

African Queer Youth Manifesto



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“Young people should be at the forefront of advocacy if we all envision a future for the LGBTIQ+ movement in Africa;”

Richard Lusimbo - UKPC”

Foreword

According to United Nations statistics, Africa currently boasts the world's youngest population, with 70% of sub-Saharan Africa falling below the age of 30. This demographic fact highlights the continent's immense potential for the future. However, the realisation of this potential hinges upon our collective dedication to investing in and nurturing the youth, preparing them to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

Likewise, within the LGBTIQ+ movement, a growing number of young individuals are increasingly embracing and expressing their sexual identities with confidence. Despite the challenging societal context, a new generation of LGBTIQ+ individuals is emerging, demonstrating heightened visibility, self-assuredness, and innovation in the ongoing struggle for the protection of human rights for all within the LGBTIQ+ community.

However, our prevalent heteronormative and homophobic societal norms have led to the marginalisation of young people. Present sex education remains confined within heteronormative norms, neglecting the diverse realities of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, services catering to gender and sexuality often disregard the needs and budgetary considerations of LGBTIQ+ youth, effectively depriving them of their fundamental human rights, as enjoyed by their heterosexual counterparts.

Addressing the deficit within our LGBTIQ+ movement, we recognize the lack of targeted programming and support for the younger generation. While policy advocacy and problem-solving are essential, we have not adequately prioritised the imperative of grooming the upcoming LGBTIQ+ cohort, those who will continue our ongoing efforts.

In 2018, PAI (Pan Africa ILGA) acknowledged that without substantial investment in youth initiatives, our past and ongoing work within the movement would face an uncertain future. This recognition prompted our commitment to convene the 2018 conference under the theme "Empowering LGBTIQ+ Youth: Uniting for an Inclusive Future." The outcomes of this conference subsequently shaped PAI's youth-centric approach to our activities.

Since 2019, we've taken measures to ensure that young people play a prominent role in all our endeavours. At the 2023 PAI Regional Conference, we deliberately centred our attention on the youth. Prior to the event, we held two consultative sessions with young individuals, the culmination of which is this manifesto. Collaborating with youth organisations, we established a platform for their input and engagement in the manifesto's development.

We hold strong conviction that this manifesto will serve as an invaluable guide for all partners, including activists, in reshaping our approach towards engaging with young individuals in the LGBTIQ+ movement. This manifesto is driven by the youth and necessitates the endorsement of all stakeholders.

I find immense gratification in witnessing this milestone and remain wholeheartedly committed to realising the actionable recommendations outlined in this manifesto.

Sincerely,



Executive Director
Pan Africa ILGA



Foreword

In a continent as diverse and dynamic as Africa, the vibrancy and resilience of its youth consistently shine through, laying the foundation for the continent's future. The African Youth Manifesto captures the unique challenges, aspirations, and dreams of this demographic's young LGBTIQ+ Africans. These challenges, compounded by layered identities and existing socio-cultural stigmas, offer a perspective that demands immediate attention.

The young LGBTIQ+ African community finds itself navigating the tumultuous waters of youth challenges while facing systemic discrimination based on their sexuality and gender identity. This intersectionality paints a grim reality for many caught between living authentically and seeking acceptance within broader society. Yet, it is from this crucible of adversity that the true strength and resilience of young queer Africans emerge. Their call for recognition, respect, and rights is urgent and valid, grounded in freedom, liberty, and equality.

While reading this manifesto, one cannot ignore the stark reminder that the fight for equality and justice isn't merely the fight of a particular age or generation. It is a collective struggle that requires the elders' input, guidance, and wisdom, combined with the youth's zeal, passion, and vision. It's an acknowledgement that for movements to sustain momentum and effect genuine change, they must be inclusive, addressing the needs of all involved. The older generation's duty to mentor and elevate the younger members becomes evident – a challenge transcending beyond tokenism.

It is heartening to witness the determination of young queer activists and organisers to highlight the problems they face and actively put forward solutions and principles for future action. This manifesto is a testament to their dedication and commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable Africa. As they emphasise, their rightful place at the table is not a privilege but a right.

In urging for a more inclusive approach to activism, this manifesto serves as a clarion call to all stakeholders – civil society, donors, and the community. To truly uphold the values of diversity and equality that Africa stands for, every voice must be heard, every story must be acknowledged, and every individual must be empowered.

In conclusion, this manifesto, in its essence, is a call to action, a reflection of dreams nurtured by adversities and challenges. It serves as a reminder of the ever-evolving nature of society and the need for all of us to be part of this change, to create an Africa where everyone, irrespective of age, gender, or sexuality, can truly belong.

To the young queer Africans behind this manifesto, your passion, dedication, and resilience are commendable and inspiring. May this document serve as a stepping stone towards a more inclusive, understanding, and equal African society. Your stories, struggles, and dreams will undoubtedly pave the way for future generations.

Richard Lusimba
Director General, UKPC



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young LGBTIQ+ African are exposed to the same challenges as most African youth- but these are made worse by their intersectional identities which are penalised by continuing homo-/bi-/trans-phobia at home, school, in religious fraternities, and in society at large. This puts young queer people at the crossroads of having to choose between leading a life of secrecy, or the dangers discrimination and violence that living openly brings – whatever choice they make, their human dignity is always the casualty.

Even when they choose to advocate for their rights and welfare, they must still struggle against the chains of ageism and the restrictions it places on their abilities and their freedom to organise, to express, to live. This is an aberration within a movement that pays homage to ideals of freedom, liberty, and equality. The error is on us, the older generation of activists and organisers. While we have been pushing ever forward, we have failed to turn our eyes backwards to ensure that we have been empowering and preparing the persons who will come after us, who will carry on the work after we are gone from the scene.

This manifesto is the culmination of meetings and earnest conversations had with and between the diverse community of young queer african activists and organisers detailing the problems and barriers to queer youth organising on the continent. It also contains solutions and suggestions of principles that should guide future action to ensure equality, diversity, and justice in our advocacy and programming. It is young queer Africans taking charge of their stories and demanding their rightful seat at the table.



As part of the effort to sustain the work of the movement in Africa it is imperative that young people are provided with platforms, support and opportunities to facilitate increased participation and representation of youth queer activism in Africa. This manifesto seeks to address the growing number of vibrant and visible young activists within the LGBTIQ+ movement in Africa who often face challenges due to the lack of experience and opportunities made available to them. The results of this manifesto aims to: promote leadership and involvement of young people in the development and realisation of programs advocating for LGBTIQ+ rights; facilitate dialogue and redefine networking between LGBTIQ+ African youth and adult-led organisations on key issues; secure commitments to strengthen the involvement of decision makers and donors with LGBTIQ+ youth participation over their tokenism; and redefine the networks of LGBTIQ+ youth-led organisations at regional and domestic levels.

Now that our young people have spoken, we must listen. Solemnly. We must recognise that while we work, we also owe a duty to posterity, for it is only in posterity that we may find the consummation of our efforts. Young people are the repository of our hopes for the future, and if our work must have any meaning, it must ultimately resonate with the future. It is therefore imperative upon us that queer youth are involved meaningfully in the fight for LGBTIQ+ rights. That as we advocate for queer liberation, no one group is left behind. And the creation of the African future that we all envision has a place for each and every one of us.



INTRODUCTION

This Manifesto is a consolidation of the work that we have done collectively over the past years with queer youth organisations and activists across Africa. In this period, youth constituencies have put together many manifestos in response to the exclusionary and oppressive practices faced by youths in the development space, but, until now, there has not been unity and consolidation at this level, and with the reach and diversity as this current manifesto. We have created this document to bring together a peculiar response to the exclusion of young queer persons in the development space.

In devising this manifesto, we held participatory and uncensored spaces that suited our organising as young people and encouraged honesty, openness, and participation. This document was co-created through dedication and persistence as we worked together across time zones and languages, starting a process in 2022 that climaxed at the 2023 Pan Africa ILGA Youth Pre-conference. Our dreams and stories of resistance birthed this manifesto. It is testament to the power of a youth collective.

We advocate for meaningful participation of young LGBTIQ+ people in all our diversities within and outside the LGBTIQ+ movement. We ask that our work be well resourced, and our inputs valued. We raise alarm over the tokenization of young people and their identities as well as the inequitable systems of partnership that do not value and trust the leadership and skills of young queer organisers. Furthermore, we ask funders to critically assess the initiatives and organisations they support in the name of youths.

To all reading this, we urge you to respect the contributions of young people in the struggle for liberation and put resources in the hands of young LGBTIQ+ people and their initiatives. To our allies who support our work, please support our demands in this manifesto by advocating alongside us for the rights of young queer Africans.

To our fellow young queer Africans we thank you for daring to conspire together to demand a movement where young people, in all our diversities, have a voice and a seat at the table. Special thanks to the people and organisations who pushed this manifesto forward.

Sincerely,
Young queer Africans



BARRIERS TO YOUTH LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE LGBTIQ MOVEMENT AND LARGER DEVELOPMENT SPACE

Young activists and organisations are othered and often treated as 'beneficiaries' and not equal stakeholders within the African LGBTIQ+ social justice movement despite our important and significant contributions to the collective struggle for queer liberation in Africa. Deliberate or not, these exclusionary practices have frustrated many queer youth activists and organisations. Through the spaces and discussions held, we identified the following key issues constituting barriers to youth leadership and organizing within the African LGBTIQ movement.

Unequal power & Partnership dynamics

The complex power dynamics between adult stakeholders, youths and funders is central to how youth leadership within the movement works. Through our consultations with diverse young, queer Africans, it became clear that the ways in which donors operate and, in particular, how they identify and enter into partnerships with youth organisations, is in large part a by-product of the broader development aid ecosystem. The power dynamics between funders and youth organisations is an unbalanced one. It is these systems that expect youth organisations to accept programs and partnership terms that are not jointly developed thereby setting up young organisations for failure. There is a need for change in how funders identify and resource youth organisations.


Lack of Trust

The negative connotations that have been attached to youth and youngness creates a general unwillingness to engage with young persons and youth organisations. We are excluded from decision making, positions of responsibility, and denied opportunities to express ourselves or to try out our innovative ideas. Where we are engaged, it is typically at low-level roles – as interns, volunteers, etc. – and there is usually a lot of micromanaging. There is always the expectation that we will make mistakes, or fail. As if these are not also important aspects of the learning process.

Donors prefer to go for “more experienced” actors within the space – code word for “older”. The result is that we are denied access to resources and important opportunities for learning, making mistakes, building capacity, and gaining experience needed for effective activism.

Tokenism

Adult stakeholders, funders and INGOs often take advantage of the knowledge and expertise of young LGBTIQ+ persons in program design and context understanding, without meaningful follow ups or engagement when the program starts. This is an extractive practice. Our presence and experiences are used to legitimise the diversity of spaces and projects, but in ways that do not benefit us or the community.. We tell our stories and offer strategies as LGBTIQ+ youths, but then the final decisions are made by others.



We are often given a seat at the table, but still have no say.

This finding aligns with ownership issues, such as idea farming, lack of follow-up after consultations, leading to the feeling that consultations are mere tokenism designed to provide validity or some other transactional requirement.



Language injustice

There is concern about English language hegemony, where most of the regional/global opportunities to engage only provide spaces for English-speaking activists and organisations, leaving other language speakers on the margins – Francophones, and Lusophones for example. In addition, young organisers and activists are faced with the challenge of meeting the high linguistic standards set by INGOs, multilateral agencies and donors in the Global North.

In addition to this, there is a need to decolonise the language used to describe the lives and realities of queer persons in Africa. The current language models, while helpful, do not fully convey the messages of our lives and realities across the continent. Amongst queer youth and organisations, linguistic models are constantly being developed to adequately describe our lives, narrate our experiences, convey our needs, and evade the danger that characterises our context. The insistence on colonialist language and descriptions serve to stifle our expression and maintain our underrepresentation in important conversations and spaces.

Unrealistic donor requirement to access funding

These unrealistic requirements include requirements of government registration, proof of having handled huge funds in the past, physical office space, audit reports, and the like. While normally, these would be fair requirements in the interests of accountability and transparency, they fail to take into account the context in which we young persons work. Criminalisation and institutionalised queerphobia make it virtually impossible to register organisations; having a physical office space exposes us to violent attacks; we cannot audit accounts where we cannot even have official organisational accounts for fear of government targeting. Also, we are young and are usually just emerging into the advocacy space, we have not necessarily had as many opportunities as seasoned activists to access funds and carry out programs. But this does not automatically imply our incompetence.

Rather than show innovation in funding, accountability requirements, and assessments of competence, donors continue to insist on traditionalist approaches that only push organisations and activists to put themselves at risk of government crackdowns and violent attacks from both state and nonstate actors.

Unhealthy competition

The limited/dwindling resources for LGBTIQ+ activism in the continent creates a toxic atmosphere that encourages political and power tussle and gatekeeping, making queer youth organisations and activists to engage in pernicious competition with each other. This is at a time where more than ever, there is great need for unity amongst us. It is impossible to build relationships, set up partnerships and foster collaboration within an atmosphere of unhealthy competition. And while we are divided and strife-ridden, we cannot come together to speak with a strong and unified voice on important issues that affect us.

Poor succession planning amongst LGBTIQ+ organizations

Organisations are not structured with an awareness of the need for succession, continuity, and sustainability for the long-term. Year after year, we find the same crop of persons continue to occupy all leadership positions. There is no novelty to organisational systems, structures or leadership. And within these systems, young people keep waiting for a chance to try their ideas; chances that never come. So, the only option for young persons then becomes to break out and set up their own organisations where they can express themselves freely to implement their ideas and pursue their visions. Now, they must begin anew, rather than building on and continuing on the work of the older generation.

Ageism

Ageism is a value system that establishes a hierarchy of people based on their age. It is a bundle of ideas, beliefs, institutions, practices, and policies that inform and perpetuate prejudice and discrimination against people on the basis of their age. Africa currently lies under a regime of an adultocracy that sets adulthood and adult interests over and above youth and young people and their interests. This holds true in almost every aspect of life and existence in Africa. On a continent, where, despite accounting for over 60% of the population, we are underrepresented in government, politics, and in virtually every decision making platform, the picture for youth is a bleak one. The same dynamics are also played out within the African queer organising space where we have seen a carryover of the prejudices and practices from the wider society. Assumptions about us, of incompetence, lack of discipline, lack of capacity, and inexperience, continue to prevail.



PRINCIPLES FOR MEANINGFUL QUEER YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

We asked our queer youth constituents to list words that reflects their vision for meaningful and equitable youth engagement;

flexibility inclusion
accountability co-creation
accompaniment
feminist leadership
intersectionality meaningful inclusion
participatory process
co-ownership

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS

Equitable partnerships are fundamental to our organising as queer youth in Africa. We need donors to be committed to co-creating a more vibrant and sustainable African LGBTIQ+ movement that values the contributions of all stakeholders, regardless of age or experience, and is better equipped to address the community's challenges.

The recommendations for donors to address the challenges are as follows:



Increase sustainable funding for initiatives that support young LGBTIQ+ activists and organisations. Allocating more sustainable funding, particularly towards youth-led ideas and initiatives in the early stages of development, helps to level the playing field and provide opportunities for young activists to participate in movement building and drive transformative change. It is also of the utmost importance to provide multi-year funding to youth-led organisations and initiatives as it supports long-term approaches to scaling the impact of queer youth organising across Africa.



Adopt inclusive, partnership-based funding models.

These funding models targeted at supporting queer youth innovation should be co-created with young LGBTIQ+ activists, and donors need to develop flexible funding criteria that promote access to funding opportunities for young LGBTIQ+ activists and organisations. This can include criteria such as funding youth organising irrespective of registration or operational status, age limits, experience requirements, or yearly budgetary requirements. Donors also need to ensure that funding is distributed fairly and transparently, with clear criteria and processes for application and selection, as a means of reducing biases in grant making.



Provide opportunities for leadership development.

Young LGBTIQ+ activists and organisations need ample access to capacity development opportunities and donors must ensure that meaningful accompaniment for capacity strengthening is key in their agenda for the young people they partner with.



Provide flexible and long-term sustainable funding.

Most young activists entering the civil society space have yet to learn the traits in the grant-making and application process, thus funding that is flexible and takes into account the bureaucratic barriers these young activists and organisations face will allow such queer youth to access support to grow and capacitate their initiatives. Flexible funding empowers young activists and organisations to have greater agency over decision making processes, and ensures that they are able to best decide on resource utilisation to achieve their mission.

Most funding allocated to young LGBTIQ+ activists and organisations are project-based to suit a check-box initiative which involves ‘supporting’ young queer initiatives instead of ‘sustaining’ such initiatives for the long-term. While project-based funding is imperative, prioritising these may amount to only supporting ‘vanity projects’ instead of ensuring activists and organisations have a foundation to stand on for long-term growth once such projects reach their end-of-funding term. We suggest that donors seek to invest in both young queer activists and organisations who propose meaningful initiatives that provide long-term upliftment of queer youth and strengthen the capacity and longevity of their organisations.



Build trust through open communication and collaboration:

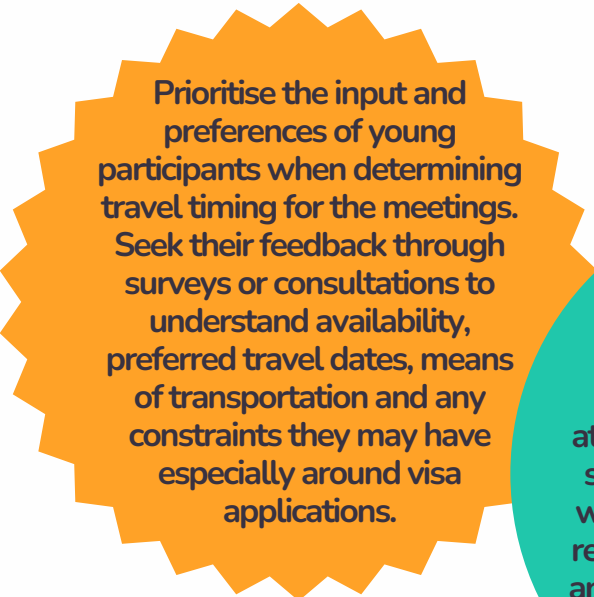
Open communication between grantees and donors can build trust. This can include regular dialogue, learning visits, feedback sessions, and joint initiatives, over just including young LGBTIQ+ activists and organisations in proposal/grants information sessions which take place long after the parameters of grants have been established. Donors can also seek input and feedback from young activists on funding requirements and expectations and work collaboratively to develop realistic funding goals and outcomes.



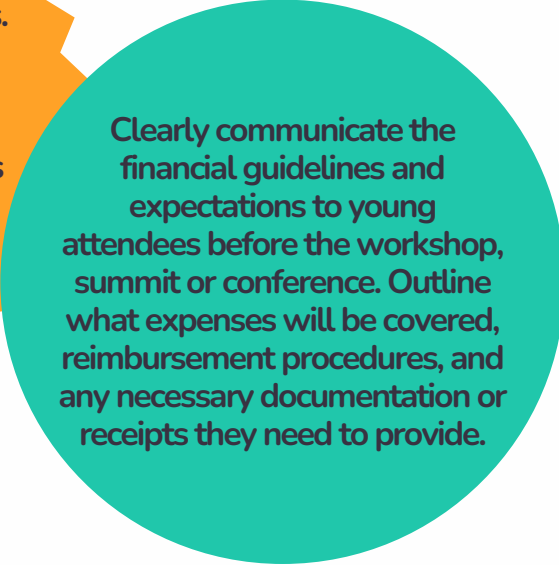
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONVENERS

Young queer people face a lot of economic exclusion so it is essential to take an economic justice approach to ensure that young people have the resources they need to participate in spaces. This can look like, data or internet support, accessibility and secure accommodation.

As a convener of advocacy spaces, conferences or workshops, here are some steps you can take to make sure queer youths' participation is safe, meaningful and dignified.



Prioritise the input and preferences of young participants when determining travel timing for the meetings. Seek their feedback through surveys or consultations to understand availability, preferred travel dates, means of transportation and any constraints they may have especially around visa applications.



Clearly communicate the financial guidelines and expectations to young attendees before the workshop, summit or conference. Outline what expenses will be covered, reimbursement procedures, and any necessary documentation or receipts they need to provide.

Always, arrange for prepaid travel and accommodation options for young participants. This eliminates the need for them to pay upfront and wait for reimbursements, ensuring a smooth and hassle-free experience as well as delayed reimbursement processes due to administrative burdens.

Offer *Per Diem* in advance or upon arrival to cover daily expenses such as meals, transportation, and incidentals during the conference. This financial support ensures that young persons can focus on their participation without worrying about personal expenses. Be clear on how much they can expect to allow for planning.



Always ask for consent before taking or using the photograph of young queer participants at events as this may expose them to danger within their community or country.

Provide language support, including interpretation services or translated materials, to ensure effective communication and inclusion of young attendees from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Ensure that physical space is accessible to all body types by providing alternatives to stairs, spacious seats and gender neutral bathrooms. Centre disability justice in all programs and activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONS

These are practical steps that organisations can take to address the challenges on their own part and promote a more equitable partnership that includes young activists. By implementing these recommendations, organisations can help to create a more vibrant and sustainable African LGBTIQ+ movement that values the contributions of all stakeholders, including young activists, and is better equipped to address the community's challenges.

01

Ensure that decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive of youth opinions: By promoting transparency and inclusivity in decision-making processes, LGBTIQ+ organisations can help to build trust and foster a sense of ownership and belonging among young activists. This involves creating a participatory decision-making culture that values the contributions of young LGBTIQ+ activists and provides them with opportunities to shape the direction of the organisation and the wider movement. These could include creating spaces for youth on decision making panels, creating youth committees or other forms of youth representation that encourage and value youth contributions.

02

Provide opportunities for young LGBTIQ+ activists to get involved in leadership and decision-making roles within the organisation: By promoting the active participation of young LGBTIQ+ activists in leadership and decision-making, organisations can help to build the capacity and effectiveness of the movement and ensure that the voices of young activists are heard and valued. This involves actively seeking out and empowering young activists to take on leadership roles, encouraging participation in organisational decision-making, and allowing them to try their ideas and creating room for failure and mistakes. To achieve this, LGBTIQ+ organisations can establish mentoring programs, internships, leadership trainings, or other initiatives that provide young activists with the skills and experience necessary to take on leadership roles.

03

Eliminate gatekeeping practices and tokenization of the 'youth' identity within organisations or the movement:

Through this, LGBTIQ+ organisations can promote a culture of inclusivity and collaboration and ensure that young activists are valued and respected for their contributions to the movement. This helps to build trust and foster a sense of identification with the organisation by young activists. To achieve these, organisations can set up youth quota systems, democratic and transparent decision structures, provide answers to genuine interrogatories from young people, ensure that the flow of information is free, and that funding and resourcing criteria are equitable and conscious of unique contexts.

04

Encourage collaboration and unity among organisations by participating in joint initiatives and partnerships:

Encouraging joint initiatives among organisations, can also help to build a more effective and influential movement for Africa. This can help to build a sense of solidarity and shared purpose within the movement and create opportunities for organisations to leverage their strengths and resources to achieve common goals.



05

Build trust with young LGBTIQ+ activists: By building trust with young LGBTIQ+ activists, LGBTIQ+ organisations can create a more engaged and committed cohort of activists, promote a culture of accountability and responsibility, and foster creativity and innovation within the organisation. To build trust, LGBTIQ+ organisations must ensure that young activists are informed about their vision, mission, and goals and that they understand their role in achieving these objectives. This can involve setting clear and measurable goals for initiatives and providing regular updates on progress and outcomes. It can also involve actively seeking out and incorporating feedback from young activists and responding to their concerns and suggestions constructively and respectfully. Organisations should prioritise transparency in communication and information sharing, providing young activists with access to relevant information and data and ensuring that all decision-making processes are open and inclusive of all stakeholders.

06

Provide opportunities for knowledge and expertise building for young LGBTIQ+ activists:

This is done through encouraging the active participation of young activists in spaces designed by them and for the and ensuring that young activists are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to drive positive change in their communities. To achieve this, LGBTIQ+ organisations can establish training programs, workshops, and mentorship initiatives that focus on building knowledge and expertise in areas such as advocacy, community organising, and leadership development. These programs should be designed with the specific needs and challenges of young LGBTIQ+ activists in mind.

07

Develop effective succession planning strategies within the organisation:

By developing succession plan/ strategies, activists can ensure continuity of leadership and expertise within the organisation, ensure intergenerational learning, and build a sustainable and effective organisational culture that is well-positioned to address the challenges and opportunities of the future. To develop effective succession planning strategies, organisations can start by identifying key leadership positions and roles and the skills and competencies required to fulfil these roles. This can involve conducting assessments of current and future needs and identifying potential gaps in leadership and expertise. Once key positions and roles have been identified, organisations can create mentorship and leadership development programs that provide young employees with the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to take on leadership roles.

08

Address burnout, demotivation, and apathy by providing mental health and well-being support for young LGBTIQ+ activists:

By providing mental health and well-being support for young LGBTIQ+ activists, organisations can promote a culture of care and support within the movement and create opportunities for young activists to thrive and make a meaningful impact. This can involve creating support groups or counselling services that provide emotional and psychological support to young activists and help them to cope with stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. Organisations can create initiatives and programs that promote self-care and well-being, such as mindfulness practices, annual pauses, and wellness retreat. These initiatives can help young activists to build resilience, maintain their mental and physical health, and sustain their activism over the long term.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, we would love to thank Pan Africa ILGA, who believed in us and supported this project, specifically Robert Amofo, and David Larbi, who worked closely with us to make this happen. We would also like to thank CHEVS: Queer Youth collective; specially Justin Chidozie and Ifechukwu Irobi, who worked tirelessly over the past year to make sure our work was aligned through consultations, interviews and focus group discussions in order to ensure proper representation of our collective voices .

We would also like to thank Nate Brown, and Richard Lusimbo, two youth inclusion champions who invested their time and energy to write the forward of this document. We also want to thank Charles, the designer/illustrator who gave this document unique and beautiful imagery as well as the GALZ team members who made sure we were in line during the drafting process.

Finally, we would love to give a big shout out to all the young queer Africans from across languages, identities and geographies who contributed to the building of this manifesto. We are delighted to be in solidarity with over 500 of you (ths)