

TAKING SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITIES OUT OF THE TOO- HARD BASKET

JUNE 2018

Manila, Philippines - Jun 25, 2016.
Thousands of people join "Metro Manila Pride,"
the longest running pride march in Southeast Asia.
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HUMANITARIAN HORIZONS PRACTICE PAPER SERIES

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INTRODUCTION

Humanitarians provide assistance and protection to those affected by crises based on need. They have committed to “leave no one behind”.¹

Despite this commitment, sexual and gender minorities are largely missing from humanitarian action, from most needs assessments, response plans and guidelines.² While some progress has been made, humanitarians are nowhere near as inclusive as sexual and gender minorities need them to be.

“Across the humanitarian sector there is more usually a wholesale failure to engage with local LGBTIQ communities.”³

This may just be a blind spot. It’s possible that the humanitarian community does not see sexual and gender minorities or is not aware of their different needs.

“Too many officials and NGO leaders operate on the mistaken beliefs that LGBT people face no greater vulnerabilities than the general population, constitute a number insignificant to warrant attention, or are undeserving of the assistance due to other disaster victims and survivors.”⁴

Inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in 2018’s 10 largest Humanitarian Response Plans



Bangladesh

Yemen

Syria

Sudan

South Sudan

Somalia

Nigeria

Ethiopia

DRC

Chad

It may be that humanitarians are already struggling to address the particular needs of a broad range of people and marginalised groups – people with a disability, women and girls, children, the elderly – and efficiently and effectively deliver food and water to millions of people every day. Humanitarians may have well-founded fears of unintentionally causing more harm to an already vulnerable population.

Whatever the reason, there are real implications for real people in times of crisis.

This paper challenges the premise that it is too hard to improve the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in humanitarian action. It looks at why it is so important that we make progress quickly, identifies possible roadblocks, and suggests ways to move the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities into the ‘possible basket’.

METHODOLOGY

This practice note is based on a review of academic and grey literature, consultations with national and international actors working with sexual and gender minorities, and field research in partnership with the Vanuatu non-government organisation Wan Smolbag and community-based organisation the VPride Foundation.

This paper is a high-level rapid analysis that provides practical insight into the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities.

6
key informant interviews
with international and local
organisations, NGOs and
the United Nations

ETHICAL
RESEARCH
PRINCIPLES

25+
documents
reviewed

1
workshop in Vanuatu
with 18 participants

Fiji December 17 2016:Fijian woman boarding up her house during a Tropical Cyclone. Rafael Ben-Ari / Alamy Stock Photo

Taking sexual and gender minorities out of the too-hard basket

3

This paper is a high-level rapid analysis that provides practical insight into the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities.



ETHICAL RESEARCH PRINCIPLES



Taking sexual and gender minorities out of the too-hard basket

WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO MOVE TO THE 'POSSIBLE BASKET'. FASTER.

There is an urgent need for protection and inclusion in humanitarian assistance

Sexual and gender minorities often experience harassment, discrimination, exclusion and violence in everyday life. This gets worse in times of crisis:⁵ the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has found for example the lowest degrees of acceptance of sexual and gender minorities in camp settings.⁶ Reports range from being refused assistance from communities and humanitarian actors,⁷ being bounced between male and female queues for distributions and bathroom access, to rape and coercion into sex in exchange for food.⁸

"Sometimes, people who identify as LGBTQI+ are amongst the last to receive humanitarian assistance due to active discrimination. For instance, one NGO employee who worked in Aceh during the tsunami response described reports received through the community feedback mechanism that Local Government Units were actively skipping LGBTQI+ people during distributions."⁹

A gay man displaced by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines pointed out that aid usually targets mothers, fathers, young women and young men, but never sexual and gender minorities. He said that in a project distributing fish cages to men, "gay men were not chosen as beneficiaries even though guarding and feeding the fingerlings are tasks we are capable of. Nobody informed us about the project since the proponents wanted men."¹⁰

Unique needs are not being met

Humanitarians regularly address the particular needs unique to various groups. Sexual and gender minorities also have unique needs and challenges to access. For example, the discrimination, exclusion and violence outlined above prevents some people from accessing assistance; dignity kits may not include the sanitary items that trans men who menstruate need;¹¹ some transgender people may need medication urgently.¹²

People identify as sexual and gender minorities everywhere

Statistics on sexual and gender minorities are notoriously unreliable, with prevalence varying from 1.5% to 11%.¹³ Edge Effect, an organisation specialising in the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in humanitarian and development aid, uses at least 5% representation as a conservative rule of thumb, in line with estimates by a United Kingdom-based charity and the UK Treasury.¹⁴

So much to offer

Humanitarian response can miss out on much-needed additional capacity when sexual and gender minorities are excluded. Personal and professional skills including leadership, caring for dependent family members and friends, organising or supporting relief operations

(including with technical skills such as in health or engineering) are always needed. Specialist skills may include access to informal networks and an ability to communicate the needs of the sexual and gender minority community.

At-risk groups	Examples of violence to which these groups might be exposed	Factors that contribute to increased risk of violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social exclusion Sexual assault Social exploitation and abuse Domestic violence (e.g. violence against LGBTI children by their caretakers) Denial of services Harassment/sexual harassment Rape expressly used to punish lesbians for their sexual orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity High levels of impunity for crimes against them Restricted social status Transgender persons not legally or publicly recognised as their identified gender Same-sex relationships not legally or socially recognised, and denied services other families might be offered Exclusion from housing, livelihood opportunities, and access to health care and other services Exclusion of transgender persons from sex-segregated shelters, bathrooms and health facilities Social isolation/rejection from family or community, which can result in homelessness Engagement in unsafe livelihood activities

Directly sourced from the Global Protection Cluster and Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action <https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015-IASC-Gender-based-Violence-Guidelines-lo-res.pdf>

WHY THE TOO-HARD BASKET?

Sexual and gender minorities experience the world and crises differently from others that humanitarians are more accustomed to working with. This section aims to improve familiarity with those differences and their impact on access to assistance.

Legal status

Seventy-five countries criminalise same-sex sexual activity.¹⁵ Identifying as a member of a sexual or gender minority in these countries can risk criminal consequences. Lack of protective laws, such as those that outlaw employment discrimination and hate crimes, can also impact the safe expression or association of sexual and gender minorities. Research has found that criminalisation is an indication that social acceptance of sexual and gender minorities is likely to be lower¹⁶ and that the risk of gender-based violence is higher.¹⁷

Self-identification

Sexual and gender minorities must have the choice as to whether to let their families, community or aid workers know that they identify as a sexual or gender minority. In Australia, for example, almost half of people who identify as sexual and gender minorities choose to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity in public.¹⁸ Reasons for not self-identifying include valid fears of violence or discrimination.¹⁹ It may not be viable or safe for sexual and gender minorities to self-identify to access humanitarian assistance.

Disaggregated data – do we, don't we?

Disaggregated data is intended to assist humanitarians more accurately plan for and meet the needs of particular groups within crisis affected populations. However, disaggregating data by sexual or gender identification is complicated; many sexual and gender minorities choose not to self-identify, and any improvements to humanitarian response may be offset by risks to people's safety. Any list identifying people as belonging to sexual or gender minorities risks causing harm if it falls into the hands of the wrong people. An alternative approach is to use the rule of thumb that at least 5% of the population is likely to identify as a sexual or gender minority and contextualise this information with qualitative data from local organisations representing these groups.

Beyond male or female

Many sexual and gender minorities do not identify as male or female or form traditional families. This can create problems when people are required to register as male or female or need to access gender-specific protection or assistance such as gender-segregated evacuation centres or food assistance targeted at traditionally defined families.²⁰

Other sexual and gender minorities who choose to identify as male or female (either because that is how they usually identify or because they want to fit the requirements of humanitarian assistance) face difficulties in accessing assistance when the community perceives their presentation as contradictory.

For example, when collecting relief goods from government institutions in the response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, those identifying as the gender minority Bakla were ridiculed because their presentation did not match the community's expectations of their gender on their identification.²¹ In the United States, a transgender evacuee was arrested and detained for showering in the female bathroom in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2015; other evacuees and authorities mistook her for a man.²²

Differences within sexual and gender minorities

As people grouped under the banner 'people with disabilities' have starkly different abilities, disabilities, needs and experiences of life and humanitarian assistance, so do sexual and gender minorities. Transgender men and women in Australia, for example, experience significantly higher rates of abuse than gay men and women.²³ Humanitarians have reported consultations with sexual and gender minorities where one sub-group dominates while others may not be heard.²⁴ Intersectionality of vulnerability with other factors will further impact the needs of individuals.²⁵

Informal networks

Informal networks – friends, family, neighbours, groups of people who identify as or support sexual and gender minorities – can become lifelines for people who are excluded from access to protection and assistance through more formal means.²⁶

This perhaps unique reliance on informal networks presents challenges to humanitarians. Informal networks are unlikely to have the capacity to absorb the demands of multiple large organisations wanting access in crisis response, particularly as these networks may

require privacy and protection so as not to expose its members to danger. Informal networks are also more vulnerable to disruption in times of crisis as people are displaced, regular patterns of movement are interrupted and normal means of communication are disrupted.²⁷ Edge Effect particularly highlighted the need for restraint and respect when considering accessing informal networks and is planning more research in this area to better inform humanitarian actors.²⁸

The role of religion

Religious institutions, with established trust and relationships in local communities, can be the first responders to crises and important providers of assistance and protection in many parts of the world.²⁹ While this assistance is often provided to all in need in line with principles of humanity and non-discrimination, anecdotal evidence suggests pre-crisis religious teachings from denominations that are not inclusive of sexual and gender minorities can reduce both perceived and actual access to humanitarian assistance. For example, someone might expect to experience discrimination or harassment and choose not to attempt to access assistance as a result.³⁰

"It is forbidden to be a lesbian in my church and the pastor preaches against it. After Tropical Cyclone Winston, the church pastor said that Winston was caused by our sin, and I felt bad. It is not us who they should blame ..."³¹

No agreed terminology that works in every context

"We [a consortium of six organisations specialising in sexual and gender minorities] haven't managed to agree on a term. Transgender people tend to get a little drowned out in conversations."³²

This paper uses the term 'sexual and gender minorities'³³ to refer to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other people whose sexual and gender identities are not encompassed by these terms.³⁴ It is used with the intention of the broadest possible inclusion. Debates on terminology are needed to ensure all sexual and gender identities in each context are included, but it is important that these debates don't slow inclusive humanitarian action.

Gender identities in Asia and the Pacific³⁵

Southeast Asia and the Pacific are home to significant minorities who share gender identities other than male or female. Examples include the Fakaleiti of Tonga, the Mahu of Hawaii and Tahiti, the Whakawahine of Aotearoa in New Zealand, the Bakla of the Philippines, the Waria of Indonesia and the Fa'afafine of Samoa, and the aravanis of India. Many are assigned male at birth and perform different and specific cultural roles in their societies.

Sexual and gender minorities may hold important roles in society. For example, the Fa'afafine in Samoa are people assigned male at birth and live a feminine identity in society; they hold senior positions in government and their leadership in organising national events is widely recognised. This does not, however, protect them from social marginalisation.

A CASE IN POINT: SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITY VOICES FROM VANUATU

Category five Tropical Cyclone Pam hit Vanuatu in March 2015, killing at least 15 people, causing widespread damage across all of its six provinces and affecting 188,000 people – more than half of Vanuatu's population.³⁶

Vanuatu increasingly supports sexual and gender minorities and was one of the first Pacific Island nations to decriminalise same-sex sexual activity.³⁷ However, many sexual and gender minorities still choose not to self-identify.³⁸ Churches play a central role in the political and social development of Vanuatu,³⁹ including during crisis response.

The experience of sexual and gender minorities in Vanuatu after Tropical Cyclone Pam reflected the literature with one exception – informal networks, which had been relied on pre-crisis, had been disrupted

to the extent they were no longer able to provide substantial support as part of the crisis response and recovery. Sexual and gender minorities reported harassment and exclusion at distributions—including from people distributing assistance—and violence when using communal bathroom facilities. No humanitarian assistance targeted sexual and gender minorities, and many people chose not to identify themselves publicly. Churches were sometimes inclusive, and sometimes not. The law permits discrimination in employment, reducing opportunities to rebuild livelihoods. Sexual and gender minorities in Vanuatu made clear recommendations for future humanitarian action: include sexual and gender minorities in consultations, offer inclusive programming that targets the needs of sexual and gender minorities, and safe feedback channels to report exclusion, harassment and violence.

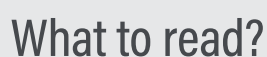
Aftermath of cyclone Pam. Pam struck the islands of Vanuatu (South Pacific) on March 14 and 15, 2015. and destroyed almost 90 percent of the houses. Shot shortly after the disaster. ausnewsde / shutterstock

Quotes from sexual and gender minorities reflecting on their experiences during the response to Cyclone Pam:

As an LGBT person
NO ONE FROM AN INFORMAL OR FORMAL
NETWORK ASSISTED ME There is **nothing for us** LGBT
PEOPLE ARE NOT IMPORTANT The public does not want to
see the kind of people we are and they sometimes swear
badly at me The community and NGOs are **NOT INTERESTED IN ME** I am
scared because they say many bad things about me and this
brings shame to me **DISCRIMINATION THROUGH ACTIONS, ATTITUDES AND
DISRESPECT As a lesbian** I have faced a lot of **challenges
and discrimination** One person was **JEERED AND LAUGHED AT BY
OTHERS IN THE COMMUNITY** at a distribution of food supplies **THE DISTRIBUTORS
HARASSED SOMEONE WAITING TO COLLECT FOOD SUPPLIES** because their dress
didn't match their gender They had to **RELY ON FAMILY MEMBERS
TO COLLECT FOOD FOR THEM** because they were worried
about harassment and shame at food distributions **They
were shot at with sling shots BOYS IN THE COMMUNITY WERE
SPYING ON THEM IN COMMUNAL BATHROOMS THAT LACKED
PRIVACY I was told I should have died in the cyclone**
They did not want me to join them in the workshop because I
was gay, even though it was an NGO run workshop THE CHURCH AT THAT TIME
REGARDED ME AS A SERVANT OF GOD AND SAVED ME FROM THE CYCLONE BY
KEEPING ME SAFE INSIDE THE CHURCH **The churches blame us for
the cyclones** The church did not help her evacuate her elderly
family because of her sexual and gender identity, despite her
dedication to the church over many years. We avoid certain mannerisms
in public to make sure it is not obvious... **we act as normal people**
Self-identification is a problem for me. My family knows I am like this and treat me
normally, but **it is the other people who treat me differently**
Self-identification is not an issue for me because I act
normally and my family is aware of my sexual
preferences and **I identify myself as a straight guy in
public and because of that I am not faced with
discrimination THE LAW DOES NOT LOOK AT OUR NEEDS,**
just every other people

The imperative to improve inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in humanitarian action is clear. The challenge is supporting humanitarians to do so in a realistic and pragmatic way that facilitates rapid uptake in spite of competing priorities.

the unique experiences of sexual and gender minorities that impacts the way they access humanitarian assistance. Its purpose is to make this knowledge accessible to humanitarian workers who normally use this framework to adapt and apply as part of normal operations. These actions can equally be applied to the Core Humanitarian Standard and other humanitarian frameworks. A reading list is provided to assist with further awareness and knowledge.



<https://www.outrightinternational.org/content/impact-earthquake-and-relief-and-recovery-programs-haitian-lgbt-people>

Humanitarian Program Cycle

Preparedness

Step up the preparedness game

- Make sure your organisation's policies and practices are inclusive of sexual and gender minorities as staff, suppliers, partner organisations and beneficiaries, and protect them from inadvertent harm.
- Train (or at least talk to) staff and partners about the importance of actively ensuring the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in humanitarian assistance and protection.
- Build relationships and trust with local organisations representing sexual and gender minorities pre-crisis whenever possible.

Needs assessment and analysis

Know all you can and make some assumptions

- Assume at least 5% of the affected population are sexual and gender minorities, and likely to be amongst the most vulnerable. Don't collect data on sexual and gender minorities directly from the community unless it is safe to do so.
- Talk to people who publicly identify as sexual and gender minorities and include them in needs assessments. A first safe point of contact is likely to be local organisations which support sexual and gender minorities.
- Determine the unique assistance and protection needs of sexual and gender minorities and plan to address them safely.
 - Frame your needs assessments and planning with the knowledge that sexual and gender minorities are likely to experience discrimination, harassment, exclusion and violence. These issues will be more severe where laws prohibit same-sex sexual relations.
 - Don't assume that one sub-group represents all sexual and gender minorities. Aim for broad consultation. Consider the impact of inter-sectionality on vulnerability and needs.
 - Assess how the local context affects sexual and gender minorities, including the teachings of religious institutions.

Planning

Tweak standard categories

- Consult with local organisations representing sexual and gender minorities on ways to be inclusive with gender selection requirements, such as for registration and receiving assistance. This could include offering an 'other' gender category.
- Include sexual and gender minorities as part of vulnerability criteria.

Implementation and monitoring

Get practical

- Assume people are choosing not to identify and need specialised assistance and protection. Support local community-based organisations who can use their informal networks to access people choosing not to identify.
- Protect the personal data of people who do not wish to self-identify publicly as belonging to a sexual or gender minority.
- Ensure safe access to bathroom facilities, evacuation locations, distribution points and safe spaces. Ask local organisations how; this may require separate facilities.
- Monitor for exclusion and discrimination.
- Provide safe access to feedback and complaints mechanisms and ensure they are not being used to exclude sexual and gender minorities.
- Provide hygiene kits, contraceptives and antiretroviral drugs to anyone in need, regardless of gender, securely and privately.
- Respect informal networks which may rely on privacy and may not have capacity to assist with information or humanitarian action.
- In coordination mechanisms, ensure there are no gaps in services offered to sexual and gender minorities.

Resource mobilisation

Localise

- Raise funds to support or partner with local organisations representing and assisting sexual and gender minorities.

Evaluation and learning

Learn

- Assess whether the response met the needs of sexual and gender minorities. Include sexual and gender minorities in consultations.

Taking sexual and gender minorities out of the too-hard basket

WHAT TO DO NOW?

A good place to start is raising staff and partner awareness about the importance of including sexual and gender minorities and how to do it. If possible, make use of dedicated expertise and training, perhaps integrated into existing support for including other marginalised groups. Experience in the humanitarian sector has demonstrated that attempting to mainstream

new concepts without dedicated support rarely works.

A good place to continue is to support and build constructive relationships with organisations specialising in the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities.

CONCLUSION

This framework and suggestions were developed to assist organisations to progress more quickly towards better inclusion of sexual and gender minorities. While it does require effort, it is not

too hard; we can move the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities from the 'too-hard basket' into the 'possible basket' and leave no one behind.

Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that can positively contribute to excellence in humanitarian practice.

Spotlight on national partner organisation: VPride Foundation is a community-based group, founded in 2009 to help educate, advocate and mobilize sexual and gender minorities in Vanuatu. Giigii Baxter, Executive Director and co-founder of the VPride Foundation, is a leading advocate for the sexual and gender minority community in Vanuatu. Giigii focuses on public education to change attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities. Giigii also stars in 'Love Patrol', aimed at breaking down barriers in the Pacific on a range of issues including the sexual and gender minority community.

Humanitarian Horizons is a three-year research initiative. The program adds unique value to humanitarian action in Asian and Pacific contexts by generating evidence-based research and creating conversation for change. The program is supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.



ENDNOTES

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