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on
Ending
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Message from the Representative

As we mark one year since the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Kenya, we are also heralding the arrival of the vaccine, a ray of light amidst the darkness that the pandemic cast on women and girls across the country. It is estimated that two million additional cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are likely to occur over the next decade globally, due to COVID-19. Even before the pandemic disrupted women and girls protection and empowerment programmes everywhere, Kenya's target of ending FGM by 2022 was already an ambitious commitment, way ahead of the global goal of 2030. However the year has started with several wins that demonstrate the value of unity in action, funding, and advocacy to end this human rights violation. We must therefore not relent in our march towards being the first country to achieve zero FGM during this global decade of action.

Eliminating FGM is intrinsically linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), because it brings us one step closer to the full realization of gender equality. Advancing the rights of women and girls in this way results in a positive multiplier effect on education, health, and economic development. No excuses should be tolerated, cultural, religious or otherwise, in the continuation of this harmful practice. UNFPA commends the elders who have this year

stepped up to lend their leadership and voice in the fight against FGM. These include elders from the Samburu community as well as the Pokot elders from both sides of the Kenya-Uganda border, who committed to work together in ending cross-border FGM. The involvement of the youth, from as early as primary school in raising awareness on the harmful effects of the practice is encouraging, as it signals that future generations will be protected from this harmful practice.

Much work remains to be done, dear partners, if we are to end FGM by 2022. An estimated 450,000 Kenyan girls and women are still at risk of undergoing the cut by 2030, if our target is not met. Although the practice is declining and progress visible, we will need to ramp up our interventions ten-fold, in order to ensure that every woman and girl is protected from FGM. UNFPA's commitment to supporting the government of Kenya remains unshakeable in this new year. In 2021, our focus will be on working in unity and collaboration with stakeholders, including civil society organizations, grassroots organizations, women's rights groups, teachers, health workers, law enforcement and judicial officials, as well as religious leaders and elders. Using lessons learnt from the pandemic, UNFPA will scale up efforts in our work with partners to amplify, and direct efforts in implementing proven strategies to end FGM.

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Landmark Samburu elders' declaration affirms Kenya's commitment to end FGM by 2022



Photo: His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta is inducted as a Samburu elder at Kisima sacred grounds in Samburu County



Photo: A plaque built to commemorate the declaration made by elders in Samburu County.

Samburu county in Kenya's Northern region has one of the highest prevalence rates of female genital mutilation (FGM). According to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS) 2014, 86 percent of women and girls aged 15 to 49 years in Samburu have undergone FGM. Despite an existing national law that bans FGM, the practice has continued largely driven by the traditional belief that cutting girls is a necessary initiation rite that welcomes them into womanhood. In a historic move to abandon this harmful practice, elders from the nine clans of the Samburu have made a landmark declaration to end FGM and child marriage within the community. The issuance of the declaration was presided over by His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta on 5th March 2021 at the Kisima grounds, recognized as a sacred site by the Samburu people.

In a public acknowledgment and recognition of the contribution and role of empowered women and girls in the community, the elders heralded a new norm that guarantees the protection of Samburu women and girls from all harmful practices. The heartfelt declaration read in part: "We recognize our role as community leaders and

custodians of culture and our ability to guide and protect our community members. We affirm our commitment to end FGM and child marriage in the community. We therefore lift the curse that had been bestowed on uncircumcised girls. As tradition gatekeepers, we bless all girls who have not undergone, and will not undergo FGM in the future.”

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At the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25, Kenya made 17 commitments aimed at advancing the promise of universal access to sexual and reproductive health, girls’ and women’s empowerment and gender equality. Key amongst these was the commitment to end FGM by 2022, and to eliminate by 2030, all forms of gender-based violence including child and forced marriage. “My commitment to eliminate FGM in Kenya by 2022 will only be achieved if each one of us takes their own initiative. The journey we have started here today will require each one of us to play their part,” said President Kenyatta. The declaration of the Samburu elders moves Kenya a step closer to realizing the ICPD25 commitments, as addressing the social, gender and cultural norms that perpetuate harmful practices remains critical to the protection of women and girls.

President Kenyatta remains at the forefront in ensuring that the commitment to end FGM by 2022 is realized. He has continuously called on communities to abandon the retrogressive cultural practice and instead, find alternative rites of passage. In support of government efforts, community advocacy and dialogue events supported by UNFPA and other stakeholders have led to an increased awareness of the harmful effects of



Photo: Girls hold up End FGM signs during the Kisima Declaration in Samburu county.

FGM across generations. So far, more than 28 Kenyan communities have made public declarations that outlaw FGM, with three of the declarations happening in 2021. Declarations by elders and community leaders are pivotal in ensuring that women and girls remain empowered and protected from harm, as they represent a sanctioned shift in tradition and cultural practices. “I know it is possible for our girls to go through alternative rites of passage without suffering,” said President Kenyatta. He advised the Samburu community to give boys and girls an equal opportunity to obtain an education.

UNFPA Kenya works closely with the Anti-FGM Board, the Ministry of Public Service and Gender, among other partners in ensuring that the presidential vision becomes a reality. The Country Office through implementing partner World Vision Kenya mobilized 200 Samburu elders to be present at the declaration. Cabinet Secretary in the Ministry of Public Service and Gender Prof. Margaret Kobia welcomed the Samburu elders’ intervention to end FGM and Child Marriage, noting that an equal world will only be achieved by ending FGM and other harmful practices that impact on the lives and wellbeing of women and girls.





Photo: Chief Administrative Secretary Ministry of Public Service and Gender Hon. Rachel Shebesh and Chief Administrative Secretary Ministry of ICT, Innovation and Youth affairs Miss Maureen Mbaka launching the Youth AntiFGM Network in West Pokot County

Young people as agents of change in West Pokot County

The 2021 International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM was celebrated with pomp and dance in West Pokot, where young people converged in a youth forum to discuss pertinent issues that challenge the attainment of a Zero FGM society. This year's theme was; "No time for global inaction: Unite, Fund, and Act to end FGM." West Pokot county has in the past reported alarming cases of girls undergoing FGM. The situation was further aggravated during the Covid-19 lockdown due to infrastructural challenges and the fact that the safe havens such as schools had been shut down as part of mitigating measures put in place by the government to adhere to the World Health Organizations (WHO) guidelines in averting the further spread of the pandemic.

In applying more concerted efforts towards the prevention of FGM, Kenya has embraced young people as advocates and leaders in the campaign against the practice. The Youth Anti-FGM Network (YANK), launched in 2016 as a movement to end FGM, has been instrumental in rallying communities to eliminate this harmful practice. During the Zero Tolerance Day 2021, the youth came

together to launch the West Pokot Chapter of the Youth Anti-FGM Network. The government through the Ministry of Public Service and Gender, and the Anti-FGM Board vowed to support the young people and include them in meaningful engagement towards eliminating FGM in Kenya. Chief Administrative Secretary for Gender, Hon. Rachel Shebesh lauded the establishment of the new chapter and the work done by the network so far in driving intergenerational dialogue on FGM. "We are committed to facilitating the launch of YANK chapters in all 22 hotspot counties where FGM is prevalent, because the youth must be at the forefront in leading this fight," The Chairperson, Anti-FGM Board Agnes Pareiyo, reiterated the board's commitment to walk with young people in ending FGM. Also present at the youth forum was the Chief Administrative Secretary ICT, Maureen Mbaka, who urged the young people to embrace technology and innovation in their interventions; she further committed to supporting the young people who are using art and music as a tool for social change in the elimination of FGM.

UNFPA works closely with the Youth anti-FGM network in efforts to shift attitudes and social norms that underpin FGM. Through social media engagement, community dialogues and peer-to-peer learning efforts, members of the network have been able to reach wide populations across generations, in efforts to ensure that a zero FGM society becomes the reality in Kenya. They have further set out to grow the movement by involving more youth at all levels in activities aimed at eliminating FGM. At the end of the forum, YANK members issued a call to action with a request for the inclusion of a young person (below 35 years) as a member of the Anti FGM Board. They further called for the inclusion of YANK focal points at the county Anti-FGM Steering committees, and donor funding to prioritize funds to youth-led organizations and entities all aimed at achieving the presidential commitment to end FGM by 2022.



Photo: Jeddy Lemaron from the Youth AntiFGM network speaks on youth issues during the West Pokot anti-FGM youth forum.



Photo: Youth engagement forum during the launch of the Youth AntiFGM Network West Pokot Chapter



This plaque was unveiled
on 6th February 2021
during the celebrations of
**International Day for Zero Tolerance to
FGM in Commemoration of
a Landmark Declaration to End FGM**
by Pokot Elders from Kenya and Uganda
in the presence of
Senior Government Officials from Kenya
and Uganda, UN Officials, NGOs, CBOs and
the Pokot community from both countries



Photo: Youth engagement during the launch of the Samburu chapter of the Youth AntiFGM Network

Strengthening the momentum of young people to end FGM in Samburu County

UNFPA Kenya believes in galvanizing and amplifying the energy and the voices of the young people towards the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in their generation. The Country Office is working closely with the Government of Kenya through the State Department for Gender and the Anti-FGM Board to bring together young people in the various hot spot counties as agents of change to hold meaningful engagement with their peers and interact with policy makers as a way of ensuring that no one is left behind in the elimination of FGM in Kenya.

In Samburu county, UNFPA Kenya supported young people in the launch of the Samburu County chapter of the Youth Anti FGM Network (YANK). Youth Anti-FGM networks established in the various hotspot counties work to ensure meaningful youth engagement, participation and inclusion at the decision making platforms, amplifying the voice of the young people in efforts to end FGM. Samburu County has the second highest FGM prevalence rates in Kenya, based on the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS) 2014.



Photo: Samburu youth decorated in traditional ornaments during the launch of the Samburu Chapter of the Youth AntiFGM Network

During the launch of the Samburu Chapter, Dr. Josephine Kulea, Founder of Samburu Girls Foundation, encouraged the youth people to speak up against FGM and the related gender-based violence issues affecting them without fear. Also present were the National Youth Council (NYC), the official voice of the young people in Kenya. The NYC Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Roy Sasaka Telewa committed to support the young people through his office in their efforts to safeguard and promote women and girls' rights. The Deputy Governor, H.E Julius Leseeto in his remarks committed to put in place and fund a gender department in Samburu County for protection, prevention and psychosocial support on issues of gender based violence and harmful practices. Other dignitaries present included the Anti FGM Board chairperson and CEO, Spread Truth Africa CEO and the Men End FGM Executive Director.

UNFPA Gender Advisor Caroline Murgor challenged the Young people to demonstrate the impact of the work they are doing in ending FGM as they strive to grow the movement and build on the momentum to end FGM. Similar sentiments were

further echoed by the UNFPA Country Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide on the UNFPA's commitment to leverage the leadership and energy of the young people to deliver on the presidential vision to end FGM in Kenya by 2022. The Launch was officiated by the Chief Administrative Secretary, Dr. Jebii Kilimo, a renowned Anti-FGM champion and Advocate. She commissioned the young people as foot soldiers and change agents who must utilize all the available spaces of influence to ensure that an end to FGM becomes a reality in Samburu County.



Photo: Deputy Governor, Samburu County, H.E. Julius Leseeto, Chief Administrative Secretary Ministry of Public Service and Gender Hon. Dr. Lina Jebii Kilimo, CEO National Youth Council, Roy Sasaka UNFPA Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide and CEO Spread Truth Africa, Rev. Hamisi Kirenga during the launch of the Youth AntiFGM network Samburu Chapter.

Kenya's High Court ruling signals hope in the campaign to end FGM



The ruling of the High Court of Kenya to uphold a ban on FGM as stipulated in the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2011, is a big boost in the campaign against a harmful practice that violates the rights of women and girls. UNFPA representative Dr. Ademola Olajide in response to the ruling issued on 16th March 2021 lauded the court's decision as a significant milestone in the efforts to eradicate FGM in the country by 2022. "With the presidential directive to end FGM by 2022, the existence of the anti-FGM law, and now the court's ruling to uphold the same, all three arms of the Kenyan government have demonstrated that FGM has no place in Kenya's society, and that women's health and dignity must be upheld," said Dr. Olajide.

The Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act passed in 2011 outlawed FGM with a stipulated punishment of three years imprisonment, or a fine of not less than two hundred thousand shillings (\$2,000) or both. The act also established the Anti-FGM Board as a government agency mandated to lead the campaign to end FGM in Kenya. The High Court's ruling was in response to a petition filed by Dr. Tatu Kamau, seeking to annul the act and disband the Anti-FGM Board. Dr. Kamau had

argued that the law passed in 2011 infringes upon the rights of adult women who wish to practice their culture by undergoing FGM. In dismissing her petition, the high court judges said that they were not persuaded that one can choose to undergo the harmful practice voluntarily. "From the medical and anecdotal evidence presented by the respondents, we find that limiting this right is reasonable in an open and democratic society based on the dignity of women," they said. The ruling further stated that evidence presented showed that FGM causes harm and has no medical benefits. The justices noted that testimonies from survivors further showed that FGM is rarely consensual.

Around 4 million, or one in five women and girls in Kenya have been subjected to FGM, with an estimated 450,000 additional girls at risk of undergoing the cut between now and 2030. While tremendous progress has been made in accelerating the abandonment of the practice, threats such as the increased medicalization of FGM and loss of social protections due to the Covid-19 pandemic demand that stakeholders remain united in acting to end the practice. UNFPA remains committed in our support to the government of Kenya in actioning President Uhuru Kenyatta's pledge to end

FGM by 2022. Our work to strengthen community engagement through dialogue and education has resulted in strengthened initiatives in the response to and prevention of FGM in counties with the highest prevalence rates. UNFPA's focus continues to be on the identified 22 hotspot counties, with the aim of shifting social and gender norms that perpetuate FGM and other harmful practices such as child marriage.

“With the presidential directive to end FGM by 2022, the existence of the anti-FGM law, and now the court’s ruling to uphold the same, all three arms of the Kenyan government have demonstrated that FGM has no place in Kenya’s society, and that women’s health and dignity must be upheld,” said Dr. Olajide.



Photo: Women from Samburu County engage in a traditional welcome dance to receive H.E Uhuru Kenyatta during the Kisima Declaration to end FGM by Samburu elders.

After-school clubs reinforce fight against FGM in Isiolo County

As the lunchtime bell rings at St. Kizito primary school in Isiolo county, excited chatter can be heard all around. Following months of Covid-19 restriction measures that led to the closure of schools across the country, young boys and girls are excited but cautious in celebrating the reunion of friends, as learning institutions re-opened in early January 2021. Everyone here is fortunate to be back in school, healthy and eager to learn. Data gathered by the government shows that at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya, nearly 200 girls underwent FGM in the period between June -December 2020. FGM signals an end to education for a majority of girls, as they are soon married off in keeping with this and other harmful traditional practices. With the support of UNFPA in partnership with World Vision, a community based organization, Every Girls Dream, has set out to establish anti-FGM clubs in local schools with the aim of mitigating the high prevalence of FGM in Isiolo.

The pilot clubs have been launched at St Kizito and Wabera Primary schools in Isiolo central sub-county, with a roll-out of more clubs expected in the coming months. According to Every Girls Dream founder Aisha Hussein, interest in the clubs is high amongst both boys and girls. “We have also seen a lot of support from teachers, who serve as patrons in the



Aisha Roba Anti-FGM champion in Isiolo county, and founder of Every Girl's Dream.

clubs after receiving training on child-friendly approaches to anti-FGM advocacy,” says Ms. Hussein. The organization works with school administrators to set up the club and develop learning activities. Patrons are encouraged to use songs, skits, poems, and other fun activities to sensitize the students on the harmful effects of FGM, and how to seek help if at risk. Every Girls Dream also works to sensitize the patrons and other teachers on local referral pathways through police and victim rescue mechanisms. Fatuma Halkano, a teacher and club patron at St Kizito shared that as a survivor of FGM, she is committed to ensuring that no girl in the school undergoes the cut. “When I was young I longed for the day I would be cut, because I was told that it would make me feel complete. I had many complications during delivery and I don’t want any Girl or woman to undergo FGM,” she said. She added that her goal would be to make the Anti -FGM club the most active in St. Kizito.

Young girls and boys who are members of the club receive training on the harmful effects of FGM and how to prevent its occurrence within their families and communities. They are also encouraged to sensitize their friends and peers through club activities. “We thank UNFPA and Every Girls Dream for visiting us and putting



Wabera Primary School anti-FGM club members at a recent club meeting.

the Anti -FGM club in place. We are ready to learn about FGM and also go out and teach our community,” said St. Kizito club member Faith Karemba. St Kizito and Wabera primary schools have a combined student population of 1,800. More than 1,000 of the pupils are young and adolescent girls aged between 7-15 years. “Being from the Cushitic community, I understand the challenges women and girls face after undergoing the cut. I am grateful that our school was picked as a pilot school and we will support the club to remain active,” said St Kizito Headteacher Andrew Jillo.

Data from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS, 2014) shows that 21 percent of the population of circumcised women and girls underwent the cut when they were aged 5-9 years, while 43 percent were circumcised when they were aged 10- 14. Worrying emerging trends show that girls are being circumcised at younger ages, including during infancy. The establishment of the school anti-FGM clubs therefore offers a unique opportunity for girls at high risk of the cut to engage in conversations in a safe environment on ways to prevent FGM and respond to threats with the support of duty bearers.



Students who have formed a part of the AntiFGM club in Wabera primary School



Photo: Aisha Hussein addresses students at the St. Kizito Primary School. Accompanied by Hon. Mumina Bonaya, Chief Administrative Secretary, Ministry of Education, and Isiolo County Commissioner Hon. A. Abdi.



International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM: Pokot Elders from Kenya and Uganda unite against cross-border FGM



Pokot Elders from Kenya and Uganda Converge at Okip (Sacred Tree) In Alale to denounce FGM.

Among the Pokot community, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is practiced as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. This deep-rooted culture has been in existence for thousands of years and continues to be practiced to date. On February 6, 2021, during the Internationally recognized day on the Zero Tolerance for FGM, Pokot elders from Kenya and Uganda converged at the Okip (sacred tree) to denounce the practice of FGM in their community.

West Pokot County borders Uganda to the west, and has witnessed high rates of cross-border FGM as girls from the Pokot community are trafficked to and from the two countries in order to escape local authorities. This significant landmark declaration by the elders is a boost in the fight against cross-border FGM as it indicates unity at the highest level of the community's hierarchy, which will go a long way in shifting the social and cultural norms that perpetuate the harmful practice. At the ICPD25 summit held in November 2019, both Kenya and Uganda committed to the elimination of harmful

practices that hinder women and girls efforts to achieve their full potential, including all forms of gender-based violence. Kenya in particular, committed to strengthen coordination in legislation and policy framework, communication and advocacy, evidence generation, and support to cross border collaboration on the elimination of FGM by 2022.

Present to witness this landmark declaration were His Excellency John Lonyangapou, Governor of West Pokot County, Chief Administrative Secretary, Ministry for Public Service and Gender, Hon. Rachel Shebesh, Chief Administrative Secretary, Ministry of Youth and ICT, Maureen Mbaka, the Anti-FGM Board Chairperson, Agnes Pareiyo, as well as representatives from UNICEF and UNFPA. Hon. Rachel Shebesh, the Chief Administrative Secretary (CAS) Ministry of Public Service and Gender, lauded the great effort by the elders which is expected to propel Kenya towards ending FGM by 2022. In his official remarks, H.E. John Lonyangapou reminded the community of their ancient cul-

tures, noting that the community had in the past shifted from detrimental practices as new knowledge and education allowed. He reiterated that community members' education and sensitization at all levels is paramount in the abandonment of FGM, and called for further policy dialogues and anti-FGM legislation. The governor assured the community of continued collaboration and support from his government in accelerating the Presidential commitment to end FGM by 2022.

With less than two years to go, the government of Kenya has put in place strategic measures to ensure that the vision becomes a reality. Out of the presidential commitment, a multi-agency steering committee comprising ten ministries headed by the Chief Administrative Secretary, Public Service, and Gender was set up to ensure that FGM matters were given priority and for coordination purposes. This strategy is one of the best practices Kenya has embraced in providing that a multi-sectoral approach is applied in the abandonment of FGM. With such an intervention, access to government services and resources like the National Government Affirmative Funds (NGAF) and other services have been devolved at the lower level. This has been particularly significant in providing

economic empowerment tools for circumcisers to assume alternative sources of income and in the process renounce the practice of FGM. Through ministries of Youth and ICT, youth empowerment centers have been launched across the 47 counties where young people can access learning materials and other tools aimed at enhanced peer-to-peer learning and demystification of myths and stereotypes around FGM and other harmful practices.



Pokot Elders from Kenya and Uganda under the Okip (Sacred Tree) denouncing FGM in the region



Engagement of Pokot Elders from Kenya and Uganda under the Okip (Sacred Tree) In Alale during the International day of zero tolerance for FGM

A multi-sectoral approach in ending FGM, Teenage Pregnancies and Child Marriage in Kenya



From left to right :Chief Administrative Secretaries in the Ministry of Public Service and Gender Hon.Dr. Lina Jebii Kilimo and Hon. Rachel Shebesh, Chief Administrative Secretary in the Ministry of Education Mumina Bonaya and Chief Administrative Secretary in the Ministry of ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs Nadia Abdalla during the KenyaNiMimi Upper Eastern Region launch in Isiolo County

Ending Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage and teenage pregnancy requires dedicated efforts across all sectors and at all levels. It requires understanding of the complex drivers behind the practices in different contexts in order to adapt interventions. It also needs a multi-level, holistic approach to identify and address the root causes as well as relevant agents of change at all levels.

It is for this reason that several stakeholders, cut across from different sectors of government, civil society, religious and cultural leaders, and the private sector, joined youth from upper eastern region in Isiolo county to address issues affecting young people. The regional dialogue was organized under the KenyaNiMimi Campaign, an initiative whose agenda is youth empowerment through engagement and involvement in conversations, including on issues such as FGM, child marriage and teenage pregnancies. The meeting was held on the 25th to 27th February 2021 with a clarion call on the importance of partnership, collaboration and sharing of best practices in fighting these harm-

ful practices. In Kenya, 4 million girls and women have undergone FGM. Overall, 21 percent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years have been subjected to the practice. The effects of FGM on the health of women and girls is devastating increasing risks for complications during pregnancy and child birth and in some cases resulting to death. Ending FGM guarantees that girls can live in dignity, free from violence, and able to realize their full potential.

In our rich and diverse African culture, it is not usual to find elders and young people mingling together freely and conversing as equal partners.

The effects of FGM on the health of women and girls is devastating increasing risks for complications during pregnancy and child birth and in some cases resulting to death.

The climax of this multi-sectoral approach event in Isiolo was therefore an intergenerational dialogue between the elders from upper eastern counties, Kenya National Council of Elders representatives and youth from Isiolo, Marsabit, Tharaka Nithi, Embu and Meru. In attendance in the dialogue were four Cabinet Administrative Secretaries (CASs) from different government ministries. They included; Hon. Rachel Shebesh and Hon. Jebii Kilimo both from the Ministry of Public Service and Gender, Hon. Mumina Bonaya, Ministry of Education and Hon. Nadia Abdalla, Ministry of Youth ICT and Innovation.

As the saying goes, what an elder can see when seated down, a boy can never see, even when standing on top of an Iroko tree (*Milicia excelsa*). The intergenerational dialogue helped both groups to speak and listen to each other. The youths were pulled down from top of the Iroko tree to sit down with the elders and look into the future together. For three consecutive days, the youth engaged in a captivating dialogue with the senior government officials, Council of Elders including the famous Njuri Ncheke from Meru. In her remarks, Hon.

*“As the saying goes, what an elder can see when seated down, a boy can never see, even when standing on top of an Iroko tree (*Milicia excelsa*). The intergenerational dialogue helped both groups to speak and listen to each other.”*

UNFPA played a key role in driving this initiative in line with its mandate in ending FGM. The Country Representative of UNFPA, Dr. Ademola Olajide in his remarks stated that, “intergenerational dialogue is not a prescriptive engagement of young people by the older generation; it is a two-way dialogue to facilitate informed decision making”. The youth need to be challenges not to wait for the elders to tell them to end FGM, rather they need to pick up the mantle and be at the forefront in ending FGM. UNFPA continues to work with the government of Kenya, civil society organizations, and community members to ensure that the national commitments made at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 are realized, among them the Presidential declaration and action plan to end FGM by 2022.



Photo: Caroline Murgor, UNFPA GBV/Gender Advisor engages the youth on ending FGM in Kenya's Upper Eastern region.

Rachel Shebesh emphasized that cultural and religious leaders must be supported not only to make declarations against FGM, but also to ensure that it is publicized and imbibed by the community as a whole. On her part, Hon. Jebii Kilimo reiterated that age appropriate End FGM information should be integrated into the education system to engage the youths as early as possible. Hon. Mumina Bonaya, emphasized that all cultural practices that interfere with the access of girls and boys to education must be abandoned.



Chief Administrative Secretary in the Ministry of Public Service and Gender Hon. Dr. Lina Jebii Kilimo engages with youth during the intergenerational dialogue session on ending FGM.

Reformed circumciser turned community health volunteer doing her part to end FGM in the Kuria community



Photo: Engagement of women and men during a training session on ending FGM in Kuria, Baringo County

Born and raised in Mabera Kuria, a community in Kenya's Migori County that practices Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Teresia Nyabaraka did not escape the cut. She underwent the painful and harmful practice at the age of eight.

As a child, Nyabaraka suffered from an eye problem that would force her to miss school for several days at a time. This would happen so often that teachers would reach out to her parents to inquire about her. As she had no access to medical services, her condition grew worse and she stayed at home longer, leaving her in danger of early and forced marriage.

At the age of thirteen, she was married off. "I gave birth to my first child when I was fifteen years old. It was not easy, and by the time I was nineteen, I had three children," she says. Having not received any sensitization on the negative impacts of FGM, she became a circumciser herself, cutting young girls in rites similar to what she had gone through in her childhood. Her two daughters also underwent FGM, covertly referred to as the "wedding ceremony" in her community.

"I gave birth to my first child when I was fifteen years old. It was not easy, and by the time I was nineteen, I had three children," she says.

Nyabaraka's turning point as a female circumciser came when one of the girls she was cutting experienced excessive bleeding and almost lost her life. "I took her to the hospital despite my own fear of repercussions, and on that day, I decided to put down the blade," she says.

Among the Kuria community, FGM is practiced as a traditional rite of passage that often leads to early and child marriage. According to Natalie Robi, Executive Director of community based organization

Msichana Empowerment Kuria, efforts by stakeholders to sensitize the community on the harmful effects of FGM are slowly bearing fruit. “Increasingly, girls are being offered the opportunity to go to school as compared to before. The involvement of religious leaders in the fight against FGM has also helped in the fight, as the preach that FGM is not part of religion,” she says.

UNFPA supports organizations like Msichana Empowerment Kuria, the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), and the Men End FGM Foundation to carry out interventions aimed at accelerating the elimination of FGM in the community. It is through such programmes that reformed circumciser Nyabaraka and other members of the community have received training on the harmful effects of FGM as well as prevention and response mechanisms that aid in the fight against the practice.

Nyabaraka now works as a Community Health Volunteer (CHV) in Kuria, where she educates the community on the dangers of FGM and advocates for girls’ right to education. She is most proud of the fact that her two youngest daughters have

been spared the trauma of FGM, and is working to ensure that other girls are protected. “I tell people to stop FGM and focus on sharpening the brains of girls. This is what will guarantee them a good life, and not early marriage,” she says.

Campaigns to end FGM in this region have received support from government officials following President Uhuru Kenyatta’s directive that Kenya end FGM by 2022. The assistant chief at Ibraha sub location Thomas Gati says his office carries out many rescue efforts during the cutting season which takes place during the months of October and November. “When someone reports to my office that a child is at risk of being cut, we will move the girl to a rescue centre immediately. Anyone caught carrying out FGM faces the full force of the law,” he notes.



Photo: Reformed cutters in Kuria county undergoing training on alternative rights of passage for girls in Baringo County





Photo: Primary school students recite a poem on ending FGM for His Excellency, the President, Uhuru Kenyatta

Let's work together to end FGM in Kenya

By UNFPA Representative Dr Ademola Olajide and UNICEF Representative Maniza Zaman

Female genital mutilation, or FGM, is internationally recognized as a violation of human rights. Yet over 200 million girls worldwide are at risk of undergoing this harmful practice every year, many of them under the age of 15. Many factors contribute to the prevalence of FGM but in every society in which it occurs, it is a manifestation of entrenched gender inequality.

Here in Kenya around 4 million, or one in five, women and girls have been subjected to FGM. In some communities, this rises as high as 94 per cent. Although overall these numbers have declined over recent years, they remain much too high. And we note that the gains can be precarious – when schools closed last year in response to COVID-19, we saw an increase in cases of FGM, child marriage and sexual violence. An estimated 574,000 additional Kenyan girls are at risk of undergoing FGM between now and 2030 unless urgent action is taken to prevent it. Thank-

fully, ending FGM is a national priority in Kenya, with an action plan to end the practice by 2022.

In cultures where FGM female genital mutilation is entrenched in tradition and social norms, it takes real courage to speak up against it. And yet every day, survivors of FGM like 26-year-old Aisha Hussein are calling for an end to FGM. This is because Aisha knows first-hand, the long-term physical, psychological and social consequences of FGM, and the danger it poses to the current and future generation of girls and women. It is time to listen and act fast in addressing the structures, and harmful gender norms that perpetuate the practice. We have less than two years to do this if we are to realize Kenya's goal. So what will it take?

Because female genital mutilation is rooted in gender inequality and power imbalances, fighting it requires changing the cultural and social norms that increase the risk of harm to women. This means

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addressing all other forms of violence and harmful practices such as child marriage, as well as physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, institutions and our communities.

Religious leaders, elders, and other cultural gatekeepers hold the key to the abandonment of FGM by entire communities. They can make public statements delinking female genital mutilation from religious teachings and ethnic culture. Decrees from the Borana Council of Elders, Pokot elders, the Tana Delta elders, the Loita Maasai elders and others have outlawed the practice amongst their ethnic groups, paving way for alternative rites of passage that honour the rights and well-being of women and girls. Religious and cultural leaders from across the country signed a commitment to support government efforts in ending FGM, during a meeting held in State House Nairobi.

In 2019, President Kenyatta made the bold and important pledge to eliminate FGM in Kenya by 2022. The presence of a structured government response puts the country ahead of its neighbours in the fight against FGM. The collection of more reliable and accurate data and tight coordination among the various actors remains paramount. All of this will require sustainable domestic funding and prevention programmes, through national budget lines, county budget lines and contributions from the private sector and other local institutions.

At the county level, it takes county governments working hand in hand with grassroots organizations and communities to develop strategies for



Photo UNICEF Country Director Maniza Zaman

challenging the social norms and behaviours that drive female genital mutilation. Within the 22 counties with high prevalence of FGM in Kenya, worrying trends are emerging, such as the medicalization of FGM, girls cutting themselves, increased cross-border FGM, cutting of married women and the cutting of younger girls and infants. Establishing strong community surveillance mechanisms is crucial to ensuring the protection of at-risk girls and women, while collaboration between community leaders and law enforcement officers can help curb these emerging trends and prevent cross-border FGM.

Through the Joint Programme on Ending FGM, UNFPA and UNICEF are providing financial and technical support to the Ministry of Public Service and Gender to help implement the Presidential Costed Action Plan to End FGM in Kenya by 2022. We also help to provide girls and women with access to suitable care, while mobilizing communities to transform the social norms that uphold the practice. As we mark International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, let us unite and act together to achieve the goal of an FGM-free Kenya. This is not just another cause – it is about a gross violation of human rights, and one which we can completely stop if we all have the will and determination.



Photo: Dr. Ademola Olajide UNFPA Representative

Measuring effectiveness of female genital mutilation (FGM): A compendium of indicators



Measuring the effectiveness of interventions to eliminate FGM has proven challenging, partly because of the lack of relevant indicators and standardized definitions that would allow comparisons across programmes and geographical locations, and over time. The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation is pleased to share its newest publication that compiles FGM indicators in the aims to measure the effectiveness of FGM elimination programme. The compendium is an evidence-based resource that can be used by policymakers, government officials, researchers, service providers and other practitioners interested in developing, measuring, and monitoring the results of FGM initiatives.

The publication outlines Impact, Outcome, and Output indicators to aid in measuring the prevalence of FGM, medium-term or intermediate changes deriving from FGM programmes such as change in beliefs, attitudes, and norms, as well as the measurement of lower level results such as changes in the existence of laws, policies, institutions and tools.

The compendium offers a menu of indicators to determine if interventions are producing tangible results. Users can access the publication [HERE](#). We hope you find it useful in the context of your work!



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