

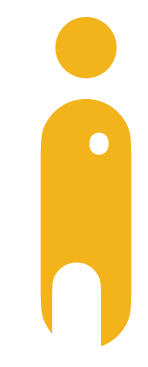
Intersex Bodies | Global South Alliances

Memoir

We, the intersex people from the Global South

Africa
Edition





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About GATE

GATE is an international advocacy organization working towards justice and equality for trans, gender diverse and intersex communities. Rooted in our movements, we work collaboratively with strategic partners at the global level to provide knowledge, resources and access to international institutions and processes. Our vision is a world free from human rights violations based on gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. Our strategy is to transform the landscape of global advocacy, knowledge creation and resource distribution through critical inclusion of trans, gender diverse and intersex movements at all levels of political, legal and socio-economic processes.

Find out more about **GATE** by visiting www.gate.ngo



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Our bodies Our alliances

Preface



Our bodies are our first experience in the world, and not only for intersex people. Our bodies are conditions for our very possibility. They represent our chance to take action. Instead, for intersex people, our bodies are an impossibility, our first struggle to be and exist in this world. That is why speaking on intersex bodies is the same as debating intersex politics.

For **GATE**, it is vital to foster alliances between intersex bodies from the Global South. Compared to intersex groups in the North, data suggests that intersex groups in the global South and East regions are much less likely to receive funding, have access to community-building initiatives, and regional and global advocacy entry points.

Despite so many constraints, through activism we have found a way to survive, in this life, in this time and space, as long as we live in our bodies and territories. Over the past few years, our way of being and resisting has gained more strength and momentum against the force of a world that mutilates us since birth.

Their secret has become our public issue. An issue that catalyzes an activist movement and interconnects multiple agents. We have been building a complex network of alliances to save our lives; to ensure our integrity. That is a task only possible within the dense network of alliances we have articulated with increasingly greater insistence, in order to save our lives and ensure our bodies' integrity.

Articulating more alliances with brothers, sisters, and siblings with lived intersex experiences is a step in pursuing ways to survive while affirming and honoring our bodies in the precise ways we exist in the world.

Intersex Bodies Global South Alliances

Memoir



GATE hosted a webinar to discuss the trajectories of intersex-led movements in the Global South. In its first iteration, we invited activists from six different countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The **Africa Seminars** are the second iteration of a three regional webinars series, one for each great region of the Global South, aimed at producing a space where local, national, and regional organizations working to the promotion and protection of the human rights of intersex people can encounter to discuss their experiences when it comes to their political engagement.

With this project, we cover a great variety of topics regarding intersex issues in the Global South. By providing a safe space for intersex Global South movements and activists to meet, we intended to foster peer-learning processes on advocacy and capacity development strategies while tracking down recommendations and priorities for human rights advocacy for intersex people. In stimulating the debate on sex variations and intersex issues at the regional level, we would like to assess national and regional trends and best practices, and persisting challenges regarding sex variations and intersex issues, while providing an encounter opportunity.

Participants were invited based on regional and background diversity, meaning we heard from range of actors about their experiences and projects on intersex matters. Each panelist produced an article on the topic presented and their articles are now together and public in this final publication

We, the intersex people from the global South.

Contents & Authors

We, the intersex people from Africa

Ghana

FAFALI D. AKORTSU

 Intersex Ghana Movement

Intersex trans man, advocate and activist. Key population specialist providing services to community-based and civil society organizations in Ghana with focus on the LGBTI community aiming at changing attitude and fostering acceptance.



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 Intersex Persons Society of Kenya [IPSK]

Intersex person. The co-founder and the Executive Director of the Intersex Persons Society of Kenya, IPSK. A degree holder in Political Science and Sociology from the University of Nairobi.



Nigeria

OBIOMA CHUKWUIKE

 Intersex Nigeria

Intersex and human rights activist living in Nigeria, working for the promotion of intersex rights with experiences in advocating for different issues affecting intersex children and adults throughout national, regional and international committees on intersex rights.





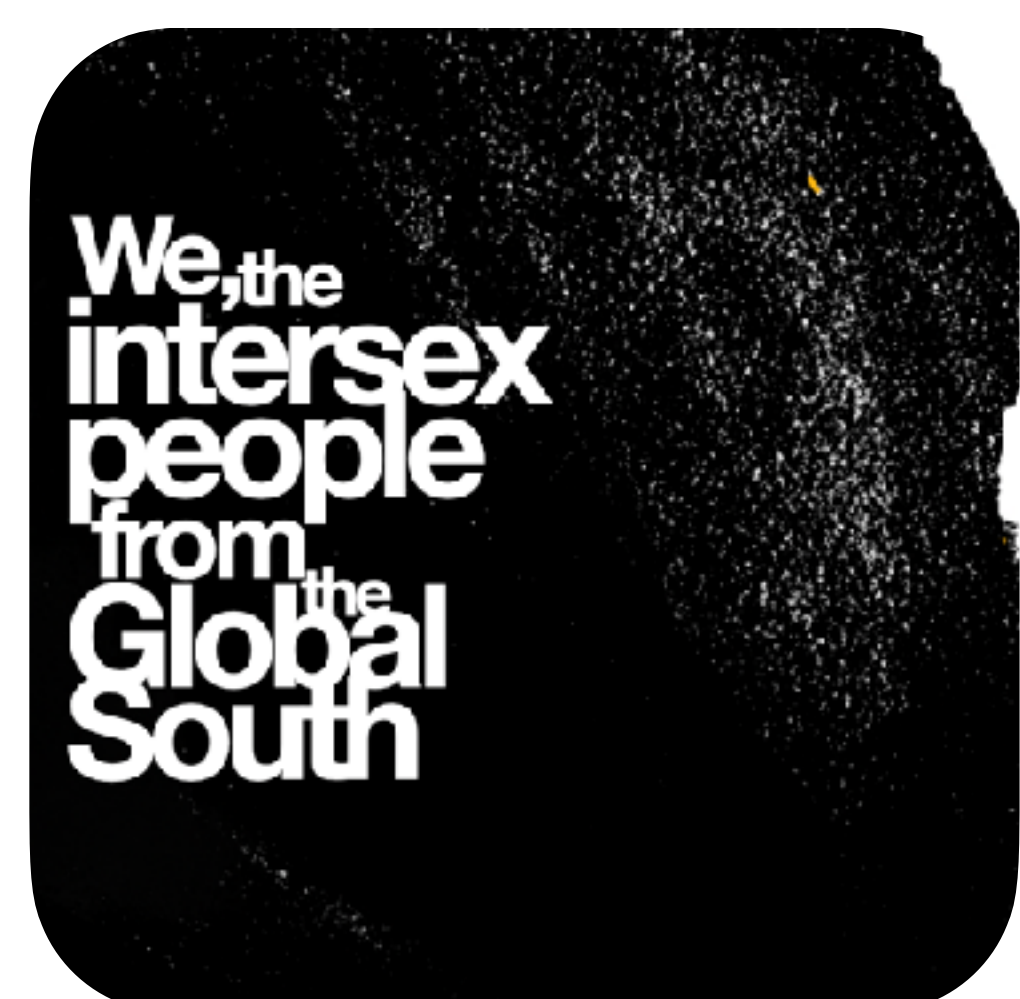
South Africa
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Queer intersex feminist womxn advocating for change for African intersex people. Current Intersex Officer at Iranti, administrator for Intersex South Africa, chair of the ILGA World Intersex Committee and an Advisory Board member of the Intersex Human Rights Fund.



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 Intersex Community of Zimbabwe

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Intersex Bodies
Global South Alliances
AFRICA

The **Africa Seminars** are the second iteration of a three regional webinars series, one for each great region of the Global South to discuss the trajectories of intersex-led movements in the region.

Check out a [replay](#) here!

We, the
intersex
people
from
the
Global
South



Ghana

Fafali D. Akortsu
Executive Director
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The notion of sex in the Ghanaian traditional setting has always been binary (male and female.) This fact has been unquestioned for several decades, but there are biological gene imbalances in persons that make it difficult to designate a sex for such person even to use the sex given to them at birth. In terms of definition, intersex has been described by the UN Office for the Commissioner of Human Rights as an:

[...] umbrella term used to describe a wide range of innate bodily variations in sex characteristics. Intersex people are born with sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions for male or female bodies, including sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormonal patterns, and/or chromosome patterns. (OHCHR, 2019)

Whilst the United Nations estimates that between 0.05% and 1.7% of infants are born with intersex traits (HCHR, 2019; **Fausto-Sterling, 2000**), these figures are socially constructed in the sense that medical definitions of intersex remain contested (**Griffiths, 2018**). Some children's chromosomal sexuality contradicts their sexual characteristics and others have the physical traits of both sexes and of neither. Preves (2003), drawing on life history and interviews with adults who were treated for intersexuality as children Sharon E. Preves explored how such individuals experience stigma and cope with being labeled as sexual deviants in a society that demands sexual conformity to the concept of male and female.

In the Ghanaian context, there are difficulties with estimating the number of people in Ghana with variations in sex characteristics. The reasons for this include firstly, for some, the variation may never be apparent. Secondly, some people may not disclose information when asked, for example via a survey. Thirdly, there exists no consistent definition or approach to collecting data of people with variations in sex characteristics.

Furthermore, unavailability of relevant data on number of intersex babies/minors or persons who have undergone coerced, uninformed, and unnecessary genital normalizing surgeries, aimed at altering the sexual and reproductive anatomy to suit social classifications of male and female.

Also, in the Ghanaian context as well as the Global South, there is lack of legal framework except for a few African countries like South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda; there is no law that mentions or protects the rights of intersex persons. This lack of an appropriate legal framework exacerbates human rights violations against intersex persons. Having identified this gap in national legislation, the Centre for Human Rights proposed the adoption of a Model Law which aims to help African States to develop national laws, policies, and institutions to protect the rights of all intersex persons.

Intersex people in Ghana and most Global South countries lack access to affirming medical healthcare services, not only as infants but as adults as well. Access to healthcare for intersex persons in Ghana and Africa is usually characterized by healthcare practitioners that have no knowledge of the existence of intersex persons or have no knowledge on what affirming healthcare services for intersex persons is supposed to look like. These trends within the public health sector led to intersex persons and their guardians receiving pathologizing information that promotes IGM (Intersex Genital Mutilation) instead of alternative affirming information. Poor health systems in Africa also lead to intersex people being unable to access their health records, a provision that is supported by law but is often not accessible in healthcare facilities.

Intersex individuals and activists in Ghana continue to build a movement to defend intersex human rights in various parts of the country. Intersex Ghana consists of intersex activists representing the diverse regions of Ghana, working together to end discrimination, and promoting and protecting the human rights of intersex people. Some of the focus areas of activism by Intersex Ghana Movement include:

- To acknowledge the suffering and injustice caused to intersex people.
- To recognize that sexism, medicalization and stigmatization of intersex people result in significant trauma and mental health concerns.
- To remove the stigma from all the terms referring to intersex.
- To recognize that being intersex relates to biological sex characteristics, and is distinct from a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. An intersex person may be heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual or asexual; and may identify as female, male, both or neither.
- To put an end to mutilating and 'normalizing' practices such as genital surgeries, psychological and other medical interventions through legislative and other means. Intersex people ought to be empowered to make their own decisions affecting their own bodily integrity, physical autonomy, and self-determination.
- To put an end to preimplantation genetic diagnosis, pre-natal screening and interventions, and selective abortion of intersex fetuses.
- To develop national laws, policies, and institutions to protect the rights of all intersex persons.

While in Kenya results of activism have encouraged legislation that promotes the protection of the rights of intersex people i.e., there are few protections from mutilation and non-consensual cosmetic medical interventions. Ghana on the other hand in the year 2021 has introduced an anti-LGBTI bill named the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill, 2021. The current bill aims to protect Ghanaian family values; and promote arbitrary harmful notions and provisions that violate the fundamental human rights of people as stated in multiple Human rights treaties and conventions.

As a result of the misinformation, misbeliefs, myths, and misconceptions construed by anti-gender movements, we have witnessed a confluence and re-framing of multiple longtime anti-rights movements under the banner of a global "anti-gender" movement which attempts to enforce the concept that biological sex represents the "natural" order while gender is an invention and an "ideology." And, about the notion that sex is a binary. Which is due to indoctrinated myths that have been mostly championed by faith and inherited colonial moral laws. These has resulted in anti-gender movements and their champions pushing and advocating for harmful laws and bills to erase the existence of intersex people and the infringement on our fundamental human rights.

The current bill supports the practice of invasive, deeply traumatizing, irreversible harmful treatments on intersex infants and children that are unable to consent, and that are not at any danger to health or at any risk, such harmful and coercive medical interventions are mainly intended to change the cosmetic appearance of genitalia have no genuine therapeutic purpose for the treatment and are often only performed only to minimize a (perceived) social stigma rather than any real medical concerns; such harmful interventions according to multiple accounts of the Intersex International organizations, and medical bodies are often followed by lifelong hormonal treatments, disability, chronic infections, sexual dysfunction, incontinency, sterility, chronic pain, and medical complications, compounded by shame, torture, and secrecy.

The Ghanaian Intersex community strongly opposed the current bill presented at the Ghanaian Parliament, by presenting a memorandum to the parliamentary-select committee stating that the bill should be withdrawn altogether, since it clearly violates the fundamental human rights of intersex persons. The community also as a form of advocacy met with the committee to present a defense of the memorandum presented.

Between the 24th and 26th of November 2017, the First African Intersex Meeting took place in Johannesburg, South Africa. Participants drafted a Public Statement to extend demands aiming to end discrimination against intersex people in Africa; and to ensure the right of bodily integrity, physical autonomy, and self-determination. It is in this same spirit that as activists in the Global South, we continue to work tirelessly to garner support to be the drivers of social, political, and legislative changes that concern us.

The challenges of intersex activism in the Global South have largely been limited funding to project and advocate for intersex rights. The challenge of Global South has been protection of intersex people's human rights and awareness however, there has been some level of recognition and awareness creation of intersex people in Global South, acquiring more visibility thanks to intersex advocacy and activism efforts. Although there have been significant steps toward constructing intersex human rights frameworks, there is still a gap between the parameters provided by international law, which is not strictly enforceable, and the application of these in national legislation.

Key intersex and trans issues in the Ghanaian context [2018-2022]

- **Criminalization**

Introduction of Anti – LGBTIQ+ Bill which seeks to criminalize association and organizations that provide services for intersex and transgender persons.

- **Violence**

Discriminatory laws fueling the increase in HIV and other STIs transmitted illness within the intersex and trans community.

- **Arbitrary arrest and discrimination**

The anti-LGBTIQ+ bill which has led to the escalated rate of abuse against intersex and Trans person with the rise in arbitrary arrest, detention, gender-based violations, blackmail, and extortion due to the lack of proper interpretation of some laws such as section 104 of the criminal code of Ghana and pressure to conform or face jail term.

- **Institutional response**

Ghana Police always justifying and ignore the abuses of Intersex and Trans persons when cases are reported and rather making them victims, as well as support blackmail and extortion.

Media intolerance and hate agenda against Intersex and Trans persons.

Refusal by state identification offices to provide legal gender recognition for Intersex and Trans persons.

Sports institutions reject persons found to be intersex and trans from the various disciplines.

- **Education**

Physical and emotional abuses on persons born Intersex which causes the increase of school dropouts.

Intersex and Trans children are being discriminated and stigmatized against in educational facilities for being different.

Religious established schools justifying rejection and dismissal of students who are Intersex and Trans from their institutions of learning

- **Health**

Forced surgeries and treatment given to children and persons born intersex, discrimination of intersex and trans persons.

Infanticide of intersex born babies and fetus.

Forced and cohesive Conversion therapy on intersex and trans persons.

The future looks bright as the intersex movement is building support, engaging with policymakers and key stakeholders while empowering community members to be assertive and confident. Intersex politics can be continued and promoted in Global South by working to improve the following areas:

- Factual and accurate data on the intersex community and our needs (i.e., research, data collection and situational analysis of the realities of intersex people)
- The need to have strong and vibrant intersex movements in the sub-region
- The need to have exchange programs to other countries who have made major strides and changed narratives of intersex people in their countries to learn and share knowledge on their advocacy strategies, tools, approaches used in making their achievements.
- The need to have strategic engagements with policymakers in the health and human rights sector.

We, the intersex people of the Global South, are affirming that intersex people are real, and we exist in all countries of Africa. In view of the above narratives: We, the intersex people of the Global South, want to call on:

- National governments to address the concerns raised by the African Intersex Movement and draw adequate solutions in direct collaboration with intersex representatives and organizations.
- Traditional and religious leaders to stop harmful cultural practices, such as tradition led mutilations and killings of intersex people.
- National, regional, and international human rights institutions to take on board, and provide visibility to intersex issues in their work.
- Community leaders to engage in intersex education to dispel misconceptions and the stigma around intersex people.
- Human rights organizations to contribute to build bridges with intersex organizations and build a basis for mutual support and meaningful engagement. This should be done in a spirit of collaboration and no-one should instrumentalize intersex issues as a means for other ends.
- Funders to engage with intersex organizations and support them in the struggle for visibility, increase their capacity, the building of knowledge, and the affirmation of our human rights.

Fafali D. Akortsu

Executive Director
@ Intersex Ghana
Movement







Kenya

James Karanja

Executive Director
@ Intersex Persons
Society of Kenya

In Kenya, just like many African societies intersex activism has been very minimal and challenging. This has always responded with denial, and at best, silence, on matters about the existence of an intersex population in Kenya and often preferred to relate these issues to either witchcraft or other influence. One, society takes a firm and defensive stance, stating that such a birth is sin or curse related and people need to be delivered from it. Two, it responds by criticizing intervention strategies, specifically concerning sexuality and human rights messages, rather than providing additional credible alternatives.

Intersex activists are seen as individuals who are anti-science as well as the anti-medical establishment and are perceived to challenge the most trusted profession by the members of society. The interlinkage between the legal, political, medical, cultural and religion makes it even harder for activism as each has its theories on how to deal with the intersex issues projected to them. The binary system of male and female in the Kenyan system has been entrenched within social, political and religious beliefs that any individual challenging that status quo is purported to be influenced by the west, this always put intersex activities life in danger.

The Kenyan society, culture, and laws for a long time have been silent on the human rights violations and the lived realities of intersex people and particularly intersex children, however, there has been a paradigm shift from 2009 on the well-being and legal recognition of the community.

Working on intersex issues has been one of the most rewarding journeys of my life as an intersex person. Understanding the nature of activism in Kenya, especially on minorities helped us on how to advance intersex human rights in my country. The approaches and the strategies we use have been very successful in the achievements we have had in the short period; indeed, Kenya can be categorized as one of the most advanced countries in the world on intersex human rights. We acknowledge there is still a long. However, these achievements came through us sharing our lived realities on how society has meted stigma, discrimination and exclusion of intersex.

Intersex issues and intersex activism have gained traction in local, regional and international spaces. This has led to the formation of movements in each region and Africa is no different. The global south has been at the forefront in advocating for intersex human rights. Despite the differences in cultures, religion and political establishments, we activists from the global south are fighting against the same violations of intersex genital mutilations, lack of legal and social recognition, discrimination, exclusion and erasure of our existences as normal human beings.

The global South region holds vehemently conservative attitudes towards sex and gender variant people. In recent years, there have been activists' efforts advocating for the rights of other minorities. However, whereas some dialogue on those subjects was initiated, there are constant efforts to challenge them. The lack of proper information and knowledge to the parents of intersex children has led to the misuse of power by medical practitioners to subject intersex children to unwanted surgeries.

The lack of adequate resources and capacity for advocacy has led to a huge gap in creating public awareness considering that there is a low level of education in the global south as compared to our counterpart in the global north. Security and mental health of the intersex activists are key issues that need to be prioritized, the idea that intersex people are bringing western concepts to the global south has seen them being targeted and their life put in danger. The very same governments that ought to protect the activists turn out to be the perpetrators of the very said human degrading and undignified acts.

One great lesson we have learnt is that to influence social attitudes in a prejudiced, fundamentalist, traditionalist, conservative society, there is an urgent need to reinforce those efforts by crafting strategies that touch and appeal to the people's cultural, religious, and social identities. We need to urgently shift the paradigm from a focus on the victims of a situation that the society we live in does not seem to understand and focus instead on getting the community to take a deep and voluntary look at itself as they share in the undeniably emotive and courageous stories of other people across the region, with the highlighted theme of diversity, and which show that we are all human beings with inherent rights regardless of our uniquely different circumstances.

Intersex activism is getting a lot of traction in the world, I foresee a great future for the current and upcoming intersex activists in the global south. We have seen donors around the world warming up to intersex issues, this is the light at the end of the tunnel. There is a lot that needs to be done from a capacity-strengthening point of view, we need to improve the capacity of the current activists and equip them with the skills and knowledge required to advance intersex issues in the region and global sphere. The resilience pays.

To promote and protect intersex rights there is a need to continue with intersex politics around the region through awareness creation and making necessary noise in the decision-making spaces for social inclusion. Intersex politics should be disruptive to help give insights into their plight. Modern society is driven by laws and policies and the intersex community need to take the centre stage where they are formulated to ensure equal representation just like any other community.

The biggest way to continue educating the public on intersex issues is through creating visibility in every part of society. Work closely with already established movements such as the feminists, and relook at the intersectionality to reinforce our work in the global south.

There is a need to re-strategize and strategize as a minority within the global south, and each community to work from their country's context. This will shift society's perception of intersex activism as a western influence to destabilize their governments.

We, the intersex people of Global South are human beings who are living healthy and can contribute to society's welfare like any other human beings. That our existence does not in any way hinder society from moving forward. We the intersex people of the Global South want to be included in our societal social well-being without discrimination and stigma. We want our voices to be heard and acted upon.

Nigeria

Obioma Chukwuike
Executive Director
@ Intersex Nigeria

Intersex community and organizing have been invisible before 2019 in Nigeria, a lot of visibility came into light after the formation of Intersex Nigeria in 2019. The reality is that intersex people have always existed not just in Nigeria or West Africa but all around the global. Invisibility and secrecy around intersex people who are often referred to as hermaphrodite.



In Nigeria, different local x interpretation shows the existence of intersex people but the lack of intersex understanding in society brought cultural condemnation of intersex persons as taboos, abnormal or cursed. This has eaten deep into society with high level of discrimination and stigmatization of intersex people.

The secrecy around giving birth to an intersex child or discovering you are born intersex continues to spread across the Africa region. This situation has led many intersex-led specific organization like Intersex Nigeria and others around Africa to cautiously advocate for the inclusion and recognition of intersex persons. Intersex children and adolescent have been subjected to harmful and unnecessary medical treatments which continues to harm and violate our body and dignity. There are also exclusion of intersex specific services and information in healthcare systems, educational bodies, policies, and laws that should protect and promote intersex wellbeing and visibility. There are misconceptions of intersex being a form of gender identity rather than variation in sex characteristics of a human being. The neglect and denial of intersex rights have dated back to centuries but in recent decades developments intersex activists' voices has been the light that has sparked various visible changes you see around the global. Africa is not left behind in this great course of intersex activism, many intersex activities and advocate, we continue to use our experience and stories as intersex people to shine light to the issues and challenges that limit our existence and fulfillment of our potentials. For me as an intersex person and intersex activist, the experience of carrying the mantle of passion to bring change to my community is path that is exhausting and sometimes fearful to dare.

Nigeria is still very shallow at recognizing intersex rights, the political atmosphere is very harsh and unsettled but we are starting by engaging with the grassroots stakeholders, whom we believe will form an integral part of intersex advocacy in near future in Nigeria. We believe that Nigerian context for political change is bottom-up, and sensitization of stakeholders will in turn promote more positive political situations that will enable intersex discussions at the State and National levels.

Obioma Chukwuike

Executive Director
@ Intersex Nigeria



Language barrier is one of challenges that limits effective communication within the intersex movement in the Global South and differences in cultural and political context; some countries in Global South see intersex as unnatural and forbidden existence. Lumping intersex issues and LGBTQ+ issues without specification in programming; in as much as LGBTQI+ issues have similar context and intersectionality, major programming around intersex has some issues that needs to be addressed separately but most LGBTQI+ organizations take up spaces for intersex organizations, limiting the programming for intersex specific needs.

There is limited access to intersex funds to carry out our work, intersex organizing globally has access to less than 2% funds of LGBTQI+ funds, this reflects in organizational capacity for intersex organizations and activists to become well equipped for advocacy and human right programming. Lack of opportunities for intersex persons in Global South to meet in person to link, share, and learn from each other as many of our issues have similar context. Limited access to international spaces for learning and expert promotion with the intersex community. Most intersex activist experience burnout from huge amount of workload with little recourse to carry it out.

We must be united to achieve our goals as a community, we must learn from similar organizing with the human right spaces which can help to sustain our initiatives and programs. Strengthening our community's capacity is the key to a sustainable activism in the region, young intersex persons should be supported to become future leaders of the movement. Research and documentation of the past, present, and future goals should be carried out with the Africa region, there is little, or no research done on intersex issues.

The future is bright because of the great minds and resilient intersex activists who are springing up at different countries and region, the future is the young intersex persons who will have more visibility and support to achieve major milestones for our community, the future is assured as political shifts continue to happen and increased discussion will bring new narrative of intersex discourse. I believe that intersex will steer other positive narrative around gender rights and other minority rights that has been criminalized by most countries.

Through evidence based research and documentation of different issues and challenges of intersex people in Global South, cross movement learning programs for knowledge sharing, advocacy capacity strengthening for intersex activist for improved organizing, and international support from human rights organizational and countries, more educational support for intersex folks who want to advance their studies in different fields, most intersex persons are denied access to education because of discrimination and stigma.

In 2021, I authored a **report about situation of intersex people in Africa during the Covid-19 Pandemic**, the report showed a comprehensive impact of Covid-19 on intersex persons in Africa. It also shows the importance of urgent call to all government and society a large to become more aware of the increase dehumanization on intersex people. Our government can do better by being accountable for the neglect of intersex community, calling more international spotlight on intersex issues and resource mobilization for the intersex organizing in Global South. We should go further to hold events that can promote visibility to our work and invite more allyships to the work we do as advocates and activists.

We, the intersex people of the Global South, are resilient, visible and demand rights to live a dignified and happy life. We, the intersex people of the Global South, want to uphold our right to life, we want recognition and inclusion in all aspects of life (socio-economic, healthcare, political, legal etc.). We demand end to all harmful practices and violation of our body. End intersex genital mutilation; and end pathologization of our body. We uphold the right to determine our bodily autonomy and integrity. We are human beings and have always existed.



**Crystal
Hendricks**

Intersex Rights Officer
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South Africa

Crystal Hendricks
Intersex Rights Officer
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The complicated social, economic, and political environment in which we work and live presents difficulties for intersex persons in South Africa. The environment in which we work is marked by a wide variety of traditional, current, and emerging trends, as well as by opportunities and challenges. The developments and elements that affect our job include.

Intersex people continue to face widespread abuses of their sexual and reproductive rights, which are made worse by restrictions placed on them by laws, regulations, the economy, as well as social and cultural norms. These include persistent physical assaults against intersex people and their bodies, including non-consensual unnecessary genital procedures, often known as intersex genital mutilation (IGM). The incapacity of the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) movement to acknowledge intersex health difficulties, as well as the absence of protection for intersex people's agency, bodily autonomy, and integrity, are central to these violations of human rights.

Insufficient access to affirming healthcare services

Intersex persons, both as infants and adults, do not have adequate access to affirming medical healthcare treatments. Healthcare professionals who don't know that there are intersex people or don't know what affirming healthcare services for intersex people should look like are typical characteristics of access to healthcare for intersex people in South Africa. Because of these developments in the public health field, pathologizing material that supports IGM instead of alternative affirming information is given to intersex people and their guardians. Intersex persons in South Africa are also prevented from accessing their health records due to poor health systems; this restriction is legal but frequently not available in healthcare institutions.

Mental health issues

Compared to the overall population, intersex people experience disproportionately high rates of mental health problems because of the shame, secrecy, isolation, and stigma caused by societal, cultural, and medical conventions. Instead of acknowledging that the mental health concerns are a result of the violence and discrimination that intersex person's experience from society, the medical community utilizes these mental health issues to support coerced IGM. The dearth of safe spaces for intersex people and their guardians/partners as well as the absence of affirming knowledge on intersex variants and realities make the mental health issues even worse.

Harmful cultural practices

Myths and false beliefs about intersex people and their bodies are prevalent across the continent. Due to the idea that intersex children or their families are cursed or bewitched, intersex infanticide and baby dumping have occasionally occurred, especially in rural areas.

Media representation of intersex individuals and their realities

The preconceptions and falsehoods mentioned above also show up in the media's portrayal of intersex people. To portray all intersex people, a sessional, singular, and erroneous narrative is frequently utilized, omitting the fact that intersex people have a very broad range of identities.

Limited legal environment

Act 49 of 2003 and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA), two legal frameworks that seek to protect and recognize intersex people in South Africa, are in place, but they are not sufficient to stop IGM or other systemic violations of intersex people's sexual and reproductive rights. The promotion and protection of the rights of intersex people still require better legal and policy frameworks, as does the creation of an environment that supports access to the legal protections that are in place.

The emphasis is on the parent of the intersex child, who are consulted to decide whether to have surgery for their child, when the principle of informed consent is used in South Africa regarding medical treatments and procedures on intersex infants and children. Instead of concentrating on the child's bodily integrity, privacy, right to freedom, security, and sexual and reproductive health rights, this method primarily informs the parents of the potential dangers and difficulties of surgery. Even though all decisions made by the clinicians and parents should consider the child's rights and/or best interests, the authority to make decisions regarding the child's body still largely resides with the parents.

The South African Department of Social Development acknowledged that the government was aware of the problems of IGM in the nation in its briefing to the UN's Children's Rights Committee in 2018. The requirement to stop the practice. Intersex rights advocates pointed out that as a result, South Africa became the first country to officially recognize at the UN the harm perpetuated by IGM on intersex children.

Zane Dangor, a counselor to Bathabile Dlamini, the minister of social development, spoke at a UN committee and said.

“As a government, we do recognise that being intersex is a sexual characteristic and not a medical condition. But at the same time, we recognise that there are still practices where surgeries are being performed on new-borns and young children, which are harmful ..So we are now beginning a process in its early stages to acknowledging that such surgeries performed at a very young stage are harmful and that it needs to stop.”

It is noteworthy that the Children's Rights Committee brought IGM to the Department's notice after identifying it as a major problem with respect to South Africa. Intersex organizations and their allies' advocacy actions directly contributed to this prominence. The fact that intersex is frequently still conflated with gender identity does not diminish the larger difficulties that now plague intersex activism in South African culture. The most important difficulties for intersex individuals "are not the existence of binary sex and gender categories, but what is done to intersex persons, to force them to conform to restrictive conventional classifications.

Although we could observe that intersex persons were severely impacted by the pandemic, this population continues to be the most marginalized. Most intersex persons relied on governmental support, which was occasionally unavailable. Intersex persons are unable to access housing, schooling, employment, healthcare, water, or sanitary facilities due to discrimination. This directly contravenes the 2030 Agenda, which supports the development of all human rights.

It is crucial that we dispel the stereotypes around intersex people in the developing world. We must run efforts to raise awareness of the issues surrounding SOGIESC. People are frequently still ignorant of what it means to be intersex, which contributes to additional prejudice and marginalization of the community. Because intersex people receive significantly less funding, our activities are constrained. Therefore, we must develop strategies for expanding the movement by emphasizing the intersections of the problems that intersex persons confront.

We, the intersex people of the Global South, want to ensure that intersex individuals get the right to bodily autonomy and self-determination. We will keep spreading awareness and pressing our governments to implement laws and policies that protect and advance the rights of intersex persons.

We, the intersex people of the Global South, want to ensure that Intersex persons lead full and productive lives. Our goal is to help create a society where being intersex is not viewed as a disease, sickness, or abnormality but rather as a set of naturally occurring differences that make up human variety. We picture an inclusive, diverse Global South where intersex people's human rights, bodily autonomy, and integrity are valued, safeguarded, and affirmed. An intersex person has power and control over decisions that have an impact on their life, and the birth of an intersex child is celebrated like any other birth. We strive to make our neighborhoods ones where intersex people can freely choose whether to have any medical procedures performed without being forced or coerced. a culture where intersex people are accepted as they are.



Zimb abwe

Ronie Zuze

Executive Director
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In Zimbabwe, intersex activism has been a very challenging task in the sense that there is very limited knowledge and information available on intersex people as well as their issues due to the secrecy surrounding the birth of an intersex child. This is something that has made it more difficult to carry out intersex activism, especially in my territory. Zimbabwe is a country that is dominated by both Christian and cultural beliefs and values, which make most people believe that human beings should only be either male or female so for one to start bringing out topics and ideas which are contrary to those beliefs is considered an abomination, therefore, one can imagine how it can be to start engaging systems of society on issues of intersex which are widely misunderstood since they are never spoken about openly. It can be both risky and dangerous to be involved in intersex activism.

My history of engagement in intersex politics in Zimbabwe has been that of both painful and rewarding experiences since many times I have found myself in trouble with security agents. I have faced blackmail, victimization, stigma, and discrimination in all its forms. I have experienced misrepresentation of intersex issues and the work I do for others. I have been rejected, excluded from spaces, and I also have been left feeling like I do not fit anywhere within communities and movements where I thought I could be belonging to just for standing up for intersex activism and speaking out my truth. However, besides all the negativity, I have also celebrated and experienced some milestones through hard work, perseverance, dedication, and having a resistant spirit that refuses to give up, something that has made me realize being part of some national, regional, and international advocacy processes which I proudly count as milestones in the short time of my intersex activism.

As an emerging movement in the region, intersex activism in the Global South has managed to gain recognition in Global spaces and it is no longer possible to ignore it despite the challenges that we face. There are many factors counting against the growth of the movement as well as many barriers that we are faced with, but these cannot break us apart. Instead, we are growing strong with each day despite being faced with many opposing factors such as social, economic, political, cultural, and traditional factors including many more.



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Intersex activism in the Global South is faced with many challenges which include social cultural and religious beliefs which attempt to silence and make intersex persons invisible since talking about intersex issues is still considered taboo and this affects intersex visibility. On the other hand, we have medicine through medical practices, attempting to erase the existence of intersex people through non-consensual medical surgeries and other harmful and irreversible medical interventions on both intersex children and intersex adults, to make them conform to their own definition of 'gender normalcy' and in most countries in the Global South, no one is doing anything to stop these harmful practices. Some of the challenges we have encountered include issues of misrepresentation of intersex issues by some non-intersex groups and individuals for their own agendas as well as issues of intersex tokenization for various selfish gains. One other main issue which is a challenge in intersex activism is the issues of language barriers as well as capacity, since most intersex persons who might be passionate and doing intersex activism have not had the opportunity to attain a proper education due to their upbringing and many other issues surrounding their lives as intersex persons, something that will affect their ability to properly carry out their work with efficiency. The lack of psycho-social support is also another challenge that hinders intersex activism since most intersex activists end up suffering from mental health issues.

Our biggest lesson of intersex activism in our context is for us to use solutions that work in our own different contexts for our challenges as much as they may be similar challenges that we are facing. We have also learned vital lessons in the power of unity, having to speak with a unified intersex voice, perseverance, dedication to the community that we serve, and resilience and these are very key components in intersex activism. There is also a need for strategy and consistency in intersex activism, we have seen these elements working well in the context of intersex activism in Kenya, and as intersex activists, we look up to learn more from their achievements in the progress made in the attainment of the rights of intersex persons.

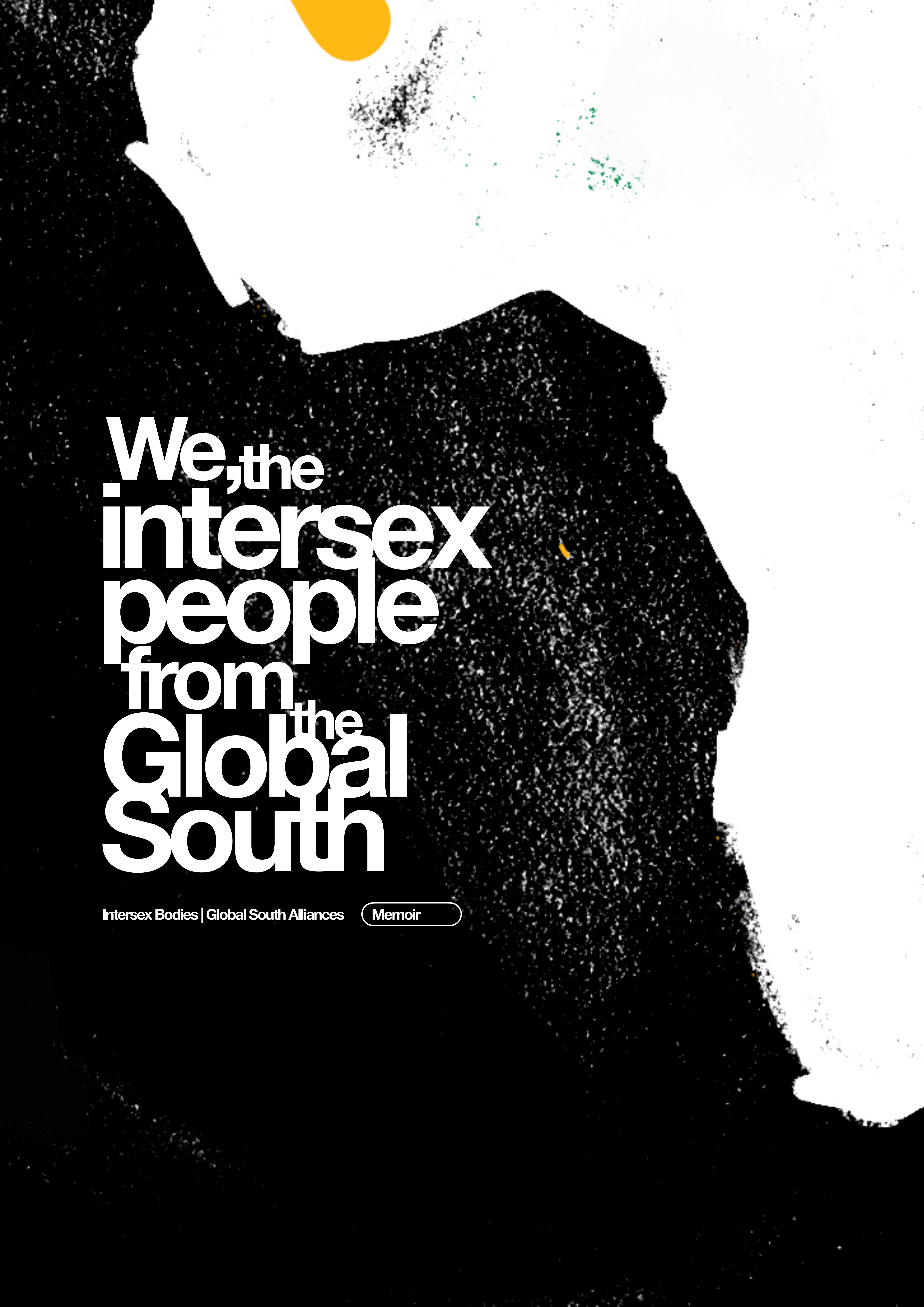
I can envision the growth of intersex activism in the Global South, and I see that even if we are still a long way to get to viewing intersex bodies as normal bodies, we will eventually get there as long as intersex activism in the Global South is in existence.

Intersex politics can be continued and promoted by a continuous fight for intersex visibility and a unified intersex voice that speak out to educate and inform about intersex issues so that intersex bodies can be viewed with the same view that non-intersex bodies are viewed. I believe parents of intersex children as well as parents of non-intersex children should all be given enough and adequate information about intersex persons in their diversity.

The Global South has been experiencing anti-LGBTI attacks and these challenges can be addressed by education and awareness raising as well as dialogues between the LGBTI and all different social groups at different levels. I believe that these should be strategic given our different country contexts in the Global South to help end hate towards LGBTI people.

We, the intersex people of Global South are human beings just as good as all other non-intersex persons out there and we deserve to be listened to. We deserve our full set of human rights, such as protection, legal recognition, and access, as well as acknowledgment.

We the intersex people of the Global South want to be part of society as well as be part of every process that concerns all human beings, and we want to be involved in order to be able to contribute in every possible way. We also want to be acknowledged without any shortchanges or reservations.



We, the
intersex
people
from
the
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South

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