

Towards an inclusive and gender equal Bhutan

# **Dedication**

This story is inspired by Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck's tireless advocacy for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), equality, and diversity. Through Her Majesty's high-level advocacy and RENEW's rigorous efforts, people have become more aware of LGBTQ+ rights and individual dignity. Her Majesty's dedication to combating gender-based violence and fostering inclusivity has empowered countless individuals. We extend our deepest gratitude to Her Majesty for her unwavering commitment to these noble causes.

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#### Disclaimer

Data indicates that, in most cases, perpetrators are male, while victims are female.

# Unity in Diversity



Lekimeto stood nervously in front of the washroom. Lumo and Lhadhar were washing hands in the girls' toilet just when Lekimeto walked in. "Look at Lekimeto!" exclaimed Lumo, "She acts like a boy, talks like a boy, and walks like a boy but goes to the girls' toilet. What a shame."

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Lekimeto was in the toilet listening to the girls' talk. Just then Lhadar added, "Her parents must have fed her something to raise her like that."



After the two girls had left the washroom, Lekimeto walked out of the toilet with her head lowered and eyes fixed on the floor. She walked straight to a corner of the classroom. She thought, "Am I really a shame to myself and my parents?"

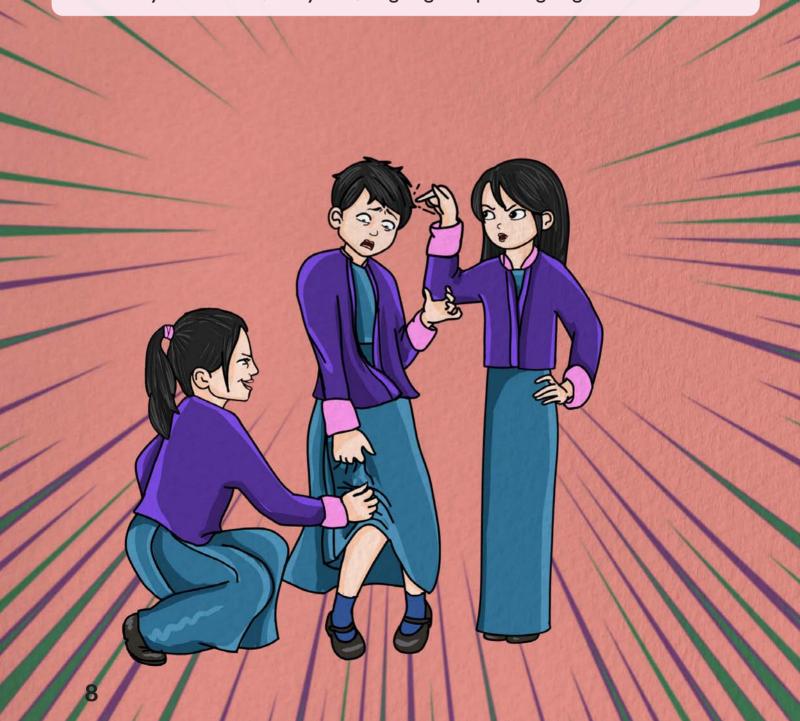
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During the interval, Lekimeto met Penjore in front of the classroom. As they waited for their teacher, they talked about how their friends made fun of them. "These boys always talk bad of me," he said, teary-eyed. "They say that I should wear an ankle-length gho so that it looks like a kira."

After the interval, Lekimeto and Penjore went back into the classroom, relieved that they could talk to each other about their problems. But things only got worse once they were inside the class. Other students pulled up Lekimeto's kira to the level of her knees, and pulled Penjor's gho down to the length of his ankle. "Now they look better," they said, laughing and pointing fingers at them.

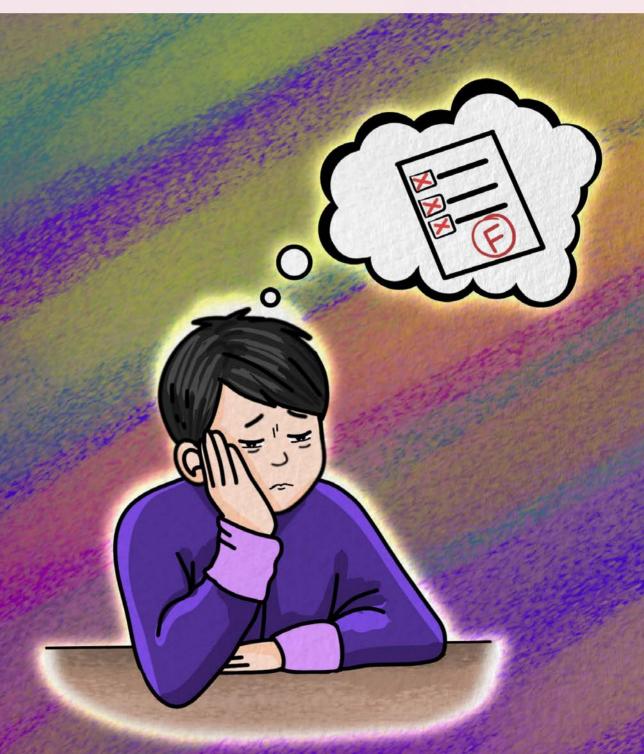


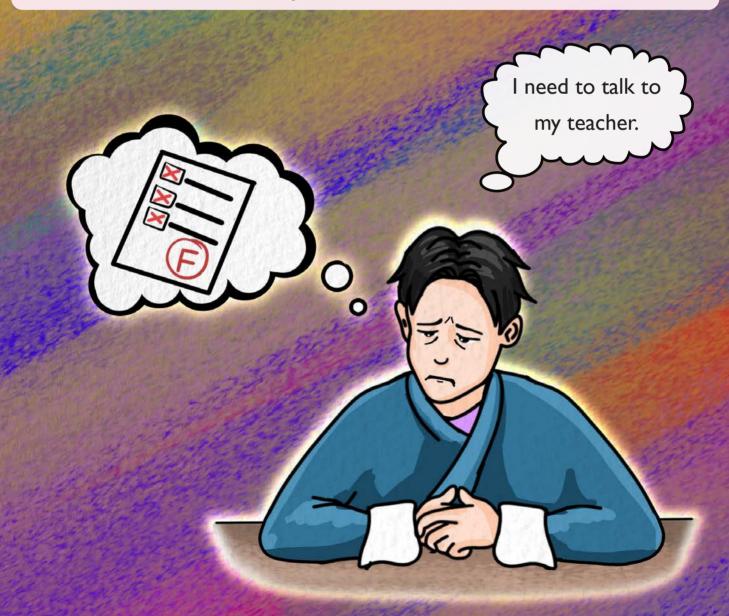
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Bullying started to take its toll on Lekimeto as her classmates and other children refused to understand her. Lekimeto was sad and was failing in studies. She wanted to drop out of school. She even started to withdraw from extracurricular activities. The situation was no different with Penjore. "I cannot take their insults anymore," he thought. "It's better to stay at home and help my parents than come to school. I will talk to Gatu sir of my decision."





The next day, Penjore approached Gatu sir in his office. Gatu sir listened to him with empathy. The teacher knew Lekimeto must be suffering too.

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"These two children had enough," Gatu sir thought. "I need to talk to other children." In the noisy classroom, Gatu sir greeted them with a warm smile. He had attended an advocacy programme organised by the Queen Mother, Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck, and learned that we should respect and accept everyone irrespective of their diverse gender identity and sexual orientation. He knew that he had to teach other students to accept their friends with gender differences.

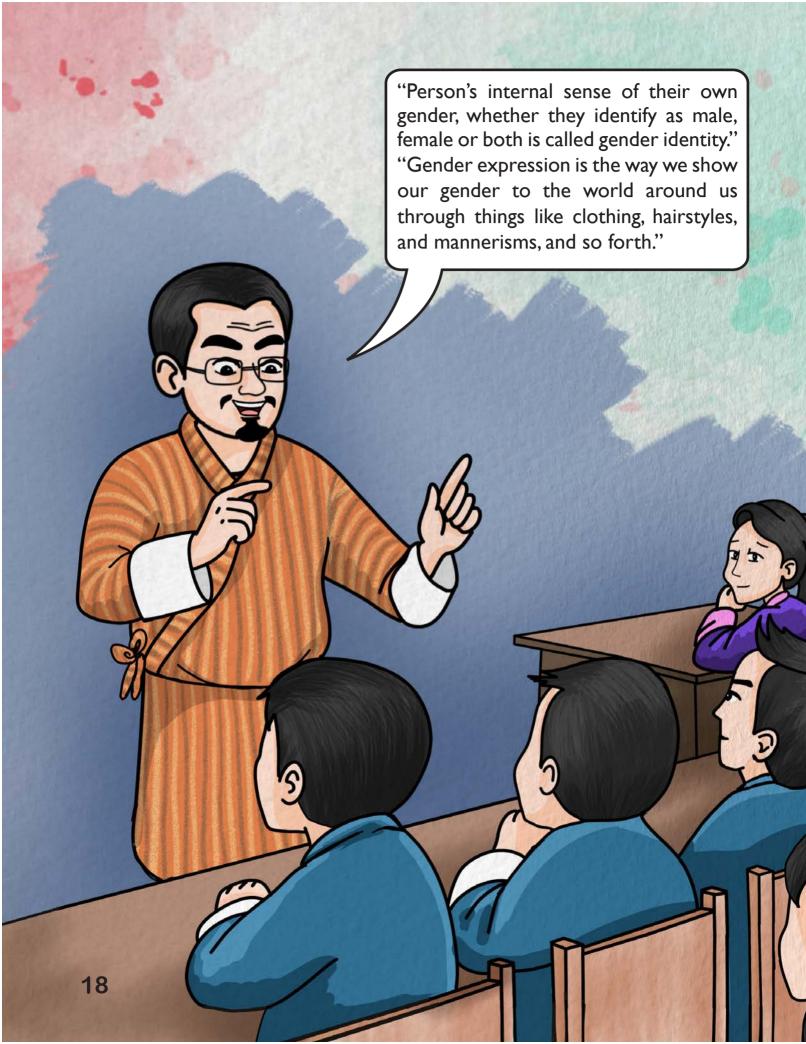
"Today, we will learn about mutual respect and acceptance," he said gently. "We will learn how to respect and accept each other regardless of individual differences."

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During the class activity, Gatu sir asked his students to write their expectations from their friends on a piece of paper and keep it in the bangchung that lay on his table. Once every student had done it, he then randomly picked up a paper from the bangchung and read it aloud. "I wish they accept me as I am" read the first note. As the note was read, all eyes peered at Lekimeto and Penjore. The teacher picked up another piece of paper and read, "I expect my friends not to judge me based on how I dress." Gatu sir shook his head and put the pieces of paper back in the bangchung. It was time to discuss the issue.





"Everyone here is different in some ways," Gatu sir said. "Everyone has different preferences of expressing themselves to the world." All the students looked at their teacher but did not dare make any noise. They knew what their teacher was talking about and felt bad about their behaviour towards Lekimeto and Penjore. "Everyone has the right to feel accepted," Gatu sir said. "How would you feel if you were ignored and not respected?"

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Meanwhile, Gatu sir invited them in Druk Adolescent's Initiative on Sexual Awareness Network (DAISAN) group where Lekimeto and Penjore could meet other students sharing similar experiences. With the support of friends and teachers, Lekimeto began to rebuild her confidence. The network enabled gradual understanding and acceptance of gender expression and identity.



Sometime later, classmates invited Lekimeto to join their group project. It was the same group that did not include her a few weeks ago. Lekimeto was surprised, but she joined the team feeling supported and happy. "I will study hard and improve my grades," Lekimeto said with determination. "Me too," said Penjore, who was already in the team. Finally, Lekimeto and Penjore felt a sense of normalcy and acceptance.

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June is celebrated as PRIDE month, where the whole community comes together to respect diversity and promote acceptance of gender differences. Gatu sir, Lekimeto and Penjore, and the rest of the students found unity in diversity, and they spread love and acceptance. "We should always be supportive and accept differences," Gatu sir said. "Yes sir, we should always be supportive and accept differences," echoed the students.

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Any form of discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals is unacceptable and a breach of fundamental human rights.

# Help is available

RENEW ...... 17126353

The PEMA Secretariate ... 1098

In Unity in Diversity, Lekimeto and Penjore struggle with bullying and exclusion at school because of how they express their identities. Facing harsh judgment and isolation, they consider giving up. But with the guidance of their compassionate teacher, Gatu sir, and the support of their peers, they embark on a journey toward acceptance, respect, and understanding.

This heartwarming story reminds us of the power of kindness, empathy, and the beauty of diversity. Set against the backdrop of an inclusive school environment, Unity in Diversity highlights the importance of embracing who we are and finding unity through mutual respect.







This book is to supplement Comprehensive Sexuality Education teaching and learning materials for primary school students.

