

Baseline Survey on Intersex Realities in East Africa, 2015-2016 (SIPD)

- specific focus on Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda

The Baseline Survey is a survey which was conducted by the Support Initiative for people with congenital disorders (SIPD) in Uganda (including each 120 participants from the North, Western, Eastern, and Central regions), as well as Kenya and Rwanda (including two intersex people and three partners) to “identify essential indicators to capture in describing the current lives of intersex people and the state of organizing intersex communities in Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda.” The data was collected through personal contact to intersex people, their families, and further stakeholders such as for example medical practitioners, legal experts, counselors, psychologists, religious leaders, local leaders, and educators.

The survey shows that in all three countries an intersex child faces many challenges. Due to superstition it is often believed that intersex children are witches, or victims of witchcraft, their birth is mostly seen as a punishment of the mother who will therefore be frowned upon and in many cases even be excluded from society. To protect themselves from that treatment, many parents kill or abandon their intersex infants shortly after their birth.

Other children are forced to live a secret life; they are often forced to live in a small hut far from their families to not pass on their “curse”.

Many intersex children are also forced to undergo involuntary surgical procedures and mutilation which leads in most cases to long mental and physical scars.

Older intersex people have to face severe discrimination and in many cases physical and sexual harassment in East Africa. Because of a lack of specific facilities for intersex students in combination with discrimination by other students and teachers 90% of the interviewed intersex teenagers were forced to drop out of school and do not get the opportunity to pursue the future of their choice.

All this in addition to the constant question about what their being intersex means in regards to their identity leads to a great amount of intersex people suffering from severe anxiety and/or suicidal thoughts. Another problem is the lack of adequate and affordable health care.

While the children and human rights which Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda are signatory to, and which are included in the constitution of Uganda should theoretically include intersex children and people, they do not specifically do so.

In all three countries it is only possible to register your child as either male or female. If you cannot be categorized as either you are therefore stateless.

The continued work and advocacy of SIPD in Uganda since 2008 has however led to a first basic recognition clause on the right of citizenship of intersex children in 2015. While it is a first step the use of the word “hermaphrodites” instead of “intersex” in said clause remains stigmatizing and dehumanizing.

In 2014 a Kenyan court granted the five-year-old intersex Baby “A” a birth certificate.

The Persons Deprived of Liberty Act 2014 is also the first Kenyan Act that defines who an intersex person is.

In Rwanda at least twelve intersex adults were reported to have fled an LGBT refugee camp, because of discrimination and lack of support. In general intersex is being silenced within wider LGBT organizing in all three countries.

SIPD is the only exclusively intersex organization in Uganda and East Africa. In 2014 they organized the first regional intersex meeting with 20 advocates from East Africa. They have however discovered

that socialization has forced their organizing to operate along gender binaries of male and female body politics and gender identity only.

SIPD suggests that in the future government and non-state institutions work together to support intersex inclusion, to introduce specific laws protecting intersex children and people, to stop harmful unnecessary surgeries, to continuously document sex and gender based violence towards intersex people, and to put a central registry in place.

The survey is planned to be updated every 3 years.

Ferial Mott, Köln