

Researching LGBTQ rights in restrictive contexts: theories, methods, ethics

Convener:

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Cultural relativism is one of the most discussed topics in theories on human rights, and perhaps nowhere else do adversarial positions meet more fiercely than in discussions around the universality of LGBTQ rights. With few exceptions, development research, practice and funding mechanisms are challenged when adopting a universal human rights lens as a normative position in contexts where local, regional and cultural systems not only reject universal human rights of LGBTQs, but actively push an adversarial position. After more than a decade of advancement of LGBTQs' rights and increased social acceptance in many contexts, the pendulum appears to have reversed. Several countries are currently fiercely rejecting the notion that universal human rights encompass LGBTQs, often on the grounds of protecting cultural identity and integrity, as well as national sovereignty.

The purpose of the panel is to explore the challenges connected with navigating and conducting research in restrictive contexts where the rights of the research subjects and participants are not only ignored, but actively and fiercely opposed. Although the panel's emphasis is placed on research related challenges, the same mechanisms are also likely to impact negatively on development practitioners' ability to support universal human rights objectives, most recently restated in the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) and its rally call - Leave no one behind.

The panel will in particular explore the following topics in greater detail (but is not limited to them):

Methods and ethical considerations. That is, an exploration of challenges connected to access to the field and participants in restrictive contexts, as well as ethical considerations in planning and conducting research.

Funding and access to funding where research project will potentially be clandestine and not be able to obtain local research permits or include easily identifiable research partners.

Theoretical learning opportunities through empirical experiences. The panelists have experiences from three semi-democratic contexts - Tanzania, Russia and Uganda – where LGBTQ rights are actively attacked by both state and civil society actors. These case countries, albeit with some differences, are strong proponents for a reversal of last decade's global human rights gains, thus fueling a global backlash against LGBTQ rights.