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Discussion Paper on Empowerment and Capacity Development for Parents of LGBTI Persons in Asia



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Discussion Paper
Empowerment and Capacity Development
for Parents of LGBTI Persons in Asia

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Terminology

Bisexual	A person who is sexually or romantically attracted to or has sex with people of more than one gender
Cisgender	A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth
Coming Out	Coming out is a metaphor for LGBTI people's disclosure of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and/or sex characteristics
Gay	A person who is sexually or romantically attracted to or has sex with someone of the same gender. Commonly used for men
Gender	Either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female
Gender Expression	How someone expresses themselves in terms of appearance, speech, behaviours, or other factors that society characterizes as masculine or feminine. Some people's gender expression or presentation may not match their biological sex
Gender Identity	An individual's self-conception as being man, woman, or another gender, as distinguished from their biological sex
Heterosexual	People who have sex with and/or attracted to people of the opposite sex
Intersex	An umbrella term for people born with sex characteristics, such as physical, hormonal, or chromosomal features that do not fit typical binary notions of male and female bodies. Intersex persons may have any sexual orientation or gender identity
Lesbian	A self-identified woman who is sexually or romantically attracted to or has sex with other women
LGBTI¹	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex
NGO	Nongovernmental organization

PFLAG	The acronym originally meant Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Organizations and groups that work with parents and families of LGBTI people. Originally established in the United States, the acronym has been adopted by similar groups in other countries around the world in their English name.
Sex Characteristics	Inborn characteristics distinguishing between male, female and intersex individuals. Often used in reference to intersex issues
Sexual Orientation	Refers to whether an individual is attracted to the same sex, another sex, or both the same and other sexes
Sexuality	The sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors of individuals. Its dimensions include the anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry of the sexual response system; sexual identity, orientation, roles and personality; and thoughts, feelings, and relationships. Its expression is influenced by ethical, spiritual, cultural, and moral concerns
SOGIE/SC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics
Transgender	An umbrella term for people whose gender identity or expression differs from the sex assigned at birth. Transgender identity does not depend on medical procedures. It includes, for example, people assigned female at birth but who identify as a man (female to male or transgender man) and people assigned male at birth but who identify as a woman (male to female or transgender woman)

¹ This report uses the acronym LGBTI as an umbrella term of the diverse ways to identify sex, gender, and sexuality.

Executive Summary

This discussion paper documents the outcomes of the Regional Meeting on Empowerment and Capacity Development for Parents of LGBTI Persons in Asia. The meeting was convened in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam on August 24-25, 2018 to accomplish four objectives: (1) understand the role and impact of parents of LGBTI persons in Asian societies; (2) share and document best practices in engagement and capacity development; (3) create and maintain a regional community of learning and knowledge sharing; and (4) strengthen solidarity among parents.

Parents shared their journey from overcoming stigma to fighting for acceptance. Participants spoke of the direct and indirect stigma parents of LGBTI people face. Parents faced direct stigma when they were blamed by family members and neighbors for having a child who is LGBTI. They faced indirect stigma as they dealt with their fears for their child's future, their family's public image, and when they blamed themselves for their child being LGBTI. Some parents were unaware that their child was LGBTI, only to realize the need for acceptance after a catastrophic event like their child attempting suicide. Initially some parents tried to conceal or change their child by forcing them to get married with a heterosexual partner or by joining the military. Facing the reality of their child's LGBTI identity, acceptance became easier for parents as they focused on the love for their child.

During this period of moving toward acceptance, parents were supported by LGBTI organizations and groups. Some parents who did not have access to parent support groups became founding members of such groups. There were numerous useful practices participants shared such as bringing parents together through in-person or online support groups, building awareness in society by working with schools, businesses, religious leaders, and the media and helping LGBTI individuals come out in a constructive way to allay parents' worries. Capacity among organizations varied greatly across Asia. In countries like Pakistan, Nepal, and Cambodia, parents' groups were in the planning stage whereas places like China, Taiwan and Vietnam had very active organizations with several provincial chapters.

Plans for increasing capacity reflected the diversity of existing organizational support. In countries like Pakistan, the work ahead consists of providing support to a greater number of parents individually. Other countries with more formalized support structures planned to support parents by recruiting more volunteers and staff, establishing more provincial chapters, initiating new activities, and working across countries to support and implement best practices. Participants in many countries aimed to advocate for LGBTI rights by engaging local authorities, lawmakers, and schools. By supporting, educating, and advocating with parents of LGBTI people, this meeting set the strategy on empowering and developing capacity across Asia.

Introduction

The rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people are a crucial aspect of freedom and equality. However, in many Asian societies LGBTI people face violence and discrimination. Most Asian societies are collectivist, with individuals relying significantly on their family well into adulthood². LGBTI individuals demanding human rights may be seen as selfish or too individualistic by their families for doing what they want or seen as neglecting social harmony. Parents play a key role in shaping social attitudes, knowledge, and awareness of LGBTI people. However, many parents do not know how to handle the news when they find out that their child is LGBTI. Additionally, parents of an LGBTI child may experience stigma and discrimination themselves because of their child's identity or characteristics. Despite being key to ensuring equality, parents are seldom involved in LGBTI advocacy.

Organizations that support and empower parents and families of LGBTI persons have grown in Asian countries over the past decade. These organizations have challenged the false narrative that parents who love their children must protect their children from an LGBTI lifestyle, even if it means disowning them. While the voice of some organizations is getting stronger, there was a huge difference in capacity among countries around Asia. Prior to the meeting documented in this report, there had not been any regional forum in Asia bringing together groups supporting parents of LGBTI persons to build their capacity, empower their organizations, share best practices, and form strategic plans.

The Regional Meeting on Empowerment and Capacity Development for Parents of LGBTI Persons in Asia was convened in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam on August 24-25, 2018. This meeting was co-hosted by the ICS Center in Vietnam, ILGA Asia, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Consulate General of Canada to Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City, Open Society Foundation, and the Faculty of Learning Sciences and Education, Thammasat University. The meeting was conducted in English with simultaneous translation into various languages. The objectives were to:

- Understand the role and impact of parents of LGBTI persons in Asian societies and their impact on the perception of the general public
- Share and document best practices for engaging parents of LGBTI persons in advocacy and developing their capacity across Asia
- Create and maintain a regional community of knowledge sharing and learning among organizations that work with parents of LGBTI persons
- Strengthen the solidarity among parents of LGBTI persons in Asia

Participants represented organizations in nine countries including Cambodia, China, India, Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The organisers also identified and invited parents groups from Lebanon and Singapore, but their representatives were unable to come in the end.

Of the twenty-six attendees, ten were mothers of LGBTI individuals, nine were LGBTI activists working with parents, and seven represented regional and international organizations. Those who attended were diverse in age (ranging from 22 to 63 years) and were highly educated (a majority held university degrees). Additionally, faith played a major role in the lives of most participants with religious affiliations representing Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. While many of the groups that attended had more than sixty members and had existed for over five years, only one third of organizations were officially registered in their own country owing to legal, political, practical, and bureaucratic barriers. Their funding mainly consisted of individual donations and grants.



2 All Asian countries except Israel are listed as having a score below 50 on the Hofstede Individualism Index (on a scale of 1 to 100, with 100 being the most individualistic); see: <http://clearlycultural.com/geert-hofstede-cultural-dimensions/individualism/>

Parents at the Crossroads

Stigma against LGBTI people affected parents directly and indirectly. Participants from India, Myanmar, and Taiwan shared that direct stigma was shown through negative reactions from outsiders whereas indirect stigma was shown through parents' fears and feelings of guilt about their LGBTI child. For example, Nguyen Lang Mong, a parent from *PFLAG Vietnam*³, recounted that her former husband, neighbors, and relatives all blamed her when they found out her son was gay. Initially, she passed this blame onto her son. Similarly, Kuo Mama from *Loving Parents of LGBT* in Taiwan noted that in Chinese culture, mothers are often blamed if children do not fulfill social expectations or are LGBTI. Saraswoti Thapa from *Blue Diamond Society* in Nepal shared that after others found out her child was born intersex, she and her husband were blamed. Their extended family members stopped inviting her to social gatherings, believing Saraswoti and her husband had done something to cause their child to be born intersex.

Parents also discussed how self-stigma caused harm to themselves and to their LGBTI child. Self-stigma usually resulted from what parents heard from their significant others, religious leaders, and society at large, and led parents to blame themselves and each other. They feared for their child's future and their family's public image. A strong sense of shame and losing face is often associated with a collectivistic society, which exists in all the countries these participants come from. Their fear also comes when they think about the future of their kids, an unfamiliar future to them. Sridhar Rangayan from India, director of the award-winning film *Evening Shadows*, shared that when he came out to his mother twenty years ago, she did not even know the meaning of the word gay. After he told her, she expressed concern over what would happen to their family's property. Sridhar shared that parents in India are deeply concerned when their child cannot get married, when they may not want to provide grandchildren, or when the child wants to undergo sex reassignment. One of the related concerns is that without offspring, no one will take care of their LGBTI child in their old age, nor will perform funeral rites for the LGBTI child when they die.

Some parents attempted to change their child to a cisgender heterosexual person in numerous ways, especially after the child first came out. Aruna Desai Kartik, a member of *Sweekar* in India, noted that some parents forced their child out of the house when they found out their child was LGBTI, while others confined their child to house arrest, in hope that their child would become cisgender and/or heterosexual out of fear. Other approaches included forcing their child into an unwanted marriage, enrolling their child in the military, and seeking help from a spiritual or psychiatric practitioner to change the child's sexual orientation or gender identity.

The process of overcoming stigma, learning to accept their kids and stopping the blame is a tough journey with multiple challenges, and the happy ending may not come at all for many parents. However, with love and courage, some parents were able to pull themselves together and create a miracle.

³ PFLAG abbreviates Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Organizations using the term PFLAG in Asian countries are independent from PFLAG in the United States, where the term originates.



Overcoming Stigma

Parents described that coming out could feel like a bomb dropping out of the sky. The complexity and fluidity of gender and sexuality can make it difficult for parents to understand their child at first, because they are used to living in a gender-binary, heteronormative world. When LGBTI children come out, their love interests, attractions, and behaviours can become more visible to parents. Sometimes it can be harder if the person coming out is single as parents may expect to see a relationship as proof of the child's genuine same-sex attraction or of the child being in a happy, healthy, and successful relationship. Having to label themselves with a gender or sexual identity, some LGBTI people may come out multiple times. For example, this could happen if they first identify as a lesbian woman and later discover that they are a transgender man, or a bisexual person.

Coming out was identified as painful for both children and parents. Even when parents sensed something different about their child, or that the child was hiding something this whole time, many never prepared for such a moment. Some also chose to keep lying to themselves despite all the signs before the coming out event, and continued to do so after the child came out. They did not want to accept the truth that hurt. Some others had to come to terms with new information about their child's past and redefine their vision for the future. Myint Myint San from *PFLAG Myanmar* recounted that her son wrote her a letter confessing and apologizing for his attraction to other men. Kuo Mama thought for years that she had a daughter, until the day her daughter came out to her as her son. She remembered crying from time to time, but she knew she had to pull herself together no matter how tough it was. She sought information and support that would help her embrace the situation. Eventually, she understood and accepted that her son's gender identity was a natural matter and not something to be changed or discriminated against. On the other hand, some parents managed to quickly overcome their fear and express their love to their child regardless. When Aruna's son came out to her, he feared rejection and abandonment asking her, "Do you hate me now?" Instead of being overwhelmed by the initial shock, Aruna countered his fear by reminding him a hundred times a day that she loved him unconditionally. She wanted her child to know that her love for him surpassed any label, gossip, or challenge they might face. For Nguyen Lang Mong from Vietnam, the need to accept her son being gay became evident when she found out from her son's friends that he was contemplating suicide because he had not been accepted by her. On the verge of losing her son, she had to accept his sexual identity regardless of how difficult it seemed.

Lack of participation from fathers in the movement was reflected in the absence of fathers among the delegates, and it was explored in discussions. A Qiang from *PFLAG China* explained that in Chinese society, fathers were often more burdened by breadwinning duties and by law, men had a higher retirement age than women, making engaging fathers in their activities more difficult. In patriarchal societies, fathers are also more prone to the fear of shame and losing face, which may make them more reluctant to spend time dealing with their children and accepting their gender and sexual identity. However, both *PFLAG China* and *PFLAG Vietnam* have seen in their practice that fathers care for their children as much as mothers do. Supporting, engaging, and encouraging fathers may help to expand the movement's public influence. Engaging fathers

also strengthens marriages between two parents of an LGBTI person when the responsibility for the child can be shared by both parents. This is particularly important because coming out event may create conflicts between the two parents when one person blames the other, or when both blame each other, for turning the child into an LGBTI person.

Parents emphasized that the first step to overcome stigma was education. Access to information about gender and sexuality through online materials, books, documentaries, social media, and news was crucial for parents to understand the experiences of LGBTI people. However, these resources might not be readily available, especially in their native languages. Censorship of homosexuality from the government in some Asian countries also made it difficult to find correct information about diverse gender and sexuality in the media. Additionally, the lack of terminology for LGBTI identities in many languages and across contexts poses additional challenges in building understanding among parents.

Accessing correct information helped parents of LGBTI people understand their child's experience. Understanding sexuality and gender diversity led to the realization that being LGBTI was not something they should worry about. It was important for parents in their journey to realize that neither they nor their child had done anything wrong; there was no one to blame and nothing to change. Many spoke of the importance of realizing that being LGBTI was natural and not a result of bad parenting. With this understanding, parents became empowered and shifted their parenting style. For example, instead of approaching parenting through a lens of making sure her child fits into society, Kuo Mama is now a supportive parent that fosters health, bonding, communication, and openness with her child. As Tran Khac Tung from *ICS Center* echoed, "There is always love in the family. Love is the answer to our problems."

Fighting for Acceptance

Because of these challenges, many organizations focused on facilitating a healthier coming out process. Kuo Mama stated that many children thought it was easier to stay in the closet and kept a distance from their parents; however, this may drive parents and children further apart as parents thought their child did not care about them. To reduce the risk of hurting each other, it is important for LGBTI children to prepare for coming out, anticipate possible reactions, identify allies, and seek support. An example of this is the work of *Loving Parents of LGBT* in Taiwan. Kuo Mama and other parents in Taiwan help LGBTI children to understand their parent's mentality and to respond properly when their parents ask them about marriage, inheritance, property ownership, and their responsibility to take care of their parents in old age.

After learning that their child was LGBTI, some parents took a strong stance against stigma. By assuming the role of vocal public advocates, they began to fight for the rights of their children within society at large. A Qiang from China reiterated the need for parents to be advocates among their friends, family, colleagues, and neighbors. Some parents confronted extended family members by forcing them to choose between accepting their child and ending their relationship. Doing this took strength and courage.

Turning themselves from victims to allies, some parents were empowered to share their stories and spread their love. Some events organised by the parents attracted thousands of people. They lobbied policymakers on behalf of LGBTI people and proudly marched in Pride parades. As they shared their stories through news channels and social media, those involved became role models for other parents. With more parents joining, the wider network created even further opportunities for building awareness and connection. Mani from Pakistan envisioned that, "with good understanding and love, the journey will come to happiness."



Champions for the LGBTI Community

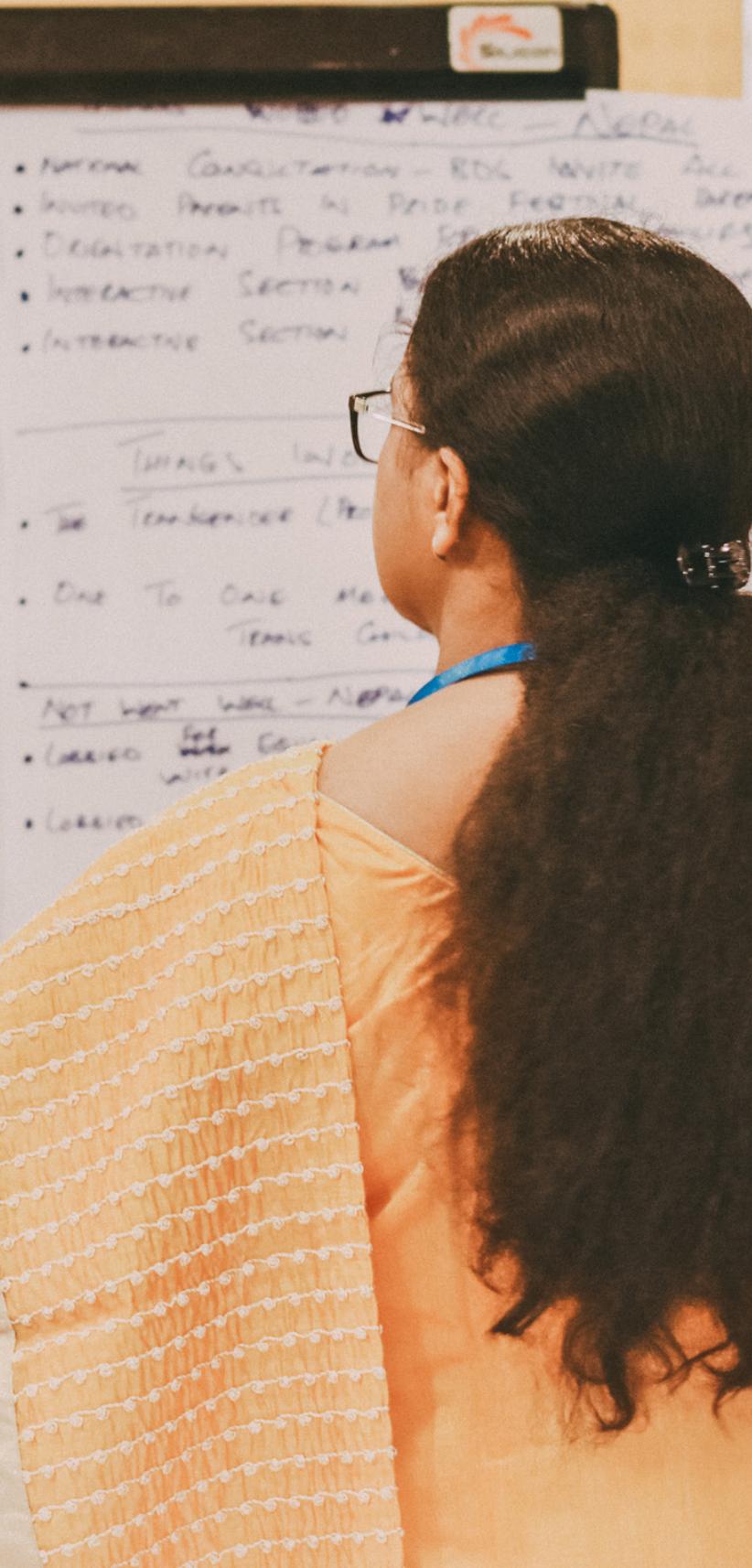
Parent-led networks created tremendous impact for the LGBTI movement. The scope of their activities was enormous, ranging from mobilizing communities through public events, engaging parents in support groups, and lobbying the government for policy changes. The most effective activities were thought to be strategy setting and membership development. Through educational events such as conferences, seminars, workshops, and training sessions, they were able to provide accurate knowledge, eliminate prejudice, change mindsets, and motivate other parents to become proud of their LGBTI child. Some events reached an audience of thousands.

Parent groups also operated telephone hotlines, arranged private meetings, and provided peer-to-peer mentorship to support other parents, which was crucial to the functioning and development of their network. For example, *PFLAG Vietnam* helped parents to reduce prejudice against LGBTI people by engaging them as volunteers who could provide others with updated information about SOGIE/SC issues. Parents became champions for LGBTI people by joining advocacy activities. These empowerment strategies were not only used for new parents, but also among those who had already been active to boost their confidence and strengthen their capacity.

The delegates who attended the meeting recognized that their role was not only to support parents, but also to change negative social perceptions and stand up to discriminatory attitudes within society at large. Activities addressing this need included pride celebrations, social gatherings, coming out projects, art activities, and commemorating days such as the International Human Rights Day. The importance of engaging people working in different sectors (i.e. education, healthcare, business) and from all walks of life was discussed. Their advocacy efforts did not stop at changing social attitudes on gender and sexual diversity, but continued into building relationships and creating allies with local, state, and national authorities. Some parent groups recruited volunteers, and one in particular hired staff, specifically to help them communicate with the government and advocate for LGBTI-inclusive laws and policies. Some participants noted the power of telling their personal stories and convincing politicians on an emotional level.

Messaging was very important to the success of advocacy. The most effective advocacy tools to reach the public that were identified included social media, marketing, and publicity in general. For example, *PFLAG Korea* became well-known through their YouTube video "I Love You As You Are" where parents were shown giving free hugs at the *Seoul Queer Culture Festival*, garnering over 42,000 views. Several awareness-raising activities were described where parents shared their personal stories, which were then disseminated through diverse channels including interviews, public statements, press releases, reports, fact sheets, and reading lists. A Qiang summarized that an effective advocacy strategy "started from the heart and then came to the mind," highlighting the importance of starting from emotional engagement.

Despite their success, organizations faced many issues in their advocacy including social and cultural norms surrounding family, notions about the inappropriateness of being openly LGBTI, community perceptions, and insufficient government engagement and backlash. Burnout was an issue for some organizations, addressed through strengthening communication, providing mutual support, hosting bonding and reflection activities, building resilience, relying on organizational support teams, recruiting volunteers, and adjusting organizational policy. It was important to have a strong group, and identifying appropriate community, physical, and financial resources was crucial for the survival and expansion of these networks.



- NATIONAL CONTESTATION - BODG INVITE ALL
- INVITED PRESENTS IN PRIDE FESTIVAL
- DIGITALISATION PROGRAM
- INTERACTIVE SECTION
- INTERACTIVE SECTION

THINGS TO DO

- THE TEAMWORK (P)
- ONE TO ONE MEETINGS
- TEAMS GOING
- NOT WANT WORK - ALPAC
- LOANED FOR GOING
- LOANED

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Hope

Successful Parent Organizing

China currently has the largest network of parents of LGBTI persons in Asia and the second largest worldwide. Headquartered in Guangzhou, *PFLAG China* has 13 staff, 63 chapters, 3,000 volunteers, and over 150,000 members. They host diverse activities in small and large cities, including university talks, traveling in parent groups, as well as arranging sharing sessions and workshops. Some of *PFLAG China*'s greatest difficulties include parents blaming each other for their child being LGBTI and resistance from school management when attempting to work with schools. However, a few large businesses have been receptive to awareness-raising sessions.

Engaging young LGBTI people is a crucial part of *PFLAG China*'s activities because LGBTI people have access to other LGBTI people through social media and mobile apps. In the past, the organization would get contacted by mothers of gay sons more than parents of other LGBTI groups, such as lesbians or transgender people. Therefore, enhanced outreach was needed for parents of these groups in particular. *PFLAG China* has a helpline that parents can contact during a daily, two-hour period. The helpline began with just one parent volunteer and has since expanded to a team. From Monday to Friday, the line is now staffed by a parent peer counselor. On Saturdays it is staffed by a youth volunteer, and on Sundays it has a professional counselor on duty. To date, the organization had registered 23,988 client contacts over their ten-year history. The helpline provides assistance to young LGBTI people in coming out and has been instrumental in providing information to parents and recruiting volunteers. *PFLAG China* also provides education to counseling psychologists. Some psychologists still engage in sexual orientation or gender identity change efforts in China.

Loving Parents of LGBT in **Taiwan** uses a set of five questions to facilitate a more constructive way of coming out that will help parents understand what their child is going through. The first question LGBTI children should be prepared to answer is: When did they realize they were different from other children? The second relates to the age when they became confident that they were definitely LGBTI. Identifying this age helps parents to believe that their child is not just undergoing a phase of identity exploration. The third question is about the child's history of relationships and other LGBTI-related experiences. The fourth is about how the child sees themselves at present, and the fifth is about how they envision their future. *Loving Parents of LGBT* realized that these were common questions that parents had, so finding answers to them in advance of coming out could be very helpful in allaying parents' doubts and fears.

Vietnam has also been successful in providing assistance to a large number of diverse parents. *PFLAG Vietnam* recognizes that they cannot wait for parents to come to them; instead, they do outreach in various cities and provinces, with 30 branches established since the group was founded four years ago. *PFLAG Vietnam* uses social media to disseminate correct information about LGBTI experiences. Some parents are quite knowledgeable, but others are not, which means they may only have been exposed to minimal information about LGBTI issues. Whenever interesting experts are available, *PFLAG Vietnam* invites them to talk at the organization's events. They also partner with other organizations to provide training of trainers to themselves and to other parents. Their core principles are love and dissemination of information to counter

discrimination, which the group considered to be endemic in Vietnam. The Vietnamese delegates noted that it was crucial to not just talk to the LGBTI community, but also to educate society at large to reduce discrimination.

Other best practices in building awareness and acceptance also exist in other countries. In **Myanmar**, an “Outstanding Parent of the Year” award is given on an annual basis. **Nepal** has hosted an intersex conference that includes parents of intersex kids. In **India**, contact with parents is maintained through a private WhatsApp group. In **Cambodia**, arts are used to engage the public, while parents of LGBTI people are often invited to participants in community events. Additionally, groups across the region arrange regular support meetings, national consultations, and annual Pride celebrations. They give interviews to media outlets and disseminate their own content through social media. Some groups conduct surveys that include questions on family and strive to increase the diversity of their steering committees to broaden their work’s possibilities.



Ways Forward

The Regional Meeting on Empowerment and Capacity Development for Parents of LGBTI Persons in Asia gave participants the opportunity to share their experiences, discuss best practices, and develop country action plans. The delegations expressed some ideas around education, organizational capacity, advocacy strategies, and types of collaboration needed to realize their objectives:

RoCK from **Cambodia** noted that while they had not arranged activities with parents before, they had plans to do so in the future. They planned to assess the needs and feelings of parents. They also planned to make existing resources more accessible, begin hosting parental support meetings, and use the voices of parents and celebrities to advocate for an understanding of LGBTI issues on social media and radio talk shows. They also planned to work with artists to create a photobook and an exhibition to document stories and organize a study exchange trip with a parents' group of a similar socio-economic context.

Participants from **China** stated their goals for fundraising, education, and advocacy. The team focused on expanding partnerships by engaging various NGOs, the national women's federation, schools, businesses, embassies, and government offices. They emphasized the need to advocate more for LGBTI issues among lawmakers and the government through key offices and platforms such as the Civil Affairs Bureau and the United Nations. *PFLAG China* planned to grow its training workshops to involve NGOs from different countries, expand its *Rainbow College* program, and host meetings and conferences with similar organizations.

The team from **India** stressed building organizational capacity through fostering skills in their core group. They planned to seek more funding, translate existing resources to local languages, incorporate relatives of LGBTI people, and expand into other cities. They discussed the need for activities to increase visibility such as attending conferences, talking to religious leaders, providing peer counselor training, establishing a helpline, and recruiting personnel.

The **Myanmar** delegation will provide support, arrange activities, and establish more partnerships for increasing their capacity. By increasing family participation, funding, data collection, and governmental support, *PFLAG Myanmar* plans to establish an SOS helpline, establish their presence in Pride celebrations, grant awards for outstanding parents of LGBTI persons, and provide psychosocial counseling. They stressed the need for regular meetings to expand the discussion on the feelings, fears, and discrimination parents of LGBTI people face. They plan to collaborate with NGOs working on LGBTI issues, women's issues, and disability rights, as well as schools and celebrities to increase their visibility.

Nepal does not have a formal parents' group yet, but the delegates from *Blue Diamond Society*, including a parent of an intersex child, intended to establish one. They will focus on advocacy by lobbying for equality education, LGBTI legislation, and by inviting parents to join Pride celebrations. The team stressed their focus of creating spaces (i.e. conferences, orientation programs, interactive sessions) to engage families, communities, schools, and governments in sharing best practices.

Pakistan does not yet have a parents' group, but Mani AQ who represented NAZ Pakistan in this meeting will begin efforts with one-on-one meetings to build awareness among parents of trans children. He plans to support the implementation of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act passed in 2018, collaborate with the *Blue Diamond Society* in Nepal to draft further LGBTI legislation, collaborate with *Sweekar* in India to receive guidance for engaging parents, and conduct a literature review of LGBTI issues in light of religion considering the centrality of religious concerns in the country.

South Korea will focus on establishing *PFLAG Korea* as an independent organization as it has previously worked under the aegis of another organization. Increasing personnel, funding, chapters, and working with LGBTI university groups and international partners while managing organizational growth outside of the capital city are priority areas in the upcoming years. South Korea's main focus is on education through coming out workshops and increasing media coverage. Heesu Myung, who works for *PFLAG Korea*, also plans to draw on the experiences of *PFLAG China* in scaling up the work in the Korean context.

In **Taiwan**, fostering a better understanding among Christian groups, facilitating a constructive coming-out process between LGBTI children and their parents, and encouraging parents to diversify their supportive actions will be key priority areas. Increasing visibility of parents and children portrayed together in targeted media communications is another focus area.

The delegation from **Vietnam** will focus on making schools safer by sensitizing teachers, parents and school management, supporting local PFLAG chapters to function more independently, and mainstreaming LGBTI issues into the agenda of other NGOs. *PFLAG Vietnam* plans to partner with local LGBTI people, educational authorities, lawyers, psychologists, civil society organizations (particularly ICS), and United Nations bodies.

All delegates set a strategy for increased organizational capacity, implementing best practices, and expanding demographically and geographically to create momentum. Education in all its forms (i.e. workshops, training, conferences, schools) was repeatedly mentioned as the primary tool of building understanding, compassion, and change. Engaging the public, civil society, donors, local and national governments, and international organizations was seen as crucial to change harmful laws and work towards the goals of acceptance, love, and equality.



Conclusion

This meeting highlighted the crucial role that parents of LGBTI persons in Asia play in ensuring a future characterized by freedom and equality. This was one of the first regional meetings for parents of LGBTI people in Asia to discuss challenges, best practices, and solutions with organizations doing similar work. Participants remarked they could sense the positive energy from others and felt supported and reenergized to continue the fight for equal rights in their respective countries. Participants felt that they had learned a lot and would apply their new knowledge back home. One participant commented, "It is wonderful that in spite of our diversity we can connect on this level." Parents and organizers felt empowered by the concept of "opening your heart and then your mind." Coming together, delegates shared their vision where LGBTI people can live with safety, dignity, freedom, receive appropriate education, be able to come out without fear, and have the supportive legal framework necessary for equality.

Recommendations

Governments are encouraged to:

- Engage LGBTI people and their parents in policy dialogues to learn about their concerns to make laws more inclusive of diverse gender and sexuality and more respectful of LGBTI human rights.
- Remove state censorship that bans the portrayal of diverse sex, gender and sexuality, while restricting hate speeches that may incite discrimination and violence against LGBTI persons.
- Incorporate comprehensive sex education into national curriculum and initiate national awareness raising campaigns that confront LGBTI-related stigma and violence in school.
- Include LGBTI issues in meeting of parents-teachers associations and highlight positive role models for parents of LGBTI persons.
- Facilitate the formal incorporation and/or government recognition of organizations serving and led by LGBTI persons and those serving their parents.

Funders are encouraged to:

- Provide funding for meetings and multi-stakeholder consultations that enable organizations led by parents of LGBTI persons to learn best practices from each other.
- Assist organizations led by parents of LGBTI persons with capacity building, especially to overcome bottlenecks in early organizational development.

Academic Institutions are encouraged to:

- Conduct research on parents' concerns and perspectives on their LGBTI children, best practices in assisting parents to accept and understand their LGBTI children, as well as on the challenges and approaches of parent-group organizing.
- Synthesize research literature and reported best practices in assisting parents of LGBTI persons across various contexts, connecting theory with practice.
- Engage with organizations led by parents of LGBTI persons and assist them with capacity building as well as monitoring and evaluation.
- Translate resources for supporting parents of LGBTI persons to multiple languages, with localization of the contents to the local cultural context when necessary.

LGBTI Communities & Civil Society are encouraged to:

- Support parents of LGBTI persons directly by providing human resources, volunteers, technical expertise, etc.
- Invite parents of LGBTI persons to community events so that parents and LGBTI persons can better understand each other and engage in constructive dialogues.
- Engage parents of LGBTI persons in advocacy campaign so they can share their concerns and perspectives with the public, policymakers and other stakeholders and influence their attitude towards LGBTI persons.
- Incorporate issues of LGBTI persons and engage parents of LGBTI persons when working with parents of other populations for a more inclusive approach in otherwise non-LGBTI focused projects.
- Form online and print media campaigns for LGBTI persons and their parents that facilitate mutual understanding, for example through constructive ways of coming out.
- Document and disseminate reports and lessons learnt from projects focused on relationship between LGBTI persons and their parents and family, including support to foster mutual understanding between them.

United Nations Agencies are encouraged to:

- Provide greater visibility for studies and publications on the role of parents and family in changing social attitude towards LGBTI community and reducing SOGIESC-based stigma and discrimination.
- Arrange regional and international forums to discuss the role of parents and family in supporting LGBTI persons and advocating for LGBTI human rights, as well as approaches to support parents and family of LGBTI persons in playing their role.



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