



POLICY BRIEF

FOR CULTURAL LEADERS:

***INTERROGATING
CULTURE-BASED STIGMA
AND DISCRIMINATION
TOWARDS THE LGBTQ+
COMMUNITY IN UGANDA***

Introduction

Tribe is the second form of identity among Ugandans, the first is religion. Uganda's population is made up of different tribes with varying practices and beliefs. Most Ugandans identify by two names. The first displays their religious affiliation, and the second their tribe. Tribal identity is jealously guarded by Ugandans. Tribal practices and beliefs are passed down from generation to generation without question. These are often spoken and practiced but not commonly written. They guide the way of life, perceptions, and attitudes, as well as how Uganda's society is organized and regulated by policies, including laws.

Executive Summary:

Opponents of same-sex relationships contend that homosexuality is a foreign behavior that is unacceptable in Uganda and the broader African culture, and it is also condemned by religion.¹

A survey conducted in 2023 revealed that Uganda is a continental extreme in rejecting people in same-sex relationships.²

Perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community are reflected in social attitudes and policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons in Uganda. These reinforce human rights violations and hinder access to essential services, including education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. However, there have been few efforts to interrogate the nexus between religion, culture, and policy as it relates to social attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community.

It is against this background that the Universal Coalition for Affirming Africans - Uganda (UCAA-UG) conducted a study titled "The Root Causes, Manifestations and Impact of Religious, Policy, and Culturally Based Stigma and Discrimination Towards the LGBTQ+ Community in Uganda". This study sought to understand the foundations of homophobia and its impact on the LGBTQ+ community in

¹ Makanga Ronald Kakumba, 'Uganda a continental extreme in rejection of people in same-sex relationships', Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 639, 2023.

² Ibid.

Uganda. It interrogated the influence of religion on Uganda's culture and policies. It further aimed at identifying the common attitudes, beliefs, and myths regarding homosexuality, among other issues. This research conducted a desk review of the related publications. Also, 151 respondents, including religious and cultural leaders, LGBTQ+ individuals, policy makers and enforcers, influencers or opinion leaders, civil society workers, and other members of the general members of the public were interviewed. These respondents were recruited from across the country to reflect the diverse nature of Uganda's community. The report from this study is available at <https://ucaaug.org/>.

This policy brief contains some of the extracts from the interviews with the respondents. It summarizes the findings and recommendations from this study. The aim is to guide cultural advocacy to confront stigma and discrimination towards Uganda's LGBTQ+ community.

Key Findings

A Muganda cultural leader reported that: **"Just Like My Religion, My Culture Does Not Allow it. I support the law because it protects our culture and religion."**

- 1) **The majority of respondents claimed that religion influences their culture. Because religion rejects LGBTQ+ persons, so do they and their culture. They also approve of policies that stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons because they enforce religious and cultural values.**

A Mutooro and Catholic respondent stated that: "Culture treasures procreation, and with same sex, there is no procreation in the natural way. How is my tribe going to grow if its members are gay? Even if you procreate artificially, it will not be accepted."

- 2) **The main reason for ostracizing same sex relationships is that they do not lead to the growth of the human population. Human population growth sustains tribes.**

A lesbian Musoga of the Catholic faith stated: **“In my experience, first are religious leaders, then policy makers, then policy enforcers, then cultural leaders and influencers that say bad things about us cause of stigma and discrimination against us”.**

- 3) Cultural leaders are the fourth-highest-ranked drivers of stigma and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community.
- 4) Uganda comprises different tribes that have varying tribal practices. These different tribes, however, share common religions. What is commonly referred to as Ugandan culture is the common norms among these religions.
- 5) Respondents reported the existence of LGBTQ+ relationships as well as variance in the treatment of this community in pre-colonial Uganda. This contradicts the common assumption that homosexuality is a foreign behavior.
- 6) Tribal / Cultural Perceptions Towards LGBTQ+ Individuals

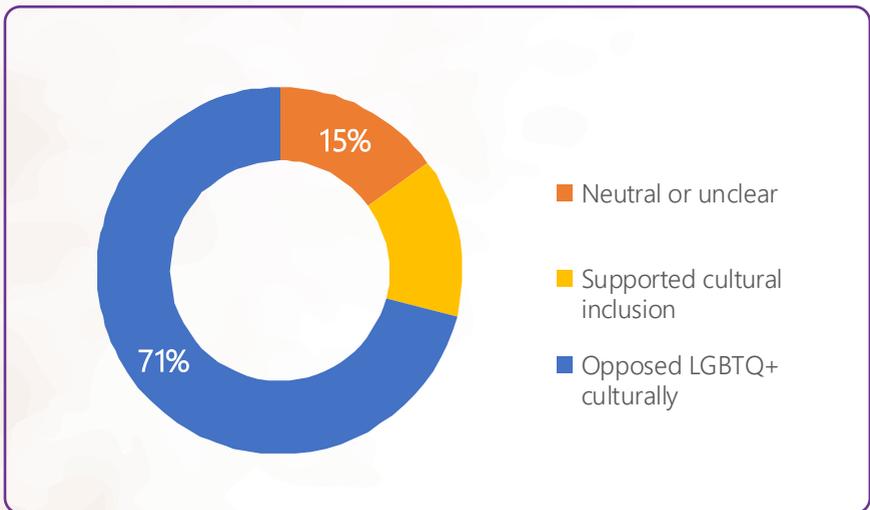


Figure 1: Tribal/cultural beliefs were overwhelmingly reported as the foundation of not accepting LGBTQ+ persons.

Detailed interpretation

Uganda's population is made up of different tribes that do not have a homogeneous culture. Tribal practices and values are mostly unwritten and largely spoken. These have been handed down to new generations. Because they are largely spoken, there is a likelihood that they have been distorted over time. However, questioning or going against tribal practices is unacceptable because it challenges the first or second form of identity among Ugandans, that is tribe second form of identity, the first is religion. Culturalists who are unaccepting of the LGBTQ+ community refer to religion as the basis of their refusal to accept this community. This may be because, unlike tribal practices, religious views on homosexuality are documented or written in sacred publications, such as the Bible and the Quran. Culturalists claim that religion and culture are indivisible. Culturalists overwhelmingly approve of national policies that stigmatize and discriminate against the LGBTQ+ community because they are perceived as preserving religious and tribal values. They, however, disapprove of the failure of the policymakers to consult them during policymaking processes. Some culturalists (unaccepting, neutral, and accepting) admit that LGBTQ+ relationships existed before the introduction of religion. This contradicts the common assumption that homosexuality is a foreign behavior. For the neutral and accepting minority, there is a need to better the LGBTQ+ community. Cultural leaders are ranked as the fourth most significant drivers of stigma and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community after religious leaders and policymaker and enforcers. Conservative culturalists believe same - sex relations are intolerable because they do not lead to the multiplication of humans, which allows for tribal populations to grow as desired by tribes and ordered by religion. They equate tribal growth with numbers.

- 7) **Uganda's Community attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community can be divided into the unaccepting, reluctantly accepting and the inclusive.**

Grouping Community Attitudes Towards the LGBTQ+ Community

Uganda's community attitudes toward LGBTQ+ community



RELUCTANTLY ACCEPTING

A larger minority tolerates LGBTQ+ individuals, emphasizing personal beliefs, while still influenced by cultural and religious norms.

INCLUSIVE

A smaller segment openly supports LGBTQ+ rights, motivated by personal conviction, love for humanity and respect for individual dignity.



Figure 2: Uganda's Community attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community can be divided into the unaccepting, Reluctantly accepting and accepting.

Detailed Interpretation

Uganda's community attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community may be grouped into three broad categories. The first category is the majority that are unaccepting. They cite religion, culture, and the law in this hierarchy as the basis for this position. The second and third categories are the minorities in Uganda. The second category comprises the larger minority group who don't mind the LGBTQ+ individuals, provided they do not display their sexual orientation in their presence. We can refer to this group as the reluctantly accepting minorities. It also represents a community that is evolving towards accepting the LGBTQ+ community. This group also references religion, culture, the law, and personal conviction in this grading as the basis for their persuasion. The third category is the second smallest group among the minorities, the inclusive minority. For this latter group, personal conviction, love for humanity, and respect for the dignity of individuals in this order are the basis for their persuasion.

8) Impact of culturally based stigma and discrimination on LGBTQ+ individuals

As a result of culturally -based stigma and discrimination, the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda has suffered the following:

1. Some have been disowned by their families.
2. Policies have been passed that stigmatize and discriminate against persons in same sex relationships.
3. Harassment, intimidation, extortion, blackmail, and imprisonment have affected their mental health.
4. Some have been excluded from schools and dismissed from work.
5. Some have engaged in heterosexual relationships to hide their sexual orientation.
6. Feel alienated from the broader Ugandan community.
7. Some are reluctant to access sexual health services, thus leading to an increase in the number of persons in the community suffering from sexually transmitted diseases.
8. Survive in a broader Ugandan community in which the majority demonizes and ostracizes them.
9. Some have denounced their culture.
10. Face persecution.

11. Are misrepresented, misunderstood, and villainized by myths and stereotypes.
12. Are not protected by the law against discrimination, and the law does not allow them to form consensual relationships.
13. Are not included in development and planning policies.
14. Are not reflected in national policies.

Common Myths, Stereotypes, Misinformation, and Disinformation about the LGBTQ+ Community

Uganda's community opinions about the LGBTQ+ community are influenced by myths, stereotypes, misinformation, and disinformation. The main ones include:

Myth(a): Homosexuality is a foreign behavior.

Reality: Same-sex relationships existed in Uganda before foreigners came to Uganda.

Myth (b): Uganda's culture condemns homosexuality.

Reality: It is Uganda's religions that ostracize homosexuality. The various tribes of Uganda were both accepting and reluctantly accepting of homosexual relationships before religion was introduced.

Myth (c): Gender is assigned at birth. It is also how other people perceive one's gender.

Reality: Gender identity is personal; it is how one experiences gender internally and thinks about oneself. Biological gender is a social construct.

Myth (d): LGBTQ+ individuals have strayed. They need either divine intervention, counseling/therapy, or to be punished by the law to return to the correct or normal way of life.

Reality: Homosexuality is not a deviant behavior; it is how one was born. Prayers, therapy, or legal punishment cannot change a person's sexuality.

Myth (e): Homosexuality is funded by Western societies to curb the growth of populations.

Reality: Like any funding for noble causes, such as ending poverty and gender-based violence, funding for the LGBTQ+ community seeks to protect this group from harm that includes discrimination, stigma, and marginalization.

Myth (f): Gay men love to dress like women because they secretly wish that they were women.

Reality: Being gay does not mean that the person identifies as a member of the opposite gender. Sexuality is different from gender identity, and they do not correlate with each other.

Myth (g): LGBTQ+ persons spread HIV/AIDS.

Reality: HIV is transmitted through specific contact with body fluids. This includes unprotected sex among homosexuals and heterosexuals, blood contact, sharing needles, and mother-to-child transmissions.

Myth (h): A person whose biological sex is female but feels like a man on the inside is still female.

Reality: Someone's experiences of their gender identity should be accepted and respected without judgment or stereotype. Regardless of what genders they were assigned at birth.

Recommendations and Future Actions

Challenges to LGBTQ+ equality are deeply rooted in religious, cultural, and policy stigmatism and discrimination. The following recommendations are aimed at guiding cultural, policy-based advocacy to confront stigma and discrimination towards Uganda's LGBTQ+ community.

- 1) Emphasize compassion and inclusivity as important customary values.
- 2) Support policy reforms that protect all citizens equally, regardless of orientation or identity.
- 3) Uganda comprises many tribes with different customary values. Aim to ensure that your customary values align with those of the other tribes and the modern world.
- 4) Educate yourselves on issues related to diversity and inclusion. By being aware and understanding different perspectives related to social justice issues, you will be better equipped when engaging in discussions around LGBT rights.
- 5) Aim to trace and understand the history of LGBTQ+ individuals in your tribe and perceptions, as well as attitudes towards this community. Consider whether such perceptions and attitudes have evolved.

About the Universal Coalition of Affirming Africans -Uganda

Established in 2017, UCAAA-UG was the first faith-based organization that advocates for the inclusion of the most marginalized groups of people in Uganda using faith-based approaches. This was after the realization that marginalized groups are deprived of their human





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