

ASIL I

MAGAZINE



Quarterly Magazine
on
Ending
Female Genital Mutilation
Quarter 1 (January - March)/ 2022
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Message from the Representative

There has been significant progress in efforts to eliminate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), galvanized by the presidential commitment to end FGM in Kenya by 2022. UNFPA has partnered with key stakeholders under the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation to deliver on this commitment through strategic outreach at the community level, engagement of men and boys, and enhanced access to quality services for FGM prevention, response, and care. UNFPA has also worked closely with the Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs and Special Programmes, and the Anti-FGM Board to strengthen policies and the legislative environment on the abandonment of FGM, including the development of a costed national action plan, and allocation of budgets for FGM prevention and response at the county level.

Despite the important achievements realized, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing drought that has affected several FGM hotspot counties have presented new challenges that call for greater investments in response to the needs of women and girls who suffer the consequences of FGM. More so, it necessitates a gender-transformative approach, tackling the underlying drivers of gender inequality, and emerging practices such as medicalization and cross-border FGM. Strengthening FGM data and research capacity to provide new knowledge and evidence on FGM will also be a key driver of progress as we move towards an FGM-free world.

This year marks the launch of Phase IV of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme, guided by the new vision of ‘A world free of FGM, where girls and women have a voice, choice, and agency.’ Phase IV of the Joint Programme prioritizes global movement building of allies working towards eliminating the practice of FGM as its strategic approach and positioning girls and women at the driving seat to eliminate this harmful practice. This will be supported through accelerated collective and multisectoral actions by mobilizing a broad spectrum of actors at community, national, regional, and global levels.

As I mark the end of my tour of duty in Kenya, I remain grateful to all partners for the support accorded to UNFPA in driving programmes to accelerate the elimination of female genital mutilation. As we travel the road towards zero gender-based violence and harmful practices, this support remains critical in advancing policy and advocacy work at national and sub-national levels.

Dr. Ademola Olajide

UNFPA Representative

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Anti FGM Board Holds an Islamic Religious Conference in Wajir County to Commemorate the International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM



Photo: Members of the Anti FGM Board and County Government of Wajir during the Islamic Religious Conference to mark International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM

The Islamic Religious Conference ended with robust resolutions key among them continuous engagement of the Islamic religious leaders on the harmful consequences of FGM.

The 2-Day conference held in Wajir town was convened to commemorate the International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM and brought together Sheikhs and Islamic scholars from Wajir, Mandera, Garissa and Tana River counties.

The objective of the conference was to establish a common ground with religious scholars regarding FGM in the region, where some opine that it is a religious obligation, particularly Sunnah, while others have opposing views. The Somali community predominantly inhabits the north eastern region, has the highest prevalence of FGM at 94% attributed to deep-rooted cultural practices and religion.

Speakers at the conference pleaded with the sheikhs to use the respect accorded to them by the society and huge influence to make bold pro-

nouncements denouncing the practice. The speakers beseeched the sheikhs to heed the cries of women and delink FGM from Islam. The conference was presided over by Chief Administrative Secretary (CAS) State Department for Gender, Hon. Dr. Linah Jebii Kilimo, who was accompanied by the Chairperson of the Anti-FGM Board, Hon. Agnes Pareyio, Chief Executive Officer Ms. Bernadette Loloju, local leaders and other dignitaries.

The CAS made a passionate plea to the sheikhs to provide leadership and free the girls and women from the harmful practices that deny them a level playing ground to compete for opportunities with the rest of Kenyans..

“We have many problems afflicting women. I urge religious leaders to think about it and ensure that our culture does not harm women. I do not believe this is a religious obligation as there is no religion that advocates for harm and mutilation of what God created perfect,” said Hon. Jebii.

“We have to ensure that all issues that hinder the

dreams of everyone are eliminated. Our climate has already marginalized this region. Why do you further marginalize yourselves by cutting women and causing them grievous harm? In the spirit of collective responsibility, you have to play your part to get rid of FGM from the north eastern region,” she added.

Sheikh Gudo from Tana River County appealed to the sheikhs to delve deep and openly point out that Islam holds the human body in high regard. “What the cutters do, including those who conduct Sunnah, is a gross violation of the human body. Most of the cutters have never been to any school, yet they have been entrusted to operate on a delicate body part without minding the consequences,” pleaded Sheikh Gudo.

Ms. Fatuma Ustadh, a madrassa teacher, revealed that most women from the region were avoiding marriage for fear of embarrassment when consummating marriages due to the effects of FGM. “It is high time the sheikhs from this region told people the truth. Be firm and help the women of this region,” stated Ms. Fatuma.

The Chairperson of the Anti-FGM Board, Hon. Pareyio, was categorical to the sheikhs that as gatekeepers in the community they had a high calling to protect women from any practice that causes harm. She asserted that the supreme law binds all citizens and urged the

sheikhs to inform their community on the law to end the vice, arguing that the law is supreme and supersedes all other inclinations.

“We cannot leave here saying Type 1 or Sunnah is legal. We look at the health consequences of this act, which has proven gruesome. Sexual purity is not determined by FGM but by good upbringing,” asserted Mrs. Pareyio.

The conference was held under theme “Accelerating Investments to End FGM” which is this year’s theme for the International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM.



Photo: Religious leaders participating in the Islamic religious leaders conference to mark Zero Day of Tolerance.

Experts meet to deliberate on data and research on Female Genital Mutilation



Photo: Participants at the UNFPA experts meeting on FGM held in Nairobi, Kenya

Last month, between 22-24 March 2022, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, organized a three day experts meeting on “Data and Research on Female Genital Mutilation,” under the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Elimination of FGM with support from the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme. The meeting aimed to showcase the work of the UNFPA Population Data, FGM Data, and Research fellowship initiative, and galvanize the expertise of various FGM data and research experts as well as other stakeholders towards the use of the most appropriate methodologies and research questions in line with the global FGM research agenda. Furthermore, the meeting sought to establish collaborations with key data and research experts that will provide technical review and feedback on the current and future work of the fellows.

The meeting brought over 100 experts from a variety of sectors including programming, academia, implementing partners, policy makers and community members/stakeholders representing organizations, academic institutions in Europe, United States, Asia and Africa, national statistical offices



Photo: UNFPA Kenya Representative Dr. Ademola Olajide addresses participants at the experts meeting on FGM.

and departments and Government officials. The FGM data and Research Fellows presented seven studies, which included four completed studies and three study proposals.

Addressing participants at the event, Mireille Tushiminina, Global Coordinator of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation said that in its new phase of implementation, the Joint Programme intends to strengthen partnerships with research and academic institutions to support the implementation of the global research strategy and to increase the knowledge and evidence on Female Genital Mutilation,

The meeting also featured the launch of two knowledge products jointly developed by UNFPA and Equality Now, under the Spotlight Initiative. These included a toolkit for journalists and editors on reporting on Female Genital Mutilation and a publication on the Multi-Sectoral Approach to ending Gender-Based Violence and Female Genital Mutilation in 11 Countries in Africa.

The meeting resulted in several outcomes that will help drive FGM data and research, including the formation of a multidisciplinary panel of 12 experts to serve as a peer-review committee. The panel consists of members from academia, FGM programmes, media, youth activist groups and NGOs. Participants also undertook a validation of methodology and results of four FGM studies for submission to peer-review journals, as well as the validation and improvement of the methodology of three study proposals,

Another key outcome was the identification of priority research areas and opportunities for using multinomial statistical methods to improve on current FGM incidence estimates that take into account socio-demographic and other structural factors of FGM



Photo: A panel session on the effectiveness of strategies deployed by NGOs to end FGM.

44 Anti-FGM champions graduate



Photo: 44 anti-FGM champions awarded with certificates after completing a UNFPA sponsored course on sustainable approaches to elimination of FGM.

President Uhuru Kenyatta has condemned FGM as an impediment to women's and girls' achievement of their full potential in national development.

The Head of State spoke during celebrations to mark the International Women's Day 2022 whose theme was: "Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow." The national celebrations were held at the Kenya School of Government, Lower Kabete Campus.

President Uhuru Kenyatta was accompanied by the First Lady of the Republic of Kenya, Her Excellency Margaret Kenyatta; the First Lady of the Republic of Rwanda, Her Excellency Jeannette Kagame, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs and Special Programmes, Prof. Margaret Kobia, and other dignitaries.

Speaking at the event, the Head of State lauded women's achievements over the years but decried the "systemic, structural and cultural barriers"

that have impeded realization of their full potential.

The President appreciated the progress made thus far in the elimination of the archaic practice and applauded community leaders such as cultural elders and religious leaders for supporting Government efforts to root it out.

"FGM undermines the participation of girls in education and ultimately national development. I laud the cultural elders, particularly the Borana, Pokot, and Samburu elders for their bold declarations to eliminate FGM, with the most recent one being the Kisima Declaration by the Samburu elders which I personally witnessed," stated the President.

The President also lauded the creation of a special unit for the prosecution of FGM cases by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions as a catalyst to deter the perpetration of the practice.

During the ceremony, 44 anti-FGM champions, a male and a female from the 22 FGM hotspot coun-

ties were recognized and awarded certificates after successfully undergoing a one-week programme on “Sustainable Approaches to the Elimination of FGM in Kenya developed by the Anti-FGM Board in conjunction with the Kenya School of Government and with UNFPA.

The 44 trainees were selected for the programme in recognition of their outstanding sustained campaigns and advocacy against FGM in their respective counties. They are the 2nd Cohort to be trained at the Centre for Gender Studies and Social Development at the Kenya School of Government that was officially inaugurated on the IWD by the Head of State.

While presiding over the colourful event, the First Lady of the Republic of Kenya, Her Excellency Margaret Kenyatta, noted that FGM is the worst form of gender-based violence meted on girls and women, and urged for collective efforts to end it.

“I commend you for the outstanding work that you have done and the commitment you have demonstrated to bring this practice to an end,” stated the First Lady.

“I congratulate you on this great achievement. Go out there and serve the community using the knowledge

and experience that you have shared together,” added Mrs. Kenyatta.

The Anti-FGM Board’s Chairperson emeritus, Hon. Agnes Pareyio, was also awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for her efforts spanning over 20 years to End FGM..

Women who are trailblazers and role models in various spheres were also recognised and awarded. They included the Anti FGM Board Independent Director, Ms. Dianah Kamande, HSC, who was awarded the Dr. Joyce Laboso Award for championing the rights of widows and orphans through her organization, ‘Come Together Widows and Orphans Organization’.

President Kenyatta hailed all the women trailblazers for setting the pace and being good role models to other women and girls, and encouraged them to mentor other women and girls towards a prosperous future. UNFPA supported the anti-FGM Board and the Kenya School of Government to develop curricula for training Government officials on FGM.



Anti-FGM champions celebrate during the graduation ceremony held at the Kenya School of Government, Nairobi.

Community surveillance training empowers anti-FGM champions in Kuria



Photo: A training on community surveillance organized by Msichana Empowerment Kuria.

Msichana Empowerment Kuria is among ten community-based organization supported by UNFPA through World Vision Kenya to promote the abandonment of FGM at the grassroots level. The organization launched a gender equality and women empowerment programme that includes training on community surveillance, targeting various stakeholders who are directly or indirectly affected by FGM. FGM continues to be one of the problems affecting the community in Migori County.

Robi* is a mother of 6 children between the ages of 4 to 16 years old, who has been attending the training sessions. Robi underwent FGM at 13 years old, an ordeal she vividly remembers. After undergoing the cut, she was married off to a man twice her age, and got pregnant almost immediately. She recalls how difficult all her pregnancies were due to prolonged labor, complicated by her condition as an FGM survivor. "The times I have given birth have been some of the most painful experiences in my life," says Robi.

Robi is part of the community surveillance team in her village, and has become one of Msichana



Photo: Participants listen during a women empowerment session on ending FGM.

Empowerment Kuria's biggest supporter and advocate. During the training, she shared her experiences and vowed to never let any of her daughters, or girls known to her, undergo FGM. Since the community surveillance training Robi has been using the knowledge shared on reporting channels, referral pathways and mapping of girls at risk, which has enabled her to rescue 10 vulnerable and at-risk girls in her village.

Gati* is the leader of a local women's group that has also benefited from the community surveillance training. After undergoing FGM at the age of 10, she has endured great suffering in her personal life. "My childbirth experience was painful, and I suffered from fistula which caused me great shame. My husband left me, and the stigma from the community was too much to bear," says Gati. She now knows the importance of having established referral pathways when dealing with FGM.

The community surveillance training has had a positive impact on the community, creating awareness on ways of preventing and responding to FGM. Those trained by the Msichana Empowerment Kuria are helping to spread the message on ending FGM in churches, schools, and at community events. The organization continues to work with trained community members to develop strategies to challenge gender norms that drive harmful practices against women and girls within their communities.

"More women need to be trained on community surveillance tools. We need to empower FGM survivors to lead discussions around ending FGM because they fully understand the impact of the practice on our health and wellbeing," says Robi.



Photo: Local women who are part of the community surveillance network attend a group meeting facilitated by Msichana Empowerment Kuria.

Protecting girls from FGM during the school holidays



Photo: Young girls take a break during a school day in West Pokot County, an FGM hot spot county in Kenya.

The seven weeks school holiday that runs from March to April has left many girls in FGM hotspot counties at risk of undergoing the cut. The break from school means that girls have time to undergo FGM and recover from the wounds without raising any suspicion from school wardens who are obligated to report such cases to authorities. With support from UNFPA, Gecisa Community Based Organisation in Kisii County has ramped up efforts to raise awareness on ending FGM. The organization has been working directly with families of at risk girls to encourage total abandonment of FGM. Engaging men within the households has proven to be an effective strategy for the community based organization. In Ikorongo Location, Masaba South Sub County, a 13 year-old girl was saved from undergoing the cut after her grandfather intervened. "My daughter and the eldest granddaughter underwent FGM because we were still ignorant about the harmful effects of this practice. Now that I am aware of the danger FGM poses, I cannot allow my younger grandchild to suffer the same," says the grandfather. He further promised that if the granddaughter was to undergo FGM, he would make sure that those involved are brought to book.

According to Gecisa CBO officials, male intervention to prevent cases of FGM is an indication of changing norms in the Kisii community, as FGM was widely considered a women's issue. "Men in Kisii blame the persistence of Female Genital Mutilation in the community on women. They shy away from taking responsibility. If men like this grandfather took charge of their families and especially the children, the cut will come to an end in our community at this time. We believe when men take charge, women and girls will attain optimum health and their dignity," says Gesica CBO chairperson

Training male champions to end FGM



Men take part in a group exercise on gender values, as part of a training of male champions organized by Men End FGM in Marigat, Baringo County

With support from UNFPA, the Men End FGM organization has continued to educate boys, young men and elders, who are the cultural custodians in their communities, on the effects of FGM, and their key role in the fight against this practice and transforming negative masculinities. The male champions training aims at equipping the trained male champions with relevant skills and knowledge on the harm women and girls face as a result of the practice, and empowering them to conduct community sensitizations and dialogues. The overall goal of the programme is to create a critical mass of men and boys, actively speaking out against FGM and championing its abandonment. Men End FGM Foundation, in partnership with Hami Imani Africa, UNFPA, World Vision Kenya and the Anti-FGM Board Kenya trained a total of 98 male champions in Kajiado County. The men were drawn from Maili Tisa (32 champions), Kisapuk (32 champions) and Noosikitok (34 champions) locations in Namanga Division.

The training focused on prevention, response and protection of victims of FGM and other forms of Sexual and Gender Based Violence. Trainees were taken through modules such as facilitating change

process, enabling change, gender transformation, effective community dialogues, problem solving, among others.

“For a long time, men in this community have been leaving the girl child and every issue affecting her to their mother. From now onwards, we commit to take an active role in the lives of our daughters,” said one male participant.

“It is the first time I have witnessed the brutality of FGM. I regret having allowed my daughters to go through it. None of my remaining daughters and granddaughters will go through this ever. I am taking this as my responsibility to protect them against the harmful practice,” said another.

As part of programme monitoring, the trained male champions were facilitated to conduct community dialogues in their villages to disseminate the learnings and raise awareness amongst their peers on the need to eliminate FGM. Community dialogues were conducted, where a total of 277 people from Noosikitok, Eluanata and Oletumuke villages were reached. These community dialogue sessions brought to the fore the hunger with

which the far-to-reach areas are yearning for more sensitization on the law, need of empowering the girl-child through education and challenging young men to accept to marry girls who have not undergone FGM.

The community dialogues presented further learnings which will be used to strengthen outreach and training of the male champions. Some of the notable highlights of the dialogues include the difference of opinion expressed between men and women - each blame the other for facilitating FGM, with mothers stating that it is men who ask them to take their daughters for the cut as soon as they are in their adolescence. Men distanced themselves from the practice saying, traditionally, girls' issues are left to their mothers and they have no role to play with regards to when a girl is subjected to FGM.

The issue of poverty and the value of bride price was noted as a key driver of FGM. A girl who has undergone FGM fetches higher bridewealth for the family. As such, FGM is seen as a means of enhancing a family's livelihood through which they will get more heads of cattle when the girl is married off. FGM is also more prevalent in areas with

high illiteracy levels and low exposure to urban centers. Girls living in rural areas are more likely to undergo FGM as they have been made to believe that failure to undergo FGM means they will not be eligible for marriage. Consequently, this has fueled the perpetuation of FGM albeit in high secrecy.

Through collaboration with Men End FGM, UNFPA continues to expand the engagement of men and boys with the goal of challenging and changing social norms while enlisting the support of male partners in promoting and achieving gender equality.



Photo: Participants interact at a male champions training event organised by Men End FGM.



Photo: A facilitator addresses participants during a training of male champions on FGM prevention and response.

Young men working to accelerate an end to GBV and FGM in their communities



Photo: Participants of the #Nitasimamalmara workshop conducted by UNFPA and Thriving Communities Africa

Addressing gender-based inequality and discrimination – including by engaging men and boys - contributes to better health outcomes for everyone. Young men are valuable allies in changing socio-cultural norms and attitudes, and getting messages out to their peers, and other men on the devastating effects of gender-based violence and harmful practices such as FGM and child marriage. With support from UNFPA, Thriving Communities Africa has been working to empower young men and boys as champions of gender equality to end gender-based violence and FGM, under the Nitasimama Imara (I will Stand Firm) initiative. The empowerment sessions include training on the harmful effects of FGM, and the challenges that survivors face including health complications and psychosocial difficulties.

During the first quarter of 2022, the initiative has reached more than 1000 young men and boys through dialogues conducted in the community and in schools, focusing on FGM hotspots in Kenya, including West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet and Baringo counties. This has created male champions



Photo: Facilitator and founder of Thriving Africa Communities, Faith Nashipae with a male anti-FGM champion in Elgeyo Marakwet County.

who are well versed with prevention strategies and referral pathways for at-risk women and girls and survivors of FGM and other harmful practices such as child marriage and gender-based violence.

Nitasimama Imara champions are working towards creating interventions that are tailored to their community needs, so as to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. As part of their learning, they are encouraged to seek a better understanding of the structural and socio-cultural barriers to progress with regards to gender equality and ending FGM as well as other challenges that may hinder access to care and services for survivors of FGM and GBV.

“Through my role as a Nitasimama Imara champion, I have become more aware of the need to have culturally-sensitive FGM care, and the importance of ensuring confidentiality and privacy is given to women and girls within the hot spot areas. Many face financial, physical, and communication barriers

while seeking care, which is largely due to the taboo associated with matters to do with sexual and reproductive health,” says a male champion. The champions conduct regular outreach activities targeting members of the community, sharing FGM and GBV prevention messages. They have also been involved in rescue missions which include linking survivors of FGM to referral services such as legal aid, shelters, and health facilities where they can get help.

Involving young men in the prevention of FGM is changing the mindset of a new generation and creating new social norms that will herald an end to the practice. “Young men who in the past would have refused to marry a woman who has not undergone FGM have now begun to embrace the message that FGM does more harm than good, and they are going against cultural norms to partner with them,” says Thriving Communities Executive Director, Faith Nashipae.



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