

**Guidelines for Economic Inclusion of
Gender and Sexual Minorities in India**
Beyond the Corporate World

A Working Report

Outcome of a Consultation on Workplace Inclusion of
Gender and Sexual Minorities in India
Kolkata, January 17, 2019

A collaborative effort of:

All Manipur Nupi Maanbi Association, Imphal
Empowering Trans Ability, Imphal
SAATHII, Chennai
University of Sussex, Brighton, UK
British Deputy High Commission, Kolkata
Varta Trust, Kolkata

Contents

1. Context	03
2. About the Kolkata consultation	05
3. Consultation objectives	06
4. Summary of consultation proceedings	07
4A.Challenges faced by gender and sexual minorities in economic inclusion	07
4B.Interventions for economic inclusion of gender and sexual minorities	08
5. Select case studies	12
6. Consultation participant list	15

1. Context

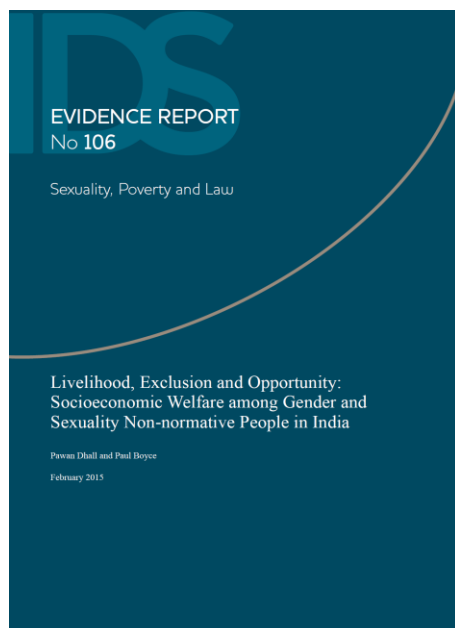
In 2014, the Honourable Supreme Court of India, in its landmark judgement *National Legal Services Authority Vs. Union of India & Others* (henceforth *NALSA*) recognized every citizen's right to self-identify as 'male', 'female' or 'transgender'¹. This verdict came soon after the same court had reinstated Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in December 2013 (*Suresh Kumar Koushal & Another Vs. Naz Foundation & Others*), thereby recriminalizing gender and sexual minorities² in India on grounds of their supposedly non-normative sexual relations. In doing so, the court had completely ignored the unconstitutionality (discriminatory nature) of Section 377 in light of the changes in the country's sexual assault laws in early 2013, when the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 had decriminalized all kinds of consensual sex among heterosexual partners. In effect, the Supreme Court had landed the gender and sexual minority communities of India in a peculiarly contradictory legal environment – they were free to choose their gender identities, but not to choose their sexual and romantic partners with whom they could live out their right to life and dignity.

Against this backdrop, in 2014-15, the Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, UK (as part of their Sexuality, Poverty and Law programme funded by the UK Department for International Development) commissioned a qualitative study on the experience of economic exclusion and precarity faced by gender and sexual minorities in India. The study, titled *Livelihood, Exclusion and Opportunity: Socioeconomic Welfare among Gender and Sexuality Non-normative People in India*, was conducted by researchers affiliated with the University of Sussex and Varta Trust. It covered the states of Manipur

¹ 'Transgender' stands for all persons whose own sense of gender does not match with the gender assigned to them at birth. In the Indian context, it includes transgender men and transgender women, genderqueer and gender fluid persons and a number of socio-cultural identities, such as *kothi*, *kinnar*, *hijra*, *ranga*, *maichiya*, *aravanis*, *jogtas*, *nupi maanbi*, *nupa maanba*, etc., whether or not the persons concerned have undergone sex reassignment surgery or hormonal treatment or laser therapy, etc. Many individuals among socio-cultural groups such as *hijras* may identify with the expression 'third gender'. Explanation adapted from *LGBT Mental Health: The Way Forward*, editorial published in *The Odisha Journal of Psychiatry*, September 2017 issue.

² The expression 'gender and sexual minorities' includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, transgender, *hijra*, *kothi*, intersex, genderqueer, gender fluid as well as people who may identify differently, or with no such 'political' term at all, though their sense of gender, gender expression, sexual attraction, sex characteristics, sexual behaviours or even sexual/romantic relationships are anything but heteronormative. Whether such people constitute a numerical minority or not is open to debate. But given the stigma, discrimination and exclusion around gender and sexual diversity, their social realities are often similar to those of minorities on the basis of religion, race or disability, not to forget that they may be part of multiple minorities and marginalities. These terms should not be seen as 'categories' into which people can be conveniently bracketed. A few examples: Men who identify as gay or women who identify as lesbian may also have heterosexual relationships or experiences. Transgender persons are not bereft of sexual orientation – a transgender person may also identify as gay, lesbian, asexual or bisexual. Some intersex persons are transgender and vice versa. Some intersex persons could be heterosexual. Not all transgender women are *hijras*. The same person may identify differently during the course of their life, depending on their changing self-perceptions. Moreover, in the Indian context, using gender or sexual identity terms with western roots as blanket expressions may be problematic. For instance, 'transgender women' or 'transgender men' may not be easy translations for many expressions of and around gender variance in India.

and Odisha (while also looking at the larger Indian scenario) and focused on economic inclusion in the context of the government's social security agenda (which included the aspects of identity documentation, social welfare schemes, public health programmes and free legal aid).



This study formed the basis of a two-year community-led training, research and advocacy project which was undertaken by the University of Sussex, All Manipur Nupi Maanbi Association (AMaNA), Empowering Trans Ability (ETA), SAATHII and Varta Trust in Manipur to support the economic inclusion of gender and sexual minorities, in particular transgender communities (2016-18). The project (Sexual and Gender Diversity, Welfare and Precarity in India: Impact, Advocacy and Process) was funded by the Sussex Social Sciences Impact Fund with support from the Newton Fund.

The project focused directly on issues of livelihood and skills building with gender and sexual minority peoples in Manipur with a view to drawing lessons and strategies that were to be taken forward in the wider Indian context. This initiative was largely focused on private sector employers (particularly small-scale businesses) and vocational training centres, though, keeping in mind a holistic view of what economic inclusion encompasses, stakeholders from the spheres of education, child protection, social security, media, law, health and sanitation were also sensitized.

The project resulted in key lessons and a number of pilot level successes in terms of job openings and skills building opportunities that need to be scaled up and replicated for greater impact. A case study on the Manipur experience later in this report provides details. The lessons learnt were shared through national and regional dissemination events in Delhi (August 2017) and Manipur state capital Imphal (February 2018), and later in a consultation in Kolkata (January 2019) which is documented in this report.

In September 2018, the Supreme Court overturned its 2013 judgement by declaring that Section 377 was unconstitutional to the extent that it criminalized sexual intercourse between consenting adults of the same gender (*Navtej Singh Johar & Others Vs. Union of India Ministry of Law and Justice*). This verdict gave a fresh opportunity to look at larger issues of socio-economic exclusion faced by gender and sexual minorities. However, several deeply flawed attempts were made by the central government to pass legislations on the rights of transgender persons in the period 2016-18. In 2019, the

Parliament passed the deeply problematic Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 (henceforth Transgender Rights Act), which went against the letter and spirit of the Supreme Court's *NALSA* verdict. The constitutionality of the Act has been challenged in the apex court on grounds that the Act subjects the right of transgender persons to self-identified gender to certification by the State, it is silent on reservations for transgender persons, and that it fails to provide for a remedy to affected persons in case of discrimination (*The Constitutional Challenge to the Transgender Act* in the journal *Indian Constitutional Law and Philosophy*, January 31, 2020).

2. About the Kolkata consultation

A one-day consultation on gender and sexual minority workplace inclusion was held in Kolkata on January 17, 2019 to engage with different workplace and larger economic inclusion initiatives undertaken by community groups, NGOs, educational institutions and corporate organizations in different parts of India. Sharing of the Manipur experience was a key element in this consultation, which was co-organised by AMaNA, ETA, SAATHII, British Deputy High Commission (the hosts), University of Sussex and Varta Trust (see photograph below). The consultation provided an opportunity to learn from recent gender and sexual minority economic and diversity inclusion initiatives and provided an opportunity to plan wider strategies for non-discrimination and inclusion in the sphere of livelihood in the immediate future.



The consultation recognized that companies across India were beginning to take up the challenges of diversity and inclusion, especially regarding improved opportunities and recognition for transgender employees. Several corporate organisations and community based organizations (CBOs) were working on corporate guidelines with respect to gender and sexual minority inclusion (example *Supporting Gender Affirmation: Towards*

Transgender+ Inclusive Workplaces in India, an initiative of Orinam, Chennai and Diversity Dialogues, Bangalore, published December 2018). In 2017, the United Nations too had issued a set of 'standards of conduct' for businesses with regard to the inclusion of gender and sexual minorities in the workplace (*Tackling Discrimination against Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, & Intersex People – Standards of Conduct for Business*).

These developments, however, indicated that the inclusion of gender and sexual minorities had so far received attention primarily in the corporate sector. Not much thought seemed to have been given to their inclusion outside the corporate world,

specifically in the far larger and diffused world of the informal or unorganised sector of employment in India (which also includes those who are self-employed).

In a country where most of the workforce is located in the informal sector, a sector characterized by lack of regulation and security, limiting advocacy efforts to the formal sector fails to do justice to the cause of inclusion. It is thus critical to have conversations about how employees' rights and protections can be strengthened in the informal sector, and how specific challenges of gender and sexual minorities can be navigated in this space. This was repeatedly highlighted in the Kolkata consultation and became the bedrock for discussion with several participants raising critical issues that require a deep dive. The participants urged that the very concept of 'workplace' needs to be viewed beyond the formal corporate environment, and that a discussion around larger economic inclusion remains more pertinent than the relatively narrower implications of workplace inclusion. This realization was the most crucial outcome derived from the consultation, reflected also in the title of this report. Similarly, in the body of the report, workplace and larger economic inclusion have often been emphasized together.

3. Consultation objectives

- How do we understand economic inclusion, workplace inclusion and financial inclusion?
- How do we understand workplace inclusion for gender and sexual minorities? What does this mean to us differently in our different experiences? Is it our priority? How might it mix with other priorities and needs in our lives?
- What do we understand by 'impact' in our work on economic inclusion of gender and sexual minorities? Is 'impact' a helpful term? What stories of change and transformation might be told under the theme of impact?
- What does the Manipur experience of advocating for economic inclusion of gender and sexual minorities, particularly transgender persons, offer as a model or template for similar kinds of actions elsewhere in India and other country contexts?
- What do other examples of economic inclusion interventions centred around training, research, advocacy and project development offer us in the context of India and beyond?
- What kinds of roles might be played by the people in this room (the consultation participants)?
- How might we connect business leaders with community organisations? How might we better understand experiences of gender and sexuality in relation to politics and practice of workplace inclusion?
- How might we better allow gender and sexual minorities to get a foot in the door of different work contexts? And in doing that how might we change workplace cultures for the better?
- How would we frame the above kinds of concerns as research questions?

- What kinds of new and innovative actions might we imagine and seek to develop to take forward together?
- What kind of new partnerships and plans of action can we come up with today, including funder prospecting and grant writing to raise resources for both small scale and large scale economic inclusion interventions?

4. Summary of consultation proceedings

4A. Challenges faced by gender and sexual minorities in economic inclusion

Gender and sexual minorities face a range of challenges around economic exclusion. Challenges and potential responses in the spheres of education, employment in the unorganised sector, employment in the organised sector, and laws and policies were discussed in the consultation.

i) Education (and skills building) barriers: Gender and sexual minorities in India face high levels of bullying and harassment in educational institutions. There is a lack of proper sensitisation among teachers, students and other staff. There is also a lack of inclusive infrastructure in terms of toilets as well as counsellors trained to handle issues around gender and sexual diversity. These factors lead to a high level of school/college drop-outs among gender and sexual minorities (particularly transgender students) and a consequent lack of adequate skills for employability.

ii) Gender and sexual minorities in the unorganised sector and self-employment: According to a report published by the International Labour Organization in 2018 (*Women and Men in the Informal Economy – A Statistical Picture, Third Edition*), 81 per cent of all employed persons in India make a living by working in the informal or unorganised sector. The scenario for gender and sexual minorities is not likely to be any different. The consultation participants shared that transgender persons seem to be largely concentrated in the informal sector or are self-employed, and for transgender women, sex work remains a primary or at least a secondary source of income.

Overall, one of the issues of further large scale research that stands out is the need to find out what gender and sexual minority persons want in terms of skills building and employment as against what opportunities are currently available to them (both in terms of quantity and quality). The gap between the two can offer an indication of where future workplace and larger economic inclusion and legal reform efforts are needed. Moreover, such research needs to be conducted periodically to measure change (or lack of it) over time. The findings from such research may also help question social stereotypes of what kinds of work gender and sexual minority individuals may be interested in and capable of.

The question of workplace and larger economic inclusion in the Indian context goes way beyond the formal or corporate sector. The informal sector employs the vast majority of individuals in the Indian workforce, where the relationship between the employer and the employed is deeply iniquitous with little bargaining power in the hands of the employees. Marginalization around gender and sexuality further adds to the livelihood precarity in the informal sector, with even trade unions not in a position to take up the cause of gender and sexual minorities in a sustained manner (as shared by transgender activists engaged in advocacy with trade unions in West Bengal).

Further, self-employment through small-scale entrepreneurship constitutes a significant facet of informal sector employment in India, including for gender and sexual minorities, and early exclusions from educational and skills building systems puts them at a disadvantage in these spheres as well. Another factor to keep in mind is that many transgender women and men who have sex with men, earn their livelihood from professions that fall in a grey area of legality – be it the traditional occupations of *hijras* or different forms of sex work or engagement in the ‘pleasure industry’.

iii) Gaps in the organised sector: One of the learnings from the consultation was that in the last decade or so, particularly since the first time Section 377 was read down by the Delhi High Court in 2009, gender and sexual minority inclusion in the formal (corporate) sector, however sporadic and limited to a certain class and organizational hierarchy of the workforce, has taken off in terms of dialogue and articulation of inclusion guidelines. Both international multinationals (like Google, IBM, KPMG, LinkedIn and Microsoft) and homegrown ones (like Dr. Reddy’s, Godrej, Lupin Laboratories, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Steel and Wipro) have undertaken gender and sexual minority inclusion in varying degrees. Despite this, discrimination and stereotyping continue to dominate formal workplaces and impact the implementation of ‘progressive’ human resource policies. Further, there is a serious lack of infrastructure and facilities catering to the needs of gender and sexual minorities such as gender-neutral toilets and gender and sexual minority inclusive mental health services.

(iv) Challenges in legal and policy environments: Despite progressive judgements such as *NALSA* and *Johar*, workplace laws in India continue to largely exclude gender and sexual minorities. These include laws such as the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976; Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; and Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2013. As mentioned earlier, the Transgender Rights Act is a deeply flawed legislation and does more harm than good for the transgender communities.

4B. Interventions for economic inclusion of gender and sexual minorities

Given the nature of the challenges that gender and sexual minorities may face at every life stage and in every sphere in life, simultaneous and continuous interventions are

required to enable uniform inclusion across educational institutions, skills building institutions and different places of employment.

i) Comprehensive research on the impact of current laws, policies and practices on gender and sexual minorities for economic inclusion:

Research has played a critical role in identifying the barriers to workplace and larger economic inclusion posed by laws and policies. For instance, the study *Livelihood, Exclusion and Opportunity: Socioeconomic Welfare among Gender and Sexuality Non-normative People in India* showed that a plethora of government poverty alleviation programmes notwithstanding, hetero-normative

definitions of gender, marriage and family at the policy level, and legal stigma (criminalization) continued to exclude people with non-normative genders and sexualities from economic benefits.

Similarly, advocate Surabhi Shukla's working paper *Sex Is Voldemort – A Qualitative Study to Understand the Experiences of Queer Students during Their School Life in India* (2017) provided crucial and nuanced insight into the inclusions and exclusions at play in a specific class of educational institutions in India. The need for further rigorous research was indicated during the consultation, as well as identifying ways forward in light of judgements like *NALSA* and *Johar*. These studies will need to examine the intersections between gender, sexuality and issues like disability, caste, class, ethnicity and location while looking at the issue of economic inclusion. Region-specific studies will be important in such a scheme of things.

ii) Interventions needed in education and skills development sectors: It was agreed that interventions for education and skills development would be needed at two levels – interventions to ensure that gender and sexual minority students stay in school or college, and interventions for students who have already dropped out. While the exact nature of interventions should be framed on the basis of research findings, the consultation participants proposed a number of ways forward. As far as the education sector is concerned, these included better use of child rights laws, working closely with the child rights machinery including Child Welfare Committees, and encouraging schools to conduct gender and sexuality sensitisation for students and faculty to ensure that no student drops out because of discrimination and violence around their gender and/or sexuality.

Interventions for education and skills development would be needed at two levels – interventions to ensure that gender and sexual minority students stay in school or college, and interventions for students who have already dropped out.

Recommendations for skills building included conducting an assessment of the education level and skills building needs and interests of individuals who have dropped out of or have discontinued formal education, or are anticipating the same, career counselling by NGOs/CBOs, and encouraging individuals who have dropped out to consider completing their studies.

The interventions suggested for the unorganised sector took on a more structural approach, given that the sector largely falls outside the labour law framework.

iii) Interventions needed in the employment

sector: Sensitisation of employers to adopt inclusive workplace policies and create safe spaces is necessary (not just in a narrow manner for specific communities, but in an intersectional manner for all marginalized social groups). The following section breaks down potential steps to be taken in three different areas of employment – the organised sector, the unorganised sector, and entrepreneurship for gender and sexual minorities.

Organised sector interventions: Multiple interventions were discussed to make the organised sector more inclusive of gender and sexual minorities. These included designing inclusive workplace policies, and carrying out consultations with the gender and sexual minority communities to determine the substantive content of such policies, sensitisation and training in corporate spaces, inclusive infrastructure and anti-sexual harassment policies. At the same time, the consultation participants were concerned about ‘pinkwashing’ and sought actual implementation or application of policies that looked good on paper.

Unorganised or informal sector interventions: The interventions suggested for the unorganised sector took on a more structural approach, given that the sector largely falls outside the labour law framework. The suggestions included carrying out consultations with gender and sexual minorities in the unorganised sector to understand their expectations in terms of inclusion, strengthening mobilisation and organisational politics in the informal sector, inclusion of state level welfare boards as key stakeholders in inclusion-focused sensitization and training activities, involving the corporate sector in advocacy given that they work extensively with informal sector employers/businesses, and advocating for gender affirmative care-inclusive government funded insurance schemes.

Further, it was emphasised that interventions in the informal sector must also necessarily deal with the concerns of gender and sexual minorities who have livelihoods that fall in the grey area of legality, particularly different forms of sex work or engagement in the ‘pleasure industry’. Legal reforms in this context have been

discussed earlier and are likely to be a part of a much longer timeframe of action. At the same time, alternative employment avenues should be made available for the individuals interested in switching professions or complementing their existing sources of income. A more unorthodox and immediate approach could be to make sex work and pleasure services 'safer'.

Interventions to support entrepreneurship among gender and sexual minorities:

When it came to entrepreneurship, it was noted that individuals from the upper middle and upper classes were possibly more likely to have access to resources (including education, training and capital) that could help them run their businesses on a sound footing as well as manage and survive risks of failure involved in entrepreneurship. In comparison, individuals from the middle classes or poorer socio-economic sections were possibly more in need of guidance to start new enterprises or upgrade existing ones. Another area of concern, something that also requires further research, could be how gender and sexual minority entrepreneurs or aspiring entrepreneurs from different socio-economic backgrounds experience and deal with stigma and discrimination.

Keeping these issues in mind, the consultation participants came forth with a variety of suggestions for interventions, particularly focusing on gender and sexual minorities from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. These included providing support to gender and sexual minority entrepreneurs with start-ups, entrepreneurship development programmes, developing networks of supportive financial service providers (chartered accountants, income tax lawyers and bankers) and holding sensitisation workshops for such service providers, and including the aged sections of gender and sexual minorities in the sphere of entrepreneurship.

A pioneering experience in India to learn from in the context of supporting gender and sexual minority individuals engaged in the informal sector (including those who are self-employed) would be the model initiated by Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Ahmedabad. SEWA has been registered as a trade union since 1972 under the Indian Trade Unions Act of 1926. The union is open for membership to informal sector women workers all over India. SEWA is an outcome of the confluence of three movements – the labour movement, the cooperative movement and the women's movement. SEWA aims at organising women workers in the unorganized sector towards 'full employment', which stands for work security, income security, food security and social security (at least healthcare, childcare and shelter). The main strategy is to enhance the bargaining position of informal sector women workers in their dealings with key stakeholders in the world of work as well as policy makers.

Studies have shown that SEWA has been successful in significantly enhancing the average earnings of informal sector women workers, particularly in urban areas. Similar

successes have been noted in healthcare access, food and nutrition, childcare and shelter. While the successes and challenges of SEWA will be rooted in particular contexts, there may well be several overlaps with the context of gender and sexual minority peoples. SEWA as an example was not discussed in the consultation, but its mention here seems worthwhile as this report seeks to set out the pathways towards greater economic inclusion for gender and sexual minorities in India.

5. Select case studies

Case study 1: Sexual and Gender Diversity, Welfare and Precarity in India: Impact, Advocacy and Process (August 2016 to March 2018) – AMaNA, Imphal; ETA, Imphal; SAATHII, Chennai; University of Sussex, Brighton, UK; Varta Trust, Kolkata



The objective of this project, informally named Gender and Sexual Minorities Economic Inclusion Advocacy Project in Manipur, was to develop the capacity of small scale gender and sexual minority community groups in Manipur to advocate for structures that address their socio-economic vulnerabilities. It also intended to begin an ongoing process of institutionalizing changes in employment

practice in Manipur. The long term intent was to disseminate the learning from Manipur nationally to replicate the process in other states as a model for codes of practice by gender and sexual minorities in India.

The project began with orientation and training sessions on issues around gender, sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, economic inclusion, human rights, advocacy and research ethics for four transgender community advocates (peer leaders) associated with AMaNA and ETA, both primarily transgender support groups in Manipur, and the preparation of a qualitative baseline economic exclusion map for the state. The baseline study led to identification and prioritization of advocacy issues and related stakeholders in the spheres of not just livelihood, but also education, skills building, social security access, health, sanitation, and laws and policies. Among the stakeholders were entrepreneurs running small businesses, officials of vocational training centres, media persons, child protection officials, and key officials associated with the Department of Social Welfare, Government of Manipur, and sanitation officials at the municipal level in Imphal.

The community advocates were also given inputs on storytelling and were guided in setting up a community blog (*Rainbow Manipur | Inclusive Manipur*), where they were

encouraged to document and upload case studies on different aspects of socio-economic inclusion and exclusion of gender and sexual minorities. This blog also served as a key tool for advocacy.

I. Public Relation Officer (PRO)	15,000 - 25,000	30	XIUG
II. Area Field organizer	10,000 - 15,000	40	X/IIIUG

Date of Submission : 15-06-2017
 Date of Interview : 16-06-2017
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The advocacy with employers included a series of sensitization meetings, workshops, consultations and sharing of good practices on diversity and inclusion. As an impact of these advocacy activities, many of the employers came forth to offer training and job opportunities in their companies, mainly to transgender individuals. Some of the job advertisements were also placed on the community blog as a unique experiment to gauge the community response. However, there were only a few applicants for these openings. The community advocates felt that the stigma, bullying and harassment faced by gender and sexual minorities right from the school days continuing into adulthood meant that many of them never completed their formal education and so probably did not feel confident enough or were

not qualified to apply for the openings on offer. It could also have been a question of hesitation or distrust in the minds of community members and it was argued that such efforts at inclusion would need to be sustained over a long period of time for there to be a positive impact.

Advocacy with Accent, a major vocational training institute based in Imphal, resulted in the institute publicly announcing in newspaper advertisements that all its courses were open for transgender persons and that the institute had made available a gender neutral toilet for transgender persons. Information technology firm MOBIMP, one of the small businesses sensitized through the project, also conducted an in-house sensitization session on gender and sexuality for its staff members, and made all its toilets gender neutral. The project's pilot level successes in inclusive sanitation as a tool for economic inclusion found a mention as a case study in international journal *Waterlines* in a paper on transgender inclusive sanitation in South Asia (*Transgender-inclusive Sanitation: Insights from South Asia*, April 2018).

Success was also achieved with regard to media sensitization. The All Manipur Working Journalists Union, with whom two advocacy workshops were conducted, lent its support to AMANA, when they protested stigmatizing language used for gender and sexual

minorities in a newspaper report. This led to an immediate apology and correction being issued by the newspaper.

A sensitisation meeting was organised with Bishnupur district child protection officials in collaboration with gender and sexual minority support forum Maruploi Foundation, one of the oldest in Manipur, to advocate for prevention of harassment, bullying and dropping out of gender variant children from schools in the district.

A national consultation was organised in Delhi in August 2017 with community groups, gender and sexuality activists, employer representatives, government representatives and multilateral stakeholders to share the learning from this project. This consultation also enabled a compilation of steps to be taken at state and national levels with a long term vision to ensure economic inclusion of gender and sexual minorities. A public exhibition was organized in Imphal in January-February 2018 to showcase the learning, successes and challenges of the project, which was covered by the media in Manipur.

A final consultation in Imphal with a number of entrepreneurs sensitized through the project in January 2018 resulted in the documentation of specific future strategies for workplace and larger economic inclusion of gender and sexual minorities. These strategies in turn informed the agenda of the consultation documented in this manual.

Case Study 2: Transgender Resource Centre, University of Delhi – Amrita Sarkar, SAATHII, Delhi office

In 2015, the University of Delhi had introduced ‘third gender’ as a gender option in its admission forms. However, there were no takers from the transgender communities. The university wanted to better understand the reasons behind this situation. In December 2017, the Department of Adult Continuing Education and Extension (DACEE), University of Delhi set up the Transgender Resource Centre in an attempt to promote inclusion of transgender students. This centre includes an online platform and a physical resource centre. In 2018, 101 applications were received from transgender individuals by the university, the highest since the ‘third gender’ option was introduced in 2015. But again, though all the applicants were called for an interview, none of them turned up. It was found out that most transgender students preferred open schools and open universities instead of attending educational institutions for higher education because of fear of stigma and discrimination. But the open schools and universities do not maintain a record of transgender students in their system, and so the extent of transgender inclusion in these institutions is not known.

In order to understand the roadblocks to transgender inclusion in the university, the DACEE, in collaboration with SAATHII, organised a consultation on mainstreaming transgender persons in education in July 2018. With the recommendations of this

consultation, the Transgender Resource Centre now plans to start short-term leadership courses for transgender community members to learn essential life skills, 'soft skills' and media skills. These skills can be helpful in coping with the expectations of a formal educational environment.

The need for vocational education based on individual interests has also been recognised. Additionally, sensitisation programmes for students, faculty and other staff in colleges under the University of Delhi will continue to be undertaken by the Transgender Resource Centre to make them all community-friendly and welcoming of transgender students.

6. Consultation Participant List

- Aditya Batavia, Diversity Dialogue Member, Mumbai
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- Anurag Maitrayee, Queer Activist, Kolkata
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- Brindaalakshmi K., Gender and Sexuality Researcher and Activist, Chennai
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- Sudeb Sadhu, Transgender Community Mobilizer and Activist, Baruipur
- Sumedha Mandal, Sappho for Equality, Kolkata
- Suzi Bhowmik, Founder, Dum Dum Aikya and Actor, Kolkata

Acknowledgements for report preparation: Brindaalakshmi K., Dr. Paul Boyce, Namrata Mukherjee, Pawan Dhall

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