



GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE INTERVENTIONS TO END FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION: CHECKLISTS FOR FRONTLINERS

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Contents

Glossary	4
Introduction	5
About the checklists and target users	6
Gender integration continuum: selected examples in FGM programming	7
INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS AND PLANNING CHECKLIST	8
Analysis checklist	8
Success criteria	10
COMMUNITY ANALYSIS AND PLANNING CHECKLIST	11
Analysis checklist	11
Success criteria	13
Annex	15



GLOSSARY

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM) is a traditional harmful practice that involves the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to female genital organs for non-medical reasons ([WHO](#)).

GENDER refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours and attributes that societies consider appropriate for women, men, girls and boys. These norms shape expectations, responsibilities, and access to resources and decision-making, often leading to inequalities. Gender is specific to context and changeable over time. It intersects with other social factors such as class, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation ([UN Women](#)).

GENDER-BLIND describes processes that ignore gender norms, roles and relations, and thereby often reinforce gender-based discrimination ([UNFPA](#)).

GENDER EQUALITY means equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women, men, girls and boys. It does not mean they are the same but that their rights and opportunities are not determined by sex. Gender equality recognizes diverse needs and interests, and requires the full engagement of both women and men. It is both a human rights issue and a key to sustainable, people-centred development ([UN Women](#)).

GENDER-EXPLOITATIVE refers to practices that perpetuate gender inequality by reinforcing unbalanced norms, roles and relations ([UNFPA](#)).

GENDER INTEGRATION CONTINUUM is a tool to help assess whether – and to what extent – gender needs and inequalities are considered in social protection policy and programme objectives, designs and implementation. The tool consists of five categories along a continuum. It ranges from more regressive approaches that ignore gender needs and inequalities (gender-exploitative and gender-blind) to more progressive ones with increasingly far-reaching actions to address gender inequality (gender-sensitive, gender-responsive and gender-transformative) ([UNICEF](#)).

GENDER NORMS are social and cultural expectations that determine which individual behaviours and expressions are appropriate or acceptable based on gender. Norms become socially accepted and part of “culture” but can be changed ([United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative](#)).

GENDER-RESPONSIVE refers to intentionally considering gender norms, roles and relations, and taking steps to reduce inequalities ([UNFPA](#) and [UNICEF](#)).

GENDER-SENSITIVE entails considering gender norms, roles and relations but does not address resulting inequalities ([UNFPA](#)).

GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE approaches challenge gender inequality by transforming harmful gender norms, roles and relations while working towards redistributing power, resources and services more equally ([UNFPA](#)).

MASCULINITY describes the socially constructed traits, behaviours, roles and norms associated with being a man, encompassing a range of practices and expectations that vary across cultures and time ([UNFPA](#)).

MOVEMENTS are broad social or cultural phenomena aimed at objectives such as abandoning FGM or achieving gender equality. They bring together people with the same values or goals to advocate for change at the grass-roots, subnational, national, regional and global levels ([UNFPA](#)).

POSITIVE MASCULINITY refers to ways of being a boy or man that embrace a broad and healthy range of emotional expressions, including vulnerability and the willingness to ask for help. It involves feeling confident and fulfilled in caregiving and nurturing roles, actively sharing domestic and care responsibilities, and practising open, kind and honest communication. Positive masculinity also includes promoting and advocating for gender equality, and encouraging other men to do the same, thereby fostering respectful, supportive and inclusive relationships and communities ([Equimundo](#)).

SOCIAL NORMS are informal, mostly unwritten rules that define acceptable and appropriate actions within a given group or community, thus guiding human behaviour. They comprise what we do, what we believe others do, and what we believe others approve of and expect us to do. Social norms are therefore situated at the interplay between behaviour, beliefs and expectations ([UNICEF](#)).

Introduction

Female genital mutilation (FGM) affects over 230 million women and girls.¹ It is rooted in discriminatory gender and social norms that violate human rights: namely, the rights of the child as well as rights to health, physical and mental integrity, life, freedom from torture and inhumane treatment, privacy and a life without discrimination. Power imbalances and gender roles drive the practice of FGM, including through social norms around marriageability, purity or upholding family honour. There is international consensus and commitment to end FGM by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Gender-transformative approaches to FGM elimination are context-specific, long-term interventions that require sustained commitment and investment. They call for engaging diverse stakeholders to address social and gender norms and power imbalances that perpetuate this harmful practice.

Effective gender-transformative interventions often involve diverse stakeholders, cross-sector activities and strong community engagement. They include both women and men, rely on well-trained facilitators and run for at least three to six months. Regular follow-up and efforts to remove barriers to participation are key to their success.²

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM applies a gender-transformative approach to programme design and implementation. This translates into interventions such as engaging men, boys and traditional leaders in redefining gender roles; increasing the agency and decision-making power of women and girls; and integrating FGM elimination within feminist and women-led social movements.

Several resources on gender-transformative approaches, covering sexual and reproductive health; gender equality; work with women, men and youth; peacebuilding and other development programmes, are available in the Annex. These include tools designed explicitly for FGM interventions targeting mid- to high-level programming.

The following checklists were developed to fill a resource gap for frontliners working to end FGM. Building on UNFPA and UNICEF experiences, the checklists provide practical, user-friendly tools, offering a potentially cost-efficient, sustainable means to build capacity and scale up gender-transformative approaches.

1 UNICEF, 2024. ["Female Genital Mutilation: A Global Concern."](#)

2 *The Lancet Global Health*, 2020. ["Characteristics of Successful Programmes Targeting Gender Inequality and Restrictive Gender Norms for the Health and Wellbeing of Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults: A Systematic Review."](#)

About the checklists and target users

The checklists aim to support frontliners in applying gender-transformative approaches in day-to-day activities. They feature tools for conducting quick assessments, and developing tailored plans with criteria for monitoring and building in subsequent steps on the journey to end FGM.

The checklists use the gender integration continuum as a framework. They include a table with illustrative examples and questions to assess roles/agency in decision-making, the readiness to be a change agent or make community changes, perceptions around support mechanisms and barriers to change.

The target users are frontliners working in the social, health, education or legal sectors who interact daily with individuals (girls, boys, youth, men, women, the elderly) or groups in service delivery points or communities. Frontliners who are part of a community or have a deep knowledge of power dynamics and gender roles can use the checklists for quick reminders/references in day-to-day work. Those newer to the concept of gender transformation or the communities in which they work may find the checklists useful in understanding the gender continuum and building their skills in applying gender-transformative approaches.

Gender integration continuum: selected examples in FGM programming

The gender integration continuum is a useful framework for policymakers, development partners, civil society and grass-roots organizations, and frontliners. It may be valuable for government institutions working on sexual and reproductive health and rights; violence against women; child, early and forced marriages; FGM; the involvement of men and boys in advocating gender equality; child protection and so on.

The table below defines the different elements of the gender integration continuum and provides illustrative examples for FGM interventions. The continuum serves as a tool to assess where programmes or interventions fall along the spectrum; however, progress towards transformative approaches is not necessarily linear.

Approach	Gender-exploitative	Gender-blind	Gender-sensitive	Gender-responsive	Gender-transformative
 Impact on gender norms	Reinforces gender inequalities	Ignores gender dynamics	Recognizes gender issues but does not challenge them	Addresses gender inequalities	Dismantles harmful social and gender norms and shifts power dynamics
 Examples of interventions to end FGM	Engaging men as sole leaders and decision makers in ending FGM, without involving women and girls, which risks reinforcing patriarchal norms and sidelining female voices and leadership.	Campaigns that focus only on the health risks of FGM, without explicitly addressing gender norms and gendered power structures and dynamics that sustain the practice.	Raising awareness of the harmful effects of FGM without explicitly advocating that it violates the human rights of women and girls, and/or challenging harmful social norms.	Establishing targeted safe spaces where girls can talk about their experiences with FGM, and providing mentorship through female role models and FGM survivors.	Engaging women and girls as leaders and decision makers, and developing activities that centre the voices of girls and women and their own power for self-determination.
 Effectiveness in addressing gender inequality					EXPLOIT → ACCOMMODATE → TRANSFORM



INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS AND PLANNING CHECKLIST

An individual analysis and planning checklist provides a series of guiding questions to help frontliners who interact with individuals in service delivery points or at the community level. The questions are intended to cultivate a clearer understanding of individual perspectives and family and community dynamics, providing insights on the living environment as a basis for planning. It is not necessary to ask all questions; the most appropriate ones can be selected based on context and practicality. This template could also be used in subsequent follow-up sessions.



ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

Frontliner information

Name	Phone
Individual information	
Date	
Locality	
Country	

	Questions	Responses
1. Personal position on FGM abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you support FGM continuation? 	
2. Personal agency to be a change agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you have the power to refuse FGM as a practice? Do you have the power to be an active change agent? Are any interventions implemented for girls? 	

	Questions	Responses
3. Perceived family position on FGM abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who in the family decides whether a girl undergoes FGM? • Who is the most influential decision maker in the family? 	
4. Perceived community position (from a personal point of view) on FGM abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who most strongly supports the continuation of FGM? • Who are the key community influencers regarding the continuation or elimination of FGM? • What roles do men and boys play in the community regarding the continuation or elimination of FGM? • Do any interventions help boys and men promote positive masculinities and stand against FGM? 	
5. Barriers and facilitators in becoming a change agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who can challenge or stop you from refusing FGM or becoming an active change agent? 	



SUCCESS CRITERIA

This checklist for use with individuals during follow-up meetings is designed to assess success or make necessary adjustments to gender-transformative interventions. Success is defined as four out of six responses marked as “strongly agree” or “agree”.

Criteria to evaluate success	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Shifting power relations The individual clearly understands that girls/women should be actively involved in decision-making.	<input type="radio"/>				
2. Centring the agency of girls and women The individual fully supports empowering women and girls and gender equality.	<input type="radio"/>				
3. Tackling harmful gender and social norms The individual clearly understands that FGM is rooted in discriminatory gender norms. Through reflection and dialogue, he or she can begin to challenge these beliefs and support FGM abandonment.	<input type="radio"/>				
4. Engaging men and boys as part of the transformation The individual fully endorses the creation of men's groups to champion women's rights and gender equality.	<input type="radio"/>				
5. Multisectoral interventions The individual is aware of the legal and health consequences of FGM.	<input type="radio"/>				
6. Able to contribute to structural and policy change Understanding FGM is a human rights violation and showing agency or commitment to make a change.	<input type="radio"/>				

Overall comments and any other relevant information	What next? A plan to mitigate gaps at the individual level
	For example: individual follow-up meetings, home visits, community meetings with specific individuals and community leaders...



COMMUNITY ANALYSIS AND PLANNING CHECKLIST

The community analysis and planning checklist is for frontliners who interact with community groups. It can be used in discussions with community members to define the main local decision makers and understand agency and the readiness to change. Such sessions can also plan activities to engage identified community members and define expected results, such as to shift perceptions among men and boys so they become active change agents in families, schools, mosques, churches, markets, etc.. This template could be used in follow-up community engagements as well as to create a movement that ends FGM locally and champions similar efforts in neighbouring communities.



ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

Frontliner information

Name	Phone
Community information	
Date	
Locality	
Country	

	Questions	Responses
1. Community position on FGM abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who most strongly supports the continuation of FGM in the community? Who are the key community influencers regarding FGM? What happens to families who decide not to practise FGM? 	

	Questions	Responses
2. Community engagement to end FGM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do leaders, institutions and families help to promote gender equality and challenge harmful norms? • Are diverse voices, especially of girls and marginalized groups, included in efforts to end FGM? • Are youth, women, girls, boys and men empowered to participate in decision-making? • Do community leaders, schools, health centres, legal services and law enforcement support FGM abandonment? 	<p>Strong <input type="radio"/></p> <p>Weak <input type="radio"/></p> <p>Not sure <input type="radio"/></p>
3. Movement-building for FGM abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there an existing social movement to end FGM? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are people or groups of people mobilizing the community to stop FGM? • Is there interest and awareness to change and end FGM? • Are there local groups to work with? • Are local groups willing to collaborate? 	<p>Present <input type="radio"/></p> <p>Not present (willing or not willing) <input type="radio"/></p> <p>Not sure <input type="radio"/></p>
4. Barriers and facilitators in ending FGM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who can support community change to end FGM? • Do any groups or interventions address FGM abandonment or positive masculinity, or build the agency/skills of girls or women? • Do community members want to lead efforts to end FGM? • Are there connections with policymakers from the community/region? Please specify. 	



SUCCESS CRITERIA

This checklist, designed for use with community groups during follow-up meetings, helps to assess success or make necessary adjustments to gender-transformative interventions. Success is defined as four out of six responses marked as “strongly agree” or “agree”.

Criteria to evaluate success	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Shifting power relations Families have the power to oppose the community's decision to practise FGM.	<input type="radio"/>				
2. Centring the agency of girls and women The community fully supports empowering women and girls and takes steps towards having women in leadership roles and community decision-making, including to end FGM.	<input type="radio"/>				
3. Tackling harmful gender and social norms Community members clearly understand that FGM is rooted in discriminatory gender norms. Through reflection and dialogue, they begin challenging these beliefs and supporting FGM abandonment.	<input type="radio"/>				
4. Engaging men and boys as part of the transformation The community fully supports creating men's champion groups for women's rights and gender equality.	<input type="radio"/>				
5. Building alliances/movement-building Adoption of community rules banning FGM.	<input type="radio"/>				
6. Able to contribute to structural and policy change The community is aware of FGM as a human rights violation and its legal and health consequences.	<input type="radio"/>				

Overall comments and any other relevant information	What next? A plan to mitigate gaps at the community level
	<p>Examples of interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilize a coalition of girls, marginalized groups and community members • Conduct regular dialogues, including awareness campaigns, with families, community leaders and politicians • Strengthen positive parenting programmes through special community training, such as on masculinities perspectives for fatherhood and empowerment for mothers • Engage local leaders through community meetings • Build alliances and support initiatives targeting the most vulnerable groups • Implement community-based programmes • School meetings to support girls' agency and bodily autonomy

ANNEX

[Adopting a Gender Transformative Approach](#) in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Gender-Based Violence Programme (Rutgers University, 2019).

[Advancing Gender-Transformative Approaches](#) in the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (UNFPA and UNICEF, 2024).

[Applying the Gender Integration Continuum to Social Protection](#): A Guidance Note for Assessing the Level of Gender Integration in Social Protection Policies and Programmes (UNICEF, 2024).

[Gender-Transformative Accelerator Tool](#): Workshop Facilitation Guide (UNFPA and UNICEF, 2021).

[Gender Transformative Approach to Livelihoods: A Toolkit](#) (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH, 2023).

[Gender Transformative Approaches Toolkit](#): Community Dialogue Tools for IFAD Project Implementers (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2024).

[Gender Transformative Approaches to Achieve Gender Equality and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Technical Note](#) (UNFPA, 2023).

[Gender Transformative Toolkit](#) (Mercy Corps, 2021).

[Securing Women's Resource Rights Through Gender Transformative Approaches](#) (Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry, 2024).

[Integrated Gender-Transformative Accelerator and Values Clarification Workshop Facilitation Guide](#) (UNFPA and UNICEF, 2024).

[Towards a Gender-Transformative Organisation](#) (Women Engage for a Common Future International, 2022).

[Transformative Change for Gender Equality](#): Learning from Feminist Strategies (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021).

[UNOY Gender Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Gender Transformative Approaches for Youth Peace Organisations](#) (United Network of Young Peacebuilders, 2022).



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