



Salzburg Global LGBT Forum Strengthening Communities: LGBT Rights & Social Cohesion

Monday, June 15, 2015

Going Global: Help or Hindrance?

That global attention on LGBT issues has increased is indisputable – but is this having a positive impact on individual nation's situations?

As the 57 Fellows from 33 countries grappled with the question, the overwhelming response was: not always.

Too often “helicopter researchers” come into countries without a real understanding of the local context, explained Kasha Nabagasera of Uganda. “They take our stories but they don’t give back,” she added. Often these stories only portray the extremes, calling certain countries “the worst place in the world to be gay.” This narrative is not helpful, Fellows agreed, as it enables countries to maintain their regressive laws on the assumption: “At least we’re not the worst!”

“Sometimes we need the world to make noise,” added Nabagasera. “Sometimes we need quiet diplomacy.” Too often the international attention given to LGBT rights enables homophobic governments to claim that sexual minorities are not a natural feature of their societies but instead a Western import. Xin Ying of China added that LGBT advocates are often advised to avoid working with Americans.

International media and advocates need to realize and respect the local situation, recognizing that it is not the same from country to country. Marriage equality and gay adoption might be a priority in some countries – but you cannot advocate for these rights if homosexuality is still illegal.

Even if legal recognition and protection are in place, these laws can be “hollow” if they are not supported by real societal change. We need to sensitize institutions like the police, maintained one Fellow.

Nor is the situation the same across communities. Homophobia is rife in Latin America, remarked one Fellow, but trans acceptance is higher than in more LGBT-tolerant societies: what can be learned?

But this is not to say that the global conversation cannot be helpful. Global alliances can provide valuable support – financially and emotionally, offering the aspiration: “If they can do it there, we can do it here – and in our lifetime.”



Fellows consider the impact of the global conversation in Uganda, Venezuela, Russia and China

Strengthening LGBT communities Third Salzburg Global LGBT Forum opens

“The global discussion has reached a critical point where we need to secure progress,” declared founder and chair of the Salzburg Global LGBT Forum, Klaus Mueller.

Speaking at the opening of the third annual Forum, Mueller urged the growing network of LGBT rights advocates to ensure this global attention is met with “real structural changes” before attention and momentum is lost. “Now is the time to combat for full equality,” he added.

To this end, this year’s program focuses on *Strengthening Communities: LGBT Rights & Social Cohesion*.

“Some states...use homo- and transphobia as a marker of their cultural identity, national sovereignty or religious purity. So-called ‘traditional family values’ are claimed to justify the exclusion of their lesbian, gay, trans- and intersexual citizens from legal protection, their daughters and sons from their families, their neighborhoods, their culture. Advocating hierarchies, exclusion and hate, they threaten the very fabric of family, parenthood and citizenship which are defined by inclusion, protections and equality,”

stated Mueller.

The Salzburg Global LGBT was founded in 2013 with the goal to engage in and strengthen the global conversation on LGBT human rights, developing a long-term global and personal network – which now spans 53 countries six continents – that enables LGBT advocates across the world to understand each other and join forces in developing and galvanizing international solidarity.

Over the course of the five-day program, Fellows will focus on how to advance LGBT rights both locally and globally, focusing on the social impact and economic cost of social exclusion of LGBT communities; the value of LGBT community-led storytelling in enhancing visibility and acceptance of sexual minorities; and the need for truly transformative change. “Before the global attention wanes – and it will – can we identify the decisive steps needed to advance LGBT human rights?” asked Mueller.

Through facilitating global conversations, working groups and exhibitions, Salzburg Global hope the Fellows will find some helpful answers.



Reports of previous Salzburg Global LGBT Forum sessions can be found outside Parker Hall



Chair of the Global LGBT Forum, Klaus Mueller

Hot Topic

How has the global conversation impacted your country?

“Sometimes the Chinese LGBT activists localize the projects or campaigns from abroad, which can help our community become more visible and develop more alternate strategies. We also try to adopt best practices from other countries and form connection with activists from those countries to exchange opinions and information. We recently learnt to get involved in litigation to promote our advocacy.”

Ying Xin, executive director of the Beijing LGBT Center in China, and co-founder of Wuhan Rainbow

“You have to think globally, and strategize globally. You think of a globally strategic plan, but at the same time you have to give everyone in the field the ability to change this strategic plan according to the specific needs of each country. You cannot impede equality. It is inevitable in humans to have equality. That is where global perspective is influencing local perspective. You have to strategize at both levels: global and local.”

Tamara Adrian, Venezuelan lawyer, chair of the Committee for the IDAHO

“It gives an idea of where we are in terms of LGBT rights not in a particular country, but globally. There is no place that is perfect and picking a particular country and saying that needs improvement or that needs improvement, is just too narrow. So it sets the perspective of where we are as humanity... But the most important part of global movement is that it inspires other people to become activists. When they see that change has been achieved somewhere in the previous years, it makes it feel like it is possible to achieve it in our country.”

Rooi Teve, Salzburg Global LGBT Forum member

“The global movement has brought the issue [of LGBT community in Uganda] to the forefront. The countries that were never paying attention are beginning to pay attention. It is no longer under the carpet. People have to face reality that it is happening in our backyards, it is happening in our own homes. For me that is a positive thing that activists are willing to speak out and put a face to the struggle.”

“There is also a negative side. The line ‘LGBT rights’ is being misinterpreted by people, who think we are asking for special rights. So it should be human rights for LGBT people. That language needs to change to encompass it in to general human rights for everybody.”

Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera, founder of Freedom and Roam Uganda and editor of Bombastic

Join in online!

Do you have an opinion on the topics we’re discussing here? Or do you want to share your thoughts on how you feel about the whole experience of being here with such a diverse and international group at a palace in Salzburg? If you’re interested in writing either an op-ed style piece or a personal reflection blog whilst you’re here this week, please let Salzburg Global Editor, Louise Hallman know or email your submission directly to lhallman@salzburgglobal.org.

You can also join in the conversation on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram with the hashtag #SGSLGBT. You can find all your fellow Fellows on Twitter via the list www.twitter.com/salzburgglobal/lists/SGS-506

Follow [@salzburgglobal](https://twitter.com/salzburgglobal) on Twitter and Instagram and like Salzburg Global Seminar on Facebook: www.facebook.com/SalzburgGlobal

In all your writing and online postings, please remember the Chatham House Rule: you can say what was said here, but you can’t say who said it without their explicit permission. Thank you!

The 2015 Salzburg Global LGBT Forum is being held with the generous support of Austrian Development Cooperation, the German Federal Foreign Office, Hivos, Michael Huffington and Open Society Foundations. Additional support is provided by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and the Economy (bmfwf), the German Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), the HDH Wills 1965 Charitable Trust, The Korea Foundation, and The Nippon Foundation.