

ASILI-NEWS



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

YOUTH CARAVAN TO END FGM



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The commencement of the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation on the 6th of February 2020 led to the formation of a Youth Caravan that would traverse 4 counties, in 7 days, to put an end to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)



After weeks of planning the D-day, 3rd of February 2020, was finally here. Filled with anticipation and excitement, Youth representatives from the 22 hotspot counties with high prevalence to Female Genital Mutilation, brought together by the UNFPA Youth Advisory Panel and the Youth Anti-FGM Network,

trickled into the Anti-FGM Board offices to kick off the 2020 Youth end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

The Youth end FGM Caravan campaign was a six day mission set to traverse 4 counties namely, Samburu, Isiolo, Meru and Embu in a bid to involve the youth in accelerating the vision of H.E Uhuru Kenyatta to end Female Genital Mutilation by 2022. In line with the 2020 theme for the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, 'Unleashing Youth Power': One decade of Accelerating Actions for Zero Female Genital Mutilation by 2030. The Government of Kenya supported by UNFPA took key interest in the execution of this

“FGM is a retrogressive practice whose continued existence in our country in actual fact assaults our individual and our national consciousness.”

~H.E Uhuru Kenyatta~

Caravan to ensure the voices of the Youth in the campaign to end Female Genital Mutilation was heard loud and clear throughout the country.



Dr. Ademola with representatives of the Youth Caravan before they set off.



CEO of the Anti FGM board Bernadette Loloju and UNFPA FGM Coordinator Caroline Chebet pose for a photo with Members of the youth caravan at the Flag off ceremony

Bernadette Loloju who challenged the youth to be the change the nation was looking for in the fight to end Female Genital Mutilation.

“The National Policy on the Eradication of Female Genital Mutilation, will accelerate my effort to Champion and end this harmful practice by 2022.”

~H.E Margaret Kenyatta~

“People always tell us that the future belongs to the young people, but today I differ, the present belongs to the youth!” Remarked UNFPA Representative, Dr. Olajide Ademola. A word of prayer commenced after for journey mercies and finally, it was time for the rubber to hit the road as we set forth for the 6-hour journey to Samburu County to begin the campaign to end FGM in Kenya.

Excitement filled the air, on the sunny Monday morning, as formalities were underway to set off the youth with a clear mission to end Female Genital Mutilation. Present at the flag off ceremony were representatives from UNFPA, State department of Youth and the Anti-FGM board who gathered to impart wisdom on the youth as they set out on their mission to make a clear and firm declaration on ending Female Genital Mutilation.

The flag off ceremony commenced at exactly 9:00 am with opening remarks from the CEO of the Anti-FGM Board,



Arrival of the caravans in Samburu county

Samburu County

We safely arrived in Samburu county 7 hours later, where we pitched camp ready for the days brief on how the proceedings for the 4th of February would be carried out. Samuel Adismo, a Youth representatives from Samburu county and an activist with the Pastrolist Child Foundation & our county host, gave the youth a detailed programme and highlights of their work on the ground inclusive of the challenges faced by Samburu county and how they have managed to overcome. Though much has been done in the area to stop FGM much work was still underway to ensure the directive given by H.E Uhuru Kenyatta would come to pass, by 2022.

Samburu county would set the tone for the Youth Caravan, being the first county the caravan visited, it was clear that they were ready to leave their mark.



Members of the youth caravan with samburu morans in Samburu county during the 7 day youth caravan

The sensitization in Samburu would involve 50 morans, who as per the community structure were boys who had just undergone circumcision a right of passage that allowed them to be considered men thus paving way for the next step in their lives which was marriage. Educating the morans would be a key

avenue to ensure that as they pick their future wives basic cultural norms i.e A girl is not a woman until she undergoes FGM, would stop with them.

The sensitization programme began at 10:00 am at the County Inn hotel, where engagement between the youth, activists and morans quickly took shape with uncomfortable discussion about the female genitalia, led by Samburu Anti-FGM champion, Elizabeth Lelemoyog. On the day, Elizabeth who is keen on having her community free from FGM, carried with her a model that exposed the dangers and effects of FGM to women and girls, drilling through why the practice of FGM must come to an end within the community.



Elizabeth Lelemoyog displays a model to describe the effects of FGM to women and girls

“People always tell us that the future belongs to the young people but I say the present belongs to you. As the highest demographic we rely on you to put an end to FGM by 2022”

~ Dr. Ademola Olajide ~

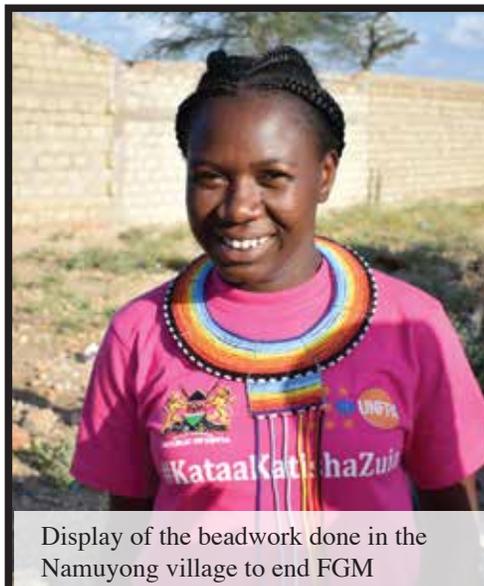
The message was loud and clear as was seen clearly printed through the morans faces, through out the discussions with Elizabeth, as she firmly demonstrated to them the challenges undergone especially while giving birth and how fistula, a hole between the birth canal and bladder/rectum, comes about after undergoing FGM. The sensitization programme was then followed through by engagement amongst the youth to get a better understanding as to why the practice of FGM is carried out among the Samburu and how best to put an end to it in a bid to accelerate the promises of the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 to ensure zero harmful practices such as FGM against women and girls before a short break for lunch.

After a fruitful morning discussion with the morans. We were ushered into the Namuyong village by the morans where the women and girls broke out in song and dance excited to receive the champions of change.



Song and dance at the grassroots level with the community ladies

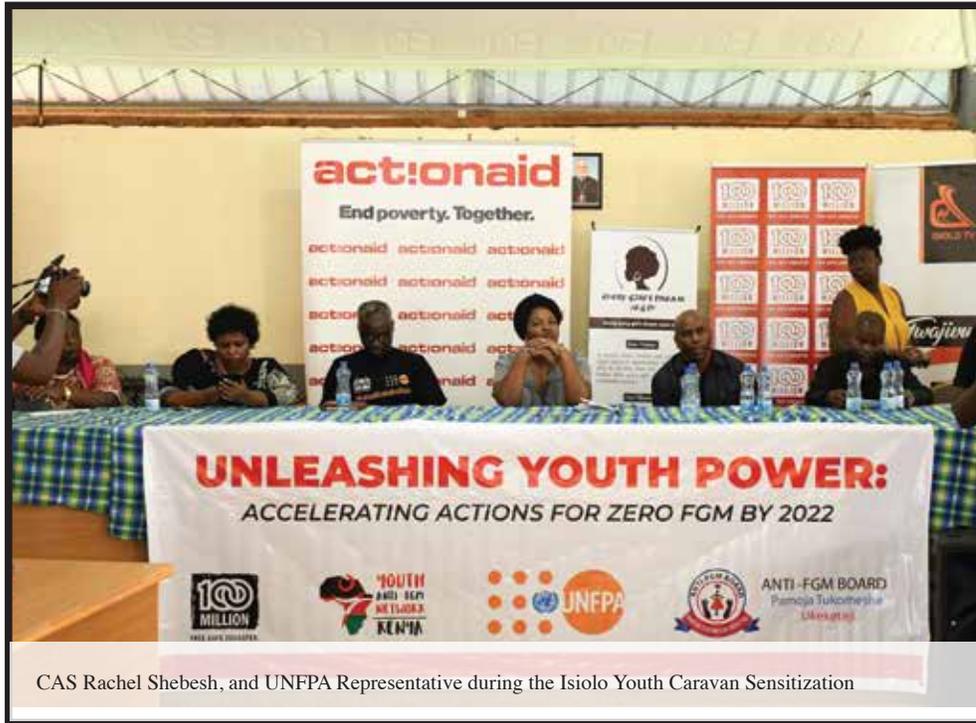
One of the key factors prohibiting the end of FGM in communities such as the Samburu is lack of a stable income, as cutters heavily rely on FGM to make ends meet. In Namuyong village the narrative is different as the women and girls who are pioneers of change, have sought out alternative sources of income through beadwork where they produce necklaces, bracelets and rings just to name a few to ensure their families are fed and the practice of FGM comes to an end among the Samburu.



Display of the beadwork done in the Namuyong village to end FGM

The rest of the day in Samburu county was spent in the heart of the village

where we got a better understanding of the challenges faced by women in the area and how they, as champions of change, have resorted to ensure their daughters stay in school and don't undergo the cut. As dusk settled we left the Namuyong village, headed to Isiolo county, an hours drive, where the County was preparing to mark the International day for Zero tolerance to FGM on the 6th of February.



CAS Rachel Shebesh, and UNFPA Representative during the Isiolo Youth Caravan Sensitization

Isiolo County

Isiolo County would be home for the next two days for the Youth Caravan with exciting sensitization and engagement activities for the youth in the area set to take place throughout our stay. A debrief of the day was carried out by Godano Yusuf, a part of the UNFPA Youth Advisory Panel and our host in Isiolo, where she highlighted the plie of FGM in Isiolo county and the strides taken to ensure the harmful practice is brought to an end by 2022. Though progress over the years has been achieved through the support of UNFPA and the Anti-FGM board, a lot still stands unturned in the communities as it is among the counties in kenya with the highest prevalence of FGM.

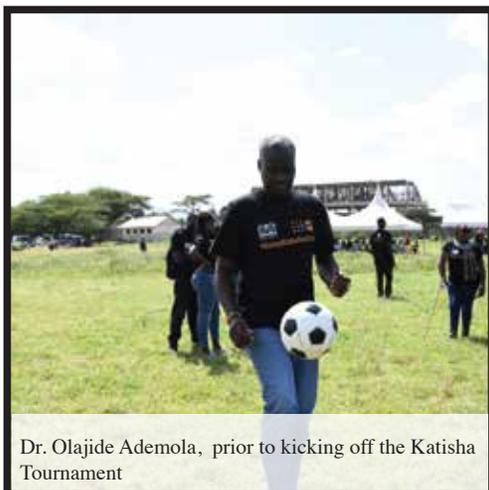
The sensitization among the youth took place at the Catholic Pastoral Grounds where, youth from all over Isiolo county joined to stand up and speak out against FGM in the country, The event was graced by Hon. Rachel Shebesh Chief Administrative Secretary for Ministry of Public, Service & Gender, Dr. Olajide Ademola UNFPA Representative and representatives from the Anti-FGM board, who have given immense support to the Youth Caravan. The youth sensitization event programme kicked off with the youth showcasing local talent through song, dance and spoken word aimed at putting an end to FGM.

As soon as the dust settled it was time for serious business with key speakers taking the floor to impart knowledge and applaud the youth for the efforts taken to let their voices be heard in the fight against FGM in Kenya. “The law is clear on Female Genital Mutilation,” echoed Hon Rachel Shebesh. “that anyone found practicing the act faces a jail term of not less than 5 years and we, as the Ministry of Public, Service & Gender are more than ready to support the youth voices as we seek to achieve the presidential commitment to end FGM by 2022.” Words of wisdom imparted by CAS Hon. Rachel Shebesh to the youth served as guiding principles and encouragement to face the task ahead as she closed her remarks by handing copies of the FGM policy to Catherine Motian, Youth End FGM Network chairperson. This document would serve as the binding document for the preliminary discussion among the youth. The preceding session was an engagement amongst the Youth where each gave their views on FGM and solutions on how best to support the

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~ Hon. Rachel Shebesh ~

efforts already in place to put an end to FGM in not only Isiolo but all 22 counties with a high prevalence to FGM.

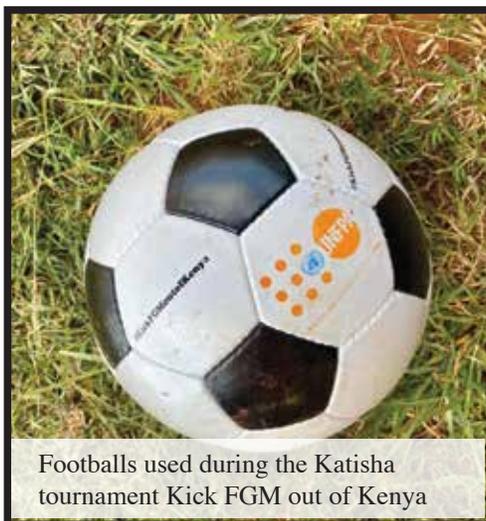


Dr. Olajide Ademola, prior to kicking off the Katisha Tournament



Kelly Wanja a part of the Youth Caravan giving remarks

The afternoon session of the sensitization is what we had all been waiting for as the theme Kick FGM out of Kenya by 2022 was the highlight of the Caravan, where youth engagement through sports, would be used to not only to bring youth together for a common purpose but to accelerate the end of FGM in Kenya. A total of 4 teams, 2 female teams and 2 mens teams, would play against each other for bragging rights and to kick ensure the message is clear that they would take a stand against FGM.



Footballs used during the Katisha tournament Kick FGM out of Kenya

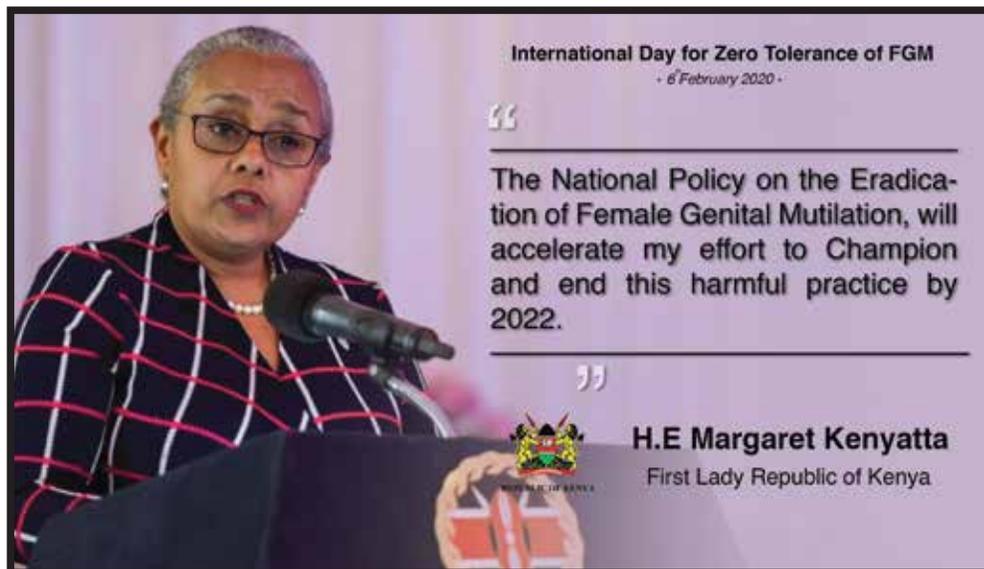
All roads led to Isiolo boys Secondary School, where the football tournament dubbed , ‘Katisha’ Tournaments were flagged off by UNFPA Representative Dr. Olajide Ademola. Though one team would emerge victorious through-out the games it was clear that the cause that brought them together was clear with branded kits handed to each time inclusive of a ball and participation trophy to ensure we leave a mark everywhere we go.

International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM



Thursday the 6th of February 2020 was the much awaited day as we marked the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM around the globe under the theme: ‘Unleashing Youth Power’: One decade of Accelerating Actions for Zero Female Genital Mutilation by 2030. Kenya led by the Ministry of Public Service & Gender, UNFPA, UNICEF, Anti-FGM board and the Isiolo community marked the day at the Isiolo Police Grounds, where song and dance elated through-out the event.

Residence from the neighboring counties such as Meru county Samburu county and Marsabit county came through in large numbers to showcase their solidarity and unity in the support of the Presidents directive to end FGM by 2022. Performances in the form of short skits, songs, spoken word and poems rang through the air all morning to not only entertain the audience but to educate them on the harmful practice that is Female Genital Mutilation.





Celebrations underway with the womand and Youth groups as the country marked the International Day for Zero Tolerance to FGM

Though significant progress has been made not only in Kenya but throughout the globe, today FGM is still rampant in communities prompting immediate action against the vice.

The Youth Caravan made a bold and clear statement to the Government and involved parties as they were given an opportunity to give their communique explaining how best they would like to

be included to put an end to FGM in Kenya. An overview of the youth concerns included, inclusion in the Anti-FGM Board, Support and facilitation by donors to empower the youth to put an end to FGM and support from UNFPA to build capacity of the youth at both professional level and at the grass-roots to enable them end FGM.

“Today’s young people play a critical role in ending the practice of FGM. Unleashing the power of youth means investing in youth-led movements to champion gender equality, an end to violence against women and girls and the elimination of harmful practices,” Chief Administrative Secretary, Ministry of Public Service and Gender Rachael Shebesh stated, as she reaffirmed the Youth that the Government of Kenya is fully behind them to give the necessary support and resourced needed to put an end to FGM in Kenya

“Without partnerships like that of UNFPA, we would not be able to sit here and say that we are steps closer in achieving an END to FGM by 2022”

~ Hon. Rachel Shebesh ~



CAS Hon Rachel Shebesh and UNFPA Representative Dr. Olajide Demola, dafter distribution of dignity kits to the youth in Isiolo

Meru County

Early Friday morning the Youth Caravan were taken through the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) course by UNFPA Representatives before setting off for Meru County a 2 hour drive from Isiolo, where Catherine Kathure, the Youth Representative from Meru county and an Anti-FGM champion in the region, had assembled youth for the days sensitization at Maua football grounds.

After a quick brief on FGM in the region and the agenda for the day from the Youth, everyone broke into small groups to further discuss how best to tackle the prevalence of FGM in Maua. Through the clusters, the youth got a better understanding of the dangers of FGM to women and girls. Immediately after the group discussions the 'Katisha' Tournament seemed to be the highlight of the day as streams of supporters trickled into the stadium to watch the two top teams go head to head, in what we later found out to be the Maua Derby.



Youth in small discussions as they find ways to end FGM in Meru County

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~ Hon. Rachel Shebesh ~

The message in Maua was loud and clear as scores of fans cheered on for the football team with the Youth Caravan hashtag “Kataa Katisha Zuia”, used as a rally call for the Youth to mobilize and ensure their voices are heard in the fight against FGM. As dusk settled in, the Youth Caravan was on the road once again with end in sight as we headed to Meru town where we would reside for the night in preparation to finish strong in Embu County which would serve as the last stop before returning to Nairobi.



Youth celebrate after winning the Katisha Tournament in Meru County

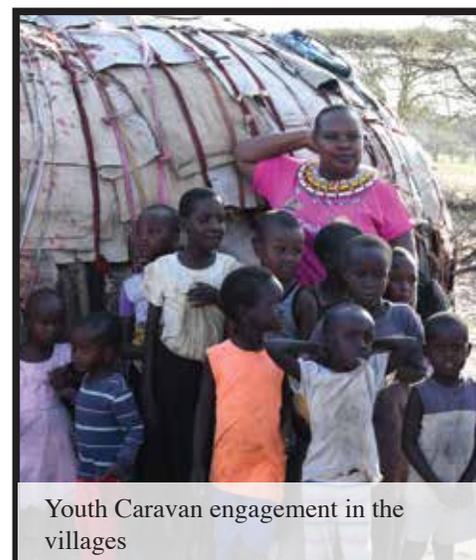


Youth engage in a game of football at the Katisha Tournament held throughout the Caravan

Embu County

Makima village, in Embu county would be the last stop for the Youth Caravan where the days events kicked off at exactly 10:00 am. Song and dance elated throughout the village as clear excitement was in the air for the long awaited youth caravan. The youth who showed up in numbers were quick to get into their respective groups for the sensitization to begin where they would learn a lot more about FGM and how to ensure the harmful practice ends with their generation.

Through the small clusters the youth were able to discuss various challenges they have undergone in their fight against FGM in the region and how they have been able to overcome these challenges on the ground. In turn the officials from the youth caravan educated and empowered the youth.



Youth Caravan engagement in the villages



Youth Caravan engages with their youth counterparts in Meru county for a quick warm up before the sensitization began.

At 2:00pm all four teams were heavily kitted ready to go head to head for the 'Katisha' trophy that seemed quite popular through out the counties. Shortly after distribution of the playing kits the whistle sounded to kick off the games. It was a much anticipated game no doubt with both male and female teams going into extra time and finally penalties to decide who would lift the trophy. As the final whistle blew signaling the end of the games, it was bitter sweet moment as we knew the 7 day journey that led us through 4 counties had come to an end.



Youth celebrate engage with the women champions in Namuyong village in Samburu County.

Just as the International theme for Zero Day of Tolerance to FGM for 2020 dictates, Unleashing Youth Power: One decade of Accelerating Actions for Zero Female Genital Mutilation by 2030, The Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Public Service and Gender in partnership with UNFPA and the Anti-FGM board are spear heading the engagement of the youth to unleash their full potential and accelerate the end of FGM by 2022 in Kenya.

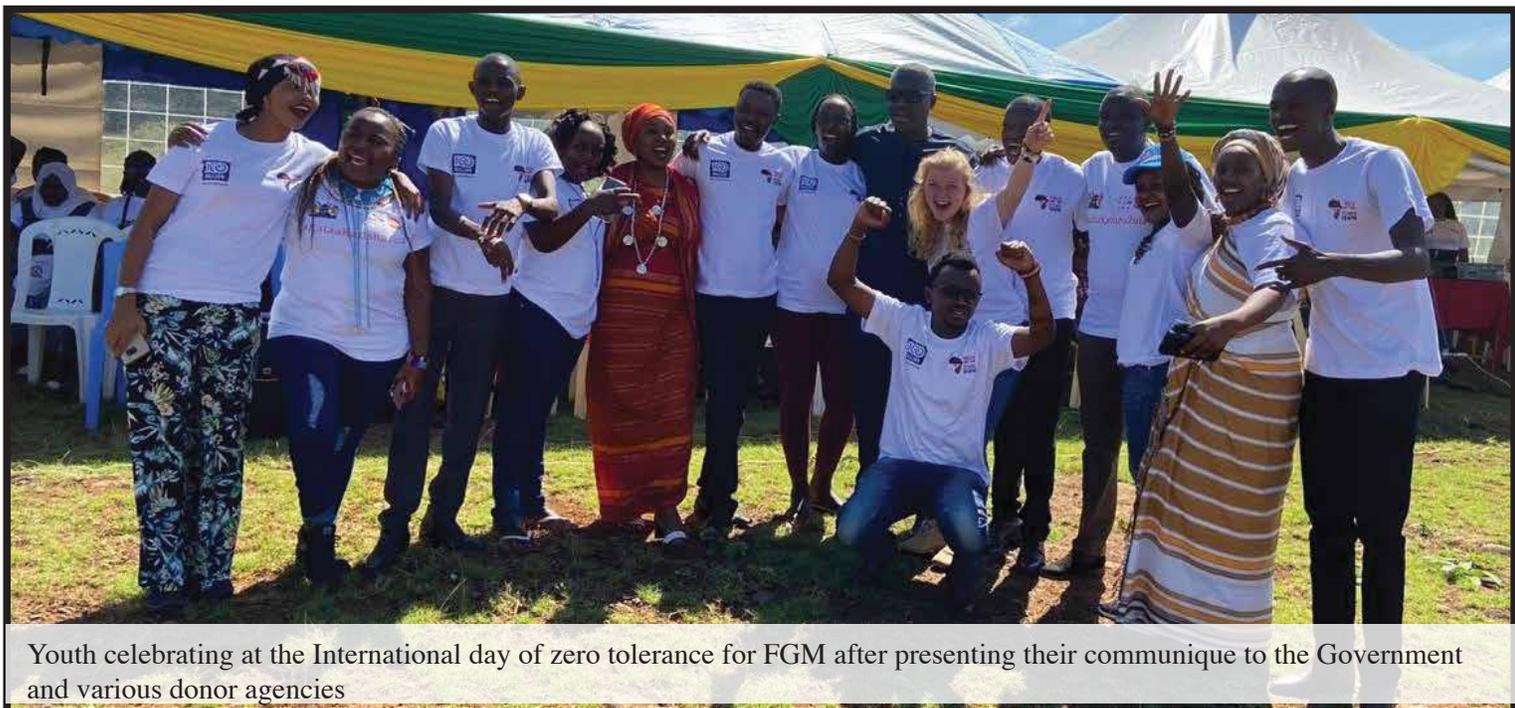
The Caravan provided a platform for the youth to share knowledge on the innovative ways of addressing FGM in the community as well as learn what youths in other counties are doing to stop FGM. According to the young people, the visits to the counties was a big success and the visibility of UNFPA and the government through the Anti-FGM Board was of real importance to create huge impact for the youths both online and in each of the counties.

Conclusion

Since 2008, UNFPA and UNICEF have been leading the largest ever global programme to eliminate FGM. In Kenya, the programme focuses on 12 out of the 22 hotspot counties with a high prevalence of FGM. Through the Youth Caravan counties have been engaged giving the youth a platform to express themselves and let their voices be heard as they pioneer the voices of change to end Female Genital Mutilation in Kenya.



S.Arai displays the Katisha Balls used to Kick FGM out of Kenya



Youth celebrating at the International day of zero tolerance for FGM after presenting their communique to the Government and various donor agencies