

# Mobilization of the “Men having Sex with Men” (MSM) community in French speaking Africa

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## Issues

Until very recently, the HIV epidemic in Africa was considered as exclusively heterosexual. Recent surveys alerted the international community to significantly higher seroprevalence rates for African MSM (more than twenty times higher than in the general population in Senegal), but MSM communities are hard to reach.

## Description

AIDES, the largest French AIDS Community-Based Organization (CBO), has developed partnerships with African CBOs to strengthen their capacities in advocacy for universal access to treatment and comprehensive care of people living with HIV/AIDS. Some of them expressed the need for information exchange on practices of HIV prevention and care among MSM in Africa. In October 2007, AIDES organized a one week meeting in Burkina Faso gathering CBOs and MSM associations from 9 countries in French-speaking Africa. Among the 28 participants, 13 declared themselves MSM. They have been identified through LGBT international networks, word of mouth and contacts between local CBOs and MSM leaders (who were mostly met at dating locations). The encounter of MSM organisations and CBOs created a 'working together' momentum and led to a common action plan.

## Lessons learned

- Most CBOs face a lack of knowledge about MSM prevention and care, and therefore barely engage in MSM services.
- MSM need CBOs for specific comprehensive care services.
- MSM groups can be easily identified through peers at gay dating locations and gay websites.
- Given the opportunity, African gays can enrol in CBO prevention programs within MSM communities.

## Countries

Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, France, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Morocco, DRC, Senegal, Tunisia.

## Next steps

- Encourage emerging mobilization and consolidate the willingness for commitment from the participants: AIDES shall provide technical support for the implementation of the action plan.
- Advocate the acknowledgement of sexual minorities in Africa, at international and national levels. Moreover, HIV prevention and care for MSM shall be developed and sustained both in African national public health policies as well as in international programs.

### An example of an action led together

*Just after the second workshop that was held in Bamako, about twenty homosexuals, in Senegal were arrested by the police who recognised them as having participated in a private gay party two years previously. The very existence of the AFRICAGAY network made it possible to react immediately, reassuring the activists in danger and ensuring the release of the homosexuals incarcerated arbitrarily. The young AFRICAGAY network alerted the other African networks already in place, thus allowing for more consistent and forceful action together.*

Second AFRICAGAY workshop, Bamako (Mali), january 2008



## AIDES, a French NGO

Set up in 1984, AIDES is the largest HIV/AIDS community-based organisation in France, with centres in over 70 cities. We support partner organisations in Central and Eastern Europe, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

### Our main goals:

- To inform vulnerable people about HIV/AIDS prevention and testing
- To support PLWHAs, (social & professional integration, therapeutic education)
- To advocate for the rights of PLWHAs.