

Addressing the Needs of Nigerian Queer Creatives: A Survey Report



The Kolanut Collective

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www.thekolanutcollective.org



About The Kolanut Collective

The Kolanut Collective (TKC) is a Nigerian youth-led creative art collective dedicated to deepening conversations around crucial social issues, especially queer and other minority issues, through dialogue, creative collaborations, cultural experiences, and innovative advocacy.

Our name, The Kolanut Collective, comes from the fruit of the kola tree that is often used as a symbolic ritual of respect, community, hospitality, and togetherness and as libations by hosts during gatherings and events in many communities in West Africa. The Kolanut symbolizes peace, unity, reconciliation, integrity, fraternity, hospitality, goodwill, and kindness. We aim to embody these qualities as we build a formidable queer youth movement that celebrates our uniqueness, centers our issues and needs, and holds people in power accountable while demanding justice and equality.

TKC is a community of youth from all works of life dedicated to a common purpose. We are made up of young artists, advocates, feminists, and leaders for a changing world, implementing diverse projects to enhance the lives of queer youths and other minorities. These projects include artivism, cultural festivals, training, research, and community resourcing. Our collective came together because of the urgent need for crucial social debates, advancing queer issues through the nontraditional route of artivism, centering marginalized and often discounted voices, and fostering community wellbeing and wholesomeness.

Table of Content

About The Kolanut Collective	1
Table of Content	2
Introduction	3
Background	6
Other Challenges Faced by Nigeria Queer Creatives	7
General Analysis	8
Recommendations	9
Way Forward	12

Introduction

'What is your primary art form?': **Literary arts (writing, poetry, storytelling, etc.)** appears most often.

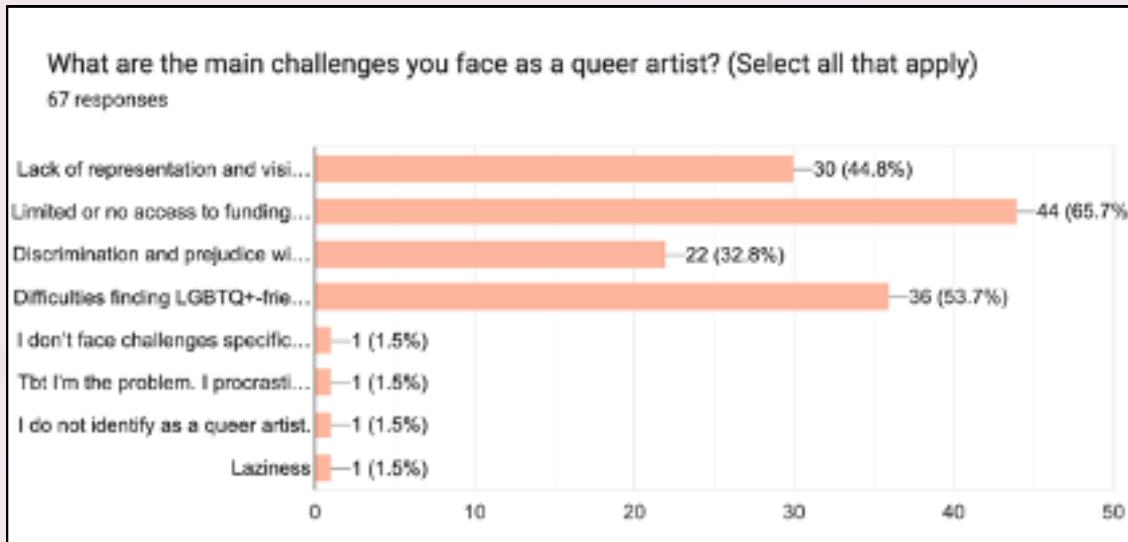


TKC conducted a short, anonymous online survey within Nigeria to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by queer creatives and their needs. The survey aimed to establish secure collaborative spaces and build a robust and inclusive community. With 80 respondents, the team ensured representation by structuring questions to include creatives from diverse identities within the community. Additionally, the team ensured proportional representation from all relevant demographics.

Primary Queer Art Forms:

The survey revealed that respondents identified with various primary art forms, including visual arts, literary arts, and digital media arts. Expertise and experience levels varied, with 54% reporting being intermediate, 28% advanced, and the remaining split between expert and beginner levels.





Challenges from survey findings faced by queer artists:

Discrimination and Stigma: A significant portion (65%) of respondents reported facing challenges accessing resources and opportunities for growth due to discrimination and stigma.

Lack of Visibility and Representation: Many respondents (44%) expressed limitations in expressing themselves authentically due to fear of threats to their lives and loved ones, highlighting the lack of visibility and representation they experience.

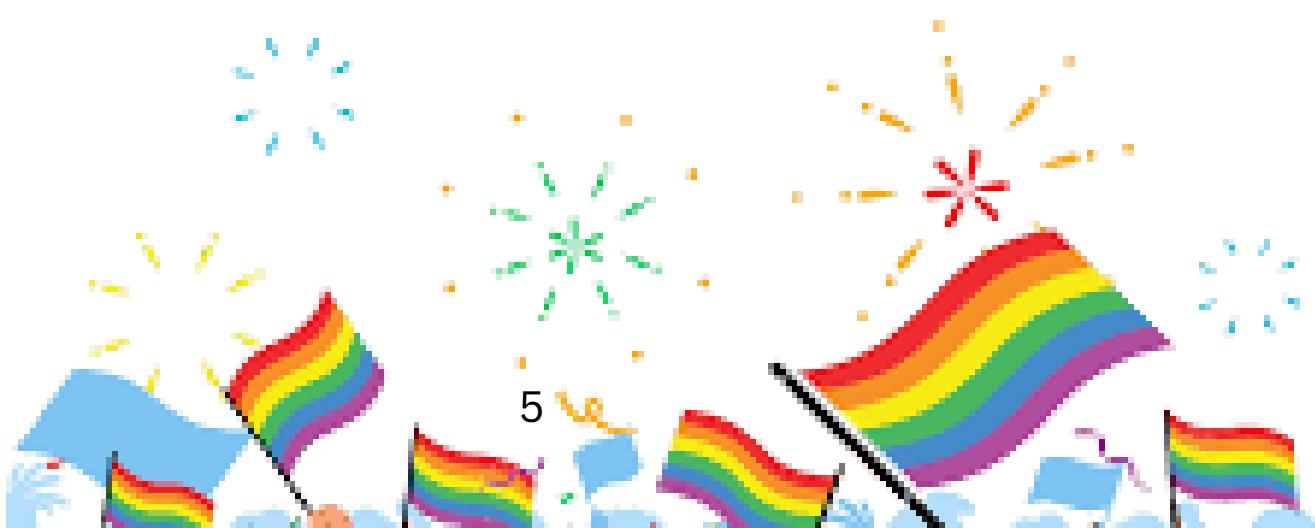
Prejudicial Treatment: The survey revealed that many respondents experience frequent prejudicial treatment, leading to difficulties accessing queer-friendly spaces and hindering collaboration opportunities with mainstream artists.

18 - 29 accounts for the majority of 'What is your age range?'.



Interest in Being Part of a Queer Collective:

The survey results indicated a strong interest in being part of a queer creative collective, with 62.7% of respondents expressing a definite interest. Additionally, 35.8% expressed interest based on the level of engagement offered. Notably, 77.6% of respondents had not previously been part of a creative collective, while 17.9% reported past membership. Regarding engagement preferences, 40.3% expressed openness to flexible engagement based on needs, while 28.4% and 16.4% preferred part-time and full-time involvement, respectively.



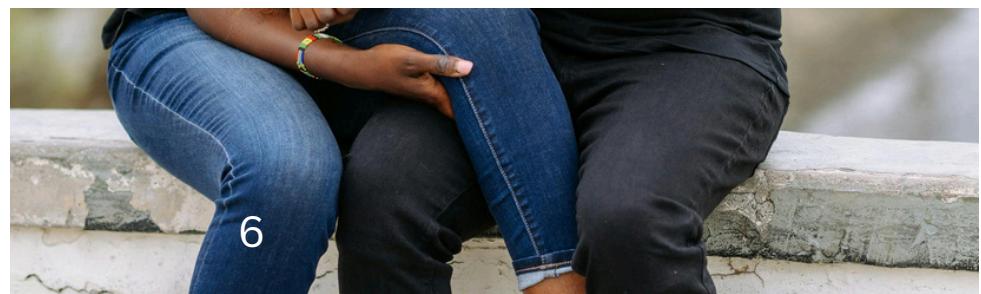


Background

Nigeria boasts a vibrant tapestry of cultures and artistic expressions, encompassing over 225 million people. However, this vibrancy does not extend equally to all citizens, particularly the queer community. The Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) of 2014 criminalizes same-sex relationships, with potential imprisonment of up to 16 years. Additionally, some northern states have adopted Sharia law, prescribing even harsher punishments, including death by stoning, for same-sex acts. This legal and social landscape fosters a climate of fear and discrimination, profoundly impacting the lives of queer individuals, including those in the creative fields.

Despite these challenges, the community demonstrates remarkable resilience. Several brave advocates and groups have been instrumental in securing the limited gains the community enjoys today. Many have employed advocacy and visibility as tools to share their authentic stories, empowering others. Others have utilized the legal system to demand justice and challenge draconian and archaic laws. Thriving community centers, safe shelters, and vibrant organizations stand as testaments to the community's resilience in the face of immense adversity.

However, the work continues. More than ever, it is crucial to solidify the hard-fought victories achieved by the community. As anti-gender movements and far-right groups employ increasingly sophisticated tactics to push back against the community, it is imperative to match their efforts and adopt innovative approaches. While traditional advocacy and activism have undoubtedly yielded progress, new and emerging threats necessitate exploring unconventional methods of empowerment. Understanding the potential of art as a tool for change presents an opportunity for the community to leverage this powerful resource. However, specific challenges hinder the full inclusion and participation of everyone in this fight, particularly queer creatives.





Other Challenges Faced by Nigeria Queer Creatives

Self-Censorship

The constant fear of persecution and violence often compels queer creatives to self-censor their artistic expressions, avoiding themes, narratives, or identities that might be perceived as non-conforming. This stifles artistic freedom and hinders the creation of authentic and diverse narratives.

Limited Platforms and Visibility

Openly queer artists face immense challenges in gaining access to platforms and securing funding. Galleries, theatres, and other institutions may be hesitant to showcase work deemed "controversial" limiting their reach and exposure.

Psychological Impact

The constant threat of discrimination and violence takes a significant toll on mental health. Anxiety, depression, and fear are prevalent among queer artists, hindering their creative processes and overall well-being.

Forced Exile

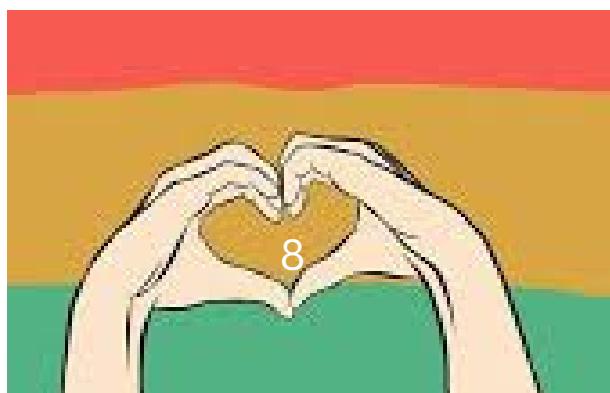
Some artists choose to leave Nigeria altogether, seeking safer environments where they can openly express themselves and pursue their careers. This not only deprives the nation of valuable talent but also disrupts their personal and professional lives.

General Analysis

The findings from the survey paint a clear picture that a significant number of queer creatives exist in Nigeria, working in diverse artistic fields and with varying levels of expertise. However, a majority haven't actively participated in efforts to advance queer rights in the country, and for various reasons. They understand the importance of using their voices and tools to join the fight, but the detrimental consequences of widespread criminalisation and discrimination force them to remain hidden, stifling their talents and contributions to building a more welcoming society. Existing queer organisations often struggle to effectively utilise art as a form of advocacy due to a lack of resources, and expertise, and being stretched thin by the constant need to address various emergencies. Consequently, the current broader queer movement in Nigeria lacks a welcoming environment for queer creatives to thrive.

The survey also revealed a significant number of queer creatives willing and eager to contribute to the crucial fight for advancing queer rights in Nigeria; however, they require a supportive environment, meaningful resources, and the right tools to succeed.

It is crucial to acknowledge, although not directly addressed by the survey, the suppression of queer arts in the country. This tactic, increasingly used by bad actors and policymakers, aims to further marginalise the queer community. The community must fight back against this suppression and elevate art as a form of liberation and freedom for their rights. The suppression of queer arts not only violates fundamental human rights but also impoverishes the cultural landscape of Nigeria. It silences diverse voices and perspectives, hindering creative innovation and preventing the nation from reaching its full cultural potential. Additionally, the forced exodus of queer talent represents a significant loss of intellectual and artistic resources.





Recommendations

For Government

Repeal the SSMPA

Abolishing this discriminatory law is the most crucial step towards creating a safe and inclusive environment for all artists, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Promote Dialogue and Awareness

Engaging in open and respectful dialogue with diverse stakeholders, including religious leaders, policymakers, and the public, is essential to foster greater understanding and acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities and expressions.

Support for Queer-owned and Led Organisations

Providing financial and logistical support to initiatives focused on showcasing and promoting the work of queer artists can create vital platforms for their voices to be heard.

Empowerment and capacity building

Investing in programs and workshops that equip queer artists with skills and resources can help overcome the challenges of self-censorship and limited access to opportunities.



For Donors

Investment in Knowledge Generation and Dissemination

Invest in research on queer arts, particularly in hostile environments, to showcase its potential as a form of liberation and freedom. This research and its dissemination can help dispel misinformation and myths surrounding queer arts and artists.

Fund Queer Arts, Artists, and Groups

Provide flexible and core funding to support the development and efforts of queer artists, collectives, and organizations working to advance queer rights. Many existing queer organizations are already overburdened and lack the capacity to integrate artivism into their work. Providing direct support to queer artists and groups will be an innovative way to contribute to the fight for freedom and introduce new tactics to counter opposition.

Provide Emergency and Flexible Funding

Queer people are disproportionately represented in the informal economy due to discriminatory laws and oppression, hindering their ability to function normally. Providing flexible and emergency funding is instrumental in meaningfully supporting the crucial work of queer artists and groups.

For CSOs

Create a Welcoming Space

Ensure a focus on building a welcoming and safe community where everyone, including queer creatives, feels valued and included. Many CSOs become accustomed to traditional methods and may resist new ideas and approaches, often leading to gatekeeping and exclusion of important actors.

Diversify Your Programmes

Integrate activism as part of your advocacy work to leverage its vast potential. Consult and meaningfully involve queer creatives in your programming, particularly during strategic planning, to avoid tokenism.

Invest in Queer Arts and Artists

Develop and implement programs to meaningfully support, uplift, and engage queer creatives in the fight for queer equality in Nigeria. Many queer creatives are eager to collaborate with existing groups working towards these goals.

Meaningful Partnerships

Seek out and establish partnerships with existing or emerging queer creative groups to offer guidance and support their growth. Ensure these partnerships are mutually beneficial and avoid exploitation.

By implementing these recommendations, various stakeholders can create a more supportive environment for queer creatives in Nigeria, empowering them to fully express themselves and contribute meaningfully to the struggle for equality. This will not only enrich the nation's cultural landscape but also foster a more inclusive and just society for individuals of all sexual orientations and gender identities.



Way Forward

In conclusion, the findings presented in this report paint a compelling picture of a resilient and talented community facing significant hurdles. By recognizing the challenges faced by queer creatives and implementing the proposed recommendations, stakeholders across the board can play a crucial role in fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment.

This will not only empower queer creatives to flourish artistically but also equip them to become powerful advocates for equality. Imagine the vibrancy a thriving queer arts scene could inject into the movement for equality and by extension, Nigerian culture, fostering empathy, acceptance, and a richer national identity.

The time for action is now. Although trapped with some challenges, Nigeria presents an opportunity for a thriving multifaceted LGBTIQ+ movement that has morphed into an opportunity for neighbouring countries and the African continent.

Therefore, It is imperative that the ongoing work for equality urgently taps into this opportunity and complements crucial efforts by employing non-traditional strategies and efforts to combat the ever-increasing work of the anti-gender and rights movement. We urge the government to repeal discriminatory laws, donors to invest in queer arts and artists, and CSOs to create welcoming spaces and integrate artivism into their work.

By working together, we can create a Nigeria where all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, can express themselves authentically and contribute meaningfully to society that extends beyond the shores of the country and continent.



Support queer creatives 
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