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Needs for Education about LGBT Issues

Report of a Global Need Assessment for a Global Network on Sexual Diversity Education

Summary

This article describes the main results of a needs assessment for a global network on sexual diversity education. It was found out that homosexualities and gender identities vary widely and imposing one specific definition as a starting point will deny global realities. The degree of discrimination, the different perspectives on sexual orientation and gender identity and the different situations of local organizations all have a definite influence on their priorities. Limiting the definition of "education" of a global to the school system is not feasible at this time. Attention to internal capacity building, influencing the media and external training of professionals like journalists, the police forces and health professionals is necessary. The global trend to neo-liberal policies and conservative sexual politics were perceived as serious threats to education about LGBT issues. From these findings, a range of recommendations for the creation of a network emerged.

Introduction

In 1998, Amnesty International and HIVOS organized the first global workshop on education against homophobia. The main recommendation of this workshop was to create a global network for exchange and to raise the quality of the work. During the years 2003-2005, the author of this article did an assessment to research the views on education about LGBT issues and the needs for a network. This article is a summary report of this assessment.

In this article, we will first go into the method of the assessment. Then we will give a short overview of global differences of homophobia and sexual diversity discrimination which are relevant for education. We will go into the concepts and definitions of homosexuality and transsexuality that follow from those differences. Different situations, homosexualities and gender identities lead to varying perspectives and priorities on education as well and we will give attention to those, before getting to the expressed needs by the range of interview individuals and organizations. We will close with some risks which were mentioned by respondents and with some conclusions and recommendations for the creation of a network.

Assessing the Needs for a Global Network

Questions raised at the workshop in 1998

When we organized the education workshop at human rights conference in 1998, it became obvious which kind of basic challenges would be put even when talking transnationally about education about LGBT issues. The first question of the invited speakers was: what do you mean by "education". This was a very valid question. Are we talking about formal education

(schools, training) or informal education (learning on the spot, theme sessions)? Which kinds of schools or other formal education are we talking about? Which kinds of target groups: children, teenagers, heterosexuals, LGBT constituencies, professionals? For the 1998, we decided to focus on education of heterosexual young people to combat homophobia, especially in schools.

During the workshop, it became clear out educational work differs in some ways, but it resembles in other ways. The divergences seemed to be mainly due to social and political contexts, which determined access to the school system and to young people. The more conservative the context, the more difficult it was to get access. But once educators have access, the discussions they have with young people seem to be very similar all over the world. Most young people are surprised and ask lots of (the same basic) questions. Some are afraid and angry; those kids and their often fundamentalist religious parents pose the biggest challenge for educators.

Developing a questionnaire

In Western and Southern Europe, there is a long tradition of volunteer gay and lesbian educators who go to secondary schools to facilitate awareness sessions. Although the teachers invite those educators, schools take responsibility themselves to teach about LGBT issues. This was the context from which I organized the 1998 workshop and of my first attempts to do a needs assessment. I started doing some trial interviews with volunteer LGBT education groups in Europe. For these interviews, I used a questionnaire I developed in 1983 to study the work of Dutch education groups.

These interviews were very difficult and tiresome because this questionnaire was not suitable for most of these groups. It was an elaborate questionnaire, tailored to the almost professional way North-Western education groups work. For groups with less experience, most questions were difficult to answer, simply because they never considered them. For example, asking which groups are targeted and which objectives are set is difficult when the education activity consists of giving students (who ask for this) a tour around the building of the LGBT organization and having a nice conversation afterwards.

After these trial interviews, it was clear that the scope of a proper needs assessment should be broader and the questions very general. I finally decided on two formats of each four basic questions. One interview format was focussed on organization without any experience with education.

With organizations *without* education experience, I started to discuss three issues:

1. Resistance - What are the kinds of resistance you experience against LGBT issues?
2. Opportunities - What would be opportunities for education in your country?
3. Change - If change were possible, what would you aim for?

With organizations *with* education experience, I started to discuss three issues:

1. Strategy - How do you work (marketing mix)?
2. Content - What are the main messages of your education?

3. Effect - What kind of effects do you see of your education?

All interviews were closed with a question on network needs: which support would be useful for the interviewee or their organization.

Developing an interview technique

These questions were more starting points for an open discussion than closed research questions. When the interviewees had a problem answering a question, I did not press it but went on to other questions. When the interviewee seemed stimulated by a question, I asked more detailed questions.

Often, language and cultural concepts made me feel unsure whether I really understood the answers I got. The more interviews I did, the more I learned to assume a structurally "wondering" attitude, asking for more clarification again and again until I felt sure I got the point. In Latin America, many respondents did not speak English, and I do not speak Spanish or Portuguese (although I understand about 70%). In most of these interviews, there was a translator present. However, the translations were usually not literal and often cultural ways of communication and local settings were challenges to a mutual clear understanding.

For example, when I asked the question: "What kind of education do you do?", a Latin American respondent might answer: "We have a broad range of initiatives with many partners". Then the respondent would go into detail about all the partners and about the general aims of the collaborations. This was told with an obvious pride in the fact that the LGBT organization was able to be an accepted partner in such networks. Since I was curious about the actual interventions, I usually asked on about that. But often, the translator did not really understand what I wanted to know more than what already was said and later I found out that often the collaboration was a lot of talk, but very little intervention. This was difficult to discover, partly because the respondent did not like to admit that, partly because the respondent and the translator see the talk about what could be done' as an intervention and as education itself (a more process oriented interpretation than I had) and because the translator could not understand and accept that I wanted to ask such 'offensive' questions (offensive, because they to him it felt as a depreciation of the good work that was being done).

To prevent misunderstandings, all the interview reports were typed out and the respondents were asked to correct them. The report of interviews with respondents that did not understand English were translated in Spanish or Portuguese. After correction, the interview reports were put on the website in order to make the whole process clear to everyone. Some respondents, however, did not react on this check at all. When they did not respond to several appeals, these reports were published anyway, but with a note that the text was not checked and the sole responsibility of the author.

The interviews

Since there was no funding for this needs assessment, the interviews were organized to fit into the time and financial limits of the author. For my own work, I travel around Europe regularly. In 2003 and 2004, I extended work trips for one or two days extra to do interviews in Italy, Finland, Sweden, France, the UK and Austria. In late 2004 and early 2005, I had a sabbatical and decided to spend it on a needs assessment in the South. In this period I visited 14 cities in 9 countries (India, South Africa, Namibia, Australia, Mexico, Colombia,

Brazil, Peru and Argentina) and did about 45 interviews. In the spring and summer of 2005, I did some extra interviews in other parts of the world by e-mail, at a conference in Bangkok and in New York. This article is based on the results of about 60 interviews.

The respondents were of a diversity of backgrounds.

In Europe, most of them were voluntary of professional educators or trainers who worked specifically on LGBT issues. Most of these focussed on schools.

Many respondents I met during my South trip were activists from LGBT organizations. I got my initial contacts mainly from HIVOS, which resulted in an over-representation of AIDS organizations. I tried to balance this by actively looking for lesbian and transgender activists. Next to that, I did interviews with researchers, family planning and sex education organizations and on occasion with (national and local) government officials and representatives from other sectors, like lawyers and police officers. However, all of them had in common that they had an interest in education about LGBT issues.

Follow up after this report

This article is one step in a process towards creating a global LGBT Education Network. The general outline of the follow-up is this:

1. making an online survey with questions to check support for the recommendations, ask feedback about dilemma's and to promote participation
2. sending out invitations to fill in the survey to interviewees, and a wider audience of possible interested persons and organizations
3. meanwhile, asking particular especially interested people to become active as volunteers in the start of the network
4. conversations with international donors
5. develop project proposals, with a phased approach (starting small; elaborating later, first small meeting on mission and working strategy)
6. start the network on a volunteer basis
7. elaborate the network with funding and professional support

Results of the assessment: views on discrimination

One of the main results of the needs assessment was the importance of how one looks at the discrimination of people who have homosexual, bisexual or lesbian feelings and the relevance of typical or atypical gender behaviour and identities. In some parts of the world, it is considered extremely important to have a correct view on this in order to prevent exclusion and to be effective in education. In other parts of the world, activists care less about proper concepts and labelling and want to focus more on direct shop floor action. In these parts, activists are afraid to lose too much time on ideological discussion.

From a global perspective, it seems not to be surprising that the groups and persons who focus on political correctness are operating in a context of strong resistance; they don't have much opportunity to work on shop floor level, they are not able to have a working relationship with general institutions and they spend time on properly thinking well but what they want. On

the other hand, groups that do have opportunity to work of shop floor level and find a working relationship with general institutions and heterosexuals, find it not very helpful to be strongly politically correct. So, instead of focusing on political correctness, they focus on discussions about how to gain access and how to maximise results of the LGBT-heterosexual collaboration.

In building a global network, these differences of perspective need to be taken very seriously. There is not one right view; perspectives depend on the context. Moreover, people in both situations can learn from each other.

I will now outline a few major differences between global cultures that seem to be essential to take into account when building a global network.

Europe: sexual orientation identities

In Europe and in North America sexual orientation identities are central in combating discrimination of people with homosexual, bisexual lesbian feelings. Assuming an identity and pointing at the norm of heterosexuality as the dominant system of oppression is central to the struggle in those parts of the world. Often, there are separate movements of self identified gays and lesbians. The gay movement focuses on sexual liberation and acceptance of homosexual identities, the lesbian movement focuses on gender rights and in combating the heterosexual norm. Usually, the gay movement is more outspoken than the lesbian movement. One aspect of this male dominance is that the Western LGB movement usually speaks of combating homophobia.

On a global scale it is important to take into account how this concept of homophobia is interpreted in different parts of the world. It is important to realize the concept of homophobia is a male and Western concept. Male, because it sounds as if it just refers to men (homosexuals). Western, because the concept presupposes that there exists a global identity of homosexuality against which a phobia exists.

Scientists and some more learned activists clarify that homophobia is not a correct concept, because the native attitudes and behaviour against people with homosexual behaviour is not an individual psychological phobia that social phenomenon. The scientific correct terms should be homonegativity or heteronormativity.

Latin America: machismo and fluid sexualities

In the perspective of most Latin Americans, it is not very relevant to talk about sexual orientation in the context of identity. It seems to Latin America, two concepts are much more important: machismo and sexualities. Heteronormativity is very important to Latin America and the role pattern between macho men and feminine women is crucial. To a large extent, social order is organized around these gender roles. Sex is acted out and defines whether one is powerful or in submission.

In this context, women are in submission to macho men and people who display non-heterosexual feelings or atypical gender behaviour are degraded in the role system. At the same time, sexuality and erotic play remains an important way of communication and of

defining power and pleasure. Within the heteronormativity context, there is a lot of space for experimentation and pleasure which is not heterosexual or limited to typical gender roles. So respondents call these "fluid sexualities".

An international network will have to take into account is such a context; the aim of antidiscrimination policies is to make those fluid sexualities more acceptable to individuals and to society. In the Latin American context this can only be done by taking the battle between the sexes into account.

Asia: rigid social systems, formal outcasts, context of respect for hierarchy

In Asia, most countries have age old cultures and social arrangements which are not fluid in any way. On the contrary, social relationships are prescribed in detailed ways. One of the most important aspects in these societies is the importance of mutual respect, and especially respect to people who are higher in the hierarchy. India, with its cast system, is the most outstanding example of this.

Most of these age old social systems are organized in a heteronormative way. People who display non-heterosexual feelings or atypical gender behaviour can fall into two categories: either they commit themselves to a cast that accepts and defines their behaviour within a traditional (low rated) section of society, or they become complete outcasts. In most Asian countries there are groups of transsexuals who have a traditional way of existence, but are still fundamentally part of the lower strata of society.

In Asia, sexuality is traditionally not a taboo, although there are rules and restrictions connected to the social hierarchy. Conservative Asian governments that hearken back to the "original culture", still take over British Colonial negative views on sexuality. Here too, prescribed gender roles are important.

Culturally sensitive educational interventions in Asia would benefit more from connecting to the general value of mutual respect than from promoting sexual liberation or sexual identities.

Gender and transgendered people

Another important aspect is the position of gender and of transgendered people in the movement. In parts of the world where homosexual, bisexual lesbian sexual feelings have been taken up as the main issue, and where combating heteronormativity in a wider sense does not seem essential, people with atypical gender behaviour and transgendered people fall out of the analysis and movement.

When the LGB movement does not take the gender context properly into account, it becomes very difficult to even understand transgenderism, let be to include it in the movement. With an exclusive focus on sexual orientation, it becomes irrelevant to combat the discrimination of non heteronormative gender behaviour and identities and including transgenders in the movement becomes just an act of goodwill instead of an integral part of

the battle. This is especially difficult in regions where the focus is on sexual orientation identities, like and Europe and North America.

For a global network, it is important to take into account that in most parts of the world, an integral perspective on heteronormativity, including gender roles in the position of transgendered people is important. Furthermore, it is important to take into account that transgenderism cannot be interpreted as one single identity, but should be viewed as a continuum of feelings and identities.

Concepts and Definitions

Following from these cultural differences in the interpretation of discrimination processes, there were a lot of strong opinions on concepts and definitions that are relevant to building a network.

Categorizing definitions

It is clear that the concepts of "gay and lesbian" are Western and limiting. The use of these words will not be acceptable when building a global network.

In some areas of the world, there are attempts to more be inclusive, and we will find the acronyms GLBT, LGBT, TLGB, LGBTQI. The order of the letters is never accidental: they signify the priority organizations give to combat discrimination of the most vulnerable groups. Still, the disadvantage of all these attempts is that they still categorize.

In other areas, there is an attempt to even more inclusiveness by using the concept of "sexual minorities". However, some respondents say this has the disadvantage of putting ourselves in a victim position and it gives the false impression that heterosexually identified people cannot engage in homosexual encounters. This is especially a problem in parts of the world where large percentages of (at least the male) population engages in homosexual encounters.

Sexual diversity

The most inclusive concept is "sexual diversity". It implies recognition of a continuum of feelings and identities and it integrates heterosexual behaviour. However, the disadvantage is that is rather vague; for heterosexuals it may not be immediately clear what the word refers to. Next to that, some LGB organizations are afraid that a too wide focus on for example general sex education will dilute the effort to combat specific forms of discrimination.

Network needs

Seen from the perspective of a global network, we need to find a balance between a general and a specific focus, and between access and correctness.

To maintain a clear focus and mission, there is a need for visibility of LGBT issues. But to get access to general institutions, we need to be able to appeal to wider concerns and contexts. In sum, we need a broad perspective on liberation of constrictions of sexual preference and of rigid gender role expectations.

Views on Education

In the interviews, I asked for views on education, on aims and effectiveness. This was a rather disappointing part of the needs assessment; most respondents did not have enough experience on this.

Monitoring

Most interviewed groups do not have clear measurable objectives for education. There is hardly any research or monitoring on effectiveness (yet). Most respondents don't have any ideas about this either, although they often became interested when I talked about such research in the Netherlands and the USA.

Many LGBT organizations get their funding for HIV/AIDS related interventions. Monitoring is getting more relevant in that area, because the financial donor organizations increasingly ask for accountability. This kind of monitoring is usually more about counting the number of distributed condoms than about measuring attitudinal or behavioural effects of education. Most organizations find proper monitoring, whether on process, impact or effect, quite difficult. There are few resources on this. A global network could fulfil a useful function here.

Personal perspectives and professional collaboration

When I asked for perspectives on what the content of education should be, many respondents gave a wide variety of personal opinions. This was especially true for LGBT activists were not connected to professionals in the field of education and prevention. When LGBT activists were working together with a regular sex education organization, it was clear and that the LGBT part of the more general program in which it was integrated, was more thought-through. When there was not such collaboration, the content of the education reflected more the personal expertise and preference of the LGBT educator.

Priorities for sectors

When I started the needs assessment, I started with a focus on schools. This was my own Dutch background. In the interviews, I asked more open what the preferences of the respondents were. Although there were some differences according to the background of the people I interviewed, it appeared that on a global level, we can make a list of four priorities:

1. media
2. police
3. health
4. schools

Focusing on the media was especially important in countries where discrimination is rampant and where there is not access to other sectors. Correcting the negative images of LGBT people in the media seems to be the most important issue in those countries. In the interviews, several strategies were mentioned on how to get access to the media, how to lobby for change, how to train journalists and how to help to media to set quality standards. Exchange of these good practices would be really useful.

A second major priority was to focus on the police forces. In countries with more serious discrimination, the police forces one of the main abusers of LGBT people. Access to lobby and train those police forces seems impossible, but still some respondents gave excellent examples of how this is possible. In countries with less discrimination, the police is important as a protector of national and international human rights including sexual rights.

The AIDS epidemic has brought the position of health services into view. Stigma of LGBT people prevents them from getting access to medicine and to good health services. Especially in countries where the basic battle for HIV combination therapy is won, there is space and attention for the promotion of the better health services towards LGBT people. Immediately following the interventions targeted at HIV and AIDS, education towards other health services becomes an issue.

Teaching about LGBT issues in schools, or even promoting a safer working and learning environment for gay, bisexual, lesbian and transgender teachers and students, is not the highest priority in most countries, simply because the access to schools and young people is too difficult. Many government authorities, schools and parents still consider teaching about LGBT issues as promoting non-heterosexual behaviour and paedophilia. Still, when there would be access, most of the organizations would be very interested in developing interventions, because youth is the future.

In some countries in the South, there is some access to schools, but very integrated in more general sex and AIDS education. There are several good examples of how this can be done.

The few examples of more specific LGBT education when targeting adults and professionals, focuses in the South usually more on basic human rights, especially in the context of citizenship.

In the North-Western countries of Europe, specific LGBT education for professionals focuses more on the quality of services.

Internal and external education

In many interviews, there was confusion about the word education. In some discussions, we finally made a distinction between internal and external education: external education focusing on combating discrimination among heterosexuals and internal education focused at capacity building and combating discrimination of subgroups within the LGBT communities.

However, this distinction between internal and external education did not be a logical or even workable for some of the respondents. Some respondents expressed the needs to link external and internal education which each other. For example, some groups could not a mention how they could offer education without having a strong self empowered community behind them; internal education is needed to help create such a strong empowered community. This place is an especially important role when we are talking about more vulnerable communities like blacks and lesbians. In this context, many LGBT organisations expressed the need that an education network should not only focus on external education but too on community capacity building.

Expressed Needs

The final but most important question in the interviews was about which needs are seen for an international network. Needs were expressed concerning:

- ❑ the process of network building, working and structure
- ❑ goals and focus
- ❑ a website
- ❑ meetings
- ❑ internal capacity building
- ❑ liaisons of the network

These needs were always expressed from a situational framework. So, before outlining the expressed needs I more detail, I will give an idea of the background of such underlying factors.

Factors influencing needs

I noticed 4 basic factors influencing the kind of needs respondents gave:

1. the background of the organization
2. the stage of development of the organization
3. the political perspective
4. the level and kind of homonegativity

The background and mission of the interviewed organizations was crucial for the kind of needs they expressed. For example, university representatives mainly expressed needs for research collaboration and theoretical development; schools expressed needs for concrete materials that can be used in the class rooms; sex education organizations wanted exchange of good practices (not only on gay and lesbian issues but about sex in general) and AIDS organizations wanted to collaborate on promoting of human rights as a necessary precondition for more condom and medication use.

Grass roots organizations (gay, lesbian, LGB or transgender) expressed needs for capacity building, for support in getting funding, in exchanging good practices to get access to mainstream institutions. In addition to those, they formulated a range of more specific educational needs related to their own constituency, for example how to organize more

lesbian visibility or what kind of specific information should be given about transgender issues to a range of target groups.

Specific needs were influenced too depending on whether the respondents or their organizations were professionals or volunteer based. Professionals usually have more experience and have been thinking about their needs. They could often express more specific needs than volunteers. Professionals usually have an infrastructure for their own capacity building and they express few needs in this area; for volunteers who lack such an infrastructure, capacity building is the first priority.

The stage of development of the organizations had an important influence on their needs as well. This especially plays a major role in grass roots LGBT organizations. Younger organizations usually have less differentiation of activities. Community building and empowerment of LGBT individuals is often the first step in LGBT organization development; followed by collective and political action. Externally targeted educational interventions seem to come in a later phase; many LGBT organizations did not make that step yet. In earlier phases, such organizations don't set educational priorities, they have less expertise with education or with project management and the continuity of the organizations is often not very stable. Such younger organizations want support for "everything", starting with capacity building.

More experienced organizations, which already developed external and educational strategies are usually quite happy with the general quality of their work, although they identify some specific problems, like how to reach difficult populations, how to get access to resistant mainstream organizations and how to deal with methodical problems (like how to educate fundamentalist religious people). Such experienced organizations ask for specific educational expertise and exchange.

The third major influence on the expressed needs is the political perspective of the respondent. These depend on the local, national or even international context. It seems having a common enemy helps to unite LGBT forces and supports wider coalitions with other progressive groups in society. On the other had, when there is not such a common enemy, internal differences and become more apparent and often play a destructive role.

It is often disappointing to see that broad coalitions collapse at the very moment when opportunities for effective education arise. In countries with a conservative regime, there may be a united opposition, but apart from protesting there is often little space for mainstream work. In more progressive contexts, there are more opportunities for getting access to mainstream organizations and policies, but internal competition within the LGBT movement or between progressive forces in general can take away a lot of energy which could have been devoted on external work.

Ideological views and definitions (like LGBT, diversity, human rights) are linked to these local political situations. Many LGBT organizations find it difficult to collaborate with others who maintain another view or who are less politically correct.

Needs are influenced by these situations, because choices for a focus on political protest versus developing concrete educational interventions, or choices for establishing coalitions and ways of collaboration depend on whether the participating organizations are willing to

collaborate, how flexible and accepting they are of the contexts and perspectives of other partners and whether there is a basic trust that collaboration will benefit all partners.

The level and type of homonegativity has a definite influence on needs too. For example, in India, sodomy is forbidden but some forms of homosexuality/transsexuality are quite visible, while in the Netherlands there is a kind of national moral to be "tolerant", but in fact there is a total public disinterest in LGBT issues. In Latin American there are lots of machismo hate crimes and LGBT organizations have to deal with fierce opposition of the Churches - but at the same time there are some increasingly supportive governments in the last few years. In the USA, the polarized moral panic seems to have a "winner takes all" effect.

Each organization makes specific choices in how to deal with such local cultural homonegative resistance. Although there may be many similarities in how to combat homonegativity, the strategic way of implementing it will be culturally and regionally specific. Collaboration in a global network will depend on how a balance can be made between this similarities and differences.

Needs relating to the process of network building, working and structure

Some respondents express a need for a joint process of network building. Most want to limit this to one starting meeting to establish a mission statement and a working programme. No-one offered concrete ideas about a structure. Most respondents were not very interested in what structure the network has; they just want to get together to do practical work. At the same time, most respondents implicitly reason from the starting point that the network should be interactive and that the input of the members is taken seriously. The conclusion is that an education network should not have a heavy bureaucratic structure, but it should be open en facilitate input by all members.

An important suggestion was to start with a limited scope. If we are over-ambitious, the effort of the network will become too diluted, which is disastrous for the practical output which is everyone's priority. Still, nobody wants to be excluded. There is a tension between the wish of all respondents to be "there" and their wish that only experts on the subject at hand will be invited to specific meetings.

Needs relating to the goals of the network

Most respondents see the network as a source of information exchange and for inspiration. When respondents are more involved in education, they look forward to working together personally on practical projects. The initiative to work together in Geneva on lobbying for the Brazilian resolution was mentioned as an inspiring example on how to do that. But there was some concern about exclusion as well, especially by some respondent who would have liked to be part of the Geneva initiative but were excluded in the selection phase.

When thinking about practical projects, most respondents would like to develop formats for training. They often mentioned "open" formats, which can be adapted to local needs. Some respondents express the need to link the global collaboration or projects directly to local action. This could for example be done by organizing a network of specific local pilot

projects. This strategy would require a strict selection of a limited number of partners, but according to most respondents, it would make the network stronger.

Raising the quality of the work was recognized as a need, but not brought forward by the respondents themselves. By this, I refer to doing research on the effects of strategies and interventions, identifying factors for effectiveness and redeveloping strategies and interventions to increase the effects.

I had the impression most organizations don't see any flaws in their current work. This is because they are unduly self-satisfied, but because they never had the opportunity to critically look at their own work like that. They have no comparison for their work and no tools to measure effects.

Some respondents suggested setting international aims for the network; especially to lobby against homonegativity in the UN and against US moral conservatism. However, some other respondents warned to become too political. Their fear is that external political aims would create a need for a more energy consuming internal democracy in the network and might create too much internal struggle about which positions to take. They preferred to focus on designing practical interventions; in other words, to limit the aims to the professional and shop floor level.

Needs relating to the website

Most respondents want databases with information. The databases they mentioned are:

- personal and organizational profiles
- training materials
- student level curricula
- campaign materials
- articles on homonegativity/heteronormativity
- country information and information about laws
- scientific literature

Profiles, which would support exchange, and educational formats and materials, which would provide inspiration were mentioned most.

Most respondents want recent updates of developments in education. They want background articles with analysis, good practices and concrete suggestions as well. For respondents it was too difficult to say how this should be presented. The general trend is that they want lots of information, but that it should be easy to access and quick to find.

Most respondents have limited time and not much experience with internet forums, messenger or chat. Although experiments with such internet based communication would be appreciated by many respondents, most of them would prefer to get updated information directly in their mailbox and to participate in discussions by way of e-mail based newsgroups. The website should at least be in English, French, and Spanish and preferably in Portuguese. (There were no respondents to express a need for Arabic or Chinese.)

Needs relating to meetings

A few respondents like the idea of a large exchange conference every few years, with presentations of work being done. But most respondents prefer smaller meetings with experts working together on developing open formats, which can be adapted for local use. Developing training courses and related strategies for getting access and for a follow-up targeting the police, teachers, journalists and health workers are mentioned most.

Some respondents mention developing campaign formats, for example for lesbian visibility. Another interesting idea is to develop a format for local implementation of the recently launched IDAHO (International Day against Homophobia) initiative.

There is much need for global exchange of good practices of education about transgender issues. However, there were no concrete ideas yet about how to organize meetings concerning this.

All costs will have to be subsidized. Most respondents, even professionals, don't have access to funds to pay for themselves.

Needs relating to internal capacity building

Capacity building was the most expressed need by grass roots LGBT organizations. However, the word "capacity building" was used for a range of meanings:

- personal skills and empowerment
- community building
- organizational management
- project management
- getting funding
- organizing accountability to financial donors

I got the impression that when organizations were less experienced and had less access to funding, they had a broader range of needs for capacity building.

Many grass roots organizations express a lack of recognition by international networks and by international donors of the basic need for capacity building. Many LGBT organizations get some money for (usually AIDS-) projects. But often they are criticised by their (international) financial donors for not being accountable enough. Living up to accountability standards that donors require is often difficult for the LGBT organizations. Following this argument, there is a strong need for flanking capacity building programs in the strategies of international networks and by international donors.

Needs relating to liaisons of the network

Some of the respondents suggested to hook up, or at least work closely with existing international networks. Networks and organizations mentioned were UNESCO, ILGA,

IGLHRC and trade union networks, like Education International (educational personnel) and ILO International Labour Organization).

However, becoming a part, extension or collaboration partners of such organizations does need some further consideration.

UNESCO and the UN in general are not known to be champions of LGBT rights. On the contrary, the basic recognition that LGBT rights are human rights is not self evident in this organization yet, as was proved by the fruitless struggle to get the Brazilian resolution¹ accepted. Still, a good relationship with UNESCO would be important for the status of the network.

ILGA, as the only grass roots based global LGBT network is another logical partner. Some members of the international board already expressed interest in close collaboration with a LGBT Education Network in 2004. A possible risk of a close collaboration and especially of integration in ILGA is the relationship of LGBT organizations in the South. From the interviews, I seemed some individuals and organizations are committed to ILGA and others are not. The respondents who were not committed to ILGA explained this was because they perceived ILGA to act only according to Westernized views (especially limiting their strategy to fighting sexual orientation discrimination and promoting identifying as gay or lesbian). Due to these views, they saw a lack of willingness to collaborate with organizations with other views.

Educational International and ILO will certainly be interested in collaboration with a LGBT Education Network. This interest has been sounded out at the global Educational International conference in Porto Alegre in 2004. However, it should be taken into account that the primary aim of trade union networks is the advancement of employee interests. The content of education or of good services in other professions is a related but secondary issue. LGBT issues are now an accepted but not main issue within global trade union networks.

At the time of the needs assessment, the initiative to create an LGBT Education Network is made by Empowerment Lifestyle Services, which is a one man organization. Most people (including the author) recognize that there may be a need to become part of, or have a close link with a larger organization which can provide better continuity. However, few respondents made suggestions about which particular organization would be suitable. Apart from UNESCO and ILGA, some US organizations were suggested, like GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network). These US organizations are quite strong and well organized, but have no experience in international work.

Finally, many respondents warned about several aspects in the collaboration with international financial donors. This goes especially for close links with some US donors, who are now under the influence of (for LGBT people) destructive US government policies.

Risks

¹ The Brazilian resolution proposed the UN to recognize LGBT rights as human rights.

Some of the respondents pointed out some risks which could damage a new international network. There were three main ones: international funding, international policy priorities, and copyrights.

International funding is growing but threatened at the same time. The situation concerning human rights is especially confusing. Sexual orientation is not recognized as a human right and transgender issues are often not taken serious as legitimate gender issues. In practice, this means transnational organizations like the UN do not have LGBT policies and collaboration on specific projects depends on the goodwill of individual representatives. Next to the true transnational organizations, there is a limited number of national or private donor organizations who provide funding for LGBT related projects. Most of the money respondents get comes from the USA. However, the conservative backlash in the USA is currently threatening this funding in serious ways. Some US donors set a range of limiting criteria for funding:

- ❑ they do not allow positive attention for homosexuality
- ❑ they do not allow help for (child) prostitutes (unless they left prostitution, which is often economically not realistic for them)
- ❑ they allow only attention to promoting abstinence
- ❑ they increasingly exercise detailed censorship on materials

These criteria pose not only serious challenges and risks, not only to local organizations but too for an international network which would want to make use of such funding.

The current international policy priorities provide another ambiguous risk/opportunity concerning LGBT issues. The relevant formal international priorities focus on combating AIDS and on equal rights and safety for women. Of course, LGBT people are victims of AIDS and are women as well. But gays, lesbians and transgenders are seen as deviants, not as victims with rights, so for them it is more difficult than for others to make use of these priorities. This will be relevant for an LGBT Education Network as well: funding and access will be largely dependent on links with AIDS or with the advancement of the position of women and with the off-spin of the work for heterosexuals.

The maintenance of copyrights is another risk. On one hand, authors have of course rights to protection of their work; on the other hand, an international network would want to offer materials for exchange and adaptation for local use. This risk can be handled by making careful agreements about dissemination.

Some donor organizations (especially from the US) seem to require the copyrights of materials that were developed using their funding. This practice is disenfranchising the organizations which develop the material and it limits distribution, adaptation and re-use. Exchange of such materials and collaboration with such donor organizations will necessitate careful judicial backing.

Conclusions

In this final paragraph, I will outline some main conclusions which are pertinent to the creation of a LGBT Education Network.

1. The network should focus on professional development as well as on social action. Professional development could focus on exchange of good practices to inspire, training, development of new methods, and on raising the quality of existing methods. Social action could focus on lobbying international, national and local institutions which threaten opportunities for (LGBT) education.
2. The network should not focus on "LGBT-education" but on sexual diversity education, which means it should be more encompassing and it allows for more access to mainstream organizations. At the same time, members of the network should not get entangled in fights about political correctness.
3. The focus of the network should be broader than schools: there should be attention to the media, the police and health professionals as well - to begin with.
4. The start of the network should not be over-ambitious. The suggestion is to start with small initiatives and broaden the scope when possible.
5. The network could start with basic information on a website and a mission meeting with key members. Later on, the network could be elaborated with small specific meetings on open training formats for teachers, journalists, police, and health professionals, or maybe on a format for the International Day against Homophobia.
6. The network should not only develop formats, but collaborate to create local projects as well. In these projects, not only the training formats, but too the strategies to gain access to mainstream institutions, the follow-up and implementation strategies, research on effects and capacity building to organize all this should be integrated.
7. The network should be independent, but link with other relevant organizations.