

HOMOSEXUALS ARE HUMAN BEINGS LIKE YOU AND ME AND DESERVE DIGNITY

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INTRODUCTION:

Sexual minorities, homosexuals, gays, bum-shafters, sodomites..... these are some of the names by which people who engage in same sex relations are known by. If one showed a v-sign in some European countries, it would be similar to showing a middle finger sign by Americans. Two men greeting each other by hugging in some countries would be construed differently from say, among some African countries where it is a form of salutation. All these are ways showing how people relate. Relations among different sexes, different genders, or same sexes and same gender are on many different planes. Criminalising homosexuality will stifle how people of same sex relate. It will stifle initiative and natural spontaneity among humans. People will be careful with their handshakes. People will interpret any form of same sex relations as homosexuality. This will in turn be basis for suspicion of people of same sex living in same quarters; enjoyment of their lives will be tampered with. There are self-help organisations seeking to set an agenda for service provision and hopes to improve on the status of Sexual Minorities. Sexual Minorities are faced with insecurity and this impacts on decision-making, healthy practices, economic and social development.

Without providing an environment within which Sexual Minorities enjoy respect, self esteem, fundamental rights, and where their violation is sanctioned, Sexual Minorities cannot realize their economic and social development.

One of the most important fundamental rights is the principle of non-discrimination, through which every individual enjoys the fundamental rights and freedoms set out in the various international instruments without regard to gender, professions and belief.

DEMYSTIFYING HOMOSEXUALITY:

Under Ugandan Law, minorities have been considered (Article 36 of the Constitution of Uganda). In this same constitution all persons should not be discriminated against and are equal before the law (Article 21, clause 1, 2, 3). Any one has the right to associate (Article 29). However, the disconnect arises when; statistical majority is basis of conformity and right; when it is thought that all homosexuals are immoral, not law abiding citizens and all they do is engage in sexual intercourse and therefore formal marriage for them is denied (Article 31, clause 2a); when homosexuals are de-humanised and called all sorts of names; when no reference of need of a family setting is made setting grounds for cases like detention with intent for sex assumed (Article 31); when there is assumption made that homosexuality is related to paedophile setting grounds for conspiracy to defile (Section 129 Penal code, 2007). Homosexuality is illegal and is penalised by Criminal Law (Section 145 Penal Code, 1906). This exposes sexual minorities to risk of violent repression. In Uganda, there are different forces that impact differently on this kind of activity ranging from; perception

that sexual minorities "need rehabilitation", attribution of homosexuality as a culpable offence, outright state mistrust for activities concerning same sex issues and arbitrary arrests. This is what organisations friendly to same sex persons should understand and therefore first address.

UN-MET NEEDS:

It can be concluded that the situation within which same sex orientation prevails is alarming in Uganda.

As well as the discrimination resulting from this repression, the stigmatization and rejection of Sexual Minorities has impacted on their holistic health and in turn public health. People who have sexual relations may not bargain/negotiate for safer sex and therefore present a higher risk of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. Public health problems are linked to development, making the situation of Sexual Minorities doubly important. Many sexual minorities have a backlog of traumatic experiences unattended to (eviction, shamed, expulsion, ridiculed, poor employable skills, poor integrative skills in their communities) they therefore may have coped with these problems and this may present a different way they need to be handled.

The fight against discrimination and empowering same sex oriented persons through organised formal activity groups is one step to bring their voices to a platform where they are galvanised into action for self-development.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Involving Sexual Minorities in the conceptualization, design and inception of projects that are friendly and emphasize social values and belief practices.
- Avail choices and explore means of engaging Sexual Minorities as persons deserving dignity and whose rights need to be addressed. There is need to mobilise same sex oriented persons in formal groups with an agenda that demands formally; health, empowerment, Legal reforms, and psychosocial support (HELPS Model).
- Engage security agencies and "rehabilitation homes" in understanding handling of same sex oriented persons not as offenders but as human beings. This will decrease on abuses that these persons are arbitrarily subjected to.
- Take steps to engage Sexual Minorities in active participation, enjoyment of rights to free choice of profession, life, access to health information, care including integrated sexual/reproductive/ maternal health, post-abortion care and education, association among themselves and other networks.

- Provide friendly methods that allow Sexual Minorities' experiences to be heard. This will encourage evidence-based programming and application of best practices.
- Engage media to reduce shameful reporting by the press and ridiculing in the society.
- Mobilise Sexual minorities to benefit from seminars and workshops that will improve on their understanding of policy and programming that impacts on their welfare as a form of capacity building.