bound” to assume male roles and a woman is “bound” to assume female roles, that a man is associated to power and a woman is associated to weakness, that a man has to be the head of the family and therefore is considered superior to a woman. If a woman assumes a more active role it is not considered as an appropriate behaviour because she has to respect expectations of her role. This has a major influence even on the sexuality because it is supposed that men have to marry women but at the same time it influences the gender identity of a person because if you are born biologically as a woman or a man you have to behave yourself as it is expected from a woman or a man. From there comes gender discrimination and homophobia”*.

Without any difficulties it can be affirmed that this heterosexual normativity of gender roles is always in the centre of many cultural and political discussions of the country and is often claimed by strong powers in the name of “original Africanity” opposed to “corrupted morals” of the Occident, however in the recent years it has been present in the same way and carries often just as serious consequences (if you think of the high rates of femicide in Western Countries). In practical terms as stressed by interviewed witnesses, if in one hand this country is well advanced from the legislative point of view relating to human rights, the traditional practices are too often preventing a real progress in women rights; in fact they see themselves informally excluded from fields considered as traditionally male fields as well as from decision-making process, preventing them to abolish oppressive practices. As affirmed by one of the defenders met *“The Charter of Rights says something that in fact doesn't exist because women aren't part of the decision process and cannot be leaders. Furthermore a woman cannot lead a clan; just a man can do it. Women are the one who sow and harvest agriculture products but cannot decide anything about their sale”*. For the LGBTI instead, the gathered testimonies show that their situation has been worsened in the recent years, using just such cultural and political discussions to exclude them from access to the household and basic services like medical and education.

2.1 The rhetoric of the defence of “Africanity”

While trying to understand how the political and cultural discrimination discussions around women and homosexuality in Uganda have developed, it seems very interesting interlacing the testimonies gathered by the IVM with analysis made by Gusman and Viola (2015) about the rhetoric born around the “Anti-Homosexuality Act” to propose another interpretation. In fact the supporters of this law repeatedly insist on some narrations which, as some IVM's witnesses have told, were proposed again in the debates around other

laws which have also hit women in the past and also in successive times (e.g. Domestic Relations Bill or Anti-Pornography Bill). Gusman and Viola (2015) detect two main arguments: the first argument is the “foreign” and “white” origin of homosexuality seen as occidental importation to counteract. This argument is supported in its turn by other two arguments: the first recalls to a “real African culture” supporting that homosexuality didn’t exist before the arrival of the Occident; the second one is that law is the defence against the neo-colonial occidental attitude. According to the last argumentation the introduction of homosexuality in Uganda (and in whole Africa) would be a plot of some groups which, hiding under the label of the “defence of human rights”, would like to impose homosexuality as a much wider strategy of submission. Museveni himself has supported these narrations on several occasions and doing so the fight for homosexuality (but also for other patterns of gender relations considered as “foreign” to African culture) has taken on nationalistic characters and construction of a post-colonial African identity. The second argument is the one that is referred to the protection of a “traditional African family”, heterosexuality and monogamy for the protection of children. It’s a privileged argument of religious leaders in the country who refer to fertility as one of the sensitive issues in Society. Despite being an obvious false history (polygamy is widespread in Uganda and homosexuality existed even before the colonial period), this argument is used by religious leaders to express with violence against the expected external influences of liberal groups and LGBTI activists which would undermine the social and familiar cohesion with sexual anarchy that would result from their despicable sexual behaviours.

As noted by some respondents during the IVM and as confirmed in other studies, there has never been mentioned any interference from “external” religious groups in this defence for Africanity, in particular American. On the contrary in the international debates many have placed emphasis on the role of US evangelical groups and this is reflected in the interviews made with representatives of international organisations during the mission in Uganda.

Whether the Ugandan supporters or their critics from outside the country both tend to support the exogenous nature of the forces which have led to the formulation of this and other laws. What unites both representations is the spread of the image of a passive Africa that suffers helplessly the control and imposition from outside. A vision that nonetheless flattens the complexity of the dynamics that led to the spread of evangelical churches and Pentecostals in the country and the propositions of law which impose the restriction of freedom of sexual orientation rights and of gender identity, looking to a risen heterosexual model as to an “original African model”.

The connection between the Ugandan Pentecostalism and the American conservative evangelical groups is undeniable but it’s not possible that the homophobic trend and the difficult acknowledgement of women rights are due only to exogenous factors.

How to build a defensive speech for “African purity”?

2.2 What do we mean by “Africanness”?

“What is really our culture? To what culture do laws refer? Why am I considered as “un-African” if I don’t follow that cultural model?” (IVM interview)

This is what many defenders we met during the IVM were wondering, given the obvious ways in which the Government and the Church manipulate culture in the name of an original “Africanness” when it comes to the introduction of new laws or the reinforcement of customs, and they underlined the historical falsehood of these stories. By claiming an alleged pureness of the pre-colonial past, the Government and the churches are actually using models conveyed by colonialism itself. If we look at pre-colonial times, for example,

homosexuality was openly accepted even if it was less discussed, and matrilineal systems in which women could freely decide about themselves and their family were in existence.

Some of the defenders we interviewed during the IVM see the attention given to the so-called threat posed by the intrusion in the country of the gender models of the corrupted Western morals as a strategy to better control the population, a strategy where nationalism and the “purity of African culture” play an important role. In this respect, the alliance with the Church - especially with the Pentecostal Church - is highly strategic since it represents an important means of control at the local level. They economically support schools and hospitals, without which an important part of the population would not have access to the most basic human rights, and they also have the power to pervade the country thanks to those charismatic leaders who know how to talk to people. At the same time, from the IVM meetings it emerges that, if on one hand the Evangelical and Pentecostal Church are those that openly express their disapproval towards those behaviours that are considered “immoral”, on the other the Catholic Church and the local Muslim community - even if they have never directly incited to hatred against the LGBTI community - have actually never taken a stand against the violations of their human rights even when these led to the death of LGBTI activists, as it happened with David Kato. The representatives of the main churches on the territory take part in the consultative meetings and have a voice in the decisions made by the Government. This, according to the defenders who were interviewed, has very negative consequences, especially when it comes to laws that have been proposed in order to safeguard the so-called “African purity”, since the religious leaders - all men - have always been extremely conservative towards gender equality issues: this endangers their own role and contributes to the adoption of laws that discriminate women and LGBTI members.

Other interviewees explained how this hate against the corrupted Western morals (and, as a consequence, the tireless defence of the rights of women and of the LGBTI community by the Western countries) conceals the far more relevant interests that the West has in the country: these interests concern the energy and territory resources that, however, enrich a very small portion of the population, mostly made up by the powerful groups who are related to the Museveni clan and its allies. In this respect, the contradictory attitude of the Western countries - that attack the Ugandan Government when it violates the rights of the LGBTI community - has been highlighted: this attitude is a lure to conceal their direct involvement in other equally serious violations of the Ugandan rights committed by the foreign multinational corporations. This is the so-called “pinkwashing”. As highlighted by one of the interviewees, *“the problem with the Western countries is that they seem interested only in LGBTI issues, but they don’t say a word against the exploitation of the resources carried out by oil companies, the confiscation of the territory, the mistreatment of journalists, etc. therefore it is then easy for the Government to take advantage of this attitude and claim that homosexuality was brought from the outside”*.

Anyway, it is impossible to deny that this stereotypical gender culture is rooted in the social and cultural heritage of big part of the Ugandan population. Despite the existence of a cultural plurality linked to different local clans that during the pre-colonial era enjoyed a much more flexible social and relational gender system, in the country traditional heteronormative practices, according to which men must be strong and act as *breadwinner* whereas women are subordinated, still prevail. If a man or a woman deviates from the rules of “tradition”, they are marginalised and risk triggering homophobic or transphobic behaviour that leads to violence and stigmatisation. This model seems to be more engrained in the North than in the capital: the long civil war has led to the repetition of these chauvinist male models. The mass deportations, sexual abuse and kidnappings carried out during the conflict compromised men’s role as protectors of the family. This inability to live up to the expectations of the masculinity normative model has been and still is a reason of humiliation that leads them to compensate by exaggerating other expectations like control and power on weaker individuals, women and children (Dolan 2002 cited in Lundgren, Adams 2012). Those who are able to adapt to this stereotype enjoy more power; those who cannot are subjected to the pressure of social expectations. In all that, the education system is not helpful because the programmes and teaching methods have not been updated in a long time. It is also for this reason that many young people take part in anti-gay demonstrations, as outlined during one of the meetings of the IVM. Furthermore, school - together with family - is the first

place where many LGBTI are discriminated and left out because of their sexual orientation. The depositions undertaken during the IVM meeting report extremely negative events experienced by the defenders of LGBTI during their childhood and even afterwards, when they progressively started to gain more awareness (“*at school they used to tell me that I behaved in a certain way because I was gay, and that homosexuality was illegal. I was kicked out of school and arrested, but I managed to graduate anyway.*”). They also report the difficulty in dealing with their families: “*my family is very patriarchal, but I have never accepted that my sisters and I had a given role, whereas my brothers, for example, never had to cook or to clean the house. Therefore I have always been considered the rebel of the family. When I told them that I was lesbian, they told me that I wanted to be like men, and they didn’t accept my diversity. I didn’t go back home for three years - they were shocked, and said that I was bringing shame to the family name.*”.

In the presence of a culture that is more and more controlled by a rigid gender dichotomy both on the political and the social level, some of the most experienced defenders agree on the necessity to start being the narrators of their own story. It is interesting what was added by one of them: “*Those who counterpose the African values to those of the Western countries are doing so because too often we let other people speak for ourselves.*” Which means, if the Government and the religious leaders play “witch hunting” with “immoral” women and LGBTI, and if they think they are coping the corrupted Western models, it is because several associations of defenders risk themselves referring to the West - more or less implicitly or explicitly - in the interpretation of the local contexts and in the planning of the advocacy actions. This happens mostly in two ways:

- By looking at the so-called African culture - i.e. local clan cultures - and comparing them with “tradition” and “underdevelopment”, the risk is that of doing what the religious and political discourses do. Furthermore, we risk losing the variety and the syncretism that have characterised the ancient times and that are still present in the country;
- By referring mostly to the gender categories offered by feminism and by the LGBTI, categories actually imported from the West (and implicitly considered as progressive if compared to an underdeveloped culture), we risk that the local variety of the gender relationships - way more complex than the Western one - doesn’t emerge.

This new set of images and categories must be created to reach out more effectively to the local population and to achieve more independence from the help of certain Western governments that do nothing else apart from fostering the accusations of intrusion and collusion made by the Ugandan Government. A defender gave the example of the American embassy that at the time of the introduction of the anti-gay law threatened the Government to withdraw their financial support from the country if the law had been approved. This was seen as a double-edged sword: if on one hand it risked depriving the whole country of this kind of precious assistance for a far wider portion of the population than the one addressed by the law, on the other it reduced the authority of the local organisations involved in these matters and it fostered the Government accusations of alleged alliance with the corrupted West.

2.3 Homophobia as a means of social control: comparison with the theory proposed by Gusman and Viola

In light of the aforementioned reflections, where the theme of control was introduced on different levels during several IVM meetings, it seems appropriate to examine in depth the origin of this control, even by using Gusman and Viola’s theory (2015), according to which the homophobic campaigns are part of a long-term political and religious strategy of “sexual control”. In Uganda, this strategy also resulted in the “Abstinence Campaign” and in the campaign against pornography, which resulted in the signing of the Anti-Pornography Act in 2014. This theory is interesting because to demonstrate it, the two authors go through the social and the historical processes that created the gay subject in Uganda, showing in this way the complexity of the relationships and of the powers involved now and then.

Even if the two authors are mainly focused on homosexuality issues, from their analysis the historical and cultural framework that reveals the construction mechanisms of the subordinated role of the woman emerges as well, mechanisms that then contributed to the discourses around homosexuality.

2.3.1 The colonial period and the construction of the gay subject

Historical and ethnographic sources show that in Uganda - as many other pre-colonial Sub-Saharan African Countries - there were many different kinds of “homosexuality”, a term created in Europe in the 18th century that cannot include all different African nuances.

In eighteenth-century Europe - profoundly influenced by the Victorian morals - the gay subject was created to reinforce heteronormativity. Whoever had sexual intercourse with someone of the same sex was automatically labelled as “abnormal”. At that time, with the expansion of colonialism, many European countries aimed to “educate”, classify and dominate African people. The identity ideology that had been imported from Victorian Europe (heteronormativity, praise of biological reproduction, rigid determinism between sex and gender) met a social setting where gender and behaviours vary according to different variables such as power roles, age and sex. Even if today this gender categorisation has deeply changed and most people use biology to define someone’s gender, there are “non-biological” genders such as female-men and male-women. The Baganda people for example, not all males of the royal court are men, and not all females are women: there are variables such as age and social status according to which one’s gender is assigned. In the pre-colonial period, the king (Kabaka) could choose his sexual partner regardless of their biological sex because everybody was a subject, i.e. a woman (subordinated). According to the same principle, princesses were female-men and male subjects were considered as women. In many other African countries there were and still are many different ways in which gender is assigned according to criteria such as power and magic. The European classifying objective led to the diffusion of ideas such as impurity, social danger and deviance for any same-sex sexual intercourse and to the definition of this behaviour as specifically gay. Slowly, the concept of sexual orientation lost its richness and became more and simpler by merging with fluid local systems where sexuality could take on different forms according to age, role in society, cultural context and economic and power relations.

2.3.2 Political manipulation of sexuality

In Europe, towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea that homosexuality was a sign of the decline of our society started to circulate. African people were not included in this conception, since they had always been considered as uncivilised and unaware of any form of civilisation. For this reason, those episodes showing that homosexuality was accepted and institutionalised in Africa were seen as influenced by the Arabs, considered guilty of this “vice”. This interpretation was functional to the colonial power that claimed to be the protector of the alleged sexual morals. This manipulation was perpetrated by the Christian missionaries who, at the end of the nineteenth century, were in the kingdom of Buganda. The sexual customs of the royal court were always demonised and blamed on the Muslim influence, proving in this way the ideology and the symbology of the European powers.

The stereotype of the heterosexual African and his animal-like sex appeal (Fanon 1996) became more and more engrained in the colonised society and after the Ugandan independence the authorities of the country themselves took on this representation. Therefore, during the postcolonial era the stereotype according to which homosexuality is imported from the outside started taking shape, and after the gay revolution in the seventies the outside corresponded with the West.

At that time, the movement of gay liberation started expanding in North America, and it eventually spread to the West. From the nineties, the principles of the LGBTI movement began being exported everywhere with the aim of fighting homophobia all over the world. This was unfortunately unsuccessful. These organisations exported the concept of homosexuality and the Western principles of the LGBT movement as if they were universal, unconcerned of the fact that other societies use different criteria of classification. Africa could not avoid this process. It is not a case if in the nineties many heads of state started making homophobic statements in which they defined homosexuality as a perversion alien to the “African culture” and religion.

To conclude: if colonialism and evangelisation had enough time to import the Victorian morals and to create the stereotype of the African as someone characterised by an uncontrollable sex appeal and “naturally” heterosexual, the postcolonial processes did nothing but make this belief stronger: they engrained in the Western consciousness the contrast between Africa - a country where people’s rights are denied - and the West - where these rights are granted (Awondo, Geschiere, Reid 2012 cited in Gusman, Viola 2015). At the same time, they diffused in great part of Sub-Saharan Africa the feeling that the LGBTI movement was some kind of neo-colonialism willing to spread the Western “perversion” by corrupting the “inner” African heterosexuality.

From different interviews done during the IVM it emerges clearly that these ideas have been deeply interiorised by the local people. One of the interviewees, for example, states that before becoming a defender of women rights she knew nothing about the LGBTI, she had never heard of it, and she even wondered *“if they were really human beings like us.”* She then explains that she had the chance to travel abroad and to personally meet both members of the gay community and transgender (*“we had never seen men turning into women before, it was shocking for us”*) and, just then, to realise how important it was to *“talk more and more about these realities. I realised that discrimination comes from ignorance”*. Unfortunately, not all the defenders had this chance and, especially in Northern Uganda, these ideas still deeply affect those who work as activists, as explained by one of the defenders we met during the IVM: *“the discrimination of the other Human Rights Defenders towards the LGBTI is strong especially in the rural areas, and they justify this attitude with culture and religion, and say that your behaviour is against culture and religion. This is due to the fact that many HRD are men, many of them don’t really share or understand the principles of the respect of human rights, probably because they were not trained properly”*; it is then clear that it is necessary to support the local associations especially through training and capacity building. On the other hand, others stress that, especially in the North, the defenders of the LGBTI groups are in their turn deeply marginalised and risk their lives, therefore not everyone wants to expose themselves and their family to this risk: *“most of the HRD tend to focus on issues specifically related to their job, and they are often afraid of talking about other problems, for example defending the LGBTI rights can be dangerous because it means being exposed to the attacks of some members of the community. Also, when the law on homosexuality was first proposed, the MPs tried to make propaganda inside the community to make it popular and this contributed to increase the general negative attitude towards the LGBTI”*.

2.3.3 “Sexual control” and the construction of sexuality as a “social problem”.

The depositions undertaken by the IVM and anthropological considerations made by Gusman and Viola lead us to see the anti-gay law as part of a wider postcolonial project of “sexual control”. By looking at the “sexuality” campaigns made in the last decade, it emerges that since 2005 groups of conservative politicians and of religious authorities (mostly Pentecostal) have been supporting more and more campaigns that - starting with the threat of AIDS - recommended sexual control through the use of programmes of defence for the “natural family” and of prevention of the virus based on the AB principle (*Abstain, Be faithful*). The main target audience of these campaigns were young people who, being the future of the country, needed to be “saved” from the point of view both of the physical integrity (not catching HIV) and of the morals (reducing the widespread corruption, avoiding the decay of the country). The discourses of some Pentecostal Churches and organisations were very powerful. Starting from the idea of “breaking up with the past” (the AIDS emergency), these groups believe that it is necessary to control episodes of moral corruption.

This propaganda has slowly become a means to control those behaviours that belonged both to the private and the public sphere. As it happened with the Anti-Pornography Act, which contains explicit restrictions to the freedom of behaviour of some individuals - especially women¹ - and which strengthen the sexual control already put into effects by the AHA, there was a huge resonance in the media. Many conservative and religious groups became more visible and took advantage of this moralising mission to become part of the public dimension of the country.

The main feature of these campaigns was that of defying sexuality as a “social issue”, long before the promulgation of the new laws against homosexuality and pornography: which means, sexuality can be dangerous if we don’t stick to the heteronormative principle of the “natural family”, seen as traditionally African. From the Pentecostal perspective, this aspect is even more stressed: whoever differs from this is considered as “sick” and “possessed”, and must be healed.

Ironically, these discourses started spreading at a time when the incidence of HIV reached the lowest point of 6% - compared to the 18% of the years of the “HIV emergency” - and it was therefore unnecessary to radically change the preventive measures. Until that moment, Uganda was an internationally renowned champion of the fight against AIDS, but the *Abstain, Be faithful, use Condoms (ABC)* strategy was replaced by AB. Only in this way this “problem” became a public matter where languages and categories were used to express the widespread fear and spread what the authors define as “moral panic”. And there is more. As underlined by one of the defenders we met during the IVM, this helped increase the diffusion rate of HIV again: on one hand, the measures consisting in abstaining from sexual intercourse contributed to the disappearance from the public debate of any reference to the use of condoms as means of prevention; on the other, according to some of the defenders who have been interviewed, the stigmatisation of same-sex intercourse forced many people to live two parallel lives: one official, as husband or wife of a traditional family, and one more “informal”, made of secret relationships.

2.3.4 Homophobia as a mean of social control

So as colonialists tried to justify their presence by purifying inhabitants from the “immoral” Arabic influence, in the same way today some US churches make their being in Uganda legit by saving the country from an assumed moral decadence, calling themselves defenders of the “true African and Christian identity”, opposed to an “Other” out of control. This kind of talking could gain space to spread because it was instrumental to local politic talks of control. In the same way as the category of “sodomy” used by Kabaka Mwanga was a mean of resistance to colonialist domination, today the battle against homosexuality is an instrument of a nationalist ideology, which aims at representing homosexuality as a western neo-colonialist influence and thus homophobia becomes a mean of resistance against the interferences of European and American countries.

Heteronormativity becomes more and more important as a source of validation of the entire social system: masculinity, tamed and undervalued within the colony, now sets its principles on a strict hierarchy among genders. Transgenders’ condition is even more complicated, it is a scarcely known gender identity and it is difficult especially for transgender women: on this patriarchal ideological background, the transgender woman has to prove to be as such and risks to undergo an even more radical subordination than that imposed by the present gender hierarchy. At the same time, she can be a target for hatred, because she refused a

¹ Originally, the law prescribed strict rules as far as women clothing was concerned, but after the demonstrations in the squares and after many episodes of violence against women, in 2015 new guidelines to mitigate this law were published: the focus was then on pornography (videos and films showing images of naked or half-dressed women), which threatens morality and foster dangerous and sick behaviours. The way in which these guidelines are expressed remains ambiguous and leaves space to personal interpretations and discretionary penalties.

privileged social position, that of the man. In this broader picture, homophobia has to be understood in its dimension of irrational fear and in its misleading use in politics.

In a country full of inequalities as Uganda is, all many men have left is the privilege of gender and it is hard for them to give up on it. The prude proposition has a strong pull among the people of the poorest classes and this can partially explain the spread of Pentecostal and Evangelical churches, a phenomenon which can be seen in many non African countries as well. “To use religion in order to maintain this status quo and make the gender privilege stronger is an attractive path: who would ever question God?” (Brum E. 2016, Internazionale)

All of this caused for the defenders of the human rights themselves to find it difficult to get out of this way of thinking and adopt a view based on the indivisibility of human rights. From many of the interviews realised during the IVM it comes to light, on one hand, the difficulty for people who defend vulnerable groups such as women and LGBTIs of finding solidarity and collaboration from organisations fighting for the rights of “other” categories (children, small expropriated land owners, and so on); and, on the other hand, the difficulty for them to confront themselves with whom was always considered as “different”. As a defender said: *“If you are a woman HRD and/or LGBTI you get stigmatised three times, so it is even more difficult for you, and discrimination comes from others HRD too: there are some HRDs who cannot accept to be in the same room with a LGBTI person, but luckily in this gay and lesbian movements are joined together, what we try to make people understand is that this is not only a struggle for privacy but rather for the right of being and acting according to what everyone is”*. This is why many people demand a different approach, even from the support that comes from international associations and institutions, as it is not only a matter of LGBTI rights being respected and “corresponding” to international standards, but also those of all citizens of Uganda, regardless of their social condition, political opinion and/or sexual identity.

3. Freedom and right of expression for human rights defenders and associations

3.1 The restriction of freedom for women HRD and LGBTI in their private and public life

When social control is so deeply-rooted, the defenders' commitment on gender discriminations involves relevant challenges both on private and public life. And this is even truer if they are women or LGBTI:

-Many HRDs acknowledge that women are more exposed than men because their activism exposes them "against" the expectations of a patriarchal system that doesn't give any decision power to women and even renders them to be less involved in public debates. Thus it often happens that women are victims of threats and attacks from their own families and communities. These violations are seen as regarding private and domestic life, therefore is it hardly ever possible to bring them to the Court of Justice. As one of the two HRDs interviewed says: *"It is much harder to be a woman HRD because you are not treated the same way as men, first of all it is assumed that you have to fulfil your duties as a woman and then be a HRD. Sometimes they ask you if you have a husband, because they can't understand why you are doing what you are doing, starting with the same women which expect you to act in a certain way just because you are a woman. For example if I am threatened I have to prove twice that I was threatened for real, I always have to explain what I am doing and why [...] Every time you do something, as a woman you have to prove you are capable of doing it, luckily my peers are all very sensitive and always ask for my opinion and also the other HRD men respect me, because I am often invited to talk to international organisations."*

-Not all of the HRDs though are aware of gender stereotypes, even among defenders themselves the heteronormative model is present and essential for some talking, as an interviewed says: *"There is no difference between a man and woman HRD. They both face challenges, the woman has to be more careful because she has bigger responsibilities on the children she raises and because this is local social expectation towards her. Some defenders don't realize they support this model, men as much as women"*.

-As far as LGBTIs are concerned, as seen in the interview of the previous chapter, outing involves that individual gender identity and sexual orientation are forcedly exposed to families, friends and communities where they live or come from. The deeply-rooted homophobia implies the risk of being marginalised or ostracized and of losing support from their network of reference in a short time. After all families which live this experience sometimes are forced to maintain a marginalising attitude in order not to risk to be refused themselves from their own community. On the communitarian level the situation is even more difficult, as discrimination is not only operated by citizens but often also among defenders of human rights themselves. About this, it is interesting to hear what a HRD who always worked for women rights said about her own experience: *"For LGBTIs the situation is even worse because people doesn't know much about the issue and is afraid of talking about it, they judge them negatively, it was difficult for me as well at the beginning, I had to argue with them, before I used to ask myself if they were human beings just like us, but then I travelled to the USA to learn, the US Embassy made us meet with LGBTI people which belonged to a police station in California, we could talk to them, we ask them and their parents a lot of questions, and I realised that discrimination comes from ignorance. We had never seen before men becoming women, it was shocking for us. We needed to talk more about these issues, and we are trying to integrate this focus in our work, we need to create a space where we can talk about LGBTIs"*.

If you are a woman HRD or LGBTI in the rural areas or in the North of Uganda, the situation is even more difficult because the idea of human rights is still not established. Even more when it comes to LGBTIs. During the mission it was clearly stated by an interviewed that: *“Discrimination from other HRDs is especially strong towards LGBTIs, particularly in rural areas, and they justify this behaviour referring to culture and religion and would be ready to kill you for this, because they say your attitude is against culture and religion. This is linked to the fact that many of the HRDs are men who probably didn’t become HRD out of passion, but because they were looking for a job. After the war many NGOs and international agencies went away, but then they came back and started looking for local staff, but many of them neither agree nor understand truly the principles related to the respect of human rights.”*

Therefore, for a woman HRD and/or a LGBTI it is difficult to be recognised for her own skills and work, because, before these, they question her own right of expression and freedom of gathering about themes and topics which risk to criticise common laws of the country or the acting of government.

The country is into a paradoxical situation, as some HRDs did notice. On the one hand in fact, it is pretty advanced on the legislation point of view: almost all of the treaties were ratified, women are formally excluded from no aspect, and they are even present in contexts which used to be exclusively for men, such as law enforcement. On the other hand, “traditional” practices often stop an actual advancement of women condition. For example, if a woman wants to be a taxi driver, nobody would forbid her to do so, but it would be actually impossible, because nobody would trust her, men would harass her, and so on. Even harder is the condition of LGBTIs, who, according to many, still “don’t exist”.

3.2 The restriction of freedom of speech in public life

These limits went through further restrictions in public life with the POMA proclamation in 2013 and later with the law on NGOs ratified at the beginning of 2016, which seriously obstruct freedom of public assembly and association.

Once more these laws seem to aim particularly at LGBTI association, especially the law on NGOs, because at clause 44 there is an explicit reference to the prohibition of constitution for associations which work “against the interest of the Nation and the dignity of Uganda people”. Even though almost all of the associations which struggle for the rights of LGBTIs never make a clear statement on this topic in their charter, many times they risk to be shut down anyway, because, as we saw earlier, they spread some requests considered against public and national morals. For instance, we can quote the SMUG (Sexual Minorities Uganda) case: Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB) refused to register the organisation because its name and goals showed a working connection with people “whose conduct is condemned by the law”. A legal trial is currently underway.

It is interesting though to account for other points of view as well. Many interviewed people in fact claim that it is important to remember that both laws were promulgated in order to restrict freedom of speech for all the organisations in civil society, which often are considered by the government as potential political opponents. POMA for instance, as well as Anti-Pornography Act, was promulgated before general elections in 2016, in order to guarantee a favourable context for the re-election of the president; therefore the aim was to hit all of the organisations, opposition parties’ as much as civil society organisation. It seems clear that most of the population finds that LGBTI organisations are especially discriminated, as it is good for the government, particularly on the international level. As we saw already, in fact, if on one hand western governments call themselves champions of human rights defence when it comes to the safeguard of LGBTI groups, on the other hand they favour and support those political and economic connections which

contribute to guarantee their interests in the country when it comes to exploiting natural resources, even if it implies as a consequence to violate indigenous populations' – whose land is forcibly expropriated- rights or the rights of the journalists who try to tell what is actually happening in the country.

This interpretation is closely linked to another issue raised by several HRDs during IVM and about which many agree: the core problem with the latest law is not as much in their contents, on the contrary some of these got to be improved during parliamentary discussions also thanks to the confrontation brought about by international organisations, as it is rather in the vagueness of their terms and in the lack of education among the people. Many associations are committed to advocacy and awareness campaigns which, thanks to the gathering of data and information, risk exposing the governments to objections. Therefore, the government adopts every possible measure to discourage these processes and the growth of a civil participation which could foster the growth of the group of political opponents. It exploits laws' vagueness to maintain a certain level of ignorance and give police and control more power. Getting specific, it is interesting to report the analysis of the main ambiguities within these laws, as reported from some HRDs, of which often there is little awareness even among HRDs themselves. This is why it becomes important to spread the correct awareness as much as possible:

- About Anti-Pornography Act: *“Back in time we used weapons, now law, we use a vague language or the ignorance of the law (to limit freedom or have major control on population): for example, in the case of Anti-Pornography Act, it is written nowhere in the text that it is forbidden to dress a certain way; nevertheless, it was given the nickname of anti-miniskirt law, while the actual goal of the law is to protect children from pornography; but the government has no interest in people knowing and truly understanding the meaning of the law, this is why it is important to raise awareness in this direction”.*
- About POMA: *“Freedom of assembly was significantly limited by POMA, because police has to authorise people to meet, but the text of the law says that if I intend to organise a meeting, I have to notify this intention to the police, not to ask for permission; but people don't know this. In this case as well the government has no interest in raising awareness among the people on the actual meaning of the law, therefore probably the police herself takes advantage of this to gain power, but police should protect citizens, not oppress them. As a matter of fact the new law is used to protect the regime from all the people it regards as opponents, starting from mass media, “but if the government doesn't listen to people, people sooner or later will rise up”.* In fact, the law states that whoever wants to organise a public meeting has to give notice to the police within three days, because she has to be informed, and police can only forbid a meeting if there are others in the same place or if it can create problems for public order/traffic.
- Another interviewed speaks this way about NGO Bill: *“For example clause 44 of the law about NGOs talks about interests of Uganda, but it doesn't explain what interest is concerned, therefore you can be denied the right of working as an association in civil society and if you are not a registered NGO it is easier to attack you, and it is easy to justify your being under surveillance, having your freedom of action restricted, threats such as offices violation are common practices of which no justification is given”.* This means, opponents and thus HRDs are easily identified as individuals against the State and are stigmatised for being against the interests of the country, which are mostly economic. Many look at this law in fear because they see the end of freedom of assembly for many entities.

So the problem of working as a HRD is not only in the gender identity whose you are a carrier, but also in its politicisation and stigmatisation both in public and private life, which without a well spread awareness and advocacy intervention will keep on fostering the stigma. The institution of the Crime Preventers programme during the elections was, according to a few informers, responsible for exacerbating this situation, increasing this mood of violence and informing practices. It is all about civil volunteers who, managed by the police, took on the task of preventing disorders and answering promptly to attacks against the citizens, but who

actually interfered in political meetings or obstructed free information by the media, in order to prevent assemblies of potential opponents groups. They were also accused of getting though against defenceless citizens. Often the most targeted groups were those of the minorities.

In this scenery it is important to point out that international organisations have an important role in negotiating contents of these laws before they are promulgated. The willingness from the government to stay in touch with international organisations, which is an index of the need of guaranteeing spaces for economic investment needed from the country, contributes to maintaining a good opening towards human rights protection as well. Nevertheless, as much as Russia and China keep growing as investors in the country, as a HRD reported, it is sure that balances are going to be more difficult, since these countries are not aligned with the main international treaties about rights themselves.

3.3 Media and social media for the dissemination of women's and LGBTI rights

Media and social media have an important role in encouraging the dissemination of the HRD activities. At an international level, the messages are directed mainly through social media. On a national level, however, the tools are differentiated based on the type of message, but, most importantly, on the receiver of the message. In all this, HRD are aware of the risks they are taking if they bring too much into play in the public sphere with the media, but it also is the most powerful tool they have to reach even the nations furthest away, also thanks to the use of indigenous languages. The radio represents, in this sense, the most important media, which can promote growth of participation to the public and political life of a significant part of the population, often excluded. It's the means that can reproduce public debate in the absence of a partitive democratic system. As told by a HRD: *"As a HRD I must act very cautiously and work in secret, although I know I have high chances of being arrested. Social media could expose me and put my safety at risk, but they also help spread the information very quickly, even in rural areas; although you know someone can always watch you, and they need to be associated to other tools such as community meetings, or the radio, which is able to reach even the most isolated rural areas. For example, we often go to villages and record what people have to say, and then we broadcast it on the radio. People speak openly and love to tell even the more negative situations they face"*.

The government often intervenes with censorship because it feels threatened: *"The government doesn't care about covering the information up, but rather it cares about having what it wants reported and not being spoken against"*. Even the ban of media, as it has often happened, shows how freedom of expression is a right which is guaranteed in theory, but violated in practice. And it seems like the situation isn't improving insofar as a law is being discussed, which aims to limit the right of expression of means of information.

4. Recommendations

What are the future prospects on the evolution of the discrimination of women and LGBT in Uganda? What recommendations come out of the evidences that have surfaced during the mission?

As we have already seen, the development and propagation of activities by organizations that fight against women's and LGBTI discrimination is often possible thanks also to partnerships and international financing. Many women's rights movements, LGBTI movements and human rights themselves were born abroad and were also spread in Uganda. This has created a strong bond between international and local instances which has created, during the years, important alliances and syncretism with languages and methods that were previously unknown in Uganda. In various cases, however, there is a risk of utilising and proposing languages and methods of intervention that do not belong to a significant part of the population, with the consequence of having a scarce rooting and spreading capability for the messages and sensitization campaigns.

All of this is inserted in the context of a nation that has had a really complex history, and since the beginning of the Independence in particular, the pre-colonial period or the presupposition of "original African values" have been risen to strongholds of the nation's national identity, and have been manipulated in opposition to the "Western corruption" to highly legitimize discriminatory and restrictive interventions by the government or the local churches, aiming for a stronger control on the population and their proselytes. The population, especially the part of it that inhabits the more rural areas, is often caught at the mercy of these mainstream stories, and does not possess the skills to read into society's transformations.

This socio-cultural background has brought many interlocutors in the IVM to question the future of their own intervention strategies. Many of them have realised that, while on one hand they are leading a frontal clash with the government, often based on false and ambiguous rhetoric; on the other hand they are struggling to create a local community around their own instances. It's not just about strengthening internal or international alliances; in fact, it's more about finding something more radical to act inside the nation itself.

On many people's part, in fact, the urgency to rebuild a cultural narration which can reclaim the history of the nation and its transformations has risen, free from polarizations between Africa and the West, traditions and modernity. That way, talking to the local population becomes easier, because it is possible to valorize traditions/social roles that have been "forgotten" in the light of the recent changes in the nation, or to shed light on "traditional" discriminations" which interest many, and not just a small part of the population, in the light of old and new values. As one of them has stated: "In general, I think culture can be the foundation of discrimination, but that it can also constitute a protective factor, based on how it evolves." (IVM interview). Only then we can get out of the insidiousness of stereotypes and idealizations, as it often happens in the language of power of the government and of the local churches, confronting the population with contemporary social factors.

Starting from this instance in general, which seems to be characterising of many people's thoughts, in this section the aim is to underline the main evidences that emerged during the course of the IVM, with related recommendations.

4.1 About the role of international and regional organisations

In general during the IVM, the importance of international and regional organisations in the support of local NGOs in lobby and government pressuring activities for the compliance with protocols they have not yet signed or ratified has emerged, to discuss the promulgation of highly discriminatory laws, or for the support of the creation of monitoring facilities for violations of human rights, regardless of the role of the HRD. On the other hand, many have expressed the necessity to redefine the alliances with the latter, in order for their intervention to promote a higher level of autonomy in local NGOs, in their actions of confrontation with the government. In fact, the international organisations, often being the mouthpieces of local instances that are surely also global, are at risk of overlapping with, or even replacing, the national organisation at the risk of also weakening the nation with regards both to the government and the population itself. Also, the government would continue to have good ground on accusing the associations of being colluded with the West. For many, however, the regional organisations are still too far from away to provide a real support: African countries are still very different from one another and the communication between them and international institutions seem much easier. For this reason, the following usually suggested to international organisations:

- Reading the local context, not only in light of decisions made at a governmental level, but also in light of what happens at a civil societal level. Only then can it be possible to identify the factors which can promote the development of a culture on human rights rooted at the base, and to efficiently support the organisations that work on it. For this reason, it becomes very important to focalize the support resources mainly on the function of *capacity* and *engagement* of the groups with the support of a creation of networks, of the strengthening of the skills of local organisations and of its members, instead of using the resources for actions of advocacy that run the risk of speaking more to the international community than to the country itself;
- Promoting an approach to human rights in the country that will emphasize their inseparability, to prevent the creation of local minorities, which often are at risk of weakening their instances instead of strengthening them. What can be effective on an international level (e.g. appeals on the rights of the LGBTI community), in fact, does not necessarily have a positive impact on the communities of single countries, as it might activate and reinforce contrapositions (e.g. western democracy/other countries' authoritarianism) which do not do good to the local populations. If, instead, we act in a transversal way, the results may be more sustainable. Many international programs, such as the EIDHR², for example, shift their focus on the cultural changes of a country, and act on every aspect of the democratic cycle, supporting in particular the civil society and its organisations. Facing the discrimination against women and LGBTI starting from institutions which promote culture (e.g. the school system) is currently showing as a very effective long term strategy in many countries. In Uganda, the education system is in rapid decay. For a long time, in fact, the education level in the country has weakened, the illiteracy levels have risen and many young people find themselves outside of the school system. Lobbying at a governmental level to allow young people to have access to a decent school may be a very important role to play, in support to the local HRD organisations.

² EIDHR (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights) is a financial tool for the promotion of democracy and human rights through which the EU gives assistance for the development and consolidation of democracy and State, for the protection of human rights and the fundamental freedoms for the 2014-2020 period

4.2 About the roles of international organisations

The reconstruction of a narrative which can speak about a context starting from its history and transformations must go through a rooting of interventions. While considering what is at stake on an international level, in fact, acquiring a broader reading knowledge of phenomenon and of what happens in the country becomes important. For this reason, a few relevant points for the action of local organisations have been suggested:

- Many associations are not properly aware of the laws and fall in the trap of their ambiguities, imposing, as we have stated above, limitations that, in reality, are not established on a legislative level, but only on a praxis level; or alternatively acting in a discriminatory way without using a critical eye. For this reason, it is important to promote “legislative literacy” campaigns inside the associations themselves even before inside the population, to spread more information on legislative contexts, in order to promote the mass spreading of correct information, and to raise the knowledge level on the laws among the general population. That way, it is even easier to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices which people often feed off of;
- The language of the human rights is the foundation of the work of the HRD, although it is not a familiar language in the country. It becomes important to seek a more familiar language to the local cultures, which is able to speak on more levels and to more people. Advocacy lessons are important, although they run the risk of speaking to an international public, or a very restricted one. For this reason, for example, declining the language with which we speak of women’s rights or LGBTI rights in terms of access to main social rights (housing, health, land, education, etc.) may be more effective in a transversal way in favour of other vulnerable categories of the population;
- In order for the above state work to be possible, it is important to strengthen the alliance and collaboration between organisations which defend women’s rights and the ones which defend LGBTI rights. Contrary to many other countries, the strength of the LGBTI movement lays in the fact that the collaboration between the various gay and lesbian organisation is very strong. The collaboration with associations that fight for women’s rights is, however, very weak; many of them do not yet have a skillful knowledge of the reality of LGBTI people, with the consequence being that they start developing diffidence and discrimination. For this reason, an alliance becomes crucial; the discriminatory history towards the LGBTI community is deeply rooted on the discriminatory history of women, but that is not yet a very well known fact;
- The educational system is, by definition, the place of cultural promotion. It will be important for the associations, to promote collaborations with schools and other cultural institutions, including churches, to initiate a discourse and work on the deconstruction of stereotypes

4.3 About the role of local communities

It is important to distinguish public discourse vehiculated by central powers from the practices of local contexts. Each context has its own specifics and its history, and it often is not aligned with what is at stake on a central power level. Working diffusely on a community level all over the country (even in rural areas and northern areas where the communities are still profoundly fragmented and affected by civil war), as said by some defenders, is the most effective way to establish changes. Otherwise, the risk is that of getting to a situation unlike the one in South Africa, where laws are very advanced, but there is still a strong

discrimination on a local level, initiated by the population itself. For this reason, the following recommendations have emerged:

- Inside the communities, where possible, it is also important to involve community leaders (religious and non religious), which may already be sensitive to the violence that has been perpetrated through various forms of discrimination, to build a wider consensus around the necessity for some cultural changes, but also to find alternative solutions to consolidated customs that will not, however, imply a radical rupture. One of the HRD working on the rights of women has stated positive experiences of leader involvements on the theme of child brides and of the levirate widowed women to maintain ownership of land;
- One can act in the same way with local communities of different Christian churches, opening the discourse and seeking alliances and comparisons. Some, in fact, may be more open and helpful for collaboration than others, in order to improve the population's living conditions. It is evident that the theme of homosexuality is still a strong taboo, but starting from the theme of the discrimination of women, which has been welcomed by many parties with interest (e.g. the Catholic church), it can be a good starting point;
- In acts of positive discriminations of women, it is important to involve men in the role of husbands, partners, beneficiaries or social operators as allied in the struggle to promote more equal gendered relations. Before doing this, it is of course important to consider the consequences this may bring upon women; in fact, it is not always an adequate way of intervening, depending on the contexts;
- Not every man or boy is contributing the perpetration of gendered discrimination, but the opposite is also true: not every woman or girl is opposed to their own discrimination. It is important, for this reason, that we understand the context in which we wish to intervene; the same interventions may not necessarily be replicable in other parts of the country.

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It implements projects and activities helping vulnerable people with health-care, psycho-social, education and employment. Since 2011 it has organised specific projects to assist Human Rights Defenders.

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