



Grounding **LGBTQIA*** Organising

**Insights on property ownership
from Southern and Eastern Africa**

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Based on findings from the research project “**Developing a Participatory Process for a Movement-Led Property Funding Mechanism**” undertaken by [The Firm Consulting](#) (Johannesburg, South Africa) in 2024

Creating owners – our property purchase grant-making journey so far

Over the last few years, Dreilinden has supported property purchases by LGBTQIA* civil society organisations (CSOs) in Bulgaria, Chile, Georgia, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Lithuania, Namibia, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe in order to build movement-owned safe spaces and stabilise one of the most significant operational expenses – the cost of space.

In 2022 we worked with Wellspring Philanthropic Fund to commission [a study on the ripple effects of property purchases](#) on civil society organisations and the wider ecosystem in order to gain a deeper understanding of how our strategy is working. The study provided us with some yardsticks for assessing and framing longer-term effects:

1. Enhanced financial stability and independence
2. More efficient and sustainable organisations
3. Empowered organisations and their staff
4. Healthier queer communities, organisations and individuals
5. Greater integration of LGBTQIA* within the social landscape
6. Growth of the movement and actualisation of queer rights

We published two guides in 2023 that provide [LGBTQIA* funders](#) and [CSOs](#) with practical guidance on the journey towards funding and purchasing property. In [a short video](#) that highlights examples of property ownership by organisations in Kenya, Romania and Columbia, activists speak personally about their journey from their own perspective.

In 2023 we started out with the question: What might a movement-owned property funding mechanism for Southern and Eastern Africa look like? Our idea was that such a mechanism might lead to more demand (a pipeline of projects) and more supply (more donors getting involved). We collaborated with The Firm Consulting, or The Firm for short, a collective of consultants with close ties to the movements, which facilitated a consultation process. Activists and members of the LGBTQIA* communities from nine countries in Southern and Eastern Africa participated to put our deliberations on a firm footing and provide their thoughts on the idea.

“Asking people to dream this has been a big thing. We have asked: ‘We have an idea, what do you think about it?’ That changes the power dynamic already. We asked what they needed, and they answered.”

– AKANI SHIMANGE, THE FIRM

A research process for modelling inclusivity

The Firm crafted a process that would model inclusivity.

The consultations invited 92 individuals to a conversation on multiple platforms and in multiple formats. These individuals represented regional, subregional, national and community-based organisations and as many identities in the LGBTQIA* spectrum as possible.

The representatives came from a total of nine countries in Southern and Eastern Africa:

- **Southern Africa:** South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe
- **Eastern Africa:** Kenya, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia

These countries were selected to provide a robust cross-section of diverse perspectives on queer rights and property ownership, respecting:

- **Language diversity:** Language plays a significant role in shaping cultural norms, legal systems and societal attitudes. By including countries with different primary languages, The Firm intended to encompass the diversity of experiences and challenges within Africa's LGBTQIA* communities.
- **Status quo of LGBTQIA* organising:** Countries with diverse organisational forms were deliberately chosen so that we could explore the challenges and opportunities that emerge at various points in the movement's development. Involving countries with well-established organisations and those still in the emerging stage provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the landscape.
- **Legal and regulatory differences:** Legal environments have a substantial impact on the rights and activities of LGBTQIA* organisations. The Firm opted for countries with varying legal frameworks, ranging from relatively progressive legislation to more restrictive laws.

What LGBTQIA* movements think about property ownership

- Unanimous agreement on the benefits of property ownership for enhancing organisational stability and security across Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia, Botswana, DRC and Zimbabwe.
- Collective understanding of property ownership as a foundation for long-term sustainability.
- Recognition of property ownership as a tool for empowerment, conferring legitimacy and visibility.
- Universal understanding of the importance of property ownership in creating safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces and sanctuaries.
- Perception of property ownership as a step towards economic empowerment, providing opportunities for income generation and reducing dependency on external funding.
- Valuing property ownership as a strategic asset in advocacy efforts, providing a physical base for mobilisation and for organising and carrying out campaigns.
- Recognising that the permanence of a property serves as a beacon of hope and resistance and demonstrates the resilience and determination of LGBTQIA* communities.

But: In Ethiopia and Mozambique, property acquisition, while an exciting prospect, is hindered by significant legal and societal constraints. A purchase could turn out to be divisive for current movement-building efforts, or too risky. There are more pressing needs, such as funding for movement-building and advocacy.

The movements' recommendations for how property purchase grant-making can become even more transformative

The movement consultations gathered important insights for us and the funding community on how to navigate property purchase grant-making.

Property purchase grant-making must not be an exit strategy for donors

While property ownership reduces an organisation's reliance on rental markets and can potentially lower operational costs, it does not eliminate the ongoing need for operational support.

Capacity building is key to leaving no one behind

While the demand for property ownership is loud and clear, many organisations need training and support to get to a point where they are ready to purchase and manage property. If this sort of accompaniment is not provided, nascent, rural and less-visible organisations with reduced access will be left behind. Organisations that are already a little further down the road could help build the capacity of others. (Our "[How-To Guide](#)" for CSOs could be a start for any CSO thinking about purchasing.)

Community-centric approaches ensure accountability

It is important that property acquisition strategies are directly relevant to the needs of LGBTQIA* communities. Establishing mechanisms that ensure the involvement of diverse community perspectives is paramount when property is to be acquired in a community's name. Collective decision-making on where and how to purchase property could become part of movement-building efforts within the respective country.

Collective ownership is the better option

Collective ownership is seen as a strategic approach for property acquisition and management by LGBTQIA* organisations. This concept is built on the principle that land and property should be accessible to all, particularly benefiting organisations that cannot normally afford their own spaces. Study participants emphasised that collective ownership fosters collaboration, resource-sharing and a stronger sense of community among LGBTQIA* organisations, making it a preferred and sustainable option.

“How does a property sit within an ecosystem of activists? What will a property do for the community? How can it not just benefit a snippet of the movement? Gather folks and ask. People need to sit in rooms and have conversations.”

– THE FIRM

Funding for property ownership needs to stick around for a while

In some countries, the process of land acquisition is usually quite long (three to four years at least). Property purchase grant-making should therefore provide for long-term support.

Funding for property ownership needs to be fluid and adaptive

Property purchase grant-making should be flexible and responsive to the rapid changes and challenges within the communities and the broader socio-political landscape. A responsive funding mechanism is one that acknowledges the urgency of securing safe spaces in the face of threats or opportunities. It should be able to mobilise resources quickly to address property-related emergency needs. A pooled fund, where donors can put in money, is recommended.

A new entity could focus on giving property purchase grants in a participatory way.

Study participants recommended the establishment of a new funding body that would focus exclusively on property purchases. This entity would build up country-specific property purchasing expertise, assist in developing the necessary policies and frameworks for property ownership, and provide support on questions of sustainability and maintenance. It would also focus on strengthening the capacity of organisations interested in purchasing property in the future by facilitating training and peer-to-peer exchanges.

A board made up of activists from across the region, with the support of an advisory board composed of international and local funding partners as well as other stakeholders, is the first step towards ensuring a participatory process through community involvement.

Recommendations from further research included imagining how communities could be fully immersed in shaping funding priorities, not just serving on traditional participatory grant-making panels but also deciding on the country-specific priorities of property purchases. Opening up a call for suggestions in all priority countries and then having country-specific bodies select the top priorities for their country anonymously would allow the priorities to be community-owned and has the additional effect of broadening the scope of potential property use.

There is an overarching need for communities to feed directly into this entity. Having a combined top-down and bottom-up approach that places the new entity at the heart of multiple forms of community input is the unique feature of this approach and will require the entity to respect those processes and utilise them effectively.

Grounding – LGBTQIA* communities are here to stay

We believe that funding property ownership can play a role in putting LGBTQIA* organising on a firm footing and contribute to more autonomy and self-determination. From the research, we have learned that demand is high – and that building funding mechanisms for property purchases that are community-centred is a complex and challenging undertaking that cannot be managed alone. We are looking forward to rich conversations with peer-to-peer donors and people from the movement in order to create beneficial entities and processes together and find ways of moving forward to provide LGBTQIA* communities with the spaces they need. Because those communities are here to stay!



About Dreilinden

[Dreilinden](#) supports social acceptance of gender and sexual diversity by means of grants to existing organisations and selected projects, as well as through social investments and networking.

About The Firm

[The Firm Consulting](#) is a consulting consortium registered as a company in South Africa that brings together queer consultants from across all five subregions of Africa who have experience working with civil society in the Global South on a broad range of issues affecting queer people.

Property in Okahandja, Namibia, purchased by Y-Fem in 2023 with support from the Baring Foundation and Dreilinden