



Towards a More Equal World

**Striving for change and accountability to advance
sexual and reproductive health, rights and gender
equality in South Asia**



IPPF International
Planned Parenthood
Federation
South Asia Region

“Towards a more equal world”, striving for change and accountability to advance sexual and reproductive health rights and gender equality in South Asia.

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Consent of respondents (names changed on request) has been taken prior to documenting their experiences.

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The South Asia region is witnessing winds of change. Growing efforts are culminating into ending prejudice and empowering of all citizens.

The International Planned Parenthood Federation's (IPPF) South Asia Regional Office is working closely with its Member Associations to script powerful breakthroughs that exemplify the protection and advancement of rights for people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) – including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and

intersex (LGBTI+) people, and others who do not conform to the sexual and gender norms of society.

As a global service provider and advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all, IPPF works with and for communities and individuals across countries. Its consistent efforts have advanced abortion rights; increased public support for sexuality education; countered rolling-back of SRHR in law and policy; and fought stereotypes linked to gender-based violence, amongst others.

A specially formulated Advocacy Common Agenda outlined as part of the IPPF Strategic Framework for 2016 – 2022 called on 100 governments to respect, protect and fulfil sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality. Each country draws from IPPF's core values and vision and adds its own specific context.



IPPF's Six Pathways for Change are aligned to draw attention to multiple challenges that surround the agenda for SOGIESC inclusion, visibility, social justice, and equal rights.

Pathway 2: Countering opposition

Strategic actions: Generating research and knowledge; creating winning pathways; improving security and rapid response

Pathway 1: Social mobilization

Strategic actions: Supporting social movements; Building influential allies especially with the undecided or 'movable middle'

Pathway 3: Direct advocacy

Strategic actions: Finding ways of productive engagement; creating visibility; building consensus

Pathway 6: Institutional strengthening

Strategic actions: Positioning issues in ways that are noticeable and capable of bringing about behaviour change; upgrading capacities; raising the bar on levels of commitment

Pathway 4: Learning and evidence

Strategic actions: Gathering evidence; supporting platforms and opportunities for learning

Pathway 5: Strategic partnerships

Strategic actions: Maintaining existing associations and collaborations; expanding the network of supporters and discontinuing with relationships that are not incremental



A vibrant rainbow graphic with multiple curved bands of purple, blue, green, yellow, and red, framing the text on the page.

Championing the Global Agenda

Turning the Tide: Counteracting Anti-Gender Forces and Amplifying Progressive Voices.

A populist wave that threatens human rights, particularly sexual and reproductive health, and rights (SRHR), is gaining ground around the globe. Using well-honed strategies of disinformation, misinformation and emotionalisation, populist narratives are targeting gender equality and LGBTI+ rights as an entry point to restrict civil liberties and erode democratic institutions.

IPPF has built expertise and a solid platform of tools and strategies to proactively tackle attacks on individual freedoms and to widen public support for SRHR. It has launched a global Movement Accelerator Platform (MAP), which comprises three cross-Federation centres of expertise that focus on developing winning narratives, countering the opposition, and supporting social movements. The model combines the expertise of the IPPF Secretariat and Member Associations (MAs) to drive progressive change through research, innovation, and learning.

Countering Opposition Centre: Conducts research and monitors global and national opposition trends. Also supports MAs, civil society organisations (CSOs) and movements to predict, prevent and mitigate threats from the opposition.

Social Movements Centre: Supports activists and movements financially to enable them to build popular support for SRHR and LGBTI+ rights reforms.

Winning Narratives Centre: Trains partners in value-based narrative development covering strategy formation, message testing and narrative dissemination. Also, links communication experts with partners to help them improve their work on building narratives.



Driving Change in the South Asia Region

The invisible nature of LGBTI+ narratives and overall misinformation surrounding people of diverse SOGIESC has necessitated the urgency to find mechanisms that are more structured, relevant and long-lasting. IPPF South Asia Regional Office published a Situation Assessment in 2021 covering its Member Associations and Regional team. Findings shed light on key contextual and structural challenges to adopting more diverse SOGIESC inclusive approaches. This included a mapping of restrictive legal and socio-cultural environments that rendered it challenging to advocate with state actors for rights of people with diverse SOGIESC.

In mid-2021, each Member Association in the South Asia Region was requested to organize focus group discussions with select members of the community. India, Nepal and Sri Lanka shared their initiatives which were being supported by the Movement Accelerator Platform, Global Affairs Canada, and others. These initiatives are now paving the way for a more equitable and balanced environment where equal opportunities exist and can be accessed..

Nepal's Success with Ensuring Greater Equality of Gender Diverse People



Civil society organizations step up their presence in advocating for LGBTI+ rights

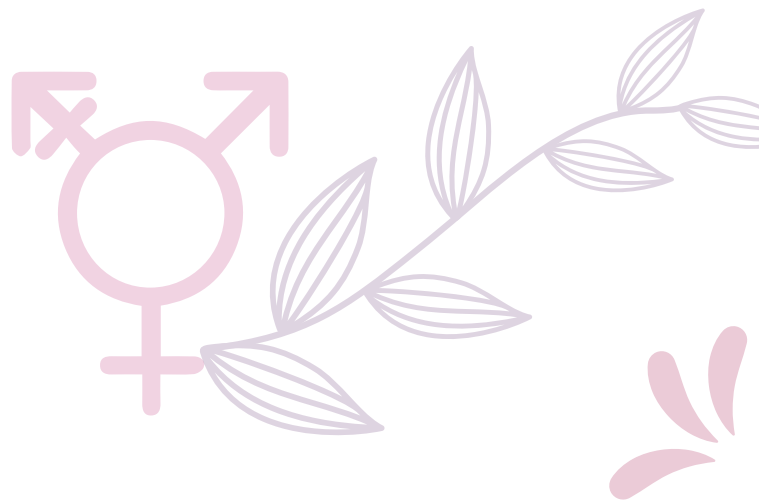


"I am a transgender woman and I have struggled a lot to change my gender identity in citizenship documents. I tried getting my marriage legally registered but found Nepali laws recognizing only those marriages that were amended in the citizenship as 'female.' Since only a sex change operation would ensure I was considered female, I self-financed my sex reassignment surgery. Today, I advocate with the state for issuance of citizenship certificates to all transgender couples entering into matrimony. It is time, the 'other' gender is accorded full marriage rights."

**32-year old Aanchal Kumari
Kathmandu**



The Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN) under the guidance of IPPF widened legitimate spaces for community-led advocacy on online and offline platforms. Continuous and ongoing collaboration with CSOs expanded the circle of influence to create greater opportunities for dialogue and visibility.



Guiding LGBTI+led CSOs to lead the process and work with health media and lawyers to support equality in marriage

Strengthening advocacy for trans-specific, gender-friendly and accessible services by inducting transwomen peer counsellors

Setting up a multisectoral think tank with representation from the government to mainstream issues

Developing a special policy brief and eliciting written endorsements of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare to support LGBTI+ members to claim their right to marriage

Building capacities of members belonging to LGBTI+led CSOs and networks

Creating learning exchange opportunities to strengthen capacities of different levels of the health system cadre, community leaders, influencers, and others



MAKING EVERY EFFORT COUNT

Outcome of advocacy efforts: FPAN was able to create a supportive environment for making clinical services more inclusive including catering to gender affirming needs of LGBTI+ communities. FPAN's advocacy efforts also generated positive response amongst the LGBTI+ community, and the general population, helping create greater acceptance of their rights and need for equality. Their efforts led to the creation of a national think tank on equality and securing commitment for support from the government on marriage equality.

Sri Lanka's Campaign Roots for Transgender Rights



Creating a winning narrative, and countering voices of dissent

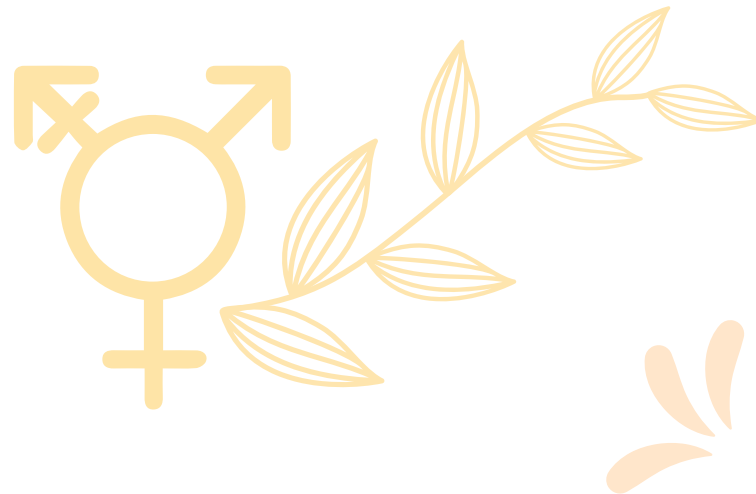


"I am a lesbian woman who confided in my parents, hoping they would be compassionate, but they were full of hatred. They snatched my phone and locked me up. I was forced to undergo religious conversion and seek forgiveness for being a sinner. Based on an email that I sent to a friend, a police complaint was lodged. My parents were summoned but no action was taken. Rather, they labelled me unstable and requested psychiatric evaluation by a Judicial Medical Officer. The case was forwarded to the Magistrate's court who dismissed the case and gave me the choice of leaving my parental home."

**22- year old Alisa Perera
Colombo**



Current laws in Sri Lanka criminalize homosexuality. The laws of the Penal Code are used to target members with severe atrocities and violations, such as unlawful and forced vaginal and anal examination undertaken by Judicial Medical Officers. Members of the community get charged with offences under the Penal Code even when they have committed no offence. Also, despite intent of the police to perform their duty, they are unable to mete out justice due to ignorance and lack of experience.



Orienting companies hiring
LGBTI+ members, families
and other social networks

Establishing an
emergency legal
fund for victims

Training and
sensitizing police
personnel in police
stations and legal
teams in lawyers'
chambers. Developing
a police handbook
in three languages
on handling cases
involving members
of the community,
legal precedents,
statements and
circulars

Implementing three
projects to legalise
homosexuality - the
decriminalization project
that helped draft an
amendment bill to
the Penal Code; the
transgender law project
that strengthened the
movement for rights of
transgender persons;
and the communications
project that fuelled the
LGBTI+ movement

Holding stakeholder
consultations with LGBTI+
organizations, legal experts
and women's rights bodies
to represent the community
and ensure that the proposed
Bill prevents misuse of the
provisions of the Penal Code
also, suggesting rewording
of Sections 365, 365A, 363
and 399 which deal with
unnatural offences, acts of
gross indecency, rape and
cheating by personation

Boosting media advocacy
with the BetterTogether
campaign that was
developed by iProbono
in partnership with
IPPF, FPASL, Pulse, the
Wijeya media group and
Wundermann Thompson.
An article writing
campaign along with a
celebrity interview series
helped garner over 50,000
views on YouTube and
12,000 impressions on
Facebook within a few
days of being published



**MAKING
EVERY
EFFORT
COUNT**

Outcome of advocacy efforts: Advocacy efforts of FPASL and its partners like iProbono and the National Transgender Network helped create a favourable legal and policy environment for penal reforms such as tabling of bills that decriminalized homosexuality and protected the rights of LGBTI+ community including the transgender population in the country ('Transgender Protection Bill'). Simultaneously, through media advocacy, efforts were made to mainstream an alternate positive narrative replacing negative portrayal of the community.

India Moves Forward on Creating more Visibility and Avenues for Inclusion



Supporting platforms, creating opportunities for learning and creating spaces for dialogue



"I lived in an abusive home and struggled with mental health, aggravated by the fact that I belonged to a disadvantaged caste. I wanted to break free and live independently but lacked courage and was insecure about managing financially. I and my partner sought counselling and within two months I stand tall without shame and embarrassment. I completed my studies, found a job and live independently. Mental health counselling sessions at FPAI Mumbai made me believe in myself and take steps towards a life I wanted."

**22-year old Pooja Karmakar
Mumbai**



Lack of trust and absence of safe spaces for dialogue created gaps in provision of SRHR services which took a hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gaps in people's knowledge of how queer women and trans-masculine people engaged in sexual activity perpetuated risky behaviours and false notions on how sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and reproductive tract infections (RTIs) were spread. They had trouble in acquiring barrier methods and gender-affirming aids and hormone interventions.

The component of mental health was found missing from most public health centres and since most trans-health professionals do not work under the same roof, services too were scattered.



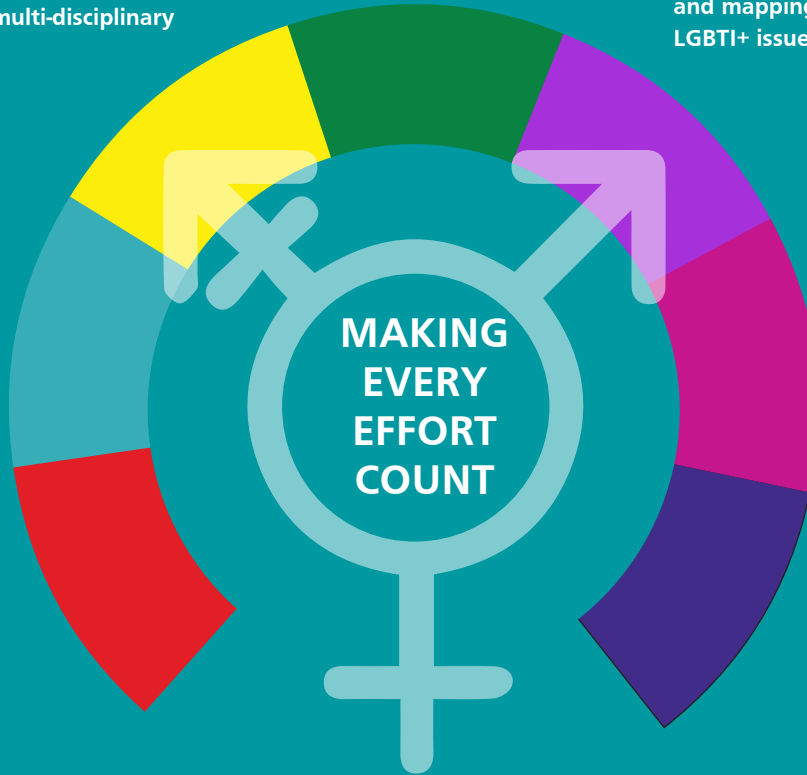
Bringing together SRHR services for LGBTI+, especially trans-persons under the same roof by setting up a one-stop centre with a multi-disciplinary team

Tackling misinformation and mistrust by assigning a special project team comprising of people with diverse SOGIESC

Undertaking Situational Analysis and mapping of LGBTI+ issues

Helping qualified mental health professionals, social workers, and others to work closely with existing medical staff to ensure holistic care

Capacity-building of staff so they are trained to work on diverse SOGIESC inclusion through online and offline modes



Customizing youth with gender-sexuality awareness initiatives such as Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) programmes for students from schools, colleges, orphanages and NGOs

Organizing health camps with uninterrupted supply of tests and medicines to LGBTI+ clients

Outcome of advocacy efforts: The project paved way for the opening of SATRANG (Rainbow) centers for Lesbian, Bisexual women, and Transmasculine (LBT) communities in two cities which ensured access to safe and judgement-free information and services. Community-led advocacy efforts also led to FPAI clinics across the country becoming more inclusive and LGBTI+ friendly.

Way Forward

Recognizing the powerful role and impact of advocacy, IPPF Member Associations will continue to mobilize social movements, demonstrating strength in working together and using all available tools to enhance effectiveness and adaptability. Building and working in coalitions will ensure better mechanisms to counter opposition and bring normative change to improve lives of people.

The South Asia Regional Office of IPPF will build capacities of all Member Associations on diverse SOGIESC inclusion and provide guidance on aspects related to collection and utilization of data; developing policies to address discrimination at the workplace and establish effective complaint mechanisms.

Focus on strengthening community engagement and partnerships

- Continue strengthening trust with the community by deepening knowledge of networks and creating a strong and dedicated outreach team for mobilization, advocacy and referral networks.
- Expand the work by hosting training sessions pan India, and mobilizing resources from corporates, CSOs and high net worth individuals who are ready to be associated with the cause.
- Work closely with traditional and new/social media to showcase initiatives like setting up safe spaces, holding sensitization workshops within police stations, designing IEC materials for those in the legal profession, organizing public debates, media campaigns, donation drives, celebrity endorsements and others so that donors can benefit from the visibility and be motivated to increase funding support.







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