FROM DIVERSITY TO INCLUSION

A FORUM ON LGBT+ INCLUSION IN THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

19 FEBRUARY, CO-HOSTED BY STONEWALL,
SAVE THE CHILDREN UK AND UNICEF

FORUM REPORT

INTRODUCTION

On 19th February 2020, Save the Children UK (SCUK), Stonewall and Unicef UK hosted an afternoon of events as part of LGBT+ History Month. Following a panel discussion around furthering the rights of children with diverse SOGIE, an inter-agency forum discussion took place, focusing on promoting LGBT+ inclusion across the sectors. This report captures some of the most critical points raised and includes some of the advice and guidance emerging from different agencies in attendance.

In attendance were representatives from the following agencies: Womankind Worldwide; Unicef UK; the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF); Greenpeace; the British Red Cross (BRC); Social Development Direct; Micro Rainbow; Kaleidoscope Trust; Oxfam UK; Safer Edge; and Save the Children UK (SCUK). The forum discussion was facilitated by Save the Children UK (SCUK) and Stonewall.

The discussion focused on two broad areas: what could be done to transform agency workplaces into LGBT+ inclusive environments and what could be done to transform the way agencies work overseas, in interaction with beneficiaries, local partners and other stakeholders. The first section of this report details the successes and challenges experienced by agencies in terms of shaping LGBT+-inclusive workplaces; the second touches on safety and security for staff of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE); the third LGBT+ programming; and the final section speaks to conclusions and next steps for the international development and humanitarian sectors in terms of LGBT+ inclusion.

The discussion adhered to Chatham House rules, whereby contributions are unattributed to ensure participants are able to speak freely and openly

Definitions

While some agencies have LGBT+ policies and this forum focused on LGBT+ inclusivity, other agencies have SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression) policies and talk about protecting those of all SOGIE. The reason SOGIE is sometimes preferred to the LGBT+ acronym is in recognition that SOGIE impacts everyone, not just those identifying as LGBT+. Some people are impacted by family members or community members openly identifying as LGBT+ or equivalent and face discrimina-

tion or hostility as a result – despite not being of diverse SOGIE themselves. Others, who would not self-identify as LGBT+ but who are perceived to be LGBT+ or equivalent may face discrimination. Others may work hard to restrict their self-expression to avoid being perceived as LGBT+. People across the world – identifying as LGBT+ or not – restrict their self-expression because of rigid ideas of SOGIE.

It was recognised in the forum discussion that how agencies and individuals approach SOGIE and the language we use impacts our work and the ways we act to support and protect staff, beneficiaries and other stakeholders. In this document, both terms are used, depending on which was deemed most appropriate for the context.

WORKPLACE CULTURE

Different organisations are at different stages on the journey to LGBT+ inclusion and there are many barriers to achieving our aims. The forum was an open space for staff participants to talk honestly about the many challenges they have faced and continue to face in achieving LGBT+ inclusion in their workplace and ways of working.

Through participants sharing their experiences, it became apparent that every organisation present had faced barriers to achieving some of their aims in terms of LGBT+ inclusion. Many of these were specific to organisations. However, some of the most common barriers raised included: a lack of buy-in from organisations around LGBT+ inclusion; a lack of time and resources to fulfil LGBT+ inclusion commitments; a lack of D&I expertise – internal or hired - leading to an over-reliance on staff networks; trans inclusion being reactive rather than proactive; and a lack of data or monitoring of staff's SOGIE, or monitoring only of staff's sexual orientation (SO) and not gender identity (GI).

Despite these challenges, it was also clear that representatives around the room worked continuously and often off their own bat to further LGBT+ inclusion at their agencies, celebrating many positive milestones along the way. While there was space in the forum to raise the above-mentioned challenges, it was also a space to celebrate these milestones, share best practice around LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace and collaboratively discuss next steps for the sectors.

———————————

Training for staff often does the most to transform workplaces. Many initiatives are taking place across agencies in the two sectors to further LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace. Staff training, including unconscious bias training and/or LGBT+ inclusion training was considered by many as the most effective way to shape the workplace. It was noted that staff training was especially important and effective when it occurred as part of agency inductions. Often a lack of LGBT+ inclusion is prompted by heterosexual and heteronormative staff and structures which demonstrate a lack of awareness around those of diverse SOGIE rather than by staff or structures which are directly homophobic, biphobic or transphobic (though this can also be the case). As such, training that makes staff more aware of how language, policies or ways of working may discriminate against those of diverse SOGIE or make them feel uncomfortable or unable to be their authentic selves at work, is needed everywhere. The challenges with this type of initiative is that it can be resource-heavy and in larger organisations prompt logistical challenges with organisers struggling to get everyone in the same room with busy diaries and competing priorities. It also often requires senior-level buy-in which not all agencies can depend upon and it requires follow-up to be long-lasting and useful. Staff participants from many organisations reported that even where this training was taking place, it was often rolled out in an ad-hoc fashion and not one that systematically approached and addressed challenges in the workplace.

———————————

Staff Networks play a vital role in furthering LGBT+ inclusion. A majority of the organisations represented at the forum had an LGBT+ staff network or equivalent equality staff network established. Across many of the agencies, these are used as safe spaces and supportive social networks as well as vehicles for change, with network members advocating for advancements within the organisations. Some of the functionalities and roles these networks could play included:

- Regular socials, helping foster a sense of community in work for those of diverse SOGIE;

- Organisation or attendance of internal and external events (including agencies marching in Pride);

- Awareness raising – including the sharing of staff blogs and other SOGIE-celebratory content;

- Working with other teams across the organisation, including facilities, to transform offices spaces (e.g. desk banks flying LGBT+ or trans flags);

- Advocacy around the shaping of HR policies (e.g. transitioning at work policies).

It was also noted that collaboration with other equality staff networks (including BME, disabilities, gender equality and parents and allies networks) could help LGBT+ allies or equivalent networks adopt an intersectional approach to their ways of working.

Network Structures

Despite a recognition of their often critical importance, a number of challenges were raised around how to create staff networks and once established, how to make them successful in their aims. There was no one consistent approach to establishing networks across agencies. Some agencies had diversity and inclusion groups; some a single equality network; some several different equality networks which included LGBT+ networks or LGBT+ allies networks. Some staff networks were formalised and had dedicated staff and resources attached; some were informal. One of the questions raised was how inclusive or exclusive to make these networks. If everyone is invited to join the networks, does this stop them being useful to those that need them most? If they are too exclusive, do they risk not reaching all those who could benefit from being a part of the network/those with the power to influence the agencies at senior levels? Establishing solid Terms of Reference (ToRs) for these networks through a collaborative process was raised as one solution this challenge – though it was acknowledged that different organisations would run these differently.

Resource Allocation

Challenges were also documented in terms of how to make these networks successful once established. These challenges tended to be focused around time and resource constraints. Staff engaged with the networks were often volunteers or had a small percentage of their worktime dedicated to the network. This meant that they would sometimes create comprehensive road maps towards how the networks would contribute to LGBT+ inclusion and then not have the time or resource to meet their milestones. With so many competing priorities, progress by the network members was often reported to be slow. Funding and financial support to the networks was also registered as a common challenge.

Overreliance on Networks

It can be difficult to achieve a balance between platforming the voices of network members across organisations without relying on them to be experts and this was pointed out by a number of different agencies. Identifying as LGBT+ or as an ally does not necessarily make someone an expert on LGBT+ inclusion and over-reliance on network members to provide solutions for organisations can lead to burn-out for those members and in some cases, a lack of responsibility taken by others in the organisation.

––––––––––––––––––

Cultural or diversity audits can help create a baseline. While some of the agencies represented at the forum discussion were LGBT+ organisations (including Kaleidoscope Trust and Micro Rainbow), many were not. In cases where organisations did not have expertise around LGBT+ inclusion, it was recommended by several agencies that a third-party audit take place. This could be a broad audit evaluating the workplace culture or could be an audit that looks specifically at the extent to which an organisation is meeting its mandate to support staff of diverse SOGIE.

Internal reviews and data collections were also noted to be useful in understanding the sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) of staff; the proportion of staff identifying as LGBT+; and the preferences of staff of diverse SOGIE for how the organisation could create an LGBT+-inclusive workplace.

Related, many representatives expressed frustration that they did not have adequate data in their agencies to understand the needs of staff or respond effectively. Collecting accurate data was noted as a challenge – especially in workplaces where there seemed to be a high level of non-disclosure amongst staff as to their SOGIE.

––––––––––––––––––

Policies are important but they have to be translated into practice. Several of the agencies were in the process of creating new policies at the time of the forum discussion – position policies on how they would support staff of diverse SOGIE, HR policies for transitioning at the workplace and others. It was acknowledged by all that this was an important starting point and a necessity for allowing staff to advocate for LGBT+ inclusion, support themselves and others, and hold senior leadership to account.

However, it was also acknowledged that translating those policies into practice can be difficult. Many of the representatives expressed frustration that good policies were

not well-known, understood or referred to amongst staff, including at a senior level. There were also concerns that the creation of policies could lead to subsequent complacency amidst staff feeling as though LGBT+ inclusivity was somehow complete. As such, policies could be experienced as tokenistic.

––––––––––––––––––

Quick wins exist and should be capitalised upon. Organising training for staff, conducting comprehensive cultural audits and establishing functioning, well-resourced staff networks are all significant undertakings – to be prioritised but often requiring resources and expertise agencies might not have immediately available. In the forum discussion, there were also several much lower-resource options discussed for how to promote LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace. The below list includes the most common practical tips raised during the forum:

- Pronoun sharing in meetings, email signatures and elsewhere (including LinkedIn);

- Gender neutral spaces, including gender neutral toilets in office buildings, and the printing of gender neutral toilet signs that could be taken to event spaces to ensure they are fully inclusive also;

- Rainbow flags, bi flags and trans flags visible in offices, as well as lanyards, posters and other visual indicators of an inclusive workplace;

- D&I objectives mandatory in all staff members' personal or work development plans (with guidance offered to support staff to choose appropriate D&I objectives);

- Using social media platforms, including workplace or LinkedIn, as a space to promote LGBT+ inclusion progress;

- Obtaining visible buy-in from senior staff and establishing accountability mechanisms to hold staff to LGBT+ inclusion commitments;

- Featuring staff, beneficiaries and other stakeholders of diverse SOGIE in marketing/fundraising campaigns where appropriate.

If resources allow:

- Training for staff during inductions and throughout their time at an organisation; training which focuses on promoting an LGBT+ inclusive workplace and ways of working;

- Comprehensive cultural audits which collect data around staff's SOGIE and staff's preferences for how

to shape an inclusive workplace;

- Establish a well-resourced and supported staff network.

PROTECTING STAFF OVERSEAS

In terms of protecting staff of diverse SOGIE travelling to overseas contexts, it was pointed out that many agencies do not have sufficient - if any - guidance for how to protect themselves in homophobic, biphobic or transphobic contexts, including contexts where to identify as LGBT+ or equivalent is illegal.

Some representatives expressed frustration that the emphasis seemed to be on the individuals to search for LGBT+ security guidance, rather than guidance or security briefings being initiated or enforced by the organisations. Safer Edge, a risk management organisation, pointed out that even when there is guidance or security policies for staff of diverse SOGIE, they do not always have the intended effect. The risk-assessment a staff member of diverse SOGIE might receive from their organisation if they are going abroad could include language or approaches which are counterproductive – suggesting they are a minority to be tolerated and protected or suggesting that they are vulnerable and putting them on the back foot before they have started their deployment.

It was acknowledged that UK-based agencies deploying staff abroad need to do much more to create and implement safety policies which would protect staff of diverse SOGIE. Thought and consultation also needs to go into making sure the development and implementation of these policies is done correctly and in a way which genuinely supports all staff – at home and abroad.

In the meantime, one piece of practical advice which came from Kaleidoscope Trust (KT) representatives was to ensure that all staff travel with an invitation letter from the local and international organisations they are working with whilst abroad (often a requirement for visa purposes anyway). Also, where possible, to send through a list of names of delegates to High Commissions to pass onto immigration officials (especially when gender identity or expression does not align with the gender marker on official personal documentation). This can protect them in situations where they may be at risk of danger with local

authorities. KT representatives also suggested that hotel briefings could be usefully carried out or distributed in document form in advance – briefing hotel staff to support individuals of diverse SOGIE likely to be staying. Additionally, they advised that organisations should prioritise hotels with inclusive facilities (gender-neutral bathrooms for instance) when procuring accommodation.

While much of the guidance offered was for staff deploying overseas, it was pointed out by Safer Edge and others that safety and security advice, guidance and briefings should be done with staff of diverse SOGIE deploying to countries in Europe, as well as further afield, and to staff who might be travelling within the UK. It is important not to assume that UK-based staff of diverse SOGIE will feel safe, secure and comfortable in these contexts.

There was also caution expressed around overly compensating for perceived or anticipated LGBT+ hostility in international contexts. Travelling with the mindset that "xyz country is homophobic and dangerous" can perpetuate a colonial narrative that undermines the important work local organisations are doing to combat stigma and discrimination, especially as hostile governments utilise this narrative to propagate the idea that homosexuality is a Western import. This narrative also invisibilises the existence of diverse local SOGIE communities. In this context, Kaleidoscope Trust representatives advised employees from the Global North make efforts to learn about and understand the history of discriminatory laws and sentiment, particularly their colonial-era manifestations especially in the context of Commonwealth countries.

LGBT+ INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING

Despite challenges, many of the agencies represented at the forum discussion had made significant progress in creating and furthering LGBT+-inclusive workplaces. In most cases, despite not having all the answers, staff participants had relatively clear road-maps in place to achieving future milestones. In terms of programming and working with partners, other stakeholders and beneficiaries overseas, as well as at home, staff participants expressed much less confidence:

'Okay, we're doing all this in the UK but how does that impact our work/presence overseas?'

'How can staff adhere to Codes of Conduct which require them to respect individuals' right to identify as LGBT+ and which also require them to respect other country's laws and cultures, many of which find homosexuality and gender non-conformity to be criminal?'

'How can we expect regional/local staff members to promote the inclusion of LGBT+ beneficiaries into programmes when they might find those of diverse SOGIE unacceptable? Is it our place to tell them how to conceive of and respond to SOGIE?'

'As agencies which work closely with governments, how can we vocalise our support of LGBT+ individuals in countries where governments are openly homophobic, biphobic or transphobic and there are repercussions for funding/permission to operate in that context?'

The above indicates some of the questions and concerns arising from discussions around LGBT+ inclusive programming and many of the ethical and logistical challenges associated with translating UK inclusivity work to work overseas. Most of the discussion raised more questions than it answered. While staff participants felt passionate about protecting beneficiaries of diverse SOGIE and others impacted by issues of SOGIE, few knew how they could achieve their aims.

———————————

Work with local partners. Acknowledging that agencies can sometimes do more harm than good when attempting to influence overseas contexts and communities, it was widely recognised that one of the most positive actions UK-based agencies can take is to partner with local organisations already working to support individuals and communities of diverse SOGIE. While they may require effort and resources to find, there are often organisations and structures already in place which are important to understand and support – rather than providing competing services or risk exposing undercover operations already taking place.

———————————

Adopt an inter-sectional approach always. Whether in the workplace, in the field or elsewhere, it is important to understand that staff, beneficiaries and others of diverse SOGIE will experience their SOGIE in different ways, shaped in part by other protected characteristics they may have. For example, a person of diverse SOGIE with a disability may require a different approach from their supporters to the approach required by a person of diverse

SOGIE who is a parent.

Kaleidoscope Trust and Micro Rainbow representatives also highlighted the importance of recognising relative privilege within communities of diverse SOGIE. In certain contexts, for example, cis-gender gay men may have improved access to services and resources and may experience less discrimination than trans BME women. Shaping effective LGBT+-inclusive programmes or LGBT+-inclusive elements of programmes requires staff in our sectors to take these factors into account.

CONCLUSION

The forum discussion which produced the above was the first of what we hope will become regular opportunities for agencies across the two sectors to meet, share best practice and discuss challenges. As such, the brief was broad and staff participants discussed a range of areas associated with LGBT+ inclusivity.

Going forward, it will be useful to focus in on some of the specific challenges and areas for improvements in terms of LGBT+ inclusivity within the two sectors – involving as many of the relevant stakeholders as possible. While this forum discussion included UK-based agencies exclusively, in future it will be important to involve non-UK-based agencies and voices from beneficiaries, partners and other stakeholders across the sectors in these conversations. It will also be important to include those impacted by and involved with the protection of other characteristics which limit individuals' freedoms.

Currently, few agencies operating across the two sectors appear to have a clear idea of how to implement LGBT+-inclusive programmes in challenging contexts. While the forum discussion held and this subsequent report do not provide clear answers to some of the questions raised, they do form part of an important discussion: a discussion, it is hoped, that will be added to, resources dedicated to and accountability afforded.

*   *   *