



NEWSLETTER

BE SEEN. BE SUPPORTED. BE POWERFUL.



Holding space and building power at a regional level

From its inception, the Marang Fund has been intentional about building a strong foundation before moving into execution. The initial period of onboarding focused on trust-building, contextual analysis, and strengthening the readiness of grantee partners to implement a regional action that is both politically grounded and community-responsive. This phase centered partners not merely as implementers but as co-strategists, rooted in lived realities, national contexts, and movement priorities across the five countries.

As implementation unfolded, the Fund operationalised its regional strategy through coordinated activities aligned with the EU Action Plan and Logical Framework. Grantee partners rolled out safe-space programming, legal literacy initiatives, psychosocial support services, community dialogues, and advocacy engagements that directly responded to the violence, stigma, and exclusion faced daily by LGBTIQ people. These interventions reached individuals at



moments of acute vulnerability, while simultaneously strengthening the organisational capacity, leadership, and sustainability of LGBTIQ-led and LGBTIQ-mandated organisations.

Strategic litigation emerged as a critical pillar of this work, not as a singular legal tactic, but as a long-term pathway towards structural change. In line with contextual readiness and risk assessment, partners pursued differentiated approaches. Some partners focused on soft advocacy, legal awareness, and engagement with ongoing national litigation processes, contributing community evidence, legal research, and movement support to cases already before the courts. In parallel, other partners initiated the structured preparation of new litigation cases, undertaking documentation, coalition-building, and legal analysis to challenge discriminatory laws and policies. This dual-track approach ensured immediate contribution to live legal struggles while laying careful, community-informed groundwork for future cases intended to advance dignity, equality, and constitutional protections.

Throughout this period, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning processes were embedded into implementation. The collection of I-Stories, refinement of MEL tools, and continuous partner support on data quality generated rich qualitative and quantitative evidence.



Movement-building & learning

In movement politics, there are times when something happens, not loudly, not all at once, but profoundly and slowly. October and the moments around it brought us several of these moments.

From the Intersex Awareness Day Regional Dialogue, our joint work for Transgender Awareness Week, to the Beyond Binaries webinar that emerged from Gender Day at the SADC Heads of State Summit in Madagascar, we are reminded that visibility is not the end of the journey but the beginning of a new one.

In all of these forums, organisations that advocate intersex and trans rights spoke of, and showed great bravery and sensitivity about what it is like to inhabit bodies that are refused recognition by the systems that are meant to acknowledge them. They talked about being absent from statutes, invisible in statistics, misunderstood in treatment rooms, and talked over in meeting spaces where decisions about their lives were being made. They also spoke about resilience and joy.



The truth remains that telling their own stories is an exercise of their power. When intersex and trans individuals tell their stories for themselves and in their own languages and terms, it destabilises the discourse that seeks to medicalise their existence by correcting it through prayers and burying it with bogus policies. These stories do not require permission to be told and are commanded to be shared.

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These insights have illuminated emerging outcomes related to mental health, family acceptance, access to support services, and community resilience, informing programme adaptation, strengthening accountability, and deepening learning across the Action.

Governance and collective oversight were further strengthened through the inaugural Project Steering Committee meeting, which brought together grantee partners, allied organisations such as the Southern Africa Intersex Forum (SAIF) and The Other Foundation, and Marang Champions from the Southern Africa Gender Protocol network. The PSC provided strategic guidance, reinforced alignment with Action Plan indicators, and created a shared space for reflection, coordination, and course correction.

Collectively, these efforts signal a meaningful shift: from isolated interventions to a connected regional ecosystem of care, resistance, and legal transformation. While structural change through litigation and policy reform is necessarily long-term, this period has laid critical foundations, stronger organisations, informed communities, advancing legal strategies, and deepened regional solidarity, that will continue to shape impact.



STORYTELLING & VISIBILITY EFFORTS

I-Stories: our lives speak for themselves

To us, at the Marang Fund, I-Stories are not merely stories; they are acts of courage. Voices from the source that are bringing lived accounts of the community to light.

They are the moments when the LGBTIQ+ community, so often referred to and never heard, decides to speak with their own voice. They are first-person accounts that are told in trust and safety, of home, with continued consent and support given. They come from bodies that wear experiences of joy and triumph together.

We collect I-Stories because the reality of what it means to live will never be expressed through numbers and percentages alone. Statistics cannot possibly articulate the experience of rejection by family members, the struggle with one's own mind, or the finding of joy and acceptance despite the odds. I-Stories are much closer to the reality of the experience. They are the human side of what we do.

In relation to the Marang Fund, I-Stories have various uses for us. They can be considered evidence: they provide us with more nuanced data for our MEL processes. They can be viewed as tools of visibility: they disrupt damaging narratives of queer life being inconsequential or existentially peripheral. And they can also be understood in terms of practices of care.

Most significantly, "I-Stories" give LGBTIQ+ people living in our region the opportunity to define themselves and their own lives. In a context where 'voices are erased, criminalised, and distorted,' what is critical about "I-Stories" is that it asserts a fundamental and profound reality: we exist, our lives matter, and our stories are important enough that people listen.



The Beyond Binaries webinar was born from Gender Day at the SADC Heads of State Summit and challenged the reality of what true inclusion and gender diversity look like in the world of policy. Questioning the kinds of structures and how they miss the nuances of the human experience if they are rooted in binary thought. This is what inclusion looks like: listening particularly to those who are being excluded from the conversation about their human rights.

In each of these meetings, there was a profound value that guided us. This representation must never harm. This visibility without viability is not freedom. That dignity must always precede spectacle.

As the Marang Fund, we treasure these moments. These moments remind us of what and who we are doing this for. That to simply check boxes and celebrate days of the year would never fulfill us; it would mean everything to see intersex and trans individuals reflected, valued, included, and protected simply because they exist.

This is the power of going past the binary. This is the achievement of the choice of humanity, again and again.



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For its first term, the Marang Fund has extended its reach in the region through investments in programme spaces which enhance movements, change public narratives, and bring about legal shifts in the region. This ranges from engagements with the media, filing strategic lawsuits, to capacity building, which have started yielding positive results based on the principles of partnerships, trust, and shared vision.

The Marang Fund's media training programme represented a positive beginning to regional engagement, which had a considerable turnout of participants from all participating countries. Reporters from various newspapers engaged effectively with content from the media training, showing a representation of increasing dedication to responsible, informed, and humanity-focused reporting on matters of LGBTIQ. Notably, it is not just the number of attendees at these sessions, but more importantly, the standard of work produced as a result of such interaction. Reporters are publishing informed, nuanced articles that reflect lived realities and challenge harmful stereotypes. More importantly, many have gone on to build ongoing relationships with grantee partners, collaborating on stories, seeking expert input, and amplifying community-led advocacy in ways that extend well beyond the training space.

There has also been some progress made regarding the promotion of strategic litigation as a mechanism of change. BONELA has successfully organised some strategic litigation sessions as a result of its involvement in this matter as a leader in this area, and this has happened in Botswana, Namibia, and Mauritius. These interactions provided important platforms for mapping out litigation opportunities, as well as assessing and conceiving a litigation plan based on local contexts among a collective of individuals.



Organisational development continues to be a core aspect of the Marang Fund's strategy. Through the GL Academy, the Fund, in collaboration with members of the allied communities, such as Reverend Nokuthula Dhladhla, took a proactive role in the implementation of the SOGIE training session delivered by Lusanda Mamba. The training session was a huge success, with many participants across the continent attending and creating a conducive environment where technical skills were shared along with values and experiences. Apart from skills attainment, the training session connected the Fund with new relations, having allowed it to establish relations with new personalities or organisations beyond its reach. This collaboration also helped to increase awareness and understanding of SOGIE issues within the community, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for all individuals. Overall, the training session was instrumental in promoting diversity and acceptance within the allied communities.

Taken together, these programmatic focus areas represent an ever-expanding landscape of collaboration, trust, and shared accountability. As the media narrative evolves, new legal strategies emerge, and organisations build confidence and capacity, the Marang Fund is committed to supporting movements that are resilient, interconnected, and poised to enact lasting change.

THE ONBOARDING EXPERIENCE

A personal reflection by Bokang Bane, Queer WorX

Attending the Marang Fund onboarding was a much-needed getaway that yielded amazing results. The whole week was memorable. The training was more than just a series of presentations and training; it was the foundation of movement building. In that space, we were not just individuals from our respective countries, Botswana, Namibia, and Lesotho; we became a community, united by a shared purpose.

Among the very first things that struck me was the immediate sense of belonging. From the moment we checked in at the Cottages, we were welcomed not as mere grantees but as partners. More than anything, when we began networking, it was clear that our work transcends borders. Hearing the different movement stories from each country and every individual in the space, from diverse backgrounds and identities, was both exhilarating and humbling. It reminded me that while our contexts are different, our struggles and our hopes are deeply intertwined.

The deep dive into strategic litigation and presentations from each country was a reality check. We often work in our own silos, but hearing the situation analyses from Botswana, Lesotho, and Namibia side-by-side was eye-opening. And my reflection, especially on this topic, somehow left me hanging on the wall as to what works and what doesn't. What is it that we, as Lesotho, can learn from Botswana and Namibia? Is strategic litigation a way to go for Lesotho, or rather we maintain and amplify our strategic advocacy? It helped us see the bigger picture and identify where our efforts can create the most change together.

I won't lie, the sessions on compliance, contracts, and financial management were intense. While there was a lot to remember, the facilitators broke down some concepts that even I, as an activist, did not understand. To build stronger movements and organisational sustainability also required to learn about EU guidelines and the Marang Grants Manual. A set of rules could sometimes sound intimidating; however, a huge part of our work as organisations, activists and advocates is rooted in trust and accountability. Managing resources properly is crucial not just for the funders, but also for our beneficiaries, who most time suffer due to mismanagement of resources.

It is incredible to achieve the legislative and policy wins. Being able to collect data that reflects the work being done, however, without the faces of humans whose lives have been transformed, impacted or elevated, we cannot fully say we have done the work. The lessons that stayed with me are the power of our own stories. The exercise was incredible. It showed us that our personal stories, our community members' stories, human stories bear such a tremendous power to change hearts and minds. Working in teams to share and shape our narratives was empowering. It reminded me of why I do this work in the first place.

I think it is also important to mention that the unified intention across the continent around claim spaces and build power. At the official launch of Marang Fund, you could feel the energy in the room that this celebration was a powerful declaration that would shape our queer futures in Southern Africa, and I am glad that I get to live to see it!!

There is pride in knowing that we possess so much power, that I honestly believe the world will be changed by queer folk. We are our own hope. We have each other. Yes, we have allies that continue to advocate for us in spaces that we would otherwise never enter, but the truth of the matter is, we have ourselves to rely on for strength and support.

My greatest takeaway from this whole experience was the realisation that we are not alone. I might come from a small country, "no one knows about", but our lives and realities form part of a strong network of support. Our stories are our strength, and we must never underestimate their power in advocacy and above all, this work demands effort and resilience. The work that we do is not a sprint; it might take some time, but we will surely get our wins. They might not be as big, but we will surely get some!

Although I left Johannesburg tired and a little bit overwhelmed, I was filled with hope, and a lot of ideas were lingering in my mind. But I left with a renewed sense of purpose. And we are ready!!!





FROM COUNTRY CONTEXTS TO COLLECTIVE COURAGE: INSIDE THE MARANG FUND PSC EXPERIENCE

Vipine Aubeeluck, Young Queer Alliance (YQA)

The week of the 17th November – 21st November 2025 was one full of sharing and learning experiences.

On the 17th of November, the Project Steering Committee of the Marang Fund was scheduled. During the PSC, each grantee, representing their individual countries, shared their project progress with the rest of the group. It was very interesting to see the contexts of each country and how, despite their challenges, each country was able to bring about their advocacy work for the benefit of the LGBTQIA+ community. It was also an eye-opening contrast that some countries, like Lesotho and Madagascar, cannot engage in strategic litigation yet due to the social dynamics. As such, they have been engaging themselves in soft advocacy campaigns, with extremely positive results.

I also felt fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend the G20 Social Summit through the Marang Fund and Gender Links. The G20 platform was one where we could see an incredible blend of African culture. The songs and dances during the various events showcased how Africa owned the G20. However, it is also important to note that while multiple vulnerable groups were highlighted, LGBTQIA people were never mentioned by

any of the orators. This made me think whether the G20 platform had the interests of the LGBTQIA community, or not. Furthermore, the last-minute cancellation of the Q20 event was quite unfortunate. The Marang folks really wanted to attend the Q20 more than the W20.

The Apartheid Museum was the last place I wanted to provide my reflections. The Museum showcased the racial segregation which plagued South Africa in the 20th Century. For a non-native, I felt a lot of sad emotions just by reading the articles and looking at the pictures and videos. I can only imagine the lived experiences of the people and their ancestors who lived through these troubling times. Being someone from a marginalised community, I do feel the pain of the victims of white segregation. As LGBTQIA people, we live similar experiences where other non-queer people get to dictate how we are to live our lives as queer people, and if we do not abide by their laws, we get punished, jailed, or even, in some countries, killed.

The entire event was very fruitful. The PSC, the G20 Social Summit, the Apartheid Museum, the Funders Round Table and many other activities provided many insights on how LGBTQIA+ advocacy could move forward.

Herisoa Phostina, VAD3M

My trip to South Africa was a remarkable experience, enriching both personally and professionally.

One of the most powerful moments was my visit to the Apartheid Museum. This place, filled with history, deeply moved me. It reminded me that the struggles for freedom, justice, and equality are universal and that remembering the past is essential to building a different future. This visit made me reflect on the resilience of people and the strength each individual carries, even in the most difficult times.

During this trip, I also had the honour of representing Madagascar in the Marang project. Carrying the voice of my country in an international space was a great source of pride. It helped me realise how valuable our perspectives, experiences, and realities are, and how important it is to share them. Even with the language barrier, especially English, sometimes being a challenge, I managed to cope.

Today, I am proud of the effort I made, of my ability to adapt, and of not allowing this difficulty to stop me from participating fully. What touched me the most were the human connections. The people I met were truly special, in the best sense: open-minded, kind, and curious. I never felt excluded. On the contrary, they made the effort to include me, support me, and get to know me. This care made the whole experience even more beautiful. I discovered that even far from home, in a completely new environment, I could find my place and build genuine relationships.

This experience in South Africa will stay with me. It taught me confidence, openness, the importance of courage when facing challenges, and the beauty of intercultural exchange. I return feeling stronger, inspired, and grateful for everything this journey has brought me.





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One of the driving forces of the Marang Fund is the application of evidence-informed action, the implementation of this action in the communities, and the building of movements. During this time, we have been trying to listen better, act better, and build the alliances that help in changing the world.

The completion of the baseline attitude survey was a pivotal beginning for the Action. The survey, which aims to measure the views, perceptions, and knowledge of the public regarding issues such as SOGIESC, serves as a very important landmark or starting point to measure progress in the future. Far from being a mere data-gathering mechanism, it is an exercise that enables partners to reflect upon, among others, how stigma, lack of information, and norms influence their interactions.

In turn, grantee-partners across the region moved this strategy into action with a series of ground-in programs: safe-space programming, legal literacy sessions, psychosocial support services, youth engagement, and community dialogues. Partners also firmly advanced advocacy initiatives that responded directly to national contexts—whether engaging policymakers, supporting community members who navigate violence and exclusion, or strengthening referral pathways to legal and health services. Together, these projects reflect the diversity, creativity, and resilience of LGBTIQ-led organising across Southern Africa.

Advocacy efforts under the Action were further strengthened through coordinated observance of key moments in the LGBTIQ calendar, including Intersex Awareness Day, Transgender Day of Remembrance, Spirit Day, and Gender Day at the SADC Heads of State Summit. These moments have been

used strategically for raising visibility, deepening public understanding, centring lived experiences through webinars, regional dialogues, media engagement, and storytelling.

In this context, the first Project Steering Committee meeting also served as an important element in the overall advocacy effort. The steering committee meeting consisted of project implementing partners, other allied groups, and Marang Champions. The Assembly covered strategic direction and learning from several countries via the objectives and indicators found within the Action Plan. The steering committee also acted as a platform for reflecting on the influence of the advocated action and the emerging challenges. Movement building continues to be an integral strategy of the Marang Fund's approach. In partnership with other organisations, religious leaders, media professionals, legal networks, as well as regional hubs such as the Alliance, the Action has been able to build links between movements and sectors. Such networks are crucial in fostering unity, coverage, and an appreciation for the reality that the advancement of rights for LGBTIQ individuals cannot be disentangled from the advancement of human rights.

These, cumulatively, are representative of an increasing ecosystem of informed engagement, based on data, and fueled by partnerships and movements that leverage advocacy and are sustained by alliances. The lessons of listening, leverage of collective action, and power of movement relationships are going to play a very important role in bringing about changes as this Action unfolds further.

I-STORY: EMBRACING MY PANSEXUAL IDENTITY

Angie, Botswana

Growing up, I always felt different, but I couldn't quite put it into words. I was attracted to people, not genders. Whether someone was male, female, or non-binary, it was their energy, kindness, and authenticity that drew me in. But in a society where love and attraction are expected to follow rigid norms, I constantly questioned myself.

At first, I felt confused and isolated. I didn't know anyone who identified as pansexual, and there was little to no representation around me. I feared judgment, rejection, and being misunderstood, not just by society, but even by those closest to me.

Eventually, I found the language to describe who I am. Identifying as pansexual felt liberating, but also terrifying. I wanted to scream it out loud, but instead, I whispered it only to a few trusted friends. Some were supportive, while others responded with silence or discomfort, which hurt.

What helped me was community; Online spaces, queer friends, and affirming events reminded me I wasn't alone. Sharing stories helped me find strength in my truth.

I want people to understand that pansexuality is real. It's not confusion or indecision; it's love beyond gender. I want others to know that visibility and acceptance matter. I am here. I exist. And my story deserves to be heard without shame.





I-STORY- FINDING MYSELF BEYOND FEAR; A JOURNEY OF COURAGE AND IDENTITY

Lemohang Seeko, Lesotho

My name is Lemohang Seeko, a proud nonbinary person from Mokema, a small rural village where being different often means being misunderstood. Growing up, I never quite fit into the boxes that society expected of me. I played freely with girls, dressed in ways that felt right to me, and expressed myself with honesty, but instead of acceptance, I was met with constant ridicule, bullying, and painful questions about who I was. "Are you a girl or a boy?" they would ask, as if my existence needed to fit into their categories.

Each word of mockery chipped away at my confidence and sense of belonging. I lived in silence, afraid to be seen, afraid to speak, and unsure if there was a place in this world for someone like me.

My turning point came when I was introduced to the People's Matrix Association, a community that opened my eyes and heart to a new world of understanding. Through their SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression) workshops, I learned the words that finally described my truth. For the first time, I understood that I was not broken, I was whole, human, and worthy of love and respect.

Surrounded by others who shared similar journeys, I began to heal, grow, and reclaim my voice. I started to see my identity not as a burden but as a source of strength. My confidence blossomed, and my fear slowly turned into purpose.

Even as I grow stronger, the world around me still has a long way to go. Violence, stigma, and discrimination continue to silence many LGBTQ+ people in Lesotho. The sodomy law remains a cruel reminder that our existence is still criminalised, and justice often feels out of reach. What needs to change is the system, the laws, the attitudes, and the silence that protect discrimination instead of people. We need education, empathy, and legal reform so that every person, regardless of gender or sexuality, can live freely and safely. I was once afraid to be seen, now I shine so others may find their light too.

The biggest challenges I face as an LGBTIQ+ person in my community are social rejection, verbal abuse, and a lack of legal protection. Many of us are still forced to hide who we are out of fear of losing our families, jobs, or safety. There is little access to mental health support, and even when we seek help, we are often judged instead of understood. To anyone going through a similar struggle, you are not alone. There is nothing wrong with being who you are. The world may try to dim your light, but within you lies the strength to rise again. Seek community, seek knowledge, and never stop believing that you deserve love and dignity. I dream of a Lesotho where being yourself is not an act of bravery but a simple right. I want to continue working with others to advocate for equality, amplify queer voices, and create safe spaces where no one feels invisible. Personally, I hope to pursue studies in social work or human rights, to help others find the same acceptance and power that saved me.

My story is not just mine; it is a reminder that even in a small village like Mokema, freedom begins when one person dares to be seen.

Read more I-Stories at <https://www.genderlinks.org.za/marang/>

WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?



Rainbow Justice: LGBTQ+ Legal Literacy Training
Legal Assistance Center, Namibia



Lesotho Pride Day
Unlocking Love x Queer WorX x The People's Matrix
Lesotho



The Wrong Generation Movie Trailer Launch
VCRC Institute, Namibia



Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity Expression & Sexual Characteristics
(SOGIESC) - University of Botswana clinical and support staff
LEGABIBO, Botswana



Queer Christmas Market
CAEC, Mauritius



Mosaic 2025
Friends of Diversity, Botswana



Safe Spaces Workshop
Women's Leadership Center, Namibia



Cake Picnic
Unlocking Love, Lesotho