

30 YEARS
SUPPORTING

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE RIGHT TO FOOD & NUTRITION



LGBTIQA community

The Right to Feed Off Inclusion

Who are LGBTIQA people?

The acronym LGBTIQA stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexual, Queer and Asexual people. It emerged to give visibility to human (sexual) plurality and to the struggles for the rights of people who do not necessarily fit into the dominant heterosexual structures of our societies and, therefore, have a non-normative sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

They represent people whose sexual orientation includes those of the same sex or gender, namely gay, lesbian and bisexual people. Besides, it also embraces people whose gender identity diverges from the gender norms associated with the sex assigned at their birth, namely transgender and intersex, as well as those who challenge traditional patterns of sexuality, such as queer and asexual people.

What are their rights?

While the protection of these groups is at the very core of the main treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the UN Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), it has not been sufficient to guarantee the rights of LGBTIQA people. In many countries, national legislation and judicial decisions do not recognize their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Besides, a wave of criminalization against people with non-normative sexual orientation and gender identities is on the rise. This is leading to discrimination, marginalization, stigmatization and growing social insecurity of LGBTIQA people: in some countries, this may mean violence, loss of life, imprisonment and, in extreme cases, death penalty.

Sexual plurality & the right to food in a nutshell

Sexual identity cannot be seen in isolation, as it plays a key role in the development of human beings - both physically and mentally, as well as in their relation to other human beings, to the environment and to their socio-economic context.

Like other marginalized constituencies i.e. women and indigenous peoples, LGBTIQA who are open about their sexuality often face major challenges when it comes to receiving adequate education, entering the labor market and being eligible for social programs. In other words, those who do not define their sexual identity by socially-accepted sexual orientations are more likely to be discriminated against in the political, economic and social spheres. These restrictions have a great impact on their ability to access adequate (culturally acceptable) and nutritious food.



Current challenges

LGBTIQA people are commonly marginalized and denied access to their political and civil rights, as well as to their economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR). These groups suffer discrimination by public institutions, security bodies, the education system and the job market. This structural discrimination jeopardizes LGBTIQA peoples' human rights, as it creates an environment of extreme social exclusion, where their basic needs are not met, nor their fundamental rights realized.

Due to this continuous and systematic marginalization LGBTIQA communities are more likely to live in poverty: As stressed in a report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, “the rates of poverty, homelessness, and food insecurity are higher among LGBT individuals”.

A number of studies addressing some of these groups confirm the rule. A study conducted in the US shows how LGBT communities are much more often subjected to food insecurity than non-LGBT people. The situation is even more acute when it comes to groups that are also discriminated against on other grounds, as they are likely to face even more financial constraints, thereby further limiting their ability to feed themselves. In a revealing report, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' (IACHR) pointed to the appalling violence that the LGBTI community suffers across the Americas, as well as their increased likelihood to face poverty and hunger.

Given the lack of resources and opportunity for this community, some LGBTIQA people engage in so-called survival sex, where they exchange sex for food and shelter. The situation also makes for grim reading in penal institutions, where there have been reports of these groups being forced to perform sex acts in exchange for food and water, as well as being forced to consume unsanitary food or drink contaminated water.

What comes next?

The next series will look into the challenges women and girls face to meet their human right to food and nutrition.

Required approaches

Despite considerable progress over the last decades, there still exists a strong resistance from governments to change normative discourses and effectively fight against stigmatization of these communities. Thanks to a tireless struggle by LGTBIQA movements, their civil and political rights have been progressively recognized in international and national legislation. Following the persistence, organization and mobilization of the community in India, the world witnessed the advancement of transgender people's rights, where a “third gender” was acknowledged by India's Supreme Court. The country still needs to work against discrimination and affected groups are increasing efforts. The truth is, two years after the landmark judgment, transgender people are still struggling.

On a more global scale, one cannot forget about the appointment of an independent expert on protection from violence and discrimination against LGBT people by the UN Human Rights Council in July 2016. Although it represented a major international socio-political step forwards, several member states expressed their opposition and explicitly manifested they will not recognize his mandate, nor will they be willing to cooperate. This clearly demonstrates the enormous relevance and the potential of having this new expert.

International policy spaces must further address the specific needs of these communities and ensure their participation in any policy-making endeavor. These spaces must lead by example and increase efforts to change prevailing discourses and perceptions of LGBTIQA, so national legislations are increasingly open to changing their norms. Mechanisms to protect the communities in the public and private spheres must also be put in place to stop all forms of violence and criminalization against them.

Want to know more?

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