

Structural violence is sustained by a culture of complicity that includes indifference, omission and inaction. This forms the basis of practices that promote biases and trauma that is aided by the silence of LGBT victims of violence in Belize! And a denial culture in governance that promotes exclusion in our system.

Barriers to Justice: LGBT Systemic Violence Report

Gender Policy assessment

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Section I: Overview

LGBT participants rejected gender as a social construct, passively resist, opposition to their gender expression and identity, but have struggled to rewrite the effects of majority opposition to their right to expression and dignity. Acknowledging that there is a loose multi-layer collective mechanism of community, family and state violence that is perpetuated through psychological, economic, physical and legislative means that must be navigated in upholding the value of self-determination.

It is acknowledged that the system to subjugate right to expression, equal protection before the law, personal security, life and dignity exist using insults, threats and legislative exclusion. They acknowledge passive resistance in our community through the lens of transwoman, effeminate gay men and butch women who cannot hide their expression of gestures, clothing, tone and physical traits.

While differential treatment existing collectively in law and community, there is a nuance psychology which promotes the importance of “passing” as a transwoman, an effeminate gay or bi sexual man. A psychology rooted in cumulative trauma, a journey of self-acceptance and a culture of policing our bodies that is sustained by state legislation, family and community practices.

Terms matter in the discussion of gender base violence because it offers a moment of institutional embrace through intervention and strategies that is supported by budget allocation of the state. At the moment gender-based violence is not treated through an intersectional lens, its remains entrenched through interventions, support services and budget allocations as a traditional man and woman issue. This becomes problematic because no man

or women live single issue or single identity lives, but state policy makers, law and policy makers have sought to uphold a system of exclusion in commentary and in investment.

The consequence, amplifies violence, health outcome, generational trauma, transfer generational values and biases that impact rights holders, duty bearers and gate keeps of the law in a culture of complicity that undermine transformation of equity and equality in the system.

The state as a system give tacit permission to sustain violence, vulnerability to poverty and to maintain poor health outcomes through inadequate legislation, poorly financed interventions in health and bad policing practices. Institutional tools design to suppress demands for protection and the strengthening of resources.

This report is about exploring the needs of LGBT populations, noting their perception as citizens in a policy framework. It can be argued that religious opposition was allowed to temporarily replace cabinet as the central policy making mechanism of the state, when the state capitulated, to the development of a Morality Commission, to the original gender policy in 2013 led to the state throwing the needs of LGBT Belizeans under the bus. The opposition at the time was equally permissive in the act of systemic erasure. While we have been given a chance to document our concerns systemic intention, is not the same as systemic positions of substance that is inclusive to all citizens.

Section II: Methodology

Focus group was organized on March 8th, 2021 at Our Circle Resource Center to explore the issues of the gender policy and perception about its application in the wider society using an LGBT lens.

A literature review was done to highlight political commentary and historical reaction to advancing LGBT human rights in Belize. A set of unstructured questions were provided to participants and their quoted we noted in creole and analysis for its application toward the discussion about the gender policy. The whole process lasted one hour and twenty-six minute using a cell recorder for note taking.

While the participants offer nuance insight into the obstacles of implementing the gender policy, they alluded to opportunities for structural change and accepted that recurring trauma was the price they pay for trying to trans form a system.

Deeper work will need to explore opportunities for partnership with the state in the area of justice, education, health an economic development. For now, the report is a base line for future exploration of strategies and interventions which matter to the community.

Section III: Literature Review

Former PM Barrow in a statement issued on L.G.B.T socio-economic rights and the need for protections is noted in a press interview on May 31st, 2013;

“The fact of homosexuality is a fact of life. Certainly it is very much a part of what is happening in Belizean society. There can be no discrimination in terms of employment opportunities, in terms of access to health care, in terms of services that the society offers. This administration certainly is not concerned about what happens in the bedrooms of the employees of government. There are constitutional protections for public officers properly appointed and even with respect to open vote workers; there can never be any kind of interference, any kind of surveillance, any kind of concern about the sexual orientation of the employees of government.”¹

While it was the view of the former PM to take an inclusive stance in governance, it was not the same for the Evangelicals who admitted not reading the gender policy, but still claimed concern about the language in the gender policy. Stirring commentary reflects what wrong with our ability to navigate our national culture of social constructed expectations about rights and gender

We are putting together a broader, comprehensive report being reviewed by not only attorneys but sociologists, education leaders, business leaders and we are compiling that report. That is, ultimately, I would say that's our real feedback because, you know, some of the specialists in different areas caught words that, you know, circle that and say that is a huge word right there. The rest of us just glanced over it².

In addition, commentary from the Channel 5 news coverage used dehumanizing language to justify the need to render LGBT Belizeans expendable in their rights and dignity. Highlighting when the state is unable to lead, it risks losing the value of its function as policy maker and helps to sustain a system of violence that is perpetrated by the system silence.

I agree with you al. If it wasn't for the nastiness of this pm and gov. Our beloved country would be prosperous and vibrant but now this pm wants to follow Obama in the wicked ways you are in charge churches now is the time to speak out for your savior out with this nasty pm and all these disease homos.

¹ [Former PM Barrow comments on homosexual citizens](#)

² [NEAB Opposition](#)

The system of community violence is demonstrated in the commentary above that includes words that alludes to policy functions of the state to be that of the evangelical churches. Offering keen insight into the value of bigotry in the advancement of law reform and progressive policy positions that is inclusive of all citizens. It is a play on power and influence and an assumption that because the church represents GOD, the state is to capitulate to the power of GOD.

The former PM was clear in 2013, in his independence day speech about the role of government vs Church matters and its function to govern. What matters in the end is the value of the constitution and its application to all citizens. He said,

Government will therefore fully respect the right of the churches to propagate their understanding of the morality, or immorality, of homosexuality. But what Government cannot do is to shirk its duty to ensure that all citizens, without exception, enjoy the full protection of the law."

"After all, the Belize Constitution that affirms the supremacy of God also affirms fundamental rights and the dignity of the individual human being."

"That same Constitution further declares that all persons are equal before the law and entitled to non-discrimination; to freedom from interference with their privacy; and to freedom from unlawful attacks on their honour and reputation³."

Interestingly, the reference to Supremacy of God is taken at the NEAB right, to question, oppose and challenge the contents of the gender policy of 2013. In their mind words matter, with GOD reference in the constitution they get to take over the role of the state to set policy.

On pastor shared,

..It is our job to safeguard the way of life for us as Belizeans and also to safeguard what we like to call the Constitution of God which happens to make up the preamble to our constitution.⁴

³ [Independence day speech, 2013](#)

⁴ [Church function as policy maker](#)

This incorrect position is noted when the preamble of the constitution is noted for section a of the constitution when it says;

affirm that the Nation of Belize shall be founded upon principles which acknowledge the supremacy of God, faith in human rights and fundamental freedoms, the position of the family in a society of free men and free institutions, the dignity of the human person and the equal and inalienable rights with which all members of the human family are endowed by their Creator

Using Supremacy of God out of context is a talking point that radiates well with followers and timid policy makers that have no basis in fact when the preamble speaks of the importance of human rights and freedoms, free men and free institutions. In addition, the pastor spoke of safeguarding a way of life, but failed to discuss livelihood matters in the same breathe for LGBT Belizeans. This commentary did not reflect a united front for the Evangelicals and the traditional churches. For there was a split with traditional churches who saw, Philp bishop Wright and Reverend Roosevelt Papouloute leave the Morality Commission. Furthermore, establishing that as a society we are not fanatical in our approach to living together. The issue of livelihood was noted in this news coverage right along with expectation that's church opposition would mature. The commentary added;

"Not one of these church leaders will clean my backside when I get old. Not one of these church leaders will pay my rent or my healthcare bill if I come with cancer. Not one of these church leaders will pay for my education if I need to go further in my studies. So we have issues that must be addressed constructively and what has happened with the commission is that it shows that as Belizeans we are not a society of extreme thinkers. We are open to constructive and logical responses and that is the way we move forward. The problem with the Morality Commission is that its optics is bad when you're going to legitimize extreme thinking in a society which is about live and let live. The problem with the Morality Commission, or as Minister Faber says, the Church/State Commission, is that it not only legitimizes extremism, it also excluded the marginalized people in that discussion and did not uphold the values of natural justice which requires that government arbitrates the issue by bringing both parties at the table. What we have not had, and there's an opportunity for Minister Faber and government to do, is to sit both sides on the table and outline what the issues are because cabinet nor the church leaders have ever studied or taken the time out to study what our issues are, nor have they considered the impact of their position in regards to opposing Section Fifty-three and our lives. And the farce has to stop because even as the decision rolls through the Court of Appeal, when are church leaders going to

take the time out to substantively take the position to say, "Alright, as LGBT Belizeans and as citizens they have substantive concerns in addressing their safety net issues."⁵

Litigation may have force the system to acknowledge the rights of LGBT Belizeans, but it did not have any transition into the application of the clause equal protection under the law. No discussion about the design of new laws, the updating of old laws, or to address the application of our fundamental rights in the constitution to upgrade old laws have occurred. Extraordinarily, while the Court may interpret the constitution and its application old laws, it does not make laws and cannot force parliament to move to enforce its ruling. Resulting in legal rulings staying in limbo without time limits. Additionally, its cabinet that gives instruction to the Attorney General Office regarding court rulings and legislative amendment. If cabinet has no interest in making legal amendments, despite a Court ruling and parliament decides to take its own time, it becomes an exercise that undermines the value of Respect for Rule of Law that's waits for Parliament to approve legislation. What one learns is that even with positive legal outcomes, political considerations must be factored in the transition process of legislative acknowledgement.

Section 53 comes to mine when in December, 2019, the Court of Appeals ruled and upheld the decision of the Supreme Court in 2016. Systemic delays have been reflected in the legislative process because over one year has passed and parliament has not seen it fit to address the amendments to section 53. Interestingly the case of Bryant Codd and Nunez in a stop and search practice showed that can be done when there was will. The case of police profiling observations;

He said that the officer could see that all he had in his bag was "two Gatorade, a water and changing clothes."

⁵ [LGBT livelihoods, 2017](#)

But, according to Codd, the police told them that, “we know Belizeans athletes love going to workout frasss”.

Codd told me that, “This is my third time being questioned and my second time being stopped and having my photo taken and information.”

He also informed me that for one of his teammates, this was the second time he was approached and questioned. Not only that, this was done to him by the same police officers. And why? “Because the officers remembered him,” Codd noted

He also indicated that their practice was delayed for 10 minutes and ruined because of being stopped.

They were no longer in the right mindset⁶.

Bryant Codd and Gregg Nunez filed claims against the police department to challenge, the constitutionality of two separate instance of stop and searches that ended with photographing of their identifying document, despite, the absence of criminality or charges ever been laid.

As a result of the case filed the police department issued a statement to stop the practice of stop and search on April 21st, 2021. The police Memo stated;

With immediate effect, all police officers must cease and desist the taking of photographs or videos of persons and/or identification documents in situations where those persons are not charge or detained and held in custody⁷

While the situations are different, the effect of the system responding to the timely concerns of ordinary citizens is possible. While the problems have an intersectional lens- straight, male, creoles- what grabs my attention is the efficiency of the head of the police department to show discretion. The constitution of Belize is clear about equal protection under the law, but in practice, unless lobbying, litigation or an advocacy mechanism develops, state systems are under no incentive to value the respect for rule of law. The effect is sanction inequality in the treatment of its own citizens.

⁶ [Brant Codd Stop and Search](#)

⁷ [Police Memo, April, 2021](#)

While state sanction harassment against young creole males between the ages of 18-30 is done through stop and search, state sanction exclusion in legislation that does not acknowledge our socio-economic rights or our vulnerability to crime remain unaddressed after 30 years plus of independence for LGBT Belizeans.

While the state may not have beaten Codd and Nunez in their Stop and Search practices, the culture of indifference is even more insidious. It showed the state willingness to render expendable the bodies, rights and freedoms of its own citizens.

In the case of Gerado Vasquez 17-year-old who went missing in September 2018⁸, the police investigator was plagued with investigation problems. It was discovered that the police department had a canine unit, but did not have a cadaver dog, there was no attempt at doing geographic profiling of the missing boy nor of a possible perpetrator. UniBAM, helped with finding the resources for a cadaver dog, profiling the perpetrator and the general area where the body parts would be found. Later, the suspect was charged with having sex with a pig⁹, but not before escaping with the murder of six people¹⁰. While the boys dismembered legs were buried on October 5th, 2020. The point is made that opportunities are missed when the state does not partner with Civil Society to identify resources to support an investigation. When budget allocations disrupts identification of a body, in this case, the legs of Gerardo Vasquez, it amplifies the grieve process of a mother. To this day, there has been no conclusive evidence who murdered Gerardo Vasquez.

⁸ [Gerardo Vasquez](#)

⁹ [Albert Ara](#)

¹⁰ [Murdering a family of six](#)

Overall all there has been, over 80 murders of LGBT persons since 1995, but there have been no hate crime legislation? LGBT vulnerability to poverty, benefits access and employment protections remain off the national agenda.

Section IV: Social Analysis

Gender is a social construct that has shaped policy, legislation and community relationships in Belize. LGBT participants were asked what gender means to them. They offered a flexible point of view that was based on individual need, not a majority cisgender views. The reality, is that policy, legislation and community practices do not deconstruct the psychosocial needs of LGBT Belizeans, but act as a loose mechanism to undermine individual right to expression and dignity, hence, becoming a tool of oppression that LGBT individuals push back on in passive aggressive actions that is unknown to the system like the mobilisation of house parties and pride events. Despite this, LGBT participants noted their views of gender in the following quotes:

your identity either male or female

The sex your assigned at birth

The way you identify yourself, the way you feel!

Gender is nothing to do with sex, but the way the person express themselves, it could be male, female, trans or intersex.

Your identity!

Who I am. Who I identify as, whether I identify as a guy, girl, something in between, something out of it. To me gender is something that is internal. something that someone access or done access for themselves. It goes beyond physical characteristics. It goes beyond your genetic makeup. And your gender can be something where you can see yourself as male, or female or both. Gender is a form of self-awareness of who you are.

Ask about three gender related issues, a lesbian participant shared the following

“Gender related issues, as a woman, sexual harassment comes into play, gender bias because they believe women can’t do what women can do. And stereotyping, would be a gender related issues, they expect you a mom, a wife and you’re a this, you’re supposed to act in accordance with what society has put in regards to what your gender is supposed to be or do.”

When a transwoman is asked her concerns, the issue is around violence. Interestingly, alluding the covert and overt nature of systemic discrimination and horizontal violence in

the workplace, state systems and community. The trans woman in particular said the following,

All a we have wa fear enna wee. Fu mek them hurt yo! We free fu express it, but da how other people will tek it.

She goes on to point out that the right to expression, identity is upheld by the person, regardless of the violence confronted in community or the exclusionary practices of the state. She alludes to a singular point that people have an innate need to be happy with themselves and be free.

I think my self-acceptance” allows me to be free. Once you have high self-esteem, comfortable ena yo own body, you have that high self-confidence, nobody can’t tell you, whenever they tell you something, you no mek it bother you, you done the up dey ena yo own mind. Ena yo own bubble.

..we are free to express ourselves ,Yes we are free, because any body could dress how dem want. it no matter, if we base our lives on what other people think, or feel, we wa never live freely.

This desire for personhood is shaped by the optics or degree of mistreatment and assimilation. Even in the gay community, there is tone and body policing culture that is part of the experience. This gay participant alludes to the nuances in his following commentary. While not intended to be disrespectful, leaves a false sense of personal security about levels of vulnerability when he said;

I can express myself freely because I no really care with what other people have to say about me. by the way I dress, the way I walk, the way I talk, by my accessories....my earrings, my bands

Prodded some more for a deeper response, he replies,

Question: do you get treated the same way like kim and jayden?

Answer: No! I no get insulted the way they do! its way different, because I no really get insulted they way they do, the way they dress.

Question: why don't you get insulted the way they do.

answer Because I am gay and they are trans.

While not discussed in the focus group, trauma, gender expression and our life cycle interplay in the daily life of the person, but not documented by the state, the community or organizations. In domestic violence cases, it takes a death, a rape and injury to

capture the imagination of the country. But for LGBT Belizeans, the injuries are internalised, cumulative and about a matter of survival. This transwoman lays out her maturation into accepting her gender identity, but struggles to appreciate that in that maturation, is a lot of internalised violence that amplifies her anxieties, the right to movement and association in her community and at the workplace. She summaries her own experience in the following way,

..Maybe at the beginning, when I just started, it started like an insult, I never know how fi dress, put mi self together and along the way you learn, try blend with normal female. I think I get over it. I no get that insult, at first, but maybe yes at first, them mi tell yo things. I never that confident in you self. Yo could a mi si you the hide, or something like that, but now yo feel confident, yo walk normal and try pass like a normal woman. I think I get over it. I no get that insult at first, maybe at first, I never really confident at first

Interestingly, we are called to balance our victimhood with or desire to resist oppression. Public perspective on gender-based violence is determined by workshops, policy meetings, public messaging on radio and news reports. We are more informed by our personal experiences, however, representation in local news, the judiciary and in parliament is lacking in awareness raising and institutional interventions and protections. Reflecting systemic practices that is endemic in public interventions that erase the concerns of LGBT populations who are citizens of Belize. One person point out,

gender base violence Is local in Belize that is limited and put into a box. I say this particularly because a lot of the campaigns around GBV focus on women and children. When in actuality all of our LGBT organization, are working toward addressing some pillar when addressing GBV. a lot of that is not advertise, a lot of that is not seen. when it comes with GBV its almost is synonymous with domestic violence. Which leaves a lot of the work to be done uncovered.

Systemic exclusion and the culture of complicity by omission, indifference and inaction helps to give perpetrator of violence permission to amply violence because the state response have been silence in terms of champions, interventions, budget allocations and legislative approval. The commentary below offers insight into the culture of state

systems “sticking their head in the sand” to ignore its own citizens because they belong to a minority group. This is problematic in governance, because leaving no one behind become a heteronormative principle that is exclusionary and alienates the country’s ability to efficiently use its human capital to drive economic growth. The participant said,

It’s a reality that the LGBT here in Belize live. Because we are considered a gender minority... So we see where a lot of the issues that may be addressed only for women and children are rampant within the LGBT community. These are not being discussed. These are not being brought at the table. I feel a lot more that could be done because of the narrow definition and scope of work we have here in Belize to address gender base violence.

What we think should go into the policy as citizens in the minority, plays into a larger discussion about systemic biases and decision-making processes that tend to welcome low hanging fruits in our system. What is clear is that inclusive planning and decision-making practices are evolving into engagement, but a commitment to act remain a fundamental challenge without a watch dog, a monitor to drive discussion of transformation in the gender policy and the gender base violence plan of action. We cannot claim consultation and participation, if the concerns are not at least noted in the narrative of both state documents. If persons with disability, older person, prisoners, poor persons, persons representing the mentally ill are not at the table. This person notes,

The action plan needs to actually provide an opportunity to widen the scope, and opportunity of gender issues while predominantly on a global scale may impact women and children the most. We need to look at our local context and understand we have a thriving and visibly growing LGBT community that is impacted daily. Something like the EOB, should be supported by the gender policy, should have some reference in regards to supporting any documents or any legislations to ensure that people have equal access, equal protection when it comes to gender minorities. Not only the LGBT community, but other minority which exist. I believe within the action plan there needs to be something linking advocacy around bills or policies such as the EOB, such as whatever bills comes up supporting gender equality on a whole. If there is any way for that could be captured in the NSP, to work towards creating that sensitization, to work towards creating that support for policies not necessarily specifically EOB, but policies that work toward gender equality across the board.

In addition, laws without systems and interventions means nothing, if they are not operationalised, this person made the point about the public and private sector role in the response to promoting gender equality. Creating policy in these sectors, may help to promote support systems, but it takes public education interventions to teach affected communities to use the systems to drive transformation. Where entire populations are not offered critical analysis about systems that oppressed, they tend to perpetrate or amplify their vulnerability to their own mistreatment by remaining silent. The quote below makes the point about the process of engagement and transformation.

There also needs to be an aspect that strengthen the public sector, as well as the private sector entities to ensure that their policies which are in place, create gender equality, and there also needs be a sensitization with the minority groups, to understand that they are not being given a privilege, hey are not being given a preference, they are given exactly what they deserve equal rights and equal access. And only by then, can the gender minorities truly advocate for themselves and make the gender policy a living document.

Who is responsible for the gender policy operationally is left up to the state to implement through its various Ministries. The problem of monitoring and evaluating the complementary contributions of civil society to the work of the state is hardly tracked in any data system. The notion that everyone is responsible for the gender policy implementation, but ignores systemic biases against persons with mental health issues, disabled, L.G.B.T, older persons, the poor, prisoners, speaks of the burden ordinary citizens carry to defend their livelihoods. This commentary speaks to the shortcomings of policy papers that exist that does not coordinate rights holders, duty bearers and gate keepers of the law and financial resources of the state.

Of course the political correct answer is everybody has a role to play, but such a thing needs to be championed by human development, and it cant just wa policy that get created weh have a sexy launch and then it no bring up against until CSW or UPR or one of them thing deh! It needs to be truly championed, it needs to be channelled. There needs to be an entire department that

is mandated and effectively execute the actions as outline in the policy because what we see all demy a policy, sexy, get created, everything and dem sit on a shelf. Nobody actually have the mandate to ensure that the action plan are effectively met. Yes we tick the box we meet with this one, we meet with that one whatever.

The opportunity is to mainstream the issues of gender equality with monitoring mechanisms in every Ministry is an interesting one. With government claiming a 300m¹¹ shortfall in revenue in 2020 or a 28% drop due to COVID 19, making recommendations without resources makes transformation a challenge, it makes enforcement superficial, it makes protective legislation a stalled reality, it creates an atmosphere of competing interest of economics, socioeconomic and civil rights concerns buck heads with state ability to perform because of a lack of resources. Nevertheless, civil society has a role to play in the form of grant mobilisation to support enforcement mechanism like the Human Rights Observatory of the United Belize Advocacy Movement while the state sort out its resources. One participant point out the ideals below with a basic message that vigilance is required to move gender equality along. It cannot become collateral damage in state planning.

But if we truly want to see gender equality in our country we need to focus on it. We need to ensure, there is within all departments actually, again, spearhead by human development , there needs to be a gender office, or a gender officer within government agencies, if it comes to police, there needs to be a gender specialist there, if it comes to immigration, there needs to be a gender specialist there , even ministry of works, there needs to be a gender specialist there, you look at the policies, especially with the engineers who work with Ministry of Works, the policies may not be conducive to the women engineers because it a male dominated field. if you truly want to see gender equality human development need to devote time to it, yes there is a lot of human issues that the HD has to deal with. They need to understand they have one of the biggest mandate, they have to be equip and ready to actually see it. And how they could do it, create training of trainers, have a cohort of gender specialist from each Ministries get trained, go back, look at the policies, mandate them, we have policies such as the sexual harassment act or policy or something like that where every entity, every government agency was expected to create a policy and submitted to human development, how much of them actually have it, who actually follow up. HD needs to create wa unit that goes out and do the work, and then off course that where it trickles back down to a civil responsibility that NGOs, Organizational leaders, ministers would have that responsibility. Because the same way you create a good standing NGO list, there should be a standing list for everyone who have their gender policy up to place. Their workplace policy up to place, their PLHIV policy up to place. We look at the economic point of ensuring NGOs are in good standing we forget the human aspect of actually protecting the people. So them there needs to be an office within human development that that's solely their jobs, because, pretty much that comes

¹¹ [PM speech 2021](#)

women, children, homes, families everything. If we have people dedicated public and private sector have these policies in place, are implemented, are rated, are publicly shared like wa NGO list, I think we can go far, it might be wishful thinking, it's something that's real and it can be done.

The community frustration about policy development is that the state consults, but does not implement the substance of its responsibility. Leaving LGBT people to wonder, if the state is serious to acknowledge livelihoods as citizens. Historical action of the state in the past, shows that state has a habit of throwing LGBT populations under the bus, to create the optics of an inclusive society. We waste millions in systems that promote biases, that is clogged, and inefficient, that promotes abuse by symbols of the state, that promote differential treatment of one population over the next in old and new legislation, that insist on talking about inclusive interventions, but make no substantive move forward in data collection, budget allocations or legislative change. In essence governance remains a divide and conquer strategy over all citizens, with changes that are at best superficial. This person highlights her concerns about the level of change and systemic biases,

Ah kinda don't the get upset with demy a questions, because a feel like we keep the talk gender, gender equality, we keep di talk womens rights, we keep di talk all dem ya thing, and especially today weh dah international womens day, and wa simply modifier, infront of the fact I dah wa woman, if I add lesbian in front of that woman, or chancey, infront of that woman, the state determine who I actually could raise my child with, who could protect me and who could protect my child and who could give my asset to. it dah wa sad state when you look at Belize as a country weh millions and millions of dollars, invested in a weh, but me as a woman does not have the simplest protection or support as any other women because there is one modifier infront of me, one modifier infront of I present myself or associate myself with or who I include in my life, so as far as i concerns, if we want to talk about GP and we want talk about gender equality and stuff like that. The mere fact that there needs to be a cohort of LGBT person to be heard, we di du wa bad thing. The mere fact that LGBT people have to be wa separate category when addressing issues in regards to gender, we de far it. So if we want to talk about gender equality. We need to ensure that every policy or action plan in place, it allows men, women, child, gay black, whatever, fu be able to have the same set of support, the same set of everything. It goes beyond just equal pay, access to changing room or stuff like that. Again, I say the gender policy needs to be able to support any other policy that comes along in favor of abolishing discrimination in this country. If the gender policy can't do that, then the GP has no purpose. If the gender policy does not have action to ensure that whatever legislation come up that is pro equality that is supported not only by the state, the churches, by everybody then there is not much that can be done. so we done know that. If there is not a action plan within the gender policy to be able to harness or to be able to gain acknowledgement that yes, it does not matter what the modifier infront of people, we are all Belizeans. We have the inalienable right to family, the inalienable right to work, we have the right to whatever it is that every single other Belizean has. Not because we are a minority or considered a vulnerable group that means we have to be given the shitty

end of the stick. For the lack of a better phrase. Until there is a policy, that can carry out a mind and hearts campaign with naysayers like the churches, then, there is not much that can be done. And that's my take on that.

Trauma does not go away because the state rules by divide and conquer strategy.

Making the point that systemic bias, the social system of violence and state indifference helps to relegate LGBT Belize to 2nd class citizens. This commentary from a transwoman expresses the fear of violence with her desire to be her authentic self as a trans woman in Belize, but she must manage her anxiety about the expectation of violence.

What she di try sey like ehm. We as trans...lota people out dey label we as trans because we do wa get wa lash back different than how wa other man get. People Ok! Society done ok with done being gay.so I mean being trans is a whole next level of thing people no accept yet. That dah the same way how people midi act when this whole thing di try accept just gay people. So we pass dat. Everybody else gay. Now being trans far different. so why she de sey, we di try pass. Dah no like we want go out deh like a normal gay person di sey. "oh I gay no give a fuck what nobody have to she!" We will tell, yes, we openly trans, but dah no something we could go tell the hole world soh, because we could get affected differently. People was get more physical, mostly, verbal. we wa get wa harder impact because people done tired a si battiman. So if they see trans, dem di see different and worse. If dah somebody dem mi si and den fine out yo dah this, like they would feel offended, which dah no your fault, but they would tek that pan demself, you mi di trick dem. Dem trick dem ownself. So we just have to blend in and duh mee!We do di go out dehand lable ourselves we dah trans.Dat dah fu we personal thing.If we no want tell nobody anything.We no need fu tell nobody anything.

There are extraordinary exceptions because as one participant puts it" DL guys accept transwomen!" point out that the culture of Belizean sexuality is just as fluid as in any other country. The comment points out that the social system of fear creates a culture of invisibility among DL men who desire transwoman, but who cannot deal with the social judgment of that desire. The power of social visibility brings psychological security in trans people for one day they will not need to live in fear. The commentary;

Gay people di out long!, everybody know certain things as gay. Dey no go into the terms, like this dah trans or bi, dey class everything as gay. So I mean gay people feel free, oh we dress like dem, but Eric sey I no dress like dey because I no dress like dem. Everybody feel like we the same, practically, almost the same, but we look far differently.

The them vs us cultures seems to play out well in the psychology of the LGBT population. This commentary about stigma and discrimination highlights the point that the community wants freedom and rights, but they don't know what level of risk to take to make it possible. Additionally, in developing mandates for the LGBT alphabet soup, it generates a psychology of division that plagues movement building through resource mobilisation and advocacy coordination. The result is a silo framework of interventions without out regard for collective benefits This is the struggle in movement building and political visibility;

The stigma and discrimination that comes along with it. There are some people who are uncomfortable out of the closet and want to just remain in their safe space. In how they managed before. They are conformist. they confirm to what society wants dem to be. They have no broken out of that shell. Because they are conforming. So when they see someone, already out the closet, then, they tend to stigmatise those people to want to fit in to the others, wider society. Others. Yo know why there is a dem vs us.Its because of our own community. If you notice, when the entire LGBT come off. They come under one umbrella. Lesbain, agy, bi sexual and transsexual. And the wider spectrum.the trans have their own thing, the gays have their own thing, the lesbian and bisexual have their own thing.So everybody start get segregated.the trans want their own umbrella, the queer their won flag, the bisexual want their won falg. By the end of the say, dey dah no wah community again. Dah weh part dah weh part the individuals are not part of the LGBT. Oh he no even freaking gay. Where they started, from a gayman. **Everybody start looking beyond the common interest of the community and they start looking at self-interest.** I dah done trans, I no need to look about your human rights cuz you trans like dem. When yo hear, yo dah trans, yo no gay, men no fuck me! When it first started, gay means, which was. But we started saying happy. Ah yo gay, I dah no trans, I dah no lesbian and we just started to segregate the whole LGBT community. We started to fight fu we own equality than fight fu meh community.

What one concludes, is that oppressive system are sustained by the collective population affected themselves because they remain divided by coordination and strategy. This allows state system to have a minimalist approach to the needs of the population and maintain the 2nd class system in perpetuity. In simple term, visibly words may show up in policy and development documents, but never get budget allocations to address mentioned concerns because there is no advocacy driver. Allowing political systems to justify inaction to advance inclusive governance.

There are always biases, the system has always worked to oppress us. They don't want the minorities to have the same opportunities like the ones in power have. We are never consulted when laws are being awarded .and I think that should change that will not change if we are going to be silent, invisible and in the shadows

Fitting into the system and who can pass is standard identity politics, but it seems to be conflated with sexual roles that confuses misplaced power with human desire. This plays havoc around the community ability to respect the right to expression, authentic motivation to do community mobilisation and advancing civil rights concerns.

Wa trans organization. Trans bottoms, no business no dey. Why are we not welcomed because we no fit under unu umbrella. Yo have to go in their hair, the makeup, , the dress, the shoes and walk like wa female, talking like me. Because when yo go under fu dem umbrella, we are ot considered whole because dah way trans organizations Operate. Whe unu di fight fah? What dah the common interest that bring the lgbt community together? Everybody fight fu equality!

Part of the process demands, community dialogue and leadership analysis that is introspective and not tainted by any capacity building exercise or demands to meet indicators to measure success of performance. What clear is that long-term outcomes demand a structure of monitoring an evaluation that we are challenged to develop as a movement or as collective organizations. The begrudging acknowledgement that transwoman give to “gay people” about progress made in Belize is tempered with safety concerns about their own lives. We are challenged as well to deal with the nuances needs of our population, along with understanding the nuances of cumulative trauma on the population ability to be politically visible in Belize;

How will I understand the individual if ah no si and have the conversation.If you notice, everybody gone from gay to trans. dem come out as gay, den gaan to trans. Obviously, we as male wa have to start off as gay. That's why I sey all ah wi have similarities, but not everything, obviously we wah always argue off ah something. How is it that we have internalise the position that their pain is greater than my pain..Well it's not acceptable. Like I said, it's about wanting to oppress a population that has always been invisible, in the shadow. as of now, they are coming out into the light. We are being educated. Some people start to be close minded, they are not open to want to be friends, open to dialogue,to start the conversation. Maybe we need to stop waiting for the conversation...maybe we need to start it ourselves. yo know why dey use dat thing, “fu you pain greater than fu we pain? Because the things is, it goes like this...if you decide to have a march for gay people, the trans community no wah show up.yo know why dem no wah show up.?no! the

march is led by gay people. No! nobody could know I am trans so dah wah forever remain in the shadows. so when the gay community is making advancement, thats why yo s idem ask the question weh di trans dem deh. The more I hide enna dishadow. So my identity will always be unknown.

The concern about violence by transwoman if further amplified by the lack of legislative acknowledgement that they are citizens too. They don't exist in health outcomes that include HIV prevention and treatment, in data collection around economic discussions nor justice conversations. The result lead to individuals carrying the burden of economic and personal security. The constant state of anxiety's is reflected in the need to keep their gender identity a secret. Becoming the new frontier of closet culture. One participant interviewed stated;

Trans absent at the table . Who need fu know, wah know! The rest no need fu know. If wah gay man come out every fucking people wah know, he dah battiman. Dat dah fuh we safety! We cant let the world know we dah way, trans!like I she, gay dah done lik wah norm for them. Dem done know dem, because gay people enna dem family. Everybody don't accept gay people from wah home.

The perceived fear, does not reflect the social reality one person alluded to in the focus group. He argued that while violence maybe an outcome of being trans, the men who are interested are DL men who prefer be in the closet and deal with trans women whom they consider female. He makes the point about the use of technology to cultivate these hidden relationships and that Belize Trans Color facebook page offers a safe space for sexual intimacy. These connections are not seen in the news, or books in education system or even research, resulting in a system of shadow citizenship which is sanction for violence by state and community systems. Homelessness, a lack of education, housing insecurity, poor health outcomes are consequences generated from reactions in the system when these relationships are cultivated in Belize. Despite this, a culture of passive resistance, rejecting any threat of violence and challenging gender norms have

been the reaction of the trans community to the socio-economic tools of oppression to meet the values of communal assimilation. The interesting thing about a secret relationship is that gay men and lesbian woman continue to have them. The participant point of view is established in the following way:

I fine eh puzzling, its because even with BTC page, right dey! The whole thing outlining tell what about the organization about. Yo have lots of profile come in and the ask. They teh it, to wah whole other level the ask fu hook dem up with transpeople to sleep with. Den, next thing which I feel trans, you as an individual have yo own thinking, maybe because of yo own safety, but dem do have people out dey wey intrigue fu wah know they actually have trans people out yah, but ena fud eh mentality, people weh done du surgery or things like that. Which we no have that yo no, weh dem du surgery. Yo have ah alota man out yah wey enna di closet or DL. Weh prefer was trans over wa MSM dat dah fu wa fact. I get dat wah lot. No care how much you know, they play with somebody out of the trans community, they would never put demselves enna wah gay relationship because dah no fu dem thing because dey si wah trans person as a female. So they prefer dem much less go with way MSM because dem no consider demselves gay.

The fears of transwomen, is reflected in general political representation, one participant shared," Even though we have had three different gay mayors past and present, gay ministers past and present, now confirmed but they no come out. We know better!"

Arguable, DL culture can amplify our citizenship invisibility as individuals and leaders in the system. This invisible nature can amplify insecurities about expression public and private expression. One participant makes the points," Sorry fu say it but some man ask you to put on Bra and no show mi this or dat."

The issue of stigma and discrimination, misogyny and violence are complementary issues that builds on each other. They may occur at the same time or on separate occasions in the system. One person brought up the matter this way;

Um ok so the issues would be the stigma and discrimination that exist when accessing health care, maybe uh government services and even private services as well because there are just some places where some don't dare walk in because they feel that they are not welcomed there and those issues deprive us from living a free and equal lives.

As a system justice access carries its own bias response, real or perceived, the optics of the justice system discourages victims from reporting violations and trusting police

officers will do their jobs. A culture of gender inequity is sustained when, evidence and proper investigations is replaced by hearsay and assumptions. As one persons noted in their commentary;

One of the issues with caleb is bias, bet report at the police station that is bias towards the homosexual community the same term that are being degraded by.. So the whole entire system is bias towards man when it comes to domestic violence and that needs to change

The right to expression in the workplace plays out with management as the place of business right to provides a public good and accommodation clashes with the right of the individuals to express their gender identity. This person offers perspective;

All of us got the same qualifications but because I gay the next one get the job. With the entire spectrum of the LGBTQIA, gender is not just male female. Removing barriers to getting jobs regardless of gender. I used to work and, I use to wear make up the only thing I couldn't maybe wear a female blouse or skirt but I wear skinny jeans and But when I started I used to really overdo it. But they ask to not wear clothes that are too tight.

One participant of the study alluded to efforts being made to address inclusive governance that advances equity in our society but we must recognize its complexities. In our policy and development plans. While he spoke of the gender policy, his commentary can apply to a wider scope of issues;

Yes so um so the gender policy has been a couple of times before, how did the gender policy came about there has been this power of women and the gender policy is an evolving document that we see the inequality across many populations sexuality and gender identity are complex terms and the what we want is that the programs the funding the allocation of resources the different opportunities reflect the other populations there are other. We can't marginalize one population and we can't. So that is what we want reflected on.

In addition, the focus group started to reflect on structures that could function among state systems, especially in the area of justice and gender. What the conversation alluded to was the need to treat the issue of gender as an intersectional issue of all citizens when designing and developing interventions and designing budget allocations. Data was reference in the conversation, but how does one collect data if the state does not see any value in doing so. It demands a discussion to cultivate a system of

disaggregation that focuses on the population. Recognizing the value of integration, the commentary insightful views offers an opportunity for reflection this way;

So maybe a trans commission, maybe the police department can have a trans unit to listen to trans issues just like there is a domestic violence issues. The trans unit won't only be but they can also embark on education campaigns. Crime violations but they can do education campaigns and go to different schools. Look pan the gender women's commission. Equality across the board. A trans unit, an African unit, a gay man unit and everybody will want their unit so you have to educate. We need to move with the tide and domestic violence How many trans rights? Do we actually need the unit? Back it up with data

Additionally, the LGBT participant recognise the need to dive deeper into community mobilization, to educate and to coordinate among L.G.B.T led organizations. The point is made that if we are not at the table and know what we want, we cannot expect government to move. Suggesting the need to cultivate coalition building, collective strategic plan and resource mobilisation framework.

When it comes to gender based violence everything falls back on the government. It's government and the community because until the community start demand what they want then government won't move. When the community start shows up at the meetings. Check what you need. My point exactly! You see it's the community that needs to demand Them people and say hear what we want A B C and D. But if the community no demand nothing. We will talk on behalf of the community. Our Circle, BYEC, EYBM Can't complain

Section V: Conclusion

While LGBT Belizean reject social norms that threaten their right to expression, association and personal security, consequentially, they have internalise the collective judgement of the majority that have led to the creation of their own collective culture of “toning it down” to mitigate unwanted attention. In simply terms, a practice of psychological violence is perpetuated to mitigated unwanted social attention.

Trauma perpetuated by the state trickles down to family units, as no legislation exists to address hate crime, ensues access to socioeconomic rights are applied evenly under the law. This law of state support, grants permission by omission for ordinary Belizeans to wound, inflict harm, threaten or insult anyone who may look different from them. Add, economic data in the area of housing, employment, health outcomes, and in generating wealth and we are left to our own solutions to sustain economic independence in the society.

While that state speaks of leaving now one behind, it does not make a significant attempt to invite the population to the development or policy table. Even with the litigation of section 53, it has made no further attempt to cultivate legislative acknowledgement in new legislation besides the Equal Opportunities Bill.

Noteworthy, overt and covert bigotry plagues the system as policymakers and champions alike, have no insisted on updated old laws that have existed from colonial times through a Legal Review Unit. They have not sought to ensure that new law are constitutionally sound and sough to make decisions without a deliberate attempt to profile our socio-economic needs as citizens.

Finally, the community has been able to create formal structures to driver their own advocacy issues that can shape the way state mechanisms involve them in decision making, in health, justice and gender matters. While there is a broad development framework is needed that has a strong inclusive financial strategy, the state and its economic framework still does not understand the contribution of over 12,000 men who have sex with men, 596 transwomen according to the population size estimate of 2018. These numbers do not include lesbian and bi sexual women.

The struggle to mainstream LGBT socio-economic and civil rights needs into state systems will continue as the community struggles to come out. With 72.1% between the ages of 16- over 41 years old¹² being down low or somewhat out, we will continue to struggle with political representation in the wider Belizean society. The most political action of any individual's is to come out the closet. In the meantime, its 27.9% of the out population driving discussion about legal reform and economic justice.

¹² Population Size Estimate of 2018