



**AFRICA'S FIRST
INDIGENOUS
ACTIVIST FUND
UHAI**



Context

UHAI, the East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative (UHAI-EASHRI), has been operating in East Africa since 2009. The organisation mainly targets sexual and gender minorities, sex workers, and people who use drugs and the unique challenges and funding inequalities they face by leveraging their comprehensive understanding of the human rights issues affecting these communities.



The Big Idea

In 2009, a surge in the far-right movement created a polarised environment in the region, further marginalising vulnerable communities, who, in response, realised they needed to participate in the civil society sector actively, organising and mobilising resources towards their work. This led to the establishment of UHAI.

UHAI has pioneered an innovative funding approach characterised by participatory, flexible and accessible grant-making.

In this model, the communities supported by UHAI are key decision-makers instead of mere beneficiaries. Rather than prescribing solutions, UHAI actively listens to activists and allows their proximity to the context and their own lived experience to inform funding decisions.



Actions

UHAI's grant-making process is dynamic and context-driven, reflecting an intersectional approach. This approach acknowledges and adjusts to the intricate layers of oppression that intersect within the context of sexual and gender minority movements.

“It wasn't really a solution to a problem as predetermined, but when you bring folk together to find their own solutions, they will look like them, they will not be over-thematized, they will not be over-prescriptive, and they will allow them space to innovate.”

(UHAI's Director of Programmes)





The Peer Grants Committee (PGC) is the cornerstone of UHAI's participatory grant-making efforts. Comprised of 18 activists representing the seven countries supported by UHAI, this committee plays a key role in setting the fund's priorities and determining grant allocations.

Participatory grant-making is coupled with capacity building and support, fostering “a dynamic environment of mutual learning and knowledge sharing. This not only empowers activists but also facilitates their engagement in regional and global spaces”.

UHA's Director of Programmes

Additionally, through trauma-based philanthropy, UHA addresses the impact of trauma on activists and communities and collaborates with donors to explore ways they can better support the movement without further exposing the already vulnerable communities they work with to harm.



Outcomes

UHAI's efforts have led to activists not just being viewed as beneficiaries of funds but acknowledged as valuable contributors to discussions, decision-making, and collective problem-solving.

They have the autonomy to identify their priorities and actions rather than conforming to funders' directives and strategic goals. This creates lasting connections and longevity since communities implement and practise their own solutions in this supportive environment.

UHAI's unique position as both an activist fund and a funder enables it to engage in various spaces and foster partnerships across various sectors, including health, emergency response, and human rights.



Learnings

- ▶ ICSOs can highlight the significance of lived experience by initiating contact with activist movements before engaging with sexual and gender minorities. This proactive step allows for the collaborative design of proposals tailored to their specific issues and needs. They can assemble teams where lived experience is also a fundamental requirement.
- ▶ Engaging key recipients of funds in grant decision-making strengthens community representation and enhances outcomes. Drawing on their lived experiences and contextual understanding, ICSOs could allocate funds more effectively to address pressing issues within the community.
- ▶ ICSOs can develop targeted initiatives for activists representing sexual and gender minorities, providing capacity-building in proposal writing and funds management. They can do this while incorporating a trauma-conscious approach.
- ▶ Engaging in collaborative spaces, such as feminist circles, where activists, ICSOs, and donors can share their work and learn from each other, can help foster an intersectoral approach to funding.



AFRICA'S FIRST
INDIGENOUS
ACTIVIST FUND
UHAI



Read the full report here.