

# "BREAKING BARRIERS: THE MAKE WAY PROGRAM'S IMPACT ON LBQ WOMXN AND SRHR EQUITY"

FARUG-MAKE WAY PROGRAM



Embracing  
Intersectionality  
for Health Equity  
& Justice



AKINA MAMA  
WA AFRIKA



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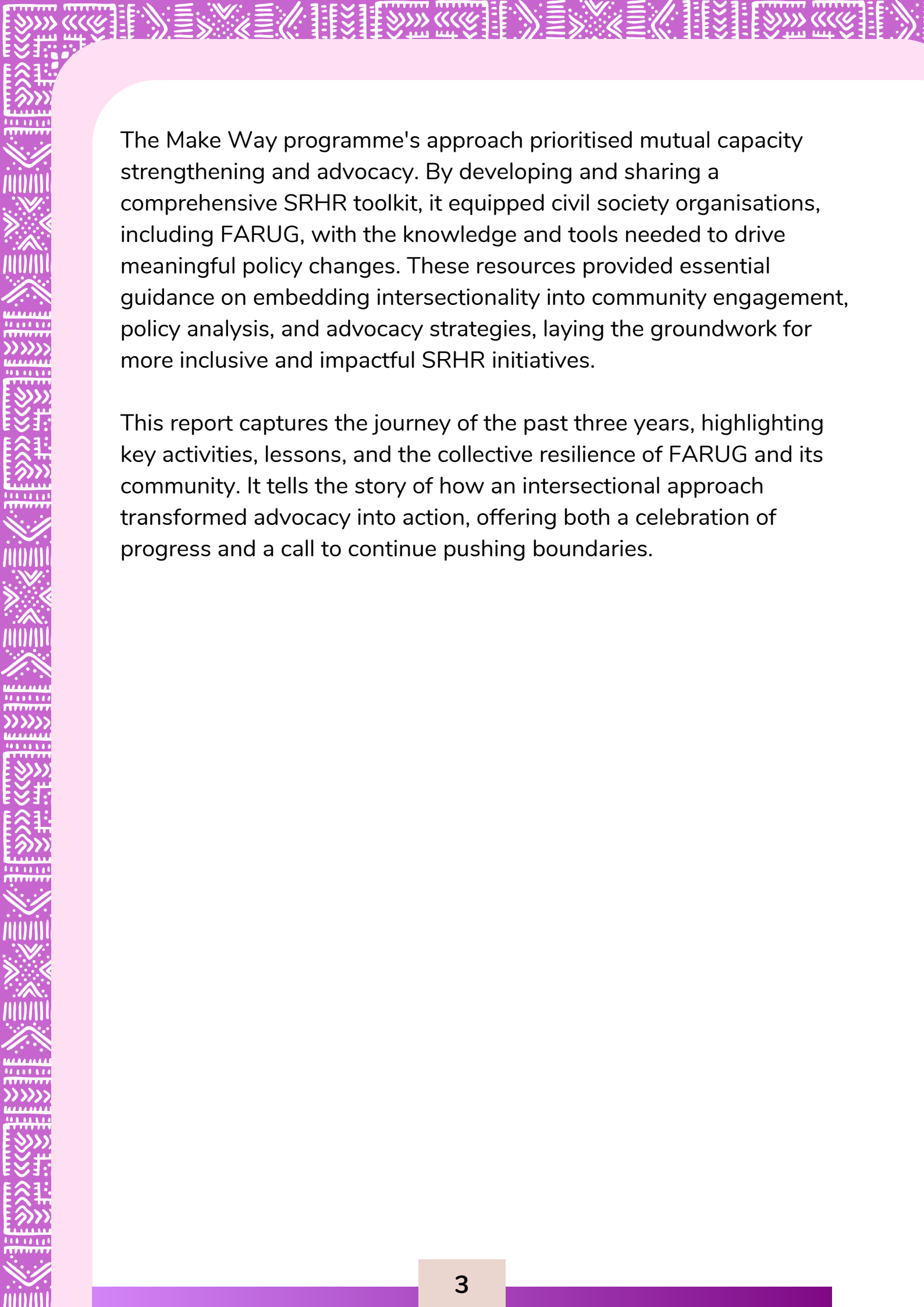


# Introduction: Reflecting on Five Years of Transformation

On a day filled with stories, reflections, and powerful insights, FARUG, Uganda's pioneering organisation advocating for the rights and well-being of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer (LBQ) womxn, commemorated the conclusion of a transformative five-year journey under the Make Way programme. This event was not only a celebration of progress but also an opportunity to critically reflect on the impact of their collective efforts in advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Uganda.

Since its inception in 2003, FARUG has worked to challenge entrenched systems of patriarchy, homophobia, and societal exclusion, building solidarity and empowerment among LBQ womxn. The organisation's commitment to addressing intersectional challenges—spanning mental health, SRHR, and gender-based violence—found a fitting partner in the Make Way programme. Together, they set out to dismantle barriers to SRHR access by employing an intersectional lens, bringing to light the compounding vulnerabilities that marginalised individuals face.

The Make Way Consortium, coordinated in Uganda by Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), brought together diverse collaborating partners, including FARUG, AWAC, and VSO, working alongside the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Implemented in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia, as well as at regional and global levels, the programme sought to address SRHR inequalities with an inclusive and intersectional approach. FARUG's role was instrumental in introducing the LBQ perspective to the consortium, which enriched the programme but also presented unique challenges. The passage of the Anti-Homosexuality (AHA) Bill in 2023 led some partners to withdraw from the consortium, significantly affecting the implementation of certain activities.



The Make Way programme's approach prioritised mutual capacity strengthening and advocacy. By developing and sharing a comprehensive SRHR toolkit, it equipped civil society organisations, including FARUG, with the knowledge and tools needed to drive meaningful policy changes. These resources provided essential guidance on embedding intersectionality into community engagement, policy analysis, and advocacy strategies, laying the groundwork for more inclusive and impactful SRHR initiatives.

This report captures the journey of the past three years, highlighting key activities, lessons, and the collective resilience of FARUG and its community. It tells the story of how an intersectional approach transformed advocacy into action, offering both a celebration of progress and a call to continue pushing boundaries.



# The Journey: Year-by-Year Narrative

## 2022: Foundations Laid

The year 2022 marked the implementation of the Make Way programme, with FARUG launching pivotal activities that set the tone for the three-year journey. These initiatives included Queering SRHR, the Training of Trainers, and the development of an SRHR Advocacy Strategy. These programmes aimed to empower LBQ youth to participate actively in SRHR decision-making and advocacy spaces while crafting a clear roadmap to guide interventions for LBQ youth over the subsequent years.

Despite the bold ambitions of the programme, challenges abounded. Resistance from conservative community leaders, logistical constraints, and the deeply entrenched stigma surrounding LGBTQ+ rights made the work uphill. However, these obstacles underscored the necessity of the initiative, pushing FARUG and its partners to persevere and adapt, ensuring meaningful participation and representation of LBQ womxn in the SRHR discourse.

## Empowering Advocates: The Training of Trainers Initiative

One of the standout activities of 2022 was the Training of Trainers initiative, which served as a launching pad for the next generation of LBQ SRHR advocates. Two exemplary voices emerged from this programme:

### Christine Ankunda: Pioneering Youth Panel Leadership

Christine Ankunda, a Youth Panel member representing LBQ womxn, shared her transformative journey with the Make Way programme.

The Youth Panel brought together representatives from three marginalised groups: LBQ womxn, individuals with disabilities, and those from hard-to-reach rural areas. Christine's role as an LBQ representative gave her a unique opportunity to address SRHR disparities and empower her community.

Her advocacy extended beyond her immediate circles, reaching those without access to the spaces she had. She recounted the challenges of the 2023 Youth Action Baraza in Kalangala, an event the Youth Panel organised. Despite logistical hurdles and the sensitivity of SRHR topics, Christine's resilience shone through.

The programme enhanced her SRHR knowledge, equipped her with movement-building skills, and offered her the chance to mentor future advocates, including her successor, Hannah Nakigudde.

### **Hannah Nakigudde: Carrying the Torch**

Hannah Nakigudde, the current LBQ representative on the Youth Panel, epitomises the impact of intergenerational mentorship. Having started as a Youth Champion mentored by FARUG, Hannah took up the baton with passion and purpose. Her involvement with Make Way opened her eyes to the interconnected challenges faced by diverse communities.

Her advocacy journey reached new heights when she represented Uganda at the NGO United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). As a passionate advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, youth empowerment, and women's rights, Hannah found the CSW to be the perfect platform to deepen her knowledge and amplify youth voices. Her presence at this global stage underscored the importance of including marginalised voices in international dialogues on equality and justice. She also participated in a panel discussion on decolonising queerness and disability at a Beijing +30 agenda side event. She also partook in FARUG's documentary screening, "Women's Advocacy for Voice and Empowerment in Uganda", showcasing feminist collaboration in pursuing LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality.

Her work extends to localising SRHR services, destigmatising menstruation, and collaborating with cultural and religious leaders to challenge harmful norms. These experiences have sharpened her understanding of SRHR research and advocacy, enabling her to respond effectively to diverse community needs and contexts.

## Advocates in Action: Applying the Knowledge

The ripple effect of the Training of Trainers was evident as participants applied their knowledge to make tangible changes:



### Starting Organisations

One advocate established a new organisation focusing on SRHR and advocacy (African Queer Network)



### Amplified Voices

Equipped with confidence and knowledge, advocates now eloquently represent LBQ issues and challenge exclusionary practices.



### Debunking Myths

Advocates dispelled misconceptions about LBQ womxn, such as the belief that they cannot contract HIV/AIDS or desire children, redirecting communities to accurate information and SRHR services.



### Creating Awareness

Awareness campaigns highlighted available SRHR services at key population clinics and drop in centres, bridging gaps in accessibility.

The first year of implementing the programme laid a solid foundation for subsequent activities. The mentorship, knowledge-building, and advocacy that emerged from 2022 proved that even amidst resistance, empowered voices could carve pathways for inclusion and progress.

## 2023: Movement Building

The Uganda Lesbian Forum (UGALEF) was a milestone moment for FARUG, as it marked 20 years of groundbreaking work in LBQ organising and advocacy, not only in Uganda but across the African region. This celebration of two decades of resilience and impact created a space for meaningful engagement, learning, and community building among LBQ womxn and allies. One of the highlights of UGALEF was the interactive session led by Dr Malik. His engaging approach to discussing topics like safe sex, pleasure, and consent left a lasting impression on participants. There was a counsellor and a gynecologist present as well to offer advice on mental, emotional well-being and reproductive health, respectively.

### Key Takeaways and Experiences

UGALEF proved to be more than just a forum, it was a transformative space where participants explored new ideas, challenged existing beliefs, and found a sense of belonging. Here are the standout experiences from the event:

### Deepening Understanding of Safe Sex Practices

The forum provided a refreshed look at safe sex, going beyond traditional narratives. Participants discovered practical, innovative ways to enhance intimacy while safeguarding their health. For many, these sessions were eye-opening, offering new techniques and reshaping their perceptions.

### The Power of Consent

The conversation on consent was a game-changer. Attendees delved into its nuances, reflecting on their past interactions and embracing the need to seek and respect consent, even in established relationships. While some acknowledged they were still on this journey, the session ignited a shift towards more respectful and informed interactions.

### Strengthening Personal Relationships

With new found knowledge on consent, participants began engaging their partners in meaningful dialogues about intimacy and boundaries. This not only led to greater mutual understanding but also strengthened communication within relationships.

## Forging Connections and Friendships

UGALEF was a hub for networking, where attendees built new relationships and reinforced existing ones. The forum's welcoming atmosphere encouraged open discussions on sensitive topics, from relationship dynamics to the often-overlooked subject of menopause.

## A Dose of Wellness with Zumba Dance

The zumba dance sessions were a highlight, blending movement, fun, and community spirit. Participants left these sessions feeling energised and connected, proving that wellness activities are as much about the mind and heart as the body.

## Participant Reflections

Discussions on consent resonated so deeply that many attendees advocated for its continued exploration in future forums. The topic's transformative potential was clear, sparking personal growth and broader awareness.

The menopause session debunked long-held myths and introduced conversations that had long been absent in LBQ spaces, marking a significant step forward in addressing health and life-stage concerns.

While the forum's sessions were enriching, participants left with one key request: more time. The call for an extended event underscored the hunger for continuous learning and engagement within such a supportive space.

UGALEF's success lies not just in the knowledge shared but in the sense of community and empowerment it fostered, proof that spaces like these are vital for collective growth. As FARUG celebrated this milestone year, UGALEF emerged as a testament to the power of creating safe, inclusive, and dynamic spaces for LBQ womxn to learn, connect, and thrive.



# 2024: Research and Resilience

<https://faruganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/AHA-RESEARCH-FOR-LBQ-WOMXN.pdf>

The Anti-Homosexuality Bill brought profound challenges, creating an environment of fear and isolation for many LBQ womxn. In response, FARUG spearheaded a critical research project to assess the impact of the law on access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services for LBQ womxn. This initiative not only documented lived realities but also amplified voices often ignored in mainstream discourse.

## Key Insights and Community Reflections

The research process was participatory, with respondents actively contributing to validation meetings to ensure the findings authentically represented their voices and experiences. Many appreciated the opportunity to see their perspectives reflected in the final report, which became a reliable resource for advocacy and citation.

For one participant, speaking on behalf of LBQ womxn living with HIV/AIDS during the validation process was an empowering moment. Another noted how presenting insights from the research during an X Space event boosted their confidence to engage more actively in advocacy, highlighting how the initiative not only captured stories but also fostered resilience and capacity building among participants.

## Strategic Recommendations for SRHR Access

The research provided not just insights but also a roadmap for navigating the challenging legal and social climate surrounding SRHR for LBQ womxn. The community's resilience and innovative spirit shone through in the proposed strategies, which emphasized both collective action and technological advancement.

Strengthening Peer-to-Peer Models was highlighted as a cornerstone for growing support and spreading knowledge within the community. Participants emphasized the importance of leveraging peer

networks to provide relatable, grassroots education, reinforcing the idea that trusted voices make the most significant impact.

Recognizing the importance of inclusivity, suggestions for Information Dissemination revolved around creating accessible summaries of physical session learnings. By making this content available online, participants aimed to bridge gaps for those abroad or unable to attend, ensuring no one is left behind.

Another significant recommendation was to amplify Global Representation. Community members called for LBQ womxn to occupy decision-making spaces on international platforms, ensuring their lived realities inform policies while building alliances that support their advocacy work.

Lastly, technology solutions emerged as a forward-thinking strategy. An envisioned app dedicated to SRHR would feature interactive elements like trivia games, educational content, and a directory of accessible services. This tool, they imagined, would empower users with knowledge while bridging critical gaps in access to care.

These recommendations not only chart a path forward but also exemplify the community's commitment to creating sustainable solutions in the face of adversity. Through collaboration, innovation, and strategic engagement, they continue to carve out spaces where every voice matters and every need is met.

## **Building Capacity Amid Adversity**

Despite the daunting context of the Anti-Homosexuality Law, this research initiative exemplified resilience. By documenting the struggles and triumphs of LBQ womxn, it not only informed advocacy but also cultivated a renewed determination to pursue equality and dignity in accessing SRHR services. Through these efforts, FARUG reaffirmed the power of community-led research as a catalyst for change and empowerment.

# 2025: Reflections and Learnings – SRHR Podcasts

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJkBLzElMupfZKRx9Lq0C2g>

As the Make Way programme neared its conclusion, FARUG's SRHR-focused podcasts emerged as a powerful tool for advocacy and connection. These podcasts carved out a unique space where LBQ women could share their stories, unpack complex topics, and connect with listeners worldwide. They became particularly significant in highlighting key advocacy dates, such as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, Lesbian Visibility Day, and International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), providing a platform for underrepresented voices to resonate far beyond Uganda.

Through these episodes, contributors discovered new ways to amplify their narratives. One participant reflected on how the platform boosted her confidence, saying it helped her articulate community issues in public spaces with newfound clarity. The podcasts not only shared stories but also forged connections, inspiring networks that extended well beyond the programme's immediate reach. Contributors also noted how the episodes became invaluable resources, often citing them in proposals and advocacy work.

The discussions hosted within the podcasts shifted perspectives in profound ways. Topics such as safe sex and consent didn't just educate listeners they spurred action. For one contributor, speaking about safe sex during an episode became a commitment to live by those principles. Another described the podcasts as a mirror, reflecting the need to embody the change they championed.

Yet, the impact of the podcasts wasn't limited to their reach. Careful thought went into their distribution, with contributors emphasising the importance of selectively sharing episodes to protect the safety and anonymity of their community members.



This balance of advocacy and caution underscored the delicate realities of their work.

Reflecting on the experience, one participant remarked, *“Sharing my story felt empowering. it was a reminder that our voices matter.”* Another added, *“It’s not just about talking; it’s about living the change we want to see.”*

One participant reflected on how the forum ignited her passion for writing and storytelling. Inspired by the discussions, she proposed creating a storytelling chain with prompts that resonated deeply with the group. These included:

- *“SRHR is a journey...”*
- *“If all selves cared for SRHR...”*
- *“I am committing myself to...”*

Participants would share their individual responses to these prompts, which she planned to weave into a collective poem. The idea beautifully encapsulated the essence of shared experiences, merging diverse voices into a single tapestry of reflection

This is what emerged.

*SRHR is a journey that has helped me know my rights.*

*A journey best explored with wisdom.*

*A journey to life, hence good health and vice versa.*

*A journey of awareness, empowerment and choice.*

*Ensuring every individual has the right to make informed decisions about their body, health and future.*

*If all selves cared for SRHR, then prevention would be better than a cure.*

*If all selves cared for SRHR, we would have a healthier community.*

*If all selves cared for SRHR, we would live in a world where dignity, equity and health are not privileges but universal rights accessible to all.*

*I am committing myself to self-love.*

*I am committing myself to learning more about SRHR, but also creating and raising awareness.*

*I am committing myself to mobilising communities to walk the SRHR journey with wisdom.*

*I am committing myself to sharing my knowledge on how to make reusable pads in non-reachable areas in my community.*

*I am committing myself to disseminating information on mpox in my community.*

*I am committing myself to grow and thrive with every step. I promise to stay true.*

*My heart beats with strength with a commitment to love.*

Looking forward, the community envisions building on this legacy. Ideas include developing a dedicated app to house SRHR content and using the platform to explore emerging issues while fostering new collaborations. These reflections affirm the podcasts' role as a dynamic space for dialogue, connection, and transformation, ensuring that the work started here continues to thrive.

## **SRHR Community Safe Spaces**

The SRHR community safe spaces served as sanctuaries for LBQ women, providing platforms for meaningful discussions on SRHR autonomy and the emerging issue of Mpox. These gatherings were not just about exchanging information but fostering (using an alternative synonym) a sense of belonging, resilience, and empowerment in a world often hostile to their identities.

### **Key Learnings from the Safe Spaces**

#### **Understanding the Impact of External Policies**

The conversation delved into the repercussions of the USAID funding freeze under Donald Trump's administration, a decision that sent ripples through the LGBTQ+ community globally and particularly in Uganda. Programs supporting LBQ women were suspended, essential healthcare services disrupted, and jobs lost, leaving vulnerable populations even more precariously positioned. These discussions highlighted the systemic challenges and underscored the resilience needed to sustain advocacy and service delivery amidst such setbacks.

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### **Recognition of Inclusive Collaboration**

Participants commended the Make Way program for its relatively inclusive and supportive partnerships compared to other projects where LBQ women are frequently marginalised. This recognition reinforced the importance of aligning with partners who genuinely respect and uplift LBQ voices

### **Knowledge Expansion and Application**

- **On Safe Spaces:** Attendees deepened their understanding of what constitutes a safe space and its role in addressing discrimination and funding inequities.
- **On SOGIE:** Enhanced knowledge on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression equipped participants to support others. For instance, one attendee guided a young person questioning their sexuality and provided a safe, affirming environment.

- **On Mpox:** Information about Monkeypox was disseminated widely among attendees and their families, coupled with education on identifying credible information sources.

### **Emotional and Social Benefits**

The safe spaces not only facilitated learning but also bolstered emotional well-being. Participants spoke of enhanced self-awareness, reduced stress, and a stronger sense of community. They shared stories, learned from each other's experiences, and found solace in collective strength.

### **Amplifying Voices in Advocacy**

The safe spaces also empowered individuals to claim their place in decision-making arenas. Maria, inspired by the discussions, voiced her frustrations about unsupportive project partners. Her persistence led to her inclusion in spaces of real influence, where she could advocate for equitable support.

These safe spaces transcended their immediate purpose, evolving into hubs of transformation and solidarity. By addressing practical needs and emotional resilience, they laid the groundwork for a more empowered LBQ community ready to navigate complex SRHR challenges.

### **The SRHR Learning Baraza**

As the Make Way Program drew to a close, the SRHR Learning Baraza became the stage for heartfelt reflections, spirited discussions, and shared insights. This gathering wasn't merely a closing ceremony; it was a mosaic of stories, lessons, and lived experiences, illuminating the program's impact over the years.

### **A Gathering of Minds and Hearts**

The Baraza brought together a diverse group of participants activists, community leaders, healthcare providers, and beneficiaries each with a unique perspective on how the program had shaped their understanding and approach to SRHR.

Attendees exchanged stories of resilience, growth, and collective advocacy, painting a vivid picture of how far the community had come.

### Stories of Change

One participant, inspired by their journey with the program, shared how they had grown from a hesitant observer to a vocal advocate in SRHR spaces. Through the Make Way Program, they had gained the confidence to challenge harmful narratives and present new ones. advocacy.

Another shared how the program's emphasis on intersectionality enabled them to connect SRHR with broader social justice issues, fostering a deeper commitment to advocacy.

### Learning Together, Growing Together

Discussions at the Baraza ranged from policy advocacy to community education, with participants candidly reflecting on both successes and setbacks. They explored innovative ways to maintain the momentum of the program, such as creating knowledge-sharing platforms and expanding access to SRHR resources.

### Celebrating Collective Impact

The Baraza was also a moment to celebrate. From personal milestones to collective achievements, participants honored the strides made in advancing SRHR for LBQ women, despite the challenges of a hostile legal and social environment.

While the Learning Baraza marked the conclusion of the Make Way Program, it also planted seeds for the future. Participants left with a renewed sense of purpose, equipped with the knowledge and networks to continue advocating for SRHR in their communities.

In essence, the Learning Baraza was not an ending but a transition,



a reminder that the journey toward SRHR equity is ongoing, powered by the voices and stories of those determined to make a difference.

# Challenges and Recommendations

## Challenges Encountered

The Make Way Program unfolded against a backdrop of systemic barriers, entrenched stigma, and glaring resource gaps. These challenges, though formidable, illuminated the resilience of LBQ women and their allies in navigating hostile terrain:

- **Systemic Barriers:** Policies such as Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Law created a chilling effect, restricting access to SRHR services and making advocacy efforts perilous.
- **Stigma and Discrimination:** Deep-seated prejudices often hindered LBQ women from seeking services or participating in public discussions.
- **Resource Gaps:** A persistent lack of funding and essential resources impeded the ability to scale impactful interventions.

# Community-Inspired Recommendations

Despite the hurdles, participants proposed actionable strategies to address these challenges and sustain progress:



01

## Policy Advocacy

Amplify efforts to challenge discriminatory laws and advocate for inclusive policies that safeguard LBQ women's rights.



02

## Education and Awareness

Strengthen peer-to-peer learning models and community-based educational initiatives to dispel myths and combat stigma.



03

## Technological Solutions

Develop digital platforms to disseminate SRHR information, connect individuals to services, and foster community engagement.



04

## Global Representation

Encourage LBQ women to take up leadership roles in global decision-making spaces, ensuring their voices influence policy and funding decisions.



05

## Resource Mobilisation

Build partnerships with progressive donors and organisations to secure sustainable funding and mitigate resource gaps.

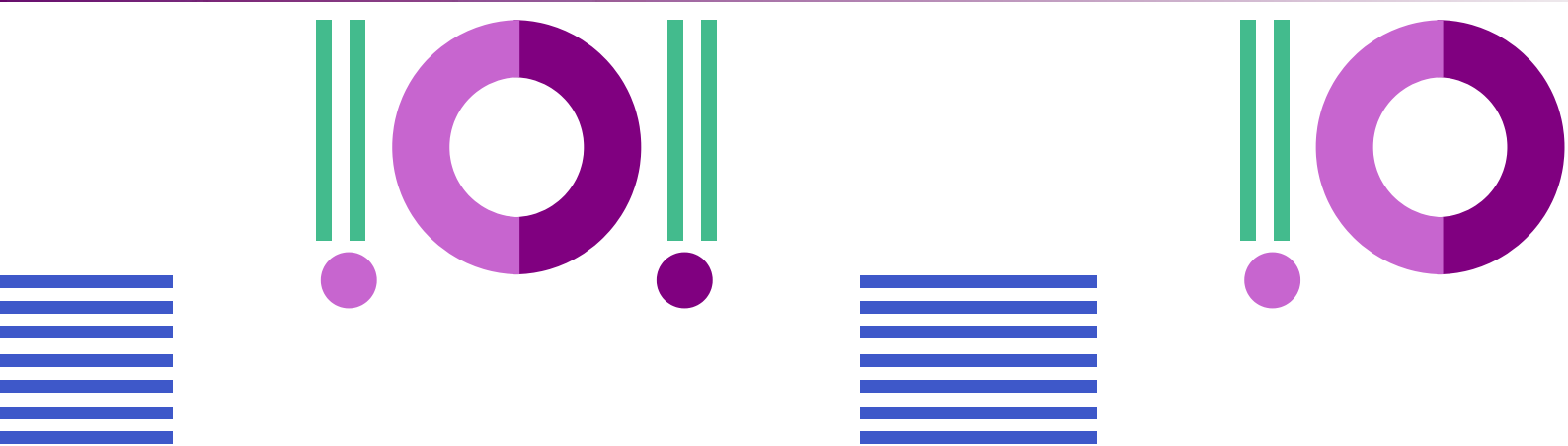
## Conclusion: The Road Ahead

The Make Way Program has been an extraordinary journey of transformation, empowerment, and resilience. Its impact resonates deeply, not only in the lives it touched but also in the strategies and solutions it inspired. To the Make Way Program and its collaborators, we extend heartfelt gratitude for their dedication, innovation, and commitment to advancing SRHR for LBQ women in Uganda.

Through providing safe spaces, amplifying voices, and creating growth opportunities, the program has left an indelible mark. Its initiatives have equipped LBQ women with knowledge, confidence, and networks to challenge societal barriers and assert their rights.

As we reflect on the achievements, the call to action remains clear: to build on this foundation, sustain advocacy efforts, and continue working toward a future where SRHR equity is not an aspiration but a reality. The Make Way Program's legacy will serve as a guiding light, inspiring continued progress and hope for generations to come.





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