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**For better Sexual, Mental
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITIES





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2015, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 70/1 outlined the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs - a set of 17 goals and 169 targets to advance sustainable development by 2030. The resolution included a “pledge that no one will be left behind” and commitments to prioritize the poorest and most marginalized. This report presents evidence that sexual and gender minorities are often among the most marginalized and, as such, require specific inclusion and attention in order to drive forward the vision of the SDGs. The report also outlines promising policy and programme approaches that seek to include sexual and gender minorities more fully in sustainable development efforts, with attention to the potential role of philanthropies, development assistance providers and the United Nations development system.

The SDGs draw attention to certain populations that are often marginalized or left behind, noting the need for non-discrimination and the importance of inclusion regardless of “race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability” as well as “other status.” While, there is no explicit attention to sexual and gender minorities¹ in the official SDG declaration, there is ample room to include them in SDG-related actions, given the attention to “sex”, “other status” and the “marginalized.” As with concepts of race, colour and disability, it is not straightforward to precisely define and therefore estimate the population size of sexual and gender minorities. But as with those other concepts, real or perceived sexual or gender minority status is strongly associated with discrimination and marginalization.

This report draws on a review of over 500 peer-reviewed and grey literature publications, mostly in English, semi-structured interviews with 40 people involved in global and regional efforts to understand and address links between sexual and gender minorities and the SDGs and semi-structured interviews with over 150 people involved in such work in three countries: India, Kenya and South Africa. The authors also benefitted from organizing and/or attending relevant events and consultations at country level.

The SDG themes that were found to be most strongly associated with sexual and gender minorities are poverty, health, education, gender equality, violence, social and political inclusion, access to justice and non-discriminatory laws, data and international cooperation. Each of these issues influences the others, and there are also significant links to other challenges addressed by the SDGs, such as housing, inclusive cities, decent work and economic growth.

1 The report uses the phrase ‘sexual and gender minorities’ for people whose biological sex, sexuality, gender identity and/or gender expression depart from majority norms. **The concept of sexual and gender minorities includes considerable diversity as well as a multiplicity of identities and behaviours**, including lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people (LGBT); intersex people (people whose bodies do not have typically male or female sex characteristics due to variations in chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones and/or genitals); gender non-conforming people who may not see themselves as transgender; and people involved in same-sex relations who may not see themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual, possibly preferring another word to self identify (such as polyamorous, queer or two-spirited) or possibly preferring no label at all.



TOGETHER WE CAN SAVE



YEARS

Poverty

On average, sexual and gender minorities earn less than heterosexual, cisgender² people and are more likely to be living in poverty. In Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, gay men earn on average 12 percent less than heterosexual men. In most countries, the earnings penalty is greater for gay men than for lesbians, and by far the most severe for transgender people. This is true even in countries where sexual and gender minorities are better accepted; trans women experience an average decline in earnings post transition of about 12 percent in the Netherlands and about 30 percent in the United States. Averages hide significant variations. For instance, some sexual and gender minorities are more likely to migrate from poor rural areas to cities that are both more prosperous and more inclusive, thereby increasing their earning potential. Small-scale studies show significant earnings penalties and poverty rates for sexual and gender minorities in low- and middle-income countries compared to richer countries. Many studies show direct discrimination against sexual and gender minorities both in securing employment and within workplaces. In addition, poverty is driven by other factors, including widespread discrimination in accessing housing, social protection policies designed only for traditional heterosexual families and longer-term disadvantage linked to issues including educational discrimination, violence and poor health care.

Health

Around the world, HIV disproportionately affects gay and bisexual men, other men who have sex with men and transgender women. UNAIDS reports that the risk of HIV acquisition among gay and bisexual men was 28 times higher than among heterosexual men in 2017 and 13 times higher for transgender women than adults aged 15-49 years. In most countries, very little policy attention and funding addressed HIV among sexual and gender minorities for the first 15 to 20 years of the epidemic until the establishment of the Global Fund, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and some large country-specific projects, like the Avahan-India AIDS Initiative funded by

2 Cisgender people are those for whom their sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Even today, however, only a disproportionately small amount of HIV prevention funding is allocated to the needs of sexual and gender minorities and even less attention is paid to issues of treatment access and adherence for such populations. Despite these limitations, however, the HIV epidemic and response has generated more awareness, data and action related to sexual and gender minorities than any other issue highlighted in the SDGs.

HIV has also drawn attention to other health and health system issues for sexual and gender minorities, including real and perceived discrimination by health care providers that reduces access to services and intersections of HIV with issues including other sexually-transmitted infections, substance use and mental health. Little attention has been paid to health challenges for sexual and gender minorities that are not linked to HIV, although research highlights a range of important challenges, including inappropriate surgery on intersex newborns, policy confusion and poor service access for gender confirmation treatment, poor access to reproductive health services for lesbians and dramatically high rates of suicidal ideation, especially among sexual and gender minority adolescents. One survey showed that gay and bisexual men have suicidal ideation rates almost twice as high as heterosexual men, while another survey in the United States showed that 41 percent of trans people reported having attempted suicide, compared to 4.6 percent of the general population. Most of these health challenges are directly or indirectly linked to stigma and discrimination, either broadly and/or within health services.

Education and childhood

Children who depart from accepted gender norms – who may or may not eventually see themselves as sexual and gender minorities – frequently suffer from discrimination. A UNESCO analysis of data from multiple countries showed LGBT-identified children reporting discrimination from friends (29.8 percent), from their families (51.2 percent) and in schools (61.2 percent). Multiple studies, including from Africa, Asia and Latin America, show very high rates of bullying in schools against gender non-conforming children, with perpetrators frequently including teachers as well as other students. Research has shown that bullying and social isolation is associated with lower academic performance, absenteeism, mental health issues and premature exit from school. Young sexual and gender minorities are not just disproportionately bullied in schools, they also suffer disproportionately from violence from law enforcement agents and from the population at large. Young sexual and gender minorities are also far more likely

to be homeless than young people in general, as they are often forced to leave family homes due to family disapproval.

In some settings, gender-typical children of sexual and gender minority parents also suffer discrimination, including exclusion from some schools, although a review of 79 studies about such children showed that on average, such children fare no worse than children of heterosexual parents on education and other well-being outcomes.

Gender equality and violence

A powerful association around the world exists between the status of girls and women and the status of sexual and gender minorities, as reflected in indices and atlases of gender equality and sexual and gender minority inclusion. Gender discrimination and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities share common roots in patriarchy and misogyny. Gender stereotypes impact everyone, can influence and restrict choices and freedoms and can lead to bias and inequality, with sexual and gender minorities often suffering the consequences alongside girls and women in general. Increasing awareness of the social construct of gender and increasing commitment to challenging oppressive gender norms simultaneously empowers women and girls and sexual and gender minorities. Despite these associations, a World Bank study found that lesbian and bisexual women were excluded from involvement and attention in most gender equality policies and programmes. Only a handful of gender equality policies and programmes around the world not only pay attention to lesbian and bisexual women but also to trans women and to the impact of gender discrimination on gay, bisexual and trans men.

Clear parallels exist between gender-based violence against girls and women (whether heterosexual or not) and violence against men who transgress gender norms (gay and bisexual men, trans men and other gender non-conforming men). The countries with the highest rates of violence against women and girls in the general population tend to have the highest rates of violence against sexual and gender minorities. Violence against visible sexual and gender minorities remains widespread around the world. A systematic literature review from 50 countries found that the prevalence of physical violence ranged from 6 percent to 25 percent (for LGBTI respondents overall) and from 11.8 percent to 68.2 percent (specifically for transgender people). Reported rates of sexual violence were also high, particularly against transgender people. Widespread

and severe violence against sexual and gender minorities has been documented in every region of the world. For example, in research prepared for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, arbitrary arrest and detention of people presumed to be sexual and gender minorities were documented in a number of African countries. Murders and other forms of extreme violence perpetrated by members of the public against LGBTI people were documented in four countries and extortion, threats of violence and blackmail were extensively documented across the continent. A study from Senegal reported 43 percent of sexual minority men had been raped at least once outside the family home. Male-on-male sexual assault has been widely documented in many conflict zones, including extensive reports in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



THERE'S
NO GENDER
THAT MAKES
SOMEONE
LESS HUMAN



WOMEN'S MARCH

Social and political inclusion

Discrimination against sexual and gender minorities is more widespread and socially accepted than virtually any other kind of discrimination around the world. The Williams Institute’s “Global Acceptance Index (GAI)” seeks to measure and compare social acceptance of LGBT people in 141 countries. On a scale of zero to ten, with zero reflecting the entire (polled) population of a country exhibiting discriminatory attitudes towards LGBT people and ten reflecting the entire (polled) population supporting equality, the mean score across all countries is only 3.5. The countries with the lowest GAI scores are Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Georgia and Saudi Arabia, while the countries with the highest scores are Andorra, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands and Sweden. Even those countries with the highest GAI scores have a considerable proportion of the population that disapproves of homosexuality, albeit a minority. An African survey organization has shown a high level of tolerance for diversity in general, with the striking exception of homosexuality, which was only tolerated in neighbours by 21 percent of those persons polled across 33 countries. There were, however, notable exceptions to these results, with clear majorities tolerating LGBT neighbours in some countries, including Cape Verde (74 percent) and South Africa (67 percent).

Social and political exclusion of sexual and gender minorities is complex, with individual countries and regions at times simultaneously reflecting homo/transphobia, alongside liberalizing values and increasing inclusion, as well as backlashes against such progress. Social and political exclusion appears to be correlated to both reported religiosity of a population and overall level of economic development (more exclusion in more religious and less well-off countries). Nevertheless, many richer countries have either made slow progress on inclusion or experienced significant backlashes: male homosexual behaviour is still illegal in Singapore; an estimated 500,000 people protested Spain’s marriage equality law in 2005; and many U.S. states have instituted laws and policies that discriminate against sexual and gender minorities, even as the federal government and judiciary in that country moved forward during the administration of President Barack Obama (2009-2017). Active repression of sexual and gender minorities by governments also seems to be associated with political dynamics – including the rise of authoritarian regimes, as well as campaign tactics in the run-up to elections or at times when the government is being challenged in other ways.

Access to justice and non-discriminatory laws

Around the world, many laws still discriminate against sexual and gender minorities, either explicitly or in their application. The most widespread discriminatory laws concern family formation. A large majority of countries do not allow equal marriage rights for same-sex couples (only 22 countries do, including the pioneer Denmark) or joint adoption (only allowed in 26 countries). A large majority of countries have legal and/or administrative barriers to recognition of gender identity for transgender people and some countries explicitly criminalize transgender people through laws against cross-dressing and/or “impersonation” of the opposite sex. Criminalization of same-sex conduct is still widespread. As of May 2017, consensual sexual conduct between adult men was explicitly criminalized in 71 countries, including 45 that also explicitly criminalize sex between women.³ Lesbian and bisexual women are also disproportionately impacted by laws criminalizing or regulating adultery and abortion and laws that permit child marriage and rape within marriage. In many settings, transgender women are disproportionately targeted by loitering and solicitation laws. Other discriminatory laws permit forced anal exams of men accused of homosexual conduct, enforce differential ages of consent for heterosexual and homosexual conduct, establish barriers to the formation, establishment or registration of sexual orientation-related NGOs, and prohibit so-called “promotion” of homosexuality through morality or propaganda laws.

Despite the severity and extent of sexual and gender minority-related criminalization, 76 countries now offer at least some, limited, LGBTI-related legal protections – outnumbering those with criminal sanctions. These include nine countries that explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and sometimes gender identity or expression, within their constitution. While only 22 countries offer marriage equality, a further 28 offer some other kind of legal recognition of same-sex partnerships. Seventy-two countries have some legal prohibitions against LGBTI-related discrimination in workplaces. Some countries are also introducing protections related to housing, bullying in schools and other issues.

³ Since May 2017, both India and Trinidad and Tobago have decriminalized male homosexual conduct as a result of court cases, and several other countries have seen progress against other discriminatory laws.

Data

The seventeenth SDG is to “strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.” SDG target 17.18 focuses on data, calling for enhanced capacity-building support to developing countries by 2020 (not 2030), in order “to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.” In development, public health and private enterprise it has become widely accepted that one should “measure what matters” and that “what gets measured gets done.” Unfortunately, as illustrated again and again in this report, even basic data about sexual and gender minorities is often lacking, let alone data about the intersection of sexual and gender minority-issues and the SDGs. With the limited exception of research related to HIV and sexual and gender minorities, there is also a lack of other qualitative and quantitative evidence about the circumstances of these populations and what works to make sure that sexual and gender minorities are not left behind in progress towards sustainable development. One of the highest priorities for international cooperation on sexual and gender minorities, therefore, is to support appropriate and ethical qualitative and quantitative research on the issues highlighted in this report. Such research should include increasing attention to sexual and gender minorities in needs assessments and programme evaluations, both of work that focuses on these populations and of mainstream work on poverty alleviation, gender equality, education, health, access to justice and so forth.

The relatively limited evidence base that already exists justifies attention to sexual and gender minorities in a broad range of inclusive development and human rights programming, both by recognizing sexual and gender diversity in programming intended to reach the poor and marginalized in general, as well as by investing in initiatives that specifically target and work with sexual and gender minorities. Including disadvantaged sexual and gender minorities in programme design, implementation and evaluation is essential.

International cooperation and the way forward

There has been slow and steady progress towards increased attention to sexual and gender minorities in development policy and programming and a significant amount of political attention and debate in recent years. Nevertheless, the necessary work is dramatically underfunded. Only four cents of every US\$ 100 of official development assistance is focused on sexual and gender minority issues – 0.04 percent. While population size estimates are difficult, all reasonable surveys conclude that sexual and gender minorities comprise more than 4 percent of the population, thus current development investments are at least 100 times below the level warranted by the population size. The very modest investments that are made focus overwhelmingly on the formal human rights system and on HIV – both important priorities in need of further funding, but by no means the only priorities.

This report outlines specific recommendations for research, policy and programming in each of the examined themes. Significant needs and important opportunities exist in each sector, and progress in any one area, such as education, will contribute to progress on other priorities, such as health and poverty alleviation. In addition to the cross-cutting need for research, the other key cross-cutting opportunity highlighted by this report is the intersection and integration of sexual and gender minority issues with gender equality and the status of girls and women. Gender norms shape boys and men as well as girls and women. Too often, traditional gender norms constrain progress for girls and women, whether heterosexual and cisgender or not. The same negative gender norms drive a great deal of prejudice and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities. Making progress for such minorities requires working hand in hand with the overall gender equality movement, so that indeed, “no one will be left behind.”





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