

## **Homosexuality and Human Rights in East Africa**

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The unprecedented wave of anti-gay rhetoric, legislation and violence that has swept across southern Africa over the past fifteen years touches on some of the most important issues of our time. The controversy over sexuality – and homosexuality in particular – runs across deep economic, social, religious and political fault lines in post-colonial Africa. The growth of religious fundamentalisms, the reconfiguration of gender relations, the meaning of nationhood and belonging, the applicability of human rights, the nature of moral norms and values and the meaning of culture are central themes in these fierce public debates. This is the context in which sexual minorities are particularly vulnerable to attack - verbal, legal and physical. What makes the controversy so volatile is that it is framed as an uncompromising battle between indigenous cultural norms and imposed foreign values – a battle of local autonomy against global imperialism. This argument, which runs like a red thread through the public rhetoric around homosexuality in Africa, makes gay rights particularly fraught terrain for non-government organizations, international human rights agencies, and donors. In this paper I will draw on my research in East Africa. I will focus on the role of the LGBT program of the Dutch-based development agency, HIVOS, in Kenya and Uganda to explore the fraught relationship between human rights claims and the moral discourse against homosexuality in the region.