



THREE INSIGHTS

HOW CAN BUSINESS SUPPORT THE ECONOMIC INCLUSION OF LGBTI PEOPLE AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN EMERGING MARKETS?

GLOBAL SUMMIT / EQUITY / WEBINAR / 14 JUNE 2022

Hosted with: IFC

We would like to thank the following panellists and members of the **Business Fights Poverty** community for their participation:

Fiona MacDonald, Diversity & Inclusion Lead, Talent & Culture, **ANZ**; **Kelly Widelska**, Economic Inclusion Advisor, **IFC**; **Philip Crehan**, Founder, **Eolas Consulting** and Senior Advisor, **Center for Values in International Development**; **Simon Brown**, Senior Global Technical Lead for Economic Empowerment, **Sightsavers**; **Rudaba Zehra Nasir**, Global Lead, Economic Inclusion

Moderator: IFC

This session, hosted with IFC, explored how business can support the economic inclusion of LGBTI people and persons with disabilities in emerging markets. What are some recent examples of businesses focusing on the inclusion of LGBTI people and persons with disabilities as employees and as customers, and what is driving this? What are some good practices that others can adopt? What are some lessons learned on this inclusion journey, and what more does the business community need to do? The session drew on new research by IFC on the role of inclusive banking in supporting employees and customers.

INSIGHT 1: **RECOGNISE THAT INCLUSION IS IN EVERYONE'S INTEREST**

Even though LGBTI people and persons with disabilities are very different, they do share commonalities in terms of the socioeconomic barriers and obstacles they face, being particularly underserved in the financial sector, according to Fiona MacDonald. Studies have shown that inclusive economies fare better, affirmed Philip Crehan, and that any type of exclusion—based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities, or any other category—comes with a cost in terms of GDP. Given that businesses exist within economies and that inclusion translates into monetary benefits, there is a strong business case for the inclusion of LGBTI people and persons with disabilities in the private sector.

Simon Brown reported figures from the ILO and The World Bank which show the labour force participation gap of people with disabilities constrains global economic growth by about \$6 trillion per year, or 7% of the global domestic product.

We need to sensitise people and train them and address those unconscious biases if we really [want] to create those inclusive workplaces and not just have rainbow flags everywhere.

**Rudaba Zehra Nasir, Global Lead,
Economic Inclusion, IFC**

My real belief is that we're simply at the right moment, when many leading companies—and within them, some brilliant leaders—have really recognized that [economic inclusion] has become an ethical credibility and sustainability issue.

**Simon Brown, Senior Global Technical Lead
for Economic Empowerment, Sightsavers**

Bridging that gap would bring about 200 million people into the labour force. However, Simon observed that the numbers are less important than this unique moment in time, where corporate leaders really “get it”.

Philip concurred, stating that not only is there a moral dimension to working with LGBTI people, it is also good business. Citing a report from the Australian Human Rights Commission and Deloitte, Fiona warned against the reputational risk that businesses face when they fail to create a diverse and inclusive work environment, as the latter means that people from diverse communities will be unwilling to engage or do business with the brand. Recapping the business case, Kelly Widelska noted that the purchasing power of LGBTI people is in the region of US\$4-5 trillion per annum.

INSIGHT 2: ENSURE GENUINE PARTICIPATION: “NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US”

Bringing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the discussion, Kelly Widelska emphasised that implementing the SDGs means leaving no one behind, and this includes LGBTI people and persons with disabilities. Fiona MacDonald brought forward the motto “*nothing about us without us*”—prevalent in the disability community—as a reminder that it is important to avoid assumptions and to make sure that people from different communities are actively involved in decisions that affect them. Such

involvement, Fiona said, must be achieved in balance, avoiding “cultural loading” of individuals from underrepresented groups with a burden to represent and talk on behalf of their communities.

Philip Crehan highlighted the need for a new paradigm in which companies engage far more with LGBTI organisations from the Global South, as well as the need for a more innovative decentralised and localised approach because “*that is where the magic happens*”. Kelly called for more inclusive services, products, and solutions to be developed through a community-specific lens, taking into consideration that there are no ‘normal’ needs anymore, as all persons are individuals. Businesses can reflect on questions such as who is being represented, who is making the decisions, and what opportunities are being missed. Kelly closed by underscoring the unprecedented digital power of new generations and the access to information that this entails, which will lead to the expansion of people’s awareness about exclusion and what can be done about it at the community level.

INSIGHT 3: AVOID “RAINBOW WASHING”, BUT DON’T WAIT UNTIL EVERYTHING IS PERFECT

Genuine inclusion requires changes to company culture and structures. Philip Crehan advised that companies target attitudinal changes in parallel with institutional barriers. To hasten attitudinal shifts, Rudaba Zehra Nasir commented that if the true end goal is the creation of inclusive workplaces and not just more rainbow flags, businesses need to sensitise people and train them, addressing unconscious biases.

Economic inclusion does present challenges. Kelly observed that change may often be a case of two steps forward and one step back; it is the direction of travel that matters. Drawing from her own organizational practices, Fiona described the systems-perspectives angle that helps ANZ in their process of becoming more inclusive of non-binary and gender-diverse staff and customers—for example, making it easier for people to change their gender on the system and not requiring people to have titles.

Our panellists acknowledged the real risk of “rainbow washing,” and Fiona MacDonald advised that conversations with and listening to different communities is pivotal for making sure that actions emerge from a place of authenticity. However, she warned that corporations cannot wait until everything is perfect to act. Similarly, Kelly Widelska

encouraged businesses to take action: *“don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good.”* Ultimately, concluded Fiona, businesses must embrace public commitments, speak out for what they think matters, and do so with transparency and accountability.

RESOURCES SHARED:

- **WBCSD:** [The business Commission for Tackling Inequality](#)
- **ANZ:** [Advancing Economic Inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community](#)
- **IFC:** [Banking and the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- **Business Fights Poverty:** [Poverty Tsunami Briefing Paper](#)