**LGBTI Rights in Georgia – Fighting for Justice and Equality**

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I represent Equality Movement which is LGBTI community organization in the republic of Georgia. First of all, I would like to thank UN Special Rapporteur on the right to development for organizing this meeting and inviting us to participate. There exists a considerable gap in terms of access, capacity, skills, resources and participation of underrepresented LGBTI activists from Global South and East when it comes to UN advocacy. Therefore, this is a significant opportunity for our community - for LGBTI community which is one of the marginalized and oppressed back in Georgia and around the world.

I will start with the quote by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon *“In too many countries, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people are among the poorest, most marginalized members of society… Studies show that gay and lesbian people suffer disproportionate discrimination and abuse. They are rejected by their families… kicked out of their homes… and pushed out of school. Too many of our LGBT brothers and sisters are jobless, homeless and struggling to survive. The situation of transgender people is even worse overall. They have higher rates of homelessness, poverty and hunger. For individuals and their families, this is a personal tragedy. And for society, it is a shameful waste of human talent, ingenuity and economic potential.”*

This very accurately describes the situation of LGBTI persons in Georgia as well. In order to respond the following challenges group of LGBTI established Equality Movement in 2011. Equality Movement is a non-profit non-governmental organization which aims at creating equal rights and opportunities for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons in Georgia; fostering their integration into society by the means of empowering LGBTQI community, carrying out awareness activities on LGBTQI rights issues, and advocating their interests.

Thus we provide social and legal services to empower and mobilize LGBTQ community, as well as public awareness raising and policy advocacy interventions.

It is important to reflect that in recent years, many countries including Georgia have made an important effort to strengthen human rights protection for LGBTI people. New laws have been adopted, including antidiscrimination laws that cover sexual orientation and gender identity, which provide sanctions and remedies for LGBTI persons who have experienced discrimination on these grounds and have adopted laws against homophobic and transphobic hate crimes. Some other countries, unfortunately not Georgia, have granted recognition of same-sex relationships and made it easier for transgender people to obtain official documents that reflect their preferred gender. But only recently, researches started to provide much needed evidence of the depth of the discrimination and exclusion experienced by LGBTI people, as well as the physical, emotional, economic and social costs borne by LGBTI people, their families, communities and countries. For example, a World Bank study[[1]](#footnote-1) conducted in 2014 reflected that in India, the discrimination against LGBTI people in employment and health disparities costs between US$ 1.9 and $ 30.8 billion.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Homophobia, Transphobia, and other forms of stigma and discrimination against LGBTI people threatens the global and national progress on SDGs.**

Unfortunately, the links between LGBTI rights and development processes is not seen in my home country. While planning human rights or development strategies, policies and actions, the government avoids even mentioning LGBTI and refuses to plan comprehensive policies to improve the lives of LGBTI people. Also, there is a lack of knowledge, vision and approach to combining both human rights and the development frameworks even in the civil society and NGOs, including the organization that I represent. We have just started to look at human rights from the development perspective.

Also, I want to highlight the challenge regards Health and well-being, goal N3 in SDGs. This goal includes global target about ending HIV/AIDS epidemic which has been prioritized by Georgian government. I must mention that HIV is one of the main concerns for LGBTI community in Georgia. The prevalence of HIV is nearly 25% in MSM (Men who have sex with men) and Trans\* community and this situation by medical workers are described as concentrated epidemics. Here we have good practice. The government through the ministry of health has been financing HIV prevention program for MSM and transgender people during the last 3 years by allocating funds for the community organization, precisely Equality Movement. It has been made clear that without including community organizations one cannot succeed in this regards. Also, there was created Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM). The goal of the CCM as of the one national coordinating authority is to ensure coordination of the response against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria on the national level implemented by governmental, non-governmental and international organizations through financial support of the Global Fund as well as by other donor organizations. The membership of the CCM is multi-sectoral and includes representatives of governmental, international, non-governmental and private organizations as well as other civil society representatives. Most importantly there are the representatives of key effected communities including MSM (men who have sex with men). Here Community representatives have the chance to raise the issues about the ill practice of the government regards human rights and development. So, this is an important mechanism for accountability.

We evaluate this approaches positively but we are not sure about its sustainability. The following actions were mainly taken because of the Global Fund’s requirements, which is one of the main donors of Georgia, and we are not sure what will happen when the Global Fund soon leaves the country.

Therefore, based on the above-mentioned challenges and practices, Equality Movement issues the following recommendations:

* Promote the right to development, start discussions about how human rights are integrated into human development efforts.
* Ensure that the information related to development policies and processes are easily accessible.
* Ensure the existence and the effective work of the Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM) permanently and participation of the representatives of the key affected communities (including MSM/Trans\*) by HIV/AIDs in its work.
* Continue funding HIV prevention program and cooperation with the community organizations in order to effectively achieve Sustainable goal N3 of Good Health and well-being.
* Include LGBTI topics while planning the human rights protection and development strategies and policies.
* Work closely with marginalized communities and plan the human rights protection and development policies with the participation of these communities such as LGBTI and women, religious and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, etc.

1. Badgett, Lee (2014). The Economic Cost of Stigma and the Exclusion of LGBT People: a case study of India. World Bank Group. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Advancing the Human Rights and Inclusion of LGBTI People: A Handbook for Parliamentarians, UNDP, 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)