CHANGE STORY 8:
RESPONDING TO A LACK OF SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNMENT TO ADDRESS BARRIERS TO HIV SERVICE DELIVERY FOR GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN IN ZIMBABWE

THE PROBLEM
Stigma and discrimination due to one’s sexual orientation or gender identity are not uncommon within health facilities in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in the world. According to a 2012-2017 violations report published by GALZ, one of the adverse effects of such unfriendly environments are reduced health seeking behaviours. Ensuring that gay and bisexual men could access friendly services required a comprehensive strategy supported by the government, which did not have any meaningful national health policy or normative guidance document developed in consultation with community. The also government had no official HIV prevalence rate or size estimate data published. This meant it could not ear-mark any resources for the delivery of sensitive and competent sexual health services to gay and bisexual men in Zimbabwe.

The Activities: Funding from Bridging the Gaps since 2012 has allowed GALZ to actively bring together civil society and HIV stakeholders to raise awareness of needs of the community to improve the rights of LGBTI persons. MPact also provided on-going technical support to GALZ in their advocacy for better inclusion of key populations and their needs in processes related to the Global Fund. GALZ actively participated in PEPFAR and Global Fund processes to advocate for inclusion, resource allocation, programming for gay and bisexual men as well as transgender people. This served a broader purpose of holding a broad community of HIV actors together in Zimbabwe focused on programming for gay and bisexual men. At the global level, MPact advocated towards PEPFAR, Global Fund and United Nations, and kept the pressure on them to sustain, increase and renew their commitments to gay and bisexual men. MPact also advocated for the inclusion of programming for key populations within the new Global Fund Strategy.

THE CHANGES
GALZ work on PEPFAR issues and the joint advocacy conducted by MPact and GALZ have culminated in the government scaling-up delivery of HIV-related services for gay and bisexual men and the training of healthcare professionals to deliver those services sensitively and competently across 45 sites identified by the community. This included doubling of targets and commensurate increases in funding support to reach more gay and bisexual men from 2016-2018 as well as ear-marked investments for the training of healthcare professionals.
providers in 2018. Further, PEPFAR through its subgranting to Population Services International (PSI) has allowed GALZ and other key populations to directly access resources to mobilise gay and bisexual men and transgender people linking them to HIV testing, STI screening, Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and information regarding sexual health and rights.

In addition, the Zimbabwean Ministry of Health, the Country Coordinating Mechanism and the National Aids Council allocated $2 million for programs and services for gay and bisexual men in 2017. The resources were earmarked to increase uptake in HIV services through establishment of drop in centres and linkage to services within new centers and public health facilities viewed as friendly by LGBTI people and other key populations. GALZ and UNFPA with other key populations went into partnership to implement programmes in 5 sites around Zimbabwe under the grant. In 2018, 7,000 MSM were targeted, with increases expected each year till 2020.

GALZ leveraged resources from Bridging the Gaps to address policy gaps by engaging parliamentarians through trainings and dialogue. At least 22 parliamentarians were trained and sensitized on LGBTI issues. This has led to champions within the Parliamentary portfolio on health calling for social inclusion and programming for LGBTI within the HIV sector and health.1,2

Furthermore, the Parliament of Zimbabwe extended an invitation for civil society to submit reviews and recommendations to the Zimbabwe Health Bill. GALZ took the opportunity to provide input on the proposed Health Bill to raise issues that address the rights of LGBTI persons in accessing health services in a friendly environment. GALZ made a submission in Parliament during the bill’s consideration. These developments are hugely significant and bring GALZ one step closer to its vision, which is to create ‘a just society that promotes and protects human rights of LGBTI people as equal citizens in Zimbabwe.”

\[quote\]
Back in the day, we had informal contact with the Ministry of Health. At that time, we were simply happy that they were willing to receive information. The environment at that time, created by Mugabe, did not even allow the Ministry to want to be associated with GALZ. Then, after a few years, they would start sending us invitations to meetings but without any mention of GALZ and being addressed to anyone and without a signature.
\[quote\]

– Executive Director, GALZ

\[lessons\]
Global-level advocacy efforts do not take place in isolation. It demonstrates a response to demands placed on high-level policy makers and global funding institutions by civil society so that key population needs are met in the context of the environment at country. As a global network and in close partnership, MPact worked as an intermediary link between GALZ and high-level policy makers. By carefully tracking shifts in the global HIV policy environment and analysing their implications with partners at country level, MPact was able to interpret community needs against donor demands – translating these into tangible results. This includes gathering timely input from in-country community leaders, facilitating robust information exchange, and ensuring capacity building of local activists to bear influence at the national level.

This change story points to the importance of a range of activities from global-level advocacy to locally-led interventions, and illustrates the role of community, their resilience and the ingenuity of their work. This change was a result of sensitization of health professionals, years of national-level and global-level advocacy, and the provision of MPact technical assistance to GALZ over time so that they could guide the Ministry of Health in development of guidance and roll-out of interventions.

\[photo\]
Wilkins Hospital, one of the first clinics in Harare that opened its doors for LGBT people

1 news.pindula.co.zw/2018/06/22/top-zanu-pf-officials-meet-gays-and-lesbians-association-of-zimbabwe/
2 allAfrica.com/stories/201811260241.html