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# VOICE, VISIBILITY AND COLLECTIVE ORGANIZING POWER

LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND QUEER WOMXN



--- COLLECTIVE HEALING , LOVE AND CARE ---

THE OPEN SOCIETY INITIATIVE   
FOR EASTERN AFRICA

JANUARY 2022

# WHO WE ARE

Meet our organization, Freedom and Roam–FARUG. We are the first Ugandan Lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) womxn’s membership organization. We have a fierce, enduring commitment and see ourselves as an organization that generates alternatives and creates transformative change. Our organization is a nurturing haven for minds, bodies and souls and one in which the struggle for human rights and dignity intentionally collide. We fearlessly promote, demand and protect the rights and wellbeing of LBQ womxn; most of whom are excluded, marginalized and exploited for exercising their right to choose whom to love.



# WHO IS FARUG?

My name is Freedom and Roam, but feel free to call me FARUG. I was born in 2003, as a sister to the women’s movement. I was conceived by three valiant, radical feminists (mothers). My entry into the world was not easy. It was firm and belligerent. A stark reminder that the impact of patriarchy and homophobic beliefs is too far reaching to be dismantled by a meek, quiet, docile, and conformist child who comes into the world without a fight.

Unlike many in the women’s movement, the circumstances surrounding my birth were difficult.

My collective mothers were isolated, each in her own corner facing profound discrimination, hatred, and backlash from religious, social, and political conservatives. As if this was not enough, they were facing coercion and arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life.

# BORN WITH A MISSION

Each time they ran full speed, they crashed into religious fundamentalism[i], homophobia, patriarchy and heteronormativity; then fell back and met violence. In their struggle for freedom, they were abused, cut, and bruised till they came to the realization that the challenges were too daunting and that if they did not organize, they would die quietly, alone and dejected.

They badly needed to build a critical mass of human defenders, able to use the power of numbers to demand change. During my work with them, they made it clear that it was my duty to work with others who wanted the freedom to roam. This would help me build a collective because, feminism; the soul of what I am, is collective.

While my mothers were pregnant, a song was composed in preparation for my birth. It was a soul song about a world where the rights, dignity, and freedom of LBQ persons are guaranteed and respected. A world where sexual diversity is normalized. I was hence born with a mission to organize LBQ womxn to demand recognition for sexual diversity, freedom to roam', dignity, justice, and equality. I was born to create autonomous and brave spaces for LBQ womxn, to collectively fight for freedom from violence while acquiring the tools to understand power and how power operates to either oppressor emancipate. In the women's movement, I was a threat for some but a breath of fresh air for others. Many remained hesitant to work upon issues of sexual identity and gender orientation. This left an empty colorful chair which I boldly and courageously sat on and joined the rest of my sisters. Some, in the movement, struggled to accept the color of my chair, but have finally accepted that no matter the color of the chair, we are co-travelers fighting for every woman's rights without judging. Today this collective continues to be built; having been replaced with the US/WE, the collective, the feminist and LBQ womxn's movement.

# GROWTH

We are barely a small LBQ organization anymore. Our function as a crucible and as a political and ideological home for LBQ womxn's rights is well known and appreciated in civil society. We are eager to learn, take risks, we are enthusiastic and boisterous, to say the least, and we disrupt the status quo, and embrace all LBQ womxn. We are bursting with energy but also face fear, for the more visible we are, the more frequent the homophobic attacks. We have experienced serious challenges, especially those pertaining to operating in a disempowering context. Some of which include; raising money for an organization whose activities are not necessarily visible to those who are not affected by homophobia. Along the way, we experienced transition hurdles as well. Over the years, we have gathered a community of activists, leaders, facilitators, thinkers, healers and feminist witches [1] to support us in searching, visioning, dreaming, daring, communicating and doing.

Additionally, we have built a diverse and inclusive alliance with a broader group of stakeholders who have joined in our mission of increasing investments—financial, social and political – for LBQ womxn. The alliances joined us in fighting the Uganda homosexuality bill [2].

We have strengthened LBQ womxn's leadership, promoted their sexual and reproductive health and rights especially challenging prejudice, taboos and stigma; increased their visibility, enabled them to access resources, rights and freedoms and expanded grass root organizing. While inequality, homophobia and hatred are deepening, it is impressive to see just how much we have contributed to change in the ways our strategy defined it, in very tangible ways. As a matter of fact, many LBQ organizations have been born and most were inspired by us.

**Mission:** Is to strengthen and mobilize the voice, visibility, and collective organizing power of LBQ womxn in order to change the norms, institutions, policies and practices that perpetuate inequality, homophobia, heteronormativity and violence in both the public and private arenas.

**Vision:** A world where being an LBQ womxn is normal. Our identity is inescapably feminist, we value and work to increase the voice, visibility and collective organizing power of LBQ womxn.

[1] Witches are powerful women who are not afraid of patriarchy and its power. They were feared and demonized by colonialists

# RADICAL LESBIAN FEMINISM

Radical feminist approach names and exposes oppressive power, with the purpose of building collective, shared power. The only way to achieve liberation is to address the root causes of oppression through radical humanity dedicated to women in the context of our relationships to ourselves and each other for radically reordering society in which patriarchy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts. Shaped by a radical African feminist understanding, our work highlights:

- A radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts.
- The primary element of patriarchy is a relationship of dominance, where one party is dominant and exploits the other, for the benefit of the former.
- Men (as a class) use social systems and other methods of control to keep women (and non-dominant men) suppressed.
- Seeking to abolish patriarchy by challenging existing social norms and institutions, believing that eliminating patriarchy will liberate everyone.

# VOICE AND VISIBILITY

Visibility, presence, and the exercise of the agency are necessary responses to contexts that deny the existence of lesbians and SOGIE in general. In some instances, the assertion that African lesbians do not exist has been disrupted, leading to attacks and backlash. It remains vitally necessary for us to be visible in-country and regional spaces where being LGBTQI continues to be invisibilised, labeled 'un-African' or met with violence.

# AUTONOMY AND FREEDOM

## COLLECTIVE POWER

- Collective lesbian power looks like;
- Authenticity and kindness with and to ourselves and each other;
- Respectful communication, sharing knowledge and active listening to ourselves and each other;
- Connecting with and supporting each other and ourselves emotionally, creatively and intellectually;
- Self and collective presence in thought, speech and action to reflect feminist processes and practices, particularly in relation to our relationships with ourselves and each other;
- Taking time to acknowledge rather than in capacity and debility as a place from which to live and work, and supporting each other to find and own our position of power; process and release trauma.
- Considering our relative positions of power
- Knowing our strength, using them and playing the particular roles each of us find meaningful;
- In the fight against oppression, to ensure we do not oppress ourselves or each other, particularly in relation to ensuring that ours is not an 'elitist' and excluding feminist movement;
- Living with joy, creativity, pleasure and friendship.

# DROP-IN INTERVENTIONS

Our work is not always conventional. When you come to our organization you might find our members sitting outside and enjoying a cup of tea. They do not visit because they are redundant, they come to hear and feel the words; 'you are not alone. You are seen. We are with you. We run a drop-in center where LBQ womxn can drop in to access Sexual and reproductive health, mental health, counseling

**Mental health** includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It is affected by how we think, feel, and act. It further helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood to adolescence all the way through adulthood.

**Mini-Clinic** is our in house clinic, where people can come in and access health services.

**Counseling** can provide people with the opportunity to share their views, be heard, and gain new perspectives on their situation and experiences. It can help people to gain clarity surrounding issues. Counseling is one of the mental health tools used to deal with a broad range of issues and problems that you may be facing.

# OUR COMMITMENTS

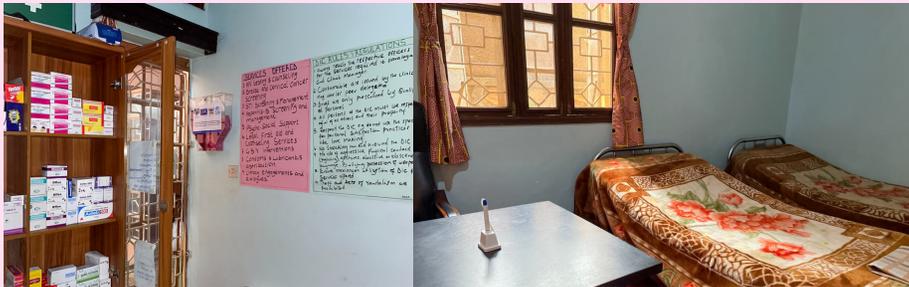
It can help one deal with stress, anxiety and depression.

Counselling can provide you with the opportunity to reassess or set new goals in your life and help you to gain clarity and direction.

Counselling can be used to address issues and problems within your relationship or provide mediation between you and your partner.

For counselling services, call **0757709096**

**Legal aid clinic** ; This links those in need of legal representation to lawyers, Legal information, Legal first aid, e.g. mediation, and dispute resolution and mediation and negotiation



- **Expanding our work beyond the “sexuality”;** Context everything. There is not a single approach that can address the full nature of our rights but even then, we start from where our members are and their day-to-day experiences as both a source of knowledge and a primary site for transformation. The process involves learning to question and challenge the explanations for why things are the way they are and what is “normal” – perpetually seeking a deeper understanding of power and inequality from the intimate and personal to the more public realms of decision making at the national and international levels. This is the foundation of developing critical consciousness—an explicit goal of feminist popular education. Critical consciousness, along with hope and solidarity, sustains us and the members’ active involvement and capacity to self-organize in response to injustice. Critical thinking skills, a commitment to equality and fairness, and a recognition of how power operates in everyday life are key features of this kind of political awareness.

- **Developing a collective agenda as radical LBQ Ugandan feminists;**

popularizing it and creating mass movements strengthened by political education and consciousness-raising. Our rites, rituals, traditions, and non-negotiable behavior (values) that describe and instruct how we handle big and small ideas, take extraordinary risks, collaborate with others both in our FARUG family and outside the family, and respond to changes are informed by feminist principles.

- **Wellness that is grounded in feminist tenet;**

Developing feminist approaches and toolkits for wellness. Burnout is a common condition for many of us activists whose multiple workloads at work and in our families add to the stress, wear and tear of political organizing. For many women – especially those challenging sexual and gender norms –speaking out provokes stigma and isolation, even retaliation, from own communities, organizations, and even families. Over many years and especially in violent or risky contexts, the physical and emotional trauma that we experience can leave deep-seated scars that,

if unacknowledged, can cause permanent damage. Processes that enable us to deal with the exhaustion, fear, anxiety, shame and self-blame that over-work violence, sexual coercion, abuse, and loss of family members generate—are vital to sustaining us, our organizations and movements.

Incorporating healing and self-care into our work simultaneously serves as a common form of resistance among us, and is a powerful motivation to (re)engage.

- **Knowledge production;** our lived realities, her story, experiences and milestones must be acknowledged and considered as knowledge. We recognize that people are energized and transformed by experiences that tap into how they feel, think and move and that this holistic approach reinforces our multiple forms of intelligence and ability to enjoy and contribute to society. Yet patriarchy and homophobia operate to discredit our ideas and emotions, denigrating how we view our own mental capacities, relationships, feelings, and bodies. We use processes that affirm our own knowledge and generate the hope, joy and spirit of wholeness

# KEY DEFINITIONS

that strengthens our sense of integrity, community, and possibility. We incorporate all forms of creativity into our efforts of reflection and analysis to benefit from our many personal and collective sources of knowledge.

- **Feminist leadership development**

Strengthening activist and feminist leadership of LBQ womxn from all backgrounds and walks of life. Looking and listening for leadership sparks; embracing mentoring and nurturing young LBQ womxn who are willing to stand out and provide leadership in their communities.

**SOGIE:** In this leaflet, we will use the acronyms that FARUG uses in the context of their work, and Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex+(LBTQI+) at other times, with the intention of including everyone. [1] The divergent terms used by global SOGIE actors also reflects the continued challenges of the politics of identify, inclusion and exclusion which exists within LBTQI+ spectrum.

**Lesbian:** A woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women.

**Gay:** A man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men. Also a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality-some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian.

**Bi:** An umbrella term used to describe a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards more than one gender. Bi people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including, but not limited to, bisexual, pan, queer, and some other non-monosexual and non-monoromantic identities

**Bisexual:** A person who experiences sexual, romantic, and/or physical attraction to more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.

**Trans:** An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, transsexual, gender-queer (GQ) or non-binary, gender-fluid, gender-variant, cross-dresser, a gender, third-gender, bi-gender, transman, trans woman, trans-masculine, trans-feminine, and neutrons.

**Queer:** A term that advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid. Queer is a term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity.

It can also be a way of rejecting the perceived norms of the LGBTI+ community (racism, sexism, ableism, etc.) Although some LGBTI+ people view the word as a slur, it was reclaimed in the late 1980s by the queer community who have embraced it. It is also seen by some as a political statement and position reflecting a diverse use of the term.

**Intersex:** A term used to describe a person who may have the biological attributes of both sexes or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal assumptions about what constitutes male or female. Intersex people may identify as male, female or non-binary.

**Gender identity:** How a person sees themselves – their internal sense and personal experience of gender. Only the individual can determine their own gender identity. Many people have a gender identity of a man or woman, but some people do not. People who do not identify as a man or a woman may identify as non-binary, both

genders, neither gender, between genders, nor not gendered at all.

**Gender expression:** How a person outwardly shows their gender identity. It includes physical expressions such as a person's clothing, hairstyle, makeup, and social expressions such as name and pronoun choice. Some examples of gender expression are masculine, feminine and androgynous.

**Heteronormative:** A set of lifestyle norms, practices, and institutions that promote binary alignment of biological sex, gender identity, and gender roles; assume heterosexuality as a fundamental and natural norm; and privilege monogamous, committed relationships and reproductive sex above all other sexual practices.

**Transgender man:** A term used to describe someone who is assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man. This may be shortened to trans man, or FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male.

**Transgender woman:** A term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. This may be shortened to trans woman, or MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female.

**Intersectionality:** A term coined by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s to describe the way that multiple systems of oppression interact in the lives of those with multiple marginalized identities. Intersectionality looks at the relationships between multiple marginalized identities and allows us to analyse social problems more thoroughly, shape more effective interventions, and promote more inclusive advocacy amongst communities.

**Intersectional feminism:** Feminism which accounts for all aspects of social and political identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, etc.) and how related discriminations overlap (or "intersect").

**Biological sex:** the medical term used to refer to chromosomal, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics as that are used to classify an individual as male, female, or intersex

**Gender expression:** the external display of one's gender through a combination of clothing, grooming demeanor, social behavior, etc.

**Sexual attraction:** a capacity that evokes the want to engage in physically intimate behavior, e.g. kissing touching, sex, experienced in varying degrees

**Queer:** An umbrella term to describe individuals who don't identify as straight or cisgender

**Romantic attraction:** a capacity that evokes the want to engage in romantic intimate behavior e.g. dating relationships, marriage, experience in varying degrees

**Femme:** someone who identifies themselves as feminine whether it be physically mentally or emotionally often used about feminine presenting women or people

**Gender identity:** the internal perception of one's gender and how they label themselves often mistakenly confused with biological sex

**Demi sexual:** little or no capacity to experience sexual attraction until a strong romantic connection is formed with someone

**Gender confirmation surgery:** refers to a group of Surgical options that alter a person's biological sex. It could be top or bottom surgery

**Intersex:** a term for a combination of chromosomes, hormones, internal organs and genitals that differ from the two expected patterns of male and female

**Gender binary:** the idea that there are only two genders and that every person is one of those two.

**Biphobia:** a range of negative attitudes e.g. fear, anger, erasure, or discomfort that one may have or express towards bisexual individuals

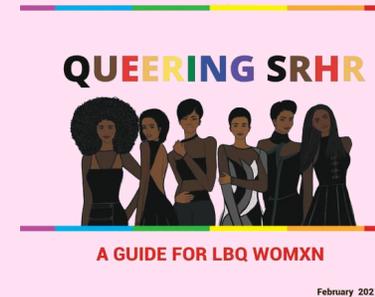
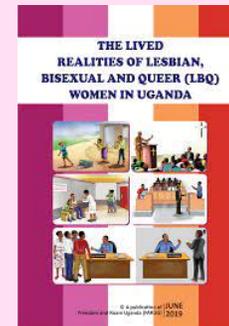
**Cisgender:** when someone's sex is assigned at birth and gender corresponds in an expected way

**Polyamory:** refers to the practice of, desire for or orientation toward having ethical, honest and consensual non-monogamous relationships

**Bi-curious:** a curiosity towards experiencing attraction to people of the same gender or sex (similar to questioning)

**Bisexual:** a person who experiences attraction to some people of their gender and others of another gender

**Asexual:** a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others and or lack of interest in sexual relationships or behavior



[1] A global phenomenon based on strict adherence to a specific ideology—religious, political, economic, or otherwise—that is acted out through concerted efforts to impose this ideology on all social, political, and economic arrangements and structures. Fundamentalist tendencies are present across all religions, including Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and localized religious traditions