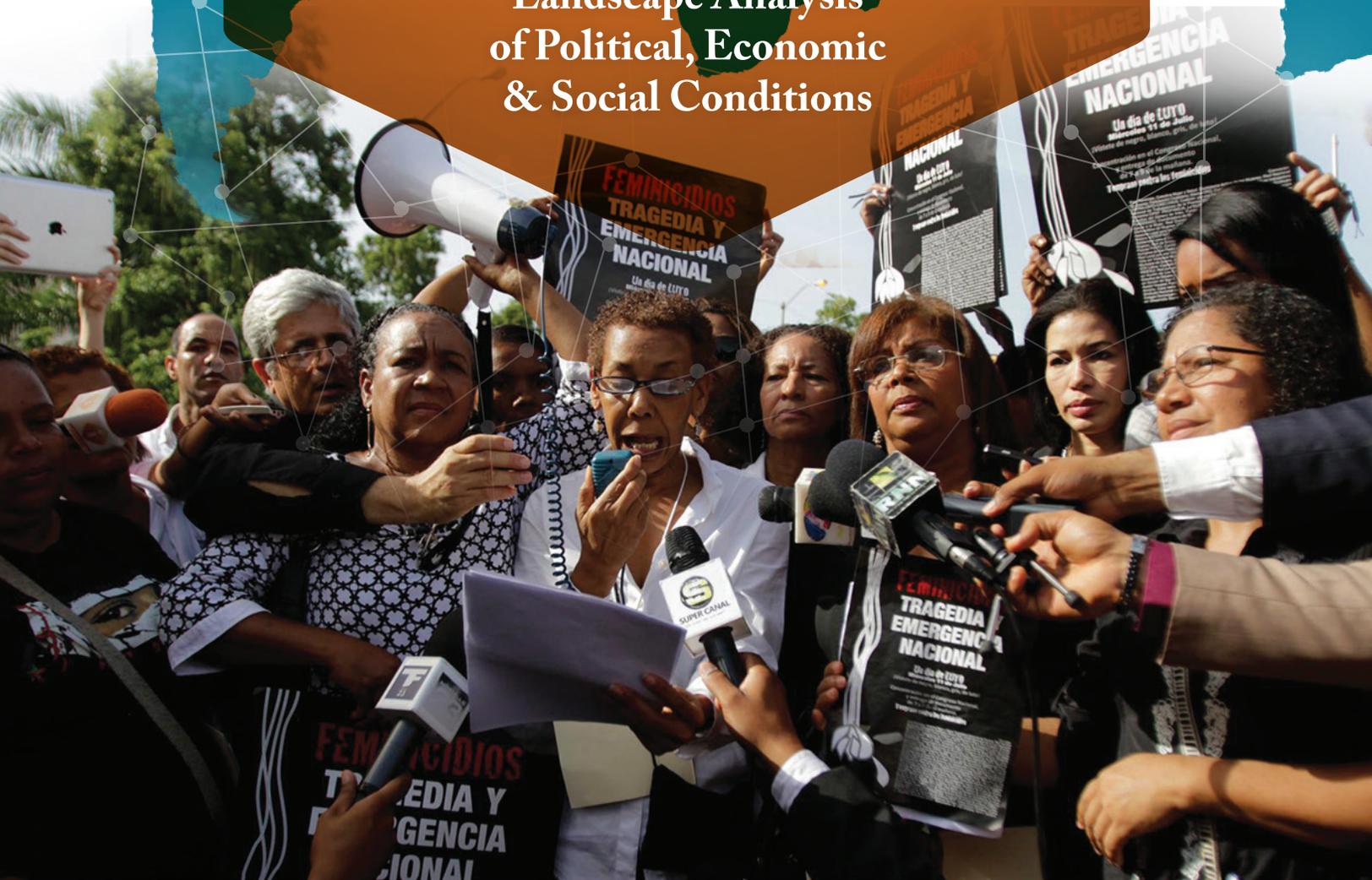


DOMINICAN REPUBLIC LGBTT

Landscape Analysis
of Political, Economic
& Social Conditions



Astraea LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE



Dominican Republic: LGBTTT Landscape Analysis of Political, Economic, & Social Conditions

October 2017

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This report was produced by the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, the only philanthropic organization working exclusively to advance LGBTQI rights around the globe. We support hundreds of brilliant and brave grantee partners in the U.S. and internationally who challenge oppression and seed social change. We work for racial, economic, social and gender justice, because we all deserve to live our lives freely, without fear, and with profound dignity.

Cover photo: *Femicides Day of Mourning, 2012*. Pic by: Colectiva Mujer Y Salud

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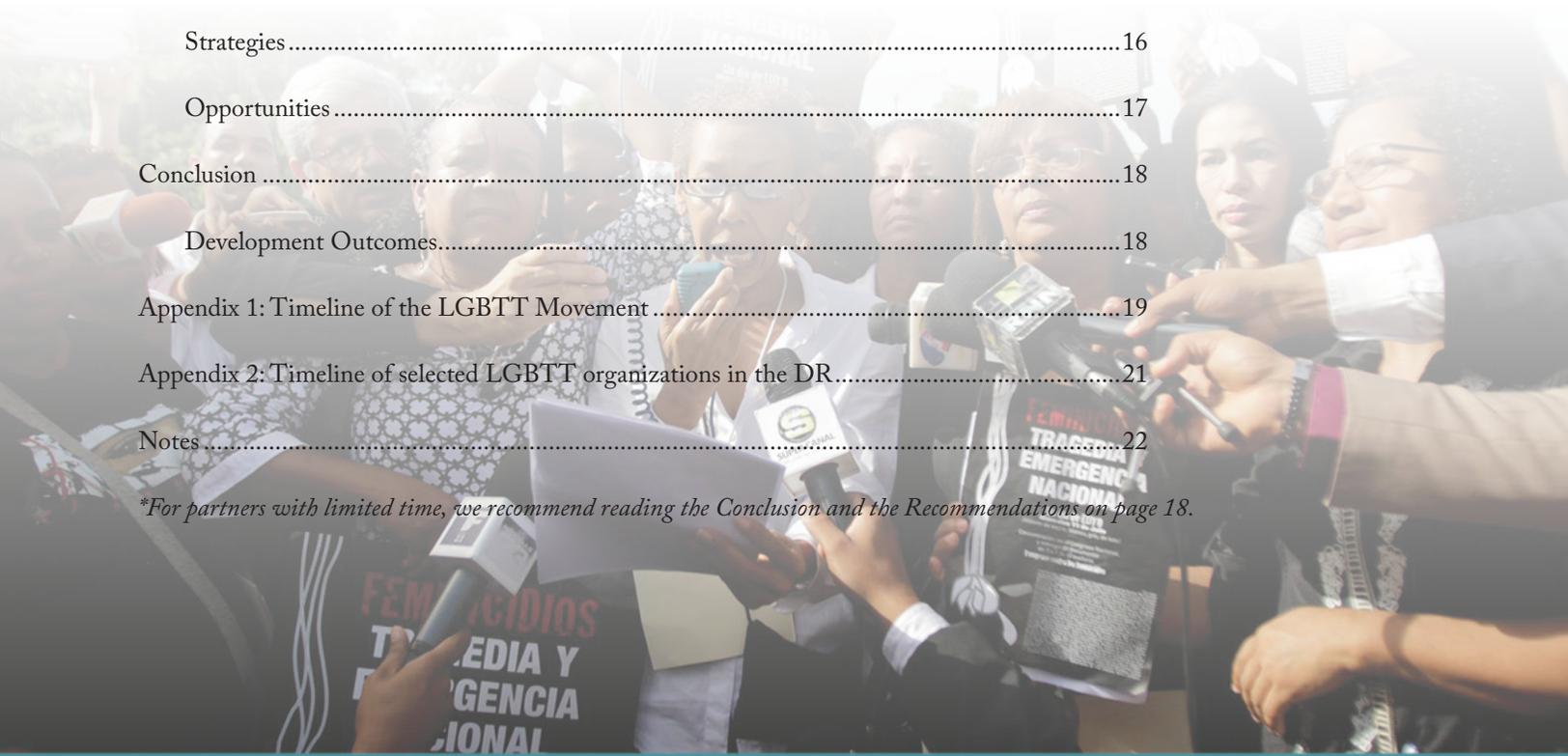
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INTRODUCTION

This report provides a landscape analysis of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/trans* and *travesti* (LGBTT)¹ movements in the Dominican Republic (DR), offering an overview of the country's political climate, history, and current status of movements for justice and equality. It presents data-driven recommendations for promising areas of reform and engagement to improve the life conditions and human rights environment for LGBTT individuals and communities in the DR.² The acronym LGBTT will be used to refer to the collective of community-based and institutionalized groups working in the Dominican context. While some individuals use the English word “queer”—or the Spanish pronunciation of that word as “cuir”—to describe their sexual orientation or gender identity, the term “queer” is not widespread and is generally used only by people with more economic, educational, and cultural mobility. When organizations use other acronyms than LGBTT to describe their work, this report will refer to them accordingly.

Starting in the 1980s, there has been a steady emergence of organized groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the DR specifically committed to raising awareness, providing support, and promoting the rights of LGBTT people. As in many countries, some of the first organizations to emerge were founded by and focused on gay men and men who have sex with men (MSM) in response to the threat of HIV and AIDS. Throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, there has been a slow, yet steady, growth in the number of community-based organizations led by lesbians, trans* women, and men.

The DR's LGBTT movement has grown tremendously over the past decade with new organizations increasing its diversity and reach. These vibrant, young groups are strengthening the voices of underrepresented communities and bringing new energy to the struggle for LGBTT rights.

Decades of LGBTT activism have yielded some important accomplishments. For example, Dominican law now includes a few specific and positive references to sexual orientation and gender identity. They are the following:

DOMINICAN LAWS THAT PROTECT SEXUAL ORIENTATIONⁱ

2000



The General Youth Law (which defines youth as those between the ages of 15 and 35) aims to promote the development of young people “regardless of gender, religion, political, racial, ethnic or sexual orientation, and nationality” and prohibits discrimination against young people on the basis of their sexual orientation.ⁱⁱ

2007



Article 11 of the Criminal Code of Procedure instructs judges and the public prosecutor to consider the particular conditions of each individual and case, and not to base decisions on factors including sexual orientation and “other conditions with discriminatory implications.”ⁱⁱⁱ

2011



An HIV/AIDS law calls for its application without discrimination based on sexual orientation, sexual conduct, and sexual and gender identity. It also calls for comprehensive sexuality education that includes information regarding the diversity of sexual orientations and identities.^{iv}

Legal protections in the DR, however, are few and far between, and the prevailing socio-cultural environment provides little assurance that the legal, civil, and human rights of LGBTT individuals will be upheld.

The laws in the DR do not extend legal protection to include any hate-crime laws that can be used to prosecute violence and discrimination against LGBTT people. There is a dearth of laws and policies to explicitly protect LGBTT people from discrimination in housing, education, employment, health care, and access to public services. Furthermore, there is no legal means by which trans* people can change their legal name and gender identity marker. Additionally, while sex work is not illegal in the DR, trans* sex workers are often arbitrarily detained, harassed, and assaulted by police and customers alike.³

COUNTRY BACKGROUND

The DR is the second-largest nation in the Caribbean with a population of over 10 million—one million of whom live in the capital city of Santo Domingo. The poverty rate has remained constant at approximately 40% since 2005.⁴ Despite the Dominican Republic's growing economy and its classification as an upper middle-income country, wealth inequality is stark. The richest 10% benefit from almost 40% of the Dominican Republic's income, while the poorest half of the country's population receives less than 20% of the nation's GDP.⁵ Unemployment rates remain high, hovering around 15%.⁶

Along with LGBTTT harassment in the DR, there has historically been rampant discrimination against Haitian

immigrants and people of Haitian descent who were stripped of their Dominican citizenship in a 2013 ruling by the country's highest court. In addition to Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent, women, people with disabilities, people living with HIV and AIDS, and LGBTTT individuals constitute some of the most vulnerable communities in the DR. Gender-based violence is widespread, and women face multiple barriers in access to justice. According to a local organization, Profamilia, one in four women, aged 14-49, has experienced some form of violence.⁷ Amongst Latin American and Caribbean nations, the DR had the third highest rate of femicide in 2013.⁸ There is little awareness of the rights of people with disabilities who face stigma, social exclusion, and barriers in access to services.⁹



Marcha Contra Transfobia (March Against Transphobia), 2014
Pic by: Carlos Rodríguez

LIFE FOR LGBTT DOMINICANS

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE) is also widespread. LGBTT groups report harassment, violence, police abuse and extortion, bullying in schools, difficulties obtaining and maintaining employment, and barriers to adequate and respectful health care.¹⁰ Religious leaders, politicians, journalists, and other public personalities routinely espouse homophobic and transphobic attitudes. Intersecting forms of discrimination based on SOGIE, as well as race and socioeconomic status, make some LGBTT people even more vulnerable to civil rights violations.

LGBTT Dominicans face discrimination and violence in many aspects of their daily lives that affect their ability to access education, employment, health care, and other critical services. In a country rife with gender-based violence, LGBTT people experience high rates of harassment, sexual assault, and other forms of violence. The murder rates for trans* women, in particular, are extremely alarming. Police

harassment is common and affects not only transgender women with a range of sexual orientations and gay men, but also cisgender lesbians. In the “Violence Against LGBTT Dominicans” section of this report, we include specific quantitative and qualitative references that support this premise.

Legal Protections

While Article 39 of the 2010 Dominican Constitution upholds the principles of non-discrimination and equality before the law, it does not specifically include sexual orientation or gender identity as protected categories, despite advocacy by Dominican LGBTT groups during the constitutional reform process. It does, however, prohibit discrimination on the grounds of “social or personal condition” and mandates that the State “prevent and combat discrimination, marginalization, vulnerability and exclusion.”¹¹ Advocates see these clauses as potential openings for the State to uphold the rights of LGBTT people.



Marcha Contra Transfobia (March Against Transphobia), 2014
Pic by: Carlos Rodríguez

While there is no explicit law *against* same-sex marriage, Article 55 of the Constitution describes marriage as the union of a man and woman. In its most recent Universal Periodic Review before the United Nation’s Human Rights Council, the Dominican government responded to concerns regarding discrimination based on SOGIE by stating, “There is no prohibition on marriage of persons of the same sex, but our Constitution does indicate that the family is made up of a man and a woman.”¹²

In 2014, a salient anti-LGBTT law was referred to in a public statement by Police Chief Manuel Castro Castillo. According to local organizations, Castro Castillo stated publicly that homosexuals would not be accepted into the police force. He referenced Law 285-66, which makes sodomy between police officers punishable by a prison sentence of up to two years.¹³

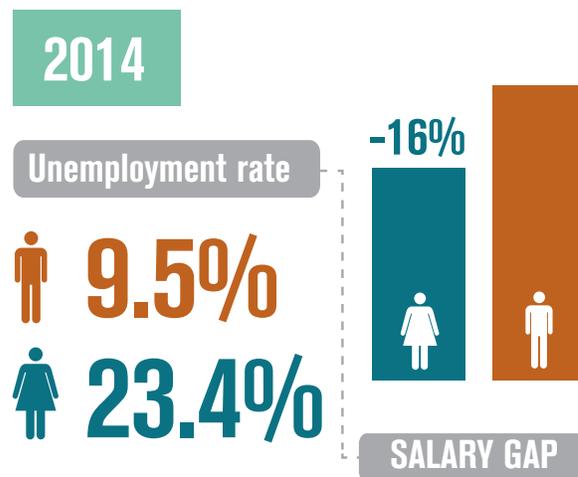
A 2015 report by Human Rights First predicted several promising openings for legal change in the country’s penal code. Throughout the year 2016, the DR Congress had the chance to approve a new penal code that would have prohibited and established penalties for discrimination on the basis of “sexual preference or orientation”¹⁴. However, the change to the penal code did not occur.

The DR has no laws prohibiting conversion therapies for homosexuality.¹⁵ Therefore, since the early 1970s, the country has hosted an Evangelical institution called Escuela Caribe, a “Christian therapeutic residential boarding facility” run by American religious organizations. It is alleged that the institution used to subject students to physical abuse and other forms of punishment that include forced labor and conversion therapy. The Escuela Caribe was infiltrated by the filmmakers of *Kidnapped for Christ*, a documentary co-produced by Lance Bass that debuted at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival¹⁶. Escuela Caribe closed in 2011 and transferred its property to another Christian ministry called Crosswinds, which reopened the school under the name, Caribbean Mountain Academy¹⁷. Hundreds of teenagers were and continue to be removed from homes in the USA and sent to these ex-gay/behavior modification schools located in the mountainous region of Jarabacoa in the DR.

Poverty and Wealth

Despite notable growth since the 1990s in the country’s GDP—primarily from tourism, remittances, and free trade agreements—economic security remains out of reach for many Dominicans. In these sectors, there are few protections for workers’ rights and the number of those engaged in informal employment has skyrocketed.¹⁸ Wealth inequality in the country remains glaring. With an overall unemployment

WEALTH INEQUALITY IN THE DR



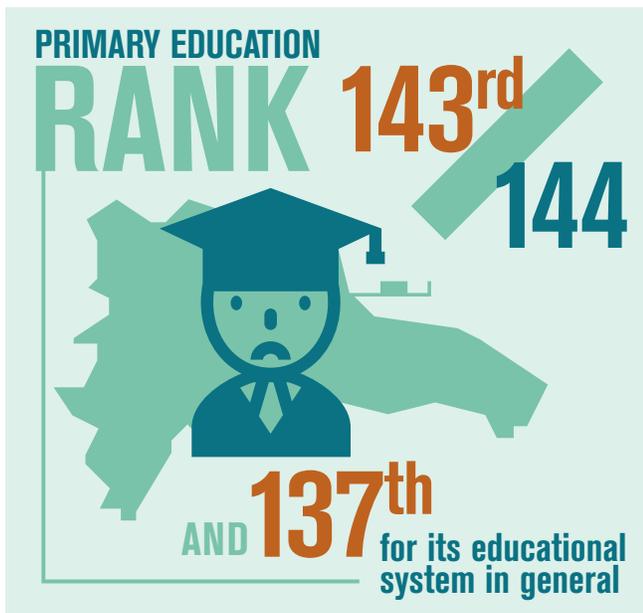
World Bank (2016). Unemployment, male (% of male labor force) (modeled ILO estimate). Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.MA.ZS/countries>

World Bank (2016). Unemployment, female (% of female labor force) (modeled ILO estimate). Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.FE.ZS/countries>

rate of 15%, women are much more likely than men to be without work: 23.4% of women were unemployed in 2014 versus 9.5% of men.¹⁹ The gender disparity is also visible in salaries, where women receive lower wages for the same work, resulting in a salary gap of 16%.²⁰

There are no official data regarding the experience of poverty and wealth among LGBTT Dominicans, but research done at the local level indicates that LGBTT people face workplace discrimination and lack of access to formal employment opportunities²¹. The DR’s labor laws do not include sexual orientation or gender identity as grounds for protection from discrimination and, unlike the constitution, do not include other categories under which LGBTT individuals might seek redress.

In a survey by the National Council on HIV and AIDS, 56.3% of gay men, transgender women, and MSM reported being rejected in the workplace.²² In another survey of individuals registered with LGBTT organizations in Santo Domingo, more than 60% reported that they did not have steady employment.²³ Dominican LGBTT organizations report that, “Transsexual women have no access to formal employment, transsexual men have to seek alternative jobs to make ends meet, lesbians do not have access to decent employment and, in most cases, are employed in call centers or engage in sex work.”²⁴ This lack of protections indicates a serious need for the creation and implementation of laws and policies that guarantee equal access to employment for those



USAID (2013, December). Dominican Republic country development cooperation strategy FY 2014-2018. Retrieved from <https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1862/dominican-republic-country-development-cooperation-strategy-fy-2014-2018>

who face discrimination on the basis of their sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression, in addition to cultural change strategies to increase social inclusion.

Education

Given the documented relationship between economic development and education, one of the most worrisome factors about the DR is its public education system. Out of 144 countries globally, the DR ranks 143rd in quality of primary education and 137th for its educational system in general.²⁵

Dominican law upholds the right to education “without any discrimination based on race, sex, creed, economic and social position or of any other nature.”²⁶ Yet LGBTTT people face multiple barriers in accessing education, including bullying and rejection, resulting in high dropout rates, especially among trans* women.²⁷

Health Care

Health care is another area where Dominican law conflicts with the lived experience of many people. Dominican law technically upholds the right to health care without discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, age, religion, social status, politics, sex, legal status, economic status, physical limitations, intellectual, sensory or any other reason.²⁸ However, local organizations report that health professionals do not treat LGBTTT individuals with dignity or compassion, and

that they fail to provide adequate or appropriate care—either because of their own discriminatory attitudes or because of a lack of knowledge regarding the health needs of LGBTTT people.²⁹ While HIV prevalence among the general population is 0.8%, it is 17.2% among those who identify as transgender.³⁰ Among MSM, HIV prevalence ranges from 3.9 to 6.9%, depending on the geographic region.³¹ Both groups are prioritized as key populations in the Dominican Republic’s national HIV and AIDS response strategy.

In its concluding observations of the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the DR, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) noted that discrimination against lesbians prevented their access to sexual and reproductive health services. Furthermore, the bullying and ridicule that trans* individuals encounter when visiting public hospitals also deters many from seeking care and increases health risks.

Violence Against LGBTTT Dominicans

LGBTTT individuals face violence and threats of violence both in the home and in public from family members, strangers, police, and military personnel. Aggressive acts range from verbal threats and intimidation, to assault, sexual violence, and murder. The lack of legal protections in the DR, including the absence of hate crime statutes, creates an environment of impunity for those who attack and abuse LGBTTT people.

The Dominican Republic’s criminal code does not explicitly outlaw homosexuality. However, few laws uphold the rights of LGBTTT people. There are no protections addressing the widespread discrimination and violence that the community faces.

The Dominican Republic’s criminal code does not explicitly outlaw homosexuality. However, few laws uphold the rights of LGBTTT people. There are no protections addressing the widespread discrimination and violence that the community faces. For example, between 2006 and June 2017, the trans-led organization, TRANSSA, has documented a total of thirty-eight (38) murders targeting transgender women³². The victims of these crimes share similar profiles as sex workers and only four (4) of them have been prosecuted through the judicial system.

Often, it is the families of victims who do not want to prosecute the cases despite the many disproportionate barriers this community faces, such as extreme poverty, job discrimination

and police harassment. This number of murders does not include transgender people whose deaths were not reported as trans* due to misgendering in police reports, news stories, and sometimes by the victim's family. Trans* sex workers are especially vulnerable to harassment and violence. A survey of 90 trans* sex workers in Santo Domingo and Santiago revealed that 33% had been victims of abuse at work; 36% in the streets; 21% by their partner; and 42% by clients. In addition, the survey revealed rampant abuse by police: 80% had been arrested or detained and 36% had exchanged sex with police officers to avoid arrest.³³

According to the Coalición GLBT³⁴, “Harassment committed by heterosexual men and suffered by lesbians... is so severe, it gets to a point where the women live in a constant fear that physical violence or sexual aggression might occur at any moment.” Many of these murders are notable for the brutalities they demonstrate, including torture and mutilation—a strong indication of hate crimes.³⁵

Harassment and extortion by the police pose serious challenges to LGBTTT individuals' security and ability to obtain justice. As of December 31, 2015, the Observatory of the Human Rights for Vulnerable Groups in the DR had recorded at least 40 cases of discrimination, arbitrary arrest, and violence, specifically against gay people, MSM, and transgender sex workers. The cases most frequently implicated the National Police and the Tourism Security Specialist Corps.³⁶

As recently as October 2016, members of the Policía Nacional Dominicana were recorded conducting arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial detentions...

As recently as October 2016, members of the Policía Nacional Dominicana were recorded conducting arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial detentions targeting people who were hanging out at Parque Duarte, which is well known as an LGBTTT haven in Santo Domingo. An ally who was nearby took civilian footage of the incident, and used social media to highlight the unfair apprehension. The video clearly showed that no one was breaking the law.

Many LGBTTT individuals do not report incidents of violence, either because they fear being exposed to further abuse or because police were the perpetrators. According to local groups, few cases are treated seriously, properly documented or investigated, and their faith in the justice system is weak. According to a report presented by Dominican civil society before the UN Human Rights Committee, “Dominican laws do not provide for punishment against hate crimes based on sexual orientation

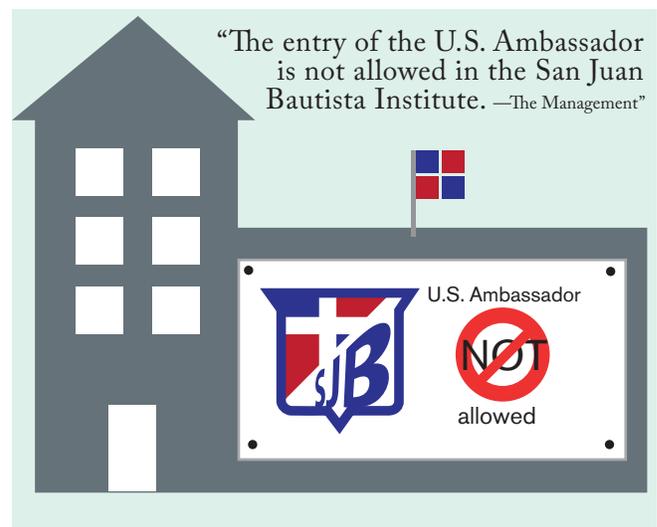
or gender identity. To the contrary, public policies seem to benefit particular sectors and media outlets [...] to instigate hatred and discrimination against this population.”³⁷

Public Opinion and Attention

According to a 2014 survey, 72% of the Dominican population is opposed to same-sex marriage and 83% say that homosexuality is morally wrong.³⁸ In some countries, a negative public opinion on LGBTTT issues is attributed to/correlated with religion. In others, it's due to political views. In the DR, it is a combination of both, which results in a complicated environment for the community and prevents LGBTTT people from freely expressing their identities without fear of persecution or violence.

The Catholic Church plays an influential role within the Dominican government.

The Catholic Church plays an influential role within the Dominican government. Its central position was institutionalized during the rule of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1961), who signed a Concordat with the Vatican, opening the path for the last 60 years of political partnership between the Church and State.^{39 40} This agreement provided financial leniency and economic guarantees for the management and expansion of Church properties, placed the armed forces under the Cardinal's pastoral jurisdiction, and in 1990, extended the Cardinal's jurisdiction to include the civilian police and their families.⁴¹



Religious leaders from Catholic as well as Evangelical churches have played a powerful role in promulgating their values regarding sexual and reproductive rights, including sexuality education and access to contraception and abortion.

They have also been outspoken with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity. In an open letter from Catholic and Evangelical churches as well as conservative intellectuals on January 5, 2016, the authors proclaim their respect for homosexuals and decry discrimination in the workplace, but state they will only tolerate homosexuality as long as it remains “private.” They also suggested in this letter that the U.S. ambassador to the DR, James “Wally” Brewster, is unwelcome in the country given his identity as a gay man and his public advocacy for LGBTTT human rights.⁴²

The Christian right and conservative media reacted negatively to the appointment of James “Wally” Brewster as the U.S. Ambassador to the DR from November 2013 to January 2017. The clergy and media met Brewster with scorn and public ridicule due to the fact that he was open about his sexual orientation and marital status as a gay man legally married to another man.

The aforementioned public letter accused the U.S. government and the United Nations of intending to create a “morally depraved” environment. They argued that the mere invitation and presence of the Ambassador and his husband normalizes “gay and lesbian practices” in Dominican schools. Indeed, a particular school in April 2016 preemptively hung a sign within school premises that read⁴³:

Events like this, which received much media coverage and stirred public opinion debates, were commonplace in the DR during the time that Brewster was the U.S. Ambassador in the DR.

Additionally and of note, U.S. Ambassador Brewster played a strongly supportive role in the LGBTTT movement in the DR during his ambassadorship, in part because of the support he showed simply by attending, endorsing, and publicly supporting LGBTTT events.

Public attention around LGBTTT experiences increased again the day after the Pulse massacre in Orlando – where 49 people were killed and 53 people were injured in the deadliest single incident of targeted gun violence against LGBT people in the history of the United States. Just a few hours after the world found out about the carnage that occurred on June 12, 2016 in the state of Florida, close to

2,000 participants organized by the Catholic Church and the Evangelical movement carried out a prescheduled march on June 13, 2016. They marched around the hotel where the 46th General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) was being held in Santo Domingo claiming that the new OAS Secretary General, Luis Almagro, represented the interests of those who want to “to impose abortion and homosexuality throughout the Americas while the people have tried to protect their families and religious liberty”⁴⁴.

Although it was just a coincidence that this march was scheduled to happen the day after the Pulse massacre, the decision to carry on with the march despite the news of the attack and the collective mourning exacerbated tensions between the local LGBTTT community and religious groups. On June 13, 2016 conservative protesters marched with signs against abortion, marriage equality, and sexual education, and in favor of “respect for the Dominican cultural identity”, while members of the trans* community inside the hotel where the OAS Assembly was taking place were also being harassed by members of these conservative organizations. Emotions ran high for everyone involved, indicating the real tensions in the discussion about reproduction, gender identity and sexual diversity in the DR.

Pulse incidents certainly bring up issues related to gun control, mental health, militant groups, and safer spaces for LGBTQ people in the United States. However, the tragedy that happened on June 12, 2016, also hit home for many Dominicans. The death of four Dominican men that night underscored the increase of migration patterns between the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Latino enclaves in the United States. For some LGBTTT Dominicans, like the four killed at Pulse, the persecution, discrimination, and criminalization they face (and which is often sanctioned by the DR’s religious, public, and private institutions) is a factor in driving those who can to migrate to the United States.

We can better understand the issues surrounding public opinion and the influence of religion over it, if we consider the stark differences in national reactions to international events and influences by looking at the sequence of events that happened in the county from June 12-14, 2016.

A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS:

June 12-14 In Santo Domingo and Conflicting Demonstrations about Reproductive Justice, Gender Identity, Sexual Diversity

ORLANDO PULSE, NOCHE LATINA

**49 killed
53 wounded**



The Dominican Republic's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and ally communities were shaken after hearing the news of the Orlando massacre on June 12, 2016, in which 49 people were killed and another 53 were wounded. That night, the Pulse nightclub was hosting Latin Night and about 90% of the victims were part of the Latinx community. Four of the victims of this mass shooting—one of the deadliest in recent American history—were of Dominican descent.



June 12

It was a tough day for LGBTTTQ and ally people inside the 46th General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the areas surrounding the assembly. Not only was the community as a whole mourning the victims of the Pulse massacre, but there were also triggering incidents orchestrated by groups within and surrounding the OAS.

In events leading up to the Civil Society and Social Actors Forum,⁹ working groups were split thematically to include women's issues, family, democracy, LGBTTT issues, and human rights, among others. The anti-rights groups were primarily gathered at the "family" working group and they also managed to register/infiltrate working groups for women's rights and human rights. Their presence was quite aggressive and made the discussion difficult, confining it to two polarized positions.¹⁰

Later, at the time of the presentation of recommendations to the Forum, there was a confrontation when an anti-rights representative blocked transwomen from entering the women's restroom. Trans* people and allies showed up at the restroom doors and loudly denounced the transphobia that was taking place until the situation dissolved.

Moreover, surrounding the hotel where the Civil Society and Social Actors Forum was taking place, local Dominican religious groups decided to keep their plan to have a "prayerful march for life," led by Catholic bishop, Victor Masalles.

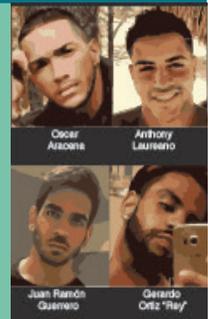
June 13



By the evening of June 14, 2016, Santo Domingo-based LGBTTT groups had organized two vigils

to mourn the sudden loss of so many lives and to memorialize the names of their own who perished to hate. They were all between the ages of 22 and 26.

U.S. Ambassador Brewster and his husband, Bob Satawake, participated in the vigils to condemn the acts of violence in Florida and to extend special condolences to the victims' families in attendance at the event.



June 14

The departure of U.S. Ambassador James "Wally" Brewster at the end of his term in January 2017 has left a void amongst the LGBTTT organizing community. Brewster frequently appeared at public events and in the Dominican media. He also met regularly with LGBTTT rights advocates. All these

appearances were very important to challenge what we know from public opinion surveys. His support to the development of the LGBTTT community helped highlight all the discrimination directed towards the LGBTTT community in the country.

THE DR'S LGBTT MOVEMENT

History of the LGBTT Movement

Starting in the 1980s, there has been a steady emergence of organized groups and NGOs specifically committed to raising awareness, providing support, and promoting the rights of LGBTT people. As in many countries, some of the first organizations to emerge were founded by and focused on gay men and MSM in response to the threat of HIV and AIDS, to which the Dominican government was initially ill-equipped to respond. Amigos Siempre Amigos (ASA), founded in 1989, was among the first of these groups and has become a well-funded leader in HIV prevention, counseling, and clinical services in the gay and MSM community.

During that same decade, the feminist movement in the DR grew and created openings for organizing around issues of sexual orientation and identity. La Colectiva Mujer y Salud, a

feminist organization founded in 1984, recognized the experiences of discrimination that women faced because of their sexual orientation and provided the home for the first group explicitly for and by lesbians, Mitilene, in 1985. In some cases, women's organizations also supported the emergence of trans* women organizing. For example, the Comunidad Trabajadoras Sexuales Transexuales y Travesti Dominicanas (COTRAVETD) emerged from the women's organization, Movimiento De Mujeres Unidas, which focuses on the rights of female sex workers.

Since the mid-2000s, there has been notable growth in the number of community-based organizations founded and the diversity of communities they seek to represent: lesbians, trans* women and men, gay university students, and local LGBTT media-makers.⁴⁴ Most recently, coalitions of LGBTT groups



Caravana Orgullo LGBT Dominicano (Dominican LGBT Pride Caravan), 2012
Pic by: Carlos Rodríguez

and allies have begun to form to take advantage of advocacy opportunities like the drafting of the National Human Rights Plan. The Coalición de Activismo LGBT, formed in October 2015, is currently working to raise awareness of hate crimes and to combat anti-LGBT campaigns being led by Catholic and Evangelical groups.

It should be noted that intersex experiences have yet to be visibly linked to broader feminist or LGBTTT advocacy at a local level. Although there is a high prevalence of intersex cases in the southern region of the DR, more research and advocacy need to be done at all levels.⁴⁶

Challenges for LGBTTT Organizing

The LGBTTT community in the DR experiences different kinds of discrimination that negatively impact all aspects of their lives. In response, LGBTTT people make subtle and profound changes to their everyday lives to minimize the risk of experiencing discrimination, thus hiding their authentic selves.

These are some of the more salient challenges that the LGBTTT movement currently face:

Religious fundamentalism and the power of conservative groups have been the biggest obstacles to advancing laws and policies that would protect LGBTTT people.

Religious fundamentalism and the power of conservative groups have been the biggest obstacles to advancing laws and policies that would protect LGBTTT people. When addressing the dramatic rise of fundamentalist forces in the DR, feminist organizations have expressed concern that there is now specific and targeted organizing against lesbianism and homosexuality. During interviews, activists stressed repeatedly that, in earlier times, it was generally known that churches were against sexual and gender diversity. However, a proactive right wing has been growing, bearing close resemblance to the extreme right in other countries.⁴⁷ New government officials have said little to nothing about LGBTTT issues in public discourse.

In the past few years, there has been an increasingly strong Evangelical presence with initiatives like the Ministerio de Transformación en Cristo (Ministry of Transformation in Christ), whose aims align with those of the international ex-gay movement. Feminist organizations report that the

Evangelical-Catholic alliance is especially worrisome because the former cannot compete with the latter's level of access to economic, media, or human resources. A **lack of legal protections and public policies** means that the LGBTTT community has little recourse in combatting discrimination on the basis of SOGIE. Violence incited against LGBTTT people is not investigated or punished, much less prevented.

Most of the funding that LGBTTT groups can access is HIV prevention-related.

Most of the funding that LGBTTT groups can access is HIV prevention-related. This limits possibilities for engagement in human rights advocacy and fails to recognize the diversity of needs within the LGBTTT community. Seeing Amigos Siempre Amigos's fundraising success as an organization focused on HIV prevention, many LGBTTT-led organizations in the country have followed suit. Groups like TRANSSA, COTRAVETD and others recently established outside of



Caravana Orgullo LGBT Dominicano (Dominican LGBT Pride Caravan), 2012
Pic by: Carlos Rodríguez

Santo Domingo, primarily focus on provision of HIV-related services and are limited in their ability to conduct political advocacy. Current HIV prevention models in the DR do not require or provide for political understandings of bodily autonomy and health in relationship to sexuality.⁴⁸ Smaller organizations are self-funded and conduct activities using volunteer labor, or have held targeted fundraising/social events (for example, to fundraise for a float in the annual pride caravan), or receive small grants from the few organizations that provide rights-based, grassroots funding such as Astraea, American Jewish World Service, or CARIFLAGS.

Unequal access to funding has affected organizing and lived realities within the LGBTTT community.

Unequal access to funding has affected organizing and lived realities within the LGBTTT community. The relative advantage held by organizations led by gay men and trans* women in accessing funding, albeit HIV-related funding, has inhibited organizational structures from being truly inclusive of lesbian and bisexual cisgender women or trans* men in leadership or membership. As a result, lesbians, bisexual and trans* masculine individuals have more limited access to direct services such as counseling, support groups, and clinical health services. In comparison to cisgender men (gay and MSM) and trans* women, they also lack safe spaces for socializing and political organizing.

There have also been historical challenges in sustaining lesbian activism. During the initial stage of the lesbian movement, groups like Mitilene produced newsletters and regularly scheduled events. But after running for almost a decade, Mitilene did not have the capacity to institutionalize their lesbian feminist activism. Unable to make a living from their organizing, many of the movement's leaders opted to take other professional routes, whereas gay men were able to support themselves through HIV-prevention focused NGOs.

A second wave of lesbian organizing emerged in the early 2000s, signaled by the creation of the literary publication, *Divagaciones Bajo La Luna*, and the significant presence of lesbians in the organizing of a 2006 Pride demonstration, but there was little sustained organizing. Over the past decade, however, there has been a marked resurgence of the lesbian movement with the development of groups including Diversidad Dominicana (DiverDom) and the Coordinadora Lésbica y de Hombres Trans (COLEHT), which is an umbrella organization for groups that merged from other, smaller groups like La Laguna de Safo, La Candela, República Libre, and the Women's Ministry of the Metropolitan Community Church.

Challenges that are intrinsic and internal to the LGBTTT movement may pose impediments to maintaining a unified front with a national agenda.

It should be noted that some of these groups are inclusive of trans* men and include women allies who may not identify as lesbian or bisexual. In 2016, the Colectiva Mujer y Salud drafted a LesBiAgenda. This document contains the results of the National Consultation on Human Rights in which 61 lesbian, bisexual and non-heterosexual women participated. It aims at a profound transformation of social structures to expand on policies and allocate budgets to meet the social demands of diverse groups of citizens, who, according to their



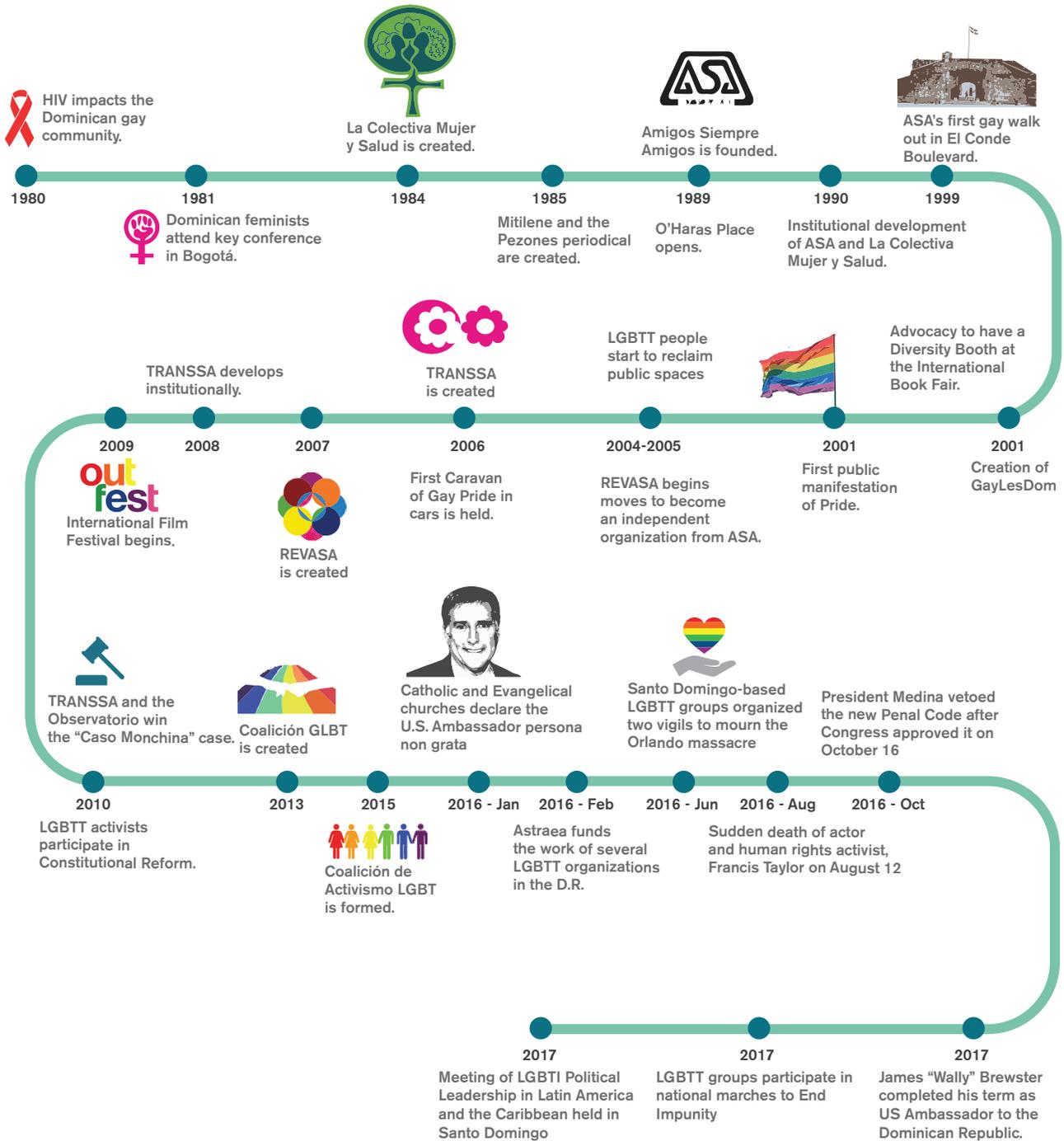
Samples of Colectiva Mujer y Salud's Social Media Campaign around their #LesBiAgendaRD publication

sexual preference, are named lesbian, bisexual or other women who do not identify as heterosexual.

Challenges that are intrinsic and internal to the LGBTTT movement may pose impediments to maintaining a unified front with a national agenda. Differences in perspectives regarding mandates, methodology, membership and attitudes toward coalition work have created fractured interpersonal and organizational relationships. Since the mid-2000s, some organizations have fought for and enjoyed increased visibility, particularly groups like ASA and REVASA. Visibility of the LGBTTT community has also grown with groundbreaking events like the annual Pride Caravan, begun in 2006, as a way to circumvent permit requirements, and the Outfest Film Festival, begun in 2009. Yet there is much disagreement among the leadership of LGBTTT organizations about whether the programmatic and funding priorities of groups like ASA and REVASA represent the aims of the movement. The lack of trust within the movement manifests in a lack of strategic collaboration and support among some groups. Tensions revolve around generational differences in understandings of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, as well as methodologies for coalition building.

TIMELINE OF LGBTTT MOVEMENT

One of the contributions of this study is an analysis of the specific time and place of the current LGBTTT movement within a larger historical context. This timeline maps many of the key events that have led to victories for the LGBTTT movement, as well as some of its challenges, successes and hopes for the future, as a way to better understand the cultural context of the LGBTTT struggle.





Samples of IURA's 2017 bi-weekly social media campaign for ally recruitment

Strategies

LGBTT organizations are employing a diversity of strategies to improve the lived reality of LGBTT people in the DR, including working as part of a national network that has been advocating for LGBTT rights and inclusive development for over a decade. Groups are providing psychosocial and other forms of support to community members, campaigning to change public attitudes, advocating at the national and international levels to improve access to non-discriminatory services, pushing for anti-discrimination protections, and increasing access to justice.

At the international level, groups such as DiverDom and TRANSSA are writing shadow reports, **conducting advocacy at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, utilizing the Universal Periodic Review** process at the U.N. to highlight violence and discrimination against LGBTT people, and calling for legislative and policy changes.

Through **coalition work**, LGBTT organizations and allies have engaged visibly and with growing strength in **national-level policy discussions**. In 2010, during the Constitutional reform process, groups participated in public forums and testified before the Constitutional committee to call for the explicit inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity as protected grounds. In 2015, they advocated successfully for the inclusion of LGBTT people in the National Human Rights Plan.

Through **grassroots organizing** and often in **partnership with feminist organizations**, the movement is strengthening community and building awareness about human rights. Groups have come together to **create greater visibility and understanding** of the LGBTT community through creative public events, such as staging fake “marriage ceremonies” to encourage dialogue about civil rights, and holding the yearly Pride caravan.

Independent cultural and media makers In the DR are producing alternative understandings of gender and sexuality to reach younger generations of Dominicans, who have grown accustomed to receiving information via social media and digital technologies rather than local television, print media or radio.⁴⁸ Recently two different coalitions of distinct LGBTT groups and allies have begun to form to take advantage of advocacy opportunities, such as drafting a National Human Rights Plan and collaborating with a local group called Human Rights Observatory for Vulnerable Groups.

To promote increased recognition of the human rights violations the LGBTT community faces as well as access



Marcha Contra Transfobia (March Against Transphobia), 2014.
Pic by: Carlos Rodríguez

to justice, organizations are **training judges and public officials** on gender-based violence, human rights, and sexual rights. Groups such as the Trans Human Rights Observatorio are **documenting human rights violations** of trans* women in the DR and pursuing **strategic litigation** to create legal precedents.

Opportunities

Despite opposition from the religious right, there may be growing momentum for legal change in the DR. Advocates hope for penal code reforms, which are expected to take place in the coming years. Since 2013, the Dominican Republic's National Council on HIV and AIDS (known as CONAVIHSIDA) coordinated a multi-sectoral group and submitted to the President, Danilo Medina, a project of General Law on Equality and Non-Discrimination. The project of General Law seeks to protect against discrimination based on "skin color, national or ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, language, religion and/or spiritual beliefs, cultural identity, political or any other type of opinions, social origin, socio-economic

position, education level, migration condition or being a refugee, deportee, stateless person or internally displaced person, disability, people who have fulfilled their sentences, genetic characteristics, mental or physical health condition, including infectious-contagious, psychic-incapacitating or any other, imprisonment, among others."⁵⁰

The fact that the project includes penalties for discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation can set a precedent for further legal advances. With coalition efforts increasing, groups will continue to employ coordinated advocacy strategies to push for an LGBTTT-inclusive, anti-discrimination law and measures to address violence against LGBTTT people. In a promising sign, the national HIV body has already indicated its commitment to anti-discrimination legislation.

The Executive Legal Counsel has been reviewing the project since 2016, and it is expected that, in line with President Medina's National Strategy for Development 2030, equality will be recognized as a pillar of public policy.



BesatónRD action, 2015. Pic by: Carlos Rodríguez

CONCLUSION

Although the movement faces serious challenges from conservative politicians and religious leaders, important gains are being made in building community, gradually influencing public discourse and increasing recognition of the need for protections against discrimination and violence. With opportunities to push for new legislation and policies that recognize the human rights of LGBTTT people, this is a key moment to invest in the movement, support organizations to strengthen institutionally, and build upon alliances.

Development Outcomes

LGBTTT Dominicans face a number of intersecting injustices. This report serves as a compilation of useful data to human rights defenders, civil society organizations, media, and allies of our communities to create a more inclusive Dominican society.

This information can be useful to support advocacy and change processes in the DR where sexual orientation intersects with other issues. Media and allies can find precise references to the actual content of laws, and then report and raise awareness of where this information leads.

These are some of the more immediate areas in need of development:

1. Increased access to non-discriminatory health services for lesbian and bisexual women, trans* men and gender-nonconforming people through consciousness-raising efforts within the health sector and development of health protocols for these communities.
2. Increased government commitment to defend the separation of Church and State and implement laws and policies that aim to decrease discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.
3. Increased accountability for protecting trans* people from violence and human rights violations, including through legal advocacy, documentation, and case-specific action, with a focus on trans* sex workers and Haitian trans* migrants.
4. Strengthened capacity of LBT grassroots organizations, including around media, communications and public education, as well as increased coalition building and collaboration among organizations and movements.

Recommendations for Advocates, Allies and Funders

Invest in building the capacity of LGBTTT grassroots organizations in organizational management, policy advocacy, international advocacy, and the use of communications and media to amplify their strategies.

Fund organizations led by lesbians, trans men and gender non-conforming people, as most funding has historically been directed to gay male-led organizations. Support under-represented communities such as youth, sex workers and Dominicans of Haitian descent.

Extend funding to organizations based outside Santo Domingo, where the human rights situation of LGBTTT is often more acute and more invisible.



Support coalition and cross-movement efforts around human rights documentation, public policy implementation, and monitoring of government commitments to reduce discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Fund activists to engage in international advocacy at the OAS and UN, such as the UPR and CEDAW, to hold the Dominican government accountable.

Support the development and implementation of efforts to counteract religious fundamentalist opposition to LGBTTT rights, including hate speech.

APPENDIX 1

1980s - 1990s		
1980s	HIV impacts the Dominican gay community.	In the 80s, HIV appears and people begin to mobilize. ^{vii} The Dominican community, especially gay men and MSM, feels the impact of HIV.
1981	Dominican feminists attend key conference in Bogotá.	Critical connections made with women from Puerto Rico at a 1981 feminist conference in Bogotá. Through gatherings, workshops, and further in-person exchanges, women organize into what they call “self-awareness groups,” dedicated to the self-exploration of consciousness and feminism. ^{viii}
1984	La Colectiva Mujer y Salud is created.	La Colectiva Mujer y Salud forms with the idea of creating a “house for the feminist woman.” Workshops are held across the country on a range of women’s rights issues. ^{ix}
1985	Mitilene and the <i>Pezones</i> periodical are created.	The feminist movement is not ready to fully accept and integrate lesbian issues. A subgroup of La Colectiva thus creates Mitilene, the first group explicitly by and for lesbians in the DR. 1985 also sees the establishment of the <i>Pezones</i> lesbian feminist periodical.
1989	<i>Amigos Siempre Amigos</i> is founded.	ASA starts as volunteer network called Friends Always Friends, created to give emotional support to people dying of AIDS.
1989	O’Haras Place opens.	A speakeasy in the neighborhood of Gazcue, while not labeled as a lesbian space, is frequented by lesbian women and allies.
1990s		
1990s	Institutional development of ASA and La Colectiva Mujer y Salud.	These organizations grow and become institutionalized, opening offices and hiring employees. They transition from self-care and awareness groups into NGOs with a greater focus on advocacy.
March 31, 1999	ASA’s first gay walk out on El Conde Boulevard.	People involved with ASA organize the first LGBT walk along El Conde. A total of 17 people walk the entirety of El Conde Boulevard with a rainbow flag.
2000s		
February 2001	Creation of GayLesDom	This group forms as a result of protests against the announcement of the dishonorable discharge of two policemen for engaging in sodomy. ^x
April 2001	Advocacy to have a Diversity Booth at the International Book Fair. ^{xi}	The International Book Fair, which purports to be dedicated to non-discrimination, includes no women or religions other than Catholicism. A Diversity Booth is created to represent marginalized groups but forced to close by the military. ^{xii}
June 2001	First mass demonstration of LGBTTT pride outside the walls surrounding the Colonial City of Santo Domingo.	Denied permission to use the public space of la Plaza España inside the Colonial City of Santo Domingo, demonstrators decide to take demonstration outside of the 15 th century stone and brick walls that surround the area. The turnout is a success as the first mass demonstration for an LGBTTT Pride gathering. ^{xiii}
2004-2005	LGBTTT people start to reclaim Parque Duarte as a safe public space.	Parque Duarte, in the Colonial Zone, begins to be reclaimed as a public space for LGBTTT communities.
2004- 2005	REVASA moves to become an independent organization from ASA.	A small group of activists decides and plans to transform REVASA from an ad hoc body of ASA to an independent organization. This move is called the Great Covenant in which the issue of health rights is divided: ASA will focus on health and REVASA will focus on rights. The understanding is that they are independent and autonomous bodies that will coexist and collaborate.
2006	TRANSSA is created.	Originally created as a trans*group of ASA focused on HIV-related issues, TRANSSA eventually grows in membership and scope to include wider human rights issues.
2006	First Caravan of Gay Pride is held.	Activists use a caravan of cars to circumvent permit requirements of the government and Catholic Church for use of areas in the Colonial Zone. Previous permit requests for Pride marches were denied for five years in a row.
From 2006-2017	Trans* women sex workers’ murders begin to be documented by TRANSSA.	The trans-led organization TRANSSA has documented a total of 38 murders targeting transgender women from 2006–2017. The victims of these crimes share similar profiles as sex workers and only four (4) of the thirty-eight (38) cases have been prosecuted under the judicial system. The total number does not include transgender people whose deaths were not reported as trans* due to misgendering in police reports, news stories, and, sometimes, by the victim’s own family.
2007	REVASA is created.	REVASA is formally created as an innovative structure dealing with issues including political advocacy.

APPENDIX 1

2008	TRANSSA develops institutionally.	With funding from Astraea, TRANSSA starts doing work around hate crimes. They document human rights violations, engage in media advocacy, work to prevent violence, and build the capacity of trans* communities.
2009	Santo Domingo OutFest, the International LGBTTT Film Festival begins.	Annual event was initiated in 2009 and continues today under REVASA's coordination. A weeklong international LGBTTT film festival that takes usually takes place in between November and December at the Cinemateca Dominicana.
2010s		
2010	LGBTTT activists participate in Constitutional Reform.	During the 2010 constitutional reform process, LGBTTT activists participate in public forums and speak before the constitutional committee to advocate for the inclusion of explicit protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity. ^{xv}
2010	TRANSSA and the Observatorio win the "Caso Monchina" case.	Advocates bring a legal case against someone who has murdered a trans* woman. A pro bono lawyer is engaged, support is provided to the family, and the convicted is sentenced to 15 years in prison. ^{xv}
2013	Coalición GLBT is created.	Founded following a challenging process of drafting the National Human Rights Plan and a report for the Inter American Human Rights Commission, this coalition emerges from efforts to create a unified voice for the movement. Some activists leave the coalition due to internal struggles. It is currently composed of ASA, REVASA, DiverDom, COLEHT, GAYP, Heartland Alliance, FUNCEJI, and independent activists.
October 2015	Coalición de Activismo LGBT is formed.	Activists form a new coalition following internal struggles in the former coalition that included differences in strategies and tactics. New coalition members include TRANSSA, UNIDI, the Observatorio de Derechos Humanos para Grupos Vulnerabilizados, Grupo de Auto Apoyo Trans Vida, Fundación Red de Jóvenes Unidos de Guachupita, Fundación Quisqueya en Desarrollo, Centro de Orientación e Investigación Integral-COIN, the Unión GTH Vegana-UGTH Vegana, Trans Este Podemos Avanzar-TEPA and independent activists. This coalition works with a great sense of expediency, raising awareness of recent hate crimes, establishing a 24 hour hotline, and responding publicly to recent attacks from Catholic and Evangelical groups against LGBTTT social justice projects.
January 2016	Catholic and Evangelical churches declare the U.S. Ambassador, James Brewster, persona non grata.	Since President Obama's appointment of James "Wally" Brewster as U.S. Ambassador to the DR in November 2013, Brewster is met with public ridicule and scorn due to the fact that he is open about his sexual orientation and marital status as a gay man married to Bob Satawake. In an open letter by Catholic and Evangelical churches, the authors proclaim their respect for homosexuals and decry discrimination in the workplace, but state they will only tolerate homosexuality as long as it remains "private." They declare the U.S. Ambassador to the DR, James "Wally" Brewster, a persona non grata and announce that he is unwelcome in the country, given his identity as a gay man and his public advocacy for LGBTTT human rights.
February 2016	Astraea funds the work of several LGBTTT organizations in the DR	The funded groups included TRANSSA, COTRAVEDT, IURA, Colectiva Mujer y Salud and Diversidad Dominicana. Some of these funds have been used to (1) document human rights violations and the establishment of the Observatory for Trans* Human Rights, (2) conduct workshops for women leaders to develop a national agenda of priorities for their community, (3) present candidates running for office with opportunities to push for SOGI rights, and (4) conduct "Safe Zone" workshops on SOGI issues with human rights stakeholders from private and public institutions, professional networks, media outlets, universities, lawyers and business owners, etc.
March 2016	Inauguration of the LGBT Chamber of Commerce of the DR	The LGBT Chamber of Commerce of the DR is launched in Santo Domingo. The new LGBT Chamber of Commerce, like other chambers of commerce around the world, seeks to foster a fair business environment and a more pluralistic consumer market in the DR.
June 2016	Santo Domingo-based LGBTTT groups organize two vigils to mourn the Orlando massacre.	Vigils and memorials for the Dominicans killed in the Pulse nightclub massacre on June 12, 2016: Oscar Ambyoris Aracena Montero, Anthony Luis Laureano Disla, Juan Ramón Guerrero, and Gerardo Ortiz "Rey." All four were between the ages of 22 - 26.
January 2017	James "Wally" Brewster completes his term as U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic.	James "Wally" Brewster completes his term as U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic.
January and February 2017	LGBTTT groups participate in national marches to End Impunity.	Massive peaceful demonstrations and related events erupt throughout the country beginning January 22, 2017. Under a general theme of "Ending Impunity," these events raise awareness about the recent multimillion-dollar Obredecht corruption scheme, which allegedly involves government officials. On February 3, 2017, the Coalición GLBT calls for <i>La Noche Verde</i> (The Green Night) at Parque Duarte to raise awareness about the impact on the LGBTTT community of governmental impunity.

APPENDIX 2

TIMELINE OF SELECTED LGBTT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE DR		
Org & Year Founded		Community Served
2015	Imberbe	Trans men and people on the trans masculine spectrum
2013	Universitarios por la Diversidad (UNIDI)	Gay men & MSM
2012	Diversidad Dominicana (DiverDom)	Women, in general, including lesbians & potential allies of LGBTT community
	Trans Este Podemos Alcanzarlo (TEPA)	Trans women
	Este Amor	Gay men, Trans women, MSM, sex workers & other vulnerable groups
2011	Coordinadora Lésbica y de Hombres Trans (COLEHT)	Lesbians & Trans men
	Gente Activa y Participativa (GAYP)	Gay men, Trans women & MSM
2009	Individuos Unidos por el Respeto y la Armonía (IURA)	LGBTT and potential allies of the LGBTT community
	Comunidad Trabajadoras Sexuales Transexuales y Travesti Dominicanas COTRAVETD	Trans women sex workers
2008	Trans Siempre Amiga (TRANSSA)	Trans women
2005	Red de Voluntarios de ASA (REVASA)	Gay men & LGBTQ
1989	Amigos Siempre Amigos (ASA)	Gay men & MSM

NOTES

1. LGBTTT is used to describe the political context of the Dominican Republic (DR). In the mid-2000s, two NGOs for women of trans experience were founded in the DR. These institutions mainly represent people who choose to identify as transgender/trans[1] or transsexual[2] (these are represented in the first of the two ‘T’s of the acronym) and those who identify as travesti[3] (represented in the second ‘T’ of the acronym). Recently, a trans* masculine organization was also founded; this group is also represented in the first of the two T’s of the acronym. Thus, currently LGBTTT is the most inclusive umbrella term to refer to the collective of community-based and institutionalized groups in the country.
[1] In the Dominican Republic, the women of trans experience (mujeres trans) are non-operative trans women who present as women most of the time. They may or may not have hormonal support.
[2] In the Dominican Republic, transsexual women (mujeres transexuales) who may have access to hormones, have had transition-related procedures performed or are post-operative women.
[3] In the Dominican Republic, people that identify as travesti are those who choose to alternate between presenting as men and as women. This category often includes sex workers and drag queens (who do their shows de travesti), but it also encompasses those who simply cross-dress whenever they feel like presenting as women.
2. METHODOLOGY: The findings presented here were obtained from a combination of individual- and focus-group interviews as well as participant observations. They were gathered through fieldwork in the DR—conducted between August 2015 and December 2016—along with a literature review on related historical, social, and cultural analyses of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean region and the United States of America that covered events up to June 2017.
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Charts

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- vi Moragas, Mirta. (2016, July). Anti-rights Groups at the OAS General Assembly. Eyeontheright. Retrieved from <https://srhrcommunities.org/eyeontherights>
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- x The National Police Law of 1954, which still exists today, prohibits police officers from engaging in homosexuality.
- xi The International Book Fair of Santo Domingo is coordinated by the government's Ministry of Culture and has been happening since 1997. In other words, at the time of this action, the fair had been only happening for four years. In 2015, the event celebrated its 18th anniversary.
- xii Sánchez, Leonardo (2015, Sept 19). Personal communication.
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- xv King, Chris (2015, Sept 15). Personal communication.



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