



The Inclusive Governance Initiative:

Promoting an inclusive approach to sexual and gender diversity that advances the SDGs and Agenda 2063 in Sub-Saharan Africa

In adopting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, the Member States of the United Nations made a “pledge that no one will be left behind”. The African Union’s Agenda 2063 has similar commitments to including and prioritizing the poorest and most marginalized in development efforts.

Recognizing that sexual and gender minorities¹ are often particularly marginalized and excluded, a group of stakeholders met in April 2019 to develop a strategic framework to advance human rights and inclusion for these populations in the region, as part of broader efforts to achieve the SDGs and Agenda 2063. Working together, the representatives from civil society, parliaments, the judiciary, the private sector, regional economic communities, UN organizations and donor agencies called for the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa **to enable inclusive, just, affirming, safe, productive and fulfilling lives for all their people, irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics**. The strategic framework developed by the stakeholders outlined six, mutually supportive pathways towards achieving this vision, emphasizing that the way forward should be driven by African values of dignity, fairness, acceptance of diversity, and respect for privacy, underpinned by the ethic of Ubuntu – the universal bond of a shared humanity.

Several months later, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) once again convened a cross-section of experts and leaders to advise UNDP on how it might best contribute to advancing the framework’s vision, working alongside the many other institutions and individuals pursuing similar goals. Building on these discussions, UNDP launched the “Inclusive Governance Initiative” in 2020. The goal of the “Inclusive Governance Initiative” is **to support countries in the region to become increasingly accountable to, and inclusive of, their entire populations, including sexual and gender minorities**. This in turn will contribute to better laws, more responsive public sector services, and social norms that affirm rights and inclusion for all.

At regional and sub-regional levels, the Initiative’s key strategies focus on supporting influential champions for change to become as effective as possible in their work to support inclusion of sexual and gender minorities, and on widening the circle of such champions. In addition to working with State actors such as government officials and parliamentarians, the Initiative will also collaborate with key influencers from development NGOs, religious and traditional institutions, the corporate sector, and development cooperation officials.

The Initiative will also support more **intensive engagement** in several countries from across the region, beginning in **Angola, Cote d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Namibia and Zimbabwe**. In each

¹ The phrase “sexual and gender minorities” is used here as shorthand for people whose biological sex, sexuality, gender identity and/or gender expression differ from the majority of the population. There is considerable diversity among people who are marginalized because of these factors, including intersex people (people whose bodies do not have typically male or female sex characteristics due to variations in chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones and/or genitals); transgender women and men; people who are perceived as outside traditional gender norms who may not see themselves as transgender; and people involved in same-sex relations.

of these countries, UNDP will convene a cross-section of stakeholders from government, civil society and other institutions to develop a shared vision for progress at national level, to identify strategic windows of opportunity for positive change, and to identify short- to medium-term priorities for action. These priorities will vary according to the country context. For example, a country team may choose to focus on leveraging lessons from working with sexual and gender minorities on HIV into work on universal health care and social protection; on increasing access to justice and expanded support for human rights; on strengthening government systems to collect and analyse relevant data; or on building broad coalitions that promote inclusion not only for sexual and gender minorities but also for other marginalized or stigmatized populations.

Combining such country level work with South-South cooperation, sub-regional activities, and engagement with regional institutions and networks, the Initiative will contribute to the following five outcomes:

- **Strengthening the commitment and capacity of African decision makers to include and respond to sexual and gender diversity issues in their work.** This will include initiatives to increase the capacity, commitment and action of those decision-makers who are already supportive of inclusion and rights for sexual and gender minorities, as well as efforts to increase the number of supportive decision makers and key influencers.
- **Strengthening the capacity of sexual and gender diversity activists and allies from other SDG-focused social movements to understand and work with each other and to influence decision makers.** This will include encouraging African civil society allies – involved in issues such as HIV, gender equality, poverty alleviation, and health for all - to become more inclusive of, and responsive to, gender and sexual diversity issues in their work.
- **Including sexual and gender diversity issues and activists in the development and implementation of laws, policies and programmes.** This will include focused support to groups of stakeholders in specific countries where there are windows of opportunity for positive change and engagement as appropriate with regional economic communities and other relevant sub-regional and regional institutions and networks.
- **Stimulating demand for and use of relevant ideas, evidence, and innovations.** The initiative will promote the use of existing tools, resources and evidence that can help support positive change. Particularly strategic products will be translated to or from Portuguese, French and/or English to reach wider audiences. The project will also include robust monitoring and evaluation, of the broader context of inclusion/exclusion as well as of project achievements and setbacks.
- **Sustaining and expanding international donor funding for evidence- and community-informed regional work in Africa that addresses sexual and gender diversity and/or key populations affected by HIV.** The Initiative will advocate with international donors for appropriate investment in organizations and initiatives that are addressing priority aspects of the broader change agenda in the region. The Initiative will also seek additional resources, based on its own learning and in line with its capacity, to expand to additional focus countries and to extend from four to ten years.

Initial funding for the Initiative has been provided by Sweden and by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The project is managed from a small secretariat at UNDP's country office in South Africa, under the guidance of UNDP's HIV, Health and Development team and UNDP's Regional Bureau for Africa.

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