

LGBTI ECONOMIC DIGNITY

A new strategic framework for activities related to LGBTI development, livelihood, the Sustainable Development Goals, workplace discrimination, corporate advocacy, and human rights.

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Draft ver. 3/14/2022

In the past few years, LGBTI groups have become increasingly involved in livelihood and development activities. Grounded in the lived experience of LGBTI people, economic dignity is a framework that can be used to coordinate, plan, implement and evaluate activities that aim to improve development outcomes of LGBTI people.

LGBTI economic dignity refers to the capability of LGBTI people to care for themselves and their family without financial deprivation, and to participate in the economy in a way that respects and supports self-determined gender and sexuality. This document outlines the following:

- I. Why a strategic framework?
- II. A focus on dignity
- III. Four pillars:
 1. Each LGBTI person is able to care for themselves.
 2. Each LGBTI person is able to understand, formulate, and express their gender and sexuality.
 3. LGBTI people, families and communities can participate in the economy free from structural and social stigma or subordination.
 4. Laws and policies foster economic arrangements which respect the equal dignity of LGBTI people.
- IV. Why not empowerment or security?
- V. Achieving economic dignity.

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I. Why a new strategic framework?

This document sets out a new strategic framework for activities aimed at improving the development outcomes of LGBTI people. A strategic framework, as envisioned here, provides an overarching set of goals and strategies that can be used by organizations and movements to help identify priorities, opportunities for collaboration, capacity building needs, advocacy targets, funding streams, and desired outcomes.

In the past few years, LGBTI groups have become increasingly involved in livelihood and development strategies such as advocacy for the Sustainable Development Goals, entrepreneurial projects to enhance the economic security of LGBTI individuals and groups, advocacy for data collection, and increasing opportunities for education and building job skills. Still, there is a lack of consensus in the LGBTI community about how these activities fit together and how they integrate into current LGBTI movement goals.

Any framework used for purposes of planning, implementing, and evaluating activities targeting LGBTI people must account for the realities of LGBTI lives and the ways those realities differ from those of non-LGBTI people. LGBTI people face social and structural stigma that impacts all aspects of their lives, particularly those related participation to economic outcomes. Additionally, LGBTI people have diverse strengths and perspectives that can contribute to positive efforts for change. By using frameworks that do not account for these realities, organizations and leaders risk engaging in strategies that are misguided and ineffective.

This document sets out an economic dignity framework that includes broad goals applicable to most economies and LGBTI communities. The goals can be refined and narrowed to apply to specific contexts. They can also be used to organize discussions, strategic planning, and movement building efforts.

**LIVELIHOOD
DEPRIVATION**

II. Dignity as a central ideal

Stigma and dignity

In all regions of the world, LGBTI people face stigma, a belief shared by those around them that because they are LGBTI, they have no value as people, workers, students, business owners or neighbors. Stigma drives efforts to exclude, punish and convert LGBTI people.

Dignity is the belief that each human being is born with inherent worth, endowed with reason and conscience. Respecting a person's dignity requires that we respect the outcome of that individual's reasoning process, and support their efforts to follow their own conscience. Denying someone's reason and conscience is to deny them the ability to do what makes them human.

For LGBTI people, dignity means the capability to understand and live according to their own self-determined gender and sexuality. This interpretation of dignity, found in almost every national high court opinion about LGBTI rights, is a core concept for economic dignity. Dignity is respected when LGBTI people, as well as their sexuality and gender, are valued by society. An LGBTI person's dignity is violated if they are coerced into being someone they are not through legal, social and economic means. Dignity, which calls for a recognition and support of the worth of LGBTI people, stands in opposition to stigma and the belief that LGBTI people are worthless.

The economic cost of dignity

Economic arrangements, including those created by laws and social practices, can limit LGBTI dignity by imposing additional costs on those whose sexuality and gender does not conform to social expectations. These costs serve to privilege heterosexual and cisgender identities while discouraging, punishing or prohibiting LGBTI identities:

Personal identity development.

Poverty limits access to information, education, and supportive social relationships necessary for LGBTI people to understand and formulate their own sexuality and gender. Expressing identity can also involve financial burdens, particularly for trans and intersex people who may face medical and legal expenses associated with gender confirmation. Inability to understand, accept and express one's true identity can have dramatic negative consequences on health (including suicide), economic productivity, school drop out rates and other outcomes.

Forming a family.

Lack of legal recognition constricts economic options and imposes financial costs. LGBTI families face criminal laws, provisions in leases, immigration laws, banking rules, inheritance laws, job hiring standards, custody laws, school enrollment regulations, hospital visitation rules, consumer credit rules, and myriad other rules that punish or ignore their existence. LGBTI people must forego options available to others or, sometimes, undertake expensive efforts to prove the legitimacy of their relationships.

DIGNITY
STIGMA

VALUED WORTHLESS

Earning a living.

In the workplace, LGBTI people face exclusion and requirements that they hide their identity. As a consequence, LGBTI people face wage disparities, higher rates of poverty, food insecurity, and poor living conditions.

Engaging in commerce.

Some LGBTI people, particularly transgender people, face high rates of harassment and exclusion from stores, marketplaces, and public transportation. People whose gender does not match their gender assigned at birth may not have access to credit and other financial products and services.

Securing safe housing.

Housing options for LGBTI people are often limited by hostile landlords, unsafe neighborhoods, rules about cohabitation, family rejection, and socio-economic disparities.

Furthering education and human capital.

Bullying in school causes LGBTI students to drop out at higher rates than non-LGBTI students. This, along with the physical and psychological impact of discrimination and violence, and exclusion from workplace experiences, can all limit the ability of LGBTI people to accumulate human capital.

The economic arrangement to avoid

Every LGBTI person is familiar with the offer of an economic arrangement that promises legal inclusion and economic opportunity in exchange for being someone they are not. The terms of this offer vary, but it always involves a demand that the LGBTI person convert to being cisgender and heterosexual, lie and pretend to they are not LGBTI, or downplay their gender and sexuality so that others can ignore it. In return, the LGBTI person can avoid punishment and exclusion, and gain benefits available to cisgender heterosexual people.

Many LGBTI people, more than 80% in some places, avoid violence and discrimination by hiding who they are. However, this trade offers false benefits. Empirical evidence from all regions of the world shows that LGBTI people, particularly those forced to conceal themselves, have higher rates of mental and physical health problems, suicide, lower levels of economic productivity, poorer social support networks, and worse development outcomes. Moreover, data shows that this relationship is causal, and that a decrease in structural and social stigma leads to an improvement in development outcomes as well as the reverse.

The lesson to be drawn from this analysis is that, the dignity of LGBTI people is tied to whether economic arrangements will support their ability to live their life according to their own choices.

II. The goals of economic dignity.

LGBTI economic dignity refers to the capability of LGBTI people to care for themselves and their family without financial deprivation, and to participate in the economy in a way that respects and supports self-determined gender and sexuality.

The goal of economic dignity stands on four interrelated pillars:

1. Each LGBTI person is able to care for themselves and their family without economic deprivation.

This people-centered goal of LGBTI economic dignity is measured according to whether LGBTI people have certain capabilities. While legal and institutional reform are means to accomplish this goal, the ends of such activities are to insure that each LGBTI person can care for themselves and their family with dignity.

Many of the needs of LGBTI people are the same as those of non-LGBTI people, and they can be assessed according to the same metrics. All people face similar needs such as shelter, food, sanitation, work, education, and good health. Thus, an important initial step in economic dignity for LGBTI people is to insure they are included in activities intended to benefit the general population. For NGOs and agencies working to improve development outcomes, adopting measures to include LGBTI people in such programs can go a long way toward the goal of economic dignity.

Though the needs and circumstances of LGBTI people overlap with those of non-LGBTI people, they are not identical. Also, achieving them may require unique approaches that address anti-LGBTI prejudice and stigma. Programs to support the economic sustainability of LGBTI people may need to be separate from those for non-LGBTI people.

2. Each LGBTI person is able to understand, formulate, and express their gender and sexuality.

The capability to understand, formulate and express one's own gender and sexuality lies at the heart of dignity and healthy human development. People with non-normative genders and sexualities face challenges in reaching this goal. As noted above, large numbers of LGBTI people facing stigma and prejudice must live in hiding as they experience dramatic health, economic and social problems.

Economic arrangements have a heavy impact on the ability of individual LGBTI people, particularly youth, to achieve this goal. Poverty can limit access to education, information about sexuality and gender, opportunities for engagement with other LGBTI people, access to safe spaces, and appropriate healthcare needed for healthy, productive LGBTI lives.

This goal focuses on the economic aspects of healthy development of gender and sexuality. Activities in support of this goal include efforts to insure adequate budgets for education, comprehensive sexuality education, gender-related medical care, safe space, and supportive services for LGBTI people.

3. LGBTI people, families and communities can participate in the economy free from stigma.

While the previous goal focused on the economic aspects of an individual's development, this goal focuses on the stigmatized aspects of LGBTI participation in the economy. LGBTI people frequently encounter social stigma when they seek to benefit from, or contribute to, the economy. Discrimination in the workplace, harassment in stores, and lack of credibility in business environments and civic spaces are common experiences for some LGBTI people. Structural stigma embedded in laws and policies impacts many aspects of LGBTI economic participation. Laws about ID documents, recognition of family relationships, citizenship requirements, are some examples.

Examples of indicators of the impact of stigma include disparities in wages between LGBTI and non-LGBTI workers, the rate of harassment of LGBTI people in workplaces, stores and public transit, proportion of LGBTI people who decide to stay closeted or delay gender transition in order to retain employment.

Activities to achieve this goal broadly include efforts to reduce social stigma as well as advocacy to prohibit discrimination in employment and the marketplace, advocacy to reform laws that disadvantage LGBTI people when they participate in the economy, corporate advocacy, and activities to increase access by LGBTI people to basic needs infrastructure and social protection programs.

4. Laws and policies foster economic arrangements which respect the equal dignity of LGBTI people.

States, corporations, schools, hospitals, and other important institutions can adopt laws and policies to support LGBTI economic dignity by addressing discrimination, recognition, and support.

First, discriminatory treatment of LGBTI people should be prohibited. Measures should include bans on discrimination in the workplace, the marketplace, schools, and government programs, a prohibition of hate-crimes, as well as a ban on conversion therapy or other means of profit derived from homophobia and transphobia. Second, States should give equal recognition to LGBTI families and adopt mechanisms to recognize and provide documentation of gender identity. Third, States should support the ability of all people to understand and formulate their own gender identity through comprehensive sexuality education, the ability of LGBTI people to form civil society organizations, and through programs targeted to improve health outcomes for LGBTI people.

Economic dignity is, at least in part, a measurable outcome. States have unique abilities to gather population data that can reveal disparities in development outcomes and opportunities. Currently, much data collection carries with it the implicit assumption that everyone in the general population is heterosexual and cisgender. Not only would the collection and disaggregation of data help determine economic dignity gaps, but the lack of data collection is itself a continuing indication that LGBTI people face exclusion. Data collection is a necessary component of economic dignity.

III. Why not economic equality, empowerment or security?

The set of strategies used to promote economic equality, empowerment, and security overlap with the strategies used to security economic dignity. However, each of these frameworks are inadequate to fully address the central role that stigma and exclusion plays in LGBTI economic issues.

The goal of economic equality implies that LGBTI people should have the same economic outcomes and the same access to wealth as non-LGBTI people. Equal treatment and opportunity are a necessary component of dignity. Eliminating disparities between LGBTI and non-LGBTI people should be a high priority. However, an expectation that LGBTI and non-LGBTI outcomes should be equal fails to account for the different needs and preferences of LGBTI people and their families, many of which involve different life plans and different use of economic resources.

In addition, equality is often viewed according to terms set by, and for, non-LGBTI people. For example, most current economic arrangements assume that a person's name and gender assigned at birth will remain the same throughout their life, that heteronormative family structures play a special role in producing and accessing wealth, that one's gender is either male or female and that gender should have massive economic implications, that no one outside the family household has any role in the conception and maternity of children. It is unlikely that LGBTI people can achieve equality and full inclusion in economic arrangements created to recognize and give preference to non-LGBTI people.

The term economic empowerment has been used most prominently in the context of

women's economic empowerment (WEE) which refers to strategies to increase women's power over resources and decisions that impact her, her family and her community. Many women lack the ability to control their own labor, barring them from equal participation in the economy and limiting their agency over their own body. Black economic empowerment (BEE) similarly refers to strategies, such as in South Africa, where BEE policies called for more black ownership of large business.

LGBTI advocates generally do not describe discrimination against LGBTI people in terms of power or control by non-LGBTI people over the labor and resources of LGBTI people. Unlike the labor and bodies of women, which society seeks to benefit from and control through economic disempowerment, the labor and bodies of LGBTI people are seen as worthless and undesirable. Discrimination aims to exclude, convert, or punish LGBTI people.

Economic security, defined as being able to meet one's basic needs, has also been suggested as a framework for development activities to benefit LGBTI people. The capability to care for one's self is a pillar of economic dignity. However, by itself, economic security may not adequately address stigma. Even LGBTI people who are able to meet basic needs may be deeply unwell and living below their potential due to prejudice and violence of other economic actors. While the goal of meeting basic needs is important, it does not go far enough to address the existence of anti-LGBTI stigma.

REJECTION
INCLUSION

IV. Strategies to achieve economic dignity.

Achieving economic dignity will be a long-term process involving multiple strategies. What follows are strategies that some stakeholders are currently undertaking or considering:

Policy advocacy:

- **Advocacy seeking law and policy reform:** Economic dignity requires laws and policies that promote the human rights and development outcomes of LGBTI people.
- **Corporate advocacy:** Corporations play a central role in realizing economic dignity. Advocacy includes strategies based on seeking
- **Data advocacy:** Data advocacy refers to advocacy about policies and programs related to collecting, maintaining and analyzing data. This includes advocacy related to how to classify people of diverse sexuality and gender, how and by whom data will be collected, ethical and safety standards, and how data is used in policy formulate.

Knowledge building and sharing:

- **Empirical Research:** Research studies increase the understanding of the socio-economic circumstances of LGBTI people, the impact of laws and policies on those circumstances, and the relationship between stigma and poverty.
- **Monitoring, evaluation, and learning:** Research to understand economic dignity interventions and their applicability and effectiveness in different contexts.

Skills and capacity of LGBTI people

- **Livelihood and Entrepreneurial skill building programs:** Programs to increase the ability of LGBTI people to secure more income through small business activities.
- **Micro-finance:** Globally, the number of microfinance borrowers range from 140 million to over 200 million people annually. Based on what we know about population patters of gender and sexuality, it would be reasonable to expect that between 3 and 10 million LGBTI people should benefit from such programs as well.
- **Activities to increase LGBTI human capital Opportunities for education and training skills building:** Scholarships, computer classes,

Support and services for LGBTI people

- Programs to increase the development outcomes of LGBTI through the provision of services.

INVISIBILITY
DATA