



DIGNITY IN
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DIGNITY IN DIALOGUE

THE POWER

OF OUR

COMMUNITIES

*Centering and Activating Collective
Power*

In celebration of International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) and the start of Pride season, we hosted our second Dignity in Dialogue session with the support of the Act Together For Inclusion Fund (ACTIF). The conversation explored how we understand and use power in our movements—centering solidarity, narrative change, emotional strategy, and dialogue as tools for justice and inclusion. We were honoured to welcome a strong panel of guest speakers: **Naïké Ledan**, Cross-Movement Initiative Lead at ILGA World, **Frederique Chabot**, Director of Health Promotion at Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights and **Chantell Fortuin**, Program Manager at the Global Interfaith Network.

REIMAGINING POWER TO HELP CREATE THE WORLD WE WANT

WHAT IS POWER?

Power is often misunderstood and feared, especially within movements for justice. The use of power against our movement – rooted in domination, control, and oppression – has created a widespread suspicion of it. But power, in its true and transformative form, is a **necessary tool for justice**. If we only see power as something to dismantle, rather than something to be harnessed for good, we risk leaving it in the hands of those who will use it against us. Power avoidance can become powerlessness.

Power is not just about money. Injustice thrives when our movements compete for resources and when we internalize scarcity, turning against each other. This erodes our sense of community and weakens collective strength.

True power is a communal fire. It is something we tend together, built not on dominance but on care. It ignites hope, revives courage, and fuels collective action. Within a global movement, **power is radical love, radical hope, and radical belief in one another.** Power includes both radical softness and transformative rage. These are not contradictions. Our vulnerability, our presence, and our righteous anger are all sources of strength. Anger, when wielded with purpose, becomes a force for transformation. It gives us the courage to create a more just world—not alone, but together.

Power is the capacity to imagine boldly and to act collectively. It is not a weapon to fear – it is a flame we share.

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHIES

Sankofa and Ubuntu are two foundational African philosophies that offer **powerful frameworks for reimagining and reclaiming power** in ways that are rooted in **justice, community, and collective liberation**. They push us to see power as a collective resource—shaped by the past and sustained by our interdependence. These philosophies challenge us to lead with integrity, to build with others, and to never lose sight of where we come from or who we're accountable to.

SANKOFA

Origin: Akan people of Ghana

Core Teaching: We must return to and reclaim lost or forgotten historical knowledge and traditions to build a better future.

Relation to Power: Our movement is not just forward-facing; it is **rooted in our histories**. We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. To wield power responsibly and effectively, we must learn from past struggles, victories, and mistakes. Historical memory is not just about honouring the past— it is a source of **strategy, resilience, and wisdom** for present and future action. Reclaiming ancestral knowledge, traditions, and resistance is itself a powerful act.

UBUNTU

Origin: Bantu peoples of Southern Africa

Core Teaching: “I am because we are” – a philosophy emphasizing shared humanity, mutual care, and collective responsibility.

Relation to Power: Ubuntu reframes power and something inherently communal. It rejects the idea of individual success at the expense of others. Instead, it insists that **true power uplifts everyone** and that no one is free unless we are all free. Power should not isolate, dominate, or divide – it should **connect, include, and elevate**. This philosophy calls us to ensure that in our pursuit of justice, no one is left behind.

POWER STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

1 CROSS-SECTORAL MOVEMENT BUILDING

To build and sustain meaningful power, we must focus on cross-sectoral movement building – unifying struggles across different communities and causes. This strategy is rooted in the understanding that the forces harming LGBTIQ+ people are the same forces undermining the rights of women, Indigenous communities, the environment, and the working class. **Power grows when our movements are connected rather than isolated.** We need to identify shared goals and show up for each other, align strategies, and expand our reach beyond silos.

Solidarity and collaboration must be recentralized as core principles of our activism. This includes building coalitions across labor, environmental justice, racial justice, SRHR, and gender equity movements. Together, we can build **stronger, more resilient movements** capable of resisting oppression and imagining radical futures.

Power, in this context, is not about control—it's about connection, convergence, and collective action.

2 CONNECTING MOVEMENTS TO POLICY TRANSLATORS

To achieve long-term change, powerful movements must bridge the gap between grassroots organizing and formal institutions. This requires policy translators—people or strategies that **connect communities with traditional centers of power** such as governments, hospitals, and regulatory bodies. Successful movements have often paired radical community organizing with effective policy engagement, allowing their demands to translate into structural change. Without these connections, even the most powerful grassroots efforts can struggle to shift laws, policies, or systems.

However, this approach carries risk. Engaging with systems of power can unintentionally reinforce the very hierarchies and infrastructures we seek to dismantle. That's why **deep community accountability is non-negotiable.** The goal is not to water down demands or sacrifice values, but to wield powerful tools strategically and ethically while staying rooted in solidarity, justice, and bold, uncompromising vision.

3 THE POLITICS OF EMOTION

In today's political landscape, **emotion is a key battleground for power.** Anti-rights actors have mastered the use of emotional manipulation to sway public opinion and delegitimize human rights movements.

These tactics are especially potent around issues of gender, sexuality, reproductive justice, and pluralism, where fear-based narratives spread rapidly and effectively. Emotional manipulation doesn't just drive people to the right—it polarizes, isolates, and dehumanizes. In response, progressive movements often counter with facts, statistics, and reasoned arguments. While evidence matters, it often fails to reach people at the emotional level where opinions are actually formed and changed.

To reclaim power, we must learn to speak emotionally, ethically, and powerfully. The emotional levers of our movements are not fear or contempt, but **hope, defiance, and collective responsibility.** These are strategic emotional forces that can galvanize action, build solidarity, and strengthen our vision. When people feel seen, valued, and part of something larger than themselves, **they don't just believe—they move.** We must tell stories of resistance and resilience, speak from shared values, and ground our work in dignity and connection.

4 NARRATIVE POWER AND STRATEGIC FRAMING

Stories shape public opinion, drive policy, and form the emotional landscape within which people act. To build narrative power, we must recognize, decode, and strategically respond to the narratives we are up against.

There is an ongoing tension between strategic communication and political integrity. To hold both, we must:

- **Name and counter** right-wing narratives head-on.
- **Frame our values broadly**—safety, care, truth, freedom, dignity—while centering trans and queer lives within those frames.
- **Avoid purity traps** on the left that punish nuance, while refusing to dilute our commitments.
- **Speak from shared concerns** while still boldly defending trans and queer youth.

Narrative power means knowing the emotional terrain, anticipating the frames being used against us, and crafting responses that are both principled and persuasive. It is not about hiding who we are, but about framing our truth in a way that resonates, builds alliances, and shifts the public conversation without sacrificing anyone at the margins. This is the work of strategic, intersectional power—**deep listening, smart framing, bold inclusion, and emotional clarity.**

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE

THE PURSUIT OF UNDERSTANDING

In our pursuit of justice and liberation, **dialogue is a strategy and a necessity**. People think differently. That is part of being human. Dialogue allows us to move beyond opposition and into understanding, to hear others not simply to respond, but to recognize ourselves in their stories. It is how we identify common ground and begin to build from it. Intentional dialogue creates space for **connection, recognition, and transformation**—not by erasing differences, but by navigating them with care.

LANGUAGE AND ACCESSIBILITY

To shift narratives and build inclusive movements, we must also consider who our messages are reaching. We often use language that excludes the very people we aim to organize with. Narrative change requires **simplicity, clarity, and connection**—language that reflects lived realities, especially for those who haven't had access to formal education or dominant cultural narratives. When we tell our own stories, we bring back the truth that is often sanitized or erased. **Storytelling is power. Language is power**. Making it accessible is not about dumbing things down—it's about bringing more people in.

ACCOUNTABILITY WITH CARE

Effective dialogue also means rethinking how we hold each other accountable. Accountability should be rooted in **kindness and care**, not punishment or performance. Calling in—rather than calling out—helps us grow together. Intra-movement conflict, driven by purity politics, tears us apart. We start judging who is "good enough"—as allies, as organizations, as activists—breaking each other down instead of building collective power.

We must become comfortable with imperfection. Dialogue is not about always getting it right—it's about staying in the conversation, staying in community, and choosing growth over guilt. Powerful movements are not built on certainty—they are built on **courageous dialogue, emotional intelligence, and the commitment to keep showing up for one another**.