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SDG: 5  
Gender Equality



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# Transforming Unequal Gender Relations in India and Beyond

An Intersectional Perspective on Challenges  
and Opportunities

 Springer

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# Engaging with Omission: Promoting Concern for Gender and Sexuality Diverse People in SDG 5 and Beyond

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Peter Aggleton, Rosalia Sciortino,  
and Christy E. Newman

## Abstract

Since their adoption in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals including Goal 5 have been criticized for their failure to recognize diversity of experience and expression with respect to gender, sex, and sexuality. Whether or not this exclusion was the intention of those who framed the goals and their associated targets is a matter of debate, but the reality is that gender-diverse people, together with their sex and sexuality diverse counterparts, remain largely absent from the SDGs (including Goal 5). In moving forwards, this chapter advocates for the need to recognize and address the needs of all people as the bearers of rights, if

the goals of the SDGs are to be met. We identify four barriers contributing to the exclusion of gender and sexuality diverse people from programs and policies: neglect of concern (both institutionally in other ways) for human rights as they apply to all individuals; problems of politics as they relate to gender, sex, and sexuality; the continued power of patriarchy over individual and community life; and the neo-liberal framing of gender and sexuality diverse people. We propose a paradigmatic shift to ensure that equity, inclusion, and respect can be enjoyed by all people—regardless of gender and sexuality—in the twenty-first century.

## Introduction

In 2015, UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Via work toward a series of indicators, the global community aimed to progress in the achievement of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets. It has been argued that the development of these goals aimed to address some of the shortcomings of the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which drove the development and operationalization of a North–South agenda for aid to eliminate extreme poverty, its correlates, and consequences. Instead, the new SDG agenda was said to be transformative, more adequately reflecting the

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interconnectedness of twenty-first century challenges, and the need for structural change and reform.

In contrast to the MDGs, the SDGs purported to offer a global agenda for sustainable development in the form of universal goals that set targets for every country, not only those that are poorer and socially disadvantaged. While poverty remains a core objective, the 17 goals and associated targets delineate a broader agenda that includes concern for social, economic, and environmental sustainability and recognize the need to reduce inequality within and between countries [1]. The SDGs carry with them a commitment to ending poverty in all its forms—not just in financial terms but in relation to well-being and health, access to education, decent work, and so on [2]. They seek to integrate economic, social, and environmental factors in the pursuit of sustainable development rather than seeing these as separate areas or issues to address. Too much development work in the past has taken place within silos (of climate, environment, work, health, education, etc.) leading to a fragmented and uncoordinated approach [3].

Most importantly, in the context of this article, the advent of the SDGs draws attention to left-behind marginal groups and stresses the need to include them in development efforts regardless of “race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability as well as other status” [4]. The characterization of the SDG Agenda with the slogan ‘Leave No One Behind’ affirms the need for development efforts to include all those groups and populations whose lives and livelihoods had, through historical, social, and structural omission and exclusion, long been ignored or discriminated against. Key in this framework is the attention given to gender and women’s empowerment, which figures both as a specific goal in itself (Goal 5—Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and in relation to health and education (Goal 4—Quality education) (Goal 3—Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) for example.

That said, the SDGs have not been without criticism. Some of the most trenchant general

critiques came from the US development economist, William Easterly, who has described the SDGs as senseless, dreamy, and garbled [5]. Jason Hickel, writing in *The Jacobin*, has likened the goals to ‘a high-school wish list on how to save the world’ [6]. Other writers, less rhetorically, have seen the SDGs as being ‘wishes not goals’ and ‘ignoring underlying inequalities in the international system’ [7]. In addition, as focused on here, the SDGs were limited (partial even) in their engagement with vulnerable groups—identifying some groups but not others as worthy of attention as part of the agenda to Leave No One Behind. Central among the groups not engaged with, but whose members were and who remain at serious risk of human rights infringements, marginalization, and exclusion are LGBTQ+ populations—or gender and sexuality diverse people—as we will refer to them in this chapter.

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### **Gender and Sexuality Diversity: A Key Omission**

For decades, if not millennia, there has been rich diversity in the ways in which gender and sexuality are experienced and expressed around the world. We can see this in temple sculpture from the Indian subcontinent, in courtly paintings from China and Japan, in wall paintings and friezes from southern Europe, in decorative pottery from Meso and South America, and in the vase and other precious object decorations from many parts of the world. In pre-Islamic and pre-colonial Indonesia, gender and sexuality diversity was rife with five genders being recognized among the Bugis people and a third gender among the Toraja people, both in South Sulawesi. To take another example from the same context, the *Reog Ponorogo* dance in East Java depicts intimate relationships between two male characters [8]. Evidence for gender and sexuality diversity has long been around; although in every culture, attempts have been made to conceal or destroy it, or pretend that such variation does not exist. In more recent times, the work of numerous authors (see, for example, [9–12]) has

shown gender and sexuality diversity to be a feature of all modern societies as well, be this recognized, decried, or simply an uncommented upon part of everyday life.

Given this diversity, it is more than a little strange that notions of ‘gender’ are articulated and approached in the SDGs with a narrow focus on specific dimensions of the lives of ‘women’ and ‘girls’ with no relation to the lives of ‘men’ or others, and little acknowledgment that their interactions are shaped by inequality and power.

While the binary gender system remains powerful in shaping social systems globally, it has long been recognized that focusing discussion of gender only on those who are gendered female perpetuates the false belief that men, boys, and others are somehow outside of gender. Not only does this erase important ways in which a binary gender system is equally reliant on constructs of manhood and masculinity, but it also limits the potential for recognizing how power operates within this system. Although this ‘ex-nomination’ [13] of men and boys from ‘gender’ in the SDGs aligns with what has been recognized as a problem throughout the history of feminist action, it represents a missed opportunity to build recognition of the power relations that underpin systems that are patriarchal, misogynistic, and harmful to those socialized as women and girls in every setting. It also omits attention in the SDGs to the need to challenge patriarchy in *all its forms* through political processes rather than only through social development. Without meaningful recognition of the fact that gender is a system that impacts everyone, there is a missed opportunity to ensure all people are engaged in the process of transforming this system. Nowhere is this more important than in changing the very programs that engage men as if they were the ‘champions of change’ in gender relations [11], thereby consolidating their position as leaders and reproducing rather than remaking the patriarchal order.

Furthermore, there is no mention at all of the sexuality diversity in the SDGs, nor of the intersectionality between gender, sexuality, and between gender and sexuality and other social structures of class, age, race, (dis)ability,

ethnicity, and so on. Although there has been rapid development internationally in the areas of same-sex partnership and transgender rights since the adoption of the SDGs, even at the time of adoption it was over-simplistic to assume that gender is an experience that involves a clear and stable alignment between sex assigned at birth and an internal sense of gender identity. Gender has always been expressed in more expansive ways than this, in every part of the world, and throughout time [14], including but not limited to the experiences of those who change their gender to better fit their internal experience (typically described as ‘transgender’) and those who do not identify with a fixed or singular experience of gender (typically described as ‘non-binary’). Even the concept of sex is now recognized as being more complex than a two-part classification system, making it further problematic that the notion of gender remains based on binary position (see, for example, [15, 16]).

Secondly, as indicated above, sexuality is almost entirely missing from the SDGs both as a concept and in recognition of the fact that the relationships and sexual practices in which people participate extend well beyond a binary heterosexual norm. The fact that people of diverse sexualities—which can include gay/homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and many more—are missing from the SDGs has been appropriately critiqued as exacerbating the existing inequities and injustices that are recognized as affecting people who are not heterosexual in their participation in economic, educational, health, and other social settings. While diverse sexualities are very different from diverse genders, there are intersections between these two aspects of human diversity that lie unrecognized or unresponded to within the existing SDG framework.

In sum, not only are power in gender relations and a genuinely transformative role for men and boys absent in the discussion of how to achieve gender equality in the SDGs, but so too are the experiences of those who are not cisgender in their perceptions of self, or heterosexual in their attraction and orientation toward others. Whether or not there can ever be agreement on how to

define these groups and definitions (which will likely continue to vary in line with available conceptual and linguistic repertoires) is a matter of debate. But not to engage with the very real issues that ex-nomination poses seems barely comprehensible at the time of SDG adoption, and is unforgivable now.

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### **Gender and Sexuality Diversity: Continuing Change**

While change has taken place in relation to many of the issues focused upon by the SGDs, change relating to diverse genders and sexualities has been particularly dramatic in terms of framing, attention, and response. Thanks to education, the media, and growing public recognition and debate, we now know a lot more about the number of people for whom diversity in gender and/or sexuality is a clear feature of their lives.

Large population surveys in diverse contexts have reported growing numbers of people who actively locate themselves outside of cisnormative and heteronormative systems of identity classification. Young people in particular are more readily identifying as non-heterosexual and non-cisgender, despite the fact that national authorities continue to deny their presence or, at least, minimize their significance and value in their communities. This heightened visibility confirms the view expressed earlier that gender and sexuality have long been more diverse than history books have represented, with their focus on heteropatriarchal norms globally [17, 18].

We now know far more about the complexity inherent to these everyday experiences. Understandings of sexuality have moved substantially from a 'monosexual' model to recognize diversity and fluidity in ways of experiencing sexual and romantic attraction [19], including multi-gender attraction, or Bi+ sexualities, as well as asexualities, and a host of gradients in between. Understandings of gender have also changed, with greater attention now paid to recognize how people who are not cisgender can be at risk of exclusion from participation and safety across social systems, and a growing recognition to

better recognize and engage with those who identify as non-binary [20].

The successful advocacy efforts of intersex communities are another notable development since the SGDs were adopted. A significant advance has been made in recognizing the human rights issues produced by a system that assumes all bodies must comply with a strict binary sex and gender system. This includes work to forbid the use of medical interventions to change the bodies of intersex infants in order to 'correct' what historically have been seen as aberrations from this binary system, to ensure that intersex people are able to reach the age of consent before engaging (or not) in surgical and other interventions which are often irreversible, painful, and distressing [21].

Finally, we know more about the power of language in providing the opportunity for individuals to understand their experiences of diverse genders and sexualities in meaningful ways, and to build advocacy in ways that can be shared with others. We know that language matters because people should be able to claim their own experience in ways that make sense both to themselves and to others. The changing nature of the language which has evolved in the area of gender and sexuality does not undermine the claims of credibility and agency that drive these agendas. Even the concept of 'LGBTQ' itself, which was always a strategic assemblage of very different experiences, continues to be transformed, with different ways of articulating this suite of diversities coming to figure in, and be valued by (or contested) in different contexts, for different purposes.

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### **The Case for Inclusion**

It should go without saying that the exclusion of any one group of people from development processes and goals is both an affront to human dignity and a violation of human rights, so at one level, it seems strange to have to argue for the inclusion of gender and sexuality diverse people in particular. Yet, given the virulent opposition, there has been in many parts of the world toward



gender and sexuality diversity rights, growing opposition to what is often claimed to be ‘gender ideology’, and the attacks on democratic values that can be witnessed in some countries today, many have tried to find supportive arguments to justify and advocate for their inclusion. In general, two, at times interlinked, lines of argument can be identified.

A dominant position has argued for the fuller inclusion of gender and sexuality diverse people as part of the SDGs and broader development responses, based on their disadvantaged position in society. In relation to health, a multitude of reports signals gender and sexuality diverse people’s vulnerability to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and reduced access to sexual and reproductive health systems (linking this to SDG 3). With respect to education, there is an abundance of literature demonstrating the ways in which gender and sexuality are stereotypically described (or omitted) from textbooks and curricular materials, and gender and sexuality diverse pupils and teachers are subject to vilification, bullying, and stigma and discrimination in schools [22–24]. In housing, there is no shortage of evidence, both historically and contemporaneously, to show that landlords, lenders, and communities discriminate against gender and sexuality diverse people [25]. And in relation to employment, for countless millions of gender and sexuality diverse people decent work is hard to find, or is precarious, offering few if any protections against discrimination and unfair dismissal [26].

Such disenfranchisement, which prevents gender and sexuality diverse people from fully participating in society, has damaging consequences not only for the individuals concerned, but also for society as a whole, which is prevented from benefiting both economically and socially from the contribution that gender and sexuality diverse people can make [27]. In a related vein, the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Rights (RFSL) one of the longest-established groups fighting for gender and sexuality, has argued.

Because of discrimination and structural oppression LGBTIQ people have worse health, less access to education and experience poverty at higher rates. So long as LGBTIQ people continue to be excluded from sustainable development, none of the global goals will be achieved. [28]

A second line of argument—and one we find persuasive—emphasizes the inclusion of gender and sexuality diverse people’s concerns in the SDGs based on universal human rights principles. In the run-up to the 2019 UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goals, Outright Action International among other international human rights groups argued strongly that efforts to enhance the health and well-being of gender and sexuality diverse people “must be grounded in human rights that respect autonomy, bodily integrity, and self-determination”, since a “human rights based approach to achieving [the SDGs] anchors implementation in State obligations established by international law” [29]. Subsequently, Stonewall International, while voicing serious concern that the SDGs could (and should) have gone much further by calling for LGBT (their term) equality worldwide, has drawn attention to the human rights challenges gender and sexuality diverse people face with respect to the areas covered by the SDGs and has identified actions needed to ensure the rights of gender and sexuality diverse people are recognized, protected, and upheld [30].

Working from this position, and in each of the areas covered by the SDGs, gender and diverse people deserve recognition not only on the basis of special arguments for inclusion based on vulnerability and marginalization, but also by virtue of the fact that *as people* they are already the holders of human rights. Articles 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights read as follows:

**Article 1.** Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.

**Article 2.** All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing, or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

In addition, the right to sexuality, which incorporates the right to express one's sexuality and to be free from discrimination, has been articulated in a number of international human rights instruments including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.<sup>1</sup>

The case for inclusion therefore should be a simple one. Since human rights are indivisible and apply to all, they *must of necessity* apply to all gender and sexuality diverse people. Building on this last statement, we articulate what we ourselves understand as the right to presence and inclusion, identifiable barriers to its realization, and how to break such barriers.

## Barriers to Inclusion

We want to begin with the worrying suggestion that not being specifically named in the SDGs is no barrier to inclusion. In their report on sexual and gender minorities (*sic*) and the SDGs, O'Malley and Holzinger [4] argue that the social and development goals leave space to include gender and sexuality diverse people through their emphasis on 'leaving no one behind' and other key concepts. In their view:

While there is no explicit attention to sexual and gender minorities in the official SDG declaration, there is ample room to include them in SDG-related actions, given the attention to 'sex', 'other status', and the 'marginalized'. [4, 11]

This approach promotes the value of working within the dominant development framework and finding ways to leverage the SDGs to improve the conditions of excluded groups. However, to accept the 'omission' in this way is to overlook the very reason that led to it in the first place—i.e. the concerted opposition of several UN Member States to any reference to gender and sexuality diversity—and fails to challenge it. It also gives Member States the opportunity to interpret the 'leave no one behind' principle at their discretion, with some States clearly opposing any attempt to 'queer' the SDGs [31]. Why should national governments include people of diverse genders and sexualities in their actions if they do not even want to 'see' them, preferring instead to maintain the pretense that the entire population is cisgender and/or heterosexual?

Here, the proposed workaround for the 'omission' falls short of recognizing that, as said above, people of diverse genders and sexualities, *as people*, have legitimate rights to claim, and that states and international institutions of jurisdiction have the obligation not simply to act with empathy or benevolence, but to be responsible for upholding these rights and be accountable when they do not act. Introducing the concept of accountability in this way makes the individuals and institutions that hold power as 'duty bearers' answerable for their policies, while at the same time enabling marginalized and excluded groups as 'rights holders' to demand their entitlements starting from being recognized, no longer ignored, nor in the current best-case scenario being considered the passive beneficiaries of tolerant and graciously granted services.

In stressing, as a pre-requisite for true inclusion, the removal of all barriers, discrimination, and intolerance, and the explicit acknowledgment that each one of us, irrespective of gender or sexuality, is already the holder of human rights, we want to make explicit that lack of such recognition is one of the root causes for the continued exclusion of gender and sexuality diverse people from programs and policies. The SDG Agenda claims to be grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and guided by a human rights-based approach

<sup>1</sup> See for example—[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right\\_to\\_sexuality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_to_sexuality)—for a more detailed exposition.

directed toward promoting and protecting human rights in line with international human rights standards [32]. However, as noted elsewhere, the Agenda fails to articulate “a rights-based approach, in that none of the SDGs is *directly* geared toward the protection, promotion, fulfillment of and respect for human rights”, with little being done to strengthen the capacity of rights holders to meaningfully participate in an equal and effective way [33].

Despite their formal endorsement of the SDGs, many States, particularly those with legislation that criminalize the practices of gender and sexuality diverse people, show a profound lack of concern (both institutionally and in other ways) for human rights as they apply to *all* individuals. Currently, no less than 71 jurisdictions criminalize private, consensual, same-sex sexual activity between men, and 43 do so against private, consensual sexual activity between women. At least six jurisdictions—Iran, Northern Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and Yemen—implement the death penalty for private, consensual same-sex sexual activities. Fifteen jurisdictions criminalize the gender identity and/or expression of transgender people, using the so-called ‘cross-dressing’, ‘impersonation’, and ‘disguise’ laws. In other countries, transgender people are targeted by laws that criminalize vagrancy, hooliganism, and public order offenses [34]. In consequence, employment, housing, health, and education are inaccessible to gender and sexuality diverse people, many of whom are forced to live alone—in fear of violence and abuse, and endure isolation from family and community [35]. How can gender and sexuality diverse people possibly be included in development when they remain formally stigmatized and discriminated against in these ways?

This lack of attention to basic human rights is compounded by a second barrier to the inclusion of gender and sexuality diverse people in development efforts: namely, the progressive shrinking of the democratic space. To advance a rights-based agenda is a political process requiring concerted action and the formation of

alliances to ensure people have the capacity to act as rights holders, and their entitlements are well understood and acted upon by duty bearers. The global decline of democracy and the more general curtailing of freedom of speech and assembly hamper progressive movements and their advocacy for structural change and human rights. As one of us wrote in a previous article on the related topic of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and the SDGs:

The attainment of economic and gender inclusion is even more challenging today because of the rise of authoritarianism and of nationalist and religious populism. This puts at risk the still tenuous progress achieved by women’s groups, and civil society in the 1980s and 1990s with the emergence of alternative human-right based discourses and movements stressing women’s rights, SRHR and more recently LGBTIQ rights. When not by the government, pressure on progressive standpoints is placed by the numerous fundamentalist and nationalist groups that have proliferated in recent years. This is particularly the case in countries where narrowly defined identity politics according to rigid ethno-religious or heteronormative gender boundaries, are increasingly employed to gain popularity, win elections, or simply to stay in power. In this constraining climate, contestation over SRHR, gender equality, and sexual diversity endures and is becoming more intense. [36]

And it is here that the continued power of patriarchy over individual and community life in both the public domain and the domestic sphere emerges as a third barrier to true inclusion. As already mentioned, patriarchy remains well entrenched and despite the promises of gender equality in the SDGs Agenda and other global and national programs, development gains and opportunities remain heavily skewed toward cisgender men. The SDGs’ blindness to the working of power in gender relations of all kinds precludes the challenging of the socioeconomic and political structures that rely on and reproduce gender inequality within the family and at all societal levels. Conservative groups upholding what they call ‘traditional’ notions of the family and gender roles within it, conceive of women’s empowerment, gender equity and diversity, and sexual and reproductive rights as threats to a

moral order, presumed as natural but in fact premised upon the rule of patriarchy and its claims of male dominance. In their view, the realization of these values implies the challenging of the patriarchal fundamentals of androcentric societies and their heteronormative rules, and are, therefore, to be opposed.

We can see this opposition in the backlash against safe abortion (another glaring omission from the SDGs) and recent attacks on the 1973 *Roe versus Wade* decision, which guaranteed federal constitutional protection on abortion rights in the USA [37]. The heightened visibility of ‘LGBTI’ causes has led to violent backlash across the globe. In both China and the Russian Federation, efforts have recently been made to ‘re-traditionalize’ men’s and women’s roles in society. In China, opportunities in the 1990s for public discussion about sexuality and gender diversity have closed down and men’s appearance and any hint of effeminacy has come under attack [38]. In the Russian Federation, two decades after homosexuality was decriminalized in what was then a more tolerant climate, a raft of legislation has been passed, ostensibly seeking to protect children from being exposed to ‘homosexuality’ and ‘non-traditional sexual relations’, but in reality, legitimating attacks on any form of gender and sexuality diversity.

In this context, no meaningful change can be achieved without first tackling the systems that privilege and sustain masculine forms of dominance and power. Here, we subscribe to the view that gender equality ought to be conceived of and struggled for within a queer, feminist, and intersectional framework no longer assuming that success does not lie primarily for the benefit of white, cisgender, and heterosexual women alone, but for all people regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality [39].

Recognition of the intersecting character of gender with class, race/ethnicity, and other structural factors, brings us to the fourth barrier to true inclusion—namely, the neo-liberal framing of gender and sexuality diverse people in a way that prevents questioning of the current grossly inequitable economic order, which keeps many members of the community

and wider society in disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginal positions. So far, the discussion of individual rights has been separated from that of economic inequality and injustice, as if one takes precedence over the other. The authoritarian vision that socioeconomic rights ought to be achieved before human rights can be respected has somehow led to hesitancy to include the demand for a different economic system as integral to the advancement of rights of gender and sexuality diverse people. Too little analysis has been conducted of the way in which liberal market economies reproduce heterosexual and patriarchal hierarchies and how gender shapes people’s access to economic power and resources. For women, it is clear that the liberal market system exploits their unpaid domestic work and tends to position them in lower salary and employment categories. Increasingly there has also been more awareness that not all women are the same and that some benefit at the cost of other women calling for structural changes in economic power relations within the feminist movement and in society.

How this plays out for gender and sexuality diverse people is as yet weakly documented, but some important insights are emerging. Writing about the USA, but with relevance to other world contexts, Vallocchi [40] has shown how capitalism influenced the development of the twentieth century gay and lesbian movements and shaped them in different ways. He writes,

Capitalism created a psychiatric gay identity; social contract capitalism created an ‘out’ minority gay identity; capitalism-in-crisis created a decentered and contested gay identity; and neoliberal capitalism created a domesticated and consumerist gay identity. [40]<sup>2</sup>

This last phase of community development has three main features: first, the centralization of advocacy in highly professionalized organizations rather than in grassroots movements supported by the community; second, growing trust in the marriage and the family rather than the

<sup>2</sup> Here, the original terminology used by the author has been maintained.

State for security in the midst of growing job insecurity and a narrowing of the public sphere; and third, the growth of market-mediated, consumer-driven images of gender and sexuality diverse people and identities. Vallocchi continues:

Now portrayed as respectable by both the media and the movement gay identity become easily commodified. Advertisers and public relations firms could now market their products and services [...] to a supposed ‘gay demographic’ [...] the unitary middle class inflected gay identity proved profitable to an [...] industry in need of bankable images. [40]

Throughout this process of repackaging, struggles for recognition of gender and sexuality diversity have become segmented and depoliticized (‘less overtly political, confrontational, and sexually explicit’) with little attention being given to systems that facilitate mobilization of the more privileged community members to the exclusion of others [40].

Such a perspective raises the question as to whether the SDGs too may be viewed as part of an agenda for the ‘domestication and depoliticization’ of gender and sexuality diverse people in development terms. The feminist activist Srilata Batiliwala has shown how the co-option of the feminist discourse into the neoliberal development discourse has weakened the collective challenge it posed to the ‘deepest structures of social power’ to become instead ‘an exercise of individual preference or [the] acquisition of assets’ [41]. Transporting these insights to the present context, this questioning of neoliberal discourse and its entrenched power, as well as the framing of gender and sexuality diverse people as a (privileged) ‘gay demographic’, in LGBTQ+ form or otherwise, ought to be challenged, and so too should any development discourse that seeks to increase opportunities for gender and sexuality diverse people without transforming a deeply inequitable economic order. A collective movement across population sectors is needed to struggle for individual and socioeconomic rights in an economically and politically just world.

## What Can and Should Be Done?

So far in this chapter, we have aimed to offer an understanding of what the inclusion of gender and sexuality diverse people might mean and an understanding of four identifiable barriers to inclusion in the form of (1) neglect of concern for human rights as it applies to all individuals; (2) shrinking space for civil society movements; (3) the dominance of patriarchy over individual and community life; and (4) neglect of economic inequality and injustice.

We have also shown how each of these barriers to inclusion is general and in character but has a special impact on gender and sexuality diverse people. In this final section, we briefly consider evidence of what might work to bring about change. Informed by the analysis articulated above, it is possible to identify a series of next steps in moving beyond the current ex-nomination and impasse, while recognizing that the world we live in now is very different from that in which the SDGs were developed and adopted.

First and foremost, it is important to name the people, groups, and communities currently excluded from consideration—using language that is both specific to the local context yet broad enough to encompass commonality and shared experience of exclusion—socially, politically, and economically. In political organizing and beyond, it is time to move beyond alphabet soups (LGB, LGBT, LGBTQ, etc.) and calls for ever finer recognition of differences to focus on gender and sexuality diverse people as *people* and what they *share in common*.

In recognition of the fact that the ‘Me Too’ and ‘Black Lives Matter’ movements (to take but two recent examples) drew much of their strength from the *shared experience of difference*, so too should future organizing for gender and sexuality rights. It is not for us to give a name to a future movement for gender and sexuality rights in relation to development—such must be struggled for, determined, and achieved democratically by the social movements involved working together,



but notions of gender and sexuality diversity, together with sex diversity as it relates to intersex people, offer a fresh and encompassing way forward.

Beyond this, it must be recognized that advancing equality with respect to gender and sexuality diversity requires a political and not a development approach; a clear focus on the root causes of inequality and exclusion in politics, patriarchy, and the economy; and concern for justice and *human rights for all*. In our view, gender, sexuality, and sex diverse people require recognition, inclusion, and support not because they are different (although some of their experiences may be so), but because they are already part of a larger whole, part of shared humanity, and persons and human beings to whom rights already accrue. Shifting the focus away from specific forms of disadvantage to gender and sexuality diverse people as people we know, people like us, and people with rights is key in this respect.

Several of these precepts have already been put into action by recent youth-led movements for democracy in countries such as Thailand and Myanmar. In their demands for democracy, these movements have advanced a vision for a non-heteropatriarchal society. Gender and sexual equity and diversity are seen as pre-conditions for a truly democratic and equitable nation that opposes “the authoritarian, hierarchical and chauvinistic values that underpin male-dominated power structures” reinforced by military and other authoritarian governments [42]. Such a vision has united women and gender and sexuality diverse people with a larger political movement in efforts to realize a common ideal for all. As one leading community advocate recently put it, ‘Patriarchy will perish and equality shall prosper’ [43].

But far more than this is needed if those not directly involved in movements for change are to become allies and supporters of it. Fundamental in this respect are two paradigmatic shifts. First, there needs to be a transformed view of who gender and sexuality diverse people are, shifting them from the unknown and the ‘unknowable’, to people we know and ‘people like us’—that is,

human rights holders deserving of full support by duty bearers. Second, there should be recognition that a justice-based agenda will not only benefit ‘vulnerable groups’ but will also change the world for the better.

At the end of the day (whether it is recognized or not), in every part of the world, gender and sexuality diverse people are—and always have been—very much part of the general population, and we all benefit from their presence and inclusion. It should be a common objective to identify the causes of exclusion for all disenfranchised groups and their origins in politics, patriarchy, and the economy. To strive for an agenda that opposes patriarchy in all its forms, that seeks to reform the liberal economic order so as to better promote equality, and which sees the struggle for democracy and human rights as fair and just, can only improve society for the better. Doing so will lay the foundations for an approach to human development that more adequately recognizes and embraces difference, and more genuinely leaves no one behind.

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