

MAKING ACCESS REAL

Doing it for ourselves

The Lesbians, Intersex, Transgender and
other Extensions (LITE) Association



Title: Doing it for ourselves
Organisation: The Lesbians, Intersex, Transgender and other Extensions (LITE) Association
Country: Malawi
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Who are we?

The Lesbians, Intersex, Transgender and other Extensions (LITE) Association is the first truly community-based lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) organisation in Malawi. It was founded in 2016 by an open trans man to fill the gap in health service provision and human rights advocacy in Malawi. Most health programming for key populations is built around the MSM community, sidelining the other extensions despite the fact that they are equally at risk.

LITE aims to remove inequalities in access to HIV prevention services, social justice and human rights. Through high and medium level lobbying and advocacy, the organisation intends to make safe spaces for LITE persons. We are hosted by Innovations for Change in Lilongwe, and work in both urban and rural areas of Malawi. The organisation, which serves about 500 lesbian, intersex and transgender persons, has four volunteers – a Director, Programmes and Communications Officers and an Advocacy Officer. LITE Association is currently self-funded, and is still looking for donors.

What was the issue?

Given the nature of the work and the homophobic and transphobic context of Malawi, there are not many funds available for LGBTI organisations, while some groups in the sector – notably lesbians, bisexuals and transgender persons – are excluded from existing funding opportunities. We have faced difficulties in

getting funding for our programmes as we are not yet registered, and have experienced challenges in identifying fiscal sponsors to host funds for us, due to money politics and donor priorities. This lack of funding has led to limited programming of psycho-social support activities, which are sorely needed in light of the high rates of violence in the LGBTI community.

What was the change we wanted to see?

We wanted to find an alternative way of sourcing funds that would sustain the organisation's activities in the absence of traditional donor funding. We wanted to create balance in LGBTI programming, without depending on donors and being limited by their requirements and conditions. We also desired that, in the long run, individuals are considering and ensuring personal safety and HIV/AIDS prevention. Further, we wanted to equip informal groups to safely hold psycho-social support meetings.

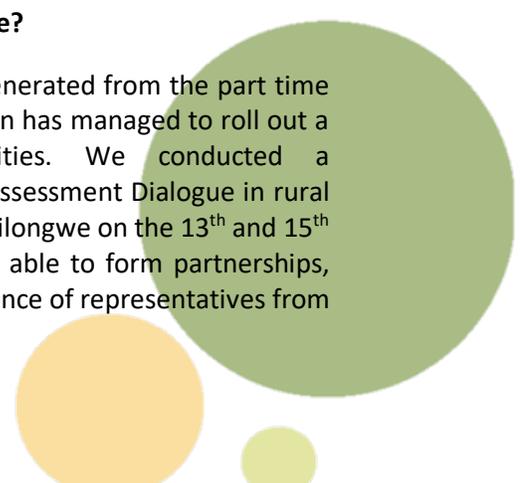
What did we do?

LITE is currently in the process of registering with the Registrar General in Malawi.

To address the funding issues, the leadership of the organisation engages in income generating activities. Three of the organisation's executive members lecture part time for the Gender and Sexuality Class of the Human Ecology Department at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources. The revenue from the part time lecturing is used for the organisation's programme activities, and allows us to fulfill our objectives.

What did we achieve?

Using the income generated from the part time jobs, the organisation has managed to roll out a number of activities. We conducted a community Needs Assessment Dialogue in rural and urban areas of Lilongwe on the 13th and 15th July 2017. We were able to form partnerships, securing the attendance of representatives from



UNAIDS, HEALTH GAP, and the American Embassy. With the community members themselves, there were 40 participants. We also provided emergency relief and shelter to a few members of the community as needed.

The organisation has been having safety and security, SOGI and human rights workshops with members of the community in urban Lilongwe. These are done on a quarterly basis. We have had an average of 36 participants per workshop and have stayed in touch with them through phone calls and WhatsApp groups.

What were the key lessons learned?

Programming: There are a lot of gaps in programming. LTI persons are not fully aware of their rights. The expected public enquiry into LTI rights has escalated homophobia and transphobia, with police being among the perpetrators.

Non-traditional fundraising: Our limited funds in turn limited the number of people we could reach for our needs assessment sessions. However, we have come to learn that non-traditional ways of funding an organisation can

actually work and have an impact. We have also realized that we could be self-sustaining.

Partnership: The organisation has also learnt the power in joint advocacy.

Research: Baseline research must be done into the needs of the trans community, as there is limited or no data about transgender persons in Malawi.

Community involvement and ownership: What we would like to do differently next time is to directly involve the community in resource mobilization to foster a sense of engagement with, and ownership of, the organisation. We also intend to train those that have shown a keen interest and strength in facilitation so that they can lead and facilitate group discussions in their home communities.

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