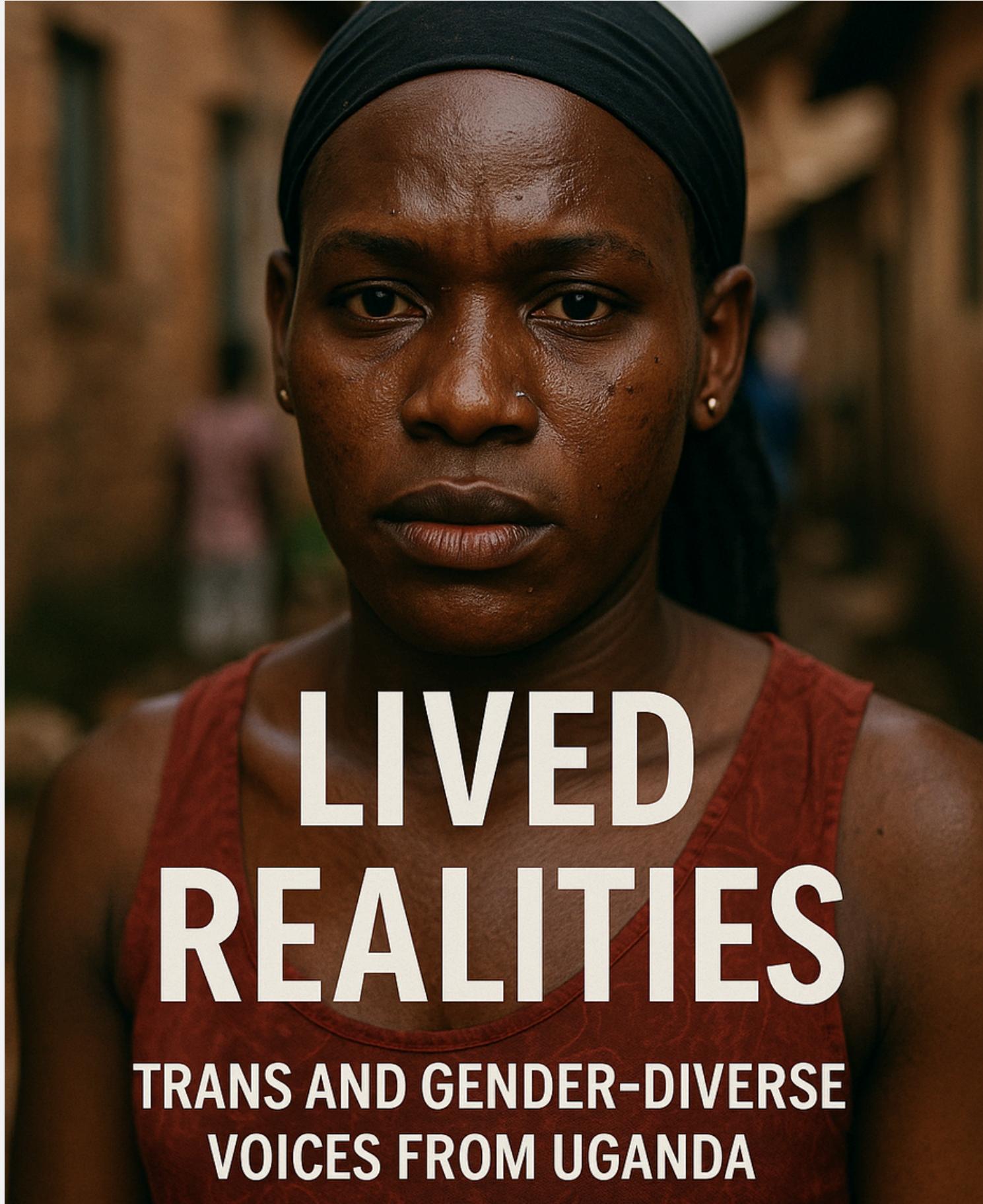




BETWEEN REJECTION  
AND RESILIENCE



**LIVED  
REALITIES**  
TRANS AND GENDER-DIVERSE  
VOICES FROM UGANDA



## **Sheebah Ntaate, Transgender Woman**

Sheebah Ntaate is a transgender woman activist dedicated to empowering transgender women and advancing inclusive healthcare and human rights. She works to raise awareness, strengthen community support systems, and advocate for equality, dignity, and social acceptance of transgender and Gender Diverse persons.



## **Jay Brodrick Otita, transgender Man, Kampala**

Jay Otita is an unapologetically out and proud trans man and trans rights activist who has been actively involved in community engagement and advocacy initiatives that promote awareness and mindset change. Through his work, he has influenced both government actors and community members to acknowledge and respect the existence and humanity of transgender persons beyond their gender identity.

Jay is also the Team Leader of T, Men Evolution Uganda, a trans men-led organization dedicated to addressing the specific needs of trans men across the country. Under his leadership, the organization advocates for equality, visibility, and the protection of trans rights in Uganda.



## **Ariana Mutoni, Transgender woman, Kampala**

Ariana Mutoni is a transgender woman and human rights advocate based in Kampala, Uganda. She works with Transgender Equality Uganda, where she leads efforts to advance equality, inclusion, and protection for transgender and Gender Diverse persons. Guided by her lived experience, Ariana is passionate about creating safe spaces, promoting legal recognition, and strengthening access to health and social services for the trans community. Her advocacy centers on visibility, dignity, and the right of every person to live freely and authentically.



## **Ruby, Central Uganda**

Ruby is a gender non conforming and pansexual activist from central Uganda. A parent, neurodivergent individual, and frontline human rights defender, Ruby is deeply committed to advancing queer disability rights and social justice. With a background in social work, Ruby advocates for the inclusion, safety, and dignity of persons living at the intersections of disability, gender diversity, and sexuality, working to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of equality.



## **Mumbya Katende, Kasese**

Mumbya Katende is a rural trans activist and community organizer with Twilight Support Initiative (TSI) Uganda, a rural Trans led organization in the Rwenzori Sub region Western Uganda Kasese district . Under Katende's leadership, Twilight Support Initiative operates the first, ever rural transgender clinic in Uganda, providing vital healthcare and support services to transgender and Gender Diverse persons. With experience across multiple professional fields, Katende is deeply committed to advancing equality, visibility, and community, driven solutions that center the voices and wellbeing of trans persons in rural settings.

A close-up portrait of a young woman with dark skin and short, curly hair. She is wearing a bright orange t-shirt. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

# Sheebah

**Q: Can you tell me about an incident either at work, at home, or any social environment that has affected you because of your identity?**

I grew up with my stepmother, and when my family found out that I am a transgender person, everything changed. It happened in 2018, while I was in Senior Five. One day, I forgot to lock my phone and left it on the dining table. My sister went through my messages and later told my mother. When my father came home, he was furious, he broke down my door, beat me severely, and called me "the devil." That night, I was forced out of our home.

With nowhere to go, I reached out to friends from the community, and they helped connect me to a shelter where I could find safety and begin to rebuild my life

**Q: How have these incidences affected your day, today life?**

These experiences affected me deeply. At the time, I was still in school, but unlike my siblings who continued their education with full family support, I didn't get that chance. I had to find ways to survive on my own.

Living in the shelter was not easy . I became depressed, missed my siblings, and often felt completely isolated. For two years, I stayed in different shelters, yet my parents never reached out or checked on me. It took a long time for me to heal and reconnect with the community. Slowly, I began to rebuild my confidence and find a sense of belonging again.

## **Q: How have these incidences affected access to social services, health care services, and livelihood?**

When my parents found out about my identity, my education came to an end. I couldn't continue to campus like my siblings. Life became very difficult, and even after I moved to the shelter, things didn't get easier. Just two weeks after arriving, I fell sick. The head of the shelter referred me to a health facility but didn't provide transport, so I struggled to find my way there. Later, I had to move from Northern Uganda to another facility in Kawempe. When I arrived, I didn't know where to start my phone had been stolen at the shelter, and I couldn't contact anyone. Luckily, I met someone from the community I had seen before, and they helped me find my way.

Life in the shelter was tough. Most of us survived on small portions sometimes just half a kilo of beans or posho to share. It was rarely enough. I didn't have close friends outside the community, so I had no support system. I also had to start presenting more feminine, contribute to rent, and help buy food to survive.

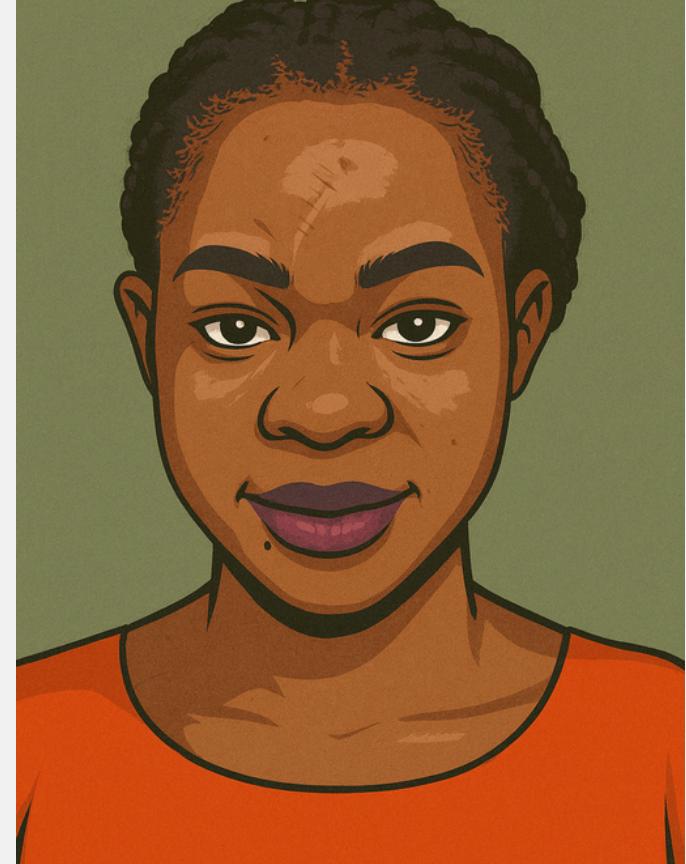
Whenever I went out to look for jobs, people would question me asking if I was a boy or a girl, or if I was gay. These questions always ended with rejection. I couldn't find work, either within organizations or outside the community. Life was very hard at first, but over time, I began to make friends at the shelter. We shared our experiences, talked about survival, and supported each other through the challenges.

## **Q. How have you managed to overcome these incidences, what is your support system?**

When I feel stressed or overwhelmed, I reach out to people I trust and talk to them. Over time, the community has taught me how to meditate and given me different coping mechanisms to manage my emotions. I also listen to music, it helps me relax and reconnect with myself.

Sometimes, I think of the future **Sheebah**, not the one I am now. That vision keeps me hopeful and reminds me that my story is still unfolding.

Organizations like Transgender Equality Uganda, Human Rights Awareness Uganda, and the Golden Center for Women's Rights have also been part of my support system. They've helped me with relocation, legal aid, medical care, and nutrition support. Through them, and through the friendships I've built in the community, I've slowly regained stability and strength to keep moving forward.



## **Reflection**

Sheebah's story reveals the profound violence, discrimination, and exclusion that transgender and Gender Diverse persons continue to face in Uganda. Family rejection pushed her into unstable shelter environments where survival was uncertain, and access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities was abruptly cut off. The constant questioning of her identity "Are you a boy or a girl?" reflects the daily policing, stigma, and dehumanization that strip trans people of dignity and belonging.

Her experience underscores how the growing Anti Rights movement fuels an environment of fear, isolation, and limited access to essential services. It also shows how fragile formal support systems remain, leaving many to depend on community solidarity and grassroots initiatives for survival.

Yet amid this hardship, Sheebah's story is one of remarkable resilience. Her courage to rebuild, her use of coping mechanisms, and the support from organizations such as Transgender Equality Uganda and the Golden Center for Women's Rights demonstrate the transformative power of community care.

Ultimately, Sheebah's journey is both a painful reminder of systemic failure and a powerful call to action, to strengthen protections, expand resources, and create affirming spaces where transgender and Gender Diverse persons can live, thrive, and dream without fear.



**Jay**

**Can you tell me about an incident either at work, home, or any social environment that has affected you because of your identity**

Changing my identification details has been a nightmare. When I tried to change my name, I was treated like a criminal, at one point, I even had to deal with Interpol officers. At office gates and security checkpoints, I have been asked to undress so that guards can "confirm" whether I am a man or a woman. In social spaces, I have been harassed, humiliated, and even forced to undress, accused of impersonation simply for being myself.

I have also been physically assaulted. When I once went to a public hospital seeking treatment, I faced open discrimination despite policies that are meant to protect everyone. Health workers whispered among themselves and made hurtful comments like, "**homosexual persons are followed by tragedy.**" It made me feel invisible, unsafe, and unworthy of care.

At home, my family has threatened to poison or kill me because they believe I am bringing them shame. In public, people have taken my photos without consent and circulated them in WhatsApp groups, mocking me and accusing me of "promoting homosexuality." Even neighbors who once offered me opportunities now avoid me likely out of fear of being associated with someone like me.

All of this has made everyday life feel like walking on a tightrope, constantly fearing rejection, violence, or humiliation just for existing.

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### **How have these incidences affected your day, today life**

All these experiences have made me withdraw and isolate myself. I no longer socialize because being at home feels safer than facing the world outside. Whenever I try to attend a meeting or a public event, I am overwhelmed with anxiety and fear of how people might treat me.

These constant experiences of discrimination have taken a toll on my mental health. I often feel trapped in a cycle of worry and fear, struggling to find peace or a sense of safety. Life sometimes feels like living in a continuous state of alert, always watching, always cautious, just to survive

## How have these incidences affected access to social services, health care services, livelihood

I can no longer go to public health facilities because of the constant discrimination I face there. Health workers stare, whisper, and sometimes refuse to serve me. As a result, I am forced to seek care from private clinics, which are very expensive and not always accessible. Transitioning requires hormonal therapy, and even consultations alone cost money most times, I cannot afford them. This means I often have to delay or skip essential treatment.

When it comes to livelihood, I currently have no job. Even though I hold a degree, it is under my dead name, which makes it almost impossible to apply for employment. Many employers discriminate against me based on my gender identity, and I am constantly denied opportunities. Without a stable income or support, I struggle to meet my basic needs like rent, food, and healthcare.

These barriers have made my life extremely difficult surviving as a trans person in Uganda feels like constantly having to prove your worth just to access what everyone else takes for granted.

## Reflection

Jay's story is not just one of personal struggle, it is a mirror reflecting the structural injustices faced by transgender and Gender Diverse people in Uganda. The denial of legal recognition through identification systems, the humiliation of forced undressing, and the exclusion from healthcare are not isolated incidents. They expose deep systemic patterns of criminalization, discrimination, and erasure that cut across family, community, and state institutions. These intersecting violations push trans persons into isolation, poverty, and a continuous state of fear.

Viewed through a justice lens, this is not merely a question of individual prejudice, it is a call for institutional accountability. Justice for trans and Gender Diverse people means ensuring access to affirming healthcare, legal and social recognition, protection from violence, and the freedom to live without fear or shame.

Jay's resilience seen in his efforts to build community, create an organization for trans men, and foster solidarity is a profound act of resistance. Yet, true justice cannot rely on resilience alone. It demands structural change: the reform of discriminatory laws, the enforcement of anti-discrimination policies, and the creation of inclusive systems that allow trans and Gender Diverse people to participate fully, safely, and with dignity in every aspect of society.

## How have you managed to overcome these incidences, what is your support system?

I've learned to avoid unsafe social spaces and instead spend time with queer friends who know and respect my identity. Being around them feels safer and reminds me that I'm not alone. I also lean on a few family members and friends who accept me as I am. Whenever I can find free or affordable therapy, I see a therapist and also talk openly with other trans community members who understand my struggles.

Out of these experiences, I decided to start an organization for trans men. We don't have funding yet, but we share a vision to help ourselves and others in the trans community live with dignity and hope. Despite the threats, accusations, and fear, that vision keeps me going. It gives me strength to believe that change is possible and that our lives matter.



# ARIANA

**Q: Can you tell me about an incident either at work, at home, or at any social environment that has affected you because of your identity.**

There's one incident that really affected me last year at my workplace. Our organization had recruited capacity support teams, and most of them were not LGBTQI. One particular person struggled to understand the community they were coming to work with. It became very challenging to even hold conversations with him, because he constantly misgendered me referring to me as "he" even after I had introduced myself and clarified my pronouns.

It didn't stop there. Even within our programming and reports, I noticed that trans people were often referred to as men, despite our efforts to create inclusive language. As a trans woman, being misgendered especially in a professional space was triggering. It brought back memories of past trauma and made me feel unseen and invalidated.

What made it even harder was that this person was under contract with the organization, which meant I had no power to dismiss him. I had to find ways to work alongside someone who repeatedly disrespected my identity. Mentally, it was exhausting. I started avoiding interactions with him and withdrew from certain conversations just to protect my peace. It taught me how much work still needs to be done, even within spaces that claim to be inclusive.



**Q: How have such incidents affected your day, today life?**

These incidents affected me deeply, especially because I work closely with the person who kept misgendering me. We often share the same workspace, sit together in meetings, and collaborate on projects involving the community. It became mentally exhausting to show up every day, unsure whether my colleagues truly respected or understood me as a trans woman.

Being repeatedly called "he" made me feel invisible and unsafe in my own workplace. Over time, I began isolating myself from others because the situation was emotionally draining. I started questioning myself, wondering if something about me didn't align with how I identify. I would look at my body and ask myself if I needed to appear "more feminine" just to be seen and respected as a woman.

It really disturbed my peace of mind. Instead of focusing fully on my work, I found myself constantly thinking about how people perceived me, and whether they would ever truly accept me for who I am.

**Q: How have these incidents affected your access to social services, health care, or livelihoods?**

Beyond that workplace experience, there have been many other incidents that have made it difficult for me to access healthcare and other essential services. Discrimination often begins the moment I step into a health facility. Health workers question me unnecessarily, and because my identification documents still carry my previous name, I am forced to reveal parts of myself I am not comfortable sharing. Sometimes, this alone has stopped me from getting the services I need.

It doesn't matter whether it's a government or private facility the questioning and judgment are the same. The name and gender marker on my ID make me feel exposed, like I don't belong there. Because of this, I have avoided seeking care altogether on some occasions.

This fear has also extended to my daily life. I avoid public transport and certain public spaces because I worry that someone maybe a former friend or family member will recognize me before I transitioned. I constantly live with that fear of being identified, judged, or attacked. It has disrupted not only my access to healthcare but also my freedom to move, to work, and to live comfortably in my own community.

**Q: What about livelihoods? Has that part of your life also been affected?**

Yes, it has been affected a lot. In my line of work, we engage directly with people, but many of us in the community are school dropouts. We often don't have formal qualifications, so we depend on building our skills and getting support to strengthen our capacity to run our own programs.

However, working in environments where I am constantly misgendered drains my energy and motivation. Even when I know I need that income to survive, it becomes difficult to show up. The emotional toll of being disrespected or invalidated at work makes it hard to focus, to contribute fully, or to feel proud of what I do.

So yes, my livelihood is affected not just because of limited opportunities, but also because the spaces meant to empower us can still be unsafe and mentally exhausting. Sometimes, I end up staying away from work altogether just to protect my peace.

**Q: How have you managed to overcome these incidents?**

What has helped me most is accepting myself and understanding who I am. I know I am trans, and I'm not going anywhere that truth gives me strength. I've realized that people cannot truly understand or respect you unless you first understand and respect yourself. So, I've become my own support system. I remind myself that healing starts from within. When those negative thoughts or "little devil sounds" come into my head, I fight them by affirming who I am and by choosing self-acceptance. That self-awareness and inner strength are what help me overcome discrimination, isolation, and fear.

**Q: Beyond yourself, do you have any other support system?**

Yes, my biggest support system is the trans community. The trans women who are also transitioning, who have walked this journey before me, and those who are still in the process truly understand me.

Whenever things get tough, I talk to my sisters in the community. They know exactly what I'm going through, because what I experience is often what they experience too. That shared understanding gives me comfort and strength. It reminds me that I'm not alone, and that together, we can keep pushing through the challenges.

**Q: Is there anything else you would like to share about how your identity affects your day, today life?**

For now, that's all I can share, but I hope my experiences help others understand what it means to live authentically in a world that often refuses to see us.

# Reflection

Ariana's story reveals how deeply misrecognition and systemic barriers shape the everyday realities of trans women in Uganda. Her experience of being misgendered, even within an organization meant to serve LGBTI communities shows how stigma becomes normalized and internalized across spaces that should offer safety. This form of violence is subtle yet deeply corrosive; it breeds self-doubt, body surveillance, and emotional withdrawal. Its impact extends far beyond identity, reaching into livelihoods, healthcare, education, and mobility, where documents, appearances, and public scrutiny become instruments of exclusion.

Yet within this pain, Ariana's voice carries resilience. She recognizes herself as her first source of strength and finds healing in the solidarity of the trans community. Her ability to name her struggle and hold space for others demonstrates the quiet power of self-acceptance and collective care.

From this lens, justice for trans people goes beyond inclusion ;it demands a cultural and institutional transformation where recognition, respect, and safety are not privileges but rights. Ariana's testimony is a powerful reminder that the fight for equality must also confront the quieter, persistent harms of mis-recognition the everyday erasures that deny trans persons their dignity, safety, and equal opportunity to thrive.





At the time, I was working with the Diverse Empowerment Foundation, and everything became complicated. My productivity dropped, and paranoia took over. I began fearing everyone around me, friends, colleagues, even allies because online harassment and social media attacks were constant. It reached a point where I had to change my phone numbers and emails. Some of the threats even reached our organizational inbox.

For safety reasons, we eventually closed our offices in Ntinda and shifted to remote work. But it was very hard to manage, especially with ongoing mental health struggles and an overstretched team. We barely survived as an organization the only one in the movement that works specifically on disability inclusion.

## Ruby

**Can you tell me about an incident either at work, at home, or at any social environment that has affected you because of your identity?**

Personally, I've faced many incidents of discrimination, especially since the introduction of the Anti-homosexuality Act (AHA) though even before its passing, things were already difficult. One major incident happened because of my relationship. I am in a relationship with a paraplegic woman who uses a wheelchair. When her family found out about us, everything changed.

The situation escalated sharply after the AHA was enacted. Suddenly, our relationship was treated as criminal. I began receiving threats, and she faced even worse ones. Because she is wheelchair, bound, her family claimed she couldn't make her own decisions and accused me of "manipulating" her. It became chaotic. Eventually, she was kidnapped by her own relatives and forcibly placed in a mental health institution. With the help of organizations like SMUG, Ubuntu, and HRAF, she was rescued and relocated to a safe house in Kenya.

But even after that, the threats didn't stop. We have children -two daughters- one mine and one hers I am now the one raising both of them, but the intimidation and fear continue. The AHA has been used as a weapon against me, to silence and isolate me. There are almost no organizations addressing the needs of queer parents, especially those with minors. Only recently has one small group begun that conversation. For parents like us, there is practically no support system. Being in a relationship with someone who is disabled adds another layer of discrimination, yet there is little intentional inclusion or care from within the movement itself. At the same time, I was managing my own mental health conditions hypochondria, anxiety, and multiple invisible disabilities which worsened under these threats. I entered a mental state I had never experienced before. It affected my work deeply.

The passing of the AHA undid years of progress. People who once came to our center stopped showing up. They were too afraid. Many only reached out to me privately, unwilling to be seen engaging with the organization. Within the disability movement, which is already heavily male dominated, being queer and disabled carries multiple layers of stigma and discrimination.

This entire experience broke me in many ways but it also exposed the deep cracks in our systems: the absence of protection, the silence of movements, and the lack of understanding of what it truly means to live at the intersection of queerness and disability in Uganda.

### **Q: How has this incident affected your day, today life?**

My partner now lives in another country. For me, as Ruby, I've been with my partner for over five years in our movement, that's a lifetime. It feels like a marriage. So having to live apart after all that time has been incredibly painful. Long distance is hard, especially when it's forced by fear and persecution rather than choice.

It's also been a struggle to hold everything together. I am the main breadwinner for my family, and that responsibility takes a heavy toll. I spend a lot of what I earn on psychosocial support just to stay mentally stable. I know I'm privileged in some ways I speak English and have access to certain spaces but the current economy, combined with the Anti-homosexuality Act, makes it nearly impossible to sustain my family and still do the work I love.

Because of security threats, I move from house to house. Every time I feel unsafe or hear neighbors whispering about me, I have to relocate. I can't afford a standalone house in a private neighborhood, so I usually rent in shared compounds. That comes with its own risks people eavesdrop, monitor who visits me, and judge me because of how I present. As a masculine presenting person, I'm constantly questioned: "Why doesn't a man visit you? Why do you live alone?" These small but persistent intrusions chip away at my sense of peace.

On top of that, I am facing a custody battle for my biological daughter. Her father always knew my sexuality and identity, but he never used it against me until the AHA passed. Now he's using it as leverage to take my child away. It's terrifying, because going to court means my identity could be exposed publicly. As an activist, there are publications, interviews, and photos of me online all of which could be used as "evidence." Trying to keep that out of the courtroom has been one of the most difficult and costly battles of my life.

All of this ,the separation, the fear, the instability, the financial strain has reshaped my daily existence. It feels like I'm constantly fighting to survive, to stay safe, and to hold on to what little stability I have left.

### **Q: How has this affected your access to healthcare services and other social services?**

Around education, my plan last year was to upgrade. I'm largely self-taught I went to school but stopped at a certain level. I had hoped to enroll at Makerere University for adult studies or continue my education in another program. But after the Anti-homosexuality Act (AHA) was passed, that dream faded. We began seeing universities like KIU putting up banners stigmatizing queer students, and some students were even outed. It terrified me. I stopped pursuing education in Uganda and started searching for scholarships abroad instead. Unfortunately, with funding cuts during the Trump administration, many of those scholarship opportunities disappeared. It's much harder now. So, I've resorted to self-learning, using online courses and AI tools to keep growing.

When it comes to health, I've developed a deep fear of big hospitals and clinics. I'm paranoid about what could happen if I'm recognized or asked too many questions. Most health facilities require an address and ID, and I'm not comfortable giving mine because it could expose me. So, I buy medicine from small pharmacies over the counter, even though I know it's risky and not sustainable. Many of my friends do the same.

Accessing basic consumables has also become more difficult. Items that should be free condoms, lubricants, and HIV self testing kits are now being sold. And when you ask for lubricants, people immediately question you: **"Why do you need this?"** The assumption is that you must be gay. As a masculine, presenting person, those questions can quickly turn hostile. Even self, testing kits are scarce; people who get them for free often hoard and resell them.

At times, it comes down to choosing between buying food or buying basic health supplies. It's a painful reminder of how deeply the AHA has disrupted not just rights and freedoms, but also the simple ability to live and take care of yourself safely.

## **Q: How has this affected your livelihood?**

As I mentioned earlier, housing and constant relocation have made survival extremely difficult. When it comes to livelihood, I try to be innovative and come up with ways to sustain myself, but it's not easy. I am often underpaid doing the same amount of work as others but earning much less. I mostly take online jobs so I can work remotely, since it's not always safe for me to show up physically unless it's a queer, affirming space. These jobs usually pay very small amounts, tokens or honorariums, which can't sustain a household. The mainstream opportunities that pay better are often unsafe or closed off to people like me.

To maintain some form of safety, I hide my identity from landlords by pretending that I have a husband living abroad. It's exhausting to keep up that lie. Every time I move to a new place, I have to repeat the same story. Eventually, people begin to question: "Why doesn't your husband ever visit?" or "Are you sure you're married?" When suspicions grow, I'm forced to move again.

Moving itself is expensive you have to pay three months' rent in advance, a security deposit, and the cost of shifting. Living as a trans or gender non-conforming person after the AHA has become extremely expensive. The longest I've managed to stay in one house since the law passed is six months and that was only because I spent part of that time traveling for conferences abroad. Usually, after two or three months, I'm on the move again, trying to stay ahead of gossip, suspicion, and potential danger.

This instability affects every part of my life my finances, my focus, and my sense of belonging. It feels like I'm constantly rebuilding from scratch, just to stay alive and safe.

## **Q: How have you managed to overcome these incidences, and what does your support system look like?**

My greatest support system has been my psychiatrist and therapist. They have helped me navigate the anxiety, paranoia, and trauma that come with everything I've experienced. My partner has also been a huge source of strength even though she lives in another country, having someone who understands me deeply makes a big difference.

The movement itself has been part of my support system, although lately it feels heavy for everyone. When I feel insecure or unsafe, I reach out to my best friend, who is queer, or another friend who lives in Kira. Just talking to them helps me breathe again. I've also learned to extend grace to myself to rest, switch off my phone, and log out of social media when things become overwhelming. During the height of the Anti-homosexuality Act, I realized that self-care isn't a luxury; it's survival.

Faith has grounded me too. I'm not as prayerful as I once was, but believing in a higher power gives me a sense of protection and calm when fear takes over. My feminist friends even those who aren't queer have been incredible allies. Some of them, like local leaders or business owners, check in regularly to remind me that I'm not alone.

Over time, I've also learned the power of walking away. If I sense that a space isn't safe or affirming, I leave unapologetically. Protecting my mental health has become more important than staying in rooms that drain me. Saying no and stepping back has become an act of survival.

Allies beyond the queer community have also supported me connecting me to opportunities, providing advice, or simply offering friendship without judgment. My non queer friends who know my full story still love me for who I am, and that kind of acceptance means a lot.

Books have also become part of my healing. I read a lot of fantasy and fiction; they allow me to escape reality for a while and imagine myself as a superhero. Self-help videos sometimes make me laugh because I can't always relate, but reading helps me reset.

I've come to accept that change won't happen overnight. Living under the AHA means constantly adjusting from finding housing to visiting a clinic. Even simple things feel risky. You walk into spaces and feel eyes behind you. The paranoia and anxiety are real, but so is our resilience. Every day is about adapting, surviving, and holding on to hope.

# Reflection

Ruby's testimony exposes how violence, stigma, and state-sanctioned hostility intersect to shape the daily realities of queer and Gender Diverse people with disabilities in Uganda. What stands out is how discrimination is not limited to one sphere, it cuts across every aspect of life: intimate relationships, parenting, housing, healthcare, education, and even within activist spaces. The Anti-homosexuality Act (AHA) did not create these vulnerabilities, but it legitimized and amplified them, turning both law and social prejudice into tools of control against those already living at the margins.

Through Ruby's experience, we witness how exclusion is layered and compounding where queer identity intersects with disability, parenthood, and public visibility as an activist. Each layer multiplies risk and deepens isolation. Structural violence becomes visible in the simplest acts: renting a house, enrolling in school, visiting a clinic. These basic aspects of life become unsafe, unaffordable, or inaccessible. The result is constant movement, self-censorship, and the exhausting survival strategies that chip away at both mental health and human dignity.

Yet Ruby's story is also one of endurance and creativity. Despite systemic hostility, she creates small sanctuaries of care through therapy, trusted friends, faith, literature, and the courage to walk away from unsafe spaces. These acts of self-preservation are not just coping mechanisms; they are forms of resistance and quiet defiance in a world designed to break her spirit.

But Ruby's resilience should not be mistaken for justice. True justice cannot rest on the shoulders of those most marginalized. It demands dismantling the laws and social systems that criminalize identity, and building intentional structures that affirm, protect, and sustain queer and disabled lives. Ruby's voice calls us to reimagine justice as more than survival justice as safety at home, dignity in public, and the freedom to dream of a future without fear.



# Kats

**Can you tell me about an incident either at work, at home, or in any social environment that has affected you because of your identity?**

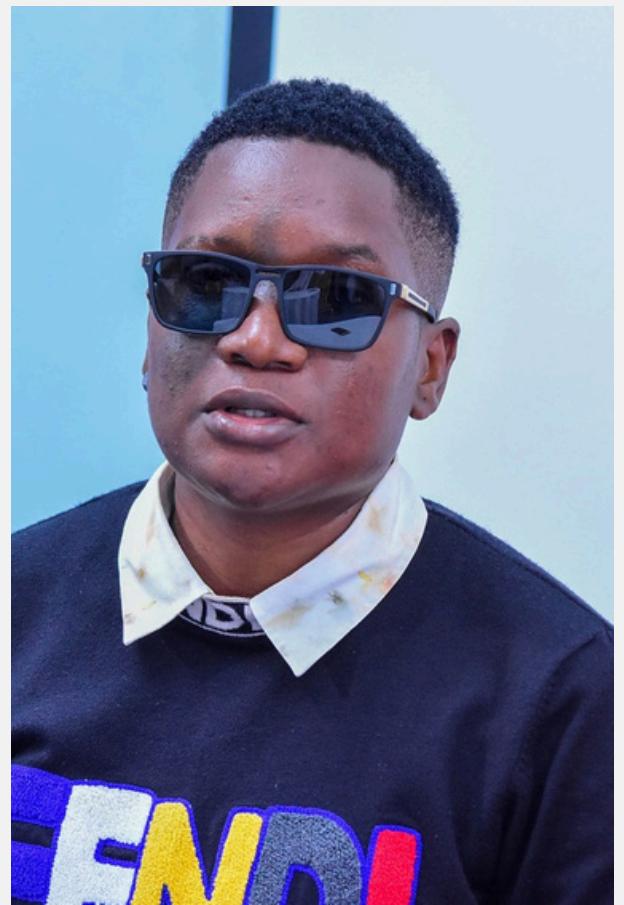
When it comes to incidents, I would say they've become a part of my life because of my gender identity and expression. There are many, but some are impossible to forget. I'll share one of them.

About a year ago, I decided to go back to school because I'm passionate about mechanical engineering. When I first registered, the school accepted me and didn't question my dress code. I live openly as a trans man, and at the beginning, things seemed fine. But after a few weeks, everything changed. I was told, "You need to stop wearing trousers and start putting on skirts."

That was painful and frustrating. As a trans man, being forced to wear something that doesn't align with who I am was deeply traumatic. But I told myself, this is your dream, you love this field. I had to choose between dropping out or conforming for the sake of my studies. So, I compromised. For two years, I carried a skirt in my bag. Every day, before entering the school gate, I would change into it. That became my routine.

One day, in the mechanical workshop, we were fitting parts in an engine. A classmate turned to me and said, "You can't fix that, you're a lady. Women can't do that." His words cut deep. I didn't respond, but I stopped participating in the workshop. I felt so invalidated that I almost failed the practical component of the course. It broke my confidence, but I pushed through and kept going.

Then, around 2022, before the Anti-homosexuality Act was passed, we were dealing with the Kasese bylaw. It had originally been drafted with Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) to promote access to services without discrimination to ensure people like me could seek healthcare and social support safely. But it turned political and was weaponized against us. Instead of protecting us, it became a tool for public hostility. People in the community were outed, attacked, and hunted. I personally experienced three attacks. The first was in the afternoon, around 3 p.m., while heading home. A man suddenly confronted me at a junction, yelling, "We know you!" I thought it was a misunderstanding, but he got aggressive, pulling my shirt, demanding to know why I dress this way and why I date people of the same gender.



He tried to strangle me. Out of panic, I screamed. Luckily, soldiers stationed nearby some of whom were friends came and intervened. That incident shook me to my core. To this day, I never use that route again.

The second attack happened at a supermarket I often visited. A soldier recognized me and shouted, "Aren't you one of those people pushing the Kasese bylaw?" He accused me publicly, pulled out a pistol, and threatened to kill me. People watched in silence. No one defended me. I forced myself to stay calm, finish shopping, and leave but I never returned to that supermarket.

After the Anti-homosexuality Act was passed, things got even worse. Villagers interpreted it as permission to attack us. One night, I went to a bar with a friend. A man approached me and demanded, "Are you a woman or a man?" When I laughed it off, he said he wanted me dead. I tried to ignore him, but he kept provoking me. In fear and frustration, I grabbed a broken glass and told him, "I am a trans person." He mocked me, and it almost turned violent before my friend pulled me away.

Even at work, I wasn't safe. Community members once stormed our office, accusing us of "recording people." They threw stones, broke windows, and demanded to see what we were doing inside. Another time, local officials visited and publicly linked our work to the Anti-homosexuality Act and the Kasese bylaw, using our existence to fuel further hostility.

These experiences have left me constantly alert always watching my surroundings. But they also remind me why visibility and advocacy matter. Every attack has strengthened my resolve to keep pushing for change, even when it feels like survival itself is resistance.

## **How have these incidents affected your day-to-day life?**

These incidents have affected me both negatively and positively. On one hand, they've caused pain, fear, and emotional exhaustion. But on the other hand, they have also made me stronger. I've learned that these experiences have, in some way, become a part of my life, something I must live with and rise above.

They have built my resilience. I no longer expect incidents to stop overnight, but I have chosen not to let them silence me. Instead, they have made me bolder and more determined to continue my work. Each experience has fueled my passion for advocacy and opened opportunities to engage with district, level leaders and community members. Through these interactions, I've been able to shift some perspectives and gain unexpected allies.

I've also learned the power of storytelling. When I share my experiences, people listen. Some even ask how they can support or help create safer spaces for others like me. These moments remind me that even in pain, there is purpose and that my voice can inspire understanding, solidarity, and change.

## **How have these incidents affected your access to social services, health care, and livelihood?**

I continue to experience discrimination, and I've almost come to expect it. Not everyone welcomes me even in places where I should feel safe or supported. I once faced discrimination at a health center from people I interacted with every day. It was painful to realize that even government health facilities, which are supposed to be our partners, can still treat us as outsiders.

There was a time I went for a lab test, and the attendant refused to work on me simply because of who I am. That moment pushed me to take action. I began advocating for resources to establish a clinic of our own a space where people like me could receive care without fear or judgment.

These experiences are not just personal; they also affect the community I serve. Many members of our community cannot afford private healthcare and are constantly turned away or mistreated in public facilities. With few livelihood opportunities available, some are forced into survival strategies like sex work, drug use, or even theft at a young age. Society labels them as criminals, but rarely stops to ask why. The truth is that the same society that rejects and discriminates against them creates the very conditions that make survival so hard.

## **How have you managed to overcome these incidents, and what is your support system?**

My support system is made up of mentors, community members, my partner, and a few supportive colleagues. They constantly remind me not to give up, even when things get tough. Their encouragement helps me stay grounded and focused on why I started this work in the first place.

I also draw strength from a few community allies, local leaders, town clerks, and business owners, who check in on me and offer words of encouragement. Knowing that there are people outside the community who see my humanity and respect my work keeps me going.

There are moments when I feel exhausted and think about giving up or even leaving the country altogether. But then I remind myself: this is who I am, and this is the work I am passionate about. My identity and my purpose are intertwined. So I keep moving forward, fighting not just for myself but for everyone who deserves to live freely and with dignity.

# Reflection

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Kat's story exposes the deep systemic injustices that transgender and Gender Diverse people in Uganda continue to face. From being forced to conform to restrictive dress codes in school, to enduring violent attacks in public, to being denied healthcare ,even in facilities where partnerships once existed ,his experiences reveal how discrimination is reinforced at every level: institutional, communal, and state. These are not isolated events, but part of an entrenched pattern of exclusion and criminalization that robs people of safety, dignity, and opportunity.

Through a justice lens, Kat's story underscores the urgent need for structural transformation. Justice must go beyond mere survival; it must guarantee access to education without coercion, healthcare without prejudice, and employment without "dead names" being used as tools of exclusion. It must ensure that trans people can move freely and exist in public spaces without fear of harassment or violence.

Kat's resilience seen through his continued activism and leadership in establishing a rural transgender, friendly clinic is a powerful act of defiance and hope. Yet, his courage should not be the only shield against systemic harm. True justice requires institutional accountability, state protection, and the full recognition of transgender and Gender Diverse people as equal citizens, deserving of rights, respect, and the freedom to live authentically.





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2025

