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Provision of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) Issues in school level curriculum in Nepal

A Position Paper
2021



This paper has been developed with support from Norec which is a collaborating partner of the Blue Diamond Society.

Blue Diamond Society is the pioneer organization working for the LGBTIQ+ community in Nepal which advocates for all sexual and gender minorities to ensure equal rights, economic empowerment, livelihood support, equal access to public and private services, representation and protection.



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Table of Contents

A Position paper on SOGIESC Issues in school level
curriculum in Nepal

Acronyms and abbreviations

1

Executive summary

2

Introduction

3

Status of issues of SOGIESC in the educational
system in Nepal

4

The Intersection between the issues of
SOGIESC and school curriculum in Nepal

5

Inclusion of SOGIESC issues in school level curriculum:
Why is it important?

6

Best Practices around the world

7

Blue Diamond Society's priorities for advocacy and engagement

8

Call to action

9

1

Acronyms and Abbreviations

SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and other gender and sexual identities
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights



2

Executive Summary

The LGBTIQ+ communities have been a vulnerable group in Nepal further marginalized by the discriminatory legislation, health system, justice mechanism and educational system. The education system has isolated the LGBTIQ+ communities through various approaches including its curriculum. There are extremely limited content on SOGIESC issues and the available content are also not accurate and not taught well by the teachers and educators because of the existing shame, stigma, lack of capacities among teachers and others. The school system has been imposing binary norms on the students through curriculum, school rules and other systems.

Because of this, many children grow up isolated and stigmatized within the education system because of their expression and identities beyond the framework of binary and heteronormativity. This has further caused bullying, harassment, assault, and other forms of violence by peers and even teachers. These forms of violence based on students' expression and identity affects all including the school. Hence, it is an educational problem that should be solved immediately.

Blue Diamond Society has been working to advocate on this issue for a long time and has also reviewed the school curriculum of Nepal and has made recommendations to update the current curriculum into an inclusive and human rights-based one. Blue Diamond Society also supports and collaborate with the government and other stakeholders to improve the current curriculum.

The SOGIESC inclusive curriculum is imperative to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all as mentioned in the sustainable development goal 4, and to fulfil all the commitments in line with the international commitments which Nepal has made. It is a prerequisite to fulfil the transformative promise of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development i.e., Leave no one behind.

3

Introduction

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) people are among the most marginalized, least visible, discriminated and subjugated against groups in Nepal. They continually face social exclusion, severe discrimination, and violence in both private and public spheres. Heteronormative gender roles are deeply rooted in social values, leaving very few LGBTIQ+ people with acceptance from their families. This discriminatory culture is also visible in medical facilities, educational institutes, workplaces and government offices. The bias-motivated violence, oppression, and harassment from the general public and even from within the educational settings through non inclusive curriculum have negatively affected LGBTIQ+ children and young people.

The vision of Blue Diamond society is to build communities free from discrimination and prejudice, to develop culture and promote acceptance in communities where each person is treated as an individual and respected for the choices they make and to build societies where sexual and gender minorities can live with equal rights, freedom and dignity and are respected and valued. This vision has been largely impacted by a number of factors which also includes the education system of Nepal and the curriculum it has introduced in the schools.

As an organization committed to advocating for the rights of the sexual and gender minorities in Nepal, Blue Diamond Society is committed to collaborating with the Centre for Human resource development and Curriculum Development committee under the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders in developing an inclusive and human rights-based school curriculum that addresses the issues of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC).

This position paper highlights Blue Diamond Society's priorities of advocacy for the inclusion of the issues of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) into the school curriculum in Nepal and engagement and collaboration with other stakeholders.

4

Status of issues of SOGIESC in the educational system in Nepal

Policy Analysis

i. School sector development plan (2016/17-2022/23)

The school sector development plan aims to improve the quality of education as its core focus to improve access to education. The school sector development plan 2016/17-2022/23 has one of the interventions as revising the curriculum on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) for the development of integrated curriculum. The document has also acknowledged gender-based discrimination and its effects on the education of adolescents and young people. Its Strategic intervention includes a gender-sensitive learning environment and WASH facilities. However, Young people of diverse sexual and gender identities have been "othered" in the document with its mention as 'LGBTI' at the footnote rather than on the main paragraph. The understanding of the terminology "gender-sensitive" in the document is only focused towards "girls friendly" and has missed the adolescent population of diverse sexual and gender identities who are bullied in schools and drop out because of their gender and sexual identities. The plan has mentioned the training on CSE for the teachers but the Teacher's resource material on CSE by the curriculum development centre under the Ministry of education is regressive in nature. The contents in the resource material promote heteronormativity, binary and have overemphasized abstinence centered education.



5

The intersection between the issues of SOGIESC and school curriculum in Nepal

Blue Diamond Society has reviewed the textbooks of grades 7-10 used in the government schools of Nepal in August 2020. The textbooks Social Education (Grade 7-10), Health, Population and Environment education (Grade 9-10) and Population Education (Grade 9-10) reviewed from the lens of the inclusion of the issues of SOGIESC found out that the school curriculum follows heteronormative framework where the languages used are limited to binary and there is a significant gap in terms of inclusion of the issues of SOGIESC. Similarly, the terminologies sexuality, gender and sex characteristics have been used interchangeably making it difficult for the students to understand the terminologies clearly. The discourse on gender equality has been carried out only between men and women. In addition, the diversity among the LGBTIQ+ communities has not been explored within the curriculum. The review also pointed out the extremely limited contents on SOGIESC, language inaccuracy in the curriculum and the problematic focus on reproduction and family lineage for the establishment of gender equality.

For example, the terminology "Third gender" has been used to imply all the diverse groups within the sexual and gender minorities. The term "third gender" has been used within the definition of biological sex to imply intersex individuals. Only men and women have been included within the definition of equality. Sexuality has not been defined in a comprehensive manner. Even within the health subject, the discussion is largely on reproductive health and procreation and less attention has been given to the issue of sexual health which includes an individual's sexual orientation, attraction, love, sexual behaviours and others.

The analysis of the review of the current school curriculum in Nepal suggests a large-scale program to transform the current school curriculum into a gender-sensitive and more inclusive curriculum.

Some of the concrete suggestions based on the review are as follows:

- In the curriculum of Grade 10, the contents on sexual and gender minorities are included in the optional subject which implies that the students who do not choose that subject might not be able to learn about the issue. Hence, it is suggested to include the topics of sexual and gender minorities into the curriculum of social studies which is a compulsory subject.
- In grade 8, the term "Minorities" needs to be well defined as "sexual and gender minorities".
- In the social studies subject in grade 9, it has been mentioned that the third gender has been accepted as a gender identity in Nepal. Similarly, in grade 7, Health and physical education subject, only two groups have been defined within the title of "sexual and gender minorities". It is recommended to include the definition of other groups such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer (LGBTIQ), non-binary and others within the title to make students aware of the diversity within the group of sexual and gender minorities.
- In grade 9, Health and physical education, there is a limited definition of only sex and sexuality. It is suggested to add the definition of the components such as Biological sex (which also includes intersex), Gender, sexuality, diversities within sexual and gender minorities (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer), sexual orientation and others.
- It is highly suggested to share with the students about intersex bodies while discussing biological sex.
- Non-discriminatory behaviour towards LGBTIQ people should be well documented in the school policies and its implementation should be in place.
- More audio-visual materials on LGBTIQ+ issues needs to be produced and distributed for the active learning process from the students.
- The curriculum should rise beyond the norm of heterosexuality and binary and the languages used in the curriculum should be revised accordingly.
- It is also recommended to include the history of the LGBTIQ+ movement in Nepal and the organizations leading the movement into the curriculum. This will help students to understand the issue better.

- The terminology "Third gender" should not be used as representative terminology for all people from the LGBTIQ+ community. Instead, the definitions of the diverse sexual and gender identities mentioned as follows and more definitions should be included for the comprehensive information and education:

LGBTQ

An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer."

Lesbian

A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

Gay

A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

Bisexual

A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Transgender

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

Intersex

Intersex people are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. There is a wide variety of differences among intersex variations, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits.

Queer

A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as the term to include people who do not identify as exclusively cisgender and/or individuals who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities.

Non-binary

An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid.

Gender-fluid

A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender or has a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

(Glossary of Terms - HRC, n.d.)



6

Inclusion of SOGIESC issues in school level curriculum: Why is it important?

The students are a heterogeneous group that consists of individuals from diverse gender and sexual identities, sexual orientation, expression and sex characteristics. The heteronormative framework of the curriculum might isolate the students who do not identify within the structure of heteronormativity. Hence, it is imperative that the students are educated about the diversity within the world they live in.

Many students have faced bully and violence by their peers in school or in educational settings. Name-calling, physical threats, physical violence, teasing, cyberbullying, sexual harassment, etc are some forms of violence that students face in the educational setting based on their sexual and gender identities and expression. In Nepal, 16% of LGBT students have experienced verbal harassment in schools (OUT IN THE OPEN, 2016). This violence is manifested mainly because of the stigma and prejudice based on the traditional beliefs about gender roles, masculinity and femininity. The violence is also exaggerated by the discriminatory policies, curriculum, education system and teaching methodologies.

Because of the violence occurring within the educational setting, the students who do not identify within the framework of heteronormativity might feel unsafe and isolated which significantly results in poor academic performance and negatively affects their mental and psychological health which is a serious issue for concern. Homophobic bullying not only have a negative impact on those who are bullied but also affects the bystanders of the bully and those who bully. Hence, violence and bullying targeted at LGBTIQ+ students is an educational problem that must be addressed by the schools and the educational system as a whole (Education Sector Responses to Homophobic Bullying, 2012).

The inclusive school curriculum which promotes healthy discussion on SOGIESC can be an effective tool to address hate against LGBTIQ+ individuals. The curriculum should take inclusive approaches by including examples of LGBTIQ+ individuals in the teaching materials and during teaching. Non-inclusive curriculum contributes to further vulnerability of the LGBTIQ+ students and promotes bullying and violence against vulnerable students. Inclusive teaching materials and environment foster mutual respect and social inclusion (Education Sector Responses to Homophobic Bullying, 2012).

To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all as mentioned in the sustainable development goal 4, and to fulfil all the commitments in line with the international commitments which Nepal has made, the inclusion of SOGIESC in the school curriculum and a safe learning environment for students of all sexual and gender identities and expression is extremely important. It is a prerequisite to fulfil the transformative promise of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development i.e., Leave no one behind.



7

Best Practices around the world

Scotland is one of the pioneer countries to include LGBTI friendly education where they started teaching about the issues of LGBTIQ+ communities such as same-sex marriage, homophobia, biphobia, same-sex parenting, HIV and AIDS and others from the beginning of 2021. The proposal was raised in the Scottish parliament in November 2018 and the ministers were fully supportive of the inclusive curriculum (Foran, 2020).

Such initiatives by the government help create a safe environment for the students at school. The transformation in the education system itself can contribute in bringing about structural changes in a larger society.



8

Blue Diamond Society's priorities for advocacy and engagement

1. A strengthened evidence base on how the school curriculum impacts the life and well-being of students

Blue Diamond Society will contribute in strengthening the evidence base on how school curriculum impacts the life and well-being of students belonging to LGBTIQ+ communities through the documentation of the experiences from the community members. We will advocate for strengthened research and documentation of the impact of the school curriculum on the overall well-being of LGBTIQ+ students.

2. Inclusion of the issues of SOGIESC as critical for the inclusive education system

Blue Diamond Society will continue advocacy on the human rights-based school curriculum inclusive of the SOGIESC issues with the government stakeholders. Similarly we express our deep interest to support government achieve the inclusive curriculum.

3. Partnership and collaboration

Blue Diamond Society will seek to build partnership and collaboration with organizations and stakeholders that support SOGIESC inclusive school curriculum.

4. Community based advocacy and support

Blue Diamond Society will continue supporting the individuals impacted by the harmful norms of the society and people affected by the violence targeted towards LGBTIQ+ communities. We will also continue our community based advocacy by engaging with students, teachers, health service providers and other stakeholders.

9

Call to Action



As per the discussion presented above, the Blue Diamond Society would like to recommend the government to:

- Introduce the components of a gender-friendly education system in the school sector development plan with a particular focus on vulnerable students including students belonging to the LGBTIQ+ community and invest in schools for the proper implementation of the plan.
- Develop and implement an inclusive and SOGIESC friendly comprehensive sexuality education curriculum.
- Enhance teachers' training on CSE and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) inclusive of SOGIESC issues.
- Revise teacher's resource material on Comprehensive Sexuality Education with inclusive and SOGIESC friendly languages and full contents on the issue.
- Incorporate the discourse on SOGIESC issues in the curriculum of all subjects in a holistic manner rather than limiting the discussion within one or two subjects.

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