

**Discussion club 1**

**Date:** 23.06.06

**Venue:** Inclusive Foundation Office

**Topic:** Presentation of activities and services of Inclusive Foundation and Tanadgoma

**Participants:** 3 Representatives of the Inclusive Foundation; 2 Representatives of Centre for Information and Counselling – Tanadgoma; 15 representatives the LGBT community: Mostly gay and bisexual men; Lesbians and FtM; Heterosexuals in their professional capacity;

**Follow up:**

1. IF will regularly disseminate information on topics of discussions and invite community representatives;
2. Tanadgoma will invite their beneficiaries to the discussion and movie clubs and will allocate volunteer on health issues and Psychologist for IF to deliver community service.
3. Community representatives committed to attend discussion clubs regularly and contribute to other activities on voluntary bases (concrete negotiations will be conducted).
4. Tanadgoma and IF agreed to share material at their disposal.
5. The IF representatives agreed to assist Tanadgoma in locating LGBT community in Batumi for their new office.

**Agenda:**

- Presenting IF to the community
- Presenting NIS project activities and plans for the year 2006;
- Receiving feedback on planned activities;
- Presenting services of Tanadgoma;

**Discussions:**

Representatives of IF introduced the first and only LGBT organization to the community representatives. Brief description of main components raised few questions to which IF representatives provided answers.

Main services and activities were described and information regarding the methods of delivery of these was discussed. Community representatives unanimously approved necessity of having these solutions in place and very actively expressed readiness to partake in and contribute to the events presented by the IF.

Most of attention was devoted to the 'ME', the first LGBT magazine in Caucasus. Headings of the magazine, content and purpose was discussed.

Tanadgoma representative offered LGBT community services of the centre, namely: AIDS prevention, free diagnostic of STIs to the target group, free testing on AIDS and the hotline service.

It was stated that Tanadgoma distributes appropriate materials and booklets for the target group.

Centre Tanadgoma is planning to open branch office in Batumi and asked assistance in locating community to the IF.

Tanadgoma representative offered to feed in the health page in the magazine as well as on the web at <http://www.inclusive-foundation.org>. Both information resources are also thought to become a good way for increasing IF's outreach.

Tanadgoma also raised necessity of conducting survey among LGBT to reveal needs of the community. The IF representatives informed Tanadgoma that number of surveys were conducted and that they are open to cooperate regarding other specific surveys.

Community representatives recalled previous discussions at the Heinrich Boell Foundation, noted intensification of exchange of ideas and initiatives between each other and affirmed that such discussions are very useful for consolidation of the community. The IF representatives thanked all for participation. The IF also stressed importance of their involvement in everyday activities of the Foundation.

Finally, participants agreed to have next discussion as scheduled and continued interaction in informal atmosphere.

**Discussion Club 2**

**Date:** 21.07.2006

**Venue:** Inclusive Foundation Office

**Topic:** Coming out

**Participants:** 12 male and 7 female participants, 1 Female to Male transgender (FtM), 1 Male to Female transgender (MtF)

**Introduction:**

Facilitator of the discussion (representative of the Inclusive Foundations) gave introduction to the topic of coming out, gave several theoretical approaches and practical advises on rational coming out, summarized consequences that can be expected as a result of coming out. She also raised several points for the group discussion.

Introduction provided by facilitator of the discussion can be summarized in several principle points:

- Person to whom one is coming out shall be prepared to handle the information;
- Process of coming out can entail different psychological responses;
- Voluntary and forced coming out shall be distinguished according to circumstances and consequences;
- Coming out process is very culture specific;
- Impact of coming out on alteration of patterns of homophobia;

**Discussions:**

After introduction floor was given to community representatives to share their experiences of coming out. General tendency of the discussion confirmed several assumptions:

- Coming out is a complex process and follows the phase of self identification;
- The consequences of coming out vary from the person to whom one is coming out;
- Coming out is accepted more positively or neutrally by friends rather by family members;
- Sisters are talking news more moderately than parents;
- Mother is most likely to be the one to whom we come out from parents, as we feel urge to come out to her;
- In many cases parents prefer to remain in denial of their children's sexuality;
- In some cases parents know about children's sexuality, however, try to avoid direct discussions and it is natural for us to leave it that way;
- One participant of the discussion claimed that it is selfish to come out to parents, that they have right not to be aware of the true sexuality of us;

Participants told positive as well as negative stories of coming out. It was generally agreed that sometimes coming out is dictated by unavoidable necessity in certain situations, and it is usually easier for person that comes out to live his/her life.

Transsexual (MtF) person contributed to the discussion by own story. She also confirmed denial from parents' side. Parents never ask her anything when she asks them money for expensive procedures of depilation, visits to sexual-pathologist etc. She thinks that they might be inventing explanations for themselves and hanging facts to her work as the stage actor/actress.

Heterosexual female, who has many friends among gay men was asked regarding her first reaction to coming out to her. She stated that even through, she takes homo/bisexuality very easy these days it still was a shocking news for her for first few times and she would not want to believe in this.

By the end of discussion points were summarized and questionnaires on coming out experience were disseminated. 16 questionnaires were returned. Results are annexed below.

**Coming out Survey:**

Questionnaires on were disseminated among the participants of discussion club. 16 questionnaires were returned. This scale of sampling does not enable us to generalize the results, however, this type of mini survey helps to add to the discussions.

Purpose of the survey was to reveal, which are the persons to whom LBGT group comes out more easily and reverse, and to what extent are LGBT ready to receive professional help during coming out.

*Statistics and analysis:***1. Age**

The average age of respondents - 24,8

Youngest – 20

Oldest – 38

**2. Biological sex**

Biological sex	Count	%
1 Male	12	75.0%
2 Female	4	25.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**3. Sexual Identity**

Sex. Identity	Count	%
1 Gay	8	50.0%
2 Lesbian	2	12.5%
3 Bisexual	2	12.5%
4 Transsexual	2	12.5%
8 Queer	1	6.3%
10 Other	1	6.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**4. Residence**

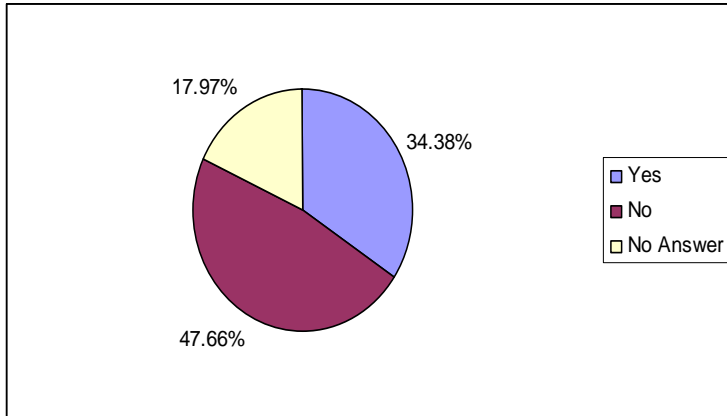
75% lives with families (below in answers under 9<sup>th</sup> question on forced coming out – 78% were those who lives with families).

**5. Economic Status**

Financial condition	Count	%
1 dependant on parent	5	31.3%
2 independent	8	50.0%
3 Family member are dependent on them	3	18.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

We could not find direct correlation between coming out and financial dependency.

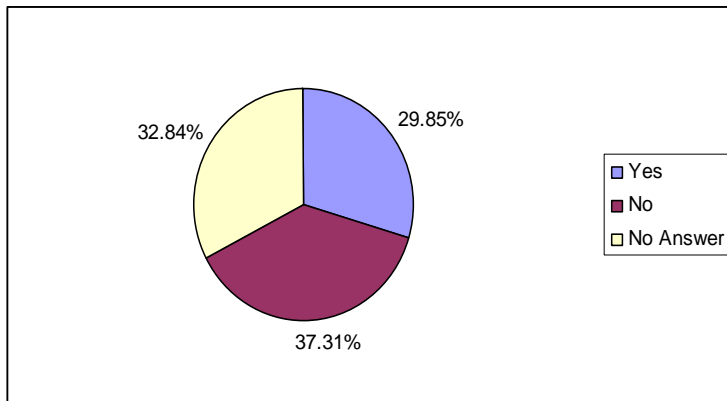
6. Does somebody know about your sexuality?



Who knows?

Friends	100.00%
Colleagues	50.00%
Relatives	37.50%
Mother	37.50%
Sister/Brother	25.00%
Father	12.50%
Husband/Wife	6.25%
Children	6.25%

7. Whether some one else should know?



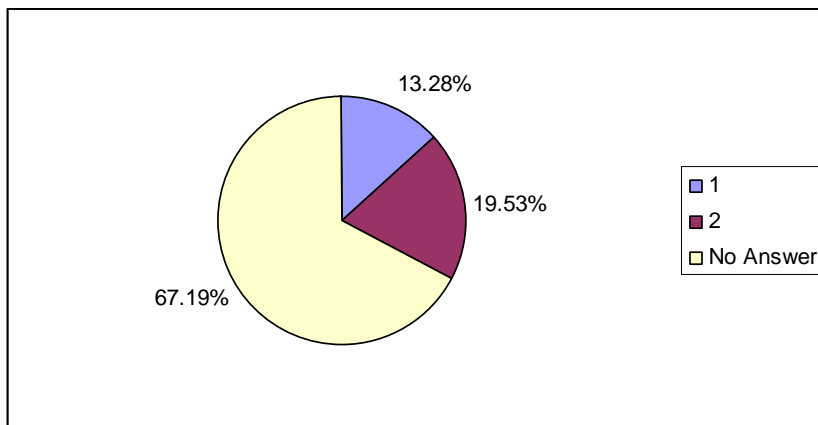
Who exactly?

Friends	75.00%
Sister/Brother	37.50%
Mother	37.50%
Father	37.50%
Colleagues	31.50%
Relatives	12.50%
Husband/Wife	6.25%
Children	6.25%

It is important to take into consideration the age of those who are to come out. Only younger than 25 would answer positively on the question whether some one else should be aware of their sexuality, while older respondents would prefer to be open only with friends in the future.

8. Not many (only 4) would need professional counseling during coming out. However, most think that opinion of the friend is important. This can be explained by the fact that not many of the community representatives are aware of possibility of professional help in this regard.

9. Forced or voluntary coming out?



1. Coming out was a consequence of LGBT person's need.
2. Family members, friends and others "had a suspicion, that they confirmed"

Among them:

## 1. During voluntary coming out

Friends	81.25%
Colleagues	31.25%
Relatives	12.50%
Sister/Brother	12.50%
Mother	6.25%
Husband/Wife	6.25%
Children	6.25%
Father	0.00%

## 2. During forced

Mother	31.25%
Friends	18.75%
Relatives	18.75%
Colleagues	12.50%
Sister/Brother	12.50%
Father	12.50%
Husband/Wife	0.00%
Children	0.00%

In 100% of cases friends are aware of respondents' sexuality and only in 3 cases did respondents need to 'confirm suspicions'. While in majority cases – mothers' curiosity speaks of forced coming out tendency with negative experiences as this was also heard during discussions.

Father deserves the least trust according to answers (75%). Only in two cases do fathers know (case of lesbian and FtM transsexual).

## 10. Who was first to know?

In this case too – friends lead.

When was asked to grade reactions to their coming out, we received following answers:

Negative reaction: 4 cases (Mother 2; father 1; colleague 1)

Positive reaction: 10 cases (sister 1; child 1; Colleague 2; medical worker 1; friend 5)

Neutral reaction: 7 cases (Spouse 1; medical worker 1; friend 5)

## 11. Necessity to inform prior to coming out.

Only 12% had prepared information for those with whom they were intending to come out. During the discussions, most of group members had agreed that this must be really productive, however, they have not done this, as they sometimes themselves do not possess enough information and are not in a comfortable position to answer questions about their sexuality. This proves the need of the foundation's work with community in terms of raising their awareness in the first place.

## 12. Sharing own experience with others.

12 out of 16 are ready to share their own experience of coming out with others. Only 4 persons, all of them gays, do mind to do the same. In their other answers we can track their general attitude – they prefer to remain as closeted as possible.

Important conclusions:

1. There is a obvious courage and readiness to be out in the age group under 25 that leaves us hopeful for a stronger community in the future;
2. Regardless of denial, most need professional counseling during coming out;
3. LGBT community and their relatives and friends need to receive more information about sexuality. Foundation needs to focus in this direction in the future;

**Discussion Club 3****Date:** 16.09.2006**Venue:** Inclusive Foundation Office**Topic:** sexuality in different cultures and confessions/religions**Participants:** 7 male and 7 female participants, 1 Female to Male transgender (FtM)**Introduction:**

Facilitator of the discussion (representative of the Inclusive Foundations) gave introduction to the topic of sexuality in different cultures and confessions/religions, gave historical, cultural and ethnographic information on issue in different countries, gave comparison of culture and traditions of sexuality between Georgia and other countries. She also raised several points for the group discussion.

Introduction provided by facilitator of the discussion can be summarized in several principle points:

1. Forms of attitudes to homosexuality in different cultures (from tolerant to total prohibition);
2. Social and cultural terms in relation with homosexuality in different cultures;
3. Attitude to homosexuality and sexuality in general in Georgia;
4. General characteristics of Georgian culture that defines intolerant way of approach.

Representative of IF reported on absence of male and female flirt rituals before and after Christianity in Georgia. However, facilitator introduced some rituals of fertility that existed in Georgia's mountain regions:

In Svanetia (mountain region in Georgia) it was the ritual of fertility when males used to arrange "men" circle where one was trying to get in sexual intercourse with standing ahead male at the same time as ahead standing man had to threaten this with lash and simultaneously he was trying to get in sexual intercourse with the man, standing in front of him.

Women's ritual: villager women used to gather and pull a cart instead of bulls. One of the women was swearing at and lashing another woman. Women used to go into the river and plow it by cart. Part of women played men's role so they were changing their roles from time to time. After that ritual, they were giving a party and hanged out together.

Christianity changed and abolished these rituals subsequently.

**Discussions:**

After introduction floor was given to community representatives to share their opinions about the issue. General tendency of the discussion confirmed several assumptions:

- In the society, where same-sex relationships are forbidden, abortions are also strictly banned;
- People have more choice and same-sex relations occur frequently in big cities where close connections are infrequent;
- Based on sculptures of the Bronze Age, most bronze stuff expressed penis or vagina and the last one was dominated;
- One participant of the discussion mentioned Georgian comic shows where gay thematic is very topical. Such shows are very tradable on our TV market;
- Sexuality has many different trends: lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and they are equal;
- All participants agreed that diversity should not be the ground for discrimination.

**Discussion Club 4**

**Date:** 30.09.2006

**Venue:** Inclusive Foundation Office

**Topic:** HIV/AIDS/STI prevention

**Participants:** 9 male and 11 female participants, 1 Female to Male transgender (FtM) 1 Male to Female transgender (MtF) – among them 6 new attendees.

**Introduction:**

Facilitator of the discussion (representative of the Tanadgoma) gave introduction to the topic of HIV/AIDS/STI prevention in msm (men, who have sex with men). Tanadgoma has solid experience in working with this group. Main reason for selection of the group was that sex between men exposes them to high risk of infection, especially, if they change partners frequently. Facilitator gave some practical information and advices to community members in aspects of safe sex and different ways of prevention of infections. She also told about ways of disease transmission, symptoms and treatment procedures of different STI's.

Introduction provided by facilitator of the discussion can be summarized in several principle points:

1. There is a pre-epidemic situation in Georgia.
2. Number of unprotected sexual contacts is very high. In msm group few people use condoms; those who are more integrated in society are more likely to follow a safe sexual behavior;
3. Statistics show that when one is not accepted in the society, he/she has less motivation to preserve himself/herself and rarely care about safe sexual contacts;
4. In some countries, e.g. Russia, Ukraine and African continent HIV/AIDS is of an epidemic nature;

**Discussions:**

After introduction floor was given to community representatives to share their opinions about the issue. General tendency of the discussion confirmed several assumptions:

- Most of participants told about nihilistic attitude from staff of AIDS testing centers in Georgia;
- Some participants reported on dissatisfaction of service in AIDS center as they are not sure if they have tested their bloods indeed;
- One of the participant claimed that nobody cares about keeping the confidentiality in mentioned center;
- Representative of IF said that IF is supposed to demand from AIDS testing centers to work according to standards.

**Discussion Club 5****Date:** 21.10.2006**Venue:** Inclusive Foundation Office**Topic:** Revealing internalized homophobia within the community**Participants:** 14 male and 12 female participants, 1 Female to Male transgender (FtM) 2 Male to Female transgender (MtF) – among them 11 new attendees (2 of them from Azerbaijan).**Introduction:**

Facilitator of the discussion (representative of the IF) organized different format of the discussion that took group work format and all participants took part in it, helping to reveal several aspects in the issue of internalized homophobia.

**Discussions:**

After introduction facilitator involved all participants in the group activity.

The interactive method was used during the group work to apprehend more efficiently the revealing forms of internalized homophobia.

Planned group work divided into several main parts:

1. Attitude towards different sexual identities;
2. Revealing internalized homophobia within the group (in a verbal form);
3. Adequacy of self-esteem;
4. The most repressive group of the LGBT community.

1. Survey showed attitude of the group towards own and others' sexual identities (including heterosexuality); e.g. 42 percent of those surveyed told that being heterosexual is "boring and unexciting", while 53 percent -understood it as a "norm" and characterized it as a "natural and ordinary", although 5 percent of those surveyed alleged that heterosexuality is a "positive" orientation.

As for their own orientation, they characterized it as "interesting, extraordinary, adventurous, and fabulous" (53%), 31 percent assessed it like "inadmissible, problematic, closed and secluded", and only 16% called it natural.

A covert resistance has been revealed associated with own "non-traditional" sexual identity: during one quiz, when they had opportunity to "choose" sexual orientation in ideal, non-homophobic environment, 42 percent of the surveyed claimed that they would choose heterosexual orientation, whilst 31% preferred heterosexuality or bisexuality; and only 30% remained to be transsexual, gay and lesbian.

2. During the work with the group, one of the quizzes added to revealing forms of internalized homophobia by verbal aggression. Anonymous questioning method showed intensity of usage of degrading epithets by the group that frequently are used by homophobes.

3. Psychological test "null animal" was selected to assess "Adequacy of self-esteem". After completion of the test, all drawings were collected together, and core points of the test were explained to the group, e.g. (adequacy/inadequacy, low/high self-esteem, level of nervousness, aggression etc.). The task gave opportunity to each participant to evaluate his or her own drawing so that perception of each person remained anonymous.

4. In relation to the identification of the most problematic segment within the LGBT community, 45 percent of those surveyed named transgender. Group considers that due to their "visibility", they become more vulnerable victims of homophobia. In addition, 25% submitted that transsexuals and gay men experience biggest pressure from society. The same number of surveyed people believes all representatives of LGBT group are equally under the risk to become a victim of violence. As for lesbians, only 4 percent thinks that lesbians undergo most pressure. It is worth mentioning, that besides those 25 percent, who considered that all LGBT group representatives undergo pressure equally, the group of bisexuals was not mentioned at all. It can be explained by prevalent stereotype in the group, according to which bisexuals belong to the segment that finds it most challenging to come out and be visible.

**Discussion Club 6**

**Date:** 10.11.2006

**Venue:** Inclusive Foundation Office

**Topic:** Transgender

**Participants:** 6 male and 8 female participants, 1 Female to Male transgender (FtM) 2 Male to Female transgender (MtF) – among them 3 new attendees.

**Introduction:**

Introduction provided by facilitator (representative of the IF) of the discussion can be summarized in several principle points:

- Transgender, as distinct from transsexual has wider concept. Very frequently people mix transsexual with transvestite. This is least studied sphere in human's sexuality;
- According to some assumptions there is an average ratio of MtF transsexuals 1:43000 in overall number of a male population, and 1:107000 FtM to female population. Occurrence of transsexuality can vary from country to country;
- Transsexuality does not determine sexual orientation;
- There are many stereotypes about life expectancy of transgender people that are not true. They live as a ordinary humans, however they have to visit doctors regularly, especially before and after surgery. Self-treatment causes many fatal outcomes;
- While some persons identify themselves with known genders, some do not relate themselves to any;
- There is a low level of sexual education in public. If subject on sexuality were taught in schools and educational institutions, and children would have learned that humans' sexuality may conceive many diverse forms and this is a norm, degree of homophobia would have been considerably reduced among children and adolescents.

**Discussions:**

After introduction facilitator of the discussion divided participants in groups (two people in each group), disseminated papers to each participant and asked them to list five distinguishing and five common features with the person sitting next to them.

Each participant read her/his options out and information was exposed on flipchart afterwards.

Task revealed that participants spent more 6 minutes for writing up common features rather than distinguishing ones. It means that most of participants perceive him/herself as an unique and it is quite difficult to find common features with others.

**Discussion Club 7**

**Date:** 24.11.2006

**Venue:** Inclusive Foundation Office

**Topic:** Same-sex marriage

**Participants:** 8 male and 8 female participants, 1 Female to Male transgender (FtM) 2 Male to Female transgender (MtF) – among them 2 new attendees.

**Introduction:**

Introduction provided by facilitator (representative of the IF) of the discussion can be summarized in several principle points:

- The first part was concerned to legitimization of same-sex marriages and marriage issues in different cultures and epochs;
- In addition, facilitator talked about family matters, in general, characteristics and values of development of social institution such as marriage;
- Development of different forms of cohabitation by the end of 20th century in world and in Georgia.
- Practical information on world same sex marriage map was submitted to the participants;

**Discussions:**

Discussions focused mainly on the issue of acceptance of the idea of same sex marriages within LGBT community and in general public. Main trends witnessed were that while some participants regarded official partnerships not necessary, others stated that recognition of partnership by official institutions adds to the normalcy perception of union between two same sex persons and have big implications on their lives.

This discussion was the first attempt to attract community's attention to the issue of same sex marriage, an issue that is perceived so distant from Georgia's reality. Some of the discussions focused on the documentary on lesbian marriage shown at the previous movie club. Some of the participants of discussions submitted that issues of marriage is not so much in the air given all social implication that they have though about it before.

**Discussion Club 8****Date:** 01.12.2006**Venue:** Inclusive Foundation Office**Topic:** LGBT activism; Activism in Canada**Participants:** 10 male and 8 female participants, 2 Male to Female transgender (MtF) – among them 7 new attendees.**Introduction:**

Representatives of the Inclusive Foundation greeted and thanked participants of the discussion and introduced Milé Komlen a Human Rights Lawyer and Diversity Management Practitioner with 20 years of experience in advancing equity and social justice issues in corporate, community and institutional settings. Presently, Mr. Komlen works for Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce as senior diversity consultant and is Chairperson of the Equity Advisory Group in Law Society of Upper Canada, in Toronto. Mr. Komlen visited Georgia with the invitation of Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies to cover topics of inclusion of ethnic minorities in state and corporate institutions. He kindly accepted our invitation to attend one of our discussion clubs dedicated to the topic of LGBT activism and deliver seminar on activism in Canada.

**Discussions:**

Mr. Komlen gave brief introduction about himself and his personal and corporate coming out. The guest shared Canadian experience of LGBT movement with community members and the IF. Speaker described processes of achieving equality for LGBT people in Canada, as well as advancing freedom of expression at corporate workplace. He referred to the story of pride parade, where bank employees decided to go and march with corporate identity displayed without prior notification of the bank Management. he also told about support that the movement obtained from president of the bank afterwards. Introduction provided by conveners of the discussion can be summarized in several principle points:

- Western experience in general, and declared adherence to the democratic values in Georgia will definitely assist in approaching suitable result;
- Homophobia in the country can paradoxically boost the movement and portray LGBT people in more positive way;
- Experience of other LGBT organizations working outside of Georgia might assist in efficient implementation of the project;
- Facilitator of IF informed participants about next year plans of Inclusive Foundation and talked about cooperation with their partner organizations;

After the seminar community representatives shared their opinions about the issues raised.

Most participants asked about Georgian legislation, methods of change of public opinion, work with media on LGBT issues.

At the end of the discussion participants agreed that having allies and networking for LGBT organizations and people are very important factors for efficient working.