

**Intersex  
Awareness  
Day  
2023**

**Are you a Boy or a Girl?**



**SIPD Uganda**

# ARE YOU A BOY OR A GIRL?

Growing up as an African Intersex person

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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SIPD thanks Mr. Julius Kaggwa for his support throughout project and for allowing to write the foreword to this booklet in celebration of this year's Intersex Awareness Day.

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## **FOREWORD**

You have in your hand a little but immensely transformational booklet! I know that from my own experience, as I can clearly remember a little over twenty-five years ago, when I first sat down with a small pamphlet from an Australian doctor to tell my story to the press secretary of the president of my country. It was the most frightening yet transformational moment! That was back in the 1990s. That one story in what seemed like an ordinary pamphlet, sent through the post office from far off Australia, somehow gave me an idea of how to frame my own journey. And that was the first step on a journey that brings me full circle to where I am today, excited to write the foreword to this incredible collection of amazing stories of personal and collective struggle, bravery, resilience, and movement as we celebrate this Intersex Awareness Day 2023.

That initial story I told in 1997 triggered the most adventurous and affirmative frontline advocacy trail, and this frontline work we have collectively done with the amazing team of committed individuals at SIPD has led to undeniable visibility of intersex people and issues in Uganda, in the East African region, and across Africa. With over 15 new intersex organizations in East, Southern and West Africa, we see

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and feel the agency of an African Intersex Movement working and shifting conversations around intersex experiences across the continent's sub-regions. I wished and worked for this moment, and it is here! We see resilience within struggle, and triumph within limitation – and that is the transformational story of all the brave young African intersex people taking leadership in their own communities and shifting narratives about their own and their communities' realities and doing it mostly with little to no funding support.

For over five years now, SIPD has housed and runs a program to develop new leadership among intersex communities in East and Southern Africa. A key objective of the program is to develop a structure that focuses greater attention to strengthening the capacity of African intersex leaders, as well as their sustainability by centering continuity, wellness, skills development, and innovation. By highlighting and celebrating the stories of some of the young African intersex activist leaders that are transforming their communities and countries through the power of their own stories, SIPD's leadership continues to commit to this strategic objective.

With all that said, I believe that our most urgent need is for the readers of these stories to take up the opportunity to celebrate, amplify, and

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promote the resilience and promise of the intersex lives represented. As excellently noted in this booklet’s introduction, intersex children and people face serious human rights violations and marginalization across the sub regions of Africa and the work of intersex activists is still scarcely funded. Against this backdrop, the determination to rise, survive and live despite insistent violations and marginalization, has led to a lot of innovative awareness and educational work guided by “adaptive” strategies, and while these strategies may often be nuanced, they are extremely effective. Examples of this effectiveness can be found throughout the stories in this commemoration booklet. It takes immense determination, self-awareness, courage, and a passion to bring about change for one and for all, to share and speak about personal, complex and often misunderstood life journeys as openly as the brave intersex activist leaders have done in these pages.

On this Intersex Awareness Day 2023, as we reflect on the strides made by the intersex community in Africa – in all its diversity — and how we can each support these individual and collective voices beyond this day, this booklet shows us all where to start.

So, be inspired as you read these stories that paint graphic answers to what is still a problematic and critical sex classification question, and



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answers that make the commemoration of African intersex lives and indeed global intersex experiences, extremely important. At the end of the day, the stories of intersex lived experiences in this little booklet point to the centrality of humanness regardless of variations in our body anatomies, and the story tellers have given us more inspiration, more insight, and more guidance on how to improve our own understanding and support of intersex communities wherever and whoever we are.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julius Kaggwa', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Julius Kaggwa  
Founder and Chief Technical Advisor  
SIPD Uganda

## **INTRODUCTION**

An Intersex person is someone born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical definitions of male or female including hormonal patterns, and/or chromosome patterns. It reflects a combination of differences in the development of a person's internal or/and external sexual and reproductive organs. In some cases, an intersex person's genitalia will be neither clearly male nor female. Some conditions may only become apparent when a child reaches puberty. According to the UN 0.05% and 1.7% of the population is born with intersex traits.

In recent years, awareness of intersex people and recognition of the specific human rights abuses that they face has grown thanks to the work of intersex human rights defenders, all over the world. Human Rights abuses commonly faced by Intersex people include infanticides, forced and coerced medical interventions, harmful practices, such as unsupervised cultural genital mutilations and spiritual exorcisms rampant in many parts of Africa, and other forms of stigmatization due to their physical traits.

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This book documents the lived experiences of 8 amazing intersex individuals from different African countries including Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia and Nigeria who share their stories with the hope that their experiences will be largely disseminated and therefore deepen Africa's understanding of intersex lives.

The book is designed in such a way that participants talk about their experiences in school, society, work, and health service centers. Stories were transcribed to compose stories that were as close to the story tellers' own words as possible. These stories represent a wide range of experiences which we believe are representative of other intersex lived realities in Africa.

In commemoration of intersex awareness day 2023, SIPD is excited to document and share the following powerful intersex lived experiences across Africa to celebrate courage and hope and to create more awareness and visibility.

## **PATRA - I WAS BORN LIKE THAT**

My name is Patra (not real name). I was born in the 90s as a baby girl much as my body proves to be genetically male. I live and grew up in a rural village named Gala in Northern Uganda in Gulu District.

I was born to a lovely couple until they discovered I was different from other babies. Much as I believe that I was loved in the womb, all hell broke loose when I was born. My birth caused my family's breakdown! It is hard to believe how much misery I brought in the family. However, I can't blame myself for the world not understanding who I am. Sometimes I feel like I am not of this world. Maybe I am Jesus (*smiling*). Nobody knows! I am a true Christian and I believe in God.

When I was about six years old, my parents had misunderstandings about me and my father subjected my mother to gender-based violence while threatening to replace her with a woman who could have a 'normal' child. This situation led to the end of their marriage. My mother took me with her to her parents' home where I grew up with my grandparents and I my intersex body was kept a secret from then on.

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Patra



*“I have realized that people are different.  
Right now, I want to tell the world that  
we exist. We deserve to be recognized.  
We deserve to be supported.”*

At the age of 9, I remember going swimming in the nearby streams and swamps with my peers. Mother made sure that I would never remove my clothes in order to keep her secret safe. I really appreciate and truly

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love her for this. However, as a child, sometimes you loosen up when playing and forget your mother's orders. In return, it subjected me to a lot of bullying at that tender age. I remember the joke that "Ajok is not Ajok" because this is a female name.

I thank God that my mother and father reconciled with the efforts of my father's extended family and later had two typical girls and a boy. This is when I noticed that I was not like my little ones. I wasn't like Nancy or Charlotte or Emmanuel. After discovering something that would change your life forever throughout the world, life is something hard to believe.

My studies began in a very rural school and because I only used the washrooms at home, my privacy was hardly invaded. It is in my secondary education that all hell broke loose! The very first day in boarding school, I realized the bathroom doors had no locks yet I took my hygiene very serious. So, my solution was to bath while facing the wall in order to stay hidden. The rest of the term I decided to bath at night in the dark or not shower at all.

I remember it was the personal hygiene checkup visits to the bathroom by the senior lady that exposed me. She would ask us to display our

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privates to check whether we were well shaved. My peers would ask, “what is that?” to which I quickly responded that “I was born like that.”

At the age of 15, the same senior lady organized an SRHR class where we talked about the appearance of women including menstruation. I realized that my clitoris was a bit bigger than my peers and I was the only one who had not yet started my menstruation period. The senior lady got concerned and organized a meeting with a doctor in one of the medical camp visits to our school. The doctor that examined me expressed concern about a how hard my stomach felt and asked if I was pregnant. But I had never had sex so I quickly shot the thought down, he advised me to go to a hospital in Kampala. This awoke my memory of my visit to a white doctor with my mum to a well-established hospital here in Gulu around the age of 6 or 7. This doctor had recommended a visit after hitting puberty and it made a lot of sense now. Other memories of visits to witch doctors, prophets, pastors, priests for a healing started flowing in as well. That day ended with so many answers and yet so many questions as well.

Studying came easy for me, I was very bright and always topped my class. An advantage over my peers that helped me get a scholarship of my higher secondary education. However, I turned this down as it

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offered a boarding school scholarship and this was an environment I could no longer thrive in. I needed a fresh start without any memories of stigma or trauma. My parents understood this and supported my idea of receiving an education in a different school. As a grown up I knew how to hide my secret and not have any issues with the rest of the students in this new school.

I have had so many stigmatizing and discriminating encounters in life and have gone through over seven surgeries to make my body fit what the society likes and accepts. I think it is unfair that an innocent person has to be subjected to all these surgeries to be accepted in society. Personally, I regret subjecting myself to so many unnecessary surgeries which ended up messing up my metabolism and hormones. I am grateful to my mum who sought medical help from the right doctor and did not subject me to early surgeries until I could consent. Right now, I have accepted who I am and I want to live as an intersex. I want to use my experience to prevent intersex babies and persons living on earth from experiencing what I have gone through. It was hell. Very demeaning. Very challenging and a very terrible experience.

So am approaching life with acceptance of who I am and appreciation of nature. I have learnt to love myself and not to blame myself for what



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who I am naturally. I have realized that people are different. Right now, I want to tell the world that we exist. We deserve to be recognized. We deserve to be supported. And we deserve quality livelihoods for all irrespective of what their genitalia or reproductive organs look like. Asante Sana. This is my story.

## **BABY J - I HAVE ACCEPTED WHO I AM**

My name is Baby John Musamba, I was born on 3rd June 1994. I am the 5<sup>th</sup> child in my family. I have three brothers and one sister. I am the last born in my family. I live and grew up in Dar-es-Salam city Centre in Ilala district.

I discovered I was intersex when I was young. My parents and I frequently visited the hospital to try and understand my body but it was not until 2014 that I did an ultrasound, a hormonal test, karyotyping test and gonadal biopsy (samples sent to South Africa and India) to fully understand what it meant to say that am intersex. The most disturbing result was the one that indicated that I was an elderly woman who had already hit menopause.

When I reached upper primary level, my parents decided to enroll me in boarding school but this was the worst experience of my life. I used to wake up extremely early before other people to use the bathroom or else bathe last in order to hide my difference. I got in a lot of trouble with the matron for being late most of the time. I experienced a lot of bullying when the other students discovered that I was not the same as

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them. And because I was raised as a girl, they expected me to have menstrual periods just like them but that didn't happen.



I also experienced a lot of name calling during school. They used to call me 'Jikedume' which loosely translates to hermaphrodite. Back

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home, neighbors wouldn't let their children play with me threatening them that I was most probably dangerous.

Some friends understood my condition and continued to live with me while others have failed to be at peace with me being an intersex person. I have never been in a relationship and I don't want to be in one. I feel like some people would only date me out of curiosity to see what I look like or just to experiment.

I have accepted who I am. In 2020, I decided to use my political party (Chama cha Mapinduzi) as a platform to come out as an intersex person and advocate for my peers. I decided to contest for parliamentary membership for people with special needs just like me but I wasn't successful due to the financial demands that come with elections and the fact that some of the voters feared that I would promote homosexuality (a taboo to them) after winning the elections. The platform gave me some popularity on mainstream and social media enabling me to do some advocacy work for the intersex community on channels like BBC Swahili and DW Africa.

People have to understand that intersex people are not cursed. Also, not all intersex people are homosexual even if my country thinks

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otherwise. An intersex person is someone born with reproductive and sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the boxes of male or female. Take time to learn and understand people before criticizing or condemning anyone. Our religious leaders should take the responsibility to protect and educate and advocate for intersex children as it is their duty to us. This is my story.

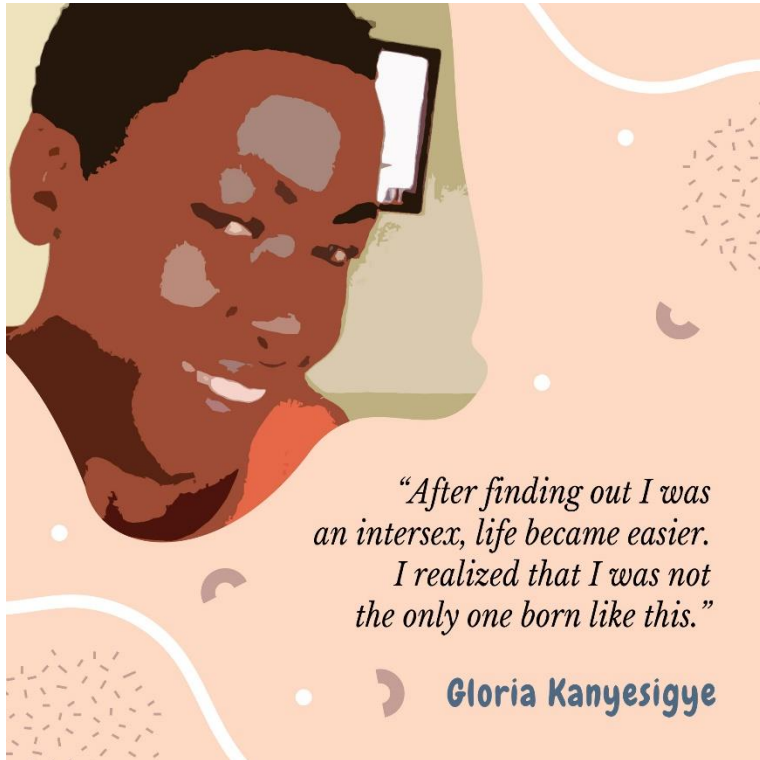
## **GLORIA - TOTALLY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER GIRLS**

My name is Kanyesigye Gloria, I was born a number of years ago on July 23rd in Kabale district. My parents passed away while I was an infant prompting me to relocate to Bunyaruguru to live with my grandparents.

I learnt about myself being intersex after relocating to Kampala. By then I was still in primary school, I remember we were still studying about the reproductive system and it was about the different milestones for boys and girls. I had not had any of them at this stage but only because I was probably still a child. At least this is what I told myself. I convinced myself that I would eventually hit all the milestones once I grew a bit older. Obviously, this never happened. I remember participating in a cultural practice called “visiting the bush” as all young girls did. This ritual involves young girls manipulating their labia minora so that they can become longer. However, I was totally different from the other girls. This memory lingers in my head like it was yesterday. Reality never set in until 2009 when I was watching TV and a gentleman shared his story that made me realize I was also intersex like him. It is true, I had never heard of the word but his

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detailed explanations, it all made sense to me. After listening to the story, I approached the host of the show who supported me to go to hospital for scientific examinations which confirmed that I am indeed intersex.



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A lot of insults were halted at me in public due to my physic that was built like a man's and yet I am genetically a girl and so I dressed like girls. People called me "owamanege" loosely translating to "the one with testis". The other issue would be by passing people and leaving them with a brand new topic to debate about. I remember passing a boda boda stage where one of the cyclists asked me directly "Lady should we go?" and the others laughed and asked, "Is that a boy or a girl?". A question I deeply hate and have heard more than 100 times probably.

After finding out I was an intersex, life became easier. I realized that I was not the only one born like this. It gave me this hope that what matters is that you are a human being and a child of God. I came to realize that no matter what happens you have a reason to be loved, to love yourself and enjoy life.

I call upon people out there to love, respect and not discriminate intersex children and people as being intersex is neither a crime nor a curse. It is also important that intersex people avoid self-stigma and continue to look for right information and counselling; a step towards empowerment.



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Finally, I urge the parents of intersex children not to rush the cosmetic surgeries when the child is still young rather allow the child grow and have a say in such a crucial decision.

Thank you so much. God bless you. This is my story.

## **SAMMIE - WE NEVER TALKED ABOUT ME**

My name is Sammie MacJessie and I was born in Malawi in 1991. My mother is from Malawi and my father was South African. I grew up mostly in Malawi. I discovered I was an intersex when I realized I was not functioning the way other women were functioning and the frequent visits to hospital confirmed that something was not right. Unfortunately, I don't remember the medical part with specific memories.

Growing up as an intersex child was quite usual to me. My home life was good. We never talked about me. In fact, I thought everyone was like me. I never realized I was different. It was never talked about until I was an adult and the topic came up. The earliest memory in primary school is that of my teachers always reminding me to use the washrooms either later or alone when everyone was in class. This I didn't fully understand at the time because I thought they just cared for me a little more than the rest of the pupils entirely relating it to frequent hospital visits. But when I went to boarding school, I realized that I was different. I vividly remember when we were getting dressed my friends would be having girls talk about body parts and when I compared theirs to mine, the difference was undeniable. And I guarantee they are not supposed to be the same but there should be a

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vast similarity. I therefore made sure that I wouldn't share the bathroom with anyone! I would wake up at 3am to shower. People thought that just loved showering in the morning but I can assure you that that wasn't the case. I was trying to hide. Friends who knew about it were very supportive but I was also big girl and there was no way anyone would ever bully me.



### **Sammie MacJessie**

*"In a day, in a month, what was normal three months ago might not be normal tomorrow. Take it easy and be kind. We are all fighting our own battles."*



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As an adult I've put life pretty much the same. After finding out about who I am, life began becoming a little bit different. A number of things started making sense. I have been approaching life with a little grain of salt. I have been acknowledging to myself and coming to terms with the fact there are experiences that I will never experience as an intersex person not matter what kind of medical intervention I get and that is okay. It doesn't make me less of a person. It took a lot for me to admit this. It is still something I sometimes struggle with but it is not as bad as it used to be.

Intersex people have been killed going back 50 years ago due to lack of enough clear information about the issue. The stigma and discrimination is keeping a lot of intersex children hidden in their homes and amounting to a huge number of school drop outs. The medical records in Malawi need to be improved to give intersex people a better chance to trace their medical journeys. As an Intersex Human rights defender, it feels like a one man's fight as other intersex people are not willing to come out. In Malawi, processes are slow and the intersex advocacy journey is not as fast as it is in other African countries.

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The biggest value I would like to share with the people is that everything changes, the world changes. In a day, in a month, what was normal three months ago might not be normal tomorrow. Take it easy and be kind. We are all fighting our own battles. My intersex journey is traumatizing to me, so be kind, it goes a long way. This is my story.

## **OBIOMA - PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT**

My name is Obioma Chukwuike. I am 28 years and from Enugu, Nigeria. My parents were civil servants. My dad worked as a deputy registrar in a university and my mom was a teacher before she also retired. I was the only ‘girl’ in the family.

My parents were passionate about education, could afford it comfortably and therefore took all of us to school. It is at boarding school during my J1&2, that I started experiencing severe pain in my lower abdomen and suffered multi nose bleeding incidents. I took a lot of medication from the school’s sick bay but the pain persisted. Eventually I developed joint and pelvic pain which forced my father to take me home for proper medical intervention. The doctors did very intrusive and painful examinations on me and from what I remember, they concluded that it was an issue with my bones.

As I got older, I still noticed how different I was from other girls. My period was a no show, same as my breasts and hips enlargement, this is the time I realized I was different from other girls. In an all-girls school, this earned me the nick name “the boy of the school.” I was stereotyped a lot so I kept away from the rest of the students. Secondary

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school was one of the worst experiences I had. If I understood myself the way I do now, I would have allowed myself to play and to have friends.



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Back at home, my mother always asked me why my body was not like all the other girls in society. She asked if I would be able to bare her grandchildren as the ‘girl’ of the family.

She is very religious and prayerful and many occasions she would take me to different churches to be prayed for. Although this put her at logger heads with the rest of the family, I also became committed to the prayer life. One time, her pastor took me to a prayer mountain for prayer intercessions that lasted for over 5 days sleeping on the floor. I was praying for a miracle to become like other girls and heal the pain in my bones. After this long intercession while back at home, I overheard my mother tell my father that the pastor alleged that someone in the village had done some black magic to try and change me into a boy during her pregnancy but he promised that I had received healing and my body would become more feminine by the day. Something I still find very funny that even with her level of education she had believed this theory. But I also understand she was under a lot of pressure as a parent.

From then on, she kept checking in on me to monitor progress and persisted on my father taking me to hospital every now and then which was not cheap as my much as my father had the means. The continued



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hospital visits also had an effect on my mental health and rubbed in how much I needed to isolate myself from others to hide my identity as an intersex person.

When I finally joined university, I had a serious talk with my dad. I think he realized that I needed to know who I was. His story began with a reminder of my frequent visits to the doctor as a child. Who then finally disclosed what the visits were all about. According to him, during these visits, medical tests revealed that I had a difference in sex development and this is why I had not got my menstruation periods. I was therefore put on hormonal therapy to try and meet some of the development milestones that a woman should. The doctor had also recommended surgery to remove something that could be dangerous to my life from my stomach but they (my parents and aunt who is a nurse in the UK) did not agree to the surgery. This is why the pain in my stomach persisted.

As an adult, I decided to see doctors on my own and discovered that my estrogen is very low with different other conditions which proved that I might not be able to have my own biological children. I utterly thought I was alone in the world because at that time I had not meant anyone like me or even heard about the term intersex. I had a lot of

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suicidal thoughts given my joint pains and endless nose bleeding. My parents didn't know what to do. I actually felt like I was going to die. However, there was a rumor that the goal keeper of the female football state team had two genitals. But no one talked about it openly. This was the only time I suspected to have heard of someone who could be like me. I don't think that she would have talked to me if I had visited her by then because being intersex was something not talked about in Nigeria by then. But I visited her after founding Intersex Nigeria and we have been able to share experiences.

After university during my year of serving the state, I did a lot of thinking, trying to discover myself. I met a herbal doctor who also said that there was something in my stomach that couldn't be healed. Our friendship grew and she became a confidant and a comforter. A year and a half later I had to move for my graduate studies which exposed me to a lot of reading and social media. This taught me and introduced me to other intersex persons. It is through this social media space and a friend that I learnt about an organization in Europe that focused on intersex people (people like me). I got in touch with the organization which inspired me to serve and connect the intersex people in Nigeria with the memory of the goal keeper who could be out there on her own without any support. The organization in Europe connected me to a lot

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of intersex people and this boosted my self-esteem and this is how intersex Nigeria was founded in 2019.

My biggest challenge in life has been and still is explaining myself to people about my physical appearance. I took a lot of medicine as a child which could still be affecting me. I faced a lot of prejudice even from my own family who thought I was in constant need of help. A lecturer at my university one day referred to me as a transsexual in front of the whole class. I have been in romantic relationships which were challenging but is something I am still exploring.

When I came to the full knowledge of who I am, I accepted myself. Some people are born intersex and that's fine. At least I am now sure that being intersex is not going to kill me. I am now very confident in the person I am and can relate with people more easily.

The biggest values I want to teach the world, as an intersex person who has struggled with their body is that the world is as diverse as can be. There is nothing like binary. There is nothing like it is either white or black. That is why we have different colors of the skin. There are different cultures, different eye colors. There are no two ways to do things. Sex is not binary. Intersex is not only in Africa. It is all over the

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human race. We are not mistakes. People should also stop assuming that their values and realities are the best or the only values and realities. I was violated as a child as people sought ways to help me out.

Lastly, at the point when all these things were happening to me and I was scared to die. I didn't have someone to talk to and this scared me. It made me feel like I was a mistake. I wouldn't want to see an intersex person go through my experience. We all have different lived realities as intersex people but the stories of discrimination and isolation are the common factor. I want that narrative to change. That is why I am so proud of the work that I do as an intersex human rights activist. I am happy and thankful. It is important for people to know it was not an easy process. I feared growing up to live in a world where I didn't have any friends and am glad this is not true. This is my story.

## **HENRY - MOTHER DEARLY LOVED ME**

My name is Henry Kakeeto. I am so glad to be sharing my lived reality as an intersex person. I am glad to share a bit of my experience with the hope that my story will help another intersex person out there. I am proud to be an intersex and once I came full circle with this situation, I decided to embrace it wholly hence the reason I am sharing my experience here.

Before I was born, my mother had had typical boys and girls for children and she was dearly loved by her in-laws. Upon my birth, things changed. At the hospital, the nurses were shocked by the child that was born. It was new to my mother as well. She had never seen an intersex baby. But as a parent, she was not moved by what the nurses had to say. She loved her child. Mother dearly loved me. Word quickly went around about the nature of the child my mother had given birth to. She was accused of cheating or even having been cursed by the spirits. I am a staunch catholic and I do not believe in such. Upon being discharged, word had reached her in-laws about the child my mother had given birth to. She was not allowed to step into my father's house as she and the family had no history of such a person. She had to take the child wherever they belonged. But thanks to my father who

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stood his ground and protected my mother and I. My relatives vowed never to step foot at my parents' home ever again.

*“As intersex persons, we endure undergoing all these surgeries because we are not recognized by the people among whom we stay. Our rights are grossly abused.”*



**Henry Kakeeto**

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Growing up, like any other child I started playing with other children in the neighborhood. However, there were some parents who would not allow me to play with their children. Others would ask me to remove my clothes so they could see my genitals. Never mind my mother had cautioned about ever undressing before people but I was a child and they took advantage of abusing me. I resented the community I grew up in. Prior, in my P7, they had taken me to a number of doctors to examine my status. If my memory serves me right, the first doctor diagnosed me with either kidney failure or heart failure and according to him I needed immediate surgery to correct the condition. A surgery that my parents didn't think was a good idea so they didn't go through with it.

In my S1, I joined the boarding section. Unknown to my parents, what they thought was the best way to protect me ended up being the most torturous way. We had to have communal baths which was a challenge.

As teenager, breasts started growing, something I hated so much since my external features showed I was a boy. I was Henry. I decided to quit school. But around the same time, my parents took me to CORSU hospital in Entebbe where we were advised to visit SIPD. There I was

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counselled and educated about my situation. SIPD was very helpful to me all through.

SIPD as an organization was kind enough to find sponsorship for my first surgery as this was my wish to do a double mastectomy. That day made me happy. The surgery catered to only the upper body features. I was supposed to do a follow up operation for the lower body parts.

I changed schools but still avoided showering with the rest of the boys. They only discovered it when I was in S2. One day as I was showering, one of the boys snitched on me. He went and told the entire dormitory about my state. That was the beginning of discrimination. I hated that school too. I was not allowed to play with boys as they accused me of being a girl. The girls too accused me of being a boy. I got fed up.

In my S3, I changed schools. I would always be in hiding. I underwent another operation and I had to take hormonal medication. But still, the operation was not sufficient as I had to undergo another.

I underwent two more surgeries in my S4 and S6 holidays respectively but still they did not solve the problem. I could not continue as there was no more money to spend on surgeries.



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I had to abandon the medicine as well as my parents could not afford it.

As intersex persons, we endure undergoing all these surgeries because we are not recognized by the people among whom we stay. Our rights are grossly abused. Thanks to my parents who took the courageous decision to stand with me, it has helped me come this far. My surgeries were very expensive for my parents. They had to sell their land to pay for the hospital bills. They have since been overstretched and have nothing left to sell. SIPD was only able to secure sponsorship for the first surgery only. Thanks to SIPD who are very supportive in helping me walk my intersex journey. There is nothing more that can be done. I am ready to face life the way I am.

All we ask for as intersex persons is to be granted our rights. To be recognized and not discriminated against. We are tired of hiding all the time. We would like schools to recognize that we exist. I am grateful for this opportunity to share my experience. This is my story.

## **FRANK - I WAS BORN A LEADER**

My name is Frank Robert. For the longest time I was known as Kwamboka Kibagendi. I changed my name officially under the provisions of the children's Act 2022 in February of 2023 only a few months after the government recognized the need to allow intersex people the right to proper documentation. I have already received my birth certificate while patiently waiting for my new identity card to be issued. I was raised in Kisii County in Kenya.

My experience growing up as an intersex person was rather interesting. My grandmother who adopted me after my parents' death raised as a girl. In my Kisi culture, we do not talk about things that are covered by clothes so I was never told anything about my body. My cousins shouted insults at me here and there but by then I didn't even understand what the insults meant.

High school, was not easy for me. I loved playing football and did for the longest time as part of the girls' team because I was raised as a one. I was extremely harassed both outside and inside school apparently because I had a lot of energy for a female. I remember this one game in Kisi stadium where the whole stadium stood up in protest against

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me being on team. The crowd suspected that I was a boy disguised as a girl and had to be checked to prove otherwise.

*“My cousins shouted  
insults at me here  
and there but by then  
I didn’t even  
understand what the  
insults meant.”*

**Frank Robert**



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Later on when I was in form three, I experienced some complications and was taken to Kenyatta national Hospital by my aunt. The doctors decided on a vaginoplasty as a way forward, a decision I was extremely against and refused. This created a lot of friction with my family that led to my aunt disowning me. Thankfully, after some medication, the issue I had in my tummy resolved. I used a lot of herbs over a long period of time to ensure that I was free of this stomach issue forever. Luckily, I was born a leader. Even in the Kenyan Slums where I lived, I always involved myself in decision making positions. This taught me a lot on taking the wheel in my own life and directed it away from bad energy.

Dating wasn't any easier. I was always referred to as a lesbian. Some people would like to be with me while others didn't want to. In the slums, privacy was a privilege that was hardly enjoyed. This kept me from dating any of the girls. I eventually moved away from the slum to middle class neighborhood where I got into a relationship with one girl who later humiliated. I am now a father of two with a very supportive wife who loves me deeply.

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When I fully understood who I am, I decided to advocate for people who were born like me. This is when I joined Jinsiangu. Through Jinsiangu I was connected to SIPD which trained me in the best practices for intersex advocacy. My work with the KNHR in 2018 prompted me to come out as an intersex person to talk about the challenges and violations that we face as a community which was a grey area for many people in Kenya. I thank Jinsiangu for giving me a paid opportunity to lead and for supporting the intersex community in Kenya especially myself. I am now the executive director of Intersex Kenya Education and Advocacy and a member on the steering Committee of the African Intersex Movement (AIM)

After 2018, I participated in organizing a survey recognizing intersex persons in Kenya. In 2019, Kenya became the first country to recognize intersex persons through a census where I participated in creating awareness especially within government institutions to make sure the exercise was a success. In 2022, I became the first person in Kenya to fight for a county assembly seat on the ticket of the ruling party (UDA). I entered this political space to find and maximize any opportunities for intersex persons through such a space. Unfortunately, I did not get the chance to represent my people.

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I want the world to understand that being intersex is not a curse. We exist. Intersex children are being killed, discriminated against, abandoned and mutilated. Don't look away, intervene. Kenya is already setting the pace for African governments and I urge all African governments to fall suit.

If given the opportunity to lead, we can. We are here. We are not broken. Intersex is not broken so don't fix it. This is my story.

## **MPHATSO - CHURCH SHOULD BE A PEACEFUL PLACE**

My name is Mphatso Sakala and I was born in Lusaka Zambia on 3rd May 1986 even though my legal documents show I was born in September 1988.

From a tender age, I knew I was different but couldn't quite put a finger on how. I truly understood how different I was after my senior secondary school education in 2004. I didn't have a term for it. I learnt about the term in 2012 when I got in touch with someone who was intersex.

While growing up, I didn't want to have problems with people so most of the time I was alone. I isolated myself a lot. I kept in only three places; home, school and the tennis court. I tried my best to stay away from people because I needed that peace. If I really had to go out and play, it would be with the boys because I loved playing football. This exposed me to a lot of insults. I experienced a lot of name calling. Being called "boy girl", lesbian, tomboy among others. This only pushed me back in shell and stayed away from the hate.

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**Mphatso Sakala**

*“When you look at our lives as intersex people, it is surrounded with a lot of secrecy. Some people were welcoming while others were not including family.”*

When you look at our lives as intersex people, it is surrounded with a lot of secrecy. Some people were welcoming while others were not including family. I was raised as a girl and had a very feminine name.



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This was my very first problem because I align more on the male side, so I was attracted to girls. My first crush happened in my seventh grade. I had written a letter to a girl which the teacher found. My classmates got to know about it and they were quick to label me a lesbian. The rumors spread to my church as well where I was accused of initiating girls into homosexuality. As a staunch Christian, this really broke my heart. I decided to leave church as well and did step in a church since 2004 until 2018 where I've made very few appearances. I put all my energy in school supports like tennis and football and was never caught in a compromising situation with a girl. This helped me be in good books with the school and society.

However, this doesn't mean I didn't date at all. I did have a girlfriend in junior secondary school and another in senior secondary school. The era of love relationships was never easy for me. People never used to understand why the "girl" was always talking about marrying other girls. Something that was never allowed in society. As much as we loved each other with my partner, we faced a lot of problems. There were times men approached me and my girl. Many believed I was a girl so they approached us to test us our commitment to 'lesbian relationship'. This relationship also attracted the attention of my parents who intervened to ask me not to date a 'fellow girl', a gender

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they had chosen for me as a new born after even doctors could not determine my gender. I found it hard to explain that I was not a girl and this drove me into a breakdown.

In 2014, I eventually decided to get in touch with a urologist who clearly expressed how unfortunate it was that I had taken long to seek medical advice. This is when my medical journey began. A journey that was insanely expensive that I had to take a loan to finance the bills. But because it is a long journey with a very slow result-oriented process I put it on hold after a number of visits.

My medical journey started after I had joined the working class. I was working as a technician and a school teacher in the Cambridge curriculum. The problem I faced in this profession was being called madam. Something I had to just live with in order to earn a living. Imagine waking up every morning living by a gender you are not. The struggle to find clothes that struck a balance between male and female so as not to strike a nerve in society.

In 2015, I was unjustly dismissed from work. I later applied for work as a Voter Registration Officer. Later appointed Assistant Returning Officer IT for a Constituency, a job I was elevated to take even to

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district level as a Technical Support Officer for Lusaka. This job allowed me to interact with people from different walks of life including a doctor who I decided to consult about my intersex condition. Kind enough, she connected to her boss who eventually connected me to who I could then call my doctor. My goal was never surgery, it was to be able to prove that I was intersex and have my documentation reflect my true self allowing society to let me marry. My doctor helped me get documents in order to begin hormonal therapy and official change of information on my documents.

In 2017, I was able to change my documentation through the High Court of Zambia. This was very exciting for me. But I could also see my family struggle even getting used to my name. I understood and gave them time. This is not a very easy process. It is tedious, rough, draining and includes a lot of work. My father had to write a letter explaining the situation and I still ended up with a wrong date of birth on my documents. It is sad that intersex people have to go through this no wonder many are still there suffering in silence without the knowledge about how the law can help them. I hope that with this advocacy work we are doing with the organization I founded, we will be able to get intersex people's documentation easily changed and reflecting the right information.

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As I conclude I would like to share the detail that life is still not that easy even in the field of relationships. There is still a lot of stigma and discrimination directed towards intersex people. Most partners feel like they are only doing you a favor by dating you because who you are. While others are highly discouraged by family due to fears of having grand children who are also intersex or not being able to have children at all. This has delayed my marriage plans more than I hoped it would. I used to be a sports person topping the charts but I had to settle for being coach because I got tired of all the questions it came with. I had to leave home early to be able to cry alone without making my family uncomfortable. A decision they took long to accept but had no option.

Zambia as a largely Christian country unfortunately doesn't have a lot of people living up to their Christian values. I believe that a Christian should be non-judgmental. If anything, church should be a peaceful place, but, it tortured me as an intersex person and forced me to leave. I would love people to learn the value of genuine love, tolerance and acceptance. This is my story.

## **ABOUT SIPD**

### **Background**

The Support Initiative for People with congenital Disorders (SIPD) is a Uganda-based intersex rights Initiative, which through outreach and public education, provides reliable and objective information on atypical sex development issues (also known as Intersex conditions and sometimes Differences in Sex Development – DSD) and mainly addresses the need for organized medical, psychosocial, and capacity support, civic education, as well as advocacy for human rights protection of Intersex children and people.

SIPD provides a framework that facilitates the visibility and agency of African Intersex voices towards recognizing the health and human rights of intersex children and people in Uganda, the East African region, and across Africa. Our engagement involves collaboration with medical, cultural, religious, and civil society organizations, to identify and document the incidence and experiences of Intersex children and

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people. SIPD also documents anecdotal evidence and information from professionals working with Intersex individuals. These findings and experiences feed SIPD's advocacy strategy with a more in depth understanding and appreciation of the social, cultural, and political attitudes in our society and how to influence social change most effectively by developing tools that "speak the people's language" and attract their attention, reflection, and action.

### **Vision**

SIPD embodies a vision of a world whose appreciation of human beings transcends the present gender dichotomy and the oppressions and violence that this represents.

### **Mission**

To enhance the wellbeing and social inclusion of intersex individuals in Africa by advocating for their rights, promoting intersex-friendly

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healthcare services, and strengthening intersex-led organisations and movements.

### **Values**

- I. **Inclusivity:** At SIPD, we understand that every intersex individual and family have a unique experience and perspective. We also recognize the importance of ensuring their diverse voices are heard and respected. We strive to create an inclusive environment that values diversity and promotes equity, where intersex individuals and their families can fully participate and contribute to our programs and initiatives.
- II. **Integrity:** We hold ourselves accountable to the highest ethical and professional standards and believe in transparency, honesty, and fairness in all our dealings. We are committed to building trust with our stakeholders and creating an environment where everyone feels respected and valued.
- III. **Empowerment and Autonomy:** We believe that intersex-led organizations and movements are uniquely positioned to effect positive and social change, and we are committed to supporting

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and strengthening their capacity for advocacy and leadership. We believe in creating opportunities and providing intersex individuals and their families with access to current and updated information, resources and the support they need to make informed decisions about their own bodies, health, wellbeing and rights to actively shape the future of the intersex community in Africa.

- IV. **Innovation:** We recognize the complex challenges facing intersex individuals and communities and believe creative and innovative approaches are necessary to address them. We embrace experimentation and new ideas and are committed to working with diverse stakeholders to develop and implement effective, efficient, and sustainable solutions.
- V. **Quality:** We are committed to delivering high-quality services, programs, and initiatives that meet the needs and expectations of intersex individuals and their families. We strive for continuous improvement in all our activities and believe in rigorous monitoring and evaluation to ensure we achieve our goals and make a meaningful impact.
- VI. **Collaboration:** We recognize that no single organization or individual can achieve our mission alone and believe in the power of collaboration and partnership. We seek to build and sustain strong relationships with stakeholders at all levels based



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on mutual respect, trust, and shared goals. We believe that effective collaboration is critical to achieving our mission and that we can create a better future for intersex individuals and communities in Africa.

- VII. **Human Rights:** We are guided by the principles of human rights, social justice, and equality, and we believe that every intersex individual has the right to be treated with dignity and respect. We work towards ensuring that the rights of intersex individuals are respected, protected, and fulfilled, and we are committed to addressing systemic barriers to equality and justice.
- VIII. **Compassion:** We recognize that intersex individuals and their families face unique challenges and experiences and approach our work with empathy, sensitivity, and compassion. We believe in creating a safe and supportive environment where intersex individuals and their families can access the resources and services they need and where they feel valued and respected.
- IX. **Sustainability:** We are committed to building programs and initiatives that have a lasting impact on intersex health, wellbeing, and rights. We believe in using resources responsibly and efficiently and in creating programs that are sustainable and have a long-term impact. We believe in the

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importance of building partnerships and collaborations that can help ensure the sustainability of our work.

X. **Equity:** We believe in promoting equity in all activities and recognize the importance of addressing the underlying causes of social and economic inequality. We strive to ensure that all intersex individuals and their families have access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive and are committed to addressing systemic barriers to equity and inclusion.

XI. **Continuous Learning and Improvement:** SIPD believes in promoting a culture of constant learning and improvement, recognizing the importance of reflection, evaluation, and adaptation in our work. We seek to learn from our experiences, successes, and challenges and to use this knowledge to inform and improve our interventions and approaches. We also value feedback from our partners and stakeholders, using this feedback to improve our performance and accountability. We believe continuous learning and improvement are essential to achieving our vision of a world where intersex individuals are valued, respected, and empowered to lead fulfilling lives.

## **Our Strategic Objectives**

S.O 1: To promote the health and wellbeing of intersex individuals in Africa by promoting a comprehensive and integrated intersex health system that is community-driven, sustainable, and rights-based.

S.O 2: To create a conducive environment for the full participation and inclusion of intersex individuals in African society.

S.O 3: To create a strong and sustainable intersex movement in Africa with empowered intersex individuals and organisations to demand respect and observance of the rights of intersex persons.

S.O 4: To promote evidence-based policies, programs and practices on intersex issues in Africa through research and innovations.

S.O 5: To optimise SIPD's institutional capacity to efficiently and effectively implement its strategic plan and advance the rights and

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wellbeing of intersex individuals in Africa by enhancing our governance, human resources, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, resource mobilisation, and communication systems.