

Executive Summary of the REACH End Term Evaluation



30th January 2026

1 Introduction and purpose of the evaluation

This document presents the findings of the end-term evaluation of the **Response, Evidence, Advocacy and Change (REACH)** programme, implemented by **Frontline AIDS** with funding from the **Elton John AIDS Foundation (EJAF)** between 2023 and 2025. The evaluation was commissioned to assess the extent to which REACH contributed to changes in attitudes, behaviours, practices and systems affecting LGBTIQ+ communities' access to HIV-related services; to understand how and why those changes occurred; and to generate learning and recommendations to inform future programming and investment. Singizi Consulting Africa conducted the evaluation between end-July 2025 and end-January 2026.

REACH was designed as a multi-level, rights-based programme operating across three interlinked workstreams:

- **Rapid Response grant making (WS1)** to enable immediate responses to crises;
- **Civil society capacity strengthening (WS2)** in selected countries; and
- **Regional and global advocacy (WS3)** using evidence generated through community-led documentation of human rights violations.

REACH, as part of WS2, is implemented in four countries: Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal and South Africa. In addition, REACH supported a wider network of grantees through the Rapid Response Funding (WS1) in countries in the following eligible regions: East Africa, South East Asia, Southern Africa, West and Central Africa as well as the Caribbean. REACH builds on Frontline AIDS' long-standing work on HIV, human rights and community-led responses, and on EJAF's sustained investment in emergency support and movement-building for LGBTIQ+ communities.

Singizi conducted the evaluation using a mixed-methods design centred on **Outcome Harvesting**, complemented by elements of the **After-Action Review (AAR)** approach. The evaluation took place in a context of escalating repression, shrinking civic space, intensifying anti-rights movements, and severe funding cuts affecting HIV and human rights programming globally.

2 Programme context and continued relevance

The evaluation finds that REACH was **highly relevant** to the realities faced by LGBTIQ+ communities and civil society organisations during the programme period. Across Africa and the Caribbean, legal repression, criminalisation, social stigma and violence against LGBTIQ+ people intensified, with multiple countries introducing or proposing harsher anti-LGBTIQ+ laws. These trends were accompanied by a documented link between hostile legal environments and poor HIV outcomes for key populations.

At the same time, global funding cuts, most notably reductions in PEPFAR funding, resulted in the retrenchment of health workers, disruption of services, weakened data systems, and the erosion of community-based responses. In this context, RRF funding often functioned as one of the **few remaining flexible funding mechanisms** available to LGBTIQ+ organisations facing acute crises.

The **Rapid Response Fund (WS1)** was particularly salient, enabling organisations to respond to arrests, violence, forced displacement, denial of healthcare, security threats, and service interruptions. Partners consistently described the fund as timely, flexible, and responsive to community-defined priorities. For many, it represented not only material support but also solidarity and legitimacy at moments of extreme vulnerability.

Workstreams 2 and 3 were equally relevant in addressing the structural and systemic dimensions of exclusion. By strengthening the capacity of organisations to document violations, build referral networks, and engage in evidence-based advocacy, REACH addressed longer-term barriers to access, accountability and influence—at national, regional and global levels.

3 Evaluation approach and evidence base

The evaluation used **Outcome Harvesting** as its core design in order to surface both expected and unexpected changes in a complex and adaptive programme. Outcomes were defined as verifiable changes in behaviour, relationships, actions or practices in individuals, organisations or institutions to which REACH plausibly contributed.

Across the three workstreams, the evaluation harvested **108 outcomes**, which were verified and substantiated through:

- Desktop review of programme documentation;
- Online outcome harvesting tools completed by grantee partners;
- Further, 74% of the outcomes were substantiated by LGBTIQ+ persons who were involved in the programme (whether as beneficiaries or REActors), partners, or external substantiators such as service providers, beneficiaries, allies or through documents.

Additional data (including related to the outcomes) was collected through:

- Surveys of WS1 and WS2 partners;
- Key informant interviews with Frontline AIDS staff, EJAF staff and grantee partners;
- In-person workshops in all four WS2 countries;

Singizi applied the **BOND Evidence Principles** to their analysis, emphasising triangulation, inclusion, appropriateness and transparency. Particular care was taken to ensure ethical practice, confidentiality and a “do no harm” approach, given the high-risk contexts in which partners operate.

4 What changed: overview of outcomes across the programme

The evaluation finds strong evidence that REACH contributed to **meaningful and multi-level change**. Outcomes clustered around three interlinked areas of change:

4.1 Empowered individuals

REACH enabled individuals, particularly those most marginalised within LGBTIQ+ communities, to be **seen, heard and supported**. Systematic documentation of human rights violations transformed individual experiences of abuse from isolated incidents into recognised and actionable evidence.

Outcomes show:

- Increased documentation of violations using REAct and related systems;
- Improved knowledge of rights and confidence to report violations;
- Increased linkages to health, legal, psychosocial and protection services;
- Improved access to safe spaces in contexts of acute risk.

These changes were particularly evident in WS1 and WS2 contexts, where emergency response and community-level monitoring were closely linked.

4.2 Strengthened organisations

The largest share of outcomes related to **organisational strengthening**, reflecting the programme's core theory of change. Partners improved internal systems, security protocols, referral mechanisms, partnerships and advocacy capacity. Evidence shows that:

- Organisations shifted from informal, ad-hoc practices to professionalised, evidence-based approaches;
- Documentation strengthened organisational credibility with governments, donors and multilaterals;
- Networks and alliances expanded, enabling coordinated responses and shared advocacy;
- Organisations increased their capacity to adapt and operate in hostile environments.

Importantly, documentation of violations was not an end in itself but functioned as an **enabler of influence**, supporting service delivery, relationship-building and advocacy.

4.3 Shifts in wider society

REACH also contributed to changes beyond immediate partners and beneficiaries. Outcomes demonstrate:

- Shifts in attitudes and practices among healthcare providers, police, journalists, lawyers and religious leaders;
- Improved relationships between LGBTIQ+ organisations and government actors;
- Increased public awareness and media coverage;
- Selected policy, normative and systems-level changes at national and local levels;
- Use of locally generated evidence in regional and global advocacy spaces.

While fewer in number, these outcomes are significant given the hostile contexts in which they occurred.

5 Contributions by Workstream

The distribution of outcomes across workstreams aligns well with programme intent:

- **Workstream 1** generated outcomes across a wide range of analytic categories, reflecting the diversity of organisations and contexts supported. Outcomes extended beyond immediate relief to include organisational strengthening and shifts in the behaviour of service workers (such as health workers, legal professionals and police), suggesting that emergency support can also catalyse longer-term change.
- **Workstream 2** outcomes show clear causal pathways from documentation to referrals, organisational capacity, government engagement and advocacy. Although fewer in number, WS2 outcomes represent deeper, more strategic change processes within national contexts.
- **Workstream 3** outcomes demonstrate how local evidence informed regional and global advocacy, including engagement with UNAIDS, the UN Human Rights Council, and the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. These outcomes illustrate how community-generated evidence can shape global norms and accountability mechanisms.

6 Performance against plans and the logframe

The qualitative findings are reinforced by a review of progress against the **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Logframe**, noting that Q4 Year 3 data is still pending. The available data shows:

- **Strong performance** in core areas such as documentation of human rights violations, effective use of REAct systems, and partners' capacity to identify, collate and present evidence. Many targets in these areas were met or exceeded, particularly in Years 2 and 3.
- **Steady improvement** in several outcome-level indicators, including successful human rights outcomes from grants and evidence-based advocacy contributions, which are on track to be achieved by the end of Year 3.
- **Weaker performance** in indicators related to structured learning activities and national-level advocacy strategies. The evaluation finds that this reflects delays, resource constraints, staffing changes and—in some cases—the absence of formal strategies with clear indicators, rather than a lack of advocacy activity or qualitative change.

Overall, the harvested outcomes align well with the programme's theory of change and intended outcomes, particularly at organisational and relational levels. Policy and system-level changes are evident but fewer, consistent with the longer-term nature of such change.

7 How change happened: key pathways and enabling factors

The evaluation identifies several mechanisms through which REACH contributed to change:

- **Evidence as a catalyst:** The use of REAct transformed documentation practices, strengthened credibility, and enabled advocacy with duty bearers and multilaterals.

- **Partnership-building:** Grantee partners built alliances for service delivery, referral systems and advocacy, including constructive engagement with government actors in some contexts.
- **Strategic narratives:** Partners framed advocacy using public health, human rights or faith-based narratives suited to hostile environments, increasing receptivity and reducing risk.
- **Innovation:** Partners introduced decentralised emergency funding, multi-channel hotlines, accompaniment models and peer-to-peer sensitisation, enhancing reach and effectiveness.

Frontline AIDS played a central enabling role through responsive grant management, technical support, facilitation of learning, and brokering access to advocacy spaces. High levels of trust between Frontline AIDS, EJAF and partners were consistently identified as a key strength.

8 Evaluative assessment (OECD-DAC criteria)

Relevance

REACH's design and implementation were increasingly relevant to the needs of LGBTIQ+ communities and organisations. The evaluation also found that it was possible to leverage additional funding for certain activities highlighting that the work was seen as relevant to the wider community as well.

Effectiveness

The programme was effective overall, with achieved outcomes largely aligned with logframe intentions, alongside meaningful unintended outcomes that helped to support innovation while breaking barriers to services. Quantitative performance was strong in core areas including documentation, use of REAct systems, and evidence-based capacity building. However, contribution to longer-term impact was constrained by context, with funding cuts and increased repression limiting access to services and progress toward an AIDS-free future. Implementation faced delays and resource constraints, but corrective actions enabled delivery of most outputs.

Coherence

Programme design effectively integrated emergency response, documentation, and advocacy, creating a reinforcing virtuous cycle linking emergency action, evidence generation, and advocacy outcomes. The model demonstrates strong coherence across programme dimensions. However, this took time to achieve, and early implementation was affected by silos within Frontline AIDS. Greater coordination across workstreams could have further strengthened programme integration.

Sustainability

The programme strengthened organisational capacity, networks, and alliances, with partners reporting sustained changes in internal practices and in how they work with health workers, police, journalists, and religious leaders. Systematic use of REAct for documenting human rights violations created sustainable changes in capacity, enabling ongoing evidence-based advocacy and behavioral change among duty-bearers.

Sustainability Challenge: Sustainability is threatened by funding discontinuation, particularly the closure of the Rapid Response Fund and reduced capacity to continue supporting REActors. Limited success has been achieved to date in replacing funding through fundraising with other donors.

9 Conclusion

The REACH programme successfully demonstrated the value of enabling community-led organisations to document human rights violations and adapt interventions to diverse contexts. Through a focus on intersectionality and disaggregated data monitoring, the programme addressed the distinct needs of marginalised subgroups within LGBTIQ+ communities, including transgender women, people who use drugs, sex workers, asylum seekers, and persons with disabilities. This community-centred approach, anchored by REActors working directly with affected populations and documenting violations, proved critical to the programme's achievements.

Implications for future program design include:

- Importance of selection of partners. Partner selection criteria could be tailored to each workstream's specific requirements, prioritising organisations with strong community connections and understanding of local priorities. Future programs should seek partners who possess foundational capacity while demonstrating willingness and space to grow, ensuring the program adds genuine value rather than simply funding existing work.
- Importance of building organisational capacity. Future programmes should establish detailed planning processes that allow partners to collectively decide when to build internal capacity versus engaging external consultants, ensuring sufficient time for grantee partners to develop capabilities before taking responsibility for actions. Cross-country learning and collaboration opportunities should be intentionally designed from the programme's outset, potentially including joint outputs such as regional reports or collective advocacy actions, rather than being introduced later in implementation.
- The value of community led approaches. Future programmes should prioritise community-led approaches from the outset, as people with lived experience design the most relevant interventions and create the credibility needed to amplify marginalised voices in advocacy efforts. Whilst allowing programmes to take different forms in each country context, designers should ensure a core framework that maintains the inter-relationship between community-generated evidence, emergency response, and advocacy, with the community consistently positioned at the centre of all activities.
- Translating evidence from the local level to advocacy at a global level is critical: to succeed it needs time and mapping for effective linkages. Programme designers should map global, regional, and national advocacy stakeholders early in the programme and establish systems to document their engagement with programme evidence, enabling more strategic connections and effective monitoring of advocacy impact.

Specific recommendations for programme implementation include the following:

The programme works – grow it/ replicate it/ find ways of sustaining learning while taking into account the following:

- **Allow for a phased approach to programme planning.** Rather than trying to accomplish all objectives simultaneously, future programmes would benefit from a more intentional and strategic sequencing of activities with clear phases (noting that this would be iterative).
- **Extend programme duration.** Longer-term funder commitment would have allowed time to generate evidence, build relationships with service providers, develop trust, and undertake strong evidence-based advocacy towards policy change
- Put in place a **dedicated core team** that can support an integrated approach. The team – while having dedicated roles – should work collectively to ensure linkages across the different components (for example, Singizi identified a missed opportunity to elevate country evidence into a joint regional human rights report coupled with collective advocacy action)
- Prioritise **partner-led capacity development** over external consultancy. Make partner-led delivery the default, structure consultancies as capacity-building for partner staff, while noting time and resources that partners have for this. It is recognised that this will also require additional funding to cover partner staff time.
- Explicit **accompaniment frameworks with regular touchpoints** (rather than too tight of a reporting framework). This includes regular engagements with grantees, as happened in this programme, with fewer form reports. This would be assisted by a clear framework defining what support partners can expect, with regular scheduled check-ins to prevent confusion and ensure consistent technical assistance. This rather than having too much of a reporting burden (not consistent with project scale)
- **Sustainability planning from inception.** Sustainability strategies built into programme design from start, including clear exit strategies, data migration plans, and alternative funding streams

As a final reflection, Singizi found that REACH demonstrates what is possible when communities are trusted and resourced. Evidence-based, flexible, rights-centred programming can deliver impact even in hostile contexts. The challenge ahead is sustaining and building on these gains in a shrinking funding environment.