

Gender Diverse Equality and Wellbeing in Manipur, North-East India: Reflections on Peer-Led Research

Paul Boyce, Pawan Dhall, Santa Khurai, Oinam Hemabati, Pebam Bobochandra Singh, Randhoni Lairikyengbam

Abstract

This chapter discusses the use of peer research to examine gender and sexual minority people's experiences of exclusion and prejudice in contexts of employment, education and welfare in the North Indian State of Manipur. Working with members of community groups run by and for 'transgender' people elicited perspectives grounded in lived experiences that would not have been possible otherwise – not because such people constitute a 'hard-to-reach population', but because they are so often excluded from more 'orthodox' research approaches.

Introduction: Gender transition and recognition in India

In this chapter we reflect on peer-research and advocacy led by gender diverse and 'transgender' community-organizers in the North East Indian state of Manipur. In the context of the present project this involved the community-organizers in training other gender and sexual minority participants to conduct research on employment and welfare experiences in their community. These actions were designed to impact on gender and sexual rights, recognition and economic well-being in this region of India especially, although with national and internationally relevance. As note, the project was a research *and* advocacy initiative; peer researchers were community leaders who had mobilized transgender communities through the years, founded transgender support forums in Manipur and advocated for their concerns with diverse influencers. Moreover, the peer research did not stop just at data collection but also involved strategization on the basis of the findings, identify relevant stakeholders in the region with whom to develop new initiatives aimed at the economic inclusion of gender and sexual minorities.

In reflecting on our process we also consider the terms and language via which our work was taken forward. In the North-East of India (as in many other settings) the employment of the rubric 'transgender' operates as an especially varied and contested political signifier in research, activism and everyday life. In turn, such complexities pertain to participatory, peer-led research interventions in contexts of gender and sexual diversity within the wider Indian political and legal scenario..

One of the ways in which peer-led, community-oriented investigation with gender and sexual diverse persons has been utilised in a number of global locations has been to enable the expression of minority voices that might otherwise be silenced. This has been so, for example, with respect to policy and welfare actions, anti-violence campaigns and projects aimed at improving transgender people's health and socio-economic circumstances (Collumbien et al. 2009, Ganju and Saggurti 2017, Shears 2019). Such actions can become complicated in the context of activist movements, law and policies wherein the terms of recognition for gender non-binary/non-conforming persons become subject to query. Language can run up against the limits of political representation where a term such as 'transgender' is contested or employed as if universally applicable. This may be so, for example where it is used as a proxy- for all gender diverse experience or after assumptions that all gender non-binary ways of being lead to transition in biomedical terms. A related issue is that regional, vernacular terminologies for gender and sexual diversity have often come to be cited in research and policies as if straightforward local exemplars of a putatively universal category (transgender) (Stryker and Currah 2016; Dutta and Roy 2014).

Such concerns have been especially salient in India in recent years where the central government agency NALSA (National And Legal Services Authority) judgement of 2014 initiated state of gender as a matter for self-determination. This create a template for the acknowledgement of the historical marginalization of 'transgender' and 'third gender' peoples in India. The judgement was followed up in 2019 with the ratification of the Transgender Persons' (Protection of Rights) Act, which had a prior processural history as the Transgender Bill and which has been subject to much protest. Non-binary, gender-fluid, queer, transgender, *hijra* and other activists in India have campaigned against ways in which NALSA and the Transgender Act have been implemented, for undercutting the very rights supposedly protected (Semmalar 2016). Protesters have, for example, vociferously critiqued governmental insistence on including, in one form or other, a 'screening process' to 'determine' who is transgender or not, as a means of deciding who might avail of the state recognition afforded by law. Recognition in these terms is not being based on self-determination of gendered experience but on external judgements made by members of regional-level transgender welfare boards.

A part of the problem described arises from the unexamined use of 'transgender' as if a singular progressive overarching categorization – in law, welfare and policy . In practice the organizing of state action in India around this categorical logic has served to erase gender specificity and diversity before the law and other mechanisms, and has impacted on the welfare of gender non-binary persons, who find themselves unable to avail of the welfare measures – such as identity documents, ration cards, progressive employment actions – that the boards as supposedly intended to assist with. .

Such issues have been especially prevalent with regard to transgender and other gender diverse rights and welfare in Manipur in recent years, having been highlighted in our prior research (Dhall and Boyce 2015). In particular our prior work highlighted the need for contextually specific research and information, based in the lived experiences of welfare, work and legislation among transgender and other sexualities and gender diverse peoples. In these terms peer-led research resonates with a very particular ethical commitment in our project. This is not just located in an ethos of inclusive action but as has been taken-forward in conjunction with asserting the right to self-determination of gendered experience that is currently both highlighted and erased for many sexual and gender minorities in India. .

Against this background the word ‘transgender’ expresses specificity in that it has acquired a particular intimate and political resonance in the North East of India as used by activists and others in the region. This both connects to and diverges from ways in which the term has come to be more used in South Asian socio-political contexts in recent years (Khurai 2019). For example, activists in the North East have explicitly protested against conflation of transgender categorization as mobilized in respect of right-wing Hindu nationalism, or a more general assumption of a pan India Hindu culture. In 2019, for instance, transgender activists in Manipur publically burned the book ‘Invisible Men’ for its portrayal of a national, Hindu, transgender culture, which was seen to erase recognition of (and self-determination in respect of) rich Manipuri gender diverse histories. As such, while we sometimes employ ‘transgender’ as a terminology in this chapter the word does not simply dub a universal, or national categorization over contextually varied gender expression. Rather we employ the category as deployed by transgender-identifying activists in Manipur and along with other regional terms of recognition (about which we say more below)

Amidst the issues described this chapter considers the use of peer-led research run with and by community advocates in Manipur to examine experiences of exclusion and prejudice in contexts of employment, education and welfare, on the basis of gender difference and diversity. The choice of Manipur was significant, not only for the current complexities of gender and sexualities activism in the state, but also for the region being neglected in discourse on development and welfare in India on account of geography, political differences and ethnicity. (Dhall and Boyce 2015).

Background: Transgender recognition in Manipur

As in the rest of India and South Asia (Reddy 2005, Dutta 2012, Hoessain 2019), there has been a multitude of indigenous and nominally ‘western’ terms that might be included under the ‘transgender’ umbrella in Manipur (Dhall and Boyce 2015). As noted, ‘transgender’ has a particular history in

North East India, having gained currency in the region from around the late 2000s, with the emergence of politically prominent activists. A key initial motive for this activism was to question the reductionist terminology that had become prevalent in the sphere of HIV interventions with regard to gender and sexual minorities at that time. A particular concern pertained to how a range of ‘non-cis-gendered’ subjects found themselves included under the rubric of ‘MSM’ in the health promotion world, where ‘MSM’ became used to designate a particular sub-categorisation of men who have sex with men who nonetheless embodied *feminine* self-presentation and were seen to practice ‘passive’ sexual roles. In other parts of India the reaction to such actions was a catalyst for the then growth in public recognition of *kothis* as a gender and sexual minority subject category that is oft presented as a core, indigeneous regional identity in health and other research in South Asia. In practice, while *kothi* identification may express rich traditions of gender diversity the popularization of the term can also be seen as tied to the influence of HIV prevention actions where in a sense it performed as a ‘made-up’ grouping of gender and sexual difference, a kind of hybrid ‘cultural category’ – both local and conceived out of the needs of global health paradigms to categorise and typify gendered and sexual ‘others’ (Boyce 2007, Lorway et. al. 2009, Reddy 2005,). This was seen by Manipuri activists, as in some other contexts in South Asia, as ‘writing-over’ far more nuanced gendered and sexual life-projects and histories in insensitive terms

While contested, such erasures have also acted as important catalysts for activists who have defined and advocated for ‘otherwise gendered’ terms of identity to be taken-up in health promotion and other public sphere actions. In Manipur such contestations led activists to explore terms that articulated ‘gender diverse experience’s that were seen to be *already* part of Manipuri cultures, especially the culture of the Meitei communities in the Manipur valley. This is the numerically dominant ethnic group in the state, with Hinduism and Sanamahism among the main religions followed (while also diverting from the kind of pan Indian Hinduism cited above). At one time, the term *nupi saabi* – derived from the Meitei context - became prevalent as a terminology promoted by activists. , This expression came about from the popularity of individuals assigned male at birth cross-dressing and playing female roles in Shumong Leela, a traditional Manipuri theatre form. *Nupi saabi* was a popular reference to these actors and literally implied ‘men who were like women’. At one stage, this was seen as a sign of Manipuri society being ‘inclusive’ of gender diversities (at least among people engaged in the development sector in and outside the Manipur state). But in the 2010s, transgender activists in the region began highlighting the fact that *nupi saabis* were often subject to exploitation and there were many among them who did not see *nupi saabi* as defining of their genders and sexualities. This expression was also often used in a derogatory sense. So parallel to the growing popularity of the term ‘transgender’ in Manipur, there were activist assertions that a different Manipuri term was needed to convey the experience of ‘being transgender’ or a ‘transgender woman’. *Nupi maanbi* for transgender women and later *nupa maanba* (for transgender men) were taken by a

new generation of activists, where these terms were better seen to convey essential qualities of gender (difference) as opposed to association of simple ‘acting like’ a gendered type.

<https://vartagensex.org/commentary/2019/09/attempts-at-erasing-trans-cultures-in-manipur/> What is important to note here is that the use of terms such as *nupi maanbi* does not just express an already present culture or history but rather is too a version of sexual and gendered contextualization that is re-made in response to the socio-political imperatives of the present.

Such diversification in the politicisation of gendered and sexual minority social action and language in Manipur in turn connects to varied issues that arise in peer-led research. This is especially so as the coordinates of participation (who takes part in a project and in what terms) reflect complex social and subjective attributes pertaining to inclusion regarding gender in this instance. A key attribute of activism in Manipur has been an imperative to define gender variant recognition beyond the application of external labels or simplified versions of gendered and sexual culture, especially as these might be seen to derive from elsewhere in India (for example through the recent historical implementation of state-level HIV programmes or current state legislation). The self-understandings of gender and sexualities diverse peers thus became an especially important political act in the region. This in turn has connects to the wider politics of the North-East region for its marginalisation in many mainstream health and development initiatives in India (Phanjoubam 2019).

Law and transgender advocacy in India and Manipur

Recent civil society debate and actions regarding transgender well-being in Manipur have been especially provoked by the establishment of the Manipur Transgender Welfare Board (MTWB) (AMaNA et al. 2016). This was set up in concert with similar actions in other Indian states as an outcome of the NALSA judgement. As noted, implementation the judgement (and the evolution of the subsequent Transgender Bill) involved the establishing of state-level Transgender Welfare Boards in many Indian states. However, to date, such actions have not led to supporting legislation or consistent on-the-ground implementation by government stakeholders.

Amidst such concerns, while larger Indian transgender movements have been conscious of the need to take along anyone who has an identification or affinity to the transgender umbrella, there have been disagreements about such processes that have been manifest in Manipur in particular ways (Bhattacharya 2019). *Hijras* constitute one of the most prominent and recognised sections of Indian transgender movements, their geographical spread more or less correlating with large parts of what the Manipuris often call the ‘Indian mainland’ – all of northern, western and central India and parts of southern and eastern India, extending up to Assam in the North-East. Among the most marginalised sections of gender and sexual minorities and yet possibly the most visible and vocal, *hijras* occupy a

centre space in the public mind, with media and academic representation often conflating ‘*hijra*’ with ‘transgender’ in South Asia (ADD CITATION).

To an extent, heated debates around gender and sexual diversity in India (after NALSA and the Transgender Act) may be read as having become especially ‘*hijra*-centric’ in recent years (with claims that *hijras* are the ‘real’ transgender in the Indian context; some aspect of the Transgender Act reflect this especially – Boyce and khanna 2020). For some, such claims have been interpreted as reflecting the general tendency of ‘mainland India’ to forget the specific contexts and concerns of gender diverse communities in the North-East – among other regions. This led to a recent social media campaign by activists from the North-East region that emphasised that all ‘transgender’ (and *nupi maanbi* and *nuupi maanba*) persons (in India) *are not hijras*. Within the scenario described, participatory practice in the present project has not only pertained to an ethos of inclusive engagement but to an important need to attend to complex relations between multiple gender transitioning experiences in Manipur as they have been politicised in divergent ways with an against the mainstream Indian context and the laws and legislation flowing therefrom.

The project

It was against this complexity that work took shape. Our programme of action comprised an economic inclusion advocacy intervention aimed at addressing the needs of transgender persons in Manipur, with a focus on the state capital of Imphal spread over the districts of Imphal East and Imphal West. The project was directly based on a formative qualitative assessment of economic inclusion of gender and sexual minorities in India conducted in 2014-15 by two of the authors of the present case study, Pawan Dhall and Paul Boyce (*Livelihood, Exclusion and Opportunity: Socioeconomic Welfare among Gender and Sexuality Non-normative People in India*, Dhall and Boyce 2015). This was a component of a five-year international programme of work on Poverty, Sexuality and Law funded by UK Aid and implemented via the Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, UK. The qualitative assessment revealed that a plethora of government poverty alleviation programmes notwithstanding, heteronormative definitions of gender, marriage and family at the social, legal and policy levels, continued to exclude people with non-normative genders and sexualities from economic benefits – both welfare and access to employment – in Manipur and elsewhere. To quote from the assessment:

[When] S. Thounoujam, a 32-year-old trans man in Manipur applied for a job card under the [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme] for himself and his female partner (as a family unit) in 2009, the Gram Panchayat official refused to entertain his request pointing out that they were ‘not a normal man–woman married couple’. Or let us take the example of 45-year-old T. Bimola from Imphal, Manipur, who has been in a relationship with

another woman since 2001 and works for a small bakery near her home. She wants to plan for old age for herself and her partner, who works as a security guard. But she has only a vague idea about government housing schemes for the poor. She is also uncertain whether she and her partner can apply for a housing loan as a couple, and adds that if required she will apply as an unmarried woman and not reveal the status of her relationship with her partner.

(Dhall and Boyce 2015, p. 21-22)

What became evident was that there were many ways in which gender and sexual minority persons in Imphal found that their socio-economic precarity was compounded because of their gender and sexualities. This was taking place in context of a sustained period of economic growth in India. As Dhall and Boyce (2015, p. 3) note, although since market liberalisation began in the early 1990s India experienced significant economic growth (from around 5.5% in the early 1990s to a peak of 10.3% in 2010, with lower rates subsequently but still among the highest worldwide), share of wealth became increasingly unequal and income inequality doubled in about 20 years.

Gender and sexual 'difference' correlates in important ways to such socio-economic inequities, as stigma, fractures in kinship relations (and related economic support) and prejudice in employment and access to welfare have compounded socio-economic precarity for many gender non-conforming persons. These effects take shape across many identity formations and gendered and sexual ways of being that might, in one way or another be judged as marginal, suspect, or at least unwelcome in respect of normative values and cultures in workplaces or other sites of livelihood or welfare (and which crucially have been poorly expressed and legislated for in the NALSA judgment and latterly the Transgender Act).

With these challenges in mind the 2014-15 assessment outlined immediate and long-term recommendations for all stakeholders to ensure large-scale economic inclusion for gender and sexuality non-conforming people in India. Some of these recommendations around capacity building for peer and community-led advocacy with education, employment and social welfare stakeholders formed the basis for this work. We particularly wanted to take up challenges and opportunities with regard to creating pathways to enable gender and sexual minorities to advocate for actions that addressed their socio-economic vulnerabilities, as defined by them. We focussed, therefore, on generating a dialogue among gender and sexual minorities in Imphal (the capital of Manipur), particularly transgender, *nupi maanbi*, *nupi maanmai* and other community leaders regarding what their issues around economic inclusion were and how we might collectively strategise advocacy. We focused in Imphal as a regional hub for relevant activism and as an employment centre. We identified specific private sector, non-government and government stakeholders who could potentially make a difference to the situation in and around our project area (Imphal), and then set about sensitising

activities. Our aim was to catalyse changes in the spheres of education, skills building, employment and media coverage regarding the concerns of transgender people.

The process: Developing peer-led research and advocacy

Working with members of community groups run by and for transgender people in Manipur, we have aimed to elicit perspectives grounded in lived experiences that would not have been possible otherwise. This was *not*, however, because transgender persons were particularly inaccessible. In some global contexts peer-led research with gender and sexual minority people has been advocated as a means to achieve connections with an otherwise ‘hard-to-reach’ population; this has not been the premise of our project. In particular we have been concerned that conceiving some populations as ‘hard-to-reach’ places an emphasis on such peoples to make themselves more visible, for example if they want avail of welfare or other ‘practical rights’. This is as opposed to focusing on how policies and legislation may render some people invisible, because the terms of recognition employed do not speak adequately to social diversity, among other factors (Boyce 2019). As such, our project was conceived on the basis of anyway already present leadership by gender and sexualities diverse communities. Peer connections, as such, were already factored into our research design, not as a facet of a problem of accessibility to overcome but as a social and material condition that made our project conceivable in the first place.

Our project was co-conceived with two main collaborating transgender community organisations – the All Manipur Nupi Maanbi Association (AMaNA), which was set up in 2010 as a peer-led collective of community-based organisations (CBOs) of transgender women (and to some extent men who have sex with men) and Empowering Trans Ability (ETA), a group for trans-masculine individuals, established in Manipur in 2012 (Dhall 2015). SAATHII (Solidarity and Action Against the HIV Infection in India), a national level NGO working on sexualities, health and HIV prevention, and with regional representation in Manipur, comprised the third key partner. Funding for the project came from the University of Sussex Social Science Impact Fund, with support from the Newton Fund, with a remit to support methods and means to improve employment and welfare opportunities for transgender persons in Manipur. The project comprised a number of training, research and advocacy activities over a period of 20 months from August 2016 to March 2018. We aimed to achieve sustained impact, not only by newly informing employment and welfare cultures with regard to sexual and gender diversity but also by equipping local advocates from transgender community groups with skills and strategic connections for ongoing dialogue and programme development with key potential employers in the region. Peer leadership, in these terms, was not only central to our project’s goals, it was also an objective in itself, with an aim to better equip local gender and sexual minority peoples to lead changes to work cultures in the region.

Data, Stories and Training

Four community advocates from Imphal, who were associated with AMaNA co-led the project. Two of these people (among the co-authors here) had acted as researchers on the prior (2014-2015) study that we had undertaken and they recruited two more colleagues. The idea for the project arose from their experience and was suggested to other co-authors (Dhall and Boyce). In dialogue we all conceptualised issues arising, seeking to translate these into a form of analysis and project outline that we could use so to leverage funding. The project development process was recursive in these terms – arising from our already ongoing dialogues about needs and possible courses of actions at different scales of action. Peer-organizers in Manipur led day-to-day aspects of the project, once funding was secured.

The training for the community advocates was undertaken over five phases throughout the project period. The idea was to build up on what the community advocates already knew about issues around economic inclusion and exclusion, gender and sexuality rather than to give them textbook knowledge or definitions from glossaries. We wanted them to look at their own understanding of these issues, and to help them articulate them better. We also asked them to look at how they (and other gender and sexualities ‘non-conforming’ peoples) experience stigma and discrimination, how this impacted their educational and employment opportunities, health, security, basic rights – leading to many micro and macro exclusions on a day-to-day basis.

This process helped the community advocates to draw out a pathway of how economic exclusion takes place. Beginning with family and community acceptance or lack of it, moving on to discrimination in nutrition, education, shelter, skills building, employment, social welfare schemes, and then how such exclusions may also be reflected in the laws and policies. This was more real to them than jargon-heavy explanations, and as part of the story-telling involved in this process they talked about examples from their daily lives

At the end of the first training period, we went on to document key elements in the pathway of economic exclusion – in the Manipur context. We planned that this assessment would comprise a mapping of economic inclusion and exclusion of gender and sexual minorities in Manipur. This involved, for example, group work with a larger cohort of gender and sexual minority people wherein participants located sites in Imphal where they might have suffered prejudice or exclusion, such as schools or workplaces. Mapping in these terms was not simply about identifying geographic locations but identifying the (shared) stories associated with such contexts. It also involved the gathering of quantitative information that might be used for purposes of advocacy. For instance, the baseline found

that the literacy rate among transgender people in the state was 67.50%, far lower than the national rate of 74.04% and Manipur rate of 79.85% (Census 2011 data). These findings helped develop advocacy strategies and tools, including a blog to document stories of, and data about, economic exclusion that emerged from the study. These have been developed into a web-site that documents lives stories of transgender, *nupi maanbi*, *mupi maanbai* and other ‘otherwise’ gendered peoples¹.

The documentation of community advocates stories and those of the larger gender diverse community in Imphal through digital media required the advocates to pick up the basics of storytelling. So a third element of training comprised sessions organized on relevant techniques. The resource person for this was a local journalist and feminist writer. She helped people to identify aspects from their own lives that related to economic exclusion, and then to try and put them down in the form of a story. A key challenge was to enable a group of adults to go back to their younger years. We used children's books, comics and short video clips - everything to encourage participants to start thinking in terms of how to tell a story as it might have evolved over their own life-time.

The fourth phase of the training was towards the end of 2017. All the community advocates who had taken part in the project were asked to list out the project activities undertaken since August 2016 chronologically. Then they were asked to look back and write down what new things they had learnt, and how the experience had changed them. Finally, they were asked to share what they would like to do next in terms of advocacy for economic inclusion. They responded with ideas such as writing a book on the subject, submitting memoranda to the government and providing seed money capital to business aspirants among the transgender communities.

The fifth and the final phase of the training focussed on community reporting or citizen journalism – an extension of some of the earlier training but with the purpose of keeping the discourse on economic inclusion alive even after the project period was over. The community advocates were provided with tips on identifying stories around economic inclusion, narrating them in the form of news stories, first person stories or feature articles. This involved tips on how to submit them to queer themed webzines and to use them for continued advocacy through mainstream media and with other stakeholders (our project, for example, was featured in regional television news reports).

Once community advocates were trained they undertook 10 consultation workshops and mass awareness events (including a public dissemination exhibition of the project in Imphal, Kolkata and Delhi – including data and story-telling highlights). In Imphal (our immediate focus area) activities were undertaken primarily with local entrepreneurs (typically with sole proprietorship or partnership businesses not employing more than 50 people), vocational trainers, media persons and government

child-protection and social welfare officials in and around Imphal. Our aim was to sensitise such people to the life-experiences, needs, exclusions and welfare of gender and sexualities diverse peoples, with trainings involving story-telling and the presentation of strategies for organizational change by community-advocates .

We decided to place the emphasis on smaller non-government actors partly because few interventions on gender diverse socio-economic inclusion in India have tapped their potential to promote economic inclusion. Moreover Manipur state has relatively few big corporate houses that could be engaged in the intervention. Small entrepreneurs, many of whom are part of India's informal and self-employment sector (where the majority of India's workforce is engaged – 80% and above according to different estimates) constitute an untapped potential in terms of sensitisation towards inclusion of transgender people.

Actions and Outcomes Impacts and Ongoing Actions

After 20 months of work, around a dozen entrepreneurs and vocational trainers began to offer training and employment opportunities to gender and sexual minorities in Manipur as a direct result of our work – this training being developed and implemented with our project team of local community-advocates (Rainbow Manipur/Inclusive Manipur 2019). Dialogue with our community-advocates is ongoing to help these entrepreneurs develop inclusive human resources policies. The information technology firm MOBIMP, for example, based in Imphal, has conducted training events developed and run with our project team aimed at sensitising their staff on transgender diverse recruitment and work-place equality issues. They also made all of their toilets gender neutral in 2017 after having participated in sensitisation sessions organised under the intervention.

Similarly, Accent & Allied Infotech, a leading vocational training centre in Manipur decided to allot one of their three toilets for transgender people in line with need. This was done in parallel to making all their training courses gender diverse/transgender inclusive. marking a difference with previous attempts to run special courses exclusively for transgender people.

Further dialogue has also started with the Imphal municipal body to develop transgender inclusive public sanitation facilities, which are vital to improved welfare and equality in work and educational contexts as well as in the public domain (Pebam 2018). This in turn has catalysed a wider aspect of our project with the publication of a collaborative article in the journal *Waterlines* (Boyce et al. 2018), which has helped to set out a new agenda for transgender inclusivity in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector and which has already been influential, e.g. as informing the DfID's public

discussion of transgender inclusive development., and in part based on our project (DfID Inclusive Societies 2018).

Beyond the field of employment, the project also included consultation by the Manipur-based project team with district-level government child-protection officers in Bishnupur, a town in the neighbourhood of Imphal. This consultation helped list the steps transgender community groups can take in collaboration with government child welfare bodies to ensure gender variant children in schools facing discrimination and bullying do not drop out and their concerns are addressed urgently. Again, the *Rainbow Manipur* blog (as developed by AMmaNA and ETA) carries stories on the discrimination faced by transgender persons in schools (Hemabati 2017).

Conclusion

Our project aimed to offer a model for peer-led intervention regarding how incremental impact in terms of employment, education and welfare of gender and sexual minority persons might be achieved within a given context. While in some contexts such peer-led processes have been advocated as a means to better insert transgender and other gender diverse voices into policy and programme development processes we took a somewhat different approach. Instead our aim has been to fundamentally locate the priorities of gender and sexualities diverse community advocates and researchers in designing the focus, reach and priorities of our programme and to advance peer-led training to (potential) employers from this basis. This was conversant with our ethos that gender and sexual minorities peoples are not ‘hard-to-reach out-group’ that peer-led research can help to reach. Rather the apriori basis of our research was to start with the reflections of gender and sexual minority peoples and to build our project design on this basis.

We learned many things along the way. We started with a draft work agenda, and then discovered what was feasible. For example, government officials were not always easy to access. This informed our collective decision to focus instead on other stakeholders (small businesses). In addition, the idea of economic inclusion itself had to be ‘sold’ to many of the stakeholders that were sensitised – not necessarily as an issue that they were not already aware about, but as something in which they could also participate in, in a truly collaborative sense. This was achieved through many dialogues and conversations during meetings and workshops aimed at building rapport between activists, entrepreneurs and business leaders. This in turn was a core attribute of our approach; community-advocates and local business people came to view one another as peers in an ongoing process as our project went along. This is not to say that all power-differentials were erased by our project or that a

simple equity was uniformly achieved. Crucially, however, our programme of work involved altering the terrain of peer relations as gender diverse activists and local business peoples sought to come up with actions and solutions *together*. Our approach sought not only to improve prospects for employment, and conditions for gender and sexual minorities in workplaces in Manipur, it also aimed to develop a range of new, proactive and equitable alliances that offer scope for ongoing collaborative actions, regionally and nationally.

References

- AMaNA, ETA and SAATHII, 2016. Media release: Manipur: Government Departments to Strategize for Transgender Inclusion in Services, Schemes and Entitlements. *AMaNA, ETA and SAATHII*, 11 August 2016. Available from: https://www.vartagensex.org/download.php?name=admin/document/_1470940240046-mnp-tg-welfare-brd-action-medrel-11aug16.pdf [Accessed 9 October 2019].
- Bhattacharya, S., 2019. The Transgender Nation and Its Margins: The Many Lives of the Law. *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 20. <https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/4930>. [Accessed 9 October 2019].
- Boyce, P., 2019. Properties, Substance, Queer Effects: Ethnographic Perspective and HIV in India. In: P. Boyce, E. J. Gonzalez-Polledo and S. Posocco, eds. *Queering Knowledge: Analytics, Devices and Investments after Marilyn Strathern*. London: Routledge, 92-112
- Boyce, P., 2007. 'Conceiving Kothis': Men who have Sex with Men in India and the Cultural Subject of HIV Prevention. *Medical Anthropology*, 26 (2), 175–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01459740701285582>
- Boyce, P. et al., 2018. Transgender-Inclusive Sanitation: Insights from South Asia. *Waterlines*, 37 (2), 102-117. Available from: <https://www.developmentbookshelf.com/doi/full/10.3362/1756-3488.18-00004>. [Accessed 9 October 2019].
- Collumbien, M. et al., 2009. Understanding the contexts of male and transgender sex work using peer ethnography. *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 85 Sup 31-36 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/sti.2008.033571>
- DFID Inclusive Societies, 2018. Transgender Inclusive Development. *Medium*, 29 March 2018. Available from: https://medium.com/@DFID_Inclusive/transgender-inclusive-development-5128f899592 [Accessed 9 October 2019].
- Dhall, P., 2015. Trans Queens of Manipur. *Varta*, 20 January 2015. Available from: <https://varta2013.blogspot.com/2015/01/trans-queens-of-manipur.html>. [Accessed 9 October 2019].
- Dhall, P., and Boyce, P., 2015. Livelihood, Exclusion and Opportunity: Socioeconomic Welfare among Gender and Sexuality Non-normative People in India. *IDS Evidence Report 106*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Dutta, A., 2012. An Epistemology of Collusion: Hijra, Kothi and the Historical (Dis)continuity of Gender/Sexual Identities in Eastern India. *Gender and History*, 24 (3), 825-849.
- Dutta, A. and Roy, R (2014) Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections. *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1 (3) , 320-337
- Ganju, D., and Saggurti, N., 2017. Stigma, violence and HIV vulnerability among transgender persons in sex work in Maharashtra, India. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 19 (8), 903-917. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2016.1271141>
- Hossain, A., 2018. De-Indianizing Hijra: intra-regional effacements and inequalities in South Asian queer space. *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 5 (3), 321-331. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-6900710>
- Hemabati, O., 2017. No Share of Family Property for Me Because I Have a Vagina... *Rainbow Manipur / Inclusive Manipur*, 3 May 2017. Available from:

<https://rainbowmanipur.wordpress.com/2017/05/03/no-share-of-family-property-for-me-because-i-have-a-vagina/> [Accessed 9 October 2019].

Khurai, S., 2019. Attempts at Erasing Trans Cultures in Manipur. *Varta*, 20 September 2019. Available from: <https://www.vartagensex.org/details.php?p=5d84e6848d020> [Accessed 9 October 2019].

Lorway, Robert, Sushena Reza-Paul, and Akram Pasha (2009) “On Becoming a Male Sex Worker in Mysore: Sexual Subjectivity, ‘Empowerment,’ and Community-Based HIV Prevention Research.” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 23 (2): 142-160.

Pebam, B., 2018. Trans Inclusive Public Sanitation in Manipur Needs a Bigger Push. *Varta*, 28 July 2018. Available from: <http://vartagensex.org/details.php?p=5b5c74f1c49de>. [Accessed 9 October 2019].

Phanjoubam, P., 2019. Why it Matters How Manipur Became a State. *The Telegraph*, 20 February. Available from: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/why-it-matters-how-manipur-became-a-state-of-india/cid/1684958>. [Accessed 9 October 2019].

Rainbow Manipur | Inclusive Manipur, 2019. Bulletin – Skills & Jobs. *Rainbow Manipur | Inclusive Manipur*. Available from: <https://rainbowmanipur.wordpress.com/bulletin-skills-jobs/> [Accessed 9 October 2019].

Reddy, G., 2005. Geneologies of Contagion: Hijras, Kothis and the Politics of Sexual Marginality in Hyderabad. *Anthropology and Medicine*, 12, 255-270.

Semmalar, G. I., 2017. First as Apathy, Then as Farce: The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016. *Orinam*, August 14 2017. Available from: <http://orinam.net/apathy-farce-trans-rights-bill-standing-committee-report/> [Accessed 9 October 2019].

Stryker, S. and Currah, P., 2016. General Editors Introduction. *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 3 (3-4), 331-332. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3545071>

Shears, K., 2019. “Because of how you are”: Using Participatory research to understand violence against transgender women in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Linkages*, 7 January 2019. Available from: <https://linkagesproject.wordpress.com/2019/01/07/because-of-how-you-are-using-participatory-research-to-understand-violence-against-transgender-women-in-latin-american-and-the-caribbean/> [Accessed 12 October 2019].

Varta, 2019. Website post: “Varta Community Reporters Training and Citizen Journalism Programme”. *Varta*. Available from: <http://vartagensex.org/training.php>. [Accessed 9 October 2019].

¹ *Rainbow Manipur | Inclusive Manipur* <https://rainbowmanipur.wordpress.com/>.