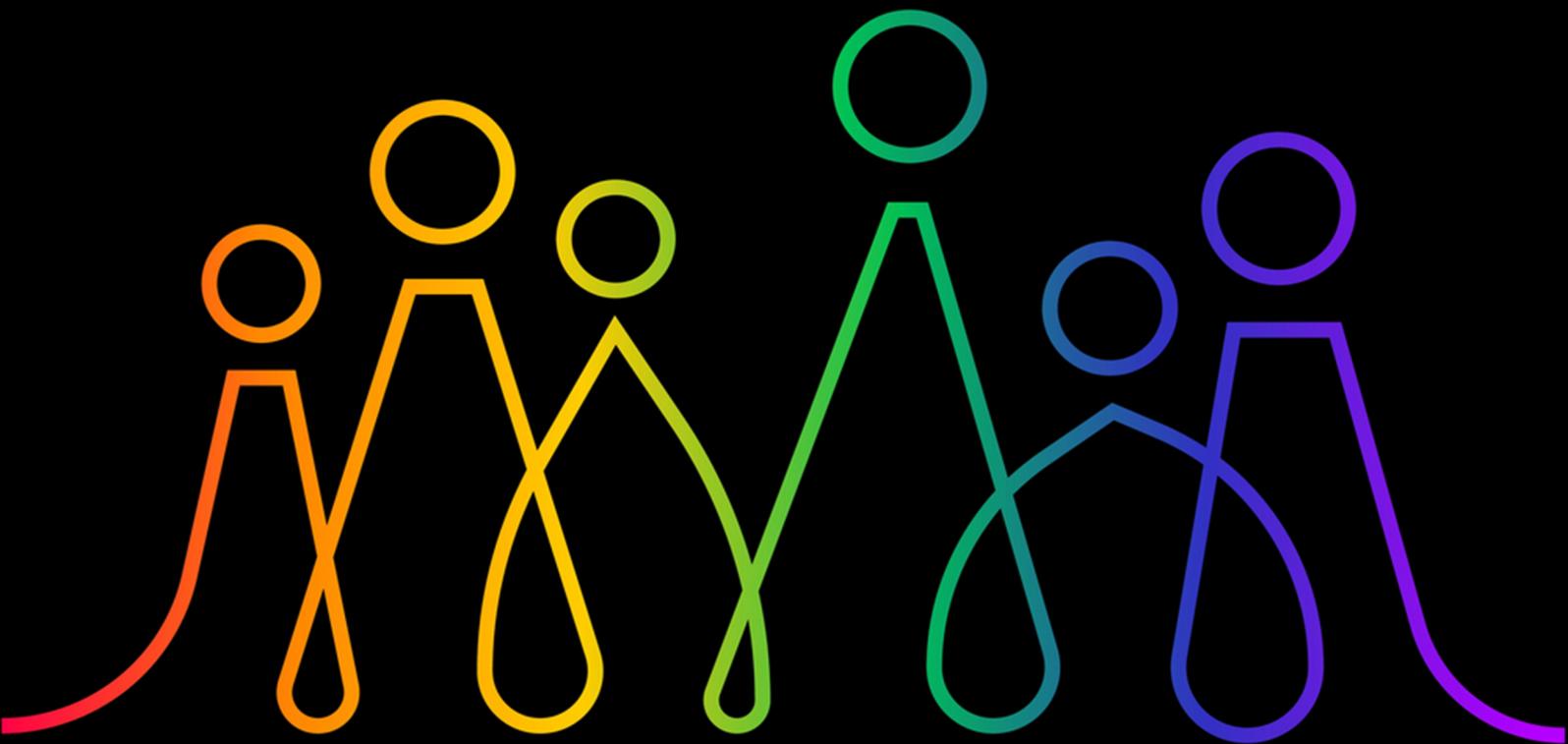




# Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex Realities in Northern Nigeria

April 2022





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# Executive Summary

The people of northeast Nigeria have been subjected to over a decade of violence in addition to pre-existing under-development, weak governance, and inadequacy of public services.

This combination has led to heightened gendered and other inequalities and social exclusion. This study deepens understanding and analysis of the realities, challenges, and resilience of people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in this region and identifies opportunities for intervention. Based on interviews with 22 queer respondents and 5 representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, it offers a foundation for programming interventions and for future research. Its main findings are as follows:

## 1. Present realities

**People of diverse SOGIESC face similar (gendered) harms as all conflict-affected people.** They are injured, left with lifelong disabilities, and traumatised by physical violence. With the death of family and friends, they rely on extended networks which provide varying levels of care. They experience (multiple) displacement. Their livelihoods are negatively impacted. Moreover, while people of all genders face all forms of violence, men are more at risk of extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrest, and detention while women are left behind to negotiate safety and wellbeing with combatants, and find ways to keep their families fed, sheltered, and secure and are disproportionately more likely to experience gender-based violence. Patriarchal gender norms particularly affect the lives of (queer) women who have lesser access to power and resources.

**People of diverse SOGIESC are subjected to gender-based violence but less able to report.** Across times of conflict and peace, they experience childhood sexual violence and intimate partner violence. While no cases of corrective rape against lesbian and bisexual women were noted, sexual violence against yan daudu<sup>1</sup> was seen as common. Marginalisation is a key (additional) barrier to survivors reporting abuse, particularly when perpetrators are of the same gender.

**People of diverse SOGIESC face specific additional harms.** They face personal struggles due to internalised discrimination and fear, with significant impacts on mental health. They are expelled from and faced violence in educational establishments for (suspicion) of same-gender romantic or sexual activity. They have lesser access to health services. Intersex people receive treatment from health workers who are unaware that variation in sex characteristics naturally occurs. Queer people also face additional livelihood barriers. Many engage in sex work and survival sex, in large part as they have few alternative livelihood options and queer sex workers face specific risks. At the same time, lesbian and bisexual women may be at increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse and queer people can face difficulties accessing humanitarian aid.

**People of diverse SOGIESC face family and societal marginalisation and violence.** They fear and experience rejection from families, subjected to surveillance, have movements controlled, and are told to leave homes. At the societal level, discrimination depends on socio-economic class but is normalised. Lesbian and bisexual women can experience less scrutiny than gay and bisexual men and yan daudu but also face difficulties in finding suitors if their sexual orientation is known while attracting suspicious if they remain unmarried. Queer people are subjected to entrapment, extortion, and violence, and forced to leave communities. Community militias members play significant roles in policing morality, including through (the threat of) violence. In response, most yan daudu try to fit with gender binaristic stereotypes. However, despite this exclusion, many queer people have strong allies and find loving relationships despite these constraints.

**People of diverse SOGIESC face brutality, extortion, and violence from the state.** Discovery often leads to reporting to the police and further violence. Police officers engage in mass arrests and extortion of men who have sex with men and there are men who have sex with men who serve as police informants. While those who have money, power and/or connections are able to escape relatively unscathed, arrest by the police can lead to social ostracism long after release for others. In addition, this police extortion enables extortion by members of the general public.

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<sup>1</sup>Yan daudu is a Hausa term for those assigned male gender who express themselves in ways and engage in activities socially coded as 'feminine'.

**People of diverse SOGIESC face discrimination and violence from armed opposition groups (AOGs).** Subsequent leaders preached against homosexuality, tying this to the decadence linked to ‘western’ institutions. AOGs have warned and targeted people seen as immoral. Queer people have been chased out of areas by AOGs who believe in strict gender binaries with delineated roles for women and men. Despite this cisnormativity, endosexism, heteronormativity, and the policing of strict gender binaries, people of diverse SOGIESC exist within AOGs and there have been cases where AOG fighters have sexually enslaved and raped men and women.

**People of diverse SOGIESC are missing from development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding programming.** Development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding organisations tend to be cisnormative, endosexist, and heteronormative. Moreover, agencies do not adequately support their queer staff and/or are unaware of their challenges and risks.

## 2. Changing space

**Borno has seen times of relative freedom but space has restricted considerably recently.** While discrimination and stigma existed, negative public discourse and public violence was less common twenty to thirty years ago as it is today. Men with power and influence were more able to forestall action against people of diverse SOGIESC. Space restricted with discourse around sharia and the institution of sharia codes in 2000 while the actions and preaching of AOGs had chilling effects from 2011/2012 onwards. The promulgation of the SSMPA 2014 also increased public discourse around homosexuality and intensified the normalisation of negative attitudes.

**The past decade has seen increasing levels of stigmatisation and violence, linked to the conflict.** In general, there is moral panic around changes brought about by the conflict with particular focus on women’s bodies and behaviour. A prevalent narrative is that displacement and poverty has brought about more immorality, including homosexuality. Other strands in conversations are that poverty has pushed more men into engaging in homosexual for money and that men penetrate other men as part of ritualistic acts to gain wealth. There are also rumours of ‘rampant lesbianism’ in IDP camps, sometimes used to discredit women and girls who remain unmarried or who are seen as outspoken, independent, and not reliant on men. Boredom and the crowded conditions of IDP camps and settlements are key factors in the rise of rumours, surveillance, and such narratives, with behaviour more hidden or accepted in rural areas now being more visible.

### 3. Resilience, mutual aid, and community building

**People of diverse SOGIESC find ways to aid themselves and others.** They act to reduce suspicion, conform, and live on their own terms. They note the hypocrisy of societal attitudes. They attempt to provide advice and support, with technology a key source of information and connection.

**Significant barriers limit community building.** People are worried that their SOGIESC will become exposed if they spend time with others. They fear group members may report them to the police in exchange for payment or after having been extorted and beaten. Attempts to build networks, for example through creating a savings and loans group, have been stopped by others. Nevertheless, there is a keen desire to do more to support other members of the community.

Please refer to the end of this paper for recommendations.



# Acronyms

<b>AOG</b>	armed opposition group
<b>DSD</b>	differences of sex development
<b>GBV</b>	gender-based violence
<b>JASDJ</b>	Jama'atu Ahl al -Sunna li -l- Da'wa wa-l-Jihad
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person
<b>ISWAP</b>	Wilayat al Islamiyya Gharb Afriqiyyah translated as Islamic State West African Province
<b>LGBT</b>	lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans
<b>LGBTQ</b>	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer
<b>LGBTQI</b>	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and intersex
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>SEA</b>	sexual exploitation and abuse
<b>SEMA</b>	State Emergency Management Agency
<b>SOGIE</b>	sexual orientations, gender identities, and/ or gender expressions
<b>SOGIESC</b>	sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and/or sex characteristics
<b>SSMPA</b>	Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act
<b>UN</b>	United Nations



# Introduction

Almost twelve years have passed since the conflict in northeast Nigeria erupted into violence, killing 40,300 people,<sup>2</sup> displacing 1.9 million, and putting 8.7 million in need of urgent assistance.<sup>3</sup> The conflict has profoundly gendered effects, with many men arbitrarily arrested, subjected to prolonged detention without trial, and extrajudicially killed. Meanwhile, women are often left behind to negotiate the safety and wellbeing of themselves, their children and elders with armed opposition groups (AOGs), security forces, and community militias and strategise how to keep families secure, fed, and sheltered. Yet, while these impacts have been documented to some extent, the experiences of people with non-normative sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC)<sup>4</sup> remains a major gap in knowledge.

**SOGIESC** is a term used to refer to sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics:

**Sexual orientation:** An enduring and profound emotional, romantic, sexual, or relational attraction to another person. It may be to those of the same, different, or all genders.

**Gender identity:** A deeply rooted internal and individual sense of gender (i.e. being male or female, both, or neither) that may or may not align with sex assigned at birth.

**Gender expression:** Behaviour, mannerisms, interests, appearance, and ways of speaking culturally associated with a particular gender.

**Sexual characteristics:** Genetic, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics of bodies which are used to categorise them as female or male despite the commonality of variance. Someone with significant variations in their sex characteristics is usually called 'intersex.'

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<sup>2</sup>Nigeria Security Tracker, available at <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>, last updated 02.02.2021, last visited 16.03.2021.

<sup>3</sup>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Nigeria Situation Report,' available at: <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/nigeria>, last updated 04.02.2021, last visited 16.03.2021.

<sup>4</sup>This paper will use SOGIESC, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) and queer interchangeably.

This study aims to deepen understanding and analysis of the realities, challenges, and resilience as pertains to people of diverse SOGIESC in conflict-affected northeast Nigeria and to identify opportunities for intervention. It addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the present realities for people of diverse SOGIESC?
2. How has space for people of diverse SOGIESC changed over time?
3. How do people of diverse SOGIESC protect themselves and support others?

Taking intersectional feminist approaches that integrate understanding of social exclusion, we used qualitative methods, interviewing 22 queer respondents and 5 representatives of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies (some of whom are queer) in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state in December 2020. We used a grounded theory approach to code and analyse data. Key principles of conflict sensitivity, gender transformation, and social inclusion guided this study. We followed a robust ethical approach, putting mechanisms and referral systems in place to address potential safeguarding and other risks and developing safety and security protocols. One referral was made, with follow up to ensure service was provided.

We intended to ensure diversity in respondents to examine how experiences vary according to age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic class and other axes of marginalisation and exclusion. However, it was challenging to find persuade people willing to participate, not surprising given the context and subject matter. Consequently, we used snowball sampling techniques and, to some extent, had to interview those willing to talk with us. We conducted interviews predominantly in Hausa, with quotes in this paper stylistic devices providing English translation.

Our respondents spanned a range of sexual orientations, ethnicities (Babur, Fulani, Guduf, Hausa, Igbo, Kanuri, Margi, Michika, and Shuwa), and occupations (civil society, farmers, entertainers, journalists, sex workers, students, tailors, traders, and the food industry). Some respondents had experienced (multiple) displacement. Respondents comprised people of Christian and Muslim backgrounds but no followers

**Dan daudu (plural yan daudu)** is a Hausa term for those assigned male gender who express themselves in ways and engage in activities socially coded as 'feminine'. They are often described as 'men who act like women' and many marry women and have families. Historically, yan daudu have played important roles in northern life but are now increasingly seen as immoral and persecuted. As yan daudu use the pronouns she/ her to refer to themselves and each other when in the company of those they trust, these are the pronouns that will be used. As many gave male names and pseudonyms, male pseudonyms have been given.

of indigenous religions, who tend to be stigmatised and underground. While we were able to incorporate some diversity in gender identities and expressions of respondents, specifically when it came to yan daudu and feminised men, we were unable to interview masculine identified women. We also did not interview intersex people for this study and, although this paper draws on previous interviews by the author to provide insights into their realities, a gap in understanding remains when it comes to the realities of people with variation in sex characteristics.

All names are pseudonyms and some information is deliberately withheld with the safety of participants in mind. Respondents' SOGIESC is provided to give context. The terms bisexual, cis, gay, and lesbian (as well as dan daudu) are used as these were often used by participants to describe themselves and in the absence of more local terms across linguistic communities.

**LGBTQI** is a term used to refer to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and/or intersex:

**Lesbian:** A woman emotionally, romantically, sexually, and/or relationally attracted to women.

**Gay:** A man emotionally, romantically, sexually, and/or relationally attracted to men.

**Bisexual:** A person emotionally, romantically, sexually, and/or relationally attracted to people of different genders.

**Trans:** A person whose gender identity or gender expression differs from their assigned sex.

**Cis:** A person whose gender identity or gender expression aligns with their assigned sex.

**Queer:** A term that describes non-normative sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and/or sexual characteristics.

**Intersex:** A variety of conditions in which a person's sexual and/or reproductive features and organs do not conform to dominant and typical definitions of "female" or "male".

Our main limitations were the COVID-19 pandemic, levels of insecurity, and risks involved given the subject matter and respondents. Bans on inter-state and international travel and other restrictions introduced to curtail infection risk meant we started data collection almost a year later than planned, particularly as ethical and safety considerations ruled out virtual data collection. Insecurity and the short timeframe left for this project meant we could not travel outside Maiduguri. Moreover, the research design had to be changed from a participatory project to one more based on interviews as very few people from conflict-affected communities were willing and able to be involved in data collection due to fear of risk of discovery and internalised stigma.

We also faced difficulties in findings respondents willing to participate, particularly those from certain groups including women, older people and people with disabilities. As a result, only one respondent had a disability, only 7 (out of 22) respondents identified as women, and we were unable to interview anyone over 40 years, leaving the realities of older queer people unexamined.

Nevertheless, this paper offers a rare glimpse into the lives of people of non-normative SOGIESC in northeast Nigeria. After providing context, it examines the realities of queer people, changes over time, and actions taken to protect and support themselves and others. It ends with recommendations. We hope it offers a foundation for programming and future research.



# Context

Even before the conflict, Northeast Nigeria had some of the worst social development indicators, especially for women and girls, in the country. It experienced inadequate public service provision, under-development, and weak governance, particularly outside major towns.

The years of violence further impacted access to education, healthcare, and other services in rural areas, had devastating impacts on jobs and livelihoods, mental health and well-being, and family structures, and led to high levels of deaths, disabilities, displacement, injuries, and human rights violations.

Root causes of the conflict include a fall in economic prospects, living standards, and wage growth from the 1970s onwards, heightened by the economic reforms introduced in the 1980s due to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank prescribed structural adjustment programme. Recent decades also saw higher levels of inequality, corruption, religious intolerance, and fundamentalism<sup>5</sup> against a backdrop of major political shifts with the re-establishment of a democratic system of governance in 1999, the adoption of sharia codes shortly afterwards, and the often violent and unethical nature of political contestation, particularly around elections.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>The term religious fundamentalism is used here as distinct from religious conservatism and to signify the project whereby those engaged in it construct tradition in a way that is highly selective, at the same time dogmatically insisting that their reconstructions of text are sacred and therefore cannot be questioned: Stephen Cowden and Gita Sahgal, 'Why Fundamentalism?' 2017 *Feminist Dissent* 2 7-39. They deny "the possibility of interpretation and reinterpretation even while its adherents engage in both and note the importance of control over women's bodies, sexuality and rigid gender norms": Karima Bennoune, *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight against Muslim Fundamentalism*, (Norton Books, 2016), p. 16.

<sup>6</sup>See Abdul Raufu Mustapha and Kate Meagher (eds), *Overcoming Boko Haram: Faith, Society and Islamic Radicalization in Northern Nigeria*, (James Currey, 2020) and Alex Thurston, *Boko Haram: History of an African Jihadist Movement*, (Princeton University Press, 2017) for more details.

Harnessing widespread public critique, Mohammed Yusuf, an Islamic scholar who preached against social immorality and the corruption and inequality of ‘western’ democracy and linked institutions including schools and the civil service<sup>7</sup> garnered widespread popularity in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State in northeast Nigeria. Increasing tensions with the State Government led to attacks against churches, Christians, and police stations by his group in July 2009 followed by the injuring and killing of hundreds of his followers, including Yusuf himself by security agents.<sup>8</sup>

His remaining followers went underground, strategised, and returned to public notice, calling themselves Jama’atu Ahl al -Sunna li -l- Da’wa wa-l-Jihad (JASDJ), translated as People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad but often referred to by the media as Boko Haram. JASDJ became increasingly violent while security agencies engaged in collective punishment against communities blamed for not identifying its members. The yan gora, a community militia of mainly young people,<sup>9</sup> developed and worked with security agencies to push JASDJ out of Maiduguri in mid 2013,<sup>10</sup> following which it became active in rural areas.

Over 2013 and 2014, JASDJ captured much of Borno’s territory, portions of neighbouring Adamawa and Yobe states, and spread into neighbouring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. It launched bomb blasts outside the northeast, in cities such as Kano, Kaduna, Jos and even Abuja, the nation’s capital. The conflict was brought to national and international prominence by these events as well as the April 2014 abduction of almost 300 schoolgirls from Chibok, not the only but the most wellknown of such incidents. In response, Nigeria formed the Multi-National Joint Task Force with its neighbours which, working with community militias, recovered some territory.

In 2016, JASDJ allied with Islamic State and split into two distinctive groups, largely as a result of disagreements over whether targeting of Muslim civilians was permitted under opposing interpretations of Islam and the harshness of punishment levied against members for infraction of rules. A new group, Wilayat al Islamiyya Gharb Afriqiyyah, translated as Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP), formed. Its objective was to focus on security agents and those who support them rather than the indiscriminate targeting of civilians. Its successful attacks and ambushes against security convoys and bases forced the military to retreat into super-camps.<sup>11</sup> As of the time of writing in March 2021, JASDJ tends to kill civilians indiscriminately while ISWAP is seen as more targeted, focused on security agencies

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<sup>7</sup>Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*, (Hurst, 2018).

<sup>8</sup>Alex Thurston, *Boko Haram: History of an African Jihadist Movement*, (Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>9</sup>This paper uses the Hausa rather than English term (Civilian Joint Task Force or CJTF) by which this group is known.

<sup>10</sup>Chitra Nagarajan, *To Defend or Harm: Community Militias in Borno State, Nigeria*, (Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2020).

<sup>11</sup>Paul Carsten, ‘Islamic State Fills the Void in Nigeria as Soldiers Retreat to ‘Super Camps’ Reuters, 16 September 2019.

and those working with them as well as government and NGO workers and Christians, justifying these acts with doctrinal explanations.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the volume of journalism, academic writing, and NGO reports produced about the conflict, there is little to no attempt to incorporate or focus on queer realities. This lack of data, knowledge, and understanding is a significant omission replicated in many other contexts where, “there is an alarming lack of attention to how homophobic and transphobic violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals occurs in conflict-related environments.”<sup>13</sup> Emerging data elsewhere shows sexual and gender minorities experience discrimination in humanitarian emergencies.<sup>14</sup> Men not viewed as ‘manly’ enough or assumed to be ‘gay’ can face violence as Human Rights Watch has documented in Iraq, writing that “fear of ‘feminized’ men reveals only hatred of women,” while lesbians continue to be overlooked as a vulnerable population as NGOs concentrate “on ‘public,’ political attacks on men.”<sup>15</sup>

Yet, human rights violations against people of diverse SOGIESC in other parts of Nigeria are better documented. In its 2020 annual report, The Initiative for Equal Rights recorded how state and non-state actors continue to incite and carry out violence against people for their real or perceived diverse SOGIESC.<sup>16</sup> While invasion of privacy, arbitrary arrests, and unlawful detention were most common types of rights violations by state actors, members of the general public were more likely to perpetrate blackmail, extortion, assault and battery, and entrapment (kito).<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, legislation criminalising same-sex sexual relations has been on the statute books for decades. Section 214 of the Criminal Code Act 1990 provides any person who ‘has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature’ or permits a man to ‘have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature’ is guilty of a felony and liable to fourteen years imprisonment. Section 217 of the same act provides any male person who commits ‘any act of gross indecency with another male person’ in public or in private is guilty of a felony and liable to imprisonment for three years. Islamic sharia law, adopted in twelve northern states, also criminalises sexual activities between people of the same sex. The latest legislative development in this arena is the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2014 (SSMPA). It criminalises the registration, operation of, participation in and support for gay clubs, societies and organisations; the public show of same sex

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<sup>12</sup>Editorial, ‘ISWAP’s Execution of Aid Workers,’ Daily Trust, 28 July 2020.

<sup>13</sup>Jamie Hagen, ‘Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity as Part of the WPS Project,’ Paper 2/2016, LSE Women, Peace and Security Working Paper Series, 2016.

<sup>14</sup>Jennifer Rumbach and Kyle Knight, ‘Sexual and Gender Minorities in Humanitarian Emergencies,’ in L. W. Roeder (ed.), *Issues of Gender and Sexual Orientation in Humanitarian Emergencies*, (Springer, 2014).

<sup>15</sup>Human Rights Watch, “They Want Us Exterminated”: Murder, Torture, Sexual Orientation and Gender in Iraq, (HRW,2009).

<sup>16</sup>The Initiative for Equal Rights, 2020 Human Rights Violations Report, 2020.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p. 15.

amorous relationship directly or indirectly; people of the same sex who enter a civil union or marriage contract; and those who witness or aid a same sex marriage or civil union. Punishments stated range from 10 to 14 years imprisonment.

Meanwhile, polling data reveal that Nigerian attitudes are changing with a drop in numbers of those unwilling to accept homosexual family members from 83 percent in 2017 to 60 percent in 2019 and those who believe people should be jailed for 14 years for same sex relationships from 91 percent of respondents in 2017 to 74 percent in 2019.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to narratives of northeast conservatism in comparison to the rest of the country, 30 percent of respondents to the 2019 survey from the northeast said they would accept a homosexual family member while 70 percent of respondents either supported or strongly supported the SSMPA, the lowest figure across all geopolitical zones.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, levels of discrimination, exclusion and violence remain, exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>The Initiative for Equal Rights and Vivid Rain, 'Social Perception Survey on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons Rights in Nigeria,' June 2019.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Chitra Nagarajan, 'Gender and COVID-19 in Nigeria: Impacts on LGBTQI People,' (EVA and TIERS, 2020).



# What are the present realities for people of diverse SOGIESC?

This section starts with noting how queer people are subjected to similar (gendered) harms as other conflict-affected people, including gender-based violence (GBV), before detailing specific additional harms they face.

It examines marginalisation, brutality, and violence from the family, society, state, and AOGs. It ends with discussing how these realities are missing from development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding programming.

## Queer people face similar harms as all conflict-affected people

**Subjected to violence during AOG and military operations, they are injured and left with permanent, lifelong disabilities and trauma.** Friends and family members are killed, sometimes in front of them. Loved ones joined AOGs and tried to recruit them, sometimes using threat of violence. Alternatively, they felt compelled to join community militias to both protect their communities and to prove to security agencies that they were not AOG members. Musa, a (cis, bisexual) man gave the following reasons for coming back to Maiduguri from Abuja to which he had escaped, “I came back as I had to join the people guarding our community... You have to support the military to protect your area and if you did not do this, they consider you to be [an AOG member].”

“ I liked school and my parents had money but my town was not safe and they were coming to kidnap children from schools. That is why I didn't want to go back to school [after spending time in hospital after a bomb blast]. I am not a fool that I will be in school and they will pack me away.”

- Maryam (cis, lesbian, woman)

**These harms are gendered.** Although different gender identities and expressions

exist in the northeast, social norms tend to enforce a rigid gender binary with people classified as either female or male. As a result, the harms people experience can depend on the gender they are assumed to be and patterns of violence associated with this gender. While people of all genders face all forms of violence, men tend to be more at risk of extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrest, and detention while women are left behind to negotiate the safety and wellbeing of themselves, children, and elders with combatants, and find ways to keep their families fed, watered, sheltered, and secure. They also are disproportionately more likely to experience GBV including domestic violence and abuse, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and abduction by AOGs following which they are forcibly married, raped and/ or sexually enslaved. This fear of abduction impacts their access to services, particularly education given the numbers of girls and young women taken from educational establishments.

**With the death of family and friends, they have to rely on extended families and kinship networks which provide varying levels of care and love,** especially given the

emotional and financial stress many people live under. Many respondents spoke of the differential impacts of loss of supportive family members and friends for LGBTQI people who tend to have weaker social networks than others, particularly if their SOGIESC is known. In the words of Mohammed, a (cis, bisexual) man, “I know that no matter what a LGBT person is doing [in terms of same gender sexual relations], only their parents can tolerate them but if they are late, people do not where to start [in terms of having support].”<sup>21</sup>

“ Now, I am an orphan and life is difficult. My brothers are looking after me but the situation of nowadays means everyone is on their own.”

– Ali (cis, gay, man)

**They experienced (multiple) displacement.** Almost every respondent interviewed fled their homes due to (fear of) violence. For many, this was due to actions of AOG fighters after they took over their town or the insecurity occasioned by fighting between AOGs and security forces. For example, Zainab, (cis, bisexual, woman) described how, after JASDJ took over Gwoza, she had to walk two days with two young children to reach safety in Maiduguri while three months pregnant while Hadiza, (cis, lesbian, woman) spoke of being in Baga both during the April 2013 fighting and 2015 massacre before escaping. Even some respondents from Maiduguri spent time away from the city during the height of violence due to the targeted killings committed by JASDJ and as soldiers were arresting and killing people, particularly young men, suspected of being or harbouring JASDJ members. Those who had spent time in camps and informal settlements for internally displaced people (IDPs) are grateful for the assistance received from government, NGOs and UN agencies but

<sup>21</sup>There are also queer people who have been disowned, made homeless, and physically abused by their parents.

said this aid, particularly food distribution, was insufficient to meet needs. They noted how levels of humanitarian aid had changed, characterising it as worse now compared to the situation in 2017: “When I first arrived in [name of camp withheld], life was so good. Then, they would give enough food - rice, beans and everything you need to cook. Now, if they even give you food, it’s not enough for even one person to eat” (Umar, cis, bisexual, man).

**Their livelihoods and that of their families have been negatively impacted, in gendered ways.**

They pointed out how norms within Hausa and Kanuri households in particular,<sup>22</sup> of women responsible for moral and physical upbringing of children while men are expected to provide financially for the family, were even less possible to attain than before the conflict. With significant numbers of men killed, detained, fighting, migrated in search of work or unable and/ or unwilling to financially provide for families, this

“ From that time [when I was abducted by AOG fighters], my school and business stopped [as my vehicle was destroyed, I didn’t have the resources to buy another, and I was afraid of driving around the state given I had been abducted while transporting goods]. Since I have lost everything, I have been thinking whether to stay in town or go to the [IDP] camp. I have been going from place to place without any work to do.”

- Usman (cis, gay/ bisexual, man)

breadwinner burden falls even more squarely on women’s shoulders. At the same time, given landbased livelihoods are less possible due to military restrictions and insecurity linked to risk of abduction, injury, sexual violence, and death outside population sites, people are even more reliant on those who provide them start-up capital or employment in urban settings. According to Salisu (dan daudu), “There are no jobs for us in this town. If you go to look for work, you do not get it except if you know someone and have a godfather. If not, you will never get a job here.”

**They are told they will only get employment in exchange for money or sex.**

According to Ali, a (cis, gay) man, “People will not take you for jobs until they have sex with you or you pay N200 - N500k... If someone has a connection and you want them to link you up, you have to have sex with them first. Without a strong link, you will be submitting your CV all the time so you have to give your body.” Respondents spoke of needing to have sex or pay money, across several sectors, to make contacts and of cases where, despite having done so, these jobs did not materialise. Bala (dan daudu) described, “I met him on [name of online platform] and we started chatting. We agreed to meet at the weekend... He asked me my qualifications and for my CV... He told me that he had work for me but that we need to meet one on one first. I said that I had to go home but he told me to lie [to my family] and say that I needed to stay back. We met in a hotel and had sex. He told me

<sup>22</sup>Gender norms vary across ethnic groups in the northeast. Women are expected to provide financially for the family as well as take care of the household and children among the Higi and Margi peoples. Lunguda people believe children belong to the mother and her family in contrast to patrilineal descent models in other groups. Among Fulbe families, particularly those who engage in migratory grazing, women sell milk and milk products to cover daily expenses while men sell cattle to cover major costs.

that I have to give him sex then he would give me a job... I've also heard of other cases in Maiduguri, for example a man who gives a discount on a keke napep in exchange for sex."

**Patriarchal norms affect the lives of (queer) women who have lesser access to power and resources.** Respondents described being forced into marriages against their will and experiencing marital rape and other violence from and being abandoned by their husbands. When they try to leave abusive marriages, they are told by family to be patient and return. They also spoke of difficulties accessing education, particularly as families considered schools unsafe for girls given AOG abductions. They are often blamed for violence against them. Fati (cis, bisexual, woman) spoke of being groomed as a teenager by a man, saying "Right from when I was young, he was calling me his wife... I don't know what happened but with time I started to hate him and not like him. Some people told me that he had charmed me." After she became pregnant, her father sent her out of house. She had no other alternative but to stay with this man who refused to look after her. After he married someone else, she returned to her parent's home where she and her daughter faced stigma, particularly from her father, until attitudes softened. Similar experiences are common for many women in the region, regardless of sexual orientation.

### **Queer people are subjected to gender-based violence but less able to report**

**Across times of conflict and peace, they experience child sexual violence.** Respondents of all genders described their experiences of child sexual abuse and grooming, starting as young as the age of seven, with perpetrators largely escaping punishment and sanction. The violence to which they are subjected takes place in Maiduguri, major towns, and small villages. They are warned not to disclose what was happening as they will be blamed. While the majority of perpetrators described were older men, Zara (cis, lesbian, woman) was in a sexual relationship from the age of 8 years for almost ten years with an 'auntie' who was often jealous, controlling and physically violent saying, "She did not want other women to see me so she would beat me if she saw me in the presence of other women and men then say sorry. It was a beating of love." A 2014 nationwide survey found that six in ten children were subjected to one or more forms of physical, sexual, or emotional violence before 18 years with 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 10 boys having experienced sexual violence and fewer than five percent of child victims ever getting the help they need to recover.<sup>23</sup>

**They face violence from intimate partners.** Respondents described experiencing or hearing of controlling and coercive behaviour, verbal abuse, and physical violence. Sexual orientations seen as 'deviant' can be instrumentalised in opposite gender relationships, for example with husbands threatening to reveal wives' sexual orientation to their

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<sup>23</sup>National Population Commission and UNICEF, 'Violence Against Children in Nigeria: Findings from a National Survey 2014,' 2015.

“ They beat the other person and see it as discipline. Sometimes, they are older and the younger one may be disrespecting them so they beat them. Or if they find out that they are having an affair with someone else.”

– Fatima (cis, lesbian, woman)

families or using it as justification for abuse. Meanwhile, unequal power dynamics and violence can manifest in queer relationships in patriarchal ways. As John (cis, gay, man) said, “If one person had more money than the other, they try to control them and the relationship becomes void.” Respondents described violence perpetrated against others to warn them against getting too close to

partners, and against partners to punish for behaviour seen as improper, particularly in relationships with a significant age difference.

**While no cases of corrective rape against lesbian and bisexual women were noted,<sup>24</sup> sexual violence perpetrated against yan daudu is seen as common.**

Difficulties in assessing GBV incidence are heightened when it comes to GBV committed against yan daudu, yet the majority of queer respondents recounted cases where yan daudu friends experienced sexual violence and believed it to be common. Salisu (dan daudu) recalled how a (dan daudu) friend was raped by six men while walking home after a party: “I don’t know why they raped him - because he is dan daudu as punishment or because they are gay and wanted to have sex with him. I just know that rape against yan daudu is common.” As seen below, AOG fighters are also known to rape (and kill) yan daudu. More work is needed to understand these dynamics.

**Marginalisation and violence against people of diverse SOGIESC is a key (additional) barrier to survivors reporting abuse, particularly when perpetrators are of the same gender.**

That survivors face immense obstacles to reporting violence in Nigeria and globally, including stigmatisation, victim-blaming, and unresponsive criminal justice processes, is well-known. Queer people have additional difficulties given widespread discriminatory attitudes which make it impossible for them to disclose the violence and its impact with health and counselling services. They may also face risks for reporting or believe they will be punished. Mubarak (cis, gay, man) said about how, at the age of 11 years, a man in his small northern Borno village started ‘giving me sweets and chewing gum then started touching me then it started like that. He deceived me. The man had friends and shared me with them. I had sex with three different men and nobody knew what was happening.” He talked of hearing preaching in the mosque that people engaging in homosexual acts would be beaten and said, “The man told me not to tell anybody as, if they heard that we were into this, they would not spare the two of us. I worried about what would happen to me if I told people. I worried I would be beaten and my father would keep some distance from me.”

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<sup>24</sup>This does not mean that such cases do not exist, only that respondents did not know of instances where corrective rape against lesbian and bisexual women had happened.

## Queer people face specific additional harms

### Queer people face personal struggles due internalised discrimination and fear which can have significant impact

on mental health. Several respondents experience inner turmoil over their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression, primarily due to social norms and religious teaching.

Some respondents had passed through this battle: “Now, when I have sex with a man, I feel it is normal but when I was younger, I was just thinking about it and seeing myself as if I am not well, I am sick. Now, I just feel relief and am happy.” (James, cis, gay, man). Many other respondents believe they commit sin and pray to change. All respondents spoke of their worries around their SOGIE becoming widely known. According to David (cis, bisexual, man),

“ We [my girlfriend and I] always pray to Allah to make us stop what we are doing so we will not die while still doing it. We pray to Allah to make us change. To make it reduced... You just need Allah to make you change before you die. If I do not [manage to stop], Allah has seen my mind and my intention [and will forgive me].”

– Fatima (cis, lesbian, woman)

“There is always this fear of being killed or harassed if caught.” Respondents told how they keep trying to stop engaging in same-gender romantic and/or sexual behaviour but are unable to continue to do so. Many of them plan to enter into heterosexual marriages in line with family wishes even if they have no romantic or sexual attraction towards people of the opposite gender.

### They have been expelled from and faced violence in educational establishments for (suspicion) of same-gender romantic or sexual activity.

Respondents narrated how people caught kissing, touching, or having sex are dismissed from schools, training centres, and universities. If not suspended or expelled, for example because teachers and

“ If they catch you having sex, they will torture you. For example, there was an incident when the security guards and students beat, wounded, and seriously injured two boys having sex in the toilet in my school.... Some people said they should not do this but rather pray for them and leave them to God but they continued anyway. That such things happen makes people feel scared. The majority of us are scared.”

– Zannah (cis, gay, man)

management were not informed, they face gossip and verbal abuse from peers even if able to continue education. In at least one case, the people caught faced physical violence. Such repercussions create a climate of fear for many queer people and a pressure on them to hide their SOGIESC.

### They have lesser access to health services.

Particularly in matters of sexual health, there are no clinics where they can be open about concerns. According to Ali (cis, gay, man), “Many [queer] people are sick but cannot access healthcare services. We need a place where we can go.” Respondents spoke about the risk of verbal abuse if they do not present in stereotypically gendered ways. Salisu, a dan daudu respondent said, “[A friend] was sick and we went to the \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital. The doctor came out and said that a dan daudu had come to disturb them and was insulting her in my presence. He treated her

afterwards but he was insulting her while treating her.” Unsurprisingly, the apprehension of encountering such attitudes and behaviour among health professionals keeps many queer people who present in non-normative ways away from clinics, including for non-sexual health related matters.

**Intersex people receive treatment from health workers who are unaware that variation in sex characteristics naturally occurs.**

In approximately one in two thousand births, people’s genitalia are neither clearly female nor male.<sup>25</sup> This is one of many kinds of variations in sex characteristics with the most inclusive definitions of differences of sex development (DSD) leading to estimates that 1 in 100 people have some form of DSD.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the existence and treatment of intersex people is not taught in many training programmes and health workers lack knowledge of intersex conditions. In one case, a 12 year old child who had been raised female was thought by health workers to be rather anatomically classified male and given surgery to bring genitalia in line with this. The family was told to gender their child male subsequent to the surgery and to move to another state where they could be socialised into masculinity in a community that had never known them as female. It is difficult to make generalisations based on this one case but it could be that that displacement from rural areas, where variation was either more accepted or hidden, into population centres with better healthcare provision makes medical intervention to ‘correct’ intersex conditions that would have gone unnoticed, hidden, or accepted otherwise more likely.

**Queer people face additional livelihood barriers.**

If their SOGIESC is known, employers are less likely to hire them. If they set up their own business, they struggle to find customers who will patronise them. Certain jobs are closed to them. While yan daudu previously engaged in cooking and selling food on the roadside, this work is considered the preserve of women and girls and others doing such tasks are seen as yan daudu. Discrimination and the threat of violence prevents yan daudu and those gendered male from pursuing such livelihoods. Mohammed (cis, bisexual, man) said this applied to the food industry at large: “If I open a restaurant and have only men there, unless I have a woman there, they will think I am a gay and not come and be comfortable eating my food. You need to have women and men working before you can sell food.”

“ If you go to look for a job, you will not get it. LGBT people find it more difficult to find work here than others. Nobody will tolerate you let alone give you work.”

– Mohammed (cis, bisexual, man)

<sup>25</sup>Melanie Blackless, Anthony Charuvastra, Amanda Derryck, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Karl Lauzanne, and Ellen Lee, ‘How sexually dimorphic are we? Review and synthesis.’ 2000 American Journal of Human Biology 12 151-166.

<sup>26</sup>Claire Ainsworth, ‘Sex Redefined,’ Nature, 18 February 2015, available here: <https://www.nature.com/news/sexredefined-1.16943>, last visited 19.03.2021.

**Many of them engage in sex work and survival sex, in large part as they have few alternative livelihood options.**

The conflict and attendant insecurity have led to lack of sustainable livelihoods and income generation possibilities, particularly for queer people who have greater barriers to sustainable livelihoods. Respondents spoke of how young people in particular had turned to sex work to buy food for their parents and other family members and pay their own and younger siblings' school fees. Aisha (cis, lesbian, woman) described how she has been having sex with richer women to earn money for some time. Many male respondents spoke of how they and/ or their friends engage in sex work with older, more powerful men, some of whom have been told that sex with another man will attract additional wealth. They said such men purposefully seek sex from IDPs as they are more likely to have sex for money, food, and other necessary items.

**Queer sex workers face specific risk.**

Sex workers in Borno face societal disapproval and stigma. They receive counsel to change their ways, including from community and religious leaders, often not accompanied by practical support. They see their homes and sites of work destroyed by the police, placing them in even more precarious situations. They are subjected to verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. Queer people face additional risks in earning incomes seen as immoral, particularly when it comes to sex work with people of the same gender. As their clients are more able to break agreements made and fail to give them the money, food, or other items promised, they face the dilemma of whether to stay silent and forego these necessities or to demand payment, risking discovery and negative repercussions.

“ When you meet someone, they promise you that if you have sex with them, they will give you an amount of money. But after the sex, most of the men will not do what they promised. If you go to their office or house to talk with them, the people around will hear about it and you might be caught. Sometimes, it is settled there but sometimes, the matter is taken to the police station.”

– James (cis, gay, man)

**Lesbian and bisexual women may be at increased risk of SEA.**

The level of SEA in Borno, particularly of displaced women and girls, is well documented.<sup>27</sup> Its incidence increases during times of food and income precarity. Marriage can be central for women's financial security in patriarchal societies where, as it is expected husbands will provide, girls are often denied skills, knowledge, and other resources to earn incomes. Yet, many queer women either do not want to marry men or are unable to do so due to rumours of their sexual orientation. As a result, unless they can earn incomes independently, being subjected to SEA may be the only way to get shelter, food, and other necessities. More investigation is required to fill this evidence gap. Queer people can be barred from accessing

<sup>27</sup>Human Rights Watch, 'Nigeria: Officials Abusing Displaced Women, Girls,' 31 October 2016, available here: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/31/nigeria-officials-abusing-displaced-women-girls>, last visited 25.03.2021.

humanitarian aid. Their names can be missing from lists drawn up by community leaders. Even when present on lists, they may not be able to go to distribution points. Umar (cis, bisexual, man) said these places can be sites of abuse: “When sharing items, the yan gora will be insulting you and SEMA<sup>28</sup> will not say anything so you do not want to go there. They embarrass you in the presence of others, as a lot of people are there [waiting], by calling you yan daudu.” He described how queer people are unable to collect items for fear their queerness will be revealed so are reliant on family members and friends to share.

## Queer people face family and societal rejection, marginalisation, and violence

**They fear and experience rejection from families.** While 30 percent of people in northeast Nigeria said they would accept a homosexual family member<sup>29</sup> and some respondents are open and have good relationships with families, most respondents spoke of difficulties. Having a queer relation is seen as bringing familial shame and disgrace. Given society sees women as responsible for children’s moral upbringing, respondents recounted and worry about their mothers being blamed for not raising them correctly. They also experience verbal abuse, conversion therapy, and public denouncements. They are ignored by family members when they speak. They are not provided meals. In some cases, families try to make them swear on the Qu’ran or Bible that they have no homosexual inclinations. While they are not prepared to make these undertakings as they are false and risk divine punishment, refusal to do so heightens suspicions.

“ I am being careful. If they come to know that this what I do, I have people with whom I have the same father who will use this knowledge to discriminate against me and blame my mother saying she did not give birth to good children.”

– Fatima (cis, lesbian, woman)

**Lesbian and bisexual women face problems in marital homes.** If their sexual orientation becomes known, they can be subjected to verbal and physical abuse, or divorced. According to Bala (dan daudu), “Most lesbians have problems in their husbands’ houses if it is known. I had a cousin who married a second wife who was a lesbian. When they found out that she is a lesbian, she was insulted by the first wife and the husband ended the marriage.”

**Queer people are subjected to surveillance and restrictions on their movements so no longer allowed to meet friends and isolated.** According to Mustapha (cis, gay, man), “I am not free. I do not have any freedom. Even if it a nice straight friend comes to visit me, I am afraid that they will be suspecting us. All eyes were on me and [my family]

<sup>28</sup>State Emergency Management Agency, a government agency with a mandate for disaster management.

<sup>29</sup>The Initiative for Equal Rights and Vivid Rain, ‘Social Perception Survey on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons Rights in Nigeria,’ June 2019.

don't want to see me with any friend." Other respondents also talked about friends who stopped communicating or spending time with them due to family pressure, leaving them further isolated and without support.

**They are told to leave homes by family members and made homeless.** In some cases where their SOGIE is discovered, they are made homeless at the same time as they lose jobs. Zannah (cis, gay, man) told the story of a friend who was expelled from university, lost his job, and made homeless at the same time. He said, "All he could do was walk the streets. He had nowhere to go as everyone knew about him. People would look at him and hurl abuse at him and he was now outside all the time." In some cases, people made homeless by family are supported and housed by friends – both queer and not queer - until they can be independent. As Mohammed (cis, bisexual, man) said, "The parents of one of my friends realised he was gay and drove him away so he was no longer in their house. He stayed with me for two to three months before he was able to get his own house."

**At societal level, discriminatory behaviour is normalised.** Many people feel unable to be open about their progressive attitudes in the face of widescale hostility which makes them worry what people will say if they are supportive of queer people and if they will think they themselves are queer. Discussion of queerness often conflates sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression with the word *dan daudu* and *yan daudu* used as insults. Queerness is seen to be more common today compared to past decades with insults and abuse expressed freely in *majalisa* conversations.

According to John (cis, gay, man), "When people talk about gay people, there is a lot of discrimination. I do not even want to bring up the issue as they think it's the devil incarnate. Sometimes, they say that gay people are not sent from God but are a different species of human beings."

" People see us as bad people, evil, *yan iska*."

– Zannah (cis, gay, man)

**Lesbian and bisexual women can experience less societal scrutiny than gay and bisexual men and *yan daudu* if their sexual orientation is unknown.** There is more tolerance for women wearing 'men's clothes,' seen as following fashion which they will grow out of upon marriage, whereas men dressing in a flashy way or in clothes gendered female is seen as proof of homosexuality. It is also more accepted for two women to be affectionate towards one another. As Hadiza (cis, lesbian, woman) said, "Lesbians are seen as people who like hellfire and that there is no sin like lesbianism [but] women tend to hardly be caught having sex unlike gay men... Women can even stay in a man's house and have sex with each other but it is hard for a man to bring another man home. People do not see two women together as suspicious in the same way as two men together." In contrast, more questions are raised, particularly for men considered to be effeminate.

**Lesbian and bisexual women face problems in finding suitors if their sexual orientation is known but are also seen as suspect if they remain unmarried.** Even if they have no romantic or sexual attraction for men, some of them wanted to marry them to fit with societal norms and be protected from censure. Others had seen the inability and/ or unwillingness of men to provide for families, the challenges mothers, sisters, and friends had with husbands, and the frequency of divorce so had no interest in marriage. Regardless of attitudes towards marriage, female respondents have trouble navigating this terrain. If they stay single for too long, they know people will wonder why and may start to look at the closeness of their relationships to other women. Those unmarried are frequently questioned by others about their single status and have set answers to provide: “Many people are wondering why I am not married but I tell them that marriage is according to Allah’s will and I will be married only when He wants.” (Fatima, cis, lesbian, woman).

“ If a man comes to marry you, people will tell him this is a lesbian and you should not marry her and so discourage him from marrying you [but] if you stay long without marriage, they will say... you are a lesbian.”

– Hadiza (cis, lesbian, woman)

**People challenging norms face verbal abuse in public spaces.** Women described being insulted as they walk on the street: “If they know that you are a lesbian, they will always talk about you as you pass and say bad things like, ‘Look at this, very beautiful woman but she makes herself a man.’” (Falmata, cis, bisexual woman). Masculinity is policed with men who talk or act in ways seen as feminine thought of as gay and facing societal censure. While this societal policing has implications for all those who do not fit gender binaristic stereotypes, it has particular salience for yan daudu. These respondents spoke of being harassed and shouted at when they wear certain clothes such as tight trousers and are seen to bleach their skin. Abacha (dan daudu) said, “I face a challenge with my voice. If I start to speak, people say, ‘This man is like a woman.’ They made fun and copy me when I was growing up. Now, it has escalated a lot. People talk about you in ceremonies, blame your mother, and spoil your family name.”

**Societal attitudes depend a great deal on socio-economic class.** Disapproval and violence fall mainly on those subjected to poverty with respondents giving many examples of wealthy and powerful men who evade repercussions even if widely known or rumoured that they are gay as long as they are relatively discreet. As Abacha (dan daudu) said, “If you have money, people cannot reject you even if you are gay. They will still respect and pray for you.”

**Queer people are subjected to entrapment, extortion, and violence.** They are asked to leave areas after their SOGIE is discovered. Significant sums of money are extorted from them. Nearly all respondents gave examples of people being severely beaten by community members after being caught engaging in same-gender sexual activity. While most

cases involved gay and bisexual men, in large part as they are more likely to be caught (see above), instances where lesbian and bisexual women faced violence were provided. While levels of entrapment, particularly using mobile telephone applications, found in southern Nigeria do not exist in Borno, there are cases where one person approaches another then arranges for a group of men to lie in wait to beat them.

**Community militia members play significant roles in policing morality, including via violence.**

For example, in a town outside Maiduguri, the kungiyar maharba (hunters) started to investigate and beat men for being gay around a decade ago. After some time, this punishment was considered insufficient so they instead began to cut off the upper part of the ear so these men would forever be identified as gay and face resulting stigma. In Maiduguri, it is yan gora members who engage in violence against people suspected of engaging in same-gender sexual activity. According to Hadiza (cis, lesbian, woman), “They suspected my friend of having sex with their women so the yan gora beat her then, together with the people of her area, took her to the police station.” We heard of at least four cases in Maiduguri where yan gora members subjected men suspected of being gay to violence until they died. In one case, a man was reported to the yan gora who stripped him, tied him to a tree, and inserted a needle in his penis. He died before the next morning. In another case, Umar spoke of how his boyfriend was severely beaten until his leg was broken. He was given medical treatment but the leg had to be amputated and he died. Umar said the yan gora of his camp were actively searching for gay men, even going so far as to shine their torches into shelters at night. As a result, many gay and bisexual men have left the camp, even if this means returning to communities where they risk AOG attacks.

“ My friend was having sex with another man whose brother found out. [Name of friend] looks feminine and is trans so the people in the area were suspecting them anyway. The brother reported my friend to the yan gora who beat them and took them to the bulama who asked [name of friend] to swear on the Qu’ran that they had never done anything with the man. [Name of friend] swore on the Qu’ran that nothing had happened but the yan gora said they would not be satisfied until [name of friend] left the area. It is very often that the yan gora do things like this.”

– Salisu [dan daudu] (They/ them pronouns are used to refer to the friend in this quote)

**In response, most yan daudu try to fit gender binaristic stereotypes.** Yan daudu respondents spoke of not wearing clothes or undertaking livelihoods gendered feminine as they had in the past and/or would like to do. They try to present in ways gendered masculine in dressing, gait, the pitch and timbre of their voice, and mannerisms. As Ali (cis, gay, man) said, “Yan daudu face a lot of discrimination. In the past, they would behave and look like women but now they are more difficult to identify as they have changed how they behave.” As a result, it can be difficult for yan daudu, particularly younger ones who have not known the relative freedom of the past or have connections forged during these times, to know one another and form community. At the same time, those who are more open find others shun their company.

“Yan daudu have problems if they show themselves to be yan daudu as opposed to hiding. Even me, if I see them, I don't like going close to them as they like showing themselves to the world. People seen with yan daudu are warned not to spend time with them or people will think you are gay.”

– Bala (dan daudu).

### **These dynamics often lead to social isolation.**

Respondents keep themselves distant from their communities and avoid social gatherings. They are also unable to meet others of diverse SOGIESC as they worry of the risks of doing so given several such gatherings have been raided by the police and attendees arrested, beaten, and/or kept in custody until they paid significant sums of money.

### **Despite discrimination and violence, many queer people have strong allies who show support and love.**

Respondents spoke of family being understanding, of friends who took them in when they were homeless, and of community members providing emotional support. Umar, (cis, bisexual, man) narrated how his childhood friends, a brother and sister, continued to stick by him despite the actions of others in their IDP camp as well as Umar's efforts to withdraw from them so they do not suffer by association. The brother is called yan daudu and insulted for being gay (he is not) while the sister's fiancé was told not to marry her. Yet not only do they continue to be supportive of him but the sister's now husband who knows about Umar's sexual orientation has tried to persuade those who verbally and physically abuse him to stop doing so.

**Queer people find loving relationships despite constraints.** Although Umar's boyfriend was killed, they had a close relationship cemented by years of friendship before his death. Zara (cis, lesbian, woman) said, “Me and [my girlfriend] are in love and I am so happy that we are together. I like everything about her.” Maryam is an intersex woman<sup>30</sup> whose boyfriend knows about her sex characteristics. They are planning to marry and build a life together.

### **Queer people face brutality, extortion, and violence from the state**

**Discovery often leads to police reporting and violence.** The police were involved in many of the examples respondents gave of community action. In some cases, officers warned people not to engage in mob violence themselves but to hand over those suspected of any form of criminality for proper investigation in line with due process. In other cases, reporting to the police resulted in more violence. Aisha (cis, lesbian, woman) spoke of two women found to be having sex after one of them had gotten married. The married woman's mother reported them to the police to punish her daughter so she would stop such activities. The police kept the two women in custody for over a week during which time officers engaged in physical violence against them.

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<sup>30</sup>Information gathered by previous research work.

**Police officers engage in mass arrests and extortion of men who have sex with men.** After the passage of the SSMPA 2014, the police raided a birthday party in Maiduguri and arrested all those they believed looked like women, asked them to point out their friends, and released the rest. They justified these arrests in court by using a falsified invitation which claimed the event was a wedding between two men, expressly forbidden under the new law. After every single one of the people arrested insisted it had been a birthday party, the judge dismissed the case due to lack of evidence. Police also search messages on the mobile telephones of people they arrest for evidence of same-gender sexual activity, in some cases noting down the names and phone numbers of all those on messaging groups for men who have sex with men. In such cases, men are told they will be held in police custody where they often experience (the threat of) violence until they give officers the names of other men engaged in same-gender sexual activity and/or pay significant amounts of money. Those men are subsequently extorted in the same way. There are fewer cases of the police extorting women in this way as women are more able to fly under the radar and as they tend to have lesser access to power and resources and so are not fruitful targets of extortion. These actions are similar to those committed by police officers in other parts of Nigeria.<sup>31</sup>

**There are men who have sex with men who serve as police informants.** These men inform of gatherings and pass on the details of those with whom they have sex. They also spoke of police officers asking them to serve as informants, offering to split money extorted. As a result, many people are wary of others and worry they will entrap and hand them over to the police for extortion, making being in community and supporting one another particularly difficult.

**Those with money, power and/or connections escape relatively unscathed.** They either pay off police officers or have powerful contacts make telephone calls. In contrast, others are kept in custody for longer periods and forced to divulge even more names before they are freed.

“ [Police officers] took me into a room with guns and sticks and teargas on the walls, handcuffed me and said I should tell the truth – they were threatening to use teargas – that I should say whether I am gay or not. I said no. Then they started beating me then I said yes.... They then started beating [me and my friends] to force us to give names of people we were having sex with... Then, they took us away from state CID to CRAC [SARS]. They were beating and flogging us, tying our hands behind our backs with handcuffs, putting teargas on us, beating us so hard that my tooth fell out. To force us to give more names of people we were having sex with. So we gave a lot of names of people. When they came, they could bail themselves with N250k, N300k. But, I didn't want anyone in my family to know what had happened so I didn't call them to bail me. I spent 6 weeks in the cells... [After they released everyone else, they said] give us your contacts so that if anyone has sex with you, you can give us the contact so we can arrest them and make money as we did with you – and we can share 50/50. They then released us. We were angry but kept quiet. We took the contact then when we were released, we threw away the paper.”

– Salisu (dan daudu)

<sup>31</sup>Please see The Initiative for Equal Rights, 2020 Human Rights Violations Report, 2020 for more information.

**Arrest by the police can lead to social ostracism long after release.** Queer people are disowned by family members, spouses, and children. Men are forced to divorce their wives and leave the family home. How they are treated by others has severe mental health impacts as well as on physical conditions such as high blood pressure and heart conditions. Respondents spoke of friends whose sexual orientations were widely disclosed after arrest dying due to these effects.

**These police actions enable extortion.** Cases where sexual partners threaten to divulge sexual orientation, share intimate photographs and video footage publicly, or report to the police if money is not handed over were said to have increased in the past two to three years.

## Queer people face discrimination and violence from armed opposition groups

“Everyone is afraid... Even people you're staying with in your own area do not accept LGBT people let alone [AOGs]”

- Mohammed (cis, bisexual man)

**Subsequent AOG leaders have preached against homosexuality, tying this to depravity linked with 'western' institutions.**

In the early days, Mohammed Yusuf said schools encouraged sexual licentiousness, specifically mentioning homosexuality, adding to general apathy in and mistrust for what is seen as 'western' education. Shekau has also spoken of homosexuality and prostitution in his preaching against immorality and societal decadence, specifying that he knows that many of the powerful men in the country are engaging in sex with other men.

**AOGs warned and targeted people seen as yan iska.** When JASDJ members were in Maiduguri and during the time they took over towns and villages, an initial letter warning people engaged in behaviour seen as immoral and telling them to change their ways was followed up by targeting killings. While this targeting mainly focused on people who drank alcohol, took drugs, went to nightclubs, and dressed in certain ways, it had a chilling impact on queer people who worried fighters would be informed about their non-normative SOGIE and come to kill them. As a result, they stopped coming together to the same both in public spaces and more privately. In one location in Maiduguri where they used to congregate openly, for example with yan daudu expressing their true gender identity, JASDJ members brought a warning letter. After that, the owner left the state and people stopped gathering there.

“Before the conflict, gay people were more open but now are more closed as [AOGs] can come and catch and kill you and nothing will happen because you are known to be gay. They have eyes everywhere and when they know you are gay, they will kill you.”

- Bala (dan daudu)

**Queer people have been chased out of areas by AOGs.** When they took over areas, people found engaging in same-gender sexual relations were told to leave. For example, Sadiq (cis, bisexual, man) recounted how a friend came to Maiduguri: “Queer people are chased out of villages...[JASDJ] caught [my friend] with his friend trying to have sex during the time \_\_\_\_\_ was taken over by them. They didn’t beat or kill him. They just sent him out of the area because he is gay and they know he is gay.” More research into AOG behaviour towards queer people in areas of control and influence is needed to ascertain how widespread such actions are.

**AOGs believe in strict gender binaries with delineated roles for women and men.**

A civil society representative recounted how an intersex woman who had been abducted by JASDJ as a child was rejected by two husbands after they discovered her sex characteristics. After the second husband told the leader the reason for the rejection, she was gendered male by the group then expected to take part in operations alongside male fighters. Her mother was threatened for gendering her child female rather than male. Once the young woman escaped the group, she reverted to female gender expression.

**Cisnormativity** is the assumption that everyone’s gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth and the organisation of society on that basis.

**Endosexism** is the assumption that there are only two biological sexes and the organisation of society on that basis. It is linked to the erasure and invalidation of intersex people and attitudes that they do not exist or should be fixed or corrected.

**Heterosexism** is the assumption that all people are heterosexual and the organisation of society on that basis.

**Despite cisnormativity, endosexism, heteronormativity, and the policing of strict gender binaries, people of diverse SOGIESC exist within AOGs.**

Respondents knew gay and bisexual men who had joined Mohammed Yusuf and who were members of both JASDJ and ISWAP. One respondent’s boyfriend joined JASDJ and tried to persuade him to do the same. Another respondent gave an instance where an AOG member used his membership of these groups to intensify his control over his boyfriend, for example killing his friends as he wanted to isolate him from social networks. Respondents saw gay men within AOGs as mostly having to hide their sexual orientation but also said that their treatment by fellow members depended a great deal on their power and status. We came

across at least one group of fighters linked to one of the two main AOGs operational in the state in which sex with male captives was common.

“ Sex with men according to the Book is the worst thing to do but they are human and have sexual pleasure and desire. Even if they do it and get caught... how they are treated depends on their power and title... Whether in the bush or in town, social class and status matters.”

–Hassan, male civil society member

**AOG fighters sexually enslave and rape men and yan daudu.**

A pattern of abductions, forced marriages, and sexual violence against women and girls is well documented.<sup>32</sup> While

sexual violence against men and yan daudu is not systematic and prevalence is unknown, multiple respondents spoke of either having been subjected to violence themselves or knowing others who were. Many times, this kind of violence seems to end with death. Respondents spoke of gay male friends who were abducted, gang raped, killed, and left on the street. The reason behind this violence and whether it is a form of punishment for behaviour seen as immoral is unknown.

### **People of diverse SOGIESC are missing from development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding programming**

#### **The environment within development, humanitarian and peacebuilding organisations was often seen as toxic**

by those who work in them with colleagues lacking understanding and/or holding discriminatory attitudes around diverse SOGIESC. Examples provided included discussion on the need for genital surgery on intersex children, homophobic gossip and rumours, and outlooks that either homosexuality is a crime and should be stopped or that discrimination on grounds of SOGIESC is unimportant as there would be no issues if people could just control themselves. Agencies are seen as not adequately supporting their queer staff or even aware of the challenges and risks they face.

#### **Development, humanitarian and peacebuilding organisations tends to be cisnormative, endosexist, and heteronormative.**

SOGIESC is not included in needs assessments and baseline studies, discussed in sector meetings, or considered as an area worthy of integration into programming. There is little analysis of or response to queer people's social exclusion and the impact it has on their lives and ability to access programming. GBV services are not accessible to queer people, including but not limited to male survivors of violence, who fear lack of understanding of their needs, judgemental attitudes by service providers, and being targeted rather than supported by criminal justice actors. Respondents working in these organisations characterised the attitudes of even progressive colleagues as believing that addressing the social exclusion of people of

“ Usman and his friend were abducted by AOG fighters while transporting goods. They were assigned to different fighters who raped them. Of the man who took him, he said, “I was like his wife and he had sex with me two times a day, sometimes three times... He was their amir... There were also other men who had taken men to have sex with – approximately 10 of the men [of this group] were doing this... The other fighters knew but... they could not talk as he could kill them if they do.” Usman’s friend was killed while escaping. After eight months, Usman ran away. A passing truck driver took him to a village where he was cared for by an old woman. She helped him to go home where he discovered his parents had died. His business was destroyed and he faced stigma for spending time with AOGs until his community leader explained that he was a victim and should not be blamed. Usman had disclosed his sexual violence to very few people and not accessed any GBV services until we referred him.”

<sup>32</sup>For example, see Amnesty International, “Our Job is to Shoot, Slaughter and Kill”: Boko Haram’s Reign of Terror in North-East Nigeria,’ AFR 44/1360/2015.

diverse SOGIESC or conducting relevant analysis to inform programming was of secondary importance. According to Fatima, a woman working for a humanitarian agency: “It’s seen as something that people derive pleasure from, not as aspect that determines their life chances and access to humanitarian aid.” Key barriers to organisations acting include lack of knowledge of how to navigate risks to organisations and people of diverse SOGIESC, unawareness of needs and realities, and fear that work on SOGIESC would be another way to discredit the interventions of NGOs and UN agencies in the context of shrinking civil society space and backlash against organisations seen to be supporting women’s agency and changes in gender relations.

“ Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding organisations don’t even look at this. The idea is that you are working on reintegration processes not LGBT but this is where peacebuilders are supposed to come in and sensitise people.”

– Tijani, male peacebuilder

# How has the space for people of diverse SOGIESC changed over time?

This section scans how space for queer people has constricted over recent decades, from a situation where, even if acceptance was not widespread, negativity and violence were less common than today.

Key dynamics and drivers of this shift include discourse around sharia and institution of sharia codes in 2000, the actions and preaching of AOGs from 2011/2012 onwards, the promulgation of the SSMPA 2014, and the social dislocations brought about by violent conflict.

**Borno has seen times of relative freedom.** While this space did not necessarily translate into acceptance and stigma existed, respondents said non-normative SOGIESC was either being never or seldom mentioned when they were younger and people had more scope to engage in the behaviours, relationships, and presentation they desired without repercussions, even if known. Opportunities for non-conformity seem to have depended on location and even neighbourhood with respondents pointing to particular parts of Maiduguri where more conservative outlooks held sway and noting how attitudes varied across the state. According to Umar (cis, bisexual, man) who reflected on his village in southern Borno, “Nobody really talked about [homosexuality] when I was a child and I knew some people doing it in my area. Back then, people did not care about what other people do.” In contrast, other respondents had different recollections: “If people heard that you were having same sex, they would insult and even beat you but nothing like that really happened as they were not looking for this but would punish you if they caught

“ It is now that they are doing serious stigma. They were not doing stigma to the same extent before.”

– Ali (cis, gay, man)

you.” (Mubarak, cis, gay, man talking about his village in northern Borno). Unfortunately, mapping how past attitudes differed across the state was beyond the scope of this study.

**Men with power and influence were more able to forestall action against queer people.** Respondents said these men acted to douse ill-feeling against people of non-normative SOGIESC, forestall arrests, or ensure release of those detained as either they were allies or engaged in samegender sexual activity themselves. Their attitudes and behaviour were said to have created an atmosphere of relative tolerance. Some of these men have died. Those who remain have less scope to navigate increasingly prevalent discriminatory attitudes and fear repercussions to themselves.

**With discourse around sharia and the institution of sharia codes in 2000, queer people saw space restricting.** Even though implementation of sharia codes in Borno was laxer than in other states, mainstream discourse around sharia in northern Nigeria was ‘not tolerant, forgiving, loving and humane’ but rather took a view that ‘the harsher the law, the deeper and more authentic it is’ with women ‘treated with disdain and made to bear the brunt of men’s insecurities.’<sup>33</sup> Respondents said these developments created a prevalent sense of fear. According to Zannah (cis, gay, man), “When sharia came and said you cannot have sex with a man and gave consequences for people caught, LGBT people were afraid. We thought we would be imprisoned or hung.” Those able to do so, particularly yan daudu, left the state. A year after the institution of sharia codes, matters relaxed. Hotels, brothels, and entertainment venues re-opened and, although fundamentalist attitudes continued to be more prevalent, the threat of violence appeared to have receded.

**The actions and preaching of AOGs had chilling effects from 2011/2012 onwards.** As described above, queer people worried of being targeted and killed for engaging in actions seen as immoral. As Bala (dan daudu) said, “Before the conflict, gay people were more open, particularly young people aged from 17 to 25 years [in age], but we are now more closed as [AOG fighters] can come and catch and kill you and nothing will happen [to them] because you are known to be gay. They have eyes everywhere and when they know you are gay, they will kill you.”

**The SSMPA 2014 increased public discourse around homosexuality and intensified normalisation of negative attitudes.** While respondents noted that significant stigma existed beforehand and that the law did not necessarily change attitudes, they believed it broke the taboo on discussing such issues and led to more surveillance and suspicion against those seen as digressing from gender and sexuality norms. According to David (cis, bisexual, man), “Now, people became more aware of it and they started to be suspicious of things they saw when they would not have thought [twice] about it before.” The SSMPA

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<sup>33</sup>Maryam Uwais, ‘Diversity of Thought in the Development of Sharia’ in Jibrin Ibrahim (ed). *Sharia Penal and Family Laws in Nigeria and in the Muslim World*, (Ahmadu Bello University Press, 2000), pp. 32-33.

also gave permission for the police and other state agents to engage in the extortion and violence described above which, unlike similar incidents in other parts of the country, is not known nationally, even among human rights activists.

**The past decade has seen increasing stigmatisation and violence.** Respondents spoke of hearing condemnations of homosexuality and gender conformity in family discussions, public conversation, and religious preaching to extents unknown in earlier eras. The normalisation of dehumanising and violent discourse has had significant impacts including several cases of mob violence and killing as well as violence by state actors.

**A prevalent narrative is that displacement and poverty has brought about more immorality, including homosexuality.** In general, there is moral panic around the changes brought about by the conflict. Most of the areas discussed, from shifts in household gender norms with men unable to provide and women taking on more household financial burdens to the prevalence of sex outside marriage with survival sex, SEA, sex work, rape, and consensual sex all grouped together, focus on women's bodies and behaviour. Another (often quieter) strand in these conversations is that poverty has pushed more men into engaging in homosexual acts in return for money. While many respondents themselves believe this to be the case and it is undeniable that economic hardship has led to more people engaging in survival sex, sex work and being sexually exploited, this narrative echoes prevalent disdain around women and girls who exchange sex for money, food, and other items. There are also rumours of 'rampant lesbianism' in IDP camps, sometimes used to discredit women and girls who remain unmarried or who are seen as being outspoken, independent, and not reliant on men. Among people displaced from outside Maiduguri, there can also be a sense that it is contact with the city that has led to such action. According to Umar (cis, bisexual, man), "They think that coming to Maiduguri led us to learn this."

“ People are talking about [homosexuality] more now than before as they find that people you wouldn't even suspect before are doing it. Before, same sex is not as much as it is now because anyone you touch now is gay and people learn it from others. Before, it was only a few people whereas everyone is into it now... If you want to have sex with a man, you can give him N1- 2k and he will have sex with you even if he is not gay. People are more desperate because of the impact of conflict on livelihoods.”

- Usman (cis, gay/ bisexual, man)

**There is belief that men penetrate other men as part of ritualistic acts to gain wealth.** Respondents were sceptical as to whether this belief is actually a motivating factor for many men who have sex with men. It could rather be a way for people to try to understand why others engage in acts they cannot understand or a way of denigrating homosexual sex and warning people not to engage in it. According to David (cis, bisexual, man), "People tag it as rituals... which people do to get money. I'm not sure this is true. Maybe it's a myth

to stop young people from doing these things [by warning to them that] if you sleep with a man, he will steal your destiny... There is the idea that if you have [penetrated another man], you are stealing their own quota [of wealth and luck].

**Boredom and crowded conditions are key factors in the rise of rumours, surveillance, and such narratives.**

The population density of IDP camps and settlements means behaviour more hidden or accepted in rural areas is now more visible. In camps and settlements with people from more than one locality residing, such talk can start due to this meeting of cultures. Umar (cis, bisexual, man) recalls the people of his town as starting to identify people as yan daudu<sup>34</sup> when they were co-located with people of another Local Government Area (LGA) and saw their men dancing in the same manner as their women during weddings. He also contrasted the situation in his southern Borno village where ‘people did not care what other people did’ to that of his IDP camp. He said, “When they were busy earning livelihoods [back home], they didn’t have the time but now [in the IDP camp] when they have nothing to do, people gossip a lot... In [name of village], people had work to do so would only gather at 9 or 10 at night to discuss so gossip did not happen but in [name of IDP camp], 90 percent of the people inside do not have anything to do but sit around and gossip [due to the lack of livelihood possibilities].” Respondents seen as engaging in homosexual activity described neighbours listening at their shelter if someone of the same gender visited to ascertain if they were having sex.

“ The conflict has made it even worse for people, especially those in IDP camps. Before, they had freedom and privacy but [they] do not anymore. People gossip a lot which spoils your name and stop you getting privileges like jobs.“

– Tijani, male peacebuilder

<sup>34</sup>Due to conflation between sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, this naming includes not only yan daudu but also men seen to have sex with other men or otherwise not meet certain norms of masculinity.

# How do people of diverse SOGIESC protect themselves and support others?

This section focuses on mutual aid and community building attempts made by queer people in Borno state as well as the barriers they face to doing so. In spite of challenges, they are keen to engage in community building, to find ways to support others, and to receive support in turn.

**Queer people act constantly to reduce suspicion and conform.** Earlier sections described how yan daudu have been forced by changing cultural mores to hide their gender identity and present in ways seen as masculine, to the extent it is difficult for them to recognise one another, heightening loneliness. Worried of mob violence and police arrests, many people of non-normative sexual orientations take considerable care to lessen risk of discovery and attendant repercussions. Sometimes, they blame others who do not follow this same strategy of secrecy. According to Musa (cis, gay, man), “Anyone caught or suspected sometimes cause it themselves as they do things and are not afraid of anyone... If you are careful, you will not be caught... so you need to calm down.”

“ I know that this gay that I am doing is not helping me so I am trying to focus on my work and my job. I am only doing this gay because I am gay.”

- Musa (cis, gay, man)

“ Sometimes, you go to imams who preach to ask them for assistance and they want to have sex with you. Nothing is proper in this life. I can be a lesbian and there is nothing wrong with this. There is no difference between this and imams who abuse their position to have sex outside marriage. We are both committing sin.”

- Hadiza (cis, lesbian, woman)

**They note the hypocrisy of societal attitudes and some decide to live life on their own terms.** Respondents noted how rich and powerful people engage in sex with people of the same gender with little consequence, with some even denouncing homosexuality publicly in contrast to their private actions. Even those who believed they were committing sin highlighted how others also engaged in actions not allowed in religion. They particularly spoke of the corruption and inequality endemic in society against which no action is taken.

**There are some attempts to provide mutual aid, advice, and support.** In the absence of formal groups, associations, or civil society organisations, examples provided included contributing money to bail others arrested for homosexual activity, providing financial support for other needs such as medical expenses, housing people made homeless by family members, giving advice on specific problems and how to minimise risk, and sharing information on sexual health. Respondents knew the importance of these support networks given how people of diverse SOGIESC were less likely to get advice and assistance from others.

**Technology is a key source of information and connection.** Respondents talked of how they educated themselves about their non-normative SOGIE by searching online and using social media. They described how knowing there were others who had similar thoughts and desires made them feel that they were not abnormal and how connecting with others via technology lessened their feelings of isolation.

**Key barriers limit the community building possible.**

Queer people worry that their SOGIE will become exposed if they spend time with others. They fear being reported them to the police in exchange for payment or due to extortion or physical violence. Attempts to build networks, for example through creating a savings and loans group, have been stopped by others. According to Salisu (yan daudu), “Before, we could do something to help ourselves. We used to gather money to give to one person... People would use this to start a business then give back the money given to them plus extra... We were doing this but the yan gora stopped us, saying we were doing women things and gay marriage [so] we can’t do anything now.”

“ When someone is in need and you are capable, you help out [but] if anything major happened that could put you at risk, nobody would help as everyone would get scared.”

– John (cis, gay, man).

**Nevertheless, there is a keen desire to do more.** Many respondents wanted to engage in community building, to find ways to support others and receive support in turn. Key priorities listed included finding ways to earn (better) incomes and be financially independent, increasing awareness of human rights and Nigerian law, training on security and safety including digital security, improving access to healthcare and GBV services, and preventing and addressing intimate partner violence in queer relationships.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has detailed the realities as pertain to people of diverse SOGIESC in conflict-affected northeast Nigeria. It has noted how they are subjected to similar (gendered) harms as other conflict-affected people, including GBV, and detailed specific additional harms they face which include marginalisation, brutality, and violence from the family, society, state, and AOGs. It has shown how space has constricted over recent decades and the desire among LGBTQI people to engage in community building in spite of the challenges they face in doing so. This paper now turns to making recommendations. While we urge taking do no harm and conflict sensitive approaches, it is clear that not acting is not an adequate response to the difficulties of working in this highly contested and sensitive area.

## **Federal and state government**

- Closely monitor reports of violations based on SOGIESC and ensure accountability for state actors, including the police, who perpetrate abuses and violence
- Avoid speaking and acting against people of diverse SOGIESC as a way to draw attention from other pressing governance issues

## **National Assembly**

- Repeal all discriminatory laws used to punish people based on SOGIESC and decriminalise relationships between consenting adults, including the SSMPA 2014
- Ensure arrest, prosecution, and punishment based on actual or perceived SOGIESC or advocacy of LGBTQI rights are prohibited
- Enact effective anti-discrimination laws that protect people of diverse SOGIESC and work to end negative stereotypes, including via sensitisation of the public and government actors

- Include sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics as constitutionally protected against discrimination in the current constitutional review

## **NHRC**

- Appoint a focal point to lead work on SOGIESC rights violations at the national level
- Track and include violations based on SOGIESC in annual human rights reports at the national level as well as in Borno state
- Institute training on gender and sexuality including SOGIESC for all employees to improve individual and institutional capacities at the national level as well as in Borno state

## **Inspector General of Police**

- Stop the arrest and extortion of and violence against people on the basis of SOGIESC
- Partner with civil society organisations to train officers in human rights, including those of people of diverse SOGIESC

## **Civil society, international NGOs, and UN agencies in the northeast**

- Investigate organisational culture and make the changes necessary so the workplace is safe and nurturing for staff of diverse SOGIESC
- Develop strategies for better SOGIESC inclusion into programming over time, including through training of staff and integration into conflict analyses, baseline studies and humanitarian assessments
- Improve access to healthcare by integrating the need for professional and non-judgemental services into engagement with health workers and institutions

- Train GBV case workers and members of the protection sector on the violence and protection risks people of diverse SOGIESC experience and develop referral pathways that provide effective and non-judgemental services

## **Human rights organisations elsewhere in the country:**

- Forge better links with people of diverse SOGIESC in the northeast and provide solidarity
- Improve awareness of realities of people of diverse SOGIESC affected by conflict among the human rights community nationally, including through bettering staff knowledge
- Ensure violations against people of diverse SOGIESC in the northeast are reflected in monitoring and human rights reporting to national, regional, and international mechanisms
- Provide human rights and security training to people of diverse SOGIESC in Borno state

## **Donors**

- Do not make threats to withhold support based on discrimination against people of diverse SOGIESC which often do more harm than good
- Hold regular discussions with LGBTQI rights activists and organisations, including those who work in the northeast, and ensure they inform decisions around funding, programming, and diplomatic engagement
- Provide multi-year and flexible funds to LGBTQI rights organisations to work with LGBTQI people in northeast Nigeria on their self-identified needs
- Support the safety, security, and well-being of human rights defenders working on LGBTQI rights to mitigate violence and ensure sustainability

# Acknowledgements

**T**his paper was written by Chitra Nagarajan based on the research she conducted with Bala Mohammed of Hope Alive Health Awareness Initiative. It was reviewed by Bala Mohammed, Bryan Weiner, Omolara Oriye, Ohotuowo Ogbeche, and Oluchi Ogwuegbu. We thank all those who gave generously of their time to be interviewed. All names used are pseudonyms.



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