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on
Ending
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Message from the Representative

The Generation Equality Forum held in Paris from 30th June - 2nd July concluded with the announcement of significant commitments to accelerate gender equality by 2026.

At the forum, His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta outlined Kenya's commitment framework on ending all forms of GBV and FGM by 2026.

The continued leadership of His Excellency's government in ensuring the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls serves as a guiding light for civil society, international organizations, and the private sector towards addressing issues impacting women's lives and livelihoods across the country. Ensuring the full enjoyment of zero FGM requires zero tolerance for gender-based violence and all other harmful practices, as well as the gender inequalities that place women at a disadvantage both socially and economically.

UNFPA remains steadfast in the commitment to deploy tangible, practical, and ambitious measures to create an enabling environment for the elimination of FGM, through scaled up prevention programs and comprehensive, accessible, affordable, and quality services for survivors of FGM

and other forms of gender-based violence. The FGM-free generation that we envision lies in the choices and voices of the young people. We recognize their zeal, acknowledge their challenges, and pledge our presence to translate their aspirations into transformative results. We affirm our solidarity with the curve of their dreams towards a safe and equal society.

Our support to the government, grassroots organizations, and leading anti-FGM champions continues to move the needle in the journey towards an FGM free Kenya by 2022. As we race against time to achieve this goal, an increase in accountability, participation and support towards anti-FGM programmes is needed amongst stakeholders. This includes capacity strengthening, awareness raising, monitoring and advocacy efforts whose momentum must be accelerated to end FGM not only within our borders, but across the world.

Dr. Ademola Olajide
UNFPA Representative
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Youth activists feted for leading fight against female genital mutilation in Kenya



Photo: Dr Ademola Olajide, UNFPA Representative and Caroline Murgor, Gender GBV Advisor UNFPA, pose for a photo with the 22 youth conferred the Youth Anti-FGM award, during the launch of the Generation Equality campaign in Kenya.



Photo: Journalist and anti-FGM champion Noelli Lillian displays her award.

Young people working to end FGM in Kenya have been lauded for their efforts in accelerating progress towards upholding the rights of women and girls in their communities. The 22 youth were conferred the “Youth Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Recognition Award” by President Uhuru Kenyatta at an event held to mark the launch of the Generation Equality Forum campaign in Kenya.

Among those awarded was Sadia Hussein, an anti-FGM champion from Tana River County who leads Dayaa Women’s Group that mobilizes FGM survivors to campaign against the practice at the community level. “If today you were sitting here without your lips or noses, we would all sympathise. But we speak of more than 4 million women and girls in Kenya living without their genitalia who endure pain and suffering in silence. We must ensure the next generation inherits an FGM free world,’ said Sadia.

To advance the commitments made at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 in 2019, UNFPA continues to support the work of youth-led movements aimed at ending FGM in

Kenya. In partnership with the Ministry of Public Service and Gender, UNFPA sponsored the presidential award that seeks to recognize youth champions from across the country who have played a critical role in the implementation of President Kenyatta's commitment to end FGM in the country by 2022. "UNFPA is proud to support the diligent work of the youth anti-FGM network operating within Kenya's hotspot counties, and we are happy to see some of them recognized here today," said UNFPA representative Dr. Ademola Olajide.

To advance the commitments made at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 in 2019, UNFPA continues to support the work of youth-led movements aimed at ending FGM in Kenya

Awardee Kelly Karimi runs Enlightened Generation, an organization that fights for the rights of young girls in Thara-ka Nithi County. "Our greatest plea is for authorities to work closely with grassroots organizations in protecting women and girls from gender-based violence and FGM," she says.

Other youth awarded were Tony Mwebia, founder of the Men End FGM movement that trains male champions on prevention of FGM. Vincent Mwita, who leads the Youth Anti-FGM Chapter in Migori county was also recognized for his role in rallying the youth to challenge the gender inequalities and social norms that perpetrate the harmful practice.

President Kenyatta thanked the young people for their tireless work which has contributed towards advancing the implementation of the presidential commitment to end FGM in Kenya by 2022. "Your efforts will lead to powerful intergenerational outcomes for generations to come," said the President.

As a co-leader in the Generation Equality Action Co-



Photo: UNFPA Representative Dr. Ademola Olajide makes remarks at the Generation Equality campaign launch.

alition on Ending Gender-Based Violence, Kenya has committed to strengthening the legislation and policy framework for the elimination of FGM by 2022. While announcing a new roadmap for advancing gender equality and ending all forms of gender-based violence and female genital mutilation by 2026, President Kenyatta committed to the allocation of USD 2.79 million to GBV and FGM, to be gradually increased to a minimum budget allocation of USD 5million in subsequent years.



Photo: Si Kelly, Youth Activist and Anti-FGM champion with her award.

I have rejuvenated energy and passion towards ending FGM in Kenya



UNFPA, Youth Advisory Panel member, Leshan Kereto, and media personality, Anne Kiguta, at the launch of the Generation Equality campaign in Nairobi, Kenya.

Article by Leshan Kereto, student leader and Anti-FGM champion.

I was honored to be among a delegation of youth present at the launch of the Generation Equality campaign in Kenya, where President Uhuru Kenyatta outlined commitments aimed at advancing gender equality in the country. It was an exciting moment when His Excellency called out the names of youth anti-FGM champions to receive the recognition award for outstanding efforts towards ending FGM by 2022.

I was amongst those recognized, alongside 21 others in a most remarkable moment where we felt like strong pillars towards the achievement of the presidential commitment to end the cut in Kenya by 2022.

The recognition and award of our efforts to end FGM by the President energized spirit, zeal and patriotism among fellow members of the Youth Anti-FGM Network Kenya (YANK).

In the presence of the top government leaders, partners and stakeholders, I took to the podium to candidly speak about the role of young people, particularly students, in changing cultural norms and shaping a generation that is free of female genital mutilation, gender based violence and social injustice.

I was dressed in the full Maasai regalia to signify the transformation of our cultural practices towards respecting the rights of women and girls. I spoke about the need to train university students as advocates against FGM. This will create a body of professionals who will bring transformative action in all organs of society and inspire change in their communities.

The Generation Equality event further united youth champions of ending female genital mutilation as we had a chance to interact and share our experiences.

With the slogan, “*pesa ifike kwa ground*,” (funds must reach the grassroots), we brought forth the need to increase funding to grassroots organizations, involvement of the youth in policy formulation and implementation, alongside mentorship to strengthen our advocacy towards ending FGM. This was echoed and supported by various government departments, partners and stakeholders who duly expressed their dedication to young people.

The launch of the Generation Equality Forum expressed to us as young people that we have a shot in shaping and actualizing a generation that we have always envisioned. That is, a society founded in a beautiful culture of norms and values that respect the rights of girls and women paving the way for gender equality and creating a threat-free environment in which girls and women can pursue their goals and dreams.

With the four strong sub themes in the roadmap to Ending Gender Based Violence, Kenya has shown exemplary global leadership and commitment towards eliminating all forms of gender based violence by 2026.



Photo: Chief Administrative Secretary Ministry of Public Service and Gender, Hon. Lina Jebii Kilimo, congratulates Leshan Kereto on his award.



Photo: Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Public Service and Gender, Prof. Margaret Kobia and Principal Secretary, Ministry of Public Service and Gender, Prof. Collette Suda, present Leshan Kereto with the youth Anti-FGM award.

Investing in girls' education to eradicate FGM



Photo: I-Rep Foundation founder, Domtila Chesang, with girls from Kotulpogh Village, West Pokot County.

"I was able to escape FGM because I had been to school and could speak up and say no as I understood my rights," says anti-FGM champion, Domtila Chesang. She is amongst 22 young people to receive the "Youth Anti Female Genital Mutilation Recognition Award" presented by President Uhuru Kenyatta. Domtila was recognized for her contributions in advancing women's and girls rights and the eradication of FGM in West Pokot. She is the founder of I-rep Foundation, a community based organization that receives support in implementing anti-FGM initiatives at a grassroots level with support from UNFPA.

A fierce champion of girls' education, Domtila is helping girls living in some of the most remote parts of West Pokot County to access learning opportunities and escape harmful practices such as FGM and child marriage. While traversing the county on an anti-FGM campaign launched through I-rep Foundation, she landed in Kotulpogh Village, a secluded locality within Masol Ward in Central Pokot Sub county. "We heard about this village in 2020 from a religious leader

who had recently moved there. We were astonished at how remote and abandoned it was. There were no schools nearby, and the high rate of FGM and child marriage within the community were particularly concerning," says Domtila. The nearest health facility is located nearly 100 kilometres from Kotulpogh. Dry and harsh climatic conditions make farming a near impossibility, and residents rely on their livestock for a livelihood.

I-rep Foundation embarked on several community dialogues to develop a greater understanding of the challenges facing village residents. In addition to high poverty levels that have curtailed access to basic necessities such as food, medicines and sanitary hygiene products, mothers decried the lack of education facilities and expressed a desire to have their daughters enrolled in school. Domtila approached her former school, Ortum Girls Boarding Primary, who agreed to enroll ten girls from Kotulpogh Village. With funds raised from well-wishers, I-rep Foundation was able to purchase school necessities for the girls ranging from 9-11 years in age. "After a term in school, we brought the girls

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back home for a visit, and facilitated the parents to tour the school and see where their children study. This helped ease minds and we now have 16 girls from the village enrolled at Ortum,” says Domtila. As part of the anti-FGM campaign, I-rep foundation also organized a father-daughter dialogue session aimed at strengthening bonds between fathers and their young girls and promoting child protection amongst men.

“I’m glad to say that our efforts are bearing fruit, and the 16 girls currently enrolled in school will be spared from FGM and child marriage thanks to the commitment made by their parents,” reports Domtila. She is proud of the recognition she received through the presidential award, which has further propelled her dedication to the eradication of FGM in the community. “If we want to end FGM, we must invest in girl’s education. This will give them the power to stand up for their human rights and confer value on women and girls beyond marriage, which is one of the primary reasons why many chose to undergo FGM,” says Domtila.

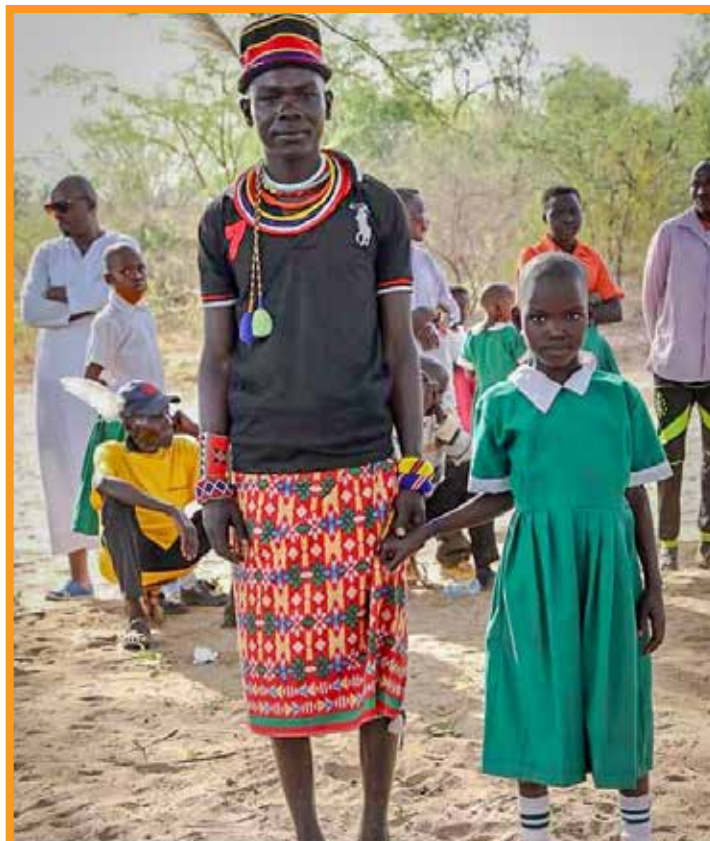


Photo: A father poses with his daughter during the father-daughter dialogue session.



Photo: I-Rep Foundation founder Domtila Chesang is conferred blessings by the Pokot elders at a ceremony to mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM.

A reformed circumciser now saving girls' lives in Lokis community



In Lokis, West Pokot county, female genital mutilation has derailed the pursuit of education for many young girls, negatively impacting the community's development. Enrolment in early childhood education and primary school is low, as girls as young as seven years are subjected to FGM. Many girls are forced to drop out of school shortly after the cut, since they are considered ready for marriage and few ever make it back to class after becoming early brides. With support from UNFPA, World Vision Kenya and the Girl Child Promotion Project responded to this worrying trend by introducing alternative rites of passage programmes and a sustained anti-FGM campaign in Lokis that aims to change cultural and social norms that drive the practice.

Thirty-two year old Chepsukun is a reformed circumciser living in Natira village located within Lokis. "My mother was a circumciser and she would call me to watch as she performed the cut. At times she would ask me to help her with lesser duties during FGM ceremonies, and soon I began cutting girls on my own," she says. Over 14 years, Chepsukun cut nearly 250 girls, earning Kshs 1,000 (approximately \$10) per girl. She was among community members who attended a session on ending FGM organized by World Vision,

which convinced her to abandon the practice. "We were taught about the effects of FGM and laws that prohibit the act. After listening to survivor testimonies, I was shocked and that is when I decided to change."

The anti-FGM campaign seeks to sensitize community members on existing government policies and child protection laws, working with them to establish community-led solutions to end FGM. This approach has helped identify alternative livelihood sources for reformed circumcisers such as Chepsukun, that has helped accelerate their abandonment of the practice. "I received training on farming methods and World Vision provided me with farm inputs. I now have a garden where I plant vegetable and sell at a local market," says Chepsukun. She earns \$3 a day from trading vegetables, which goes towards her children's education and family sustenance.

Chepsukun and other reformed circumcisers have gone against cultural norms in abandoning a trade that has been passed on for generations. Although her friends have tried to discourage her efforts, she remains committed to fighting FGM in the community, having made up her mind to be-

A unified approach to FGM prevention in Elgeyo Marakwet County.

Elgeyo Marakwet is one of the six priority counties covered in the implementation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation. According to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS) 2014, prevalence rate amongst the Kalenjin, the county's largest community, is 27.9%. FGM is practised as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood in this community, and is largely seen as a requirement for women and girls to be socially accepted in the community.

Over the years, UNFPA has supported various efforts to eliminate FGM in the county, documenting lessons learned and best approaches that have been well adapted within the FGM practicing communities. In 2020, a surveillance reference framework for effective identification, reporting and referral of FGM incidents was rolled out in Elgeyo Marakwet County which resulted in the mapping of 450 vulnerable women and girls at risk of undergoing the cut. The Joint Programme also supported elders in the county to cascade the national level commitments on ending FGM through inter-generational dialogues sessions and radio talk shows.

A team from the UNFPA Kenya Country Office re-



Photo: A religious leader in Elgeyo Marakwet speaks against FGM.

cently undertook a field monitoring visit to the county to learn more from various stakeholders the on progress and challenges faced in ending FGM. At a community dialogue organised by UNFPA's partner, World Vision Kenya, the council of elders lauded alternative rites of passage as an ideal strategy to engage young girls and sensitize them on their rights. They however stressed on the need to involve cultural elders from the onset of such interventions, as they are a voice of influence offering blessings for any event and activity undertaken in the community.

The dialogue also identified challenges created by traditional initiation processes that influence young men's attitudes towards FGM by wrongfully extolling the cut as a rite of passage for girls, signifying their eligibility for marriage. In response to the effects of these male initiation processes, the church has stepped in to introduce alternative initiation classes for boys where they are guided on the harmful effects of negative cultural practices against women and girls.

The County Government of Elgeyo Marakwet has made progress in drafting a County Anti-FGM Bill which once adopted



Photo: Engagement of security forces in Elgeyo Marakwet County to accelerate the abandonment of FGM in the region.

will serve as a legal instrument that supports efforts to eliminate FGM. County Governor, H.E Alex Tolgos, made commitments to allocate resources in the financial year towards FGM prevention and response interventions in the wards with a high prevalence of FGM cases.

Emerging trends that require immediate interventions were also discussed, including a worrying increase in the number of adult women seeking to undergo FGM. This was attributed to social exclusion where women who have not undergone FGM have been denied participation in community ceremonies and important meetings. In order to conform to societal expectations, the women have presented themselves for FGM so as to fit into the community. Elgeyo Marakwet County Commissioner Dr. Ahmed Omar says that county law enforcement officers have received training through the Anti FGM Board on responding to FGM cases. "Several arrests have been made, but further sensitization of the community is needed to avert new incidences of FGM," he said.



Photo: Viola Cherono, Youth representative and anti-FGM champion in Elgeyo Marakwet County gives her remarks during the youth dialogue



Photo: Speaker of the Elgeyo Marakwet County Assembly, Hon. Philemon Sabulei, makes remarks during a UNFPA field mission to the County.

Director of Public Prosecution unveils Standard Operating Procedures to strengthen FGM elimination efforts.



The passing of the Prohibition of FGM Act 2011 outlawed the practice in Kenya by making FGM a criminal activity punishable by up to 3 years in prison. Kenya is therefore regarded as one of the progressive countries in launching a campaign against FGM due to the various legal frameworks and structures in place that act as a deterrent to would be perpetrators. These include the establishment of the Anti-FGM Board that is mandated to advise the Government on matters relating to female genital mutilation, as well as an anti-FGM prosecution unit under the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, tasked with fast-tracking investigation and prosecution of FGM cases.

Despite these advances, prosecution of FGM cases remains a herculean task. Challenges such as poor handling of evidence have resulted in dismissal of cases by the courts. Witnesses withholding information due to a fear of reprisal by community members has also hindered the quest for justice, while a lack of established access to justice protocols has resulted in poor coordination and consistency in investigating and prosecuting FGM cases.



Photo: Director of Public Prosecutions Noordin Haji gives remarks during the validation workshop on FGM standards operating procedures (SOP).

To deal with such gaps, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to enhance efficiency and consistency in ensuring that perpetrators of FGM are punished. UNFPA recently supported the ODPP in holding a validation workshop on the SOPs. Participants included a range of stakeholders from State and non-state institutions who termed the SOPs as a critical step in strengthening the fight against FGM. During the workshop, Director of Public Prosecutions Dr. Noor Hajji further announced the establishment of a special unit of 50 officers exclusively tasked with leading the prosecution of FGM cases in the country's 22 hotspot counties.

FGM has affected over 200 Million women and girls globally, with over 4.1 million girls at risk of the practice annually. In Kenya, nearly 5 million women have undergone the cut, and despite its illegal status, the culture continues abetted by secrecy and deep seated cultural beliefs amongst practicing communities. "With the launch of an all-female prosecution unit, we hope to build confidence among at risk girls who can provide witness evidence that would go a long way in building our cases in courts," said Hajji.



Photo: UNFPA staff Asenath Mwithigah gives remarks during a workshop held to validate the standard operating procedures (SOPs).



Photo from left to right: Director of Public Prosecutions, Noordin Haji, UNFPA National Project Professional Personnel on FGM, Asenath Mwithigah, Anti- FGM Board CEO, Bernadette Loloju, and International Association of Women Judges Chair, Lady Justice Agnes.



Photo: UNFPA staff Satsuki Arai is adorned with traditional Pokot beadwork. With support from UNFPA, women in Pokot have adapted beadwork as a source of income to help in the elimination of FGM in the community.

Beadwork empowers women to end FGM in Kenya's hotspot counties.



In 2019, H.E President Uhuru Kenyatta made a clear commitment to end FGM in Kenya by 2022. This Presidential directive energized State and non-State actors to accelerate their efforts to eradicate FGM across the country. In the same year, UNFPA in partnership with the Government of Kenya, the Anti-FGM Board, Ushanga Kenya and Eco Bank launched the “Johari Beads Initiative” which supports local women’s groups in the creation and marketing of beaded jewelry.

Johari Beads aims to improve women’s livelihood by providing them with a sustainable source of income, thus empowering them as agents of change in their communities. Evidence shows that social economic empowerment of women is instrumental in the abandonment of FGM as this gives the survivors, who are women and girls, the capacity to stand up against the violation and speak up for themselves and others.

Under the initiative, Women’s groups from seven FGM hotspot counties were selected to receive training on beadwork skills and support the brand-

ing and marketing of the handmade beaded jewelry. The women have so far been able to engage in retail businesses, selling the beaded products to pay for their day to day needs. Income generated from the sales is also used to pay for their daughters’ education, ensuring that they remain in school and safe from harmful practices such as FGM.

During a recent monitoring field visit by UNFPA, women involved in beadwork in Narok and West Pokot counties spoke of the transformation they have witnessed in their lives and in the community as a result of the project. “I have managed to construct a permanent house and educate my children from the proceeds of this beadwork,” said one member of the Maasai Treasures Women’s Group. In Sigor, West Pokot County, reformed cutters have embraced beadwork as an alternative income generating activity after abandoning the FGM practice. “This business is better as it allows me to use my skills without causing any harm or hiding from the law,” said one reformed cutter. With a new sense of agency, the women are am-

plifying their voices in advocating for an end to harmful practices such as FGM, child marriage, and gender-based violence.

UNFPA Kenya seeks to empower more women to engage in beadwork through the Johari Beads initiative by providing raw materials and training in the design and making of beaded products. The initiative will continue to target women living in FGM practicing communities, offering an alternative source of income that will accelerate the abandonment of FGM. During the field visit, the women spoke of challenges faced in growing their business, including the need for reliable power sources to facilitate beadwork during evening hours. The women are currently forced to light bonfires in the evening in order to carry out the delicate work of weaving jewelry from tiny beads.

UNFPA Kenya is seeking partnership with a Japanese company Panasonic, to provide Solar Lanterns to the women which will ease their work and provide much needed light to their homesteads.



Photo: The Johari bracelets produced through the Ushanga Initiative geared towards the economic empowerment of women



Photo: A woman from the Maasai community showcases her beads

Strengthening grassroots movements to end FGM in Kenya



Photo: Capacity building of Pastoralist Child Foundation, a community based organisation supported by UNFPA

Grassroot organizations play a key role in management on issues of FGM.

mobilizing collective action needed to drive social change. Building the capacity of these institutions is key to transforming communities and responding to issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and other harmful cultural practices that curtail women and girls potential. UNFPA through World Vision Kenya supports community-based organizations (CBOs) working towards the elimination of FGM by strengthening skills and providing resources to aid in the development of sustainable, community-led solutions that can propel the country towards zero FGM by 2022.

Community-based organizations working under UNFPA's partnership with World Vision took part in a training workshop held in Naivasha, from 9-10 June 2021. The training focused on programme implementation, policies, and documentation modalities aimed at strengthening anti-FGM activities at a community level. The grassroots organizations have been tasked with raising awareness, supporting capacity building of duty bearers and service providers, strengthening community surveillance mechanisms, and strengthening community-led data collection and

The support to the CBOs also aims to strengthen the organizations' institutional structures and systems that can enhance their capacity to access access to donor funding while helping them grow into self-reliant institutions. The programme is further envisioned to grow a movement of CBOs working with local champions and community activists to showcase issues and trends from the grassroots levels to the national platform. The resulting data and evidence will be used to inform how best to apply sustainable and community-led interventions to strengthen the campaign to eliminate FGM in Kenya.

By the end of the programme, the CBOs will have contributed towards the elimination of FGM through efforts aimed at transforming social and gender norms that underpin the practice. Lessons learnt from the programme will also be used to formulate strategies and tools to ensure that UNFPA best supports efforts to empower women and girls, and accelerate achievement of an FGM free world as envisioned by the United Nations Joint Programme on the elimination of FGM.

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The socio-cultural realities of FGM in West Pokot County.



Photo: Women in West Pokot County listen to proceedings of the elders making a declaration to abandon FGM in their community during the International Day of Zero Tolerance of FGM.

Joanne is an ardent anti-FGM crusader in West Pokot County who knows only too well the pressures that cultural norms and beliefs can bear on families working to protect women and girls from the effects of the cut. As a widowed mother of three sons and a daughter, she has been helping her children navigate the impact of FGM while living in a community that is not quite ready to give up the harmful practice.

“My son’s teenage girlfriend became pregnant during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. She is a survivor of FGM.” Upon realizing that she was pregnant, the girl’s parents distanced themselves from her Joanne says, a staunch Christian, decided to pay bride wealth to the girl’s family and took her in, as she didn’t have any other shelter or place to call home. Joanne understood the risks that the young mother faced and the complications that could arise during child birth as a result of FGM. She therefore made every effort to support the young couple through the process

“My son’s girlfriend became pregnant during the pandemic lockdown. She is a survivor of FGM,” she says. Upon realizing that she was pregnant, the girl’s parents distanced themselves from her.” Joanne

It did not escape the community’s notice that the anti-FGM advocate had now embraced an FGM survivor into her family, with some criticising her stance as contradictory. “Despite the ridicule, I fully embraced my son’s girlfriend and even encouraged her to go back to school after giving birth. She knows that I support her education and fully embrace her as part of the family,” says Joanne.

On the flip side, Joanne's daughter has faced a different set of challenges due to the fact that she has not undergone FGM. After marrying a young teacher from the community, her in-laws refused to accept her and negative societal pressure forced the couple to relocate to a different village.

These are the sad realities facing families that have chosen to go against cultural norms in rejecting FGM. For Joanne and her children, psychosocial support has been paramount in helping them overcome family division and community ridicule. UNFPA works with partners such as World Vision to provide psychosocial services at the community level, through community dialogues and outreach led by anti-FGM champions. Residents such as Joanne receive psychosocial first aid and legal support as part of the integrated GBV prevention,

UNFPA works with partners such as World Vision to provide psychosocial services at a community level, through community dialogues and outreach led by anti-FGM champions.

protection and care services for girls and women. So far, 1,114 women and girls have benefited from services provided by trained first aiders. World Vision Kenya has coordinated the establishment of a child protection unit that provides support and temporary shelter for children who have been rescued from FGM and child marriage in West Pokot County as their cases are looked into by authorities.

Joanne has fully embraced her daughter-in-law and provides her with care and support to make her feel as part of her family. On the other hand, she regularly checks on her daughter and provides the support and care required to deal with the societal pressure and backlash she has received as an uncircumcised woman.



Photo: Elders in West Pokot County make a declaration to end FGM in their community .

Supporting medical professionals in eliminating medicalization of FGM.



Medicalization of FGM has over the years been one of the new shifts/emerging trends in the practice of FGM and is higher among younger generations across countries in Sub-Sahara Africa with Kenya being third of highest practising countries. Egypt leads at (82%), Sudan (78%), Kenya (20%) and Nigeria (12%) for medically cut young women. In comparison, the rate of older generations in the same countries undergoing medical FGM stands at 38%; 67%; 15% & 13% respectively (Shell-Duncan et al, 2017).

“Medicalization” of FGM refers to situations in which FGM is practiced by any category of a health care provider, whether in a public or a private clinic, at home or elsewhere. In Kenya, medicalized FGM is largely performed by clinical officers, nurses and midwives. Doctors and other health professionals are also involved in this vice. Kisii County is a hotspot for medicalization of FGM in Kenya with majority of girls (0-14 years) being cut by healthcare workers. Other counties where this is happening are Garissa, Narok, Kajiado and Nairobi.

County governments of Kisii and Migori have taken steps to address FGM with support from the UNFPA and UNICEF Joint programme on the elimination of FGM. In 2020, the County launched the county specific minimum service package for ending FGM and a county specific costed action plan for ending FGM. UNFPA has also supported other 22 FGM hotspot counties to develop policies and action plans to end FGM. These are in the process of being rolled-out by the State Department for Gender.

Medicalization of FGM refers to situations in which FGM is practiced by any category of health care provider,

FGM performed by healthcare professionals creates implicit approval of the practice, and sustains it amongst non-health care providers. This is because of the high status the professionals occupy in the society and their communities. FGM carried out by health care providers may lead to a total shift rather than abandonment of the practice, and it is therefore paramount that the practice is put to a stop. Medicalization of FGM violates the expectation of health workers to “do no harm” and the government-wide legal and policy framework on banning any form of FGM.

At the recently held 48th Kenya Medical Association Annual Scientific Conference, UNFPA partnered with the Africa Coordinating Centre for the Abandonment of FGM (ACCAF) to lead a session on ending medicalization of FGM. The discussion focused on possible solutions to address the trend, including engaging healthcare providers in social norm change campaigns that raise awareness on FGM, its complications, and

the importance of ending medicalization.

UNFPA has supported ACCAF to develop an e-learning tool for utilization in addressing the knowledge and skills gap on FGM. The tool will be instrumental in closing any knowledge and skill gaps present amongst healthcare workers, as FGM is not exhaustively covered in the medical training curricula.



Photo: UNFPA Gender/GBV programme analyst Dinah Mutinda ran the UNFPA stand at the 48th Kenya Medical Association Annual Scientific Conference.

Using menstrual health education as a pathway to ending FGM

Menstruation just like female genital mutilation (FGM) remains a taboo subject among the Maasai community of Kajiado County. The two are tightly linked as FGM among the Maasai is practiced between the age of 9-14 years the same age when a girl is expected to experience menarche.

In Oloilalei Village in Kajiado East, an intervention supported by UNFPA through the Youth Anti FGM Network Kenya (YANK), is helping break the taboo on both issues. The Vijana Zuia project uses community dialogues on menstrual hygiene management as a gateway to raising awareness on the harmful effects of FGM on the health of women and girls. The project is facilitated by a YANK member organization Malkia Initiative Foundation. “Conversations around menstruation are hardly brought to the table within the Maasai community. We train teachers and community gatekeepers on menstrual health and hygiene management, and how to have the conversations with young girls under their care,” says Malkia Initiative’s Executive Director, Jedidah Lemaron.

The organization also distributes sanitary towels and other hygiene products to adolescent girls in primary schools across the county. “During the pandemic, distribution of UNFPA provided dignity kits provided a great opportunity to reach girls and their caregivers with essential hygiene products.



Photo: Jedidah Lemaron, Founder, Malkia initiative, shows girls how to use menstrual products.

While they were elated to receive the packs, we also took the opportunity to educate them on the harmful effects of FGM,” adds Ms. Lemaron.

The approach is bearing fruit as observed at Iltilal Primary School, where in a period of one year the enrolment of girls has surpassed that of boys. The dropout rate amongst girls has also reduced, which Ms. Lemaron credits to an emerging movement of women and girls who are more aware of the need to safeguard their neighbours’ wellbeing and ensure that FGM and child marriage are prevented. “We created sanitary pad banks in schools where girls can access free menstrual products. This has also decreased absenteeism due to menstruation.”

In Kisapuk Primary School, Malkia Initiative launched menstrual health education sessions targeting parents as a way to break the silence and gain trust from the community. After months of dialogue, the team introduced the subject of ending FGM, which resulted in a commitment by parents to protect young girls from undergoing FGM.



Photo: Jedidah Lemaron, Founder, Malkia initiative, and adolescent girls celebrate their menstrual products.

In Kisapuk Primary school, Malkia Initiative launched menstrual health education sessions targeting parents as a way to break the silence and gain trust from the community.

The Vijana Zuia project has also carried out engagements with duty bearers including local chiefs and community gatekeepers. Youth involved in the project also carry out awareness activities in their villages, with a particular focus on dialogues with women who are the main custodians of their daughters, with influence over whether they will undergo FGM or not.

“Efforts by young people working within their communities are bearing fruit, but more support is needed to ensure that the work we are doing continues until every girl is safe from FGM,” says Ms. Lemaron.



Photo: Jedidah Lemaron, Founder, Malkia initiative, gives remarks during the UNFPA, Anti-FGM Youth Caravan in 2020



Photo: Members of Vijana Zuia project pose with young girls after distribution of dignity kits in Kajiado East.

Editorial: FGM a danger to girls and women's menstrual health.

By Bridgit Kurgat, Programmes Manager, Days for Girls International, and Dr. Ademola Olajide, UNFPA Representative.



Photo: Adolescent girls in Meru County with dignity kits provided by UNFPA Kenya

Despite menstruation being a deeply private and sensitive topic, and one that is not often spoken about in public, Menstrual Hygiene Day, celebrated on May 28th, gives an opportunity to shed light on the inequality that girls and women experience because of menstruation. A day like today in 2020, the Kenyan government launched its first Menstrual Hygiene Management Policy. It subsequently published a Kenyan Reusable Sanitary Towels Standard later in the year to offer girls and women choices. These steps showed that menstrual equity is a critical factor for the advancement of the country given that menstrual health has a direct impact on the education sector and economy.

On average, a woman menstruates for about 3,000 days in her lifetime. However, globally, an estimated 500 million women and girls lack adequate menstrual health resources to manage their periods. Without menstrual products, supportive infrastructure such as toilets and water, and appropriate health education, women and girls face significant restrictions in their life. Men-



Photo: Bridgit Kurgat, Programmes Manager, Days for Girls International.

strual stigma and taboos also hinder gender equality in many ways, as periods have been used as a reason to exclude women from social, economic and religious activities in societies around the world

Despite menarche being a biological process worth celebrating, it means a rite of passage to adulthood in some communities, which can only be complete through female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM is a practice that involves altering or injuring the female genitalia for non-medical reasons and UNFPA estimates that 68 million girls globally are at risk of being mutilated by 2030.

FGM leads to obstruction of the vaginal opening which may cause irregular menses, and difficulty in passing menstrual blood. Some women and girls end up having menstrual flow for up to 14 days, and by the time they are done with their cycle, another is about to start. This means that some girls miss out on going to school for up to one week due to severe pain, or the need to escape physical exercises stipulated in the school curriculum. Further, women and girls who have undergone the cut may shy off from seeking gynecological services in the event of menstrual disorders. This is due to the stigma and trauma from the practice.

The situations described above cause psychological and physiological torture to women and girls and go against the new definition of menstrual health, which is described as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity in relation to menstrual cycle. In this regard, Days for Girls International and UNFPA's call for action this year is for partners in menstrual health and hygiene and anti-FGM actors to support programmes geared towards educating communities on menstrual health and enrolling men as allies. Involvement of men means that they are able to comprehend how FGM impacts the health of women and girls, and some of the devastating consequences that occur as a result.

This year, we choose to celebrate women such as Dr. Susan Chebet who chose to take action through research and implementation of an alternative rite of passage for girls that excluded



Photo: Dr. Ademola Olajide, UNFPA Representative, hands over IEC materials to an anti-FGM champion in Elgeyo Markawet County

the cut, dubbed "*tumdo ne leel*," (new rite of passage).

It is imperative that those who menstruate are provided with the necessary information, resources and support to manage their menstrual needs throughout their lifetime, from menarche to menopause. The policy amendment to the Education Act, signed into law in June 2017, states that "free, sufficient and quality sanitary towels" must be provided to every girl registered at school, as well as "a safe and environmentally sound mechanism for disposal". The Government of Kenya is commended for being proactive in advocacy and policy initiatives in the area of menstrual health. They include the Presidential policy on menstrual hygiene management, removal of VAT on sanitary products, and publication of product standards for reusable pads.

To support transformative policies and innovate community led solutions like the above, we call upon the national and county governments, NGO's, Faith based organizations and all stakeholders to combine efforts in supporting menstrual health education. Creating more awareness will advance the well-being of women and girls, which in turn leads to healthier families and communities.



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