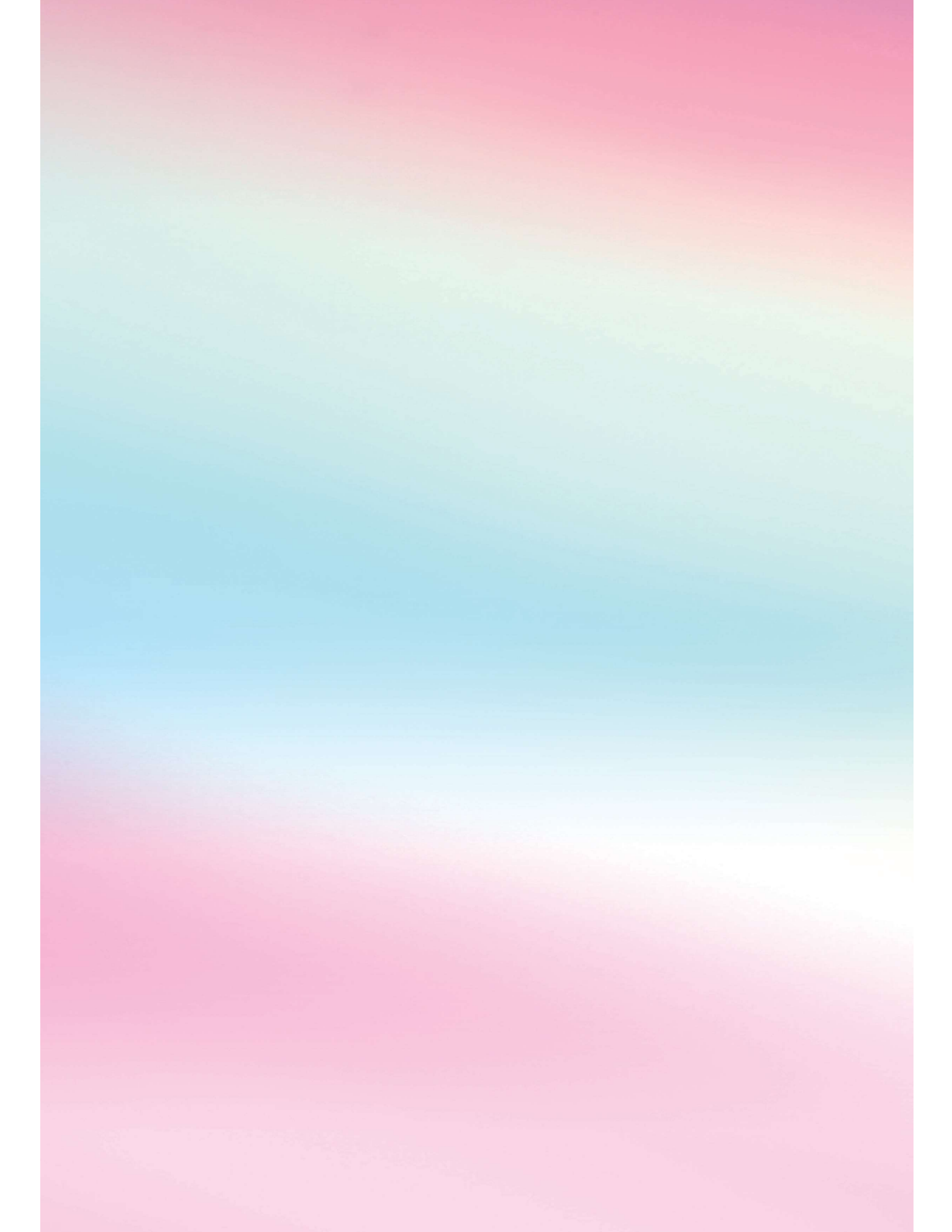




OUR LIVES, OUR STORIES: LGBTI SENIORS IN NEPAL

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Our Lives, Our Stories: **LGBTI Seniors in Nepal**

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Our Lives, Our Stories: LGBTI Seniors in Nepal was compiled by Laxman Sharma and Bimala Gurung from Mitini Nepal. The storybook was edited by Grace Poore from Outright International. We are grateful for the grant provided by SAGE USA.

We are extremely grateful to the LGBTI elders who generously shared their stories. We are grateful to Birkha Raj Chaudhary, Sunita Poudel, J.P. Limbu, and Sita Kumari Rana who conducted interviews with the LGBTI elder storytellers. We are grateful to Dia Yanzon for translating the stories from Nepali to English, and to Himal Shrestha for design and layout. Photographs of the storytellers in this book are copyrighted by Mitini Nepal.

Thank You!

INTRODUCTION

Our Lives, Our Stories: LGBTI Seniors In Nepal is a collection of stories by and about older lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people in Nepal. The stories highlight experiences of intersectional discrimination and their long-term impacts on older LGBTI people, including housing instability, income precarity, forced child marriages, and family violence, as well as the struggles related to the state's denial of senior citizen benefits, unfair eligibility requirements for citizenship cards, and failure to legalize same sex marriage. The stories also showcase the success of older LGBTI relationships, LGBTI elders' contributions to society, and what they want for future generations of LGBTI people in Nepal.

Different terminology relating to LGBTI people are used interchangeably throughout the book, such as sexual and gender minorities, gender and sexual minorities, and sexual and gender minority communities. Also used is terminology such as third gender, transgender, trans man, transgender man, trans woman, and transgender woman. Outright and Mitini Nepal do not standardize usage of terminology in the English version of the storybook which translates from three languages used in telling and documenting the stories, namely Nepali, Maithili, and Tharu.

The terms, elder(s), senior(s), and older persons refer to LGBTI people ages 50 and older. The lower age cutoff reflects the realities of aging in LGBTI communities where many people in their 50s (and even 40s) have declining health and medical conditions usually associated with much older people in the general population, due in part to lack of health equity and limited or no access to health services.

The 10 storytellers featured in **Our Lives, Our Stories: LGBTI Seniors In Nepal** are among 100 participants of a Mitini Nepal survey conducted in 2022 with assistance from an LGBTI Elders Advisory Committee. The survey provides an overview of the lives of LGBTI people ages 50 to 75 years, living in Province 1, Province 2, Bagmati Province, Gandaki Province, Lumbini Province, and Sudurpaschim Province. Storytelling themes in **Our Lives, Our Stories: LGBTI Seniors In Nepal** come from key issues that were identified in the survey. Findings of the survey are published in English and Nepali factsheets, available from Outright International and Mitini Nepal.

English fact sheet:

https://outrightactionint.prod.acquia-sites.com/sites/default/files/2023-06/English_LGBTI%20people%20in%20Nepal_Mitini.pdf

https://mitininepal.org.np/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/English_LGBTI-people-in-Nepal_Mitini-Nepal.pdf

Nepali fact sheet:

https://outrightactionint.prod.acquia-sites.com/sites/default/files/2023-06/Nepali_LGBTI%20people%20in%20Nepal_Mitini.pdf

https://mitininepal.org.np/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Nepali_LGBTI-people-in-Nepal_Mitini-Nepal.pdf

Mitini Nepal and Outright International selected the stories for **Our Lives, Our Stories: LGBTI Seniors In Nepal**. Mitini Nepal gathered the stories through interviews conducted in person, on Zoom and the telephone. Mitini's field staff and focal persons based in the provinces provided language translation

for storytellers, did outreach, and helped arrange interviews. All stories were recorded and transcribed with signed consent of the storytellers. The book features photographs of eight of the ten storytellers. The storybook was edited by Outright International. The story collection process included a wellness protocol. Outright International provided a guide on good practices for storytelling with older adults. Mitini Nepal translated the guide in Nepali and offered a learning session for staff and focal persons conducting the interviews. A resource list was provided with contact information for a crisis hotline,

women's NGOs providing psychosocial support, and mental health professionals trained in LGBTI affirmative counseling and psychological first aid.

Our Lives, Our Stories: LGBTI Seniors In Nepal is part of the LGBTI Elders Advancing Project, funded by SAGE USA. The storybook is published in English and Nepali and available in hardcopy and PDF from www.outrightinternational.org or www.mitininepal.org.np

MESSAGE

I am delighted to have the privilege of writing the foreword for this remarkable collection of stories, **Our Lives, Our Stories: LGBTI Seniors In Nepal**. This book, featuring ten inspirational narratives of LGBTI elders, sheds light on a range of issues crucial to the elder members of the sexual and gender minorities community. Within its pages, we uncover tales of strength and transformation that have marked their journeys.

The stories within this book touch upon a multitude of significant topics, including social and economic challenges, housing, cultural discrimination, adoption concerns, support for single women, elder and senior citizen allowances, family acceptance success stories, community political engagement, and questions of identity. Through these narratives, we strive to bring attention to the experiences of LGBTI elders, a group whose struggles have often been overlooked.

LGBTI elders, the unsung heroes of the movement, have weathered countless storms, yet their resilience remains an enduring testament to the human spirit. Mitini's pioneering efforts in addressing their concerns, through data collection, documentation, and publications, have culminated in this storybook.

The International Human Right Day serves as a reminder of the inalienable rights to which every human being is entitled. It is with great pride that we launch this storybook, aligning with this year's global theme, **"Dignity, Freedom, and Justice for All."** Mitini Nepal proudly recognizes and celebrates the LGBTI elders and their stories. We celebrate the past, honor the present, and envision a future where every story and every individual is valued, respected, and loved.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has provided unwavering support and guidance on this journey. We are particularly thankful to SAGE and Outright International for their invaluable encouragement, insightful suggestions, and steadfast companionship in bringing this project to fruition.

In Solidarity!



Laxmi Ghalan
President
Mitini Nepal

MESSAGE

It brings me immense joy to present this invaluable compilation, "Our Lives, Our Stories: LGBTI Seniors in Nepal" a testament to the strength and determination of individuals who have weathered unique challenges within the course of their lives. This collection sheds light on the intersectional and intergenerational issues within the community, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity in our conversations about equality.

I still remember when my grand mom shared about her child marriage when she was eight years and didn't even know what is marriage. Many narratives in the storybook also touch upon the practice of child marriage, highlighting the profound impact it has on individuals as they grow up and come to identify themselves differently from their families' beliefs when the LGBTI movement had not even started.

It was not easy for LGBTI elders when they were children and couldn't decide about their marriage and were not open at that time about their LGBTI identity. Child marriage is a practice that occurs across regions, cultures and religions and impacts the lives of the child brides and grooms because of several adverse consequences including poverty, gender discrimination, and weak law enforcement.

It is crucial to recognize that child marriage is not a practice conducive to the well-being and self-discovery of individuals. In recognizing this and sharing these narratives, we aim to fill the void left by traditional frameworks that fail to encompass the diverse experiences within the LGBTI community.

The Supreme Court's interim directive to the Nepalese government, mandating the temporary registration of same sex marriages marks a pivotal step in recognizing the relationships of these couples. Consequently, members of LGBTI community find themselves compelled to reset to child marriage, ritual unions and other alternative arrangements, underscoring the need for further legal clarity and protection of same sex unions.

I express my deepest gratitude to everyone who has played a role in making this story book a reality. Your encouragement, insights, and unwavering commitment to the cause have been instrumental in bringing these important stories to light.

In Solidarity!

With heartfelt thanks,



Sarita KC
Executive Director
Mitini Nepal

MESSAGE

At SAGE, we are deeply honored to lend our support to this invaluable work. Too often, the voices and lived realities of LGBTI older adults are silenced and ignored. The very act of sharing one's life story, as the contributors of this storybook have done, is thus a tremendous act of power and bravery. The narratives contained within these pages are not just stories; they are profound testaments to the unwavering courage and resilience of LGBTI older adults, not only in Nepal but also across the globe. Thank you to all who have contributed for offering windows into the past, reflections of the present, and beacons guiding us toward a future where dignity and joy prevail.

In solidarity,

Hannah Yore
Director of International Programs
SAGE



राष्ट्रिय मानव अधिकार आयोग

National Human Rights Commission of Nepal

केन्द्रीय कार्यालय (Central Office)

पुल्चोक, ललितपुर, नेपाल (Pulchowk, Lalitpur, Nepal)



Congratulatory Message

Article 41 of the Constitution of Nepal guarantees the right of senior citizens as it provides "Senior citizens shall have the right to special protection and social security from the State." Similarly, the Article 43 also ensures the right to social security stating that "economically poor physically incapacitated and helpless person, helpless single women, persons with physical impairment, children, persons who cannot look after themselves and the citizens who belong to communities that are on the verge of extinction, shall have the right to social security as provided for by law."

Though the Constitution provides protection to the rights of elderly people, but in comparison to other elderly people, the elderly people from gender and sexual minorities' community still face difficulties. In the present scenario, I am delighted to learn that Mitini Nepal, an organization advocating for the rights of gender and sexual minorities is going to publish a story book featuring 10 elderly people from various provinces of Nepal under the "LGBTI Elders Advancing Initiative" project. It is truly commendable that this story book attempts to address a range of issues faced by LGBTI older persons such as financial struggles, citizenship concerns, and challenges in receiving allowances, discrimination from families and society, housing issue, success stories, political participation, child adoption, and the equality in the quest for marriage. By featuring real characters and their experiences, the story book becomes a powerful tool for shedding light on the diverse and often complex realities that LGBTI elders navigate in their lives. This story book not only highlights the challenges but also reveals the resilience, achievements, and aspirations of these individuals. This publication indeed will be a significant milestone in advocating for the rights of elderly persons within the sexual and gender minorities' community.

I am confident that the story book shall serve as a guide, providing inspiration, courage, and energy to individuals within the gender and sexual minorities' community as the book includes the real stories of the elderly people from gender and sexual minorities' community. With the firm belief that the National Human Rights Commission will always be with this kind of work to protect and promote the human rights of gender and sexual minorities, I wish the success of this story book.

November, 2023

Top Bahadur Magar
Chairperson

फोन नं. ००९७७-१-५०१००१५, फ्याक्स नं. ००९७७-१-५४४७९७३, पो.ब.नं. ९१८२, काठमाडौं, नेपाल

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STRUGGLING THROUGH ECONOMIC HARDSHIP: MY UNTOLD STORY



Akali Chaudhary

I am Akali Chaudhary, an intersex woman who has surpassed the milestone of 53 years on this journey of life. I live in the small town of Sombare, nestled within Itahari in the Sunsari district (eastern Nepal). I came into this world in the midst of an economically challenged family, which meant that my upbringing was colored by innumerable hurdles. As time passed, my family's financial situation grew increasingly dire, making it an uphill task to even put basic meals on the table for me. There were instances when we had to rely on the kindness of neighbors, scraping by with whatever leftover food they could spare. Going to bed with an empty stomach is etched deeply in my memory from those nights gone by. Even though I faced struggles, children in their early stages of life might not fully grasp the extent of those challenges. Under the watchful eyes of my parents, I managed to find happiness.

When I was born I had female and male organs. Because I had more female organs, my parents raised me as a daughter. They did not want to see me wearing male attire. No one apart from my family was aware of my intersex identity. By the time I was seven years old, my body underwent significant changes that I couldn't ignore. These physiological changes were accompanied by changes in my behavior, which began to raise concerns within my family. For example, I wore female clothing around my father and brothers because they had strong aversion to third gender, and my mother said to wear female dress in front of them. But I was fond of wearing male attire. My mother possessed

some understanding of this matter. When I was seven, she brought up the topic with me, but due to my tender age, I didn't understand what my mother was saying so, it didn't have an impact on my mind.

At age 14, I finally gained a fuller understanding of being intersex. I openly engaged in conversations with my mother. She told me to discover my own journey of knowing myself. But other family members who were aware that I was born intersex began treating me differently as I transitioned into adulthood. They subjected me to hurtful slurs like *hijda* and *chakka* (terms used pejoratively to demean third gender). My brothers began physically abusing me because they believed that my identity was tarnishing our family's social standing. If I tried to defend myself, I was physically punished. But I kept on speaking up for my rights. The situation escalated to the point where my brothers and father plotted to expel me from our home. Thankfully, I found refuge under the protective care of my mother. She allowed me to wear male attire when my father wasn't at home. She even protected me when people came to her with marriage proposals for me. But I couldn't escape the weight of scorn by other family members.

When my mother passed away I was left adrift in the family, devoid of her protection. The ground beneath me eroded away. My mother's absence meant that there was no longer a haven of safety within our home. The once-familiar spaces, now felt hostile and perilous because my two brothers subjected



me to even more extreme physical and mental harassment. My father's behavior towards me was also not good. I was isolated. I found myself alone.

Fear of violence from society outside my home held me back from running away from home. But the oppression within my family became unbearable and compelled me to escape. One night, I left Itahari to find refuge in Kathmandu. I was 14 years old.

Despite being intersex, I'd chosen to identify myself as a transgender man. In Kathmandu, I lived with a friend. I had to seek employment in the garment industry. The job provided me with food and a place to stay. However, I found myself ensnared in a cycle of labor exploitation because I didn't receive a wage that truly reflected the worth of my labor, even after giving my skin, bones, and tireless efforts. For 11 years I was earning 500 rupees a month (less than four US dollars at current exchange rate).

Kathmandu had initially seemed like a refuge but my body felt battered and aged. My situation, both physically and emotionally, was in shambles. I couldn't return to the house of my family in Itahari because my family had mistreated me. Itahari offered no solace.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I was evicted from my room. The landlord showed me no compassion, leaving me with no choice but to endure over two weeks of homelessness, surviving solely on bread and

enduring a life of destitution. Throughout the pandemic, I found myself without any family support. Compounding my difficulties, my official identification card carries a female designation, which poses significant problems for me because I prefer to present myself as a man. Unfortunately, Nepal's existing laws and regulations have left me in a bind. I've been unable to secure government documents that accurately reflect my true identity due to this legal gap.

Despite the grand slogans and reassuring speeches by politicians and government leaders, my experience has shown me that our generation of elders might end up as nothing more than ashes, having endured a life plagued by discrimination and humiliation. Even though political shifts have promised rights across various levels and sectors, political leaders have yet to acknowledge the existence of single individuals like me, who are part of the gender and sexual minorities, and find ourselves excluded from access to government services. The looming concern of falling ill or the frailty of my aging body haunts me as I wonder how I will manage as a single elderly person. Safety and security have been elusive.

I earnestly request that the government empower us financially, establish collective residences or ashrams for gender and sexual minorities with precarious livelihoods, and help address the challenges that deny gender diverse individuals social security and dignity.

STRUGGLING WITH SOCIETY AND FAMILY



Bechan Mohammad Khatun

I am Mohammad Khatun and I am 68 years old. I want to identify myself as a transgender woman. I hail from Shambhunath-1 in the Khoksar municipality of Saptari from Madhesh Province (south eastern Terai region of Nepal). Born into a Muslim society, I have been compelled to navigate a life of continuous struggle from my earliest days. Being a Muslim from the Madhesi community, I'm an ethnic minority in Nepal. My family and I have faced numerous challenges in ensuring our family's survival.

Due to my family's deeply rooted religious beliefs, I have faced considerable challenges throughout my 68 years as a transgender woman. Both my parents worked as daily wage laborers, leaving them with little time for their children. Consequently, I grew up devoid of the warmth and affection a parent's presence provides. My family's financial struggles were a constant reality, as daily wage earnings often fell short of meeting our basic needs. This led to many nights where hunger kept me company as I lay in bed, waiting for my parents to return. The sound of my grumbling stomach became a familiar companion, a testament to the hardship we endured while yearning for my parents' return at the doorstep.

I confronted the pervasive discrimination in society due to my gender. My family treated me like a son, but my true interests and inclinations resonated more with girls. This mismatch in expectations led to recurring instances of verbal abuse from both my family and society. As I was growing up, I

lacked a proper understanding of my trans identity, which only added to the weight of my burdens.

At age of 13, I found myself coerced into a marriage with a girl who was 12 years old. This was per our family's customary practices. However, it was only as I matured after getting married that I started to truly comprehend my own gender identity. After four years, my spouse and I hadn't been able to conceive a child, which led to suspicions within the community where I was residing. I was told, 'You're not man, you have no ability to produce a child.' Fingers of blame were pointed towards my wife as well.

When I was 16, we had our first child. Looking back at those initial stages of my marriage, I recall the internal questioning I grappled with regarding my gender identity.

As the years went by, and I became an older teenager, I underwent behavior changes that didn't align with my external self. I gathered the courage to confide in my mother, admitting that I didn't feel attracted to my wife, that I liked wearing makeup and female clothing, and that my body language was same as women. In response, she urged me to keep my gender identity a secret.

By the time I was in my twenties, the truth gradually unfolded, revealing my reality to both family and society. When my father discovered my truth, he reacted with physical aggression, subjecting me to numerous instances of violence.



My wife did not know about my gender identity. After she found out, she did not disclose my identity to her family or our village society. For Muslim women, divorce was seen as disobeying the husband, which meant disobeying God.

I ventured away from my village into Kathmandu. I spent seven weeks there. My wife was left at home. But within a year, my father fell ill and I had to return to the village that had cast me out. Back home, I found myself entangled in a marriage I couldn't dissolve. Though I had more children by then, I still loved my identity. I also had another partner in the same village, and wanted to keep this relationship.

Various factors kept me from ending my relationship with my wife. When I was paralyzed for two or three years, my wife took care of me. There was love between us. She became my support.

The outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic compounded my challenges as a trans woman because I was publicly known as transgender. I became jobless. My citizenship card had my name as a male,

and this created a challenge when seeking or receiving COVID relief from NGOs and the government. My identity made me vulnerable, subjecting me to further victimization during the pandemic.

My wife and I battled to make ends meet during the pandemic. What stung the most was the lack of support from both NGOs and local government agencies, and even our neighbors. Their lack of assistance and understanding stemmed from society's rigid definitions of gender. Their ignorance and absence of empathy made my already difficult financial circumstances worse, fostering sadness, hopelessness, and despair. Gradually, this led me down the path of depression.

Approaching the latter half of my life after enduring various kinds of discrimination, I struggle to navigate a world where legal protection is elusive. If I knew the law, I would have sought legal recourse for the discrimination against the people of my community. There was no agency to voice our concerns and bring complaints of violence.

Caste, gender and economic disparities have long been the hurdles in my life journey. If someone is committed to eradicating poverty from their life, barriers should not exist due to one's identity. The government should not differentiate which marginalized communities receive financial assistance. My plea to the government is to foster an inclusive environment where all members of society can thrive regardless of their backgrounds.

Being a Muslim from the Madhesi community, I'm an ethnic minority in Nepal. My family and I have faced numerous challenges in ensuring our family's survival. Due to my family's deeply rooted religious beliefs, I have faced considerable challenges throughout my 68 years as a transgender woman.

LOST IN THE SHADOWS: THE GOVERNMENT THAT ABANDONED ITS PEOPLE



Chhotkanu Chaudary

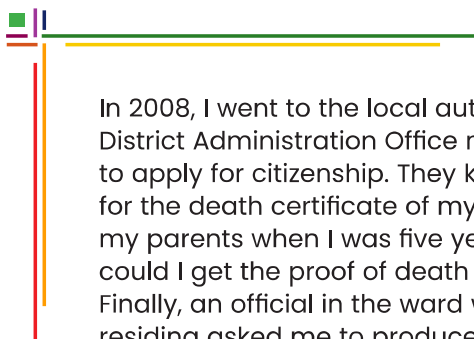
My name is Chhotkanu Chaudary. I have crossed 70 years of age. Both of my parents were from Bardiya (western Nepal). They passed away during my childhood when I could barely speak and I was raised by *sahujan* (master, landlord). My older brother and I grew up as servants in that household and it pains me to recall those early days without the protection of my parents. I can only recall deep sorrow, a life filled with hunger and thirst. At the time, it was common for people in my community from the far west to be employed in a master's field. I grew up working in the master's field and home.

I was born a boy, assigned male at birth, but I knew that I wasn't a man and when I was entering adolescence, around age 12, I started discovering myself through experiences of being a dancer at ceremonies, where I dressed up and wore make up. It was a tradition of the Chaudary family for males to wear female clothes for dancing. It's called *Nachaniya* dance tradition. I disclosed my identity to the *sahujan* and to my brother and it was accepted. There were no organizations at the time where I could get guidance on gender identity and sexuality. So, being a dancer helped me understand and embrace my identity as a third-gender woman. I would regularly dress in *lungi* (printed fabric worn like a sarong, mostly by men) and wear a *dupatta* (long shawl/scarf that covers head and shoulders, worn by women), so not completely male or female attire, it was both. Other workers for the *sahujan* did make fun of me. They called me *mehera*, which meant 'man's face and wearing women's clothes.'

At age 35 I got liberated from the master's clutches, and my brother and I moved to the Kailali District in the Far Western Province of Nepal. I got to know about programs organized by community based organizations like Indreni Srijanshil Samaj and Mitini Nepal. Another third gender woman from my village in Bardiya helped me find these organizations in Kailali. Individuals in these organizations were my mentors. Gradually, I learned about transgender rights to citizenship and dignified life. I started speaking and advocating for the rights of gender and sexual minorities.

Over the years, I have seen a slight acceptance of LGBTI community by Nepali society. But the senior citizens who are gender and sexual minorities are still facing many problems. They are deprived of various government services and facilities. They face loneliness, poor economic conditions, and a lack of caregivers. This has also been my experience.

During COVID-19, my livelihood completely stopped. I used to make *dhakiya* and *tokari* (baskets for storing fruits and vegetables). During the pandemic, physical movement was restricted and the market was not open so I could not sell my baskets. Yet I didn't receive any help from the state because I don't have citizenship certificate. I was also deprived of the COVID-19 vaccine because I didn't have a citizenship certificate with me. (Citizenship certificates serve as identity cards and have to be presented to receive the COVID vaccine.)



In 2008, I went to the local authorities and the District Administration Office nearly five times to apply for citizenship. They kept asking me for the death certificate of my parents. I lost my parents when I was five years old. Where could I get the proof of death registration? Finally, an official in the ward where I was residing asked me to produce five witnesses. However, to my distress, no one dared to help me given that I was transgender.


Even though I was born in this country, I am not recognized by the state. At age 70, I am stateless. Other citizens my age are receiving old age allowance and they were a priority for COVID-19 vaccination, except for me.

Due to the prejudice of people who have reached the level of governance in Nepal, proper identification based on sexual and gender identity has not yet been possible. Citizens of sexual and gender minority communities have the bitter experience of being rejected by the state that should act like a guardian to all. There are many citizens from gender and sexual minority communities who spend their entire lives not being properly recognized by the state. They do not enjoy the state's protection.

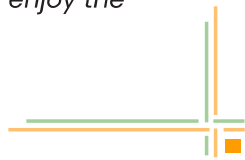
In my case, after so many ups and downs and struggles, my dream of getting Nepali citizenship was fulfilled only recently on 23 April 2023. With the help of Mitini Nepal, the official in Bhajani Municipality Ward No. 1 (in Sudurpashchim Province), Dharmendra Shrestha (ward chair in Ward 1, Kailali District), and Ekata Samaj (organization for landless, unhoused, and informally housed women) I acquired my citizenship based on Article 12 of the Constitution of Nepal, which provides the right to citizenship based on lineage of mother and father (descent). My neighbors from Ward 1 were my five witnesses. They were from LGBT and non-LGBT communities. Two of them were transgender women. Initially it was very hard but Ekata Samaj and Mitini told them that I am completely alone and needed help. The witnesses' contribution was key. Without them I would not have received my citizenship.

With citizenship, I am beginning my new life.

Postscript: In 2008, Nepal's 240-year old monarchy was abolished, a constituent assembly was elected, and Nepal was declared a federal democratic nation.



There are many citizens from gender and sexual minority communities who spend their entire lives not being properly recognized by the state. They do not enjoy the state's protection.



THE STATE THAT STOLE HAPPINESS



Milan (Dhan Kumari) Bastola

I am Milan (Dhan Kumari) Bastola and I am 52 years old. I belong to the sexual and gender minority community here in Nepal. I believe I'm one of those who truly knows how to live life to the fullest. Sometimes, though, others might not perceive that I'm genuinely content with my life.

When I was born, I was assigned female, but I didn't feel like that was truly who I was. By the time I was 10, I started identifying as a boy instead of a girl. Of course, this decision wasn't well-received by society, and I faced a lot of criticism. However, I was fortunate that my family stood by me and didn't create any issues, which definitely made my life a bit easier. With their support, I began to explore my gender identity. I strongly believe that the family plays a vital role in social validation, it's where societal norms are first shaped.

I never had to defend my gender identity against society since my family embraced my identity completely. This support allowed me to live my life on my terms, free from any external pressures.

Then I met someone within the gender and sexual minority community whom I fell deeply in love with. The feeling was mutual, and we began our relationship. However, societal voices of disapproval began to surface despite our happiness. Thankfully, both our

families stood by us, and with their support, we decided to take our relationship to the next level and had a ritual marriage.

My partner, Nirmala Bastola, took care of our home, while I worked to provide for us. This marked the beginning of a bright new chapter in my life. I acquired my driver's license and operated a MagicBus (a transport and livelihood program that helps disadvantaged children and youth to get to school and gain employable skills). My partner and I built our livelihood. In time, we decided to expand our family by adopting a daughter. She's now 14 years old and attends school, and our entire family provides her with love and care. But in Nepal, there's no legal recognition for children adopted by sexual and gender minorities. My identification card says I'm female but I'm a transman. My marriage with Nirmala is not legally recognized. So, unlike heterosexual parents, I can't give my child my name as her family name. Our adoption has no legal recognition. Also, our daughter's access to her birth certificate is suspended because her (birth) parents did not want the child and never registered her birth. We've been struggling to obtain a birth certificate for our daughter. We've filed complaints with the Bharatpur Metropolitan Municipality, Chitawan (southwestern region of Bagmati Province) but we are only acknowledged as legal guardians not parents.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, we faced financial difficulties, which included struggling to cover our daughter's tuition fees and maintain our household. I couldn't ply the bus because of the lockdowns and my income was affected. It was the sole source of income for my family. Fortunately, with the assistance of a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Woman Act Nepal, which provided relief packages including food items, we managed to navigate the pandemic without facing significant hardship.

I acknowledge that my life has been somewhat smoother due to the support of my family and, eventually, society regarding my transgender identity. Nonetheless, a shadow of darkness hangs over my life due to discriminatory laws targeting my gender identity. The constant worry about our daughter's future torments us day and night. Nirjala and I fear that once we're no longer around, she won't have rightful claims to our ancestral property, and she might not receive the necessary state protection.

Our parents and relatives have accepted our marriage, our friends and community have accepted us as a family, yet the state fails to. My partner and I feel that we are discriminated against because we belong to the gender and sexual minority community. We don't understand how we would be a burden to the state if same sex marriage is legally recognized. We demand that the state quickly enact laws for the recognition and rights of gender and sexual minority communities.

In Nepal, there's no legal recognition for children adopted by sexual and gender minorities. My identification card says I'm female but I'm a transman. My marriage with Nirjala is not legally recognized. So, unlike heterosexual parents, I can't give my child my name as her family name. Our adoption has no legal recognition.

SILENCED VOICES: THE GOVERNMENT'S NEGLIGENCE AND ITS CITIZENS' CONCERNS

Pannalal Chaudhary



My name is Pannalal Chaudhary from Sunsari (Koshi Province, eastern Nepal). I've crossed the threshold of 70 years and belong to Nepal's gender and sexual minority communities. Gender and sexual minority communities in Nepal are not safe. They are not safe in their homes, not accepted by society, didn't have access to the COVID-19 vaccine, and can't receive the senior citizen allowance. I am one of these folks.

In Nepal, the government used to give an elderly allowance every month to senior citizens above 70 years of age. A year ago, the government reduced the eligibility age to 68. This was to influence the voters before the general election in 2079 BS (April 2022). It is a bitter reality that the politics of old age allowance, which started in Nepal in 2051 BS (April 1994), is used before every general election.

The old age allowance used to be 100 rupees per month in 1994, and today it has been increased to 4000 rupees per month (less than 31 US dollars by today's exchange rate). The old age allowance has helped make life easier for many older people in Nepal. For me, the old age allowance resembles the distant moon in the sky, an elusive hope.

My citizenship identifies me with the male gender and I've persistently reached out to the relevant authorities, advocating for official documents that reflect my true gender identity, which is transgender woman. It's disheartening to note that while other women

of my age are eligible to receive an old age allowance, I've been left out of this support system. The disparity of this treatment is a poignant reminder of the uphill battle that still exists for recognition and equality.

My journey began when I was assigned male at birth. I lost my mother when I was just six months old, leaving me in the care of my grandmother. The loss continued, as my father passed away, when I was merely eight years old.

At eight years old, I was pushed into a marriage. At that tender age, the impact of this union wasn't immediately felt. Before the marriage, I used to play with the girl who became my wife and bathe in front of her. I didn't know the meaning of wife. As time passed and I matured, I became acutely aware of my gender identity. I found myself lacking any attraction towards my wife. I kept my gender identity secret from her. After she came to know about my identity, my wife did not come close to me. However, due to family and societal pressure, we had one male child finally. Even after becoming a parent, my sense of identity remained unaltered. Consequently, it was inevitable that my marriage would be profoundly affected. My wife and son left. We lived in the same courtyard but I stayed in a separate place, a different room. My son used to refer to me as father but when he was 12 or 13 years old, he found out about the *natuwa* identity, and he became angry. He stopped talking to me until now. (*Natuwa* was a Nepali term for men who

wear female attire and make-up to perform dances in wedding, birthday and other ceremonies. The term was replaced with meti which referred to transfeminine persons.)

At 23, I left my ancestral family home and embarked on a journey to a distant village called Rupani in Saptari District, Madhesh Province. There, I worked as a day laborer for 12 years. After a lengthy absence, I returned to my hometown. However, my homecoming wasn't met with warmth. The village society now held a clear understanding that I belonged to the gender and sexual minority community. People called me natuwa. There were two or three people in my neighborhood also known as natuwa. At the time they were not open as trans women. Now they are.

I chose to stand independently and embrace my affirmed gender identity rather than succumb to family pressure. I introduced myself as a transwoman, embracing my true self. But my family and the society around me consistently reminded me of my assigned male birth identity. Their refusal to accept me as I am, led to my isolation. Yet, throughout all these trials, my resilience remained unbroken. I held onto my courage and continued to navigate the challenges of this society.

Now, at age 70, my age beats me down. My body seeks rest. I have been living as a single transwoman for a long time. I have faced ten rejections of my application for old age allowance from various government offices. I didn't know of any organization that could help me with the application. The government has guidelines to bring a family member with you. I asked for help from my son who is 30 years old now. I asked my relatives for help. But they did not help. So, the ward office said, 'We can't process your application.'

I was not literate. I had no family support. When I went to the ward office, I was not able to advocate for my rights because you have to be very assertive. I was not aware of how to advocate for myself with the ward office. I was not confident.

Then I met J.P. Limbu (who interviewed me for this book and Mitini Nepal's survey). I learned that there is no reason for not getting the senior allowance since I am age eligible and I have a citizenship card. Mitini Nepal



supported me in using my legal documents that identify me as a man to apply for the old age allowance. Mitini asked my elder brother's son to be my family witness.

Just a month ago, I received my senior allowance payment. The allowance is 3,000 rupees per month every four months, total 12,000 rupees a year, which brings some relief to my daily life. The money goes to a bank account.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government provided a sack of rice and other items like oil but it wasn't enough. Mitini Nepal eased my life when I fell ill and couldn't work to sustain myself. They provided cash-based support and food items like lentils, rice, oil, and non-food items like face masks and sanitizer.

My one demand is that Nepal's laws treat gender and sexual minority communities on par with other citizens. There's been a recent increase in human rights organizations dedicated to the causes of gender and sexual minorities in Nepal. This development has empowered the youth within our community with better access to services and rights. But for elders in our community we are still being neglected.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE JOY OF FAMILY EMBRACING MY TRANSGENDER IDENTITY



Rajendra Dhobi

I am Rajendra Dhobi from Banke, Lumbini Province (western Nepal) and I've crossed the age of 56. I belong to the gender and sexual minority communities and have encountered numerous instances of discrimination from both my family and society. During my childhood, I resided with my maternal family in India. Around age 13, I learned about the concept of third gender from a neighbor. This discovery marked the beginning of my journey towards understanding and embracing my identity as a third gender. I didn't share all of this with my family in India. However, as time went on, my evolving behavior caught their attention, and they began to notice subtle changes in me day by day. Fearing that I needed some correction, they sent me back to my house in Nepal. Once I was back home in Nepal, the family decided to arrange a marriage for me with a woman (also of minor age), believing that it would somehow make me conform and behave according to their perception of a responsible son. Despite my reluctance and due to the pressure from my family, I ended up getting married against my will.

After my marriage, I didn't actually live with my wife. I returned to India and began living among members of the gender and sexual minority community. This community became my solace, where I discovered genuine happiness. I supported myself by participating in dance and song performances alongside fellow community members, and I also worked

My family accepted me as long as I fulfilled the responsibilities they associated with a son's role ... from a societal standpoint, I was seen as a man. This included taking care of my five sisters, arranging their marriages, and covering their medical expenses when needed.

as a daily wage laborer, doing laundry. With some savings under my belt, I eventually returned to Nepal.

I didn't spend much time with my wife. While in India, I had fallen in love with a Muslim third-gender man. We had a civil partnership and we lived together. But I felt the need to be honest about my feelings and my gender identity with my family. Following my partner's advice, I started visiting my home (in Nepal) more frequently, and I began providing financial support to my family. My family accepted me as long as I fulfilled the responsibilities they associated with a son's role. This included taking care of my five sisters, arranging their marriages, and covering their medical expenses when needed.



I lived a dual life with my transgender partner for a while. One day my family discovered details about my partner in India. They felt uncomfortable that I was living with a third-gender man there, and they pressured me to end that relationship.

Meanwhile, my transgender partner's family was also pressuring us to dissolve our civil partnership. They did not like us living together without being married. As a part of dissolving our civil partnership, I received a settlement of 190,000 Nepali rupees. The family then compelled me to separate from my partner.

Even though I identified as a third-gender woman within the gender and sexual minority community, I was not public about my identity outside this community. From a societal standpoint, I was seen as a man.

My family pressured me to enter into another marriage with a woman. It was uncomfortable for me. A new chapter in my life began. My (second) wife stood by me and supported me wholeheartedly after learning the truth about my identity. She chose to spend her life with me despite the challenges. This decision led to the growth of our family, resulting in us having two sons and two daughters. I remained dedicated to fulfilling my responsibilities as father and husband. My wife and her family showed unconditional acceptance towards my identity.

I now no longer feel the need to conceal my true identity. It's truly heartening that

some individuals even address me using my preferred pronouns, and this fills me with a sense of pride for who I am. My sons address me as their father and their wives who are my daughters-in-law treat me with the respect due to a mother-in-law. In our household, every decision is made collaboratively, with my input and consultation. I'm grateful that when I advocate for the rights of gender and sexual minority communities, my wife and children stand by me without any hesitation. Their unwavering support accompanies me in every step of my journey.

The acceptance I've experienced from my family has significantly contributed to my comfort within society. However, my grievance lies with the state. I yearn for every member of our sexual and gender minority communities to live authentically with their true identity. The state should play a role in ensuring this right for all citizens.

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BARREN LAND: A TALE OF DISCRIMINATION



Raju Bhujel

I came into this world as Raju Bhujel, the third offspring in our family. Much like a stone statue shaped by the relentless strikes of a sculptor, my life's journey, spanning over half a century, has been marked by stumbling at every twist and turn. I've grappled with numerous struggles, from hunger to shouldering the weight of family responsibilities. Despite being initially labeled as a son, my behavior changed.

From medical science I learned that a child typically begins to recognize their gender within the initial three years of life. This means that by the time a child reaches age three, their self-identity begins to take shape.

When I was around seven or eight years old, I chose to dress as a girl. The experience filled me with immense joy, and I returned home brimming with enthusiasm. Sadly, my family's reaction was far from supportive. They yelled and even resorted to physical punishment because they felt I was challenging our family reputation. Despite their disapproval, I continued to secretly wear girl's clothing, finding solace and happiness in doing so. My family held on to the hope that I would conform to traditional male behavior as I grew older.

At age 12, I left home. I stopped going to school. I started working as a daily wage laborer, taking care of cows, buffaloes and goats. This involved feeding them, ensuring they had water, and cutting grass for their

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food. I also helped with household chores in people's homes.

At 16, I left my village. My journey led me to Itahari (eastern Nepal), where I sought solace in the companionship of friends within the gender and sexual minority community. I stayed away from my family for seven or eight years. During this time I worked for Blue Diamond Society (LGBT rights organization in Nepal), doing HIV awareness work. I faced police harassment for distributing condoms. At the time, there was stigma against gender and sexual minority communities, and society was not open to talking about AIDS. As my advocacy work gained momentum, backlash became a recurring theme, and



I was detained by the police on multiple occasions. Despite these challenges, my courage remained unshaken. If anything, these adversities fueled my determination to solidify my identity.

At age 20, I returned to my native village, after hearing the news of my mother's severe illness. My family forcibly arranged a marriage between me and a girl, hoping that this would resolve my situation. My wife was also 20 years old. I opened up to her, revealing my identity as a transgender woman, and to my immense relief, she not only understood but also accepted me for who I am. This acceptance bolstered my self-assurance.

Was her acceptance genuine? She had no choice. She was told by her family, 'It's your fate. You are married to Raju and you have to accept him.' So her acceptance was due to pressure.

I decided to leave my village and bring my wife back with me to Itahari, where we embarked on a new chapter together. However, in Itahari, I faced a dilemma. I couldn't stay with my friends from the gender and sexual minority community. So, I constructed a modest shelter on uncultivated land and settled there with my wife. But there was constant fear of living on public land as the government had the power to uproot us at any time. This uncertainty took a toll on my mental wellbeing. I held on to a single

desire, to reside on a piece of land officially registered in my name.

In Itahari I had a relationship with a young gay man. He would visit me at my home. My wife knew about my relationship with him, but my marriage to her was legally recognized, and we were living together, we were not divorced.

Postscript: Raju passed away on 23 February 2023 from health complications. Raju was 53 years old. She had three adult daughters. The daughters accepted Raju's identity. Raju's widow lives with the youngest daughter. She is worried because the land ownership certificate still has not come through.

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SHATTERED AMBITIONS: WHEN POLITICS KILLED HIS DREAMS



Shila Gurung

I am Shila Gurung and I identify myself as a trans man. I've been living with my partner, Sita K. for a long time. I've been a dedicated warrior in the movement to transform Nepal's governance system. I devoted the prime years of my life to politics, commencing my journey by representing the Nepal Communist Party UML. I began at the grassroots level, working my way up from the youth organization of the UML to eventually becoming a member of the district committee.

I was born in the year 2026 BS (1969), with a burning desire to receive a proper education and contribute to my nation. However, my family's financial situation was far from robust, and it seemed like fulfilling my dreams would be an uphill battle. So, I took matters into my own hands after completing my eighth grade education. I set out to find work to support my family. My quest led me to Bheri Hospital in Nepalgunj, where I took the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife exam, and passed. However, there was a catch. The job at the hospital required me to wear a saree (women's clothing consisting of six or nine yards of woven fabric worn around the body and over a short blouse that bares the midriff). I strongly disagreed because I felt wearing a saree didn't affirm my preferred gender expression. Considering my family's financial hardship, I made the tough decision not to work at the hospital. Instead I decided to work as a teacher for elderly individuals. I also received veterinary training for two years from Nari Vikas Kendra, the Women's Empowerment Center which prepared me to administer medicine and

I started to identify myself as a transgender man. Soon after, I began advocating for the rights of sexual and gender minorities within the UML political party that I belonged to. However, my efforts were met with resistance from many of my colleagues ... those who used to address me as 'Comrade Shila' just the day before, began to distance themselves from me ... I was excluded from higher positions within the party.

vaccinations to cattle in our village, furthering my commitment to both my family and my community.

I planned to take the SLC exam to get my School Level Certificate with the hope of pursuing further studies. Unfortunately, due to the significant gap in my education when I had to drop out of school in tenth grade to financially support my family, my dream of higher education remained unattainable. I thought of joining the Nepal Police. Regrettably, the atmosphere within the police force wasn't conducive for someone like me



who was assigned female at birth but my gender expression aligned more with that of a man. So, I couldn't persist in pursuing this dream.

Given my bold personality and unwavering commitment to fighting injustice in society, I began contemplating a career in politics. Fortunately, my family members were supportive of this decision. In 2063 BS (2006), I started volunteering in the youth organization of the UML Communist Party of Nepal. The party officially granted me membership in 2066 BS (2009).

In 2065 BS (2010), I participated in a program dedicated to advocating for the rights of sexual and gender minority communities. It was at this event that I began to gain insight into my own gender identity and embarked on a journey of self-discovery. Consequently, I started to identify myself as a transgender man. Soon after, I began advocating for the rights of sexual and gender minorities within the UML political party that I belonged to. However, my efforts were met with resistance from many of my colleagues. This marked the beginning of a change in how people treated me. I distinctly remember how those who used to address me as 'Comrade Shila' just the day before, began to distance themselves from me. While no one dared to speak ill of me to my face, I couldn't help but be aware of the gossip circulating behind my back. This discrimination also manifested in the form

of limited opportunities and responsibilities. I was excluded from higher positions within the party. It was disheartening to realize that even within political parties that champion social equality, there is discrimination against sexual and gender minorities. My disillusionment with politics grew. My dream of elevating the voices of sexual and gender minorities to the highest levels of power was shattered.

The beauty of democracy is that citizens can elect their leaders, and people with grievances can expect to be heard by the public. There are periodic elections every five years. To make the country strong and prosperous, the system of government in Nepal was changed in 2015 from single party rule to multi-party federalism. This is the governance system envisioned in the Constitution of Nepal.

The Constitution of Nepal speaks of inclusiveness. If members of sexual and gender minority communities had truly been embraced as envisioned by our Constitution, I believe many individuals from the sexual and gender minority communities would have found their way into Nepal's parliament. Instead, people from this community face humiliation in our society. To put an end to this injustice, I propose that sexual and gender minority communities should be given equal access and inclusion in the political arena. It's high time our voices are heard and our rights are protected.

WEARY YET UNBROKEN: TALE OF RESILIENCE



Siyaram Kori

I am Siyaram Kori from Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City (Lumbini Province). I was born half a century ago in Surji village of Nepalgunj in the Terai region. I am from the Kori community, which belongs to the Madhesi caste, an economically poor community which was often regarded as lower caste. As the eldest son in a family with limited social and economic means, I could not pursue my education to completion.

Human suffering is like a journey from the foothills to the mountains. A person who wishes to stand on the top of the mountain, hoping to find a field is often left disappointed to see only harsh weather on the top. But life cannot offer happiness without offering sadness too.

Since my parents had died, it was my responsibility to take care of my younger brothers. Then came the idea of getting married and settling down. I encountered difficulty in marrying a girl due to my impoverished circumstances. Eventually, the transgender community in my village arranged my wedding to a transgender woman. I lacked any specific skills or formal education and relied on manual labor to make ends meet. There was no attraction between me and my spouse and I wasn't close to her. Not long after our marriage, my wife tragically succumbed to health complications, including heart problems and an AIDS diagnosis.

After pressure from family and society, I got married to another woman. Again, this marriage did not last due to financial hardship.

People in the village society began to make many accusations and they started using abusive words against me, like *nabheda* and *mehera* (negative references in the Madhesi community for persons assigned male at birth who choose female gender expression). I liked women, including third gender women. It was confusing for society.

When I was 35, a third gender woman entered my life. Her name was Biharu Tharu and she was 53 years old. Like me, she also worked as a laborer. We started getting closer. Bihari identified herself as a trans woman. We fell in love with each other. We decided to live together.

By this time, institutions working for the rights of communities like ours had already been established. We received a lot of information about gender and sexual minorities community. We learned about the rights of gender and sexual minorities.

While society at large struggled to comprehend our relationship, for us, it was the sole source of our happiness. In due course, we decided to formalize our commitment to each other, and we tied the knot. We decided not to let the various negative comments of society affect our lives. We, who used to feel



socially rejected earlier, started taking pride in our identities.

I have made my wife a place to live in a small house where we can spend our lives together. The house is on five acres of land in Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City Ward No. 19, Surje Village. We love the house, built with our own hard work. We have found a place to rest after the day's labor.

As we completed 15 years of dedication to each other, both of us became HIV infected. There is no problem in taking HIV medicines as they are available free of cost. Now in the journey of half a century of life, our arms have not run out of strength. We have not lost our self-respect despite many obstacles in life. We are still enjoying hard work. Sweat has become karma and religion. There is no panic and sorrow. We are drunk with happiness.

All our problems came to a head during the COVID-19 pandemic. We struggled to make

ends meet while dealing with health issues. I grew increasingly concerned about our future. Despite being together for 15 years, our marriage has yet to gain validation. My worries multiply as we face the challenges of aging health. What if something were to happen to one of us? In a country like Nepal, where natural calamities occur frequently, how would we access state services as sexual and gender minorities, but more importantly, as a couple? Adding to our concerns, we couldn't legally adopt children, so there is no one to care for us in our old age. These uncertainties weigh heavily on our minds.

We are not aware of any specific laws for senior citizens from sexual and gender minority communities. We haven't heard or seen any other community members accessing services designed for senior citizens. We are actively seeking life protection in our old age. Our hope is that the government will enact the necessary laws and provisions for senior citizens who are sexual and gender minorities. We firmly believe that, just like any other citizens, the people in our communities should also have equal access to government facilities and support.

When I was 35, a third gender woman entered my life ... she was 53 years old ... we fell in love with each other. We decided to live together ... we decided to formalize our commitment to each other, and we tied the knot ... Despite being together for 15 years, our marriage has yet to gain validation ... In a country like Nepal, where natural calamities occur frequently, how would we access state services as sexual and gender minorities, but more importantly, as a couple? Adding to our concerns, we couldn't legally adopt children, so there is no one to care for us in our old age.

SHATTERED LIFE: THE DEVASTATION OF DISCRIMINATION



Sukmaya Magar

I am Sukmaya Magar from Chitwan District (Terai region of Nepal). Voters across the country stood up early in the morning on November 10th 2022 and fulfilled their duty to be citizens. Everyone who stood in the lines had hopes and ambitions. Many politicians had visited each of their homes, each of their fields and offices to give them speeches about hope. They had promised good governance and change.

The politicians before the election appealed to me as well. But over many years, I have yet to see changes and my problems remain the same.

I have crossed more than 50 years of life. I grew up in a middle-class family. As a lesbian, I found kindness from my partner that I hadn't received from society.

I came to know about my sexuality when I was 20 years old, and ever since, I had promised myself that I would never marry a man. I met my partner when I was 18. We worked in a textile factory in Bharatpur Chitwan District. I started living with my partner when I was 20. Both of our families were shocked and started raising questions. People in society thought my partner was *hizara* (eunuch, transgender, or intersex) or *chhakka* (pejorative Nepali term for eunuch) but these words are for males who have feminine gender. My partner was born with female genitals. We were a lesbian couple.

In 2015, for the first time, Nepal's Constitution used the term, sexual and gender minorities. I took part in debates about gender equality and spoke about inclusion. I fought with local authorities. I felt the change in the attitude of common people towards the gender and sexual minority community.

At first our families didn't accept our relationship. However, my partner and I started a grocery shop in Devghat, Tahahun District (Gandaki Province, on the border with Tibet), we looked after cattle, we were independent, and didn't have to ask anyone for money or help. We started providing financial support to our families. Then our families gave us less pressure. My partner and I kept healthy relationship with our families, and did not break our relationship with them. We had faith that our families would accept us. My family slowly began accepting my sexuality, and we reached a point where both family members started accepting our relationship.

I lived together with my partner for two decades. Our business and life were going well. We spent time together working in the shop. We lived like other couples in society. My partner and I used to take part in awareness programs for sexual and gender minorities. We also took part in Gaijatra (Pride parade) in our town. At first we were not aware that sexual and gender minorities should raise their voice and advocate for their rights.

In 2015, for the first time, Nepal's Constitution used the term, sexual and gender minorities. I took part in debates about gender equality and spoke about inclusion. I fought with local authorities. I felt the change in the attitude of common people towards the gender and sexual minority community. An example of that is my family's affection towards gender and sexual minorities in the village.

In 2020, I lost my partner due to jaundice and liver problems. It was as if fate had played a cruel game on me. Losing the most precious person in my life, left me with unbearable pain, and in this pain, my focus dimmed away and I don't know how time went by. My simple life took on a monotonous and helpless rhythm.

During the 45 days before the funeral ritual, my partner's family lived with me. Then my partner's elder sisters seized the property that was in my partner's name. They cut contact with me. I had no evidence to prove our relationship so I could not get the property. I even could not get access to my partner's bank account when my partner was sick and receiving treatment because I was listed as a friend. The bank only wanted a family member. In my partner's culture, there's the Argu ceremony (an important three-day death ritual). I needed money for this too but I couldn't access the money in the bank. I had no legal claim. I could not continue to run the shop alone. I started to face economic hurdles. Soon after, I started to face many health complications. While looking for help with my needs, I came into contact with organizations like Mitini Nepal.

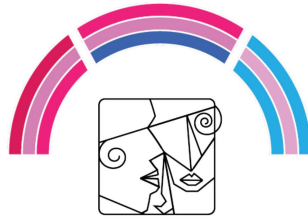
The government, who are supposed to be the guardian of the people, have become oblivious to my problems. Since same-sex marriage is not recognized, I lack legal claims



to property shared with my partner. I am also deprived of the right to receive the single-woman allowance which is accessible to widows in cis-het marriages. And it is not just me, millions of other single people in same-sex relationships have not been provided with their rights. The government should legalize same-sex marriage as soon as possible.

Postscript: Sukmaya shared her story for the first time in an elders' training on public speaking organized by Mitini Nepal in 2022.

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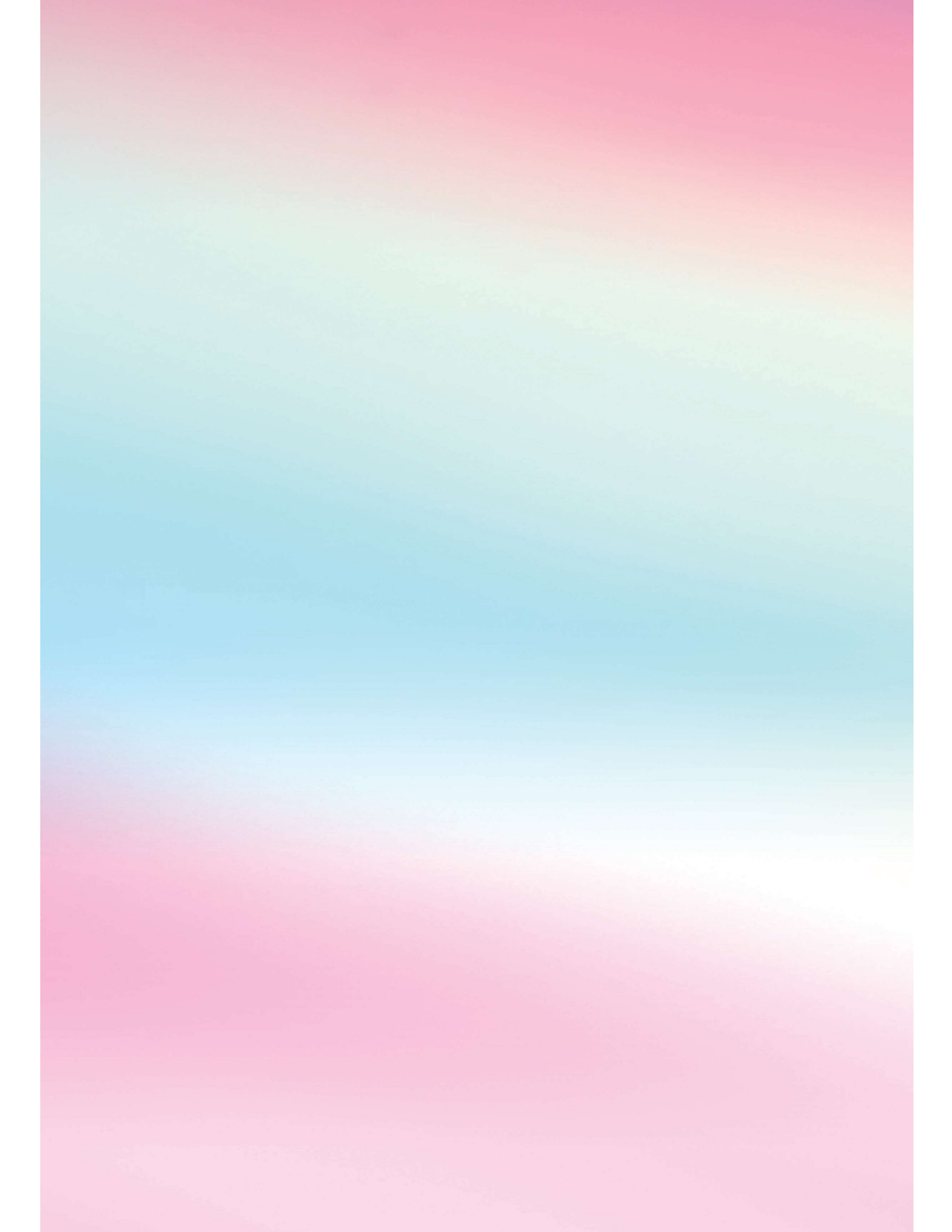
Mitini
N E P A L

Mitini Nepal (MN) is a community-based organization for the rights of people who identify as lesbian, bisexual women, and transgender (LBT). MN was established in 2002 with a vision to build a peaceful, prosperous society where sexual and gender minority communities can live with self-esteem and dignity while enjoying human rights without any discrimination, violence, assault, and fear.

MN was established by the first lesbian couple of Nepal, Laxmi Ghalan and Meera Bajracharya. MN advocates for the access of political, legal, social, economic, and educational rights of LBT people by strengthening coordination, collaboration, networking, and developing mutual understanding among all concerned stakeholders as well as by capacitating excluded and vulnerable LBT individuals in order to create an egalitarian environment for sexual and gender minorities.

Our programs: advocate for equal rights of LBT people through interaction with policymakers and government stakeholders, media and other members of civil society; organize discussion, seminars, workshops, rallies, sit-ins, and press meetings; conduct awareness raising to sensitize community on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) and LGBTI issues through street drama, radio programs, cultural programs, posters, pamphlets, and publications in academic institutions including schools and colleges, community services organizations, parliamentarians, government stakeholders, community police, and media; provide skills development and income generation training to LBT and women in marginalized and poor communities; conduct capacity development such as leadership development, human rights, legal awareness, and other training on sexual and gender rights; provide psychosocial and legal counseling services to LBT people; and conduct qualitative and quantitative research on LBT women's issues including challenges and also document their stories as narratives.

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