



REAL STORIES AND DATA ABOUT ABUSE, VIOLENCE, OR DISCRIMINATION OF TGDS IN UGANDA

Kendrick's Story

Kendrick speaks calmly, but there is heaviness in his voice when he describes his life. As a transgender man living in Uganda, his daily reality is shaped by fear, uncertainty, and constant self-protection. The hostility in the environment has grown even worse with the rise of anti-gender campaigns and laws targeting people whose identities do not conform to traditional norms.

"It is hard to live a normal life when you are seen as a problem just because of who you are," Kendrick says. "I always have to think twice before doing anything even simple things like going out or meeting friends."

His fear is not theoretical; it comes from direct lived experiences. Kendrick has been harassed in his own neighbourhood, called names, threatened, and made to feel unsafe simply for existing. This constant tension has made him withdrawn and cautious.

"Sometimes I just stay inside," he admits. "You never know who might try to hurt you because of how you look." The anti-gender rhetoric amplified by politicians, religious leaders, and the media has fueled more hate. Kendrick notes that messaging around "protecting culture" has normalised violence against transgender and gender diverse persons.

"When leaders say we are dangerous or immoral, it gives society permission to hate us," he explains. "It becomes harder even to walk or travel safely."

Employment is also a major struggle. Though trained as a mechanic, Kendrick has been denied work repeatedly. Interviewers mock him, ask intrusive questions, or simply refuse to consider his skills.

"To survive, I rely on small repair jobs from a friend who understands my situation," he says. "It is not enough, but it is something."

Accessing healthcare is equally difficult. Many health providers lack knowledge, sensitivity, or respect toward transgender persons. Kendrick recalls a painful experience where a nurse openly mocked him after checking his ID. Since then, he avoids health facilities unless absolutely necessary.

"You cannot trust people to care for you when they do not even respect your existence," he says quietly.

The cumulative discrimination has deeply affected his mental health. Kendrick battles anxiety, hypervigilance, and periods of sadness.

"I am always on edge," he confesses. "Even when I am alone, I cannot relax because I am always thinking about what could happen if someone decides to target me."

Still, he remains resilient. Kendrick has a small inner circle of trusted friends who check on one another and share support.

"They are like family," he says. "When things get hard, we talk, we laugh, and remind each other that we are still alive." Sometimes he smokes to calm his nerves. "It is not a solution, but it helps me get through the day."

Despite everything, Kendrick still holds onto hope. When asked what would make life better for transgender persons in Uganda, his response is clear:

"We need safe spaces places where we can speak freely and get support without judgment," he says. "People need to understand that we are human beings. We deserve to live in peace like everyone else."

Givens' Story

Givens is a trans man living with his parents in Uganda. He has known his gender identity for many years, but his current living situation forces him to hide who he is. At home, he cannot openly express himself because of fear of rejection and conflict. He constantly monitors how he dresses, speaks, and behaves around his family a daily emotional containment that keeps him silent.

"At home, I have to keep things to myself. They would not understand," he says.

This creates an internal split between his true self and the restricted version of himself he must perform for safety. Being around trusted friends feels liberating, but returning home means returning to secrecy, suppression, and emotional restraint.

Living as a transgender and gender-diverse person in Uganda is extremely difficult. Outside home, stigma and public hostility make it unsafe to be visible. *"People talk, people watch you. You never know who may turn against you," he explains.* His life is shaped by constant caution.

Interestingly, Givens has not experienced direct physical violence or abuse however, this safety has come at the cost of invisibility. *"I have learned to stay low," he says.* This reveals another form of harm survival through erasure. The passage and enforcement of the Anti-Homosexuality Act has heightened fear. Even though the law directly targets same-sex relationships, it has emboldened harassment against all gender minorities. *"The law made people more aggressive. They now feel empowered to police everything about you," he reflects.* Simple activities like visiting friends or seeking healthcare now require strategic risk assessment.

Givens accessing health care privately has allowed him to avoid harassment common in public facilities. *"Private clinics are safer," he says. "You pay more, but at least you are treated like a human being."*

He has not yet faced major discrimination in employment or education, partly because he has limited exposure due to his hidden daily life.

He draws strength from friendships and community networks. His main sources of support are a few close friends and organizations that advocate for transgender rights. He specifically mentions T-MEN Evolution and the Uganda National Trans Forum (UNTF) as supportive spaces.

"They invite us to meetings, we share experiences, and you learn you are not alone," he says. These spaces have also exposed him to advocacy work and with that, he has gained hope that things can change.

Education is at the top of his priority list for change. *"Education changes everything," Givens says. "If we are given equal access, we can get jobs, be independent, and compete fairly like everyone else."*

He also believes trans men need more targeted support because they are often left out of mainstream LGBTQ+ programming. *"We need our own spaces," he adds.*

As we conclude, Givens expresses one simple desire for the future:

"I just want to be able to live normally. To study, to work, and to be accepted for who I am."

Shamim's Story

Shamim Pretty sits quietly as she begins to speak, her hands folded gently in her lap. As a transgender woman living with HIV in Uganda, surviving everyday life has become increasingly difficult. Simply existing authentically has now become an act of courage.

"Life has become so much harder," she says softly. Over time, the support systems that once protected her community have collapsed. Drop-In Centres, which were once safe havens where she could access services, community, and safety, have closed due to funding cuts and political pressure. These spaces were more than service centres they were lifelines.

Being transgender and unemployed in this environment is extremely difficult. Opportunities disappear the moment

her identity becomes known. The Anti-Homosexuality Act did not only criminalise identities it dismantled her sense of stability, belonging, and purpose. The organisation where she once worked closed when funding froze, leaving her suddenly without work, income or routine.

Some experiences are too painful to describe in full. Shamim shares that she has experienced sexual violence from a group of men who attempted to punish and “correct” her identity through abuse. Although she cannot bring herself to relive the details, the impact remains with her daily. This form of gender-based violence is a tool of fear and control used against transgender women in Uganda.

“I can only find services in communities that already know who I am,” she explains. The general public environment is hostile and unsafe. She now relies heavily on a small network of community-based organisations and queer-led groups such as HRAPF, UNTF, and IBU. *“These organisations see us, they understand us,” she says.*

These community networks provide emotional support, referrals, and protection where formal systems fail. Even though these spaces remain under threat, they are still the anchors in her life.

When asked how she copes, Shamim answers with one word “Friends.” Friendships are her chosen family. They are the people who stand by her when the world refuses to see her humanity.

She also draws comfort from within herself hope that there will be better days to come. *“It’s not being unrealistic,” she says. “It’s choosing to believe that tomorrow can be different.”*

Shamim believes that what transgender people need most at this moment is economic empowerment opportunities to earn income and stand independently without fear. She also believes that transgender people need community spaces to gather, speak, and heal together. *“A space to share so that we do not feel alone.”*

Sheilah Morgana's Story

Sheilah Morgana’s voice carries both exhaustion and determination as she shares her story. As a transgender woman living in Uganda, her journey toward authenticity has been filled with barriers that most people never have to think about barriers written into law, enforced by society, and experienced in daily interactions that slowly erode dignity.

“It has not been an easy path living as a transgender woman, especially in Uganda,” Sheilah reflects. “The laws make it very hard for persons like myself to live with dignity and respect.”

The Anti-Homosexuality Act and the rising anti-gender messaging have intensified the already hostile environment for transgender and gender diverse persons. Discrimination is not always loud or physical sometimes it is subtle, quiet, but just as painful. *“People judge the way I walk and how my body is structured, and they make fun of me for being different,” she explains.*

But for Sheilah, the emotional pain is often the deepest. *“The most abuse I have had to deal with is the emotional abuse where I do not feel seen, I do not feel loved, and I am not appreciated,” she says.* This emotional invisibility reinforces a constant message: that her identity is not legitimate, and that her existence is inconvenient.

This climate of discrimination has shaped her life in very tangible ways. Education — which should be a right and a path to opportunity — was cut short because of the discrimination she faced. *“I failed to get an education because of the discrimination I experienced while in school,” she states.* This is a loss not only for her, but for the society that refused to nurture her potential.

Basic services that every human being should access including healthcare, housing, employment, protection are now risky for transgender persons. Every time Sheilah attempts to access these services, she must first calculate safety. Even law enforcement and police structures, which should protect her, can become spaces of danger, judgement, or humiliation.

In the middle of this daily harm, Sheilah has found small lifelines. *“Friends helped me survive,”* she shares. These friends are more than companions they are chosen family, a critical support network in a world where formal systems have failed her.

Yet she also understands that individual friendships alone are not enough. Systemic change requires collective strength and organised support. When asked what would make the biggest difference, Sheilah is clear and practical: *“Funding for transgender organisations is much needed at such a time,”* she says.

She knows that sustainable resources are needed to build community power, strengthen protection networks, and support collective advocacy that creates lasting change.

Her story makes one thing undeniable: this is not just about identity; it is about humanity. *“Navigating life as a transgender woman is hard because community hates us for living our true and authentic lives,”* she says.

Yet even within this hostility, Sheilah remains thankful for opportunities to be heard. In telling her story, she insists on being seen not as an issue or debate but as a human being who deserves dignity, safety, voice, and full recognition.

Casablanca's Story

Casablanca identifies as a transgender woman and gender non-conforming person. Her journey has been marked by both hope and hardship. *“Living openly as a transgender and gender diverse person in Uganda is not easy,”* she says. She constantly navigates stigma not only because of her gender identity, but also because of her HIV status. Despite these challenges, she remains determined, creative, and resilient. Today, she is a proud small business owner running a decorative business she built from scratch through her own hard work and innovation.

Casablanca recalls painful discrimination from people within her own community who continuously remind her of her HIV status to shame and reduce her dignity. *“People think HIV defines you. They reduce everything about you to that one thing,”* she says. She was among the 42 COSF members who were arrested an experience that left deep fear and trauma. For her, this demonstrated that simply existing as a transgender person in Uganda puts her at constant risk.

She explains that the social and legal environment has become even more hostile since the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act. *“After that law, everything got worse,”* she says. Online violence, hate speech, threats, and targeted attacks have intensified. Digital spaces, which once offered escape and connection, now feel unsafe. Access to essential services has worsened due to donor funding freezes affecting organisations that previously supported her and many others.

Despite this difficult environment, Casablanca relies on a few close friends and some supportive family members who provide emotional strength, protection, and encouragement. *“If I did not have my friends, I would have completely given up,”* she says. She strongly believes that economic justice is one of the most powerful ways to support transgender persons — helping them build livelihoods, earn income, and stand independently beyond stigma, rejection, and vulnerability.

As Uganda moves toward the election period, Casablanca highlights the urgent need for safety planning, relocation support, and community protection. She encourages transgender persons to seek assistance from organisations such as Let's Walk Uganda (LWU), HRAPF, and UKPC — who have been at the forefront of providing support, relocation assistance, legal help, and protection for targeted individuals. *“We need to be safe. We need support to survive the coming period,”* she says.