

**How the Haitian media view the LGBT community:  
a new study by LINKAGES and Panos Caribbean**

*Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 10 October 2017.* A new study by the LINKAGES project and Panos Caribbean highlights the past, current and potential role of the media in promoting equity and social justice in Haiti, looking at the coverage of issues affecting the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community.

Access to health is a fundamental human right, but a large proportion of the Haitian population does not have access to essential care. For the LGBT community the situation is much worse than for the rest of the population, because of discrimination, prejudice and victimisation, and the situation is even worse for people living with HIV, with recent studies having revealed that a gay man is 24 times more likely to be infected by the HIV than others are. Yet there is no public policy in Haiti that considers this reality and seeks to provide essential health care to this segment of the population.

According to Steeve Laguerre, the LINKAGES country representative for Haiti, *“one of the goals of this report is to have an Haiti in which the human rights of LGBT persons are respected and they are able to live with dignity, free from discrimination, persecution, and violence. No one should be punished”,* says Laguerre, *“for who they are or who they love. LGBT rights are basic human rights; an LGBT person should have access to all services offered by the Haitian Government. LGBT persons are an integral part of every society and they are our colleagues, neighbours, friends, and family members, each and every Haitian citizen should be recognised and equally valued.”*

This respect for fundamental human rights, including the right to health, requires fundamental changes in perceptions and attitudes, but these changes cannot occur if radio stations, newspapers and TV channels explicitly or implicitly reinforce prejudice and intolerance, thus fuelling more discrimination.

This study recognises the essential role that the media can and must play in promoting respect for diversity and for the rights of others. *“The purpose of this work”* says Jean-Claude Louis, Panos’ Coordinator in Haiti, *“is to inform the media, policy makers and stakeholders while raising awareness among them of the situation of the LGBT community. We cannot continue to deny or ostracise others because of their sexual orientation. We have to build an inclusive society with everybody’s contribution. They have fundamental rights like every citizen”.*

Based on a review of media coverage of events concerning the LGBT community or issues affecting it and through interviews with journalists, managers of media houses and other informants, the study provides an interesting overview of the cultural factors that determine dominant perceptions of the LGBT community in Haiti and of their evolution in Haitian society over the past two decades.

This study then reveals a number of important realities that will have to be considered if the media are to play a more positive role in fighting social exclusion and discrimination. It shows for example that media houses provide some anecdotal coverage of LGBT issues when there is a particular event in the news, but that they are reluctant to provide in-depth coverage of these issues.

Interestingly, it appears that one of the reasons why coverage is poor and inadequate is that many media professionals feel that reporting on LGBT issues is equivalent to encouraging and condoning homosexuality. They therefore avoid those topics, either because of their own views and beliefs, or for fear of offending their audience.

*“Panos’ role is not to influence options or to prescribe the content of the information disseminated by the media”, says Yves Renard, the organisation’s interim coordinator, “our role is to encourage debate, and to enable media houses and journalists to inform that debate constructively and intelligently. This study demonstrates the need for such debate.”*

The study therefore concludes with a number of recommendations that would help media houses and professionals to cover LGBT issues in a fairer and more effective way, including training and sensitization programs for journalists, guides and other publications, and legal reform.

In particular, the study recognizes that efforts to promote fairer and better informed coverage of LGBT issues must take into account cultural realities and local perceptions. *“This is not about imposing a foreign agenda”, says Panos’ Haiti Coordinator Jean-Claude Louis, “this is about helping Haitian media to promote and defend the rights of the Haitian people, without exclusion and without victimization”.*

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“La problématique de la communauté LGBT en Haïti à travers le prisme des medias” can be [downloaded here](#).  
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[The USAID Linkages across the Continuum of HIV Services for Key Populations Affected by HIV project](#) is a five-year cooperative agreement funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). USAID LINKAGES is the largest global project dedicated to key populations. The project is led by FHI 360 in partnership with IntraHealth International, Pact, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. USAID LINKAGES works to accelerate the ability of governments, organizations, and private-sector providers to plan and implement services that reduce HIV transmission among key populations.

[Panos Caribbean](#) is an independent, regional organisation that works to amplify the voices of the poor and the marginalised through the media and ensure their inclusion in public and policy debate, in order to enable Caribbean communities and countries to articulate and communicate their own development agenda. In particular, Panos Caribbean helps media houses and journalists to cover sustainable development and social justice issues that are overlooked and misunderstood.