

The Only Way Is Up: a tool for evaluating diverse SOGIESC (aka LGBTIQ+) inclusion

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Once emergency services organisations decide that LGBTIQ+ inclusion is important, what resources exist to support changes in organisational culture and program planning? Edge Effect’s, *The Only Way Is Up*, report and evaluation tool was designed for international humanitarian responses but could be easily used by domestic emergency organisations.

Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Harold reached Vanuatu on 5 April 2020. Almost 160,000 people were affected, primarily on Vanuatu’s northern islands including Espiritu Santo, Malo and Pentecost. The damage from wind and flooding was severe and multisectoral, affecting communications and destroying approximately 21,000 homes along with schools and health facilities as well as devastating agriculture and fishing fleets. One person experienced the immediate aftermath in this way:

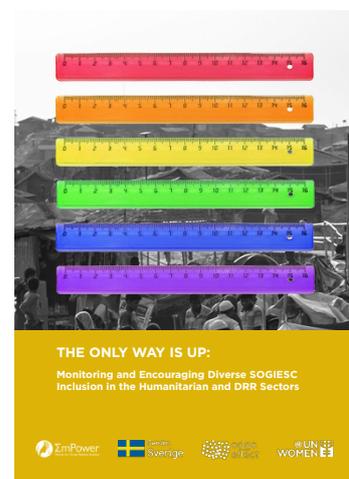
I made sure that parents, niece, her mother and brother hopped in the transports to the evacuation centre. My mother begged me to go but I refuse to go. That fear from facing people and their comments is not something that I am ready to face.¹

As recounted in *The Only Way Is Up*, dilemmas such as this are too common for people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics (SOGIESC, aka LGBTIQ+ people). Research has demonstrated that LGBTIQ+ people in Australia face their own challenges in surviving and recovering from disasters.² For that reason, work in the regional sphere could have significant benefits for domestic emergency management organisations.

The Only Way Is Up draws on 5 years of work exploring LGBTIQ+ inclusion in rapid-onset disaster and conflict displacement across Asia and the Pacific. This includes *Down By The River*³ (research into experiences of LGBTIQ+ people after Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji in 2016) and

*Pride in the Humanitarian System*⁴ (a 2018 regional gathering of SOGIESC civil society organisations and humanitarian response organisations).

Working through national civil society organisations, *The Only Way Is Up* includes experiences of people with diverse SOGIESC living in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar. These people have been displaced by conflict or earthquakes on the Philippines island of Mindanao and lived through Tropical Cyclone Harold. These interviews reinforced that discrimination, violence and exclusion experienced prior to crises shapes experiences during relief and recovery phases including harassment from other survivors, being blamed for



The Only Way Is Up report and evaluation tool is published by Edge Effect.

Image: Edge Effect

causing disasters and self-exclusion from relief centres and services to avoid unsafe situations. A parallel study of humanitarian sector assessments, program designs and funding in the same crises revealed a troubling lack of recognition of these issues.

How does change happen – or not happen?

A growing number of reports over the last decade highlight similar problems. *The Only Way Is Up* goes beyond re-stating the problem to analyse why the international humanitarian and disaster risk reduction systems seem slow to recognise the rights, needs and strengths of people with diverse SOGIESC. The international human rights principle that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'⁵, the humanitarian system principle that 'human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found'⁶, the Sendai Framework call for an 'all-of-society'⁷ approach and the Sustainable Development Goals promise that 'no one will be left behind' all provide plenty of authority to do more. But even when the United Nations and other international organisations make a commitment to diverse SOGIESC inclusion, it often doesn't go much further than adding the acronym 'LGBTIQ+' to a long list of potentially marginalised groups.

The inertia in addressing inclusion issues also occurs in Australia. Edge Effect joined a session panel at the 2021 Emergency Services Foundation International Women's Day event, Let's Choose to Challenge. At the session, an audience member (speaking with evident frustration) pointed out that 'we have many reports that have surfaced experiences of discrimination, so what is the reason that organisations are not actually changing?' (paraphrased).

The apparent resistance to change in the international humanitarian sector has led organisations such as Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance and the CHS Alliance to analyse the sector as a complex and adaptive system. Such systems have many actors that influence and interact in ways that are not always predictable. Actors within the system (organisations, groups or individuals) tend to have established ways of working, which may be influenced by funding, competition, ideas, constraints and other factors. The 'messiness' of such systems means that top-down policy pronouncements and isolated interventions such as research reports or training workshops are fairly easily absorbed by the system, which then carries on pretty much as it did before.

Research for *The Only Way Is Up* included interviews with participants from Pride in the Humanitarian System. Participants were asked what factors helped or hindered their attempts to implement LGBTIQ+-inclusive ideas when they returned to their organisation. The hindering factors were clearly dominant with issues including lack of resources for dedicated projects, lack of LGBTIQ+ program skills among humanitarian and emergency services organisations and other priorities that always seemed to be more important.

Is change possible? Yes.

That picture seems a little bleak. Except that we know, despite all the odds, that change can happen.

In 1978, protestors at the first Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras were arrested and their personal details were splashed across homophobic news reporting of the event. Forty years later, those people, now known as the '78ers', rode in a double-decker bus that cruised up Oxford Street to the cheers of a roadside and broadcast audience in the hundreds of thousands. Change does happen, though it is often easier to see how it happens in retrospect.

Complex and adaptive systems theory is sometimes said to be better at describing the problem than finding the solution. But it does offer hints. It may help to think more about incentive structures that hinder change and how they could be reconfigured. Change may come faster if we apply pressure to the system in more ways, or if the range of actors within the system becomes more diverse. So, as well as high-level announcements, research reports and workshops, more effort could go into diversity within the paid and volunteer workforces. Effective grievance procedures could also be established so that good people don't leave organisations out of frustration. Inclusive public communications could be used to tell diverse stories and stronger partnerships could be formed with specialist LGBTIQ+ and other organisations.

Monitoring change

Alongside such initiatives, a complex and adaptive systems approach needs monitoring to discern what is or is not working and to change tactics accordingly. The evaluation tool within *The Only Way Is Up* provides a way to benchmark existing emergency response programs for SOGIESC inclusion and for exploring options for improvement.

The tool is currently designed for international humanitarian responses and assesses diverse SOGIESC inclusion across 4 areas: i) organisation and program background, ii) gender analysis and needs assessments, iii) inclusion, participation and leadership and iv) safety and protection for marginalised groups and 2 optional thematic areas of v) shelter/housing and vi) livelihoods support. These are assessed through a combination of organisational and program documentation, interviews with key staff and consultation with people with diverse SOGIESC who are or would be beneficiaries. The result of this overall process is a score on the Edge Effect Diverse SOGIESC Continuum, from 0 (hostile) to 100 (transformative).

The participation of people with diverse SOGIESC is an essential step. It is accomplished through partnership with an LGBTIQ+ civil society organisation to achieve 2 objectives. The first objective is to ensure that the engagement with people with diverse SOGIESC occurs safely and that a good range of people are involved. This is more likely to occur through partnership with an LGBTIQ+ civil society organisation or network that has deep reach into their community. The second objective is accountability, ensuring that the process is robust and that people with diverse SOGIESC are part of discussions after the scoring. These facilitated discussions explore what the score means and what kinds of steps could improve future scores.

Edge Effect provides training and organisational development support that helps organisations to improve inclusion and

DIVERSE SOGIESC CONTINUUM – PROGRAM FOCUS

	HOSTILE	UNAWARE	INACTIVE	INCLUSIVE	TRANSFORMATIVE
IMPACT	Norms-based marginalisation and exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC is exacerbated.	Norms-based marginalisation and exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC may be reinforced.	Norms-based marginalisation and exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC may be reinforced.	Norms-based marginalisation and exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC may be ameliorated.	Norms-based marginalisation and exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC is ameliorated and challenged.
CAUSE	The organisation is aware of likely negative impact on people with diverse SOGIESC but goes ahead anyway because either it chooses not to address diverse SOGIESC issues or actively discriminates against people with diverse SOGIESC.	The organisation has no awareness of marginalisation or exclusion experienced by people with diverse SOGIESC in humanitarian or developed contexts, or how its ways of working may reinforce marginalisation or exclusion.	The organisation has some awareness of the marginalisation and exclusion experienced by people with diverse SOGIESC, but for various reasons has not developed neither the will or competencies to act on this awareness, or allocated resources to address these issues.	The organisation is aware that norms-based discrimination excludes people with diverse SOGIESC. It addresses this through specific initiatives that target people with diverse SOGIESC but does not redesign its mainstream programs or substantively revise its ways of working.	The organisation has developed competency to challenge norms-based discrimination that excludes people with diverse SOGIESC. It has revised its ways of working and has programs and partnerships that positively include people with diverse SOGIESC in mainstream programs while offering targeted alternative programs where safety requires.
EXAMPLE(S)	A faith-based organisation is contracted to deliver relief, however its theology commitments or those of its in-country partners cast people with diverse SOGIESC as sinners; OR a secular organisation puts aside SOGIESC concerns because they prefer to use the funds elsewhere or do not want to deal with the complexities of this work.	A schools education program is designed and implemented without any consideration of whether people with diverse SOGIESC are supported by their families to attend, whether they experience bullying, whether they achieve all they could and are well-placed to build a life, or whether they leave school with psycho-social health issues.	Gender advice for a Shelter program includes people with diverse SOGIESC in the long-list of potentially marginalised groups that should be consulted. No advice is provided on how to engage safely and effectively, or what to do with the information received, and no consideration is given to the lack of diverse SOGIESC training, guidance, policy or genuine CSO partnerships.	A post-disaster psychological health program trains community members to provide peer support. Community stigma means that people with diverse SOGIESC may be at risk, the organisation conducts a separate training for diverse SOGIESC community members.	A cash-based social protection program designed in partnership with diverse SOGIESC CSOs and accounts for the impact of diverse SOGIESC marginalisation on family and community relationships. The program provides holistic support that addresses longer-term livelihood challenges and counters community stigma.

The Rapid Assessment Tool assesses diverse SOGIESC inclusion at the levels of programs and projects.

Image: Edge Effect

transformation. The tool was piloted with United Nations Women programs in the Cox’s Bazar refugee camps in partnership with Bandhu Social Welfare Society. While some adaptation would be required for evaluating Australian domestic emergency response programs, this is certainly possible. Ideally, organisations would undertake the assessment at regular intervals, for example every 2 years, to track change over time and to make changes.

The Rapid Assessment Tool facilitates assessment of diverse SOGIESC inclusion at the detailed levels of programs and projects implemented by humanitarian organisations.

Be part of the journey

Despite the many stories of exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC and the often systemic nature of the problem, there are causes for optimism including:

- the existence of LGBTIQ+ civil society organisations that can work with the emergency management sector
- the deepening understanding of how and why people with diverse SOGIESC are excluded in crises
- steps that staff are taking within emergency management organisations to increase diverse SOGIESC inclusion.

Too often this is still the work of isolated individuals or small groups, passionate about diverse SOGIESC inclusion, but at risk of burn-out. The hope is that *The Only Way Is Up* report and evaluation tool encourages more organisations to accelerate their journeys towards inclusion for all.

Endnotes

1. Edge Effect 2021, *The Only Way Is Up: Monitoring and Encouraging Diverse SOGIESC Inclusion in the Humanitarian and DRR Sectors*, page 51. At: www.edgeeffect.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TheOnlyWayIsUp_Web.pdf.
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6. OCHA 2012, *OCHA On Message: Humanitarian Principles*. At: www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf.
7. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. Paragraph 19(d)*. At: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2157sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf>.