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NOVEMBER 2026

MARANG NEWSLETTER

Southern Africa LGBTIQ+ Fund

BE SEEN. BE SUPPORTED. BE POWERFUL.

Across Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia and the Southern Africa region at large, LGBTIQ movements continue to demonstrate resilience, creativity and courage. In this edition, we get to appreciate how the Marang Fund partner organisation communities are using advocacy, strategic litigation, storytelling and movement-building to advance rights and social justice. From landmark conversations on marriage equality and legal recognition to vibrant Pride celebrations, emerging intersectional feminist leadership and powerful stories of change, these features capture a region alive with action and possibility. As always, the Marang Fund remains committed to supporting the organisations, activists and communities working every day to build a future rooted in dignity, inclusion and human rights for all.

Regional Feature

Exploring a model anti-discrimination law

- Annie Shweta Osawaru, Collectif Arc-En-Ciel (CAEC), Marang Fund Grantee Partner - Mauritius

CAEC joined a convening hosted by The Other Foundation in Johannesburg to explore a model anti-discrimination law. The proposed model would give advocates in different African countries a shared starting point that they could adapt to their own laws and to the barriers people face when seeking protection or justice. For CAEC, that work starts with what people bring to us through case management, including experiences of discrimination, harassment and difficulty accessing protection. Looking across those experiences can help us and our legal partners identify where protections fall short and consider which gaps could be addressed through law reform or strategic litigation. Taking a case forward with the aim of securing wider change requires time, careful documentation and sustained support for the people involved. The convening helped us think through those steps and how to keep the needs of the people we support at the centre of that work.

Mauritius: National Human Rights Commission Takes a Landmark Position on Same-Sex Marriage

- Najeebah Nabeebaccus, Young Queer Alliance (YQA), Marang Fund Grantee Partner - Mauritius

A significant step towards marriage equality and the recognition of LGBTQIA+ rights

In July 2026, Mauritius reached an important milestone in the advancement of LGBTQIA+ rights when the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issued a position paper entitled *The Right to Marriage of the LGBTQIA+ Community in Mauritius*. Dated 22 July 2026 and made public in August, the paper examines the legal barriers preventing same-sex couples from accessing civil marriage and provides an important institutional assessment of their rights under Mauritian law.

The position paper followed complaints submitted to the NHRC on 2 February 2026 by two same-sex couples who had been refused civil marriage registration by the Civil Status Division. The Commission examined the provisions of the Mauritian Civil Code, the Civil Status Act, constitutional protections and the country's international human rights obligations.

One of its central findings was that **Mauritian law contains no explicit prohibition on marriage between two people of the same sex**. The Commission noted that the conditions prescribed by the Civil Code for a valid marriage relate to age and consent, without specifying the sex of the parties. Similarly, the Civil Status Act does not expressly restrict marriage to opposite-sex couples. Consequently, the Commission found that the administrative refusal to register same-sex marriages appeared to have no identifiable legal basis.

The NHRC further considered that excluding same-sex couples from marriage could constitute discrimination based on sexual orientation, contrary to Section 16 of the Constitution. In reaching this conclusion, it drew on the landmark 2023 Supreme Court judgements which established that the constitutional protection against discrimination on the ground of sex encompasses sexual orientation.

Importantly, the Commission situated its analysis within Mauritius' wider international and regional human rights commitments, highlighting the State's obligations to protect equality, dignity and freedom from discrimination. It recommended the establishment of an interministerial committee to examine the legislative and administrative measures necessary to eliminate discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people in marriage and civil partnerships. It also indicated that, should the State fail to take appropriate action, affected couples could seek redress before the Supreme Court.

The report also drew on testimonies from LGBTQIA+ individuals, documenting the practical and emotional consequences of exclusion from legal recognition. These included difficulties relating to inheritance, taxation, social security, medical decision-making, family recognition and the ability to grieve and participate in funeral arrangements following the death of a partner.

Young Queer Alliance: Building the evidence and advancing advocacy

The Young Queer Alliance (YQA), a Mauritian NGO advocating for the rights and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ people, has played an active role in advancing marriage equality through legal advocacy, research and community engagement.

On 27 November 2025, YQA supported two same-sex couples in approaching the Civil Status Division to request civil marriage registration. Following the refusal, both couples brought complaints before the NHRC in February 2026, seeking recognition of the discrimination they experienced. To strengthen the legal basis for advocacy, YQA commissioned Mauritian legal practitioner Sandy Christ Bhaganooa to conduct a comparative legal analysis of same-sex marriage in Mauritius. Published in June 2026, the research examined Mauritian legislation and constitutional protections alongside developments in other jurisdictions. Its findings highlighted the absence of an explicit legal prohibition and the potential for existing constitutional and legislative protections to support equal access to civil marriage.

YQA also engaged civil society and media stakeholders through capacity-building workshops organised with support from Freedom to Marry Global. Representatives from Gender Links, Collectif Arc-en-Ciel, EkiT, RekonekT and Mozil, among others, participated in discussions examining the legal, social and human rights dimensions of marriage equality.

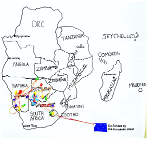
From institutional recognition to meaningful change

The NHRC's position paper provides an important foundation for continued advocacy and policy reform. For YQA and other human rights stakeholders, the priority is now to translate this institutional recognition into concrete legislative and administrative action, ensuring that same-sex couples enjoy equal dignity, recognition and protection under the law.

Strategic Litigation

From Courtrooms to Safe Spaces: Building Justice That Holds

- Sarafina Molapisi, Programme Officer; Marang Fund - BONELA



In June we wrote that justice does not always arrive with a loud knock at the door. Five months on, the Marang Fund family can add a second truth: when justice does arrive, people need somewhere safe to stand while they wait for it.

Since our last update, partners in Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius and Namibia have moved on two fronts at once. On the legal front, cases have advanced, parliaments have debated, and evidence has been gathered with care. On the safe space front, every country has designed its own Drop-in Centre (DICE) model, and four of the five have now signed agreements to bring those spaces to life.

These two streams of work are not separate. A safe space is where a person first reports what happened to them, receives support, and decides whether they want to take the matter further. A strategic case is often built on exactly that kind of carefully documented, survivor-centred evidence. Put simply, safe spaces help make justice possible, and strategic litigation helps make safe spaces less necessary.

A Region Learning Together

Between late August and early September, the Marang Fund convened its first Regional Strategic Litigation Learning Session. Rather than routine updates, five partners each presented a live case or advocacy pathway using a common framework covering the issue, the strategy, the evidence, the risks, and the lessons:

- **LEGABIBO (Botswana):** the marital equality case and the Lorato ke Lorato campaign.
- **Legal Assistance Centre (Namibia):** the constitutional challenge to the Marriage Act 2024.
- **Collectif Arc-en-Ciel (Mauritius):** moving from legal clinic evidence to strategic legal action on hate speech.
- **VCRC (Namibia):** the constitutional challenge to the Abortion and Sterilisation Act 1975.
- **The People's Matrix (Lesotho):** intersex rights, legal gender recognition and policy reform.

Six shared questions came out of the session and now shape our regional thinking. When is a matter genuinely ready for court? What evidence do we need, and how do we collect it safely? Who carries the risk, and what protection must be in place? How do we anticipate and respond to anti-rights backlash? How can communications support the legal strategy rather than undermine it? And how do we build the alliances that sustain the work beyond the courtroom?

The clearest lesson was this: no strategic case is built by lawyers alone. Parents, faith and cultural leaders, police, Parliamentarians, journalists, researchers and community members all carry part of the load.

Botswana: Holding the Line and Moving Forward

LOVE WINS
LGBTQIA+

THE HIGH COURT OF BOTSWANA
#END
LOVE WINS
LGBTQIA+

Strategic litigation. Botswana's partners continue to work on two fronts: support to the marital equality case, and advocacy for protective legislation on hate crimes and hate speech.
The marital equality case challenges section 10(2) of the Marriage Act. LEGABIBO was admitted as a third applicant following the joinder ruling in September, so the voices and lived experiences of the community are formally before the court. The High Court heard two days of main arguments on 22–23 October 2026.

The applicants argued that section 10(2) does not expressly bar same-sex marriage. They said that reading the Act through the Constitution's guarantees of dignity, privacy, equality and freedom of association, and in light of Botswana's decriminalisation jurisprudence, means same-sex couples cannot be excluded, and that the Constitution is a living instrument and therefore the Marriage Act cannot be read as it stood when the Act was passed. Counsel for LEGABIBO also challenged the lawfulness of the procedure followed when the marriage was refused, and an amicus urged the court to keep building on Botswana's progressive jurisprudence.

The respondents, including faith-based groups, argued argued that the Act was written with heterosexual marriage in mind and that any change should come from Parliament after public consultation. They proposed alternatives such as a separate civil union law or a declaration of invalidity suspended to give Parliament time to legislate.

Judgment was reserved and is expected on 2 April 2027.

Around the case, LEGABIBO's Lorato ke Lorato campaign has grounded the legal question in love, family, dignity and equal citizenship. Community dialogues in Gaborone and Francistown brought together parents and families (PFLAG), faith and cultural leaders, LBQ women and allies, and an online voluntary survey run by LEGABIBO found that 88% of respondents strongly support marriage equality. BTI and PMCFMH mobilised community presence at court, and partners took the conversation to the airwaves on RB2, Yarona FM and Gabz FM.

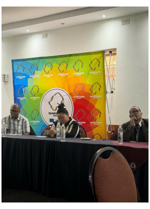
On hate crimes and hate speech, LEGABIBO led the development of a consortium concept note in August with BONELA, FOD, BTI and PMCFMH. It takes legislative advocacy as the primary pathway, with litigation held in reserve as an accountability tool. The aim is to build democratic ownership of reform rather than relying on the courts alone. Acomparative legal study of Botswana's hate speech and hate crime protections against South Africa, Zambia and Canada is also under way. LEGABIBO's town halls in Maun, Kasane and Lobatse and its self-advocacy trainings have helped community members recognise rights violations and understand where to seek redress.

Partners are also watching closely as the Attorney General's March 2026 removal of sections 164(a) and (c) from the Penal Code has garnered interest from independent applicants challenged in court. Botswana is a reminder that legal gains need active protection.

Safe spaces. Botswana has chosen a hybrid model built on what each partner already does well:

- **Mokgosi (Lesbians Gays and Bisexuals of Botswana, LeGaBiBo):** a bilingual web and WhatsApp human rights-violation reporting and case management system, handed over in July. A formal launch, district stakeholder mapping and a network of Mokgosi Champions are next.
- **Open Hands (Friends Of Diversity, FOD):** a mental health app launched at the Rainbow Picnic on 1 August 2026 with more than 70 people present.
- **Botswana Trans Initiative (BTI) virtual safe space:** a moderated WhatsApp-based peer support, verified information and confidential help desk service for trans and gender-diverse people.
- **Pilot Mathambo Center For Men's Health (PMCFMH):** a physical safe space in Francistown.

Agreements for BTI, FOD and PMCFMH have been signed, and LEGABIBO's revised agreement, which funds the Mokgosi launch, is being finalised.



Lesotho: From Parliament Floor to Drop-in Centre

Strategic litigation. On 22–23 September 2026, BONELA and Gender Links facilitated a two-day Strategic Litigation Capacity Building and Stakeholder Engagement in Lesotho. Eleven partners from The People's Matrix, Unlocking Love Foundation, Queer WorX and the International Human Rights Lab worked through three priority tracks:

1. Protecting intersex children from unnecessary or non-consensual medical interventions.
2. Inclusive legal gender recognition in national identity and civil registration systems.
3. Decriminalisation, equality and legal protection, including residual provisions such as section 187(5) of the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act, hate crimes and hate speech, and marital equality.

On the second day, partners took their sharpest asks directly to eight officials from six institutions.
The headline development is legislative. The list of amendments passed by the National Assembly on the Children's Protection (Amendment) Bill, 2023, includes a provision on medical interventions related to the intersex characteristics of a child at birth, and the issue has continued into Senate consideration. Intersex bodily integrity has moved from community advocacy into formal law-making. That shift reflects years of patient work led by The People's Matrix and partners. Lesotho's acceptance of UPR recommendations on non-discrimination and transparent legal gender recognition gives partners a clear reform agenda to hold the State to, and partners are supporting work on a hate crime and hate speech bill being led by the Ministry of Law.

Safe spaces. The four Lesotho partners have come together behind one National Drop-in Centre for Lesotho. The model links The People's Matrix's VIEWS/Mabox violation reporting system and psychosocial support, Unlocking Love's affirming counselling, Queer WorX's Queer Opportunity Hub, and IHRL's legal capacity-building for advocates and practitioners. The budget was revised in late October. Sub-grant agreements for all four partners have been prepared, and agreeing to a fiscal host is the final step before contracting.

Madagascar: Safety First, Litigation-Ready Always

Strategic litigation. Madagascar continues to show that protecting rights depends on strong accountability structures, not only on favourable laws. Following the March training and engagements, partners have built a protection pathway. It starts with safe documentation and reporting, runs through police and prosecutor focal points, and ends with structured submissions to national human rights institutions. At the request of the High Council for the Defence of Democracy and the Rule of Law (HCDDED), partners are preparing anonymised case-pattern briefs on hate crimes for the HCDDED and the CNIDH, and police commitments to LGBTIQ-friendly focal persons and training are being followed up.

JEPE has completed its legal analysis of ratified international instruments and national law, documenting illustrative cases to inform a roadmap on the age of sexual majority under Article 331 of the Penal Code. In response to recent incidents of kidnapping and doxxing, workshops with police and authorities are planned, so that community safety remains the foundation of everything else.

Safe spaces. VAD3M's safe space agreement was signed on 25 September, and the first disbursement has been paid. Working with Le Refuge, the model has two linked parts: a physical safe space in Antsirabe offering social, psychosocial, health and economic support, and a national WhatsApp chatbot that gives a confidential first door to information, listening and referral for people anywhere in the country. Privacy and hosting arrangements were agreed with the developers in July. The chatbot is not meant to replace human care. It is a way for someone in a remote town to reach a person who can help.

Mauritius: Turning Hate Into Evidence

Strategic litigation. Collectif Arc-en-Ciel (CAEC) has documented more than 10,900 anti-LGBTQIA+ online comments, more than 60 hostile videos and at least eight online groups set up to mobilise against LGBTQIA+ people. Much of this followed Pride 2026. Rather than rushing to court, CAEC's legal clinic advised that filing too early could weaken the case. Partners are therefore building the strongest possible foundation first. That means a comparative legal report, a complaint to the Equal Opportunities Commission, continued documentation of incidents and institutional responses, and a long-term strategy developed with Dentons Mauritius. The core concern is that existing provisions on harmful online communication do not expressly recognise sexual orientation and gender identity, so anti-LGBT hate is too often treated as a private insult.

In CAEC's words, a law written to apply to everyone cannot give equal protection if it fails to recognise the specific forms of hatred LGBTQIA+ people face. Alongside this, the Anti-Hate Action (AHA) protocol, YQA's Rainbow Hood Watch community reporting and crisis-management training for human rights defenders are strengthening community protection. Partners have also engaged the National Human Rights Commission, the Ombudsperson's office and the Ministry of Gender Equality, continued intersex rights advocacy with the Ombudsperson for Children, and kept monitoring an independent legal gender recognition case.

Safe spaces. Mauritius has taken a consortium approach. CAEC, EKiT and YQA are building on the CAEC legal clinic to create a DICE that combines a physical community hub with the AHA WhatsApp Community. The hub offers counselling, legal information, case management, community activities and emergency referral. The agreement was signed on 23 September and the first disbursement was requisitioned in October.

Namibia: Preparing to File, Protecting Those Who Stand Up

VCRC NAMIBIA USED CREATIVE MEDIA TO STRENGTHEN MOVEMENT BUILDING.

Strategic litigation. Namibia has two constitutional pathways under preparation. The Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) has retained counsel and is preparing founding papers to challenge provisions of the Marriage Act 2024 that bar recognition of same-sex marriages, including those solemnised abroad. Filing depends on applicants who are willing and safe to come forward.

Some earlier applicants withdrew because they feared stigma, and partners are treating this with the care it deserves.

VCRC Health and Research Institute is preparing a constitutional challenge to the Abortion and Sterilisation Act 1975, with filing planned from November 2026. The case was strengthened when the Government supported UPR recommendation 140.142 on legalising abortion. VCRC's applicant call offers a strong model for the whole region. Applicants can choose full anonymity, to be named without media exposure, or to be fully public, and they can change that choice as the case moves forward. Counselling and psychosocial support are offered before, during and after the case, nothing is shared publicly until the risks have been reviewed with the applicant, and no one is paid for testimony.

Safe spaces. Namibia's DICE is not a single building. It is a national service network with eight access points across six regions and two digital channels, including a DICE WhatsApp line supported by LAC's existing SMS line. Someone needing help does not have to know which organisation provides which service. They only need to reach the network. MPower Community Trust is the fiscal host, VCRC chairs the consortium steering committee, and the agreement was signed on 20 October 2026.

What Connects the Work

Across all five countries, the same pathway keeps appearing:

Evidence and documentation → safeguarding and litigant support → duty-bearer and legislative engagement → litigation where feasible → communications and backlash management.

Some countries are already in court. Others are deliberately building the evidence and relationships first. Both choices are strategic. Every DICE now works to a common safeguarding standard, including informed consent and no involuntary identification, so that the people at the centre of this work are protected while they help change it.

The work has not been without strain. Second-tranche funds reached grantees only in late June and July, which compressed delivery and delayed safe space contracting. Partners have also faced backlash, including the court challenge to Botswana's Penal Code reform, online attacks in Mauritius and threats to safety in Madagascar. That partners have kept moving through all of this says a great deal about this movement.

A Closing Word

In June we said the law can be slow, sometimes walking to the office in flip-flops. This season, it has also been asked to listen: in a Gaborone courtroom, on the floor of Lesotho's National Assembly, at the desk of a human rights commission in Antananarivo, and in the founding papers taking shape in Windhoek.

Meanwhile, the movement has been building places to rest, report, heal and organise. The Marang Fund remains committed to walking with partners at every stage, from the first message to a chatbot to the final word from the bench.

The Marang Southern African LGBTIQ+ Fund is implemented by Gender Links and BONELA with funding from the European Union. The contents of this newsletter are the sole responsibility of the implementing partners and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Voices from the Region

REHOBOTH PRIDE 2026: A celebration of IDENTITY, DIGNITY and THE RIGHT TO BELONG

- Hakheem !Noabeb, MPower Community Trust, Marang Fund Grantee Partner - Namibia

The streets of Rehoboth became a powerful expression of courage, visibility and inclusion on Saturday, 19 September 2026, as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) community, allies and supporters gathered for Rehoboth Pride 2026 under the theme *"Proudly Rehoboth • Proudly Namibian • Proudly Me."*

Organised by MPower Community Trust, with support from the Marang Southern African LGBTQ+ Fund, funded by the European Union in collaboration with Gender Links and BONELA, the two-day celebration, held on 18 and 19 September, provided a platform for community members to celebrate their identities, strengthen solidarity and advocate for equality, dignity and human rights.

MPower Community Trust is a Namibian community-led organisation dedicated to advancing the health, human rights and dignity of key populations, particularly gay and bisexual men, other men who have sex with men, LGBTIQ+ people and female sex workers. Through its programmes, the organisation works to address stigma, discrimination and violence while strengthening access to essential health and human rights services.

More than a celebration: a statement of belonging

For many participants, Rehoboth Pride represented far more than a colourful public gathering. It was an opportunity to challenge the silence and stigma surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity, particularly in communities where expressing one's identity can come with social pressure, discrimination and fear.

The highlight of Saturday's programme was the Pride Walk, which took place between 10:00 and 11:00, beginning and ending at Oanob Community Hall in Block E. Participants walked through designated sections of Rehoboth, carrying a message of visibility, acceptance and equal belonging.

Although MPower had engaged the Namibian Police Force (NAMPOL) to request assistance with the procession, police support could not be secured due to other commitments, reportedly including funeral-related duties. Nevertheless, the organisers and community members demonstrated resilience by proceeding with the walk, taking collective responsibility for the activity. The procession sent a clear message: LGBTIQ+ people are part of Rehoboth's social fabric and deserve the same dignity, safety, protection and freedom afforded to every other member of society.

PRIDE VILLAGE: connecting celebration with essential services

Beyond the Pride Walk, the Pride Village served as an important component of the celebrations, bringing health information, essential services and supportive spaces closer to the community. MPower partnered with the Walvis Bay Corridor Group (WBCG) to provide HIV Testing Services (HTS), creating opportunities for participants and community members to access HIV testing, prevention information and linkages to appropriate health services.

The Women's Leadership Centre (WLC) also collaborated with the organisers to establish a dedicated Women's Corner. The space provided an opportunity for diverse women to share their lived experiences, encourage one another and engage in meaningful conversations around empowerment, inclusion and solidarity.

Additional activities included a Human Rights Corner and information on pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), antiretroviral treatment (ART), condoms and lubricants, sexually transmitted infections, mental health and gender-affirming information. The partnerships demonstrated the importance of integrating health, human rights and community empowerment into Pride celebrations. They also reinforced that Pride is not solely about visibility, but about ensuring that people can access the services, information and support they need to live healthy and dignified lives.

Building safer and more inclusive communities

MARA
Southern Africa L Q+ Fu
seen.
supported.
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WLC

Rehoboth Pride 2026 forms part of MPower Community Trust's broader interventions under the Marang Southern African LGBTQ+ Fund, which supports efforts to strengthen community support systems, document lived experiences, promote psychosocial well-being and advance advocacy in Rehoboth and Gobabis.

The initiative recognises that meaningful social change requires more than an annual celebration. It demands sustained community engagement, strategic partnerships, local leadership and safe spaces where individuals can speak openly about their experiences without fear of judgement or discrimination.

Through ongoing support groups and community mobilisation, MPower continues to create opportunities for individuals to connect, access psychosocial support and collectively address challenges affecting their lives. The event also highlighted the importance of building movements from within communities, ensuring that those directly affected by discrimination are not merely participants in conversations about change, but active contributors to shaping their own futures.

A message that extends beyond Reheboth

With approximately 50 people participating in the Pride celebrations, the event provided an important platform for visibility and community expression in a town where conversations around sexual orientation and gender identity can remain challenging. For MPower Community Trust, the message remains clear: a person's sexual orientation or gender identity should never determine whether they are treated with dignity, protected from violence or afforded equal opportunities.

As Namibia continues to engage in important national conversations about equality, constitutional rights and the protection of marginalised communities, Rehoboth Pride serves as a reminder that human rights are universal and must apply to everyone, regardless of who they are or whom they love. Ultimately, Rehoboth Pride 2026 was more than an event. It was a declaration of belonging, a demonstration of community resilience and a reminder that LGBTIQ+ people are not outsiders in their communities. They are an integral part of Rehoboth, its families and the broader Namibian nation.

Stories of Change

Coming Home to Yourself: A Resource Promoting LGBTQ+ Mental Health, Wellbeing and Affirming Support in Lesotho

- Irene Thabelo Nchephe, Unlocking Love, Marang Fund Grantee Partner - Lesotho

COMING HOME TO YOURSELF

Mental health and psychosocial wellbeing remain important areas of concern for LGBTQ+ communities, particularly in contexts where stigma, discrimination, social exclusion and limited access to affirming services can affect people's ability to seek support and live openly.

Recognising the need for accessible and affirming mental health information, Unlocking Love Foundation (ULF) developed Coming Home to Yourself: A Resource for LGBTQ+ People, Families, Friends, and Practitioners. The booklet was officially launched on 18 September 2026 at Alliance Française de Maseru, bringing together community members, development partners, civil society organisations, government representatives, mental health practitioners and other stakeholders.

The resource was conceptualised by Irene Nchephe, Founder and Executive Director of Unlocking Love Foundation, in response to the need for practical information that speaks to the everyday experiences and support needs of LGBTQ+ people. With the vision translated into a resource through the work of the booklet's author, Coming Home to Yourself seeks to make conversations about mental health, self-care, relationships, intimacy and acceptance more accessible.

The booklet is organised around key areas of support, including a self-care guide for LGBTQ+ individuals, relationships and intimacy, guidance for families and friends, and guidance for practitioners. It is intended to serve not only LGBTQ+ individuals but also the people and institutions who play an important role in their lives. By providing practical information and tools, it encourages families to become more supportive, practitioners to provide affirming care, and communities to foster environments where LGBTQ+ people can feel safe, understood and respected.

The launch provided an opportunity to reflect on the importance of inclusive mental health services and the role that community-led resources can play in addressing gaps in information and support. Contributions from speakers representing mental health, government, civil society and the regional movement helped situate the resource within broader conversations about LGBTQ+ wellbeing and access to affirming care.For Unlocking Love Foundation, the booklet represents more than the publication of a resource. It reflects an ongoing commitment to ensuring that LGBTQ+ people are not left out of conversations about mental health and that families, friends and service providers have information that can help them offer meaningful support.

The title, Coming Home to Yourself, speaks to the importance of self-acceptance, dignity and finding spaces where one can exist without fear or judgement. It is a reminder that LGBTQ+ people deserve care, understanding and support, and that they should not have to navigate their mental health journeys alone.

The title, *Coming Home to Yourself,* speaks to the importance of self-acceptance, dignity and finding spaces where one can exist without fear or judgement. It is a reminder that LGBTQ+ people deserve care, understanding and support, and that they should not have to navigate their mental health journeys alone.

Importantly, the booklet is available free of charge and is not for sale. It can be accessed digitally and shared with individuals, families, organisations, practitioners and communities who may benefit from its contents. Through this initiative, Unlocking Love Foundation hopes to strengthen understanding, encourage supportive relationships and contribute to more inclusive mental health responses in Lesotho and the wider region.

The development and launch of Coming Home to Yourself were made possible through the support of the Marang Fund, in partnership with the European Union, Gender Links and BONELA.

Access the resource: **Coming Home to Yourself – Free Digital Booklet**

About Unlocking Love Foundation

Unlocking Love Foundation is a Lesotho-based organisation working to advance the rights, wellbeing and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people and other marginalised communities. Through advocacy, community engagement, mental health initiatives, sexual and reproductive health and rights programming, and movement building, the Foundation works towards safer, more inclusive and empowered communities.

Building the Movement

Marang Fund Fellows Begin a Journey of Learning, Advocacy and Movement Building

- Michelle Mutogo, Alliance and Fellowships Coordinator – Gender Links

The Marang-WOSSO Fellowship Programme continues to create opportunities for emerging LGBTQIA+ leaders to strengthen their advocacy skills, build regional networks and contribute to discussions shaping gender equality and human rights in Southern Africa. Through Gender Links, five fellows from Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Madagascar and Mauritius are gaining practical experience in regional advocacy, movement building and evidence based engagement.

An important aspect of the fellowship is connecting individual leadership development to wider civil society movements. Beyond structured mentorship and capacity strengthening through the **Gender Links Academy,** the programme provides opportunities for fellows to engage directly with regional advocacy platforms, contribute to policy discussions and build relationships with activists and organisations working across different national contexts.

Equality and Identity Rights Series
Families, Belonging, and Equality

MARANG
#PushForward4Equality
#VoiceAndChoice
#PRIDE
#LoveIsLove

A significant milestone was the participation of Marang fellows in the **Southern African Civil Society Forum,** held in Durban, South Africa, from 18 to 21 August 2026. The Forum brought together civil society organisations, activists and regional stakeholders to reflect on development priorities, human rights and accountability within the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The fellows contributed to the **Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance's** Red Lights and Green Lights presentations, drawing on findings from the **2026 Southern Africa Gender and Development Index** (SGDI). In particular, they presented findings from the chapter on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE), highlighting both progress and persistent challenges affecting LGBTQIA+ communities across the region.

The presentation identified important green lights, including advances in decriminalisation, court decisions strengthening legal protections, and improvements in freedom of association in some countries. Nevertheless, the red lights demonstrated that considerable challenges remain. Criminalisation, discrimination, violence, unequal legal recognition and restrictions on civic space continue to undermine the rights and safety of LGBTQIA+ people. Through this engagement, the fellows helped bring attention to the uneven progress on LGBTQIA+ rights across Southern Africa and the importance of ensuring that regional gender equality commitments respond to diverse lived experiences.

Connecting Regional Evidence to Movement Building

The Forum also provided an opportunity to examine the growing resistance to gender equality and LGBTQIA+ rights across the region. Discussions highlighted how narratives around culture, family, religion and national identity are increasingly being used to challenge established human rights principles.

A central message emerging from the discussions was that equality and dignity must extend to everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

For the Marang fellows, engagement in these conversations provided exposure to the relationship between research, public narratives and regional policy advocacy. It also reinforced the importance of solidarity among LGBTQIA+ organisations, women's rights movements and other civil society actors.
This engagement was particularly relevant to the **Alliance's 2030 Campaign**, which advocates for reviewing and strengthening the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. The current Protocol does not explicitly address sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, leaving an important gap in the regional framework.

The fellows' participation contributed to wider discussions on the need for inclusive legal protections, access to services, protection from violence and meaningful participation of LGBTQIA+ communities in regional decision-making. The fellows' regional advocacy engagement extends beyond the Civil Society Forum through opportunities to participate in the thematic launches of the 2026 Southern Africa Gender Protocol Barometer. The launches have covered Safe Abortion, Menstrual Health, Maternal Health and Family Planning, and Women, Peace and Security, with further thematic launches scheduled throughout November and December 2026.

These platforms connect regional research with advocacy discussions and provide opportunities for fellows to engage with emerging evidence, exchange perspectives and strengthen relationships with civil society organisations. The forthcoming Sexual Diversity and SOGIE Barometer launch is especially relevant to the Marang Fellowship. It provides an opportunity to build on the issues raised during the Civil Society Forum and deepen discussions on legal recognition, equality, access to justice and protection against discrimination.

Participation in these processes strengthens the connection between the fellows' organisational advocacy priorities and wider regional efforts to advance inclusive gender equality. Moving forward, the fellowship will continue to strengthen mentorship, encourage participation in Gender Links Academy courses and facilitate engagement in national and regional advocacy spaces. The Marang-WOSSO Fellowship demonstrates the value of connecting emerging LGBTQIA+ leaders to established regional movements. By bringing their perspectives into spaces where evidence is discussed and advocacy priorities are shaped, the fellows are contributing to a more inclusive regional movement for equality, dignity and human rights.

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