



# HOW TO ENGAGE WITH THE 2030 AGENDA ON LGBTI ISSUES

## SIMPLE TIPS FOR ACTIVISTS

Compiled on the basis of positive examples of civil society  
engagement in six countries in 2019 and 2020



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# INTRODUCTION

## Background

In 2015, Member States of the United Nations reaffirmed their commitment to economic, social, and environmental development by adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>1</sup> Building on the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and further complementing them, Member States agreed upon 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are broader in scope and include newly emerging themes, such as access to water and sanitation, safe cities, responsible consumption and production, and others.<sup>2</sup> As part of the 2030 Agenda, Member States committed to “leave no one behind,” and also to “reach the furthest behind first.”<sup>3</sup>

Each year, Member States volunteer to report on the implementation of the SDGs, by conducting a Voluntary National Review (VNR) that highlights successes and difficulties. States can share the findings of their VNR at the annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). Civil society is encouraged to share its own findings in ‘spotlight reports’.<sup>4</sup>

## Rationale for this publication

In 2017 and 2018, MPact published two summary reports, which examined the inclusion of HIV-related data and topics in the VNR reports and civil society spotlight reports.<sup>5</sup> MPact found that VNRs and spotlight reports covered HIV-related content to quite a limited extent. Between 2018-2020, reporting on both HIV and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex (LGBTI) issues, has increased and improved, in both types of reports. The 2019 establishment of the LGBTI Stakeholder Group<sup>6</sup> as one of the now 21 Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS), further increased the visibility of LGBTI issues. In 2020, MPact decided to document positive examples of civil society engagement on LGBTI issues, specifically focusing on 2019 and 2020. Some of the examples come from the work of MPact’s partners.

<sup>1</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, A/RES/70/1, UN General Assembly, October 2015. [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E)

<sup>2</sup> Using Voluntary National Reviews to keep HIV on the global health and development agenda: a 2018 review. MPact. March 2019. <https://mpactglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HIV-in-the-2018-VNRs.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Resolution A/RES/70/1, op.cit., para 89 and Getting on Track in Agenda 2020. MPact. 2018. <https://mpactglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Getting-on-Track-in-Agenda-2030.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> LGBTI Stakeholder Group. <https://www.lgbtistakeholdergroup.org/about-us/>

Even though the implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda is a State-driven process, it establishes that all these steps need to be a collaborative effort. States should involve a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society, academia, and others, through implementation, review, and follow-up, and particularly as part of their Voluntary National Review (VNR).

*“It is “we the peoples” who are embarking today on the road to 2030. Our journey will involve Governments as well as parliaments, the United Nations system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community – and all people. Millions have already engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people – and this, we believe, will ensure its success.”<sup>7</sup> - 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

This publication aims to encourage activists and organisations, who work on LGBTI issues, to participate in the process of achieving the goals laid down in the 2030 Agenda. Activists can do this by monitoring implementation at the national level with the help of the targets and indicators of each of the 17 SDGs,<sup>8</sup> participating in consultations with the government and other key stakeholders, raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda in their respective communities, reporting on the achievements and challenges in spotlight reports, attending regional fora<sup>9</sup> or the annual HLPF to amplify their voice. While some States do report on LGBTI people’s situation in the context of development already, the work of activists and organisations in making our communities visible is indispensable.

**Want to know more how the SDGs are relevant for LGBTI communities?  
See the list of useful resources at the end of this report!**

<sup>7</sup> Resolution A/RES/70/1, op. cit., para 52.

<sup>8</sup> See the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development website for a comprehensive list of all goals, targets, and indicators. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>9</sup> Regional fora take place each year, in Africa, the Arab World, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, convened by the five UN Regional Commissions. The meetings aim to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, by preparing regional input for the upcoming HLPF, identifying regional trends, and sharing best practices. Civil society can share their priorities, coordinate among themselves, and also host side events. For more information, see: <https://www.uneca.org/>, <https://www.unescwa.org/>, <https://www.unescap.org/>, <https://unece.org/>, and <https://www.cepal.org/>.

MPact hopes that this compilation will give examples and good practices to inspire other activists and organisations to engage and increase the visibility of LGBTI people in the context of the Agenda 2030. We hope that ultimately, it will help ensure that **‘no one is left behind’**.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



## Methodology

In November 2020, MPact conducted interviews with civil society representatives in Brazil, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Malaysia, and North Macedonia.<sup>10</sup> The spotlight report on Indonesia was written in 2019 and those on Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Malaysia, and North Macedonia in 2020. The Brazilian civil society coalition wrote a report in both years. These six countries were selected because the respective reports were some of the best examples of linking LGBTI issues with the SDGs, and/or because the engagement was unique in its forms or impact.



MPact is aware of other recent outstanding spotlight reports focusing on LGBTI issues, including on Azerbaijan, Myanmar, Ukraine, Zimbabwe, and other countries, but chose to focus on a small number of examples this time. Lastly, MPact carried out desk research to learn about the number of VNRs covering HIV-related data and LGBTI issues in 2020, but did not conduct a thorough analysis of their scope, like in 2018 and 2019.

## Spotlight reports\* on LGBTI issues in 2019-2020

[Indonesia, 2019](#)

[Ukraine, 2019](#)

[Tanzania, 2019](#)

[Kyrgyzstan, 2020](#)

[Myanmar, 2020](#)

[North Macedonia, 2020](#)

[Malawi, 2020](#)

[Brazil, 2017-2020](#)

\*NB some spotlight reports are not available online and were not included in this list

## Trends of engagement on HIV and LGBTI issues

Figure 1. HIV Related Data and Topics in the VNRs (2016-2021)

	Total no. of VNRs	No. of VNRs including HIV	%
2016**	22	--	--
2017	43	32	<b>74%</b>
2018	46	28	<b>61%</b>
2019**	51	--	--
2020	47	37	<b>78%</b>

••MPact did not collect data on HIV in the 2016 and 2019 VNRs

In 2018, roughly a dozen of the 46 VNRs mentioned LGBT/LGBTI/etc. (terms varied) or sexual orientation and gender identity. In 2020, 18 of the 47 VNRs mentioned LGBTI issues to some extent, which marks a slow, but tangible increase.

# TIPS FOR ACTIVISTS

## Tips for using the 2030 Agenda

### 1 Use the 2030 Agenda as yet another entry point to engage with the government!

- Activists in North Macedonia and Malawi have found that utilising the UN system was their most effective way to engage the government on LGBTI issues. As part of the human rights system, they have engaged with the Universal Periodic Review and a number of UN Treaty bodies, or in Malawi's case, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights at the regional level. They found the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development a new international tool that brings their governments' attention to LGBTI issues.
- In Malaysia, where LGBT people are criminalised, activists were sceptical about engaging with the government through the UN human rights framework. Malaysia has only ratified three of the nine core human rights treaties, which has made it difficult for activists to engage with the human rights system.<sup>10</sup> Malaysia however committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda, so this avenue seemed to be more promising.

### 2

### Build on the government's commitment to the 2030 Agenda!

- The government of North Macedonia had dedicated considerable resources towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but without meaningful inclusion of LGBTI issues. Activists saw the government's commitment as an opportunity to build on, and worked to increase its awareness of the need to include LGBTI people in all phases of the implementation process. During the election year in 2020, the government also seemed to be eager to publicly show its commitment, which was yet another incentive for activists to engage them.
- Activists in Kyrgyzstan spoke of the same experience. The SDGs had increasingly become part of the government's agenda and activists thought it was time to draw more attention to the situation and needs of LGBTI people in the context of development.

<sup>10</sup> The Core International Human Rights Instruments and their monitoring bodies, UN OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/coreinstruments.aspx>.



### 3 Learn to speak the development language!

- At first, activists in Kyrgyzstan found it hard to use the development language in their report, which focuses on inclusion, participation, human potential, dignity, and contributions. These concepts depart from the usual language of rights, obligations, and violations in the human rights system. However, the activists realised that engaging with the development framework was also an opportunity to use a different approach and focus on building a 'collaborative partnership' with them.

**“I was used to writing about how everything was bad. It was actually very difficult for me to use this new language! But now, I think it is actually easier, not only for the report, but for advocacy - that when you are talking to government representatives, you don't just criticize them, but try to find solutions together.” - Nadira Masiumova, Kyrgyz Indigo, Kyrgyzstan**

### 4 Know that you should be consulted!

- In both Indonesia and Kyrgyzstan, the government failed to involve organisations focusing on LGBTI issues, HIV/AIDS and key populations, in their consultation. As a creative response, Kyrgyz activists turned up at consultations uninvited. Responding to the lack of inclusion, Arvi in Indonesia, wrote a spotlight report to highlight key civil society concerns. In North Macedonia, the government sent out a questionnaire to NGOs in the spring before the 2020 HLPF, but having little understanding of the process, very few groups answered at first. In the end, activists decided to engage through publishing their own report and attending the HLPF (virtually). The regional organisation ERA supported them in the process, including by sharing its experiences of other countries' VNRs, and helped civil society in North Macedonia make their engagement strategic.



**Pictured:** Nadira Masiumova (Kyrgyz Indigo), delivering a statement on Kyrgyzstan at the 2020 HLPF

## 5 Take up space!

- Across the board, activists agreed about the importance of taking up space to direct attention to LGBTI issues whenever and wherever possible. They also agreed that often, it is activists who need to carve out new spaces and that we cannot afford to wait to be invited.

*“I think it is time that we take these opportunities to talk about minority rights in international spaces. This is the only way to ensure that those spaces will recognise the issues we advocate for.”*

*- Emma Kalea, Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP), Malawi*

*“It is on us, LGBTI activists and human rights defenders, to make sure that LGBTI issues are on the agenda in the development framework. If we don't do it, nobody will.”*

*- Biljana Ginova, LGBTIQ human rights defender, North Macedonia*

## 6 Build on the ‘leave no one behind’ principle!

- The guiding principle of the 2030 Agenda is to ‘leave no one behind’. The principle was a core element in each spotlight report that activists built on and used it as an argument.

*“The principle of ‘no one left behind’ should be highlighted all the time. It's not just an empathy phrase! For instance, you can approach the government if they are conducting a VNR and say “We don't want to be left behind, what are you going to do about that?” You should use the language of the 2030 Agenda to push them.” - Vuk Raičević, ERA*

## 7 Use HIV as an entry point!

- While LGBTI people are assumed to be included throughout each of the SDGs, SDG 3 on Health and well-being provides a specific entry point for some subgroups. SDG3.3.1. on Health and well-being contains an explicit reference to 'key populations', including men who have sex with men (MSM) and trans people, by establishing that by 2030, the AIDS epidemics shall be ended, and that this shall be measured "by the number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations". In Malawi, where same-sex relations are criminalised, activists have used HIV as an entry point to draw attention to the situation of trans people and MSM.

*“The HIV angle opens a door for us. After submitting our report, a government representative called me and it was quite easy to defend our report, because we documented a lot of issues on HIV in it. And the National HIV Policy is very supportive of MSM and trans issues, but this is only the case in regard to HIV interventions. Malawi is a very conservative country. To achieve that someone is accepted in the mosque or a church, we also use the HIV angle. So we basically use it to penetrate the system.”*  
- Emma Kalea, CEDEP, Malawi

## 8 Keep relying on the human rights framework!

*“We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination [...] The new Agenda is guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including full respect for international law. It is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights treaties [...]” The 2030 Agenda*

- The 2030 Agenda affirms that human rights are at its core, and that development and human rights are interconnected and interdependent. As such, activists can use their knowledge and expertise on human rights in their engagement with the development framework. The goals of human rights instruments and the 2030 Agenda are also interconnected, albeit their language and approach fundamentally different.

**Want to know more about how each SDG relates to human rights instruments?  
Check out the [SDG - Human Rights Data Explorer](#) of the  
Danish Institute for Human Rights**

## Tips for sustainable engagement

### 9 Plan the work and take action!

- Urging governments to ensure the inclusion of LGBTI people in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda should increasingly be part of the everyday work of LGBTI organisations. Some elements of engagement, such as participating in VNR consultations, writing a spotlight report, or attending the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) can be easily planned ahead.

*“Take your time and plan, way in advance. Whether your state is reporting and when the HLPF takes place, are known in advance. Prepare a communications plan on how to pressure the state. For instance, you can approach them directly and say, you’re conducting a VNR next year, what are you doing and when are you meeting us? Do not wait around for communication from the government, UN offices, or someone else. Take action by yourself, and go straight to your country!” - Vuk Raičević, ERA*

- At the time of the interviews in November 2020, all activists knew already whether their countries were undertaking a VNR in 2021. They had a rough timeline in mind for their engagement, if they planned to submit another report. In Brazil, for instance, the Civil Society Working Group for the Agenda 2030 (GTSC A2030), led by Gestos, publishes a report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda each year, regardless of whether Brazil is conducting a VNR that year, or not, so it is always part of their annual work plan.

### 10 Monitor implementation on an ongoing basis!



- The Brazilian NGO coalition has published a spotlight report each year, since 2017 (pictured left). The GTSC A2030 made this decision partly to ensure that the 2017 report served as a baseline, to which they can easily compare data from each consecutive year. Documenting progress and regression makes up the collective memory of the coalition. In addition, the coalition continues their monitoring work throughout the work. The spotlight report is not an isolated output, but one part of year-long engagement with the government and other stakeholders.

## 11 Build on the political processes in your country!

- The Brazilian coalition has used its ongoing monitoring work to launch a visible campaign in the lead-up to the 2020 municipal elections. Similarly, in North Macedonia, activists made much use of the 2020 election year. The government was eager to showcase its implementation efforts, and interestingly, it was scheduled to present its 2020 VNR on the very day of the elections.

*“Particularly in the months before the elections, they would go out and take photos with colourful banners, saying how much they are dedicated to the SDGs. They did a lot of these PR actions before the election. So that was a moment for us to challenge them on LGBTI issues!”*

*- Biljana Ginova, LGBTIQ human rights defender, North Macedonia*

- Activists who worked on a spotlight report in 2020, all reported on their government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the extent to which policies and measures considered, included, and protected LGBTI people. In Indonesia, for instance, Free and Equal Rights submitted a report to the Jakarta SDGs Secretariat, on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trans people specifically. This report will be synthesized by Indonesia’s National SDGs Secretariat.

## 12 Rely on NGOs with knowledge and infrastructure!

- Several activists mentioned that they learned about the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs through training events organised by other NGOs. The activists in Malaysia, North Macedonia, and Kyrgyzstan all participated in RFSL’s [Rainbow Advocacy Program](#) and those in Indonesia, Malawi, and Kyrgyzstan attended MPact’s webinars. Those in Malawi, Indonesia, and Kyrgyzstan received hands-on support with the writing process from [MPact](#) and/or RFSL. Those attending the HLPF (in person or in 2020 virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic), collaborated with some of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders and NGOs such as [COC](#), [Outright](#), or [RFSL](#) working in the HLPF space. For safety reasons, activists in Malaysia teamed up with the Asia-Pacific Transgender Network ([APTN](#)), who took on the responsibility of officially publishing the report.

## 13 Build on the political processes in your country!

- The 2030 Agenda is slowly, but surely becoming part of the knowledge base of LGBTI organisations and activists. A growing number of training events, courses, webinars, and publications on the intersection of the SDGs and LGBTI issues are there to support organisations in incorporating development in their national advocacy (see resource list at the end of this publication). Yet, the number of activists with knowledge and expertise in a given country is still very scarce. To ensure that engagement continues to grow and remains sustainable, it is important that the knowledge and skills to engage with the 2030 Agenda are passed on.

*“I contacted the leading [trans] activists in Malaysia, had a meeting with them and told them what the SDGs were and why we wanted to write a spotlight report. Out of 20, maybe 10 agreed. But 10 is better than nothing! So we decided to commit to participating. During our first meeting, I introduced the SDGs, and we read out all the goals and targets, and everyone raised their issues and concerns.”*

*- Y, member of a community based organisation, Malaysia*

## Tips for writing a spotlight report

### 14 You don't have to start from scratch... recycle!

- Most activists were more familiar with the international and regional human rights frameworks and language, and had already engaged with those mechanisms. Across the board, activists reported that they recycled their reports. For instance, civil society in North Macedonia and Indonesia used their earlier shadow reports to UN Treaty bodies to feed into their spotlight reports. CEDEP used its spotlight report to later draft a parallel report in the UPR process and the Indonesian spotlight report was submitted to the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. Often, the hardest step was to write the first report. When that was done, activists had to adjust the language so it fits the development framework, retaylor the thematic scope, and ensure that the contents are up-to-date.
- Activists also cited a multitude of resources in their spotlight reports, including reports by the government, equality bodies, or civil society organisations. They all agreed about the importance of using a wide range of data and information that is already out there, is credible and reliable.



- The Brazilian civil society coalition is a huge collaborative effort, which brought together 105 experts and 64 organisations in 2020. The report is then cited, used, referenced, and quoted throughout the year. It is a baseline compilation that stakeholders can make use of.

*“For the community and the government at this moment, this is the only resource where you can find all the data in relation to all SDGs in the country. We also use infographics and present the information in a simple way. We cut the analysis, and just focus on the data. So people have used it in many different ways. If they need to write a project proposal, they open the report, and they just take the data they need on a given topic. And also, I’ve been to events where people were citing our report and I didn’t even know them. It was amazing!” - Alessandra Nilo, GESTOS, Brazil*

## 15 Build on the political processes in your country!

*“At the first meeting, we decided that we will go with a broad approach and include all the SDGs we thought were relevant. We didn’t focus on just one issue or one subgroup, but made it as comprehensive as possible. We even extended the scope as we kept receiving more data.”*

*- Biljana Ginova, LGBTIQ human rights defender, North Macedonia*

- The number of SDGs covered by the six spotlight reports ranged from two (Indonesia) to 17 (Brazil). The first Brazilian spotlight report initially covered seven SDGs and grew to cover them all from 2018 onwards. ‘The more, the merrier’ however, does not apply to spotlight reporting as a blanket rule. If only two SDGs are relevant for an organisation/coalition’s work or if they only have capacity to meaningfully cover those two, that is the right way to go. The scope of the report may also depend on what makes most sense in terms of national level advocacy at the time. If the government is working on comprehensive healthcare reform, or a gender equality action plan, it makes sense to prioritise covering SDG 3 on Health and well-being and SDG 5 on Gender equality.

- There are several other factors that can influence what thematic scope a spotlight report will or should have. In Brazil, the broad civil society coalition has covered all 17 SGDs since 2018. Instead of focusing on one theme or population, the coalition report is comprehensive, intersectional, and cross-sectional. Thematic experts, for instance, on HIV/AIDS or LGBTI issues, are tasked to review the entire report and add their inputs throughout. In Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz Indigo decided to be part of a broader coalition report, but also write a standalone spotlight report on LGBT+ inclusion. The Malaysian activists saw a great need to produce a trans-focused spotlight report that the community can then use in the years to come. Each of these approaches have their own advantages and challenges, and are all legitimate and justified.

*“I was talking to a fellow activist from Azerbaijan, who wrote a spotlight report on LGBTI issues only. I read it and I just understood the importance of raising just the issues of LGBTI people, separately. Their report gave me affirmation that it’s OK to just focus on our community and we have a lot of data to use.” - Nadira Masiumova, Kyrgyz Indigo, Kyrgyzstan*

## 16 Rely on your own expertise!

- Oftentimes, writing a report or speaking before an international audience may be intimidating, but those who had engaged with international or regional human rights mechanisms before, knew that their role was to bring the lived experiences of LGBTI people closer to a high-level audience.

*“I knew we needed a report on trans people’s experiences, one that shows our issues and takes up the recommendations of our communities. But I thought I could not do it or that the report wouldn’t turn out to be great. But those around me encouraged me and when the report was done and I held the printed booklet in my hand, it was my proudest moment!”  
- Y, member of a community based organisation, Malaysia*

*“Sometimes local activists don’t think they [have the knowledge and skills to engage]. But they are the ones who know everything about their communities. No one knows better what’s happening on the ground, better than you. So you should put it all on paper. Activists should be encouraged and given credit for the work they are already doing.” - Vuk Raičević, ERA*

## 17 Complement the information provided by the government's VNR!

- Regardless of whether the government involved you in its pre-VNR consultations, spotlight reports can always fill in the gaps in what the State is presenting in its report and at the HLPF.

*“The government only invited NGOs who were supportive of them, so we didn't get invited either in 2019 or this time. But we did a lot of work to gather the data from the grassroots level. Our data was not included in the VNR, so we wrote the spotlight report to complement what the State presented.” - Arvi Bastian, Indonesia*

## 18 Work in coalition with other groups/organisations!

- Consulting and involving other activists and NGOs were an integral part of the process in all six countries. CEDEP in Malawi teamed up with all other LGBTI organisations in the country, and established the Diversity Forum to coordinate the work. In Brazil, the SDG coalition consists of 50 member organisations, covering a range of issues, and the 2020 report was written with the collaboration of 105 experts. Kyrgyz Indigo chose to submit a report with Coalition for Equality, which promotes anti-discrimination legislation, and also wrote its own standalone report on LGBT+ issues.

*“A horizontal approach works best for us, and we only have a light governance structure in place with three co-facilitators and plenary debates once or twice a month. We're more like a work group. We don't just come together to share information, but do deliver something. We have many tasks, with the parliament, the report, activities, so we focus on how we can make all of that happen. We have a Whatsapp group for the co-facilitators, and a couple of email lists.” - Alessandra Nilo, GESTOS, Brazil*

*“We formed a coalition to ensure that our voices are united. We agreed on the priorities. I learned before that a coalition is much better than separate submissions on the same topic, with different data, different conclusions, and different recommendations. In North Macedonia, civil society is incredibly strong, so we had no issues organising with them, everyone already knew the coalition process”. Vuk Raičević, ERA*

## 19 Create ownership in the community!

- The guiding principle of engagement was commonly to ensure that the local LGBT+/LGBTI/trans community has ownership over the report. In Malaysia, the author of the report worked with individual trans people and activists over a span of about six months, having regular consultations about the evolving draft. CEDEP in Malawi worked closely with the Diversity Forum members to ensure that all organisations are on board with the final report.

*“The most important thing was ownership. I said to the participating activists at the end of the meeting, that this book is not about my writing. I am merely delivering their message. This book is theirs, it belongs to the transgender community! They know all the issues, I just had to write them down, and complement them with research. When they take ownership of the report, that is when they can deliver the advocacy messages, whether to the community or to other stakeholders.”*

*- Y, member of a community based organisation, Malaysia*

*“After writing the first draft, we invited the Diversity Forum members for a validation meeting and presented the draft report. We went page by page with everyone in the room, covering all the issues, case studies, and finalising the recommendations. We made sure that everyone is part of the process. We then incorporated all the comments, had a final draft, and sent it off to UNDP”.*

*- Emma Kalea, CEDEP, Malawi*

- In North Macedonia, the local community was involved in the drafting process of the statements that the (co-)authors of the spotlight report delivered at the HLPF.<sup>11</sup>

*“We had only one spot through the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders, so it was important that the statement reflected different constituencies in the country. I had quick, but in-depth communication with several other organisations and platforms in North Macedonia, and we finalised the statement together. I gave the statement as a representative of the LGBTI Stakeholder Group, but represented a broad constituency list from North Macedonia. I think that positioned us at a different level. It was not that we were speaking on our issues only, but on the collective issues in the country.”*

*- Biljana Ginova, LGBTIQ human rights defender, North Macedonia*

<sup>11</sup> See the full statement at 1:09:28 of the UN web TV stream of the 2020 HLPF here: <http://webtv.un.org/search/2020-high-level-political-forum-on-sustainable-development-hlpf-2020-12th-meeting/6171667145001>

## 20 Share the financial resources!

- The Brazilian coalition has secured funding to work on its annual spotlight report and shares the funds among themselves. All participating activists in Malaysia received payment for sharing their expertise and investing time and energy into the work. Particularly in communities, where unemployment is rampant, even symbolic payments can make a big difference. In Malawi, members of the Diversity Forum traveled to in-person meetings from their respective towns, and were all reimbursed for travel costs. Both Brazil and Malawi were able to build funding support on the basis of their first spotlight report and have been or will be able to fund the same work or other projects, ensuring that the resources reach far in the community.

## 21 Speak through cases, testimonies, everyday examples!

- A number of spotlight reports included case studies, testimonies, and quotes from LGBTI people or people living with HIV.

*“Even if it’s not many cases, when you document a case, it is valid. And these stories don’t appear in the VNRs.” - Arvi Bastian, Indonesia*

*“We have an urgent response group to help LGBTI people in crisis and I’m part of it. Writing the report, I used research studies and other sources, but then I remembered that I actually see a lot of these crisis situations in the community. So I gathered some and included them in the report.”  
- Nadira Masiumova, Kyrgyz Indigo, Kyrgyzstan*

*“Our reason to use case studies was to give a human face to the data. So whoever reads this report will know that [...] we are talking about actual people who are left out from development processes, and when we create policies on the national level, these people should be included.”  
- Biljana Ginova, LGBTIQ human rights defender, North Macedonia*

## 22 Prioritise your safety!

- In two of the participating countries, Malawi and Malaysia, same-sex conduct and/or trans identities are de jure or de facto criminalised. In Brazil, the repressive Bolsonaro government got into power in early 2019 and has tried to intimidate civil society since. Activists have adapted their working methods in a way that prioritises their safety. They have suggested the following, to those working in repressive political contexts:

- > *Submit your report anonymously, through partner organisations at local or international level (Malaysia)*
- > *Work with local UN offices and embassies and use them as intermediaries if that is helpful (Malawi)*
- > *Build allyship in the public, get public figures on your side, communicate with local communities (Brazil, North Macedonia)*
- > *If possible, have your organisation registered (Malawi)*
- > *Protect your data and files from hacking attempts (Brazil)*
- > *Make sure that all your documents are in order, in case your organisation is inspected (Brazil)*
- > *Build on your contacts in various government structures (across the board)*
- > *Get the media on your side and train them (Malawi)*





## Tips for engaging with the HLPF

### 23 Reach out for knowledge and support!

- The annual High Level Political Forum is a unique space and it has taken a lot of effort for LGBTI advocates to carve out a space where they can introduce and highlight their most pressing concerns. It is not necessary for local activists to know the ins and outs of the Forum. Instead, they can rely on the knowledge and support of those with this niche expertise and experience. Certainly, the establishment of the LGBTI Stakeholder Group in 2019 has opened up new and additional ways for LGBTI communities to engage. LGBTI activists are welcome and encouraged to reach out to the Stakeholder Group and plan their engagement together, as part of and beyond the HLPF. You can find more information on the LGBTI Stakeholder Group's website and get in touch with them through their contact box at <https://www.lgbtistakeholdergroup.org>.



**Pictured:** The Malaysian spotlight report (2020)

## The LGBTI Stakeholder Group

*“The formal recognition of the LGBTI Stakeholder Group as one of now 21 Major Groups and Other Stakeholders constituencies was a historic achievement. Not only did it mean that LGBTI persons were recognized as relevant actors and partners in all sustainable development processes within the UN system, but it also gave us formal accessibility to those processes. Suddenly, we could participate in all formal discussions, send in our position papers, which were an official part of HLPF documentation and make statements on our own behalf. We were treated on an equal footing with other groups focusing on issues such as financing for development, youth and children, indigenous peoples or business and innovation. We became a part of the official UN structure. Now it’s time for people to use it! There are plenty of opportunities within the LGBTI Stakeholder Group to get engaged, get support with VNR reports, get connected with other activists in different regions, learn about the HLPF as a whole and most of all, bring your voices to the UN. It’s an open space for everyone – both organizations and individual activists.”*When a colleague from Ecuador delivered the Group’s first official statement to the HLPF in 2019, it was one of the most moving and proud moments of my career. Hearing the chair of the session call on the LGBTI Stakeholder Group to give us the floor, see the microphone being lit red, her reading the statement, and then to hear the room full of diplomats give us a round of applause left me in tears and with the deep belief that we can indeed create change, even within an old institution. The idea of establishing the LGBTI Stakeholder Group, which at the time seemed like a very silly and unrealistic idea, turned into structural change giving us yet another access point to make our voices heard. So next time, when you think you have a silly idea that cannot come to fruition, think about this and do it anyway, you never know what the outcome will be. You just might change the world.”

- Micah Grzywnowicz, former Organising Partner of the LGBTI Stakeholder Group

## 24 Use the HLPF as an entry point to speak to your government!

- Particularly in country contexts, where governments are unwilling or reluctant to communicate with LGBTI organisations, the HLPF can provide a unique space for activists to establish contact with state representatives. The HLPF being a high-level event, which brings together States and other key stakeholders, has also increased the legitimacy and authority of NGOs and activists attending. The fact that the HLPF moved online in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has not changed this in the slightest.

*“I think it was important that I was speaking on behalf of the LGBTI Stakeholder Group. The Kyrgyzstan government might work with some NGOs back home, but they don’t think that the LGBTI community can raise the issues and be visible in the UN spaces. I think they were a little bit shocked. That was good! After my statement, a person from the Ministry of Social and Labour Department called me to say that it was a good statement. Just earlier, I spoke to her and tried to ask her to include LGBTI issues in the government’s statement, but they didn’t want to. And when I delivered the statement, she remembered me.”<sup>12</sup>*

- Nadira Masiumova, Kyrgyz Indigo, Kyrgyzstan



**Pictured:** Biljana Ginova, LGBTIQ human rights defender, delivering a statement on North Macedonia at the 2020 HLPF

<sup>12</sup> See the full statement at 1:09:28 of the UN web TV stream of the 2020 HLPF here: <http://webtv.un.org/search/part-1-2020-high-level-political-forum-on-sustainable-development-hlpf-2020-16th-meeting/6172259437001/?term=HLPF&sort=date>

# IMPACT: SOME EXAMPLES

Each interviewee spoke of the impact that their engagement has made so far, including on themselves personally, their communities and organisations, laws and policies in their country, the HLPF space, or their respective regions.

» In **Malawi**, the spotlight report has increased the recognition and inclusion of CEDEP in a number of national policy processes. Previously, CEDEP's engagement with the international and regional human rights systems had established its cooperation with governmental entities. Thanks to their engagement with the SDGs as well, new avenues appeared. CEDEP was invited to be a member of the National Planning Commission, and is now regularly consulted on policies and measures affecting key populations. It was invited by the Ministry of Gender for the first time, to participate in identifying policy priorities on HIV and the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We are being recognised by other stakeholders. We couldn't have found ourselves in those spaces, but because of this report we are. It has opened for us another door for engagement that we did not have previously.”

- Emma Kalea, CEDEP, Malawi

» In **Brazil**, the annual spotlight report and the wide range of activities undertaken by the coalition have created a sustainable and powerful monitoring system that can reliably signal where implementation gaps are most apparent. The outstanding work of the coalition has also provided broader civil society with a pool of resources, knowledge, and data.

» The civil society statement on **Kyrgyzstan** was soon followed by a phone call from the Ministry of Social and Labour Department. The process did not stop there. Not long after, Kyrgyz Indigo was invited to meetings by the Ombudsman and the Ministry on the upcoming National Gender Equality Plan. While Kyrgyz Indigo had been a visible advocate before, its engagement with the SDGs tangibly strengthened its position and deepened its cooperation with a number of ministries and key stakeholders.

“I think now they understand that there is an LGBTI organization and that we have expertise. Before, they were just saying that everything is OK and that discrimination does not exist in Kyrgyzstan. But now they understand that international organisations hear us and that when we are asked, we speak the truth.” - Nadira Masiumova, Kyrgyz Indigo, Kyrgyzstan

» The civil society statement on **North Macedonia** was delivered online during the HLPF. The government was unable to provide a response due to time limitations, and therefore later published a written statement<sup>13</sup> after the Forum, focusing on LGBTI issues. In the context of North Macedonia, this was quite an exceptional move.

“The response is very nice actually. And I see it as a victory in our advocacy attempt, because no other country, as far as I am aware, has this kind of result that is focusing solely on LGBTI issues. I see this as an achievement not just for North Macedonia, but in general for global LGBTI engagement with the HLPF.” - Biljana Ginova, LGBTIQ human rights defender, North Macedonia

» The spotlight report written on **Indonesia** also contributed to building a dialogue between the government and civil society. Activists continue to urge the government to include LGBTI people in their 2021 VNR, and will come together to publish a second spotlight report. Cooperation within civil society has also been strengthened, and it is hoped that it will be the basis of future spotlight reports.

» Given the repressive context of **Malaysia**, impact has been most tangible in terms of cooperation with other NGOs and empowerment in the community. Through community work, the authors have been able to reach a broad group of trans people in the country. It is hoped that the report will help unite the community in pushing for legal gender recognition.

» Activists in **Malawi, Kyrgyzstan, and North Macedonia** also spoke of the hoped regional impact of their engagement. Kyrgyz Indigo is hoping that its spotlight report and HLPF engagement may inspire others in Central Asia to work more with the 2030 Agenda. Particularly due to the involvement of the regional organisation ERA, the North Macedonian example may encourage others in the Western Balkans to do the same. Activists in Malawi are hoping for similar regional impact, and increased engagement with the SDGs by LGBTI and HIV/AIDS activists.

## Concluding Remarks

Achieving the Agenda 2030 is a collective effort, requiring States, civil society, and other key stakeholders to come together. MPact hopes that the examples highlighted in this publication will encourage and inspire other activists and organisations working on LGBTI issues, to start, continue, or strengthen their engagement with the development framework.

<sup>13</sup> Major Groups and other Stakeholders Questions and Answers as part of the Voluntary National Review of Republic of North Macedonia at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26901North\\_Macedonia\\_MGoS\\_QA.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26901North_Macedonia_MGoS_QA.pdf)

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

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# USEFUL RESOURCES

## LGBTI people and the SDGs

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<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/sexual-and-gender-minorities.html>

OutRight Action International. The 2020 United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goals: a short primer to help activists working on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics make the most of your experience. 2020.  
<https://outrightinternational.org/content/2020-united-nations-high-level-political-forum-sustainable-development-goals-primer>

RFSL. For All: the Sustainable Development Goals and LGBTI People. 2019.  
[https://www.rfsl.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/FINAL\\_FORALL\\_RFSL\\_2019.pdf](https://www.rfsl.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/FINAL_FORALL_RFSL_2019.pdf)

RFSL. Guiding Principles on the Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) People in Development Policy and Programs. November 2018.  
[https://www.rfsl.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/RFSL\\_Guiding-Principles\\_final\\_digital.pdf](https://www.rfsl.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/RFSL_Guiding-Principles_final_digital.pdf)

GATE. Linking Sustainable Development Goals to Trans Work. 2020.  
<https://gate.ngo/sdgs-trans-work/>

## Reporting

The Danish Institute for Human Rights. SDG - Human Rights Data Explorer.  
<http://sdgdata.humanrights.dk/en>

UN Division for Sustainable Development and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews: The 2021 Edition.  
[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27024Handbook\\_2021\\_EN.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27024Handbook_2021_EN.pdf)

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<https://frontlineaids.org/resources/hivbeyond-goal-3/>

MPact Global Action for Gay Men's Health & Rights. Make Your Voice Heard in Your Country's VNR of the SDGs. May 2018.  
<https://mpactglobal.org/make-your-voiceheard-in-your-countrys-voluntary-national-review-ofthe-sdgs/>

# About MPact

MPact Global Action for Gay Men's Health and Rights was founded in 2006 by an international group of activists who were concerned about the disproportionate HIV burden being shouldered by gay and bisexual men. We have since expanded our work to focus on the broader sexual health and human rights needs of all men who have sex with men.

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