



The Red flags PROJECT

A photo book highlighting the multiple forms of discrimination LBQTI womxn with intersecting identities face in Nigeria.

Doose Didi

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

The Red Flags photo book is a tool for LBQTI womxn, organisations and leaders to understand and address the gaps around Equity, Equality, and Inclusion within the LGBTIQ+ community in Nigeria.

The main aim of this photobook is to highlight the various forms of abuse that LBQTI womxn encounter in Nigeria as sex workers, people with disabilities, and drug users. It focuses on equipping LBQTI organisations and individuals by objectively informing them about the specific issues and needs of LBQTI womxn who fall within these categories, identifying the gaps, and makes recommendations on how to be more inclusive of LBQTI womxn with intersecting identities. This book will help LGBTIQ+ people and LBQTI organisations understand the various intersections that LBQTI womxn occupy and how to successfully develop inclusive programming that acknowledges and, in some circumstances, gives priority to their needs and challenges.

This handbook therefore serves two purposes:

- To provide awareness to LGBTIQ+ community and LBQTI organisations on the intersections and multiple forms of abuse LBQTI womxn face.
- To raise the consciousness of LBQTI organisations/activists and stakeholders to understand intersectional stigmas and the importance of equity in advancing and protecting LBQTI womxn's rights in Nigeria.

I would like to thank everyone who supported me in creating this photobook, including individuals and organizations (WISE, DRAC, INTERSEX NIGERIA, GWHREI, and GWIHR). I acknowledge the assistance of my friends, my partner, and the LBQTI community, who voluntarily took part in the interviews and provided useful information. I would especially like to thank "ISDAO" for supporting the creation of this photobook as part of the "ASANKA" project.

We look forward to increased inclusivity and equitable programming for LBQTI womxn in Nigeria, as well as increased respect within the LGBTIQ+ community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	
Table of contents.....	
Gaps.....	
Within the unseen.....	
Ashty.....	
Max	
Rihanna	
Chisom	
Dejiana	
Linda	
Zainab	
A deeper thinking on equity, inclusion, and intersectionality.....	
Recommendations	

GAPS

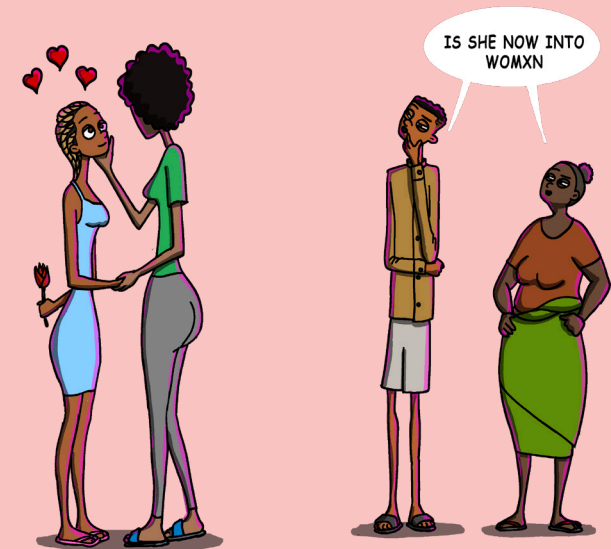
Some of the gaps this photobook seeks to address include the following:

1. Lack of collaborations/partnerships between LBQTI organizations and other organisations working with womxn sex workers, womxn with disabilities and who use drugs
2. Inefficient representation and programming for LBQTI womxn with intersecting identities in Nigeria.
3. Lack of inclusive language in programming and services in terms of narratives and agendas that prioritise the issues and needs of LBQTI womxn with intersecting identities in Nigeria. Engagements should go beyond sexual orientation to ensure the inclusion of diverse identities.
4. Unfriendly attitudes and discrimination within LGBTIQ+ community and the community spaces against LBQTI womxn with intersecting identities.
5. Insufficient understanding of intersectionality in relation to equity components. Lack of equitable access to programmes and services limit social change and leave people behind.
6. Lack of policy guidelines and ethical considerations for LBQTI womxn with intersecting identities in Nigeria.

WITHIN THE UNSEEN

Ashty

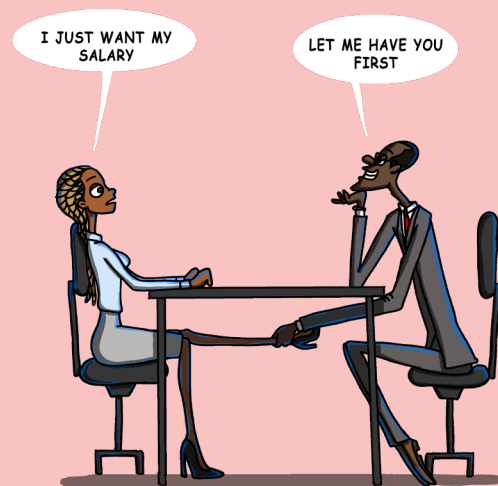
Ashty is a lesbian who is also a sex worker based in Port Harcourt. She has lived in port Harcourt all her life. She perceives most people around her including her family and friends knows she is a lesbian but are unaware of her work as a sex worker. However, other people like neighbours, school mates and colleagues are inquisitive of her sexual orientation, and you know what that means for a lesbian living in Nigeria.



Ashty described her experience at work to be awkward because a few of her colleagues know she is a lesbian and each day she shows for business, they say things like, "You don come today again, wetin you dey find? You talk say na woman you like, abi you no know

wetin you want again?”. Sometimes, they say this jokingly but, most times it gets to me and ends up making me sad for the rest of the day, ruining business for me and sometimes pushing me into depression.

Speaking on violence and harassment as a lesbian and sex worker, Ashty narrated she has been a target of harassment several times in the past five years. She said, I had a group of friends; we were four and we did everything together. We were so close that people thought we were relatives but, the truth is our bond was born from the fact that we were all lesbians. I lost my parents in 2017 and things became difficult for my elder sister and me. I was able to get some jobs but, in most cases, I ended up working without pay and sometimes even getting sexually assaulted.



I like sex work; I enjoy the flexibility it brings and how I do not have to work all day to earn money. I started sex work in 2019 and it really brought a lot of issues between my friends and me. They found it hard to believe a lesbian can be a sex worker, even

going as far as questioning my sexuality as a lesbian, and asking how I could enjoy sex with a man? But one thing about a job is, you do not have to enjoy doing it. The payment I receive is my motivation for doing it. Sadly, not everyone understands this. I was home one day, my phone rang, and I picked up the call. The person spoke with a familiar voice like we have known each other before. He asked what time I will be available to come over to his house because he enjoyed our last time together at the brothel and would want me at his place this time. We both agreed on a time for the next day, I walked into an apartment with three huge men who were paid by my stud girlfriend to rape me with the belief that I would never want to have sex with a man again, not even for money.

As a sex worker I have never been attacked at my workplace before, but I am always scared because people say things, they do not know these days and you don't know the source of their information. I'm constantly worried and scared because I feel that I might get attacked at any time, for either being a lesbian or a sex worker. I am always looking over my shoulder.

I am in a relationship and my work is affecting it. My present girlfriend often gets upset and I understand - being in love with somebody and then letting them have sex with others for money is difficult. I always feel bad when she complains about it, I am the only one providing for us seeing as she doesn't have a job now. I always make it clear whenever I get into a relationship that if you're not comfortable with the kind of job I do then you are free to leave at any point in time. Even though it breaks my heart, my financial security is more important. Sometimes they try to be understanding and stay with me, but it doesn't last long, they eventually get tired and leave. Jealousy is a

natural emotion especially when you are in love.

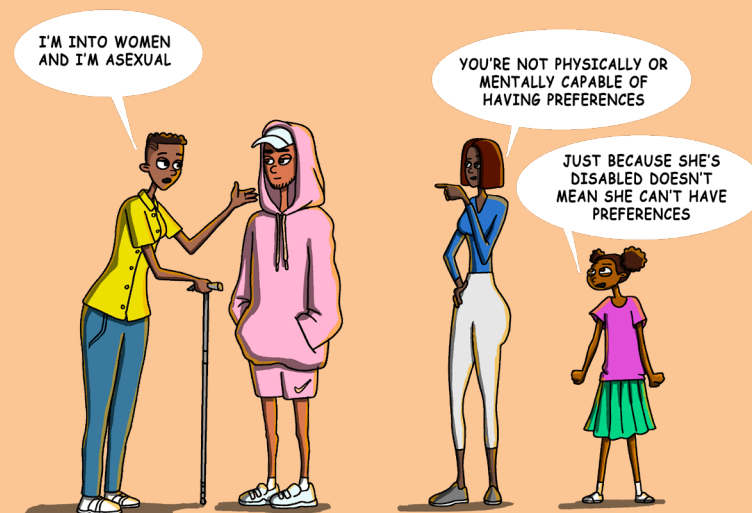


My mental health is unstable, as I always worry that things will go wrong. And because of this, I do almost everything in hiding, especially my work. I hope that one day I will be in a place where I can do whatever I want with my body, and without the fear of being attacked, molested, discriminated against, insulted, or dragged in public. I dream of a safe environment where I don't have to explain myself or my sexuality with the hope of being accepted the way I am. I just want to live like every other person.

Max

Max identifies as an intersex nonbinary asexual lesbian who is autistic and has physical disability. It goes without saying that they sit on a lot of intersections within the LGBTQIA+ community. Their pronouns are they/them.

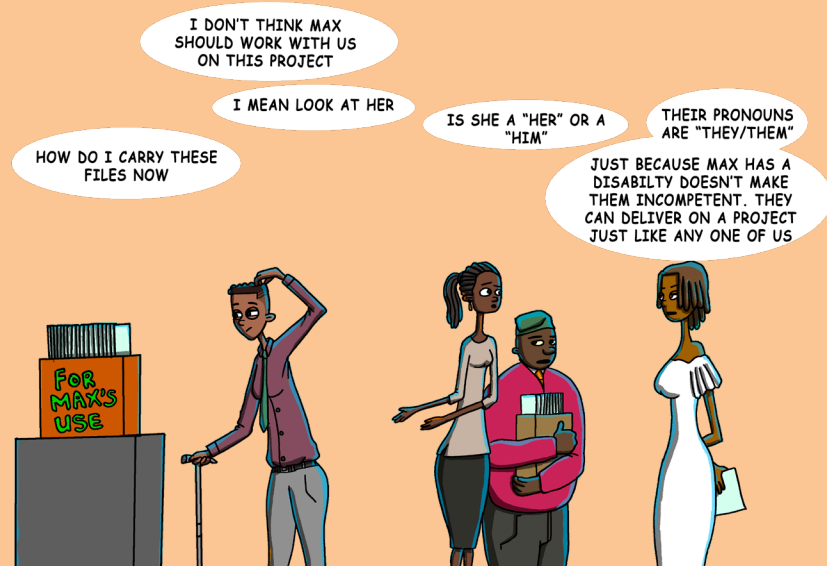
Max narrated how people tend to question their sexual orientation and gender identity a lot due to their disability and sex characteristics. As an autistic person, people often try to invalidate my queerness and gender identity as a nonbinary person. Most people don't believe that I can choose for myself,



given my new divergence and as someone who suffers from multiple comorbidities and physical disability. I'm often asked if my supposed lifestyle is what I really want for myself or, whether it is what I am settling for due to not being able to find the right man to accept me. People with disabilities are not

trusted enough to make decisions concerning their own life, so this doesn't surprise me. Most people think like that, especially therapists, doctors, and religious persons. It feels like everywhere people with disabilities turn to, they are treated like children by everyone and anyone.

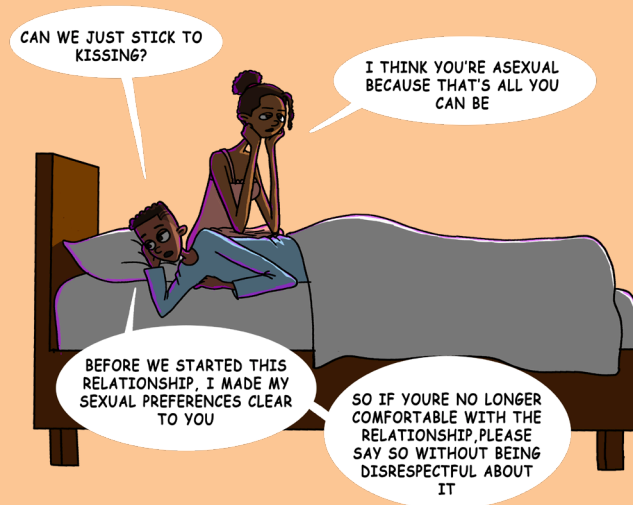
I have experienced multiple forms of discrimination, including physical and sexual harassment a lot of time. There are even statistical reports showing that people with disabilities are the most harassed due to their incapacitation. Random men have directly asked how I will defend myself when sexually harassed. People ask me how I enjoy sex with my disability, even queer people have asked how I enjoy sex with my various illnesses. People have a hard time accepting the fact that people with disabilities can choose whether to be sexual or not.



I have removed myself from spaces, including supposedly safe spaces after multiple harassments - both physically and sexually. People do not regard my bodily autonomy and my humanity as a person, how

much more as a person with a disability. People marvel at my expectations to be treated with respect and quality because people with disabilities should accept whatever life throws at them, including disregard and disrespect from everyone.

As a queer person I have faced multiple bigotry from colleagues and employers due to my gender expression and identity. I have worked in places where disability is seen as a burden to the organisation, accessibility is always zero, comfort is seen as requesting for special treatment and opinions on disability are waved off or completely dismissed.



Keeping and sustaining intimate relationships as an asexual person with physical disability has been tricky because, rather than consider polyamory to make things work, former partners will think that I don't want to put in the work to be sexual with them. Also, it is difficult having a quadruple identity of being a intersex, lesbian, asexual, a non-binary and then wrapping it up with being with a disability. It's a battle of invisibility and constant dismissal. It's

exhausting. I have suffered from multiple police harassments for been perceived as a lesbian or for not smiling. I have been beaten for looking like a boy, I have also been sexually harassed at work and at queer gatherings. Honestly, I just try to move on because people believe I cannot report these harassments to the police seeing as they recognize this same sex marriage prohibition act against LGBTQIA+ people.

Queer persons with disabilities should be given platforms to advocate for themselves. Speaking on behalf of queer people with disabilities is speaking for them or speaking over them. When queer people with disabilities are given the platform, they can capture their needs in a much more explanatory way because they are talking about their lived experiences.

Also, accessibility is a big issue and people do not consider this a lot, including LGBTQIA+ spaces. Occupy physical structures we can access, listen to us when we speak of issues affecting us, and provide sustenance for queer folks with disabilities because they are the least likely to be absorbed into the workforce. Also, creating a means to include us into cooperative health insurance programs is important because a lot of us need health checks that are too expensive for even middle earners. Also, not every person with disability can work and they should not be left without assistance. I am also very particular about programs that provide sustenance, safe housing, and health insurance.

Rihanna

The LGBTQIA+ community in Nigeria is very discriminatory towards trans persons, especially transwomen. I have had very difficult and traumatizing experiences living in Nigeria as a trans woman who uses drug, and it hurts more that these violations towards us are being perpetrated by other queer people.

As a transwoman living in Lagos, Nigeria, it is tough. I constantly get questions thrown at me about my gender identity and expression, my sexual orientation and drug use. Where I live isn't safe, but I can't afford to live somewhere else at the moment. My family has rejected me, friends deserted me, neighbours are weary of me and where I currently work,



my colleagues always make silly comments towards me. Most times, I fear going out because people are always ready to harass or even beat me when I ignore most of their questions or challenge them. It hasn't been an easy journey, I am tired.

I started using drugs when I began transitioning. The abuse, trauma and Challenges were too many for me to bear. So, I resorted to drugs for courage to defend myself, to help me not think about all these my bad experiences. Eventually, I built my confidence by using these drugs. There was a day I arranged a meet up with an old-time friend at a mall. As usual, people at the mall looked at me in a weird manner when I got there. Then I ran into someone I used to know from my family's neighbourhood (we grew together). He recognized me and from where he sat with his friends, shouted, "Wow! So, it is true. This is who you are now!"

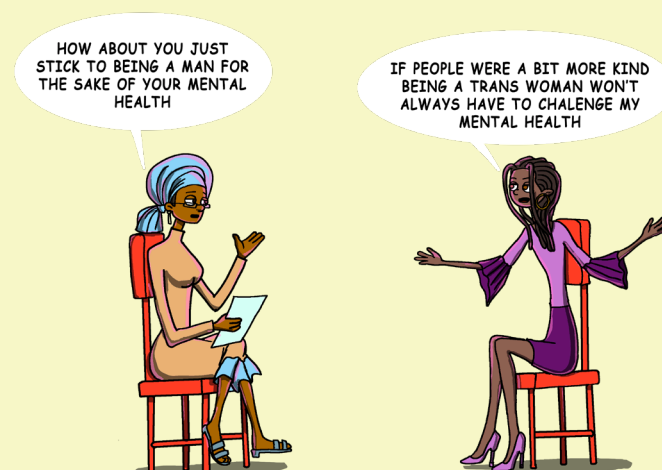
I was so embarrassed and then he went further to tell people around him that I am a boy and I just decided to become a girl. I just walked right out of the mall; I couldn't meet up with who I went there to see because people were beginning to gather around.

This incident haunted me for a month. I couldn't leave my house, nor could I speak to anyone. My mental health was unstable. I usually take drugs or inject before going to public spaces like that but on that day, I didn't, and there were so many people. It was a traumatising experience.

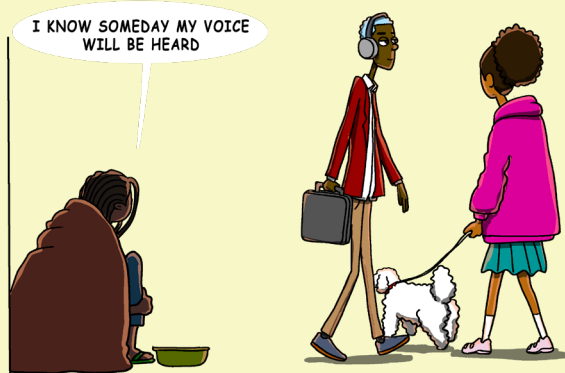
Trans people need a high level of mental support. We constantly experience a lot of stigmatisations from the LGBTQ+ community and within the society. Our transitioning process already takes a toll on us with all the different emotions and mental struggles we go through. Trans people need a good mental health professional that will always be there for us. Most mental health workers are always judgmental towards trans persons and their choices.

I have experienced a lot of issues because of my sexuality as a queer trans woman. I was raped by seven

guys in one night. This experience shattered my mental health. I kept thinking of the health implications, the pain and torture. They all raped me without protection. I was mentally unstable for a year. It was



a crazy experience because it was around that time that my family kicked me out. I lived on the streets of Lagos for three years; from one bus stop to the other, one shop to another and even under the bridge. So, it has not been easy, and it was a very big challenge for me because I had nobody to help me when I was on the streets, not even my family.



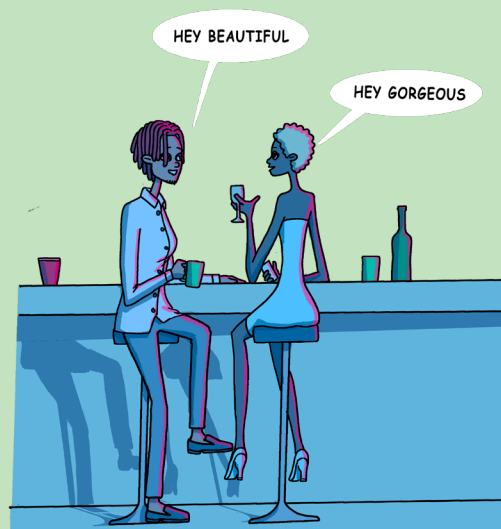
Chisom

Being intersex and living in Nigeria comes with its own stigma and discrimination, and when you add being a lesbian who uses drugs, it makes the discrimination even worse. Firstly, let me talk about my drug use. Being an intersex person is difficult and interesting at the same time. I am always lonely and because of my loneliness, I started using drugs to create fun and happiness for myself. I'm depressed



most of the time. I feel getting someone to love me for who I am is nearly impossible due to my past experiences. It seems everyone is only interested in what my genitals look like. I constantly battle depression but when the drugs come in, I feel alive. It boosts my ego, gives me hope and sometimes I'm even able to walk up to a beautiful woman and strike up a conversation. I have received a lot of rejection from other lesbians. The first time I got rejected made me sad, I felt a lot of pain but now I almost don't feel a

thing and it is because of the drugs I take. Lesbians in Nigeria need to understand that intersex people are as normal as every other person, the discrimination against us isn't fair. The LGBTIQ community should be our safe space, not the other way round. Also, you can refuse a relationship without being rude and discriminatory.



As an intersex person living in Nigeria, I constantly face discriminations from everywhere. People don't understand what being intersex means and judge based on the myths and misconceptions. People have discriminated against me at school, at church and even while doing my business. One of the reasons I stopped going to church is because the ushers often told me that they didn't understand if I were a boy or a girl and demanded that I undress in the toilet for them to confirm before I'd be allowed to dress masculine and attend their church. At school, everyone wanted to see my genitals, including the lecturers. They made fun of me and called me abnormal,

a taboo and a hermaphrodite (this is a derogatory term). I wasn't given hostel accommodation because of this, and my schoolmates discriminated against me. Where I live, people call me names like 'shemale' and point fingers at me saying I am a lesbian and a disgrace to my family. They say ignorant things about me, that because they assume I have breasts then I must be a woman.

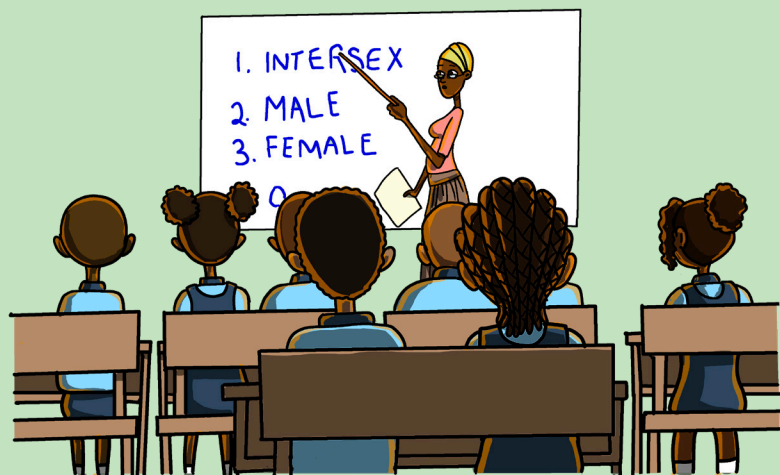
With all these discriminations, most times I don't want to go out and even when I do, I come home regretting and wondering what tomorrow will be like, what I'll have to put up with. Discrimination will make you do things you usually won't do and that is how I started using drugs and a lot of things have change since then.

The good thing is my rights have never been physically violated as an intersex person who loves women. The discrimination is there, from family, peers, intimate relationships, clients, LGBTQA persons and the public generally but I live freely, experiencing no physical violation. I am just being myself and enjoying my life on a low, not trying to bother other people, nor am I putting myself in a situation whereby something might happen, and my rights will be violated.

It will be a great achievement for intersex people if topics around intersex are included in school curriculums. This will help with educating people from a young age about what being intersex is. It will reduce the rejection, the discrimination and harmful surgeries that alter our bodies and the economic challenges we face due to lack of visibility and knowledge.

I have a friend who studied anatomy and knows nothing about intersex. This is not even included in medical schools and that is why some doctors advise parents to kill intersex babies or unnecessary surgeries on intersex children and adults. When people

are aware that gender and sex characteristics are



diverse, the mental health challenges and discrimination we face will be highly reduced. God created female, male, intersex, and others that we are yet to know about, and we want to live without fear and shame. We want to be recognized as equal members of society.

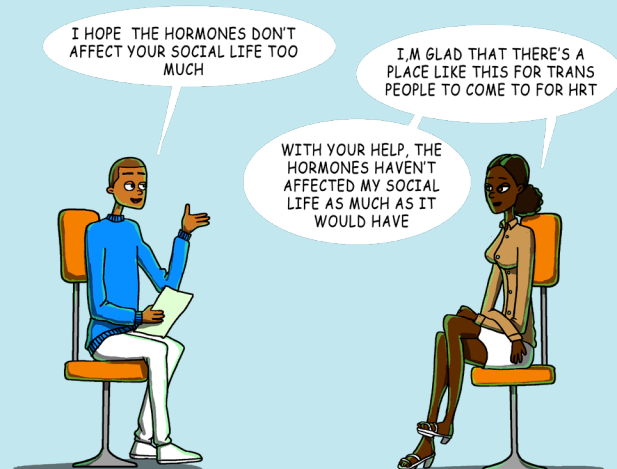
Dejiana

As a trans female sex worker I experience a lot of challenges including stigma and discrimination every day. As I speak, I am undergoing a two-week mental health therapy session. I face discrimination as a trans woman, as a sex worker and as a queer person.



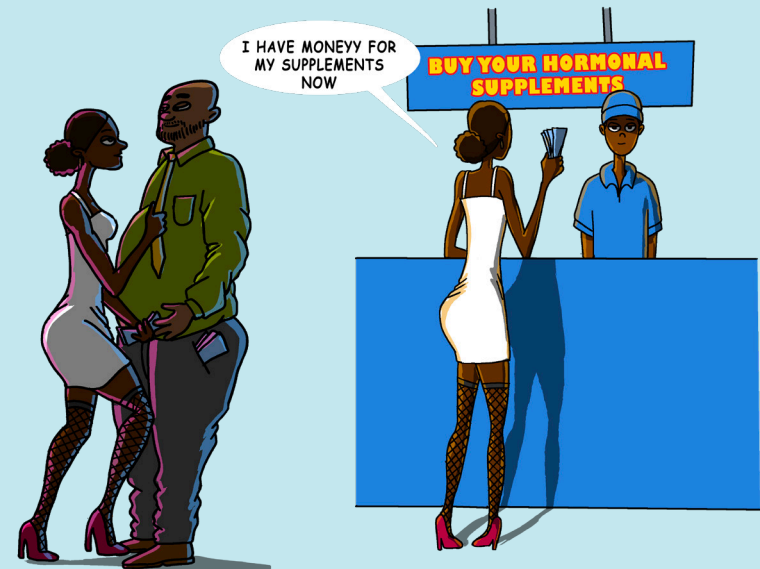
I went to a supermarket to get some personal things, after picking everything I wanted, I proceeded to the counter to pay. The sales lady gave me an irritated look asking, "Are you a man or a woman?" I asked why? The customer behind me in the queue responded, "Yes, I want to know too because we don't really understand if you are male or female, we are confused." I told them that I am a woman, and I could hear their comments after I walked out. "This one na gay, I just pity him life." I didn't respond. These are the kinds of challenges I face every day, in health facilities, workspaces and within the LGBTIQ community. Trans sex workers are most marginalized.

My job as a sex worker is very risky especially as a trans woman as I have experienced targeted harassment multiple times. One day I was in a cab going to meet a client, we got to a police checkpoint and one of the police officers stopped our vehicle and asked only me to step down, I did as instructed and then they asked me to strip, stating that they needed to confirm if I am female because I don't look it. I was paraded naked because I affirmed that I am a trans woman. I explained to the policemen that I am a trans woman and haven't done anything wrong but that was futile as they proceeded to call me gay as well as many derogatory names. That encounter remains one of the most traumatic experiences in my life.



Mentally, trans people's needs are not met. We need to have access to hormone replacement therapy (HRT) without stigma and discrimination. We deserve to have access to psychologists who will be empa-

thetic towards our mental health needs. Intimate relationships as trans sex workers are difficult as well, had so many experiences that made me suicidal. The abuse and torture from people who claim to love you because you are vulnerable as trans, and a sex worker is unbearable. Sex work for me is a means to an end just like every other job. I need to provide for myself financially as I have hormonal supplements



to take, and I need to be able to afford them. Some NGOs provide these hormonal supplements but, even that has become an unfair process riddled with sentiments and favouritism.

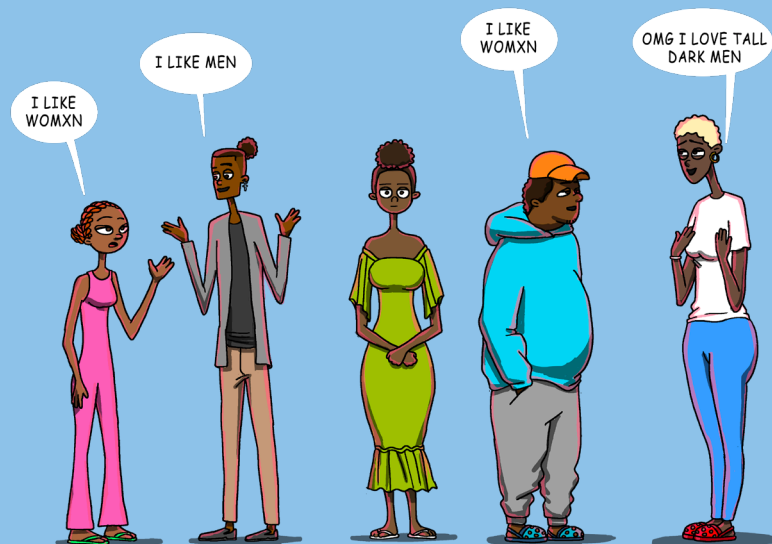
Linda



As a deaf, queer woman, it is not easy. I live in a silent world where it is difficult to communicate and relate with other people and due to this, I face a lot of discrimination and stigmatization. People often assume I don't have the ability to choose or make certain decisions for myself. I was forced into early marriage with a man because of this flawed belief. I have always felt ashamed of myself because of my hearing disability, and I have experienced a lot of difficulties and challenges in life as a lesbian woman.

This is the first time ever that I have been provided with a platform to talk about my sexuality and I feel very happy about it. Most of the time, a lot of people don't interact with me because I am deaf. I understand how difficult it is to communicate with me without understanding sign language, so I don't blame them, I only feel sad. Being a deaf lesbian has made me live a very quiet life, I always imagine the

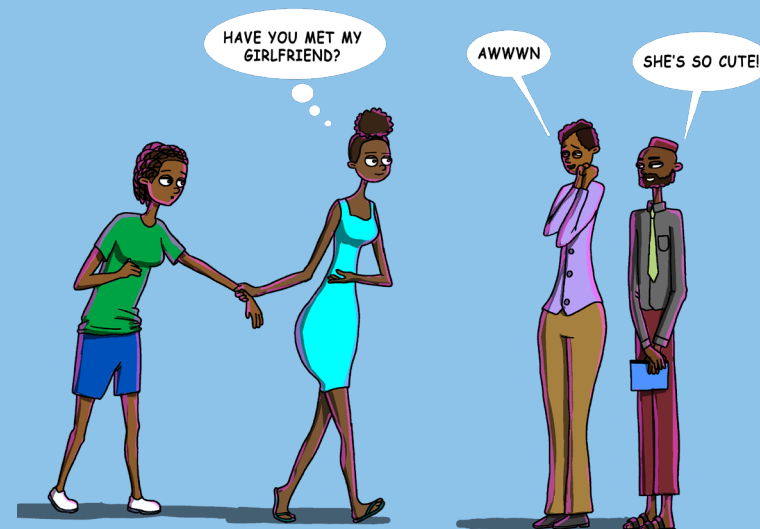
amount of hate I will get if a lot of people know I like womxn and not men. I have read a lot of stories online about how lesbians are treated around the world and here in Nigeria, the arrests, beatings and rape. I don't want to experience all that. Only a few people know that I like womxn and I intend to stay that way until I find a very safe space to be myself and find people who will make me feel at home and



safe.

I remember the first time I tried to tell my friend back then in deaf school about my feelings for womxn; she was someone I was very close to. She told me God was already punishing us with deafness and I shouldn't attract another curse to myself or her. Shortly after that conversation, she stopped being friends with me. Someone has also told me that I am not being a good mother and example to my children because I am a lesbian woman who was married to a man. They don't know that connecting with my original self is the happiest I have ever been in my life. People tend to judge others without basic reasons.

I have always been taken advantage of as deaf woman, everyone pities you and makes decisions for you without even asking if that is what you want. The deaf people organisation supporting me and my girlfriend, as well as some other deaf people, is the only



organisation that has listened to our needs without judgements and empowered us with skills.

There are a lot of things I don't know as a lesbian. I want to belong to a lesbian community, I want to learn from others, participate in Pride and all those other things that the lesbian community here in Nigeria do. There are other deaf people who are gay too but remain in hiding because they don't know who to turn to for help. We want to be able to participate in things just like other people without discrimination and stigmatization.

Zainab

My name is Zainab, and I am a bisexual woman who uses drugs and sometimes I do sex work when I am financially incapable of purchasing my drugs; I know you just raised your eyebrows, a lot of people do that when we have conversations on this topic.

Being a drug user, a bisexual and a sex worker is not a big deal within the drug user's community, it is considered as people's way of live. We exchange sex for drugs, money, or other valuable things. The discrimination and stigmatization come from the society and within the LGBTIQ community. They



see us as people that are abnormal and sinful. The lesbian community does not really mind the drug use but are judgemental towards bisexuals as they don't consider us as queer people. In my case, I receive a lot of questions like, "How can you like girls and boys

at the same time?" My response usually is, "I like what I like." It is really challenging and difficult. They assume my sexual orientation is as a result of the drug



use, but it is not so, I am aware of my attractions, and I can be attracted to a man, woman, intersex or others genuinely.

My rights have been violated a couple of times by family members. I remember when my mum and siblings said they didn't want to see some of my friends, that they were a bad influence on me. I was taken to a prophet for prayers and cleansing. They locked me up for seven days without food - just water and prayers. This was a traumatising experience for me. I left home after this experience even though I didn't know where to go.

I started using drugs at the age of 18. I had a boyfriend back then in secondary school, when we graduated, we started doing drugs and before I knew what was happening, I was deep into it. We later went our separate ways, but I could not do without taking drugs again. The level of my drug intake has

affected my relationships a couple of times. I love intimacy and when I love someone, I am with you alone. Therefore, I dislike the misconceptions about bisexuals not being able to commit to one person in a



relationship. This is not true. We only can love different genders at different times.

Young girls and women who use drugs in the LGBTIQ community can be empowered through income generating activity when given the opportunity. I believe some of us are ready to learn anything that will make us independent. At least if one learns how to make money, I believe it will really save a lot of us. As a bisexual woman who uses drugs and a sex worker, we require psycho-social support. If we have a system that is supporting us mentally, we will stay clean. Most times we fall into depression due to the discrimination and stigma we constantly face. We need professional therapists to always keep our actions and thirst for drugs in check by encouraging and counselling us.

A DEEPER THINKING ON EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND INTERSECTIONAL- ITY.



Equality is giving everyone the same pair of shoes.



Diversity is everyone getting a different type of shoe.



Equity is giving everyone a pair of shoes that fit.



Inclusion is asking everyone the type of shoe they want, their size, and letting them wear it without

fear of judgement and discrimination.



Acceptance is understanding we all wear different kind and sizes of shoes



Intersectionality requires that we give up simplifying assumptions and embrace more complexity while in the same vein paying close attention to issues of diversity. Our sexual orientation isn't all that there is to us, we have other identities that consist of our whole being and there should be a focus on these points of intersections and identities. We all deserve to have our voices heard; our faces and experiences reflected in each discourse; and our unique needs addressed through relevant programs, policies, and services. However, when we fail to incorporate intersectionality into our programs and services for the LBQTI community, we leave parts of our community behind.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. LBGTIQ+ organisations/activists should engage and recognize the voices of LBQTI womxn on their most affected and specific issues through meaningful community engagements.
2. LBQTI organisations/activists should design and implement programs and services with an inclusive language that prioritises and focuses on specific identities within the LBQTI community to create real, lasting, and equitable change to ensure leaving no one behind.
3. LBQTI organisations/activists should collaborate and partner with organisations working with sex workers, disability, and F-PWUD organizations to encourage cross-issue collaborations, innovative solutions, and transformative change. Partnerships would create opportunities for LBQTI womxn, who would rather identify with other organisations due to existing discriminatory laws, to access LBQTI specific information and services.
4. Within the broader LBGTIQ+ community and spaces, we should increase understanding as well as develop and enforce policies that recognise, respect, and protect LBQTI womxn with intersecting identities for social inclusion.
5. Strengthen the capacity of programmers, service providers LBQTI organisations/activists on intersectionality in relation to equity components.
6. Ensure the recommendation, review, and development of LBQTI organisational policy guidelines and ethical considerations that promote access to information and services for LBQTI womxn with intersecting identities in Nigeria.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Doose Didi is a Nigerian LGBTIQ+ activist who focuses her activism on LBQ womxn in her country. She is a LBQ consultant, a psychotherapist, and a nail technician. She produced a video documentary in 2021 called "Without Borders", which highlighted the inclusion of northern LBQ womxn in Nigerian national LBQ programs. Her work in various fields broadly addresses narratives of LBQ+ womxn experiences in Nigeria.

Her second project is a photobook titled "The Red Flags", which depicts the numerous prejudices against LBQTI womxn with overlapping identities. She is enrolled at the Institute of Counselling Nigeria where she will become a licensed sexual minority counsellor in December 2022.

Doose likes to dance, travel, and play scrabble. When she is not working professionally, you can find her hanging out with her queer friends and making the most of life.

ABOUT THE BOOK

"The Red Flags" is a collection of stories from LBQTI womxn from different social context in Nigeria with intersecting identities, it reveals the multiple forms of abuse, stigma, and discrimination they face, also highlighting the importance of employing equity, inclusion, and intersectionality while programming for these groups.