Proud Continent

June 2022
Introducing Proud Continent

What does Pride mean?

Meet Our AfriPROUD Voices:
- Beyonce
- Monalisa
- Mwamba
- Lucil
- Rocky
- Emilia
- Janeth

Grantee Partner Spotlight: Wake Up Ladies Cameroon

More Icons & Legends

The Path To A Proudly Feminist Future

A Proudly Feminist Future
According to population estimates, the African continent is home to about 1.4 billion people. While it is impossible to accurately establish the number of LGBTQ+ people who are part of this population, even a highly conservative estimate of 1% indicates that there are at least 14 million queer Africans on the continent. This is more than the total population of Accra and Johannesburg combined.

As conversations about human rights discourse and social norms evolve, it is important that no one gets left behind. Feminist issues like access to resources, protective government policies, ending sexual violence, etc. often take on a new and urgent dimension when questions of sexual orientation and gender identity are also involved. This is why it is important to dispel myths, combat regressive ideals and promote social inclusion when it comes to queer Africans, particularly LBQT women and girls.

At AWDF, we imagine Africa as a PROUD CONTINENT; a place where the diversity of human experiences is just as celebrated as the diversity of resources, cultures, and languages. As a feminist organisation, we are serious about doing our part to create better realities for all Africans. This is why we provide resources to LBQT+ organisations across Africa, in order to ensure that our feminist future is an inclusive one. The PROUD CONTINENT magazine is part of a storytelling effort to spotlight the activism, resilience, and courage of Africans whose sexual orientation, gender identity, and social performance transcend conservative norms.

In these pages, you will encounter people, organisations, and stories from places like Uganda, Angola, and Tanzania about what it means to be a Proud African. In the context of Pride Month, these stories focus on queer and trans realities and hopes, serving as a clarion call to us all to appreciate people for who they are and to reject violence or discrimination wherever it may rear its head. Pride Month is a celebration of a queer legacy of visibility despite the potential costs, community in the face of adversity, and solidarity across identity.

PROUD CONTINENT calls on us all, no matter our identity, to join this celebration.
What is now known as the Pride Month celebration around the world began as anti-police violence riots that started on June 28th and ended on July 3rd at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York, USA. Initiated by two Black women, a trans woman named Marsha P. Johnson and a masculine-presenting lesbian named Storme DeLarverie, the uprising was in response to one of the police raids that were common at the time. As the protest continued, other notable figures like Sylvia Rivera, a Latina trans woman, also came to the forefront.

Over the years, the Stonewall Inn riot evolved into more celebratory formats that attracted more and more LGBTQ+ people, and then began to be celebrated in other parts of the world. The African continent was put on the global Pride

March map on October 13th, 1990 by a protest organised in Johannesburg, South Africa by the Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (GLOW). It was co-led by Beverley Ditsie, a gender-nonconforming lesbian activist who also campaigned for full sexual rights at the Beijing Conference.
WHAT DOES PRIDE MEAN TO US?

Trans rights activist Mwamba from Tanzania Trans Initiative (TTI) has this to say about what Pride means to him: “To me, Pride is the power to be me and not be let down by people who do not identify as trans and queer within society. It’s the love and resilience that I possess within society that seeks to erase my existence of being queer within a country that is transphobic to people who identify differently.”

Janeth, another trans man who is an activist with TTI, says “As a queer person pride month reminds me that I’m not alone, there are so many of us and that’s our power.”

He goes on to add, “Being visible and united, standing up for ourselves and one another is how we can celebrate our queerness beyond pride month.”

Our grantee partners at Transgender Equality Uganda also share their perspectives on Pride. Beyonce says, “To me, Pride means something that defines my happiness, makes up my beliefs and roots,” while Monalisa says “[Pride] is a time where one can really be themselves in the company of real family. It’s a time for self-assessment in the journey of self-discoveries.”
Monalisa continues, “Pride is the power to be me and not be let down by people who do not identify as trans and queer within society. It’s the love and resilience that I possess within a society that seeks to erase my existence, of being queer within a country that is transphobic to people who identify differently.” Lucill, also based in Uganda, says “Pride means the power of choice that is within me to make decisions that can affect my life positively.”

From another side of the continent, members of Angola’s Arquivo de Identidade Angolano share their perspectives as well. Rocky describes Pride as a symbol of “resistance and affirmation of my identity and difference in the midst of so many other identities and diversity,” while her colleague Emilia says “Pride for me as an African Queer person means Freedom, Freedom to be who I am without feeling guilty for not fitting into the boxes imposed by my country’s society.” According to Rocky, we can extend Pride beyond the month of June by simply “Being ourselves every day, manifesting our identities and expression without fear and shame, and fighting for our visibility and rights to live a life without oppression, discrimination and violence.”
My identity can be described in my local tongue as “Nyawi.” Growing up in an African context where being trans and queer is forbidden and not acceptable, I found many challenges accessing health care and acceptance. I had strong support from our mentor organization WONETHA back then that gave mentorship support and enabled me as an individual to believe in myself. This later resulted into me forming my own organization to advance and promote the rights of transgender women and trans sex workers in Uganda.
Trans Equality Uganda (TEU) is committed to promoting awareness about transwomen and transgender sex workers in Uganda, while addressing their human, health and economic rights. We promote safer sex practices for transwomen and transgender sex workers health and wellbeing. Together we mobilize transwomen and transgender sex workers claim for their rights and allow their voices to be heard, including advocating for fair and safe working conditions for transgender sex workers.

TEU has been able to provide economic support to the communities we serve, beginning with a few members of our community to bring about improved levels of livelihood. We formed the T-Queens group to help bring about economic sustenance within our communities as they go out to events to perform. Members get paid a certain percentage of money that goes to the organizational account to increase sustainability beyond donor funding but to also pay off some members within the group. At TEU, Pride means the freedom of choice to be who we are unapologetically.

TO MY YOUNGER SELF, I WOULD SAY

“Be proud and free to be different and not care about what other people think of me.”
The local name for how I identify is Nabakyala. As a member of Trans Equality Uganda, I share the belief that Pride is the promotion of self-affirmation, dignity, and equality as a people who are marginalized within society. TEU prides itself in celebrating women's day because we believe we are diverse women being transgender, thus we commemorate it with the rest of the world.

It's always been hard for me as a transgender person to come out of the shell and be who I am today because of the stigma and fear of isolation that would have covered my life if I had done so. Hiding in the shadows was one of the ways that I could keep safe and not be judged by society. In 2014, I was done and tired of living a lie just to impress the people around me while suffocating.
myself. I had an opportunity to interact with like-minded people who then introduced me to TEU which is the first transgender-led organization for girls and women in Uganda under the leadership of BEYONCE KARUNGI. Within that space, I learnt to appreciate the differences I possessed as an individual and live my true authentic self with no fear of being judged and sidelined like the wider community normally did.

I am now a free soul who knows that being different is what makes us who we are and that it is okay not to be like any other persons within society as we are diverse. I am learning to love myself more and give power to me rather than to someone else to define my existence for me. This is why I would advise my younger self to live life to the fullest. Be unapologetic because you’re beautiful and deserve the best that life can offer.

**MEET OUR AFRIPOUD VOICES**

**MWAMBA**

My name is Mwamba T Nyanda, I identify as a Transman through the hard and tough journey of becoming the person I am today. In local parlance, you can call me “Mbadili ji”. It hasn’t been easy identifying as queer in the African continent. I had to fight patriarchy and toxic cultural practices which limit women’s freedom. These things made me angry. I am Trans and feminist so as to liberate women in our country.

Our organisation, Tanzania Trans Initiative, is a group of young people who have decided to [come together] with the aim of protecting and promoting the value of minority youth in the country. Queer persons (Trans* /L) in the society are subjected to gender-based violence, sexual assaults and ostracism.

Because of societal norms, beliefs and taboos that define and hinder women, the society has power over women’s bodily ownership as it defines how women should present and be controlled in the society. The result of this is lack of self-esteem and confidence to raise our voices in the face of inequality.

By building awareness of the protection and empowerment of minority young women and girls, there is a chance of change where women can access better education, better health care, leadership and economic stability.

My advice to young queer people is to be yourself because everyone else is already taken.
I am a Queer woman, I know the cost of expressing my sexuality on a daily basis, in a sexist, classist and heteronormative social context. For 7 years I have been fighting for the rights, freedoms and empowerment of LBQI+ women in Angola, amplifying my voice through the LGBTQI organizations I work with, fighting stigma, discrimination and violence. Despite being a tiring and lonely struggle often without the support of our friends and family, it is comforting and rewarding [to see] the paths we are opening, the spaces we are conquering, and the connections and support networks we are creating for future generations of LGBTQI people to live their sexuality without oppression and violence in Angola.

At Arquivo de Identidade Angolano, there have been several moments of celebration that we experienced as an organization. On February 11, 2021 we celebrated the entry into force of the new Angolan penal code that decriminalizes homosexuality. On March 17, we also celebrated the official registration of our organisation, which legally enabled us to have more consistent and credible interventions nationally and internationally, as a feminist collective of LBTQI women.

In my culture and environment where I live and work, it’s the greatest risk to come out. But the LGBTQI+ community is the most supportive, thus where I live my open life. For me, Pride is a time where one can really be themselves in the company of real ‘family’. It’s a time for self assessment in the journey of self discoveries. The future looks bright because the young LGBTQI+ persons are strengthening the work to better the future. To my younger self, I would say “Come out early, it’s your life.”
I would say to my younger self, “don’t be ashamed of your sexuality, your processes of self-discovery and self-knowledge. Don’t apologize for being different, and don’t lower your head when everyone turns their back on you. Always be yourself.”

**MEET OUR AFRI PROUD VOICES**

**EMILIA**

My name is Emília Gervásio, I’m Lesbian, I’m part of a collective of feminist LBTIQ+ women legally known as ADMP (Association for the defense of women and peoples) and socially as AIA (Angolan Identity Archive). For me, Pride is freedom of expression, freedom to love and be loved without being judged.

A moment of celebration that my organization created was when we organized a Pride Gymnastics, alluding to the month of LGBT pride. We made our identities and differences visible. More than Gymnastics, it was about struggles, rights and diversity.

In the future, I hope to see Human Rights become more Inclusive, particularly in access to healthcare for Queer people living with HIV/AIDS. I also hope for better access to Sexual and Reproductive Health for young women and adolescents, as well as material on gender and sexuality implemented in schools. If I could teach my younger self anything, it would be how to be proud of my identity, [to gain] self-knowledge, everything I need to know to understand myself and make better decisions. I would also advise myself on good habits.
In Swahili, I can be called “Mvulana/Mwanaume”. I can also be called “Jike Dume”. As a trans man, activist and a queer African I live and work in a context consumed by ideas on ‘normalcy’ that could somehow be hard to live in. I come from a family and a society which perceive me as a “tomboy”; to them I’m just a girl who likes dressing and acting like a boy. Sometimes we have to live and hide under that umbrella so that we can survive.

I can say the family and the society still have expectations of me giving birth and getting married to a man, yes it is not a crime but that is not something I would like for myself. As a queer African operating in this context, the issues of bodily autonomy and bodily integrity are still a challenge. I have witnessed most of the Queer friends I know being under a lot of pressure of getting married and giving birth. [Some get] raped by members of their families believing that they could change (correctional rape). Through all these difficulties we are still pushing and raising our voices to make sure that all those injustices towards the Queer community come to an end.

In the future, we can be stronger, more visible, empowered, successful, healthy and independent queer community if only we have one voice and work with unity.

I think it’s time that the families and friends of queer Africans leave behind the ideas of what’s normal and be open minded, take time to learn and understand more about sexual orientations, gender identities and expression so that they can stop hating and fearing what they do not know and give love, support and accept their queer families and friends.

Tanzania Trans Initiative where I work is a safe space and a home for the queer community in my country, a place queers can run to when there is nowhere else to go. It’s a place of healing and expressing freely without any judgment or fear, it’s a platform of connecting and experience sharing as well as learning and manifesting into ideas and skills. We are proud to be able to provide support such as learning, connecting, networking and providing shelter for the queer community when they are in a celebration, we hope to keep on doing that. Creation of safe spaces and employment opportunities for the queer community is something that our organization celebrates every day, being a unaccepting and hostile environment is also something our organization celebrates every day.
GRANTEE PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

WAKE UP LADIES CAMEROON

#AfriProud
What work does Wake Up Ladies Cameroon do?

The work we do with African LGBT+ people can be broken down into several actions. We implement systems to fight against gender-based violence (GBV), raise awareness and provide education on human rights, sexual reproductive and mental health, GBV and well-being, and carry out digital campaign on themes related to GBV and homophobia.

We also carry out screening campaigns for recurrent STIs among LBQ+ women, provide psychological, psychosocial legal and medical support, including gynecological consultations, and offer nutritional assistance to indigent people.

In addition, we offer temporary relocation of LBQ+ victims of family rejection and unfair dismissal on the basis of their supposed or real sexual orientation, capacity building on feminist themes and militant engagement, and empowerment activity and support for training in art and professional trades.

What does Pride mean to Wake Up Ladies Cameroon as an organisation?

Pride for us as an organization has several aspects. To us, Pride means to challenge the status quo through the establishment of an association that defends the LBQ+ cause in a hostile context. It means challenging patriarchal power relations through an all-female LBQ+ association that stands up to be visible.

In relation to our communities, we take Pride in being an organizer of wellness and fulfillment activities; creating a safe space to celebrate all of our diversity, resilience and courage to come out (in parties) in a heteronormative environment; investing in digital spaces to raise awareness among community members and cleaning up the environment; gathering allies to the cause; celebrating actions, activists and community members who stand out for their courage and actions, and participating in the creation of a strong, inclusive movement with high impact.
Tell us about a time of celebration that Wake Up Ladies Cameroon facilitated

At WULC, we resource activities to promote the development and well-being of beneficiaries/staff who live in hostile environments. People participate massively and on a regular basis in these activities because this is perceived as a lifeline, a moment of escape from their realities which are often very harmful to their personal development.

Community members were rejuvenated during a trip to a seaside and tourist town (the town of Kribi). This experience from Friday October 23 to Sunday October 25 at the Hotel la Marée brought together 25 members for moments of relaxation and celebration with their feet in the water. Many visits to tourist sites such as the Lobe falls and the mythical beaches of the city have helped to satisfy the curiosity of some and awaken the taste buds of others. A masked evening closed the trip on tones of diversity, pride and well-being. This activity made it possible to strengthen the links between the different members of WAKE UP and thus reboost the energies to face the hostile daily life.

Renée, you're a member of WULC and also a queer African individual. Could you please share a bit of your personal story towards acceptance and more?

My journey towards accepting my sexual orientation and my identity as a Queer person has been a very difficult one. Coming from a conservative Christian family, as a child I was a tomboy who preferred the company of boys to that of girls.

As a teenager, I felt an attraction and a sexual need towards girls. When this need was satisfied through lesbian pornographic films, I began to suffer from eating disorders, especially anorexia, because I did not accept what I was doing. I lived in denial of my feelings and my impulses. My urges controlled me and my whole life. I became addicted to masturbation and lesbian pornographic films and as punishment I starved myself to repent of my sins and not go to hell.

The more I sank into this infernal spiral, the more I sank into depression and the fear of dying in sin. My fear was so great that suicidal thoughts had become obsessive and perpetual because I thought I was alone in going through this hell. During a visit to an LGBTQ+ organization under the invitation to a talk that I read about on Facebook, I met the person who is now my mentor and things began to click. This person who at first was my psychologist became my confidante and then my friend. It took a lot of patience and psychotherapy to get me to stop feeling guilty and accept my so-called “unnatural sexual orientation”.

The fight was and remains more difficult for anorexia because this disease found a fault in my psyche and settled there. Thanks to this help that I got during dark moments in my life, I was able to regain a taste for life and invest my energy in healthier actions. Today it is my duty as an activist and LBQ+ feminist to restore people in distress and who are questioning themselves in my community. Self-acceptance and self-affirmation are personal processes that require personalized and lasting support for a fulfilling life. Finally, I would say that as long as there are people who feel bad about themselves in my community, I will be there!!!

Today, I am proud, determined and relieved to be able to say that I am a Queer person.
Besides what Pride means to you as a member of WULC, what does Pride mean to you personally?

Pride for me is a polysemic and contextual word:

Pride refers to my existence, my life and my fight;

Pride is synonymous with fierce, committed and sisterly struggle

Pride is the legacy I would like to leave to future generations composed of joy, struggle, resilience, support and individual and collective freedoms

Pride is a daily, eternal and timeless motivation

Pride is love: the choice of love; it is respect: respect for privacy; it is the gaze: benevolent neutrality. This is harmony: acceptance

Pride is the loving gaze of my companion; the gaze from below reaching out to me for a morning hug with its dreamy smile.

Pride is you, it’s her, it’s him, it’s them, it’s me: what’s the point of using pronouns if we can just be us!!!!!

Proud and fulfilled human beings Finally, pride goes far beyond the word PRIDE, it’s a social way of life!!!!

What advice would you give a younger Renée?

The advice I would give is to turn your weaknesses into strengths while maintaining your identity. It is important to surround ourselves with good people who can guide us towards our self-acceptance and our fulfillment. The fight will be difficult and strewn with obstacles, the most important thing is to face it with pride and determination.

Personal security is an aspect to be taken into account, protecting yourself and your loved ones is essential because Cameroonians are afraid of the extraordinary and respond to ignorance with violence. Having a different orientation from heterosexuality is not a divine punishment, even less a fatality but an opportunity to see life differently and in incredible ways. Finally, the most important thing is the integration of close-knit groups sharing the same realities as us. These groups can have various forms: associations, movements, networks... the most important thing is that we unite to move us forward.
Beyond this month of June when we celebrate ourselves, how else can we carry our Pride with us?

Beyond this month of pride, being an LGBTQ+ activist in a homophobic country is already a source of pride, offering essential services to a marginalized community is an achievement.

HEROINES ARE ON EVERY STREET CORNER IN OUR TOWNS AND VILLAGES.

Before you go, can you please tell us who your African feminist heroes, heroines and guiding lights are?

My heroines are unknown, often overlooked African women endowed with bravery and strength who face the trials of life. It is the mother who carries her baby on her back on a bicycle in Burkina-Faso, it is the woman who sells attieké to feed her family in Ivory Coast, it is the teacher who gives basic education to our children in Kenya.

Heroines are on every street corner in our towns and villages. They are our moms who endured abusive marriages in silence, our sisters raped for not being “careful enough” right out of school. I marvel at the black African woman in her singularity and her diversity, her strength and her weakness. In each of the women I meet in the street slumbers an unimaginable and indestructible force that would not crumble before any obstacle.

No matter the adversity they will face they will manage to get by because they are warriors from the greatest lineages of the peoples of the forests, rivers, mountains and African deserts. We cannot take away their freedom to think and act for a better and sustainable future for future generations.
We asked our grantee partners to share some of their heroes, heroines and guiding lights in the work of promoting inclusion and embracing diversity.

At AWDF, we remember and honour the dearly departed and greatly beloved Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu whose commitment to justice, reconciliation and ubuntu was an inspiration to millions of people around the world.

The late Archbishop is famously known for having said, “I would not worship a homophobic God.” In a context where homophobia and its attendant violence is often justified using religion, Archbishop Tutu’s example reminds us that love is our true divine responsibility.

We also asked our grantee partners to share some Icons who they look up to. Here’s what they had to say:

- **Mwamba T Nyanda (TANZANIA):** This is myself, I believe I’m my own Hero, I have saved me, encourage me and got myself out from every pit that is set out there for me to fall.

- **Tshepo Kosita (BOTSWANA):** A Trans woman in Boswana who has set out examples and helped Queer communities to be resilient and never gave up, work hard and live our Dreams.

- **Beyoncé Karungi (ZIMBABWE):** She is a radical Trans Activist, who inspires me every day through her struggle for Identity and recognition. She is now a Leader, a Mother with Voice of Trans Diversity who is representing them globally.

- **Pepe Onziema (UGANDA):** Trans brother, Activist, a fighter who is Proud of his resilience in his life of freedom. Pepe’s confidence, calm boldness and lifestyle as African and Queer Inspires me.

MORE ICONS AND LEGENDS

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[Image: Pepe Julian Onziema Photographed by Stephen Lovekin/Getty Images for GLAAD]
- **Barbara Smith** is a black feminist, lesbian author who has been working in feminist and anti racism movements since the 1970s. She is well known for founding of the combahee river collective, an organization credited with developing one of the earliest definitions of intersectionality. The organization called on the feminist movement to address the intersections of multiple oppressions, such as racism and heterosexism.

- I am inspired by all black African women who defy social standards, women who are self-sufficient, independent, wise, healers, activists, artists, scientists and much more.

- **Sylvia Rivera** who did a liberation of the Stonewall riots in New York city fighting for the rights of the black Trans women.

- **Kasha Jacklyn**, Executive Director Kuchu Times, Uganda. She has lived all her life creating awareness of LBQT+ persons’ existence and needs.

  - My queer African heroes I celebrate every day is every queer who is out here pushing the queer agenda, who lost their lives trying to end the injustices toward the queer community, and the pioneers of the queer movement in Africa.

- **Alicia Garza** who started the black lives matter movement that helped to showcase the injustices that people in the Black community were facing. This really moved me into loving this particular individual, as most times people choose to be silent about such issues that are very contentious and cause lots of controversy.
THE PATH TO A PROUD CONTINENT
“Family belongs to community, and community takes its cues from family. We need to go back to real community engagement that sees us as people. We need to take back our lives by engaging our families and educating our communities. There are many more human beings than there are homophobes. So the more our families, friends, allies, and communities speak out against this scourge, the more the evil is isolated and shamed. So please speak up.” - **Bev Ditsie, South Africa (source: Global Citizen)**

“Be part of queer Africans’ support system, be a good listener/ shoulder to lean on, and defend queer people in unpleasant situations or environments.” - **M.**

“Support queer persons within your families to come out and live their true authentic selves and be the backbone on to which they can rely on for any form of support needed.” - **B.**

“Constantly engage with the queer communities to consult them on how they need to be served and catered for regarding their needs. Standing in solidarity and togetherness from within the queer community itself to act as a shield in times when we are facing attacks from the broader cisgender community that seeks to diminish our very own existence.” - **B.K.**

“In Angola, discrimination and violence starts in the family from a very early age, due to expectations, misinformation and beliefs. I think that families and friends could look to their LGBTQI relatives and friends with more empathy and respect, reinforcing the network of support and affection that is necessary for LGBTQI people to feel strong, confident and secure.” - **R.G.**

“Encourage queer persons within your sphere of life to know that it is ok to be different. There is power within our differences. Support and love queer persons that you associate with, as the queer community is always nursing wounds of rejection and isolation.” - **M. A.**

“The families and friends of queer Africans can show support by doing the showing care, letting our children know from an early age that there are other ways of being, being and loving, in addition to hetero-normativity, and [demonstrating the] power of choice.” - **E.**
“I imagine a country where people are treated with respect and dignity and have no shame in being who they are. For so long patriarchy has worked against existence of queer persons as we are always hunted and killed just for choosing to live differently. I wish for a time when policies and systems in place work in unison for the promotion and protection of queer persons lives in their totality.” - Beyonce Karungi, Uganda

“I envision a more open society on gender and sexuality issues, with stronger and more empowered LGBTQ+ groups and movements, I also envision more inclusive public programs and policies, more public services available to LGBTQIT people, and more social awareness about stigma, discrimination and violence.” - Roquiana Gunza, Angola

“In the next 10 years I want queer unshackled people to live in freedom; I imagine inclusive and protective laws that protect women, LGBTQ+ people, children and marginalized people; I imagine the abolition of homophobic and discriminatory laws and the punishment of homophobic acts; I imagine myself living in a more tolerant society that has accepted and understood sexual diversity.” - Renée Nwoes A. Sanam, Cameroon

“I imagine a world full of love and freedom for people to be who they want to be. I imagine a world where being different is not something people should be ashamed of but rather freely embrace and live their true selves. I envision a world of opportunities to all queer identifying persons because we have the skills and talent to impact this world though we rarely tap into these spaces because we are constantly fighting battles of discrimination and ridicule for being different.” - Monalisa Akintole, Uganda