

# Mama Trans in Mozambique

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The 19th and 20th June yet again served to add important dates on the African trans history timeline. During this weekend Portuguese speaking activists from Angola and Mozambique came together to learn and share about Gender Identity. This remarkable workshop was initiated by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) and included Gender Dynamix and Lambda, the local LGBT organisation in Maputo, as partnering organisations. This workshop resulted from the previous joint venture between IGLHRC and GDX with the gender identity workshop hosted in Cape Town in December 2008.

Diversity in official languages on the African continent proved a challenge for communication, yet with proper planning arrangements had been made to ensure translators were prepared to have conversations flowing. &ldquo;It is very important to be well prepared for the differences in understanding &lsquo;the same word&rsquo; in various cultural settings&rdquo;, says Liesl Theron from GDX who learned during the weekend that whereas the word &lsquo;gender non-conforming&rsquo; is acceptable in English it would come across as derogative in Portuguese when directly translated and &lsquo;gender non-normative&rsquo; should rather be used.

During the workshop participants had the opportunity to map the challenges and opportunities experienced in Mozambique for trans and gender non-normative people. Social stigma in various forms was pointed out as the most challenging for any person who does not fit in the hetero-normative mainstream.

Without any previous organised advocacy for the rights of trans or gender non-normative people in Mozambique, one has to negotiate your way around within existing systems at the Home Affairs office in Maputo. One person said that when applying at the Home Affairs office with certain documentation, the official went as far as telling the person that the only way the paperwork could be completed was to strip it naked to &lsquo;establish gender&rsquo;.

Nearly 20 people attended the workshop, one person was from Angola and the Mozambiquans were from different provinces. Although clergy, journalists and a lawyer were invited, only activists and members from Lambda attended the workshop.