



## REActing to reality

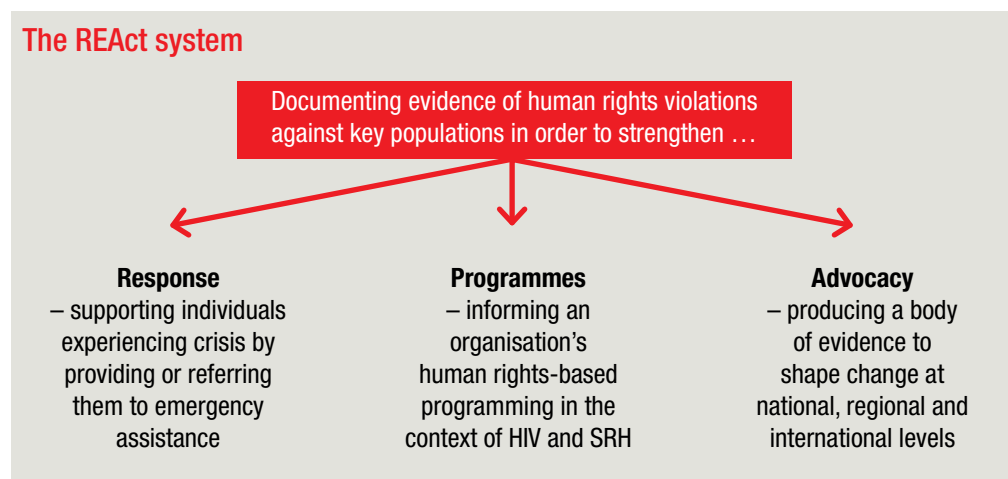
Taking action on human rights  
violations against key populations



## REActing to reality: Taking action on human rights violations against key populations

Across the world, human rights violations remain a harsh and persistent reality for key populations, including within the context of programmes for HIV and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).<sup>1</sup> Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities face harassment, discrimination and violence, denying their fundamental rights and restricting their access to vital services for HIV prevention, care, support and treatment. Yet, the organisations best placed to support them – civil society organisations (CSOs) by and for key populations – often lack a systematic way to document the abuses that occur, identify appropriate responses and advocate for change.

To address this, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance (the Alliance) has been supporting CSOs to use Rights-Evidence-Action (REAct), a community-based system for monitoring and responding to human rights-related barriers in accessing HIV and health services. This IT-based system was developed in partnership with BENETECH<sup>2</sup> in 2015 and has been used by Alliance partners in 22 countries, supporting action on over 686 human rights violations against key populations.



### Participants at the PITCH REAct workshop in Nairobi practice interview skills.



1. This case study includes references from a number of sources, including: International HIV/AIDS Alliance (2017), *Community-Owned Evidence for Human Rights Action: Rights-Evidence-Action (REAct) HIV-Related Human Rights Monitoring and Response System* (fact sheet), [www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/002/545/REAct\\_Factsheet\\_May\\_2017\\_Final\\_original.pdf?1494850083](http://www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/002/545/REAct_Factsheet_May_2017_Final_original.pdf?1494850083); International HIV/AIDS Alliance and Benetech (2015), *REAct User Guide*, [www.aidsalliance.org/resources/506-react-guide](http://www.aidsalliance.org/resources/506-react-guide); *REAct*, (PowerPoint presentation), International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2017; and interviews with representatives of SMUG, ICARH and LAMBDA.

2. Benetech is a non-profit organisation whose mission is to empower communities in need by creating scalable technology solutions.



The REAct system is owned and managed by grassroots organisations and can be adapted to local needs and contexts. When a human rights violation occurs against a community member, trained personnel conduct a semi-structured interview, capturing key information in the Martus software. This is then used to identify a tailor-made **response** to the situation, whether provided by the CSO itself or through a referral to another organisation. Examples include the provision of emergency shelter, legal advice and medical assistance. The information also informs the organisation's on-going work, guiding its selection of human rights-based **programmes**.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the database of cases and issues collated through REAct can be analysed and reported, providing a unique and powerful body of evidence for **advocacy** to hold governments and other stakeholders to account.

In September 2017, the Alliance held a REAct workshop that brought together representatives of LGBT organisations from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya and Mozambique. The workshop strengthened their knowledge and skills in using and adapting REAct, which will be part of their work under the Partnership to Inspire, Transform and Connect the HIV response (PITCH) programme. This five-year programme strengthens the capacity of community-based organisations to advocate for equal rights, and equal access to HIV and sexual and reproductive health services, for key populations. It builds skills and capacity to generate robust evidence, develop meaningful policy solutions and engage in effective advocacy. PITCH focuses on the HIV response in Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, Uganda, Ukraine, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. Partners in these countries also share evidence from communities to influence regional and global policies that affect vulnerable populations.

The workshop's facilitation team included a representative of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) – a PITCH partner and network of 18 LGBT organisations that has implemented REAct since 2014. Richard Lusimbo, SMUG Research and Documentation Manager, combined providing technical training with sharing his organisation's hands-on experience of developing, implementing and improving the system within a highly hostile environment for LGBT communities. Through an emphasis on adaptation and south-to-south learning, the workshop offered participants a wealth of practical first hand experiences, peer exchange and lessons.

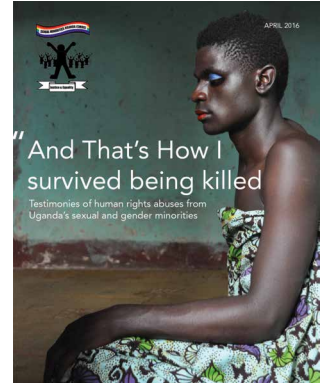
Building on the workshop in Nairobi, PITCH partners in Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe are now adapting and implementing REAct in their own countries. Alongside more and better documentation of and response to individual incidents, this will result in a set of reports that will provide unprecedented evidence of the reality of human rights violations against LGBT communities. These will inform advocacy at country, regional and international level.

3. The following eight human rights programmes are recommended by UNAIDS: 1. Stigma and discrimination reduction programmes. 2. Legal support services. 3. Monitoring and reforming laws, regulations and policies. 4. Legal literacy. 5. Training healthcare workers. 6. Training lawmakers and law enforcement officials. 7. Reducing gender inequality, harmful gender norms and gender-based violence. 8. Core community-led interventions. International HIV/AIDS Alliance (2014) *Good Practice Guide: HIV and Human Rights*. [www.aidsalliance.org/resources/400-good-practice-guide-hiv-and-human-rights](http://www.aidsalliance.org/resources/400-good-practice-guide-hiv-and-human-rights)

## Sharing REAct lessons from Uganda

In Uganda, REAct has been a game changer for SMUG, providing a more systematic and comprehensive way to document, respond to and advocate about human rights violations against the LGBT community. As Richard Lusimbo, Research and Documentation Manager, said: *“The beauty of REAct is that it is a package. At its heart is the individual – documenting what has happened to them and identifying an immediate and specific response. But, with the evidence it produces, REAct also provides a means to mitigate issues that are coming up – putting in place the actions needed to ensure that such situations don’t happen again. It gives hope to both our organisation and our community.”*

SMUG has used evidence generated by REAct to review and strengthen its human rights programming, such as with the introduction of *Know Your Rights* campaigns for LGBT people. The data and case studies have also been critical for advocacy work, conducted against the backdrop of the 2014 Anti-Homosexuality Act and on-going political and social oppression against community members. A ground-breaking publication (*And That’s How I Survived Being Killed*) was based on 264 violations documented through REAct during May 2014 to December 2015. It included testimonies of torture, arrest, blackmail, media intrusion, termination of employment, harassment, eviction, mob attack and family banishment, leaving individuals without homes, jobs, resources or access to services, including for HIV and SRHR. The report provided irrefutable evidence that has been used widely to inform academic research and hold the government to account.



**Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) (2015), *And That's How I Survived Being Killed*.** This report documents the persecution and violence that LGBT people in Uganda face. Available at: [https://sexualminoritiesuganda.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/And-Thats-How-I-Survived\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://sexualminoritiesuganda.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/And-Thats-How-I-Survived_Report_Final.pdf)



Richard Lusimbo facilitates at the PITCH REAct workshop in Nairobi.

**“I, myself, am an activist who has faced persecution. I can show groups from across Africa that, through REAct, we have a system and it works. The more countries that use REAct, the more we can combine our evidence and the more we can combine our response.”**

**Richard Lusimbo, Research and Documentation Manager, SMUG**

SMUG continues to find REAct a user-friendly and straightforward system – one that is easily integrated with its existing programmes and can be sustained by the organisation with modest resources. They are now keen to share their experiences and expertise with peer LGBT organisations across Africa.

Speaking of his role as a facilitator at the PITCH REAct workshop in Nairobi Richard said: *“My role was to not simply train the participants in REAct, but – based on our experiences in Uganda – support them to truly understand and make best use of the system. It’s important that such support comes from within our communities.”*



Participants at the PITCH REAct workshop in Nairobi practice interview skills.





## Adapting and implementing REAct in Mozambique and Nigeria

### Mozambique

Mozambique has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world, at 13.2% among 15-49 year olds.<sup>4</sup> Rates are higher yet among some groups, such as 33.8% among men who have sex with men aged 24 and above in Maputo.<sup>5</sup> With amendments to the country's penal code, removing colonial-era measures against homosexuality, there is a favourable legal environment to promote non-discrimination of LGBT communities. However, the **application** of the law remains challenging, with community members continuing to face daily harassment and discrimination and LGBT CSOs remaining unregistered.

LAMBDA is Mozambique's only activist organisation advocating for the rights of LGBT people. On a daily basis, it receives reports of violations against community members, such as corrective rape of lesbians, young LGBT people expelled from families and denied school fees by their parents, and discrimination against transgender people in health services and workplaces. Having previously depended on staff's personal resources, leaving many cases unrecorded, LAMBDA is now, as a PITCH partner, introducing REAct as a means to a more institutional response. This process was greatly aided by the practical training and insights provided at the PITCH REAct workshop in Nairobi.

Roberto Paulo, Programme Officer, said: *"The workshop was the beginning of a new era for LAMBDA. We learned how to classify and record human rights violation cases using the appropriate tool and there was a lot of experience-sharing with other organizations that are already implementing REAct. The trainers were extraordinary because they created a very interesting learning environment. What helped the LAMBDA team to build its confidence was the fact that participants from other organizations were able to show that it works and it is possible to implement it."*

LAMBDA will house the REAct database in its human rights department in Maputo, while providing training and technical support to its provincial coordinators stationed throughout Mozambique to record and take action on individual cases. The cumulative information produced will provide unparalleled evidence for LAMBDA's advocacy work.

### Nigeria

Nigeria has the second largest HIV burden in the world. While general adult prevalence is 3.2%, rates are significantly higher among key populations, such as 17% in men who have sex with men. The situation is fueled by a punitive legal and social environment, in particular for LGBT communities. The 2014 Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act criminalises same-sex relations and LGBT-supportive organisations. Mass arrests have occurred for 'homosexual acts'

"LAMBDA has a seat in different coordination platforms at the provincial and national levels. Having this data will empower us to come to those spaces with evidence and advocate for changes to behaviour, policies or law, reducing human rights violations within the LGBT community."

Roberto Paulo, Programme Officer, LAMBDA

4. Ministry of Health, Government of Mozambique (2017), *Indicators of Immunisation, Malaria and HIV/AIDS (IMASIDA) Survey*.

5. Rassul Nalá et al. 'Men Who Have Sex with Men in Mozambique: Identifying a Hidden Population at High-risk for HIV', *AIDS and Behavior* 19(2) September 2014.

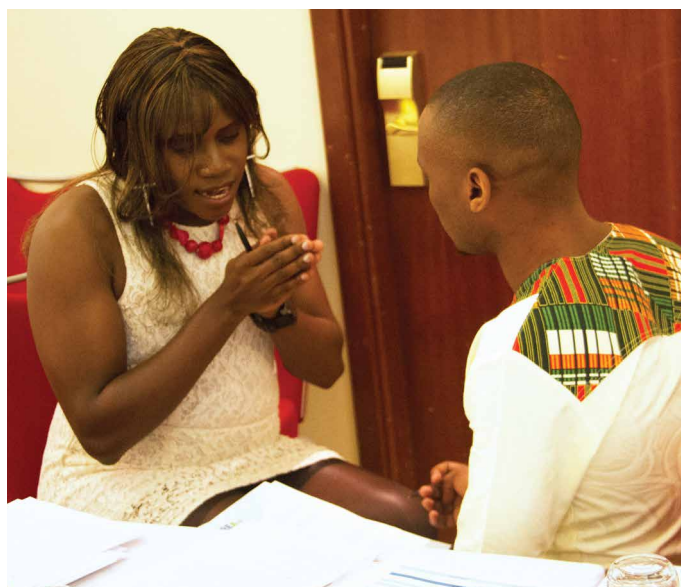
in Lagos State, while in the north, Sharia law declares same-sex relations punishable by death. Stigma, exclusion and violence remain a daily reality for LGBT people within families, communities, workplaces and health services.

In Nigeria REAct is being adapted and implemented by the International Centre for Advocacy on Right to Health (ICARH), a PITCH partner. The organisation was established in 1999 and focuses on policy development on the rights of sexual minorities and people living with HIV through research, analysis, training, awareness campaigns and advocacy. REAct will strengthen ICARH's existing work by providing a more robust and systematic approach.

Kelechi Onyeaka, ICARH programme coordinator, said: *“REAct is important in Nigeria because it will aid civil society organisations and other related networks to document and derive verifiable data of abuses: stigma, discrimination, threat to life, blackmail, extortion, arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention. REAct will redefine the process of information collation for LGBT-related human rights issues.”*

While participating in the PITCH REAct workshop in Nairobi, Kelechi particularly welcomed the opportunity to learn from peers: *“The workshop helped to strengthen my technical capacity in identifying and reporting human rights abuses and violations. I learned the need to work in synergy with other civil society organisations, using the Ugandan approach.”* Now, ICARH and their partners will modify REAct to produce a system that is tailor-made to their specific country, context and communities. Kelechi concluded: *“LGBT-led and human rights organisations will be engaged to implement REAct – helping improve and strengthen the organisational systems they already have in place. The information generated will be used for advocacy to inform an enabling environment for the LGBT community, to pinpoint opposition enablers and to direct specific advocacy asks. It will create massive awareness about the need for inclusiveness of the rights of these underserved communities.”*

Participants at the PITCH REAct workshop in Nairobi practice interview skills.



## About the International HIV/AIDS Alliance

We are an innovative alliance of nationally based, independent, civil society organisations united by our vision of a world without AIDS.

We are committed to joint action, working with communities through local, national and global action on HIV, health and human rights.

Our actions are guided by our values: the lives of all human beings are of equal value, and everyone has the right to access the HIV information and services they need for a healthy life.

## Acknowledgements

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Cover: Participant at the PITCH REAct workshop in Nairobi.

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The Partnership to Inspire, Transform and Connect the HIV response (PITCH) enables people most affected by HIV to gain full and equal access to HIV and sexual and reproductive health services.

The programme strengthens community-based organisations' capacity to uphold the rights of populations most affected by HIV by engaging in effective advocacy, generating robust evidence and developing meaningful policy solutions.