Blue Diamond Society
*(Katmandu, Nepal)*

**Speaking out about health and human rights**

**Strategies:**

- Advocating at the national level to challenge legal and political restrictions on MSM
- Using diverse approaches to HIV services to provide a full range of health and support programs
- Engaging law enforcement, government, and media to address discrimination
- Finding common ground with other marginalized groups

Founded in 2001 with a focus on HIV prevention for sexual minorities, Nepal's Blue Diamond Society has in recent years broadened its health focus and now offers HIV care, support, and treatment programs for MSM, transgender persons, and other LGBT people across the country. At the same time, the organization has taken on a significant national role as a respected advocate for policy change on a broad range of issues related to human rights, MSM, transgender persons, and healthcare. Indeed the group’s founder and director, Sunil Pant, has become the first openly gay politician in Nepal and sits on the country’s governing Constituent Assembly.

Blue Diamond Society has adopted a diverse approach to service delivery. It starts by creating safe spaces to foster interaction and imparting self-care and life skills training. With offices in 30 districts, networks in 50, and one hospice devoted to caring for HIV-positive MSM and transgender people, the organization also offers a host of HIV-related services, including educational programs, peer outreach, HIV testing, sexually-transmitted infection (STI) treatment, safe-sex advice, and condom distribution. As in many resource-limited countries, however, lubricant remains in scarce supply. “No one in Nepal produces lube,” explains Mr. Pant, “so it’s not always available.”

The peer education program has been a vital component of Blue Diamond Society’s work. The educators “are a real bridge between hidden populations and the healthcare services they need,” said Mr. Pant. That kind of outreach is essential when HIV prevalence among MSM is estimated at 4.8 percent, roughly nine times that of the general population.

It is on the advocacy front that Blue Diamond Society has made perhaps the greatest impact in Nepal. The group actively engages with law enforcement, government, and media to address broad issues of social and legal discrimination. “We used to face a lot of violence and abuse from security forces, but that’s been going down since the Supreme Court decision in 2007 legalizing...”
homosexuality],” said Mr. Pant. “Having legal rights sends a strong message to the authorities that they can no longer cause this kind of discrimination. Now Nepal is writing a new constitution and I think there will be a lot of progress for LGBT people”—perhaps including the right to same-sex marriage, a goal being advanced by Mr. Pant and other advocates.

Blue Diamond Society has been able to make significant headway for MSM rights and health despite what Mr. Pant describes as Nepal’s “political and economic instability.” One way the organization has maneuvered through the shifting landscape is by finding common ground with other groups that face discrimination in Nepal. “Whenever we can, we move to support other parts of society that are also marginalized,” he explained. “Our support of the elderly and other minority groups, for example—we have to be caring toward others and fight discrimination in whatever form it takes. That sense of equal opportunity and openness has really supported our movement.”

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