TOOLKIT

for Engaging Religious Leaders to Embrace LGBTQI+ Diversity in Religious Teachings

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Introduction to the Toolkit

LGBTQI+ individuals Iin Nigeria frequently encounter significant discrimination, social rejection, and a lack of institutional support, which contribute to their alienation from religious communities. Within many religious frameworks, homosexual behaviour is often deemed "deviant" and "immoral," a perspective influenced by the adoption of heteronormative social and political norms prevalent in some Western cultures. These norms can create a hostile environment for LGBTQI+ individuals, leading to negative perceptions and stigmatisation.

In stark contrast, various faith–based organisations and communities in Western nations have begun to foster a more accepting attitude towards LGBTQI+ individuals. Many of these groups have made strides in separating sexual orientation from behaviours, thus, promoting a more inclusive understanding of identity that embraces diversity within their congregations.

However, within the Nigerian context both domestically and among diaspora communities the prevailing religious sentiment is generally resistant to the acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQI+ persons. This stance is often rooted in deeply held cultural and religious beliefs and interpretations of religious texts that view homosexuality as contrary to their values.

This landscape creates an urgent need for comprehensive efforts to confront the challenges faced by LGBTQI+ individuals in Nigeria. Advocating for greater understanding and inclusivity within religious communities is essential. Initiatives should focus on educating religious leaders and congregations about LGBTQI+ issues, fostering dialogue that promotes empathy and acceptance, and creating safe spaces for LGBTQI+ individuals within religious contexts. By doing so, we can work towards a more supportive environment that acknowledges and uplifts the dignity of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Moreover, the BAF Pathway to Religious Inclusion Toolkit is designed to reflect the best practices established through our comprehensive engagement with religious leaders. This toolkit serves as a valuable resource for fostering meaningful collaboration with these leaders in Nigeria, providing guidelines and strategies that can enhance dialogue, promote understanding, and facilitate inclusivity within diverse religious communities. By leveraging the insights gained from our interactions, the toolkit aims to empower LGBTQI+ stakeholders and Inclusion activists to effectively address the challenges of religious diversity and promote peaceful coexistence.
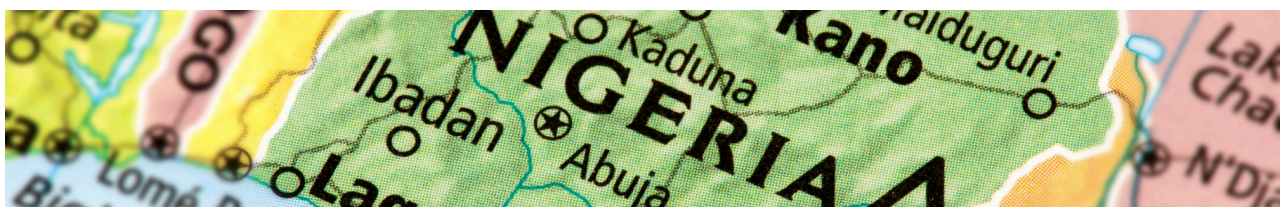
Purpose

To effectively promote understanding, foster meaningful dialogue, and encourage respectful engagement with religious leaders about LGBTQI issues in Nigeria, it is essential to create a framework that addresses cultural sensitivities, provides educational resources, and facilitates open conversations. This effort aims to bridge gaps in knowledge and perception, allowing for a constructive exchange of ideas that respects both religious beliefs and the rights of LGBTQI individuals. By creating safe spaces for discourse and dialogue, we can work towards greater acceptance and inclusion within Nigerian society.

Goals

- The toolkit serves as an entry point to engage with religious leaders and institutions in constructive and non-confrontational dialogue.
- Form synergy and safe space for religious institutions/leaders and marginalised communities or persons to engage and reconcile.
- Advocacy tool to institutionalised lessons learned.

Problem Statement

Nigerian LGBTQI+ individuals frequently encounter significant challenges such as discrimination, social rejection, and a lack of support, which often leads to their isolation from religious institutions. Within many Western religious cultures, homosexual behaviour is often labelled as "deviant" or "immoral," largely due to the prevailing adoption of heteronormative social and political norms. This perception stems from long-standing beliefs that prioritize heterosexual relationships as the only acceptable form of intimacy, thereby marginalizing those who identify as LGBTQI+.

In contrast, some faith communities and religious organizations in Western countries have made substantial strides in promoting acceptance of homosexual individuals. These communities have begun to separate personal identity from sexual behaviour, acknowledging that LGBTQI+ individuals can participate fully in religious life without compromising their sexual orientation. Such inclusivity represents a progressive move toward understanding the complexities of human identity and the importance of compassion within faith. However, in Nigeria, the prevailing religious society both within the country and among the diaspora firmly opposes the acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals in religious practices and discussions.

This rejection often stems from deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and interpretations of religious texts that condemn homosexuality. As a result, LGBTQI+ individuals face heightened discrimination, lack of acceptance, and a profound sense of alienation from their faith communities. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach grounded in empathy and dialogue. There is an urgent need to promote initiatives that foster understanding and inclusivity, encouraging religious leaders and community members to engage in meaningful conversations about sexual orientation and identity. Additionally, advocacy efforts must be strengthened to provide support for LGBTQI+ individuals within Nigerian religious contexts, creating spaces where they can be acknowledged and valued members of their faith communities. Ultimately, advancing understanding and inclusivity is essential not only for the well–being of LGBTQI+ individuals but also for fostering a more compassionate and harmonious society.

Key Concepts on LGBTQI Rights and Diversity

Key distinctions between sexual orientation and gender identity

Lesbian

Gay

Bisexual,

Transgender

Queer/ Questioning

Intersex

Sex

Sex refers to the biological attributes that define individuals as male, female, or intersex. This classification is influenced by a combination of chromosomes (DNA), hormones, and the presence of specific internal and external sexual organs.

Female

Females typically possess a set of internal reproductive organs that includes the uterus, where a fertilized egg can develop into a fetus; the fallopian tubes, which carry eggs from the ovaries to the uterus; and the ovaries, which produce eggs and hormones such as estrogen. Externally, females have a vagina, which serves as the birth canal and the passage for menstrual fluid.

Male

Males generally have internal reproductive organs including the prostate, which produces seminal fluid; the testicles, which produce sperm and hormones such as testosterone; and the vas deferens, which transports sperm from the testicles. Externally, males typically have a scrotum, which houses the testicles and helps regulate their temperature, and a penis, which is used for sexual intercourse and urination.

Intersex

Intersex individuals may have anatomical characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female. This can include variations in chromosomes, hormones, or reproductive/sexual anatomy that display features of both male and female bodies. Intersex is a naturally occurring variation in humans and may involve a range of conditions affecting sexual development.

Gender Identity & Gender Expression

This refers to how a person identifies and expresses themselves, including their behavior, clothing, and roles within the family and society.

- **Man**: Male/Masculine
- **Woman:** Female/Feminine
- **Gender Non-Conforming/Non-Binary**: Individuals who do not conform to or align with traditional masculine or feminine gender norms.
- **Androgyny**: People who exhibit a combination of both masculine and feminine characteristics. Androgyny applies to individuals who prefer not to be identified by a specific gender.
- **Transgender**: Individuals whose biological sex and assigned gender at birth do not align with their psychological gender identity.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is an aspect of human identity that refers to an individual's persistent emotional, romantic, physical, or sexual feelings and attractions toward others. It plays a significant role in shaping personal relationships and can encompass a variety of experiences and connections. The primary categories of sexual orientation include:

Heterosexual: Individuals who identify as heterosexual are attracted to members of the opposite sex. This orientation is often associated with traditional relationships in which one partner is male and the other is female.

Homosexual: This orientation refers to individuals who are attracted to members of the same sex. Within this category, there are specific terms such as "lesbian," which describes women who are emotionally and physically attracted to other women, and "gay," which typically refers to men who are attracted to other men. Homosexuality represents a significant aspect of LGBTQ+ identities and encompasses a wide range of experiences.

Bisexual: Bisexual individuals experience attraction to both sexes, though this does not necessarily mean that their feelings are evenly distributed or occur simultaneously. For some, attraction may fluctuate over time or maybe more intense toward one sex at certain periods. The bisexual experience is diverse and varies greatly from person to person, highlighting the individual nuances of attraction.

Overall, highlights other sexuality under the umbrella term and clearly emphasizes that sexual orientation is an essential part of human diversity, influencing how people connect with one another and form relationships throughout their lives. Understanding and respecting various orientations foster a more inclusive society that celebrates individual experiences.

Preminarily Stage

1.1 Building Understanding of Religious and Cultural-Societal Framework.

Human Rights Framework

Highlight the importance of the Human Rights Framework which underscores the fundamental principle that every individual has the right to live free from discrimination, violence, and persecution. This principle is essential for the protection of human dignity and personal freedom. It recognises that all people, regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation, deserve to be treated with respect and fairness and that any form of discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic is a violation of human rights. In addition, points out that the framework acknowledges the diversity of sexual and gender identities, explaining that sexuality and gender are not binary but exist along a spectrum. This diversity is a natural aspect of human existence and must be recognised and respected. Understanding and honouring this diversity is not only a matter of social justice but also a human right. Respecting individuals' rights to express their sexual orientation and gender identity promotes inclusivity and fosters a society where everyone can thrive without fear of discrimination or violence. It is important to cite that Many countries' constitutions enshrine the protection of fundamental human rights, often in broad terms that include LGBTQI+ rights, even if not specifically mentioned. Below are general principles often found in national constitutions:

- **Equality before the Law:** Most constitutions emphasize that all people are equal before the law, regardless of sex, gender, race, or sexual orientation.
- **Right to Privacy**: A common provision in many constitutions is the right to privacy, which is essential for protecting LGBTQI+ individuals from state or societal interference in their personal relationships. For example, **Article 12** of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** states:

"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation." This can protect LGBTQI+ individuals from discriminatory laws and practices that criminalize same-sex relationships

The VAPP Act was passed in Nigeria to criminalize violence against individuals, including those who experience violence based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.

- **Section 1:** Prohibits all forms of violence, which includes domestic violence, sexual violence, and harmful traditional practices.
- **Section 14:** Provides legal recourse for victims of violence, which can include LGBTQI+ individuals who may be subjected to discrimination and abuse.

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

The **ACHPR** (also known as the **Banjul Charter**) is a regional instrument that enshrines the protection of human rights across Africa. It is a key tool for advocating for the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals in African countries, although the interpretation and enforcement of LGBTQI+ rights vary by state.

- **Article 2:** *"Every individual shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms recognized and guaranteed in the present Charter without distinction of any kind such as race, ethnic group, color, sex, language, religion, political or any other opinion, national or social origin, fortune, birth or any status."*

Maputo Protocol (Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa)

The **Maputo Protocol** (2003) focuses on the protection of women's rights in Africa, but it is relevant to LGBTQI+ issues as well, particularly with regard to the rights of gender-diverse and non-binary individuals.

- **Article 2:** *"State parties shall combat all forms of discrimination, particularly those based on sex, including sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, early marriage, and forced marriage."*
- **Article 4:** *"State parties shall take appropriate measures to eliminate violence against women, including sexual violence, and to prohibit all forms of violence, including domestic violence, and harmful practices."*

United Nations Mechanisms and Frameworks

The **United Nations** has a range of mechanisms aimed at protecting the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals and ensuring that their rights are upheld under international law. Some key documents include:

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948)**
  - **Article 1:** *"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."*
  - **Article 2**: *"Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."*

UN Treaty Bodies and Human Rights Mechanisms

- **The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966)**
  - **Article 2:** Requires states to ensure that the rights of all individuals, without discrimination, are protected under the law. This has been interpreted to include protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
  - **Article 17:** Protects against arbitrary interference with privacy, family, and home, which applies to LGBTQI+ individuals, particularly in relation to laws that criminalize same-sex relationships or invade private life.

Understanding the Stakeholder's Landscape in Nigeria

The environmental landscape regarding LGBTQI+ inclusion within religious settings in Nigeria is notably intricate, shaped by a blend of cultural, religious, and political influences. As one of the most religiously observant countries in the world, Nigeria is predominantly influenced by two major religions: Islam and Christianity. These faiths play a crucial role in defining societal norms, establishing laws, and guiding everyday practices. The integration of LGBTQI+ individuals into these religious contexts is a subject of intense controversy and debate.

Key Stakeholders and Their Perspectives:

Religious Leaders and Institutions:

- Islamic Leaders: Islam is one of Nigeria's dominant religions, with a significant portion of the population adhering to its teachings. Traditional Islamic interpretations generally see homosexuality as a grave sin, which leads many Islamic leaders to firmly oppose the inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals within religious practices and community life. This opposition is often rooted in interpretations of Sharia law, which emphasizes moral conduct in accordance with religious doctrine. Islamic leaders frequently advocate for adherence to these beliefs, further entrenching the exclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals.

- Christian Leaders: Similarly, many Christian denominations in Nigeria including Orthodox, Evangelical, and Pentecostal groups regard homosexuality as immoral, drawing upon their interpretations of Biblical scripture to support this view. While there are progressive Christian movements globally that advocate for LGBTQI+ rights and inclusion, such perspectives are largely marginalized in Nigeria. The majority of Nigerian Christian leaders maintain a conservative stance, perceiving LGBTQI+ issues as contrary to their faith's teachings and frequently equating advocacy for LGBTQI+ rights with a threat to traditional family values and societal morality.

Political and Legal Framework: The Nigerian government's position on LGBTQI+ rights is characterized by repression and a lack of legal recognition. The passage of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act in 2014 marked a pivotal moment in this regard, criminalizing not only same-sex marriages but also any form of advocacy or support for LGBTQI+ rights. This legislation reflects the government's alignment with conservative religious sentiments and the pressures exerted by influential religious groups. Consequently, public officials are often cautious about discussions surrounding LGBTQI+ inclusion, fearing backlash from constituents who hold traditional views

Social and Cultural Framework: In Nigeria, public opinion on LGBTQI+ issues is predominantly conservative. A significant portion of the population perceives homosexuality as contrary to deeply held cultural norms and religious beliefs. This societal stance creates a challenging environment for religious institutions, which may wish to advocate for LGBTQI+ inclusion. Many such institutions hesitate to support these communities due to the potential backlash they would face from their congregations and the broader community. The fear of social ostracism and loss of support forces these institutions to prioritize traditional values over inclusivity, further entrenching stigma and discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals in Nigeria.

Religion and culture are intricately linked, influencing one another in profound ways. Many cultural values, particularly those related to gender roles and sexuality, are rooted in conservative principles that align closely with religious teachings. This alignment creates a framework in which traditional beliefs shape societal norms. Consequently, the inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals is often perceived not only as a challenge to specific religious doctrines but also as a threat to long-standing cultural practices and traditions. This intersection makes the conversation about LGBTQI+ rights particularly complex, as it involves navigating deeply held beliefs and the potential for significant cultural change

Understand Your Audience

1. Explore the Religious Landscape within your context: Take the time to familiarise yourself with the diverse religious affiliations and perspectives of the leaders you will engage with regarding LGBTQI+ matters and inclusion within religious spaces. Understand that perceptiveness will differ according to various Christian denominations, Islamic sects, and traditional religious authorities. This understanding will provide a solid foundation for meaningful dialogue and guide your approach to engagement.
2. Invest in Values and Beliefs Research: Delve into the theological perspectives, doctrines, and scriptural interpretations that shape the views of these leaders on LGBTQI issues. This research will enhance your ability to connect with their values and concerns.
3. Recognise Key Concerns: Identify the specific issues that religious leaders may have regarding LGBTQI topics, often influenced by their theological beliefs, moral values, and societal perceptions. Acknowledging these concerns is essential for fostering respectful and productive discussions.

Theological Perspectives and Approaches

Identifying Possible Theological Concerns

Ensure to recognise the religious texts and doctrines from various faiths that may be perceived as restrictive or prohibitive regarding LGBTQI issues. This involves examining specific passages and teachings that have historically been interpreted in ways that disallow or condemn LGBTQI identities and relationships and create room for deliberation. This is critical as this forms the basis of your argument and ensures to employ all the practical strategies listed above. Note it is important to deal with participants' comments/interpretation of verses that homosexuality is a sin similar to adultery immediately.

Biblical and Qur'anic Interpretations

This part aims to highlight a range of interpretations from progressive theologians who advocate for the inclusion of LGBTQI individuals within religious communities. It includes:

- For Christianity: An exploration of the inclusive teachings of Jesus Christ, which emphasize principles of love, acceptance, and non-judgment. This section addresses how these teachings can be understood in a way that supports LGBTQI inclusion, countering traditional interpretations that may convey exclusion. Here are some key scriptural texts often cited in discussions about homosexuality, emphasizing behavior rather than personal identity. Each reference is accompanied by context to enrich understanding.

1. Leviticus 18:22 (Old Testament) "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." Context: This verse is part of a larger collection of purity laws directed at the Israelites, outlining various prohibitions on sexual behaviors intended to maintain communal holiness and separation from surrounding nations.

The specific prohibition against same-sex sexual relations is often interpreted as condemning male-to-male sexual intercourse. Importantly, this text does not delve into the concept of sexual identity; its focus is solely on banning specific actions deemed unacceptable within the community.

2. Leviticus 20:13 (Old Testament) "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads." Context: This verse reiterates the prohibition found in Leviticus 18:22 and extends the consequences of such actions, prescribing capital punishment for those engaged in same-sex sexual activity. It reflects the severity with which these behaviors were viewed in the ancient Israelite society. Like its predecessor, this passage emphasizes behavior without addressing the broader implications of sexual identity or orientation.

3. Romans 1:26-27 (New Testament) "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error." Context: This passage is often cited in New Testament discussions regarding same-sex behavior, illustrating Paul's perspective on the consequences of turning away from divine guidance. He describes same-sex acts as "unnatural," which aligns with his broader argument about humanity's departure from God's design and moral order. The focus here is on specific actions considered sinful rather than an exploration of sexual identity, which is not addressed in this text.

4. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (New Testament) "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." **Context:** In this passage, Paul warns the Corinthian church about various behaviors that can lead to exclusion from the kingdom of God. The phrase "men who have sex with men" (often rendered as "homosexual offenders" or "effeminate" in some translations) is part of a broader list of sinful behaviors. The exact interpretation of this term is subject to debate among scholars, but the primary focus is still on actions rather than a comprehensive understanding of sexual identity.

5. 1 Timothy 1:9-10 (New Testament) "We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers and for whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine." Context: Similar to earlier texts, this passage classifies actions deemed immoral. The term "those practicing homosexuality," derived from the Greek word "arsenokoitai," is understood by some as referring specifically to men engaging in same-sex sexual activities; however, its precise meaning is debated among scholars. As with previous examples, this passage emphasizes behavior over sexual identity, thereby contributing to ongoing discussions about morality within the framework of Christian doctrine.

- For Islam: An examination of compassionate interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith that call for empathy and understanding towards LGBTQI individuals. This includes discussions on the importance of context, historical perspectives, and the core Islamic values of compassion and justice. This can provide a foundation for welcoming LGBTQI individuals in Muslim communities.

Addressing Misconceptions

It is important to clarify and correct widespread myths about LGBTQI individuals. One common myth is the belief that LGBTQI identities are unnatural or deviate from the norm. In reality, diverse sexual orientations and gender identities have existed across cultures and throughout history, demonstrating that they are a natural part of the human experience. Another prevalent misconception is the notion that LGBTQI identities are a "Western import." In truth, many cultures around the world recognise and celebrate LGBTQI identities and have done so long before modern Western influence. By dispelling these myths, and creating a clear understanding of queer existence, you'll foster a greater inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQI individuals in all societies. Here's a more detailed breakdown of how to recognize myths about LGBTQI+ people, viewed through cultural, historical, and religious lenses;
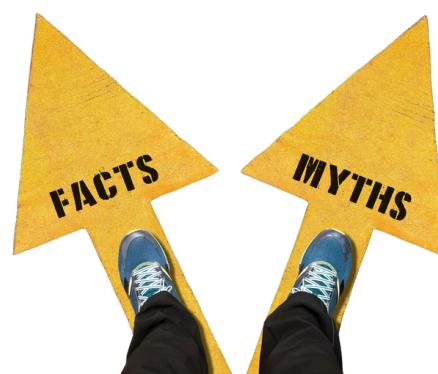
A. Cultural Myths and Stereotypes

Cultural myths originate from deeply ingrained beliefs and societal norms that have existed for generations. Often, these myths are fueled by fear of the unfamiliar, a lack of comprehensive education on LGBTQI+ issues, or a societal desire to uphold traditional structures that prioritize heteronormative values over diverse identities.

Myth: LGBTQI+ people are "unnatural" or "against nature.

"Reality: The concept of what is deemed "natural" is not static; it has been fluid throughout history. Research indicates that same-sex behavior has been documented across various civilizations, from ancient cultures like Greece and Rome to Indigenous communities in the Americas and Africa. These historical accounts challenge the perception that non-heteronormative relationships are a recent phenomenon or contrary to human nature.

Myth: LGBTQI+ people are mentally
Reality: This myth stems from antiquated psychological views that classified homosexuality as a mental disorder, a concept that has since been thoroughly debunked. The American Psychiatric Association made a significant change in 1973 when it declassified homosexuality as a mental illness, and in 1992, the World Health Organization removed it from its International Classification of Diseases. It's essential to understand that mental health concerns in LGBTQI+ individuals often result from societal stigma, discrimination, and marginalization rather than being inherent to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

B. Religious Myths and Misinterpretations

Religious beliefs and interpretations of sacred texts can significantly impact societal attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. Many myths related to religion stem from selective readings that highlight certain scriptural passages while disregarding more inclusive interpretations.

Myth: All major world religions condemn homosexuality and transgender identities.
Reality: While it is true that some religious traditions and interpretations actively oppose same-sex relationships, many others advocate for inclusivity and acceptance. Different branches within major religions hold varying views, with some emphasizing love, compassion, and justice over traditional interpretations that condemn.

Myth: Homosexuality is a sin and an abomination according to the Bible.
Reality: Although certain biblical passages are commonly cited as condemning same-sex relationships, many scholars argue that these interpretations do not reflect a comprehensive understanding of the text. The Bible does not explicitly address modern concepts of sexual identity or orientation, and many of its passages were contextualized within specific historical and cultural frameworks that differ vastly from today's societal understandings.
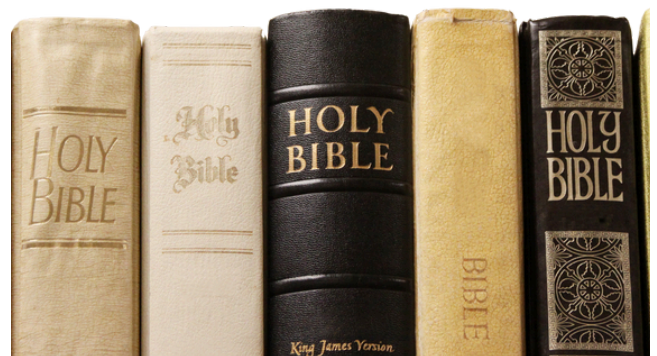
C. Social and Political Myths

Myth: LGBTQI+ individuals are a "threat" to traditional family structures.

Reality: This myth falsely portrays LGBTQI+ individuals and families as undermining the institution of marriage and family life. In reality, families can take many forms, and extensive research demonstrates that LGBTQI+ individuals are capable of creating loving and supportive family environments, just like heterosexual couples. Studies have shown that children raised in LGBTQI+ households fare just as well emotionally, socially, and academically as those raised in heterosexual households. The perception that LGBTQI+ individuals threaten traditional family structures stems from a limited understanding of what family means in our evolving society. Ultimately, the foundation of any family is the love and support shared among its members, irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Upholding Human Dignity in Religious Teachings

Understand that this principle highlights the belief that every individual is created in the image of God, which serves as the foundation for their inherent worth and dignity. It asserts that all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, deserve to be treated with respect and compassion. Emphasizing this gives you a stance and clearly reminds religious leaders that Religious teachings often advocate for love and acceptance, encouraging communities to embrace diversity and foster an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and acknowledged. This perspective not only aligns with core spiritual values but also promotes a more just and harmonious society.

Using Sacred Texts Responsibly: A Closer Look at the Bible

When engaging with sacred texts like the Bible, it is crucial to examine them thoroughly while considering the historical, cultural, and literary contexts in which they were written. This approach involves exploring the intentions behind the text and understanding the societal norms of the time. Here are some guiding questions to facilitate this deeper inquiry:

Historical Context: What was the intended meaning of the text at the time it was written, considering the social, cultural, and political circumstances of the author(s)? This requires an understanding of the customs, beliefs, and values that prevailed in that era.

Literary Context: How do the specific verses fit within the larger passages and narrative of the Bible? Analyzing the surrounding verses and chapters is essential for grasping the overall message and themes the author aimed to convey.

Contemporary Relevance: What implications does this passage hold today, given our evolving understanding of relationships and human rights? This involves reflecting on how contemporary society interprets these texts in light of modern knowledge and ethical considerations.

Regarding the topic of homosexuality, there are SIX texts in the Bible that reference homosexual acts

1. Genesis 1:27: This verse speaks to the creation of humanity in God's image, highlighting the inherent dignity of all people.
2. Genesis 2:24: Often quoted in discussions about marriage, this verse describes the union of a man and woman, which can be viewed in various ways concerning different types of relationships.
3. Genesis 19:1–14: This passage recounts the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which has been interpreted in multiple ways throughout history.
4. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: These verses from the Holiness Code address prohibited sexual practices within the context of ancient Israelite society.
5. Romans 1:26–27: This passage is often cited in discussions about sexual orientation and describes certain behaviours viewed negatively by Paul.
6. 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and 1 Timothy 1:10: These New Testament texts include lists of behaviours condemned concerning moral conduct.

It is important to emphasise that none of these references explicitly condemn loving, committed, and respectful sexual relationships between adults in the context of a faithful marriage, regardless of whether those relationships are homosexual or heterosexual. Engaging with these texts in a thoughtful and informed manner can lead to a more nuanced understanding of love and commitment in all forms.

2. Practical Stage

Engaging with Religious Leaders and Institutions; Practical Strategies for Engagement

A. Creating Safe Spaces for Dialogue: To establish a safe space, we encourage all participants to engage in open and honest discussions, even when the topics may be challenging or sensitive. It is essential for the group to collaboratively identify and agree upon the specific guidelines and principles that will help foster an atmosphere of safety and respect. This could include setting ground rules for active listening, maintaining confidentiality, and promoting non-judgmental attitudes. By creating a mutual understanding of what constitutes a safe environment, we can facilitate meaningful conversations that allow everyone to share their perspectives and experiences without fear of judgment or backlash. It is also important to consider a snowball approach while consulting with religious leaders. It is essential you do a needs assessment and stakeholder mapping to identify religious groups and leaders that would form part of the discussion body thereby constituting allies and partners

B. Facilitating private discussions or study circles: Organizing private discussions or study circles that provide a safe and confidential environment for religious leaders to openly share their concerns and challenges. These gatherings will encourage in-depth exploration of various topics, fostering a culture of learning and collaboration. Participants will be able to engage in meaningful dialogue, ask questions, and exchange perspectives, ultimately enhancing their understanding and ability to address the issues within their communities more effectively.

C. Be Observant of Body Language: Observe the body language of all participants closely, as it can provide valuable insights into their feelings and comfort levels. Approach interactions with sensitivity and empathy, and strive to avoid taking any comments or actions personally, even if they may seem directed at you. Additionally, being vigilant about both direct and indirect forms of hate speech is crucial. Ensure that everyone involved feels safe and respected, and actively work to create an inclusive environment where everyone's dignity is upheld. In an instance where participants feel threatened or you perceive a threat, be sure to break the session and initiate a silos approach to engagement.

D. Recognise Trigger sign: Furthermore, take time to recognise and understand your own emotional triggers—those situations or comments that might provoke an intense emotional reaction. By acknowledging these triggers, you can equip yourself to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively, thereby fostering a more constructive dialogue.

E. Power Dynamics: As a facilitator, it is essential to recognise and understand the various power dynamics at play within the group setting, as you hold the critical responsibility of creating and maintaining a safe and inclusive environment for all participants. Power dynamics can significantly influence how individuals interact, share their perspectives, and engage in discussions. Several factors contribute to the power each participant and facilitator possesses. These include, but are not limited to, age, gender identity, cultural background, economic status, the structure of church governance, geographic location (such as being from a rural area versus an urban center), and language. Each of these elements shapes how individuals perceive themselves and others in the group, which in turn affects participation dynamics. To foster a more equitable space, it is vital to help participants become aware of their own power and its implications on group interactions. Encourage self-reflection and open dialogue about how these dynamics play out in the group. By doing so, participants can better understand their roles and contributions, leading to a more engaged and respectful community. This awareness will empower everyone to participate more fully and authentically in the discussions, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness of the group.

F. Building Trust and Rapport: To effectively build trust and rapport with religious leaders, it is essential to approach them with a sense of humility and openness. This means acknowledging their knowledge and experience while actively listening to their perspectives. Showing genuine respect for their beliefs and values fosters an environment of mutual understanding, making it easier to engage in meaningful dialogue and collaboration. Demonstrating an interest in their insights and honoring their contributions can significantly strengthen the relationship over time.

G. Respecting Religious Beliefs: It is essential to recognise the profound significance of religion in the lives of many individuals and communities irrespective of sexual orientation and gender identity. By acknowledging this importance, you'll foster an environment that promotes a respectful and open dialogue about different beliefs and practices, allowing you to dive into conversations around queer diversity through issue framing.

The constructive discussions allow for a better understanding of diverse perspectives, encouraging tolerance and coexistence among individuals with varying perspectives regarding LGBTQI+ diversity. You strive to approach religious discussions with sensitivity and empathy, ensuring that all voices are heard and respected.

H. Dealing with Negative Reactions: It is essential to anticipate the possibility of resistance from others when presenting new ideas or changes. To effectively manage potential backlash, take the time to identify the reasons behind the negative reactions you may encounter. Develop a comprehensive plan that includes strategies for addressing concerns thoughtfully and empathetically. Approach these situations with patience and understanding, allowing for open dialogue and constructive feedback.

3. Post-engagement stage

Institutionalizing and advocacy plan:

1. Define Advocacy

Advocacy is a multifaceted process aimed at supporting or promoting a specific cause or policy through a variety of strategic actions. This may include influencing decision-makers, raising public awareness, and mobilizing community support to address critical issues. Effective advocacy often involves identifying key stakeholders, such as lawmakers and community leaders, and engaging them in dialogue to emphasize the importance of the cause. In the context of working with religious leaders, advocacy takes on an additional dimension. It is essential to connect the cause with their moral and ethical beliefs, which can significantly resonate with their followers. This alignment not only helps to garner support from religious communities but also encourages leaders to actively promote the cause within their congregations. By fostering partnerships and creating a shared vision, advocacy can drive meaningful change and inspire collective action on important social issues.

2. Working with and within the System

A deep and nuanced understanding of the environment in which religious leaders operate is essential for impactful advocacy efforts.

These leaders often serve as pivotal figures within their communities, wielding considerable influence over the hearts and minds of their congregations. Therefore, engaging with them necessitates a careful examination of the intricate social, cultural, and political landscapes that inform their views and decisions. Successful advocacy hinges on the ability to resonate with the core beliefs and moral values that are cherished by both the leaders and their followers. This involves not only showing respect for these values but also crafting strategies that align seamlessly with them. For example, acknowledging the integral role of faith in shaping community identity can help advocates frame their messages in a way that connects with the spiritual convictions of the audience. This approach might include incorporating religious teachings or relevant narratives that highlight the importance of addressing specific social issues. By demonstrating an understanding of the unique challenges and aspirations that the community faces, advocates can foster a sense of trust and partnership. Such a commitment to shared values paves the way for collaborative efforts that can lead to transformative outcomes, ultimately enriching the lives of those in the community and promoting positive social change

Key Actions:

- Build trust through respectful and open communication.
- Understand the power dynamics and decision-making processes within the religious community.
- Work with existing systems and structures, whether hierarchical or decentralized, to ensure advocacy efforts are effective.

3. Identify the Issue

Begin by clearly articulating the specific issue you wish to address. This process includes pinpointing the core problem, collecting relevant data, and gaining a comprehensive understanding of how it impacts the community at large. By assessing the nuances of the situation, you can better illustrate its significance. Religious leaders are often more inclined to lend their support to causes that resonate with their values and that address the pressing needs faced by their congregations. Highlighting the connection between the issue and the community's well-being can strengthen your case and foster collaboration.

Key Actions:

- Conduct research to understand the issue deeply.
- Connect the issue to the values and principles upheld by the religious community (e.g., justice, peace, compassion).
- Ensure the issue has a direct impact on the community the religious leader serves.

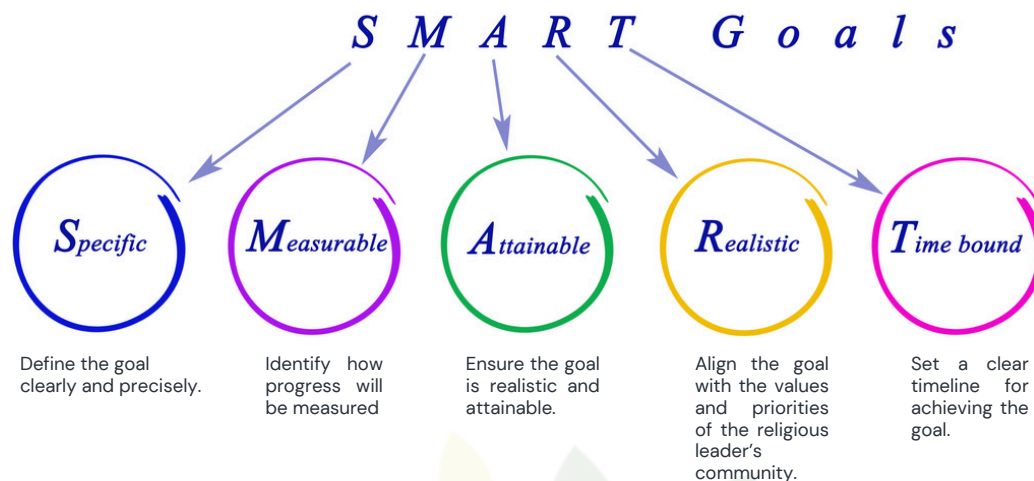## 4. Create Advocacy Wheel for Engagement

An advocacy wheel is a dynamic tool that provides a visual representation of the various strategies and tactics essential for successful advocacy efforts. This tool helps to systematically identify critical components, including diverse stakeholders, clear goals, and specific actions. By mapping out these elements, the advocacy wheel illustrates how they interconnect and influence one another, creating a cohesive and effective advocacy strategy. Understanding this interaction is key to developing a robust approach that can mobilize support and drive meaningful change

Components of the Advocacy Wheel:
- Stakeholders: Identify all involved parties (e.g., religious leaders, community members, policymakers).
- Objectives: Define the goals of the advocacy campaign.
- Tactics: Decide on the activities (e.g., speeches, media outreach, petitions).
- Resources: Identify the tools, people, and funding needed.
- Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): Track the effectiveness of tactics and adjust accordingly.

5. Explain SMART Principle as a Tool

The SMART principle is an acronym for creating clear, actionable goals. It ensures that your advocacy objectives are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This framework helps guide the development of realistic and targeted objectives.

S M A R T   G o a l s

Specific	**M**easurable	**A**ttainable	**R**ealistic	**T**ime bound
Define the goal clearly and precisely.	Identify how progress will be measured	Ensure the goal is realistic and attainable.	Align the goal with the values and priorities of the religious leader's community.	Set a clear timeline for achieving the goal.

6. Refine Your Policy Position, Advocacy Target, and Ask

Once you have clearly identified the issue at hand and established specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals, the next step is to articulate your policy position. This involves outlining your stance on the issue and the changes you wish to see. After that, it's essential to identify your advocacy target this could be a specific individual, organization, or governmental body that has the power to effect the change you seek. Finally, you should formulate a precise and compelling request, often referred to as the "ask," that clearly states what you want the targeted advocate to do, ensuring your message is straightforward and actionable.

> **Steps to Refine:**
>
> - Policy Position: Clarify your stance on the issue and why it matters.
> - Advocacy Target: Identify the key decision-makers (e.g., government officials, community leaders, policymakers).
> - The Ask: Clearly articulate what action you want your advocacy target to take (e.g., policy change, funding allocation, public statement).

7. Advocacy Tactics

Advocacy tactics encompass the specific strategies and actions employed to persuade your advocacy targets effectively. When interacting with religious leaders, it's crucial to tailor these tactics in a manner that honors their authoritative position and acknowledges the intricate dynamics of the community they represent. By demonstrating respect for their role and the values of their congregation, you can foster more meaningful dialogue and collaboration.

Common Tactics:

- Dialogue: Organize meetings with religious leaders to discuss the issue and potential solutions.
- Public Speaking: Leverage the leader's platform (e.g., sermons or community events) to raise awareness.
- Petitions: Mobilize the congregation to sign petitions or support statements of solidarity.
- Coalition Building: Collaborate with other religious or community groups for a broader impact.
- Media Campaigns: Utilize religious media (radio, TV, social media) to share messages.

8. Developing Your Advocacy Message

Craft a clear and compelling message that deeply resonates with the religious leader and their vibrant community. Your message should thoughtfully reflect the core values and beliefs held dear by the religious leader while emphasizing the significance of the issue at hand. **Key Elements of an Effective Message:

A. **Clarity**: Strive for simplicity, ensuring that the message is straightforward and easily understood by all members of the community.

B. **Relevance:** Connect the message directly to the specific challenges and needs faced by the community, demonstrating a genuine understanding of their context.

C. **Emotional Appeal:** Touch upon the leader's moral and ethical responsibilities, invoking feelings that inspire empathy and a sense of duty within the community.

D. **Action-Oriented:** Provide a powerful call to action, encouraging the religious leader to take decisive steps that empower both them and their community to engage meaningfully with the issue.

9. Develop Your Advocacy Strategy and Timeline

Creating a well-structured strategy and timeline is crucial for keeping your advocacy efforts on course. This plan should outline specific activities, complete with clear deadlines and designated individuals or teams responsible for each task. By mapping out these elements, you can ensure accountability and maintain momentum in your initiatives.

Steps to Refine:

- Set Priorities: Determine which tactics will have the most significant impact and focus on those first.
- Create a Timeline: Break down the advocacy campaign into phases (e.g., preparation, engagement, follow-up).
- Assign Roles: Identify who will be responsible for each task and set clear expectations.
- Monitor and Evaluate: Regularly assess the effectiveness of your tactics.
- Solicit Feedback: Ask religious leaders and community members for input on how to improve.
- Adapt and Improve: Use lessons learned to refine your approach for future campaigns.

10. Lobbying

Lobbying is the process of actively engaging with decision-makers to influence the formulation and implementation of policies. This may involve a range of activities, such as scheduling meetings with government officials, participating in public hearings, or presenting well-researched evidence and arguments to advocate for a particular cause. Additionally, religious leaders can serve as critical allies in these efforts, leveraging their access to influential networks and their capacity to mobilize communities, thereby amplifying the impact of lobbying initiatives. Their unique position often allows them to connect with a diverse audience, making them powerful advocates for change.

> **Key Lobbying Tactics:**
> - Direct Meetings: Organize meetings between religious leaders and key policymakers.
> - Written Appeals: Have religious leaders send letters or petitions to decision-makers.
> - Public Statements: Encourage religious leaders to make public statements calling for action on the issue.

11. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are vital components of any successful advocacy campaign, as they provide insights into the effectiveness of your efforts and the overall impact on your target issue. By implementing a structured M&E process, you can ensure that your advocacy remains focused, adaptable, and results-oriented.

Key M&E Activities:

A. Track Progress: Consistently collect and analyze data to monitor key milestones and activities. This may include tracking the number of stakeholders engaged, social media interactions, or policy changes initiated. Establishing a timeline and clear indicators will help you visualize progress and stay motivated.

B. Assess Impact: Conduct thorough evaluations to determine whether your advocacy initiatives have led to the intended outcomes. This involves analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data, such as community feedback, changes in public perception, or legislative advancements. Understanding the broader impact of your efforts will inform your future strategies.

C. Adjust Tactics: Utilize the feedback and evaluation results to refine your advocacy strategies. Flexibility is crucial; be prepared to pivot your approach based on what the data reveals. This could mean altering messaging, targeting a different audience, or employing new outreach methods to enhance effectiveness.

By consistently engaging in these activities, you will position your advocacy efforts for greater success and ensure they are responsive to the needs of the community you aim to serve.

Report

Pathways of Inclusion – Equipping Religious Leaders to Embrace LGBTQI Diversity in Nigeria. (Bisi Alimi Foundation)
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1C4ao3Pitd1FqL4gObZh8BmbhJ77Y5CJu/view?usp=drive_link

Toolkits

Fearless Allies – Conversations for LGBT Inclusion
Religious Dialogue Toolkit. (Global Interfaith Network).
https://gin-ssogie.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/GIN_Brochure_A4_final_web.pdf

Hearts Set on Pilgrimage – Preparing LGBTQI People of Faith to Participate in Dialogue with Religious Leaders. https://www.gin-ssogie.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HSOP-v2.0_sample.pdf

Dialogue for Transformation (Inclusive and Affirming Ministry)
https://iam.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Dialogue-Manual_WEB.pdf

Islam, Sexual Diversity and Access to Healthy Services.
(APCOM Foundation)
https://www.apcom.org/sites/default/files/discussion_paper-islam12.pdf

Best practices in training clergy and other religious leaders (Inclusive and Affirming Ministry)
https://iam.org.za/project/best-practices-in-training-clergy-and-other-religious-leaders/

The bibe and Homosexuality (Inclusive and Affirming Ministry)
https://iam.org.za/project/the-bible-homosexuality-toolkit/

Book

Holy Censorship or Mistranslation
K. Renato Lings
Edited by
Rev'd J. P. Mokgethi-Heath
Rev'd Loraine Tulleken

Closing the Engagement

A. Summarise Key Points

B. Recap the Discussion:

It's essential to recap the main topics we covered during our conversation. Take a moment to highlight the key points of agreement, understanding, or insight that emerged. This not only reinforces what we've discussed but also ensures everyone leaves with a clear understanding of the dialogue.

C. Extend an Invitation for Continued Dialogue:

It is vital to encourage a culture of openness and willingness to engage in future discussions. By extending an invitation for continued dialogue, we can foster relationships and build a supportive community. This can pave the way for a deeper exploration of the subjects we touched on.

D. Offer Resources for Further Learning:

Sharing additional resources is an effective way to encourage further exploration of the topics discussed. Consider offering religious texts, scholarly articles, or curated lists of references that address LGBTQI issues from a faith-based perspective. This not only enriches understanding but also empowers individuals to learn at their own pace.

Conclusion:

The journey toward embracing queer diversity within religious communities presents a valuable opportunity for growth and transformation, particularly in contexts where cultural, theological, and social norms may challenge such inclusion. This toolkit serves as a guide to demonstrate that engaging religious leaders on matters of LGBTQI+ equality and acceptance is both attainable and vital for cultivating a compassionate and inclusive faith community. By approaching religious leaders with genuine respect for their spiritual roles and an appreciation for the values they hold dear, we can pave the way for meaningful dialogue that focuses on love, justice, and human dignity. Highlighting shared beliefs, such as compassion, respect, and the sanctity of life, can help bridge the gap between faith and queer inclusion, creating space for reflection, reinterpretation, and transformative change.

The resources offered in this toolkit provide practical steps to actively engage and support religious leaders in navigating LGBTQI+ issues. These actions aim to reduce harmful stigmas while emphasizing the ethical responsibility of religious leaders to ensure that every individual, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, is treated with the utmost respect and dignity. The ultimate aspiration of this engagement is to not only shift the conversation but to transform religious communities into environments where love, acceptance, and justice reign. When religious leaders embrace queer diversity, they affirm the inherent value of LGBTQI+ individuals and reinforce the foundational tenets of faith that inspire us to love and serve everyone within our shared human family. Although this journey may have its challenges, the potential rewards of a more compassionate, inclusive, and just society are well worth the effort.

TOOLKIT

for Engaging Religious Leaders to Embrace LGBTQI+ Diversity in Religious Teachings