



UNFPA-UNICEF JOINT PROGRAMME ON FGM IN KENYA



CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

COMMUNITY VOICES
DRIVING CAMPAIGN
AGAINST FGM

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FOREWORD

Kenya is part of the global UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which is being implemented in 17 countries where the rite is practised. In Kenya, partners are working in 12 counties¹ to implement an integrated and holistic campaign towards ending FGM. Informed by a social norms perspective, the programme interventions are focusing on policy and legal environment, service provision and galvanising social dynamics through community approaches.

Working mainly with the Government of Kenya and also with various implementing partners who have been selected for their strong presence and structures in the target communities, some of the key programme strategies are supporting education, dialogue and public commitments towards the abandonment of FGM.

In the course of the campaign, the Joint Programme has aimed at consolidating the positive social norms coming from within the practising communities, providing encouragement to positive social forces and accentuating the voice and visibility of those individuals and organisations striving to keep girls intact. This is in line with the Joint Programme's Theory of Change. As more individuals discover that others who are important to them do not practise FGM, have abandoned it or would like to abandon it, they too will tend to shift to the new norm that discourage girls not to undergo FGM.

The Joint Programme has continued to focus on the key gatekeepers who uphold community norms and to engage with them because their views carry immense weight in the community. These include religious and traditional leaders, but increasingly also the youth and women.

The stories in this publication are compiled from the experiences of only a few individuals who are bringing about gradual change within their communities. The common thread that binds their stories together is the message that girls must not undergo FGM and society must help them attain their rights.

The voices of various agents of change captured in this publication provide anecdotal evidence of the shifts in attitudes in some of the target communities in Kenya. Together with other structured surveys, they can contribute towards the development of programmatic interventions based on the readiness of communities to adopt the new norm of that discourage girls not to undergo FGM.

These stories illustrate some of the achievements of the Kenya programme in Outcome 3 of the Joint Programme, which is increased social support for preventing girls from undergoing FGM.

Under this Outcome, the target outputs for the Kenya programme are that individuals, families and communities in programme areas are increasingly educated about the harms and norms related to FGM and alternatives to the practice, and that they are increasingly mobilised to collectively to abandon FGM.

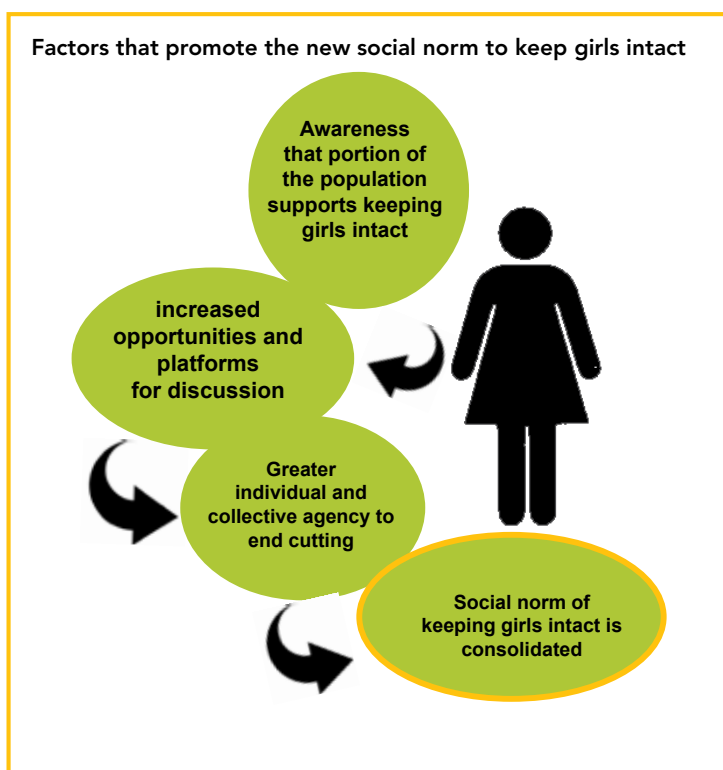
The new social norm that discourage girls not to undergo FGM will take some time to gain complete traction in Kenya, but the voices like those of the champions provide hope that this is a reality that will soon be upon us.

¹Garissa, Wajir, Tana River, Marsabit, West Pokot, Migori, Kisii, Elgeyo Marakwet, Baringo, Narok, Kajiado

Highlights of the UNFPA UNICEF Joint Programme on FGM/C in Kenya

FGM refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is a deeply entrenched social and cultural norm in many places. The practice can cause short- and long-term health complications, including chronic pain, infections, increased risk of HIV transmission, anxiety and depression, birth complications, infertility and, in the worst cases, death. It is internationally recognized as an extreme violation of the rights of women and girls.

FGM violates human rights principles and standards – including the principles of equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex, the right to freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the rights of the child, and the right to physical and mental integrity, and even the right to life. In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the first-ever resolution against female genital mutilation, calling for intensified global efforts to eliminate the practice. In 2015, FGM was included in the Sustainable Development Goals under Target 5.3, which calls for the elimination of all harmful practices.



UNFPA and UNICEF are currently leading the implementation of the second phase of the largest global programme to accelerate the abandonment of female genital mutilation. The programme, known as *The UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programme on FGM/C: Accelerating Change*, is implemented in partnership with grass-roots community organizations.

The focus is on protecting women and girls from female genital mutilation using a human rights-based and culturally sensitive approach. The Joint Programme also supports health and protective services for those adversely affected. The first phase was implemented between 2008 and 2013 and was implemented in 15 African countries. It focussed on changing the value attributed to girls and women affected by FGM/C throughout its six years. Enabling their potential, empowering their aspirations, and ensuring their protection has constituted a core of the comprehensive human rights-based and culturally sensitive approach of the programme.

Kenya is one of the 17 focus countries involved in the second phase of the Joint Programme which runs from 2014 to 2017. The Kenya programme's strategic approaches include advocacy, partnerships/networking, community based programming, capacity building, evidence-based programming and media engagement, and these approaches have been largely responsible for a decline in the national prevalence rate of FGM, from 27% in 2008 (Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) 2008/9) to 21% (KDHS 2014). The efforts have also contributed to an increasing recognition of FGM as a national agenda, with the government's commitment to abandonment of FGM demonstrated by an increase of resource allocation to the

Anti-FGM Board from Ksh.42 million in 2014 to Ksh.92 million in 2016/2017. The government has taken the lead in the coordination of the Anti FGM Programme in the country and is overseeing the implementation of the Prohibition of FGM Act-2011. A review of the National FGM Policy of 2010 was started in 2015 to bring it in line with the FGM Act 2011. The document has been submitted to the Cabinet for approval. In line with the global Programme focus, Kenya is also increasingly strengthening the measurement of the social norm change dynamics in efforts to evaluate the readiness of communities to abandon FGM. This is driven by the acknowledgement that social expectations that uphold the social norm of FGM may begin to change before collective public declarations to end the practice take place. In 2016, considerable progress was achieved in pursuit of the above outputs. The various implementing partners worked with community-based organisations and community/religious leaders to enhance community dialogue for meant to empower communities to make informed decisions to abandon the practice.

Summary of key achievements

- **Implementation of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2011:** There is good progress in the enforcement of the Act. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecution (ODPP), has continued to prosecute FGM cases under the Act. Though successful, it has not been without challenges as sustaining prosecutions is dependent on the evidence and its availability. The practice mainly occurs in remote areas with poor infrastructure and as a result, the witnesses are at times intimidated and sometimes unable to make it to the courts.
- **National Policy on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) 2016-2020:** With technical and financial support from the Joint Programme, the National Policy on the abandonment of FGM 2008-2013 was reviewed and updated in line with the Kenya Constitution 2010, the Prohibition of FGM Act 2011 and Sustainable Development Goals. The document has been submitted for Cabinet approval.
- **Improved Government led Coordination at National, County and Community levels:** The Joint Programme has continued to support national and county level coordination mechanisms through the Anti-FGM Board and County Anti-FGM Networks. The coordination structures focus on multi-sectoral approach in the prevention and response to FGM and has led to strong partnerships.
- **Multi-sectoral intervention and targeting:** The Joint Programme has utilised the comparative advantage of UNICEF and UNFPA in rallying services such as psychosocial support, education, health and legal aid. Procedural guidelines for referral and consultation which is integrated within the Child Protection and Gender were developed and operationalized across the focus counties.
- **Increased demand for mentorship programmes and Alternative Rites of Passage:** The Joint Programme continues to play a central role in supporting key initiatives which include, mentorship programmes for both girls and boys and Alternative Rites of Passage (ARP) for girls. As a result of the mentorship programme role models/champions have come up in different communities and continue to raise awareness among other girls and boys as well as the community members. To prevent girls who undergo ARP from being circumcised later, trained mentors are attached to girls for follow up and continuous mentoring.

MEN AS CHAMPIONS



‘We started this; it ends with us’

Men taking lead in the war against FGM

After their various daytime chores, early evenings were always an eagerly-awaited opportunity to unwind, with the choice occupation for the Pokot community being the regular traditional dance known locally as *Adang’oo*.

It was an opportunity to show off a young man’s dancing skills. Not so much elegant body movements or even the prowess of their vocals, but mainly a competition of who could jump farthest off the ground.

It was not only the young men who were attracted by the short, explosive dances. Quite often the older men would come along, initially standing on the side to watch, then beginning to move to the beat, swaying slowly, this side and that, and finally joining enthusiastically in the dance.

Most of the older men would be here purposely to identify a new bride, because *Adang’oo* is not just another village dance, but a venue for meeting future wives and husbands.

“When the missionaries came here, *Adang’oo* was the first tradition that they pushed us to stop,” says 50 year-old Jonathan Kudu who is the *mkasa* (village elder) for Nakwijit location, Sook Division, West Pokot County.

He explains that it is from the dances that many young men eloped with girls, luring them far away from their families and forcing them to abandon school. It is also here that old men found younger girls to take on as second or third wives.

“To get a man to marry you and bring cattle to your parents meant girls had to be circumcised, otherwise no man would even consider her for marriage,” says Jonathan.

The dances usually ran into the late night, a factor that has made it difficult for the youth to perform well in school.

As the Chairman of Wanyoi Primary School in the



Jonathan Kudu, village elder for Nakwijit in West Pokot

village, Jonathan has seen the effects of such dances. Girls are married off early and there are hardly any girls moving on to secondary school. The entire location has only six primary school but not a single secondary school.

“When we came here with the anti-FGM campaign, it was impossible to ignore the issue of education,” says Titus Kiprom, Programme Manager at the Kapenguria offices of World Vision, the organisation that is working with the UNFPA UNICEF Joint Programme in Baringo County.



Jonathan Kudu congratulates a resident of Nakwijit for tipping him off about a family that was about to circumcise their daughter

FGM advocacy and the legal consequences for those who perpetuate the practice.

It is not an easy job in the harsh terrain. The relatively small population of 2,000 people in the village is spread over an expansive, hilly area. Usually he has to depend on transportation by World Vision to cover the terrain as the organisation visits Nakwijit every three months for community dialogues.

“Fortunately World Vision is also working with the local radio, KALYA FM and it is therefore helping to spread the message. For instance the radio once ran a campaign warning that even giving your knife for circumcision is a crime and this really helped to instil fear here,” he says.

Jonathan says that while the law is going to deter some of those clinging to the tradition, the Pokot community as a whole would benefit more from more education facilities, so that the educated girls can themselves campaign against the cut.

At the local market, one sees several stalls displaying multi-coloured veils that are used to decorate during circumcision rites. It is the school holiday season and it means some families will secretly cut their girls.

Working with the local chief, Jonathan has managed to arrest one circumciser and three girls as they prepared to perform the rite this year.

The father of those girls managed to escape, crossing the border into Uganda, says Jonathan.

“Why did he run? It is the men who started this harmful practice and we must be the ones to end it,” he says.

Among the activities being carried out here include advocacy forums with members of county assembly to prioritise issues of FGM, inter-generational dialogues between boys and girls, men and women, mentorship programmes for girls and alternative rites of passage.

World Vision’s initial engagement in Nakwijit was the construction of three classrooms for Wanyoi Primary School. The expansion of the school was instrumental in establishing goodwill with the community and this was followed by community dialogues on the harmful effects of FGM.

“The community dialogues were the first forums where Pokot men and women sat together to discuss such a sensitive matter,” says Jonathan. As the elder, it is upon him to coordinate the dialogues.

“The *mkasa* is chosen by the community to deal with issues like family disputes, gender violence and recently identifying children who do not attend school,” he says.

He explains that the *mkasa* has in recent years received government recognition and today has the services of police reservists to help enforce the law. It is because of his authority that World Vision chose to train him on anti-





Petero Nkamasiai with daughter Emily Nosiali at a ceremony where he declared she would not be cut

‘They said my girls would never get married’

Former culture advocate chooses the pen over the knife

Among the Maasai of Narok East, Kikuyani village holds a special, almost sacred place. This village was once the venue of important communal ceremonies that signified various milestones for individual families as for the larger community.

For the families, this is where ceremonies for young men of the same age-set, such as the *Emuratta* (circumcision), *Enkiama* (marriage) or the *Olngesherr* (junior elder ceremony) were held.

It is also here that young girls were initiated into

womanhood through the painful process of female genital mutilation. That process would not only deprive the girls of crucial sexual and reproductive body functions, but would also be followed by their being given up for early marriage to invariably much older men.

Unlike the men who are proud to identify themselves with their age-set, women here do not have their own age-set but are recognised by that of their husbands.

Petero Nkamasiai, today a father of four boys and three girls, has presided over many of the ceremonies at Kikuyani, proudly upholding his culture and fighting to preserve those aspects that were threatened by modernity.

“When Christianity came here, some of us stopped seeing Kikuyani as a proud citadel of our culture but a place where the dreams of our daughters were cruelly destroyed,” says Petero.

As newly-converted Christians, the initial anti-FGM campaigns were fraught with opposition and threats. Even some Christian denominations refused to join in, fearful that adherents would leave for those that did not oppose the tradition.

“Our first real encouragement when World Vision came and chose a group of pastors to attend anti-FGM



advocacy training. Even then, the first few days were taken up by heated arguments and some pastors actually left the training before it was over,” says Petero.

He says some of these pastors have to date remained as stumbling blocks to the campaign. Even though they do not openly support FGM because of the legal implications, they are careful not to speak against it.

“After the training I called a meeting of some community members in the local school to explain to them about what we had been taught. It was not a smart move because I could not answer some of the questions from the community,” he remembers.

He was careful to enjoin staff from World Vision in subsequent meetings, and consequently some community members came together to form a community-based organisation that would engage with government departments and other stakeholders in the campaign.

“The support of World Vision in forming this CBO was instrumental because we were able to form networks even beyond Narok,” he says.

The CBO has since started experimenting on family-based ‘public declarations’ against FGM.

“The idea came to me when my own daughter came of age and many people were waiting to see whether I would take them through the initiation rites that I was preaching against,” he says.

He therefore decided to invite neighbouring families to his house as well as pastors from the area in a ceremony in his house. At this ceremony, he declared he would not take his daughter for the cut and asked the pastors to carry out prayers to bless her as a sign of adulthood.

“It was a simple public ceremony but I think it would work well where there are no funds for elaborate

Alternative Rite of Passage programmes,” he says.

The CBO is today proud that they have saved a number of girls from the life-wrecking knife. He says that due to lack of resources they have had to refer most of the girls to Tasaru, a bigger CBO that has been running a rescue centre or girls in Narok.

“Where families are adamant, we have been asking them to let their daughters finish secondary school first before taking them for the cut. We explain the legal consequences of forcing under-age girls to be circumcised and in any case we are sure that girls who have finished secondary school have the power to refuse the cut,” says Julius Lemanken of World Vision.

Petero says that his CBO intends to partner with the teachers in the location so they can be vigilant in recording the absence of girls from school.

“Every year we have girls who drop out from school and this is mainly because of FGM or early marriage. Using the school records we should be able to trace them, either to take them back to school or to prosecute the parents who force them to undergo the cut,” says Petero.

The campaign has managed to drive the circumcision ceremonies underground. Though this makes it difficult to enforce the anti-FGM Act, Petero and his team believe this is a sign of progress.

“Families will soon get tired of running away from the government. As more and more girls finish school and get married, the rite will soon be history,” he says.

Meanwhile at Kikuyani, the CBO has constructed an iron-sheet church at the place where the community used to gather for traditional ceremonies.

“Two months after we finished the church, heavy rainfall fell in the area creating a large water pan where we now water our cows. This area had gone for years without that much rain and for us it is a symbol of purification, a symbol of a new way of life,” says Petero.



WOMEN AS CHAMPIONS



‘We must speak up for our girls’

Brave women defying traditions to speak against FGM

With almost four out of ten women in Kenya depending on traditional midwives during childbirth, those women who have such skills are highly valued and the practice earns them a decent living. They are known and respected in their communities, especially seeing as they are often consulted in the very ultimate moments of labour.

In many communities, the midwives often double up as traditional circumcisers.

One such woman is Jennifer Kibor, a well-known midwife in the village of Mukutani in East Pokot. Of late, however, residents of this village in Baringo County have been looking at Jennifer with either admiration or fear due to her zeal in campaigning against the circumcision of girls.

At 55 years old now and a mother of five boys and three girls, Jennifer says that she never had any training

in midwifery, but found herself in it by accident.

“One evening a neighbour rushed to my house in labour pains and demanded that I help her deliver. I had no choice but to do what I could, and since then several other women came to me. I learned on the job,” she says.

She remembers clearly the incident that convinced her about the dangers of FGM.

“One young girl was brought to me for deliver, but however hard she tried, she was unable to push. After hours of trying we rushed her to hospital where the doctor operated on her, but threatened never to assist us again if we brought women who had been circumcised,” says Jennifer.

The doctor informed her that due to the scarring caused by circumcision, the girl’s birth canal could not stretch enough.

Several years later, Jennifer was recruited by the

“among the Pokot, girls who are found not to have been cut when they go for childbirth must be circumcised before being allowed to go back home”

World Vision office in Marigat as part of a sensitisation seminar on the dangers of FGM. It was at this seminar that she made the connection between FGM and the many complications she had seen in her midwifery work.

“I used to see various difficulties that women would go through when giving birth, but never knew what it was,” she says.

Her decision to begin by insisting that her own daughters would not be circumcised was the first real hurdle in her anti-FGM advocacy.

Knowing that Jennifer would not allow their daughter to be circumcised, one day her husband asked the first daughter to travel to an aunt’s home, where a circumcision ceremony was to be held the following day. However the daughter informed Jennifer who told her not to leave the house.

On learning this Jennifer’s livid husband accused her of going against the Pokot culture. Life became unbearable in the house, as her husband would often beat and insult the children. He stopped visiting her home, preferring to stay at either of Jennifer’s two co-wives.

Eventually Jennifer decided to leave and she has since struggled to raise and educate all her five children by herself.

“It has been tough, but I will never let my daughters go through the pain of FGM. In fact when my first girl was married, I warned my son-in-law against attempting to have her circumcised,” she says.

She explains that among the Pokot, girls who are found not to have been cut when they go for childbirth must be circumcised before being allowed to go back home.

John Mutisya of World Vision’s Marigat ADP explains that targeting TBAs was a strategy aimed at reaching

women who have often doubled up as circumcisers. “These TBAs can either help to stop FGM or perpetrate it, because they have seen first-hand the complications brought about by FGM during childbirth,” he says.

“Our campaign is based on the understanding that FGM abandonment typically begins with an initial core group of individuals who set in motion a dynamic of change. As this group becomes ready to abandon the practice, they then seek to convince others to abandon,” says John,

He says that TBA’s can form an influential critical mass for spreading the message about abandonment of FGM through their social networks.

Jennifer is now known all over Mukutani Village. Every once in a while, she says, some men threaten to beat her up for going against tradition. She is fortunate to have the backing of the village chief, who is equally enthusiastic about enforcing the law against FGM.

“It will take some time for people to accept my message, since there are those who accuse me of bringing the bad cultures of our neighbours who do not circumcise, while others tell me I should not discuss such matters among men old enough to be my father,” says Jennifer.





Charity Kiok (second from left) at her home with some of the girls she has helped escape the cut

‘One day I came home from school and found a husband waiting for me’

Maasai woman’s fight to ensure girls attain their dreams

For a lot of girls wishing to escape from the cut in Engang Oonkera village in Narok South, the one name that springs to mind is “Mama Laila”.

It is the home of Charity Kiok, a mother of two girls and a boy, where on any day during the holiday you will find a big group of girls busy taking informal cooking or sewing lessons.

When school opens, most of these girls will be hoping that Charity will pay for their fees and buy them stuff like toiletries and sanitary pads. This is because these are invariably girls who have been chased from home after refusing to undergo FGM.

“Many times I am forced to sell my chicken to pay for their fees and shopping, because I cannot just keep them

here doing nothing,” says Charity.

Narrating her own experience, Charity says she would have wished to proceed beyond secondary school, but the influence of tradition on her parents would not allow.

“I was married off immediately after completing secondary education. I just came home at the end of the term and the following day I was told to leave with a man I had not seen before,” says Charity.

She rues the missed opportunity to proceed with her education, and is today determined to help as many girls as possible avoid her fate.

“It is clear to many that at the heart of the Maasai girl’s problems is the initiation rite, which means the end of her dreams,” she says.

Largely driven by her Christian beliefs, Charity and



her husband decided they would not subject their own daughters to the rite. For the close-knit village in the plains of Narok South, the family soon became a virtual pariah, with neighbours avoiding much interaction.

“Our decision meant we could not take part in many of the community events, but the fact that my daughter managed to proceed to university brought about visible changes in their countenance towards us,” says Charity.

While the success of her daughter made her proud, it also led to the first incident that would later drive her somewhat unwittingly into establishing a ‘rescue centre’ in her home.

“There is this young girl employed at my neighbour’s as a house-help. One day the father came to pick her, alleging there was a sick sibling back at home and she was

needed to stay home as they took the sibling to hospital,” remembers Charity.

Luckily, the young girl heard an aunt explain to her employer that they were actually taking her for a circumcision ceremony.

“The little girl came to bid me goodbye but she was weeping and asking if I could help her. I gave her some money and told her to find a way to call me once she confirmed about her family’s plan,” says Charity.

That evening the girls called Charity and confirmed that she was to be cut the following day.

It was then that Charity got in touch with the chief in the village, who in turn contacted the chief from the girl’s village.

“The chief called the father that night and warned him that he would be arrested should they proceed with the rite”, says Charity.

The following morning Charity travelled 50 kms to the girl’s village where the father, fearing arrest, asked the gathered visitors that leave.

Charity’s determination to assist girls in the village has since led to her appointment to work with the village elders committee, the first time the committee has incorporated a woman.

“We were informed of her crusade and this is why we chose her to attend major meeting of the country’s Maasai leaders, where elders from the community made a public declaration against FGM,” says Julius Lemanken of World Vision.

At the meeting in Kajiado, Charity learnt how other organisations are working with government departments such as children’s department and office of public prosecutor in the anti-FGM campaign.

“With the help of World Vision, I will now approach similar departments in Narok for collaboration so the community will see the anti-FGM message as a government position and not mama Laila’s,” says Charity.

Today, Charity’s biggest worry regards the girls she has rescued. She feels that should any of them fall pregnant along the way or lack school fees, she will be ridiculed by the village.

The progress meanwhile is encouraging. Charity was able to convince the former house-girl’s parents to take her back to school. On Friday 2nd December 2016, she graduated with a Bachelors of Commerce degree from the Maasai Mara University.



Some of the primary school girls from Naiborkei Primary School who have gone back to school after being circumcised and forced into early marriage. The girls now teach other pupils the dangers of FGM

‘We failed these girls once, we must find a way to repair the damage’

Teacher fights to return girls to school after FGM and early marriage

The village of Naiborkei (meaning ‘white foot’ in Samburu) gets its name from the thick dust that makes everyone’s feet white, for the weather in this village that lies south of Samburu’s main town of Maralal is mostly dry.

Sporadic rains provide relief to the people here and turn the plains into scenic, lush greenery. This year though, the rains have not come in the tenth month as expected, and there is clear anxiety in the community. majority of whom are herders.

There is another topic that residents have been discussing lately. At the local primary school, Josephine Lekipaloi the head teacher has recently been on a high-profile crusade to ensure that girls who are married off

early are rescued and taken back to school.

“I have noted that while the number of boys and girls enrolling in lower classes is even, fewer girls proceed to upper primary school. Female genital mutilation is the cause of this, as many of the circumcised girls are married off shortly after the ritual,” says Josephine.

With support from World Vision’s Lorroki ADP and the local administration, the head teacher has been on the lookout for girls leaving school to be married and is now taking them back to the school.

Agnes Lekalalasho is only 16 years and had been married off to a 55-year old man, two years after she was forced to undergo FGM.

Two years ago, while she was in boarding school, she

was surprised to see her dad coming for her, and demanding that she leave for home urgently.

“Being only a child, I had no choice and had to abandon school, but I was shocked two days later when three old men came home and I was ordered to pack and go to the home of one of them,” she says.

One of her siblings whispered to her that while she was in school, the men had on several occasions brought sugar to their parents, signalling there were dowry negotiations going on.

Fortunately, Josephine got wind of the matter and quickly informed the local chief and World Vision staff. They went to the homestead and ordered the old man to release her or face arrest for child marriage.

Agnes is now back in school and will be sitting for her final primary school examinations this year.

According to the World Vision Area Manager for Lorroki Jonathan Lepoora, girls who undergo FGM get the feeling that they have become adults, and very often enter into risky sexual liaisons with male counterparts.

A mother at 17

At only 17 years and in the last year of secondary school, Mary Lekuchul is already a mother. On learning of her pregnancy, her father promptly chased Mary and her mother away.

Among the Samburu, a girl who gives birth while still living with her parents brings a curse upon the home and it is believed either the father or first born child will die as a



“I was shocked two days later when three old men came home and I was ordered to pack and go to the home of one of them”

result.

“After being circumcised, I made the mistake that many girls do and thought I was now an adult. I became careless with boys and fell pregnant,” says Mary.

It was the headteacher Josephine again who came to her rescue when she hosted her until she gave birth and later leading a delegation to her father to convince him to accept her back.

“I am still not in good terms with dad, but my mum has been taking care of the baby during the day and I take over in the evening after school, says Lekuchul.

Mary and Agnes are among the girls who have attended peer education training seminars held by World Vision.

The head teacher has set aside a session every Friday afternoon when the girls speak to fellow pupils, giving their own experiences as warning to other girls to avoid pregnancy and decline early marriage.

This year alone, Josephine and World Vision have rescued eleven girls from early marriage, and they are all involved in counselling fellow pupils.

“One of our projected outputs is to strengthen religious groups and schools to advance issues such as FGM and child marriage, and we are seeing encouraging results,” says Lepoora.





‘I now know why I lost my babies, but I will not let it happen to others’

The county of Tana River is mainly inhabited by the pastoralist Orma and the farming Pokomo communities. Frequent conflicts over grazing land and water occur, many of them leading to loss of lives.

The government and leaders from the two communities have often come up with strategies for peace, even though the conflicts flare up intermittently especially during drought.

Realising that they are disproportionately affected during conflicts, women from both communities have reached out to each other to bring tranquility.

One of the fruits of the peace initiatives is the Humboza Women Group Hamesa Village, Garsen.

Nuru Dokota, a 42-year old mother of one is leader of the group, which brings together women from the Orma

and Pokot tribes to campaign for peaceful co-existence. Apart from pooling funds for various income-generation projects, the group also campaigns against gender violence and for child rights.

As I ask her about her family, I see signs of pain when she explains that she has only a son. Among the Orma, the majority of women of Nuru’s age will have an average of five children, she says, but three times she has lost her babies during delivery.

“All through the three instances, I wondered why God was punishing me, until one time a neighbor rushed to our house in her last stages of labour, requesting us to rush her to hospital. The local hospital could not perform the required caesarean operation and we had to take her all the way to Malindi,” says Nuru.

Luckily for them, the neighbor made it through the 100 km journey to the hospital.

She remembers the nursing staff reprimanding them for endangering women through circumcision, saying that this was the cause of the difficult labour the woman had undergone.

It was then that Nuru made the connection between the rite she herself had undergone when she was 13 years old and the loss of her own unborn babies. From that day she decided that she would introduce anti-FGM advocacy as an agenda of the Humboza Women Group.

“It was not easy at first but the presence of the Pokomo women who do not undergo circumcision was already a good advantage for us,” says Nuru.

The group was one of the beneficiaries of anti-FGM advocacy training workshops organised by WomanKind. The workshops brought together youth, women, community elders and Islamic leaders from Garsen, opening up a topic that was previously rarely discussed between men and women.

“The support of some of the Sheikhs helped our campaign, because nobody could accuse us of going against the Islam religion. Because of our interaction with the Pokomo, it was crucial that we should not be seen as propagating the teachings of those who were not of our faith,” she says.

She says that despite their differences, Orma women had always observed that many women in their community

had to give birth through caesarean operations followed by prolonged stay in hospital for recovery.

“Our neighbours would go to hospital, leave the following day after giving birth and in two days they would be back in their farms,” observes Nuru.

She says that they soon discovered that child birth was not as harrowing among the Pokomo because they had not been circumcised.

She explains that many women have had their sexual and reproductive organs messed up permanently by FGM, because after the cutting, only a small hole for the passage of urine is left.

“It means that labour and childbirth are usually a life-or-death gamble, and many women have lost the gamble,” she says.

The women of Orma have recently noticed another trend that is causing concern. Many young men of the Orma community are beginning to take wives from among the Pokomo, a trend that would have been unthinkable a few years ago given the belligerent relationship between the two tribes.

“My own brother is married to one of the Pokomo girls,” says Nuru.

Members of the Humboza Women Group from the Pokomo community have explained the trend, saying that Orma men find it taxing to have sexual relations with circumcised women.

“At circumcision Orma women lose the clitoris as it is said that if it is not cut it will keep growing longer. Now our young men say they are struggling with Orma women during sex and they cannot keep labouring just to enjoy their conjugal rights,” says Nuru.



The increasing cases of inter-marriage have also helped to debunk the myth that uncut girls can never find husbands.

Nuru says that the workshops by WomanKind have had considerable impact, especially because of convincing a number of women to stop the trade of circumcision.

“The voice of redeemed circumcisers has really helped especially because the men listen to them. Even though men insist their daughters should be cut, very few of them have been told exactly what happens to the bodies of their daughters, and these former circumcisers are now explaining the procedures,” says Nuru.

She says that while women in main towns such as Garsen are fortunate to have workshops organised for them, those living deep in the interior need support, especially because most of them are also illiterate.

“I am proud that my own elder sister has refused to cut her daughter because of my campaign. It may not be much, but if each woman is able to convince just one family to refuse the cut, maybe our young men will start coming back home,” she says.



Women fetch water from River Tana, which has been a shared resource between the Orma and Pokomo. The Humboza Woman Group is working to end internecine clashes between the two communities.

A man in a light-colored uniform, likely a police officer or administrator, is sitting outdoors. He is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved shirt with a pocket and a dark cap. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background shows a thatched hut and some outdoor structures.

LOCAL ADMINISTRATORS AS CHAMPIONS

Abdi Rashid Hussein, Assistant Chief for Sankuri in Garissa, Kenya and ardent campaigner for the abandonment of FGM among Somali women



Jacylin Yego, the Chief of Moro Location in Marakwet East.

The giant escarpments that in some places rise as high as 6000 ft and the picturesque floor of Kerio Valley are just some of the awe-inspiring sites that attract tourists to Elgeyo Marakwet County. The county's most famous town is Iten, the birthplace of most of Kenya's top sportsmen and where international athletes flock for high altitude training.

It is also the home of Hon. Jebii Kilimo, chairperson of Kenya's Anti-FGM Board and one of the most fervent crusaders against the rite.

In the past few years, disturbing reports have been received of a phenomenon that threatens to roll back the gains of the campaign against female genital mutilation. More and more married women, who had initially escaped the cut, are being forced to undergo the rite due to the increasing stigmatisation of uncut women as well as the men who marry them.

"These women as well as their husbands are ridiculed and kept of social activities such as weddings or even positions of leadership," says Jacylin Yego, the Chief of Moro Location in Marakwet East.

Jacylin's own experience illustrates the disparagement that was customarily directed towards those refused to be circumcised. When she left her job as a school matron after being appointed as chief in 2012, the opposition she faced often left her in tears and many times she considered resigning from the post.

"There is a Kalenjin proverb that my father used to tell us when we were struggling to go through school. *Chepkisas ko tatun kechome* means that the one who is scorned one will one day be appreciated," says Jacylin.

Jacylin's father was a pastor at the local church and despite the insistence of her grandmother and even some fellow pastors, he was adamant that his three daughters would not go through the ritual of circumcision.

In their school days, Jacylin and her two sisters would often be ridiculed by other girls. Pupils would refuse to share desks with them, claiming they were unclean,

'The men who called me a child now take off their hats in my office'

Female chief reading the FGM riot act to community in Elgeyo Marakwet

immature or incapable of being married.

“It was tough but we often told them we came to school to compete in education,” she says.

It was in her first year as chief that she met Hon. Kilimo and became involved in some anti-FGM work. Even this was not an easy task, and some in the community would refuse to attend her public meetings, saying it was taboo for an uncircumcised woman to address adults.

It was her getting married to a school headmaster that began a gradual change in the community’s perception about her. Her anti-FGM crusade was further emboldened by a workshop organised by World Vision where they were trained extensively on the provisions of the Anti-FGM Act.

“We were given copies of the Act which we are now using to explain the consequences the practice. For instance we did not know that it is a crime even to insult or taunt someone who is not circumcised and people are really surprised when we tell them this can send them to prison



for up to three years,” says Jacylin.

She adds that with this information, she has been having community dialogues where she is asking married women to report to her if they are compelled threatened by their husbands to go for the cut.

She says that enforcement of the Act has not been easy for many administrators. There is often a hostile response when they approach families intending to carry out the rite. Jacylin narrates how a chief and some policemen were beaten up as they tried to arrest culprits.

“Of late the rites are performed high up the hills and some men are hired to roll down huge rocks at anyone trying to go uphill to stop the ceremony,” she says.

The threats have forced the government to assign armed police reservists to every chief in the Marakwet East. These reservists were initially engaged to quell the internecine battles between the Pokot and the Marakwet, but are now also involved in enforcing the anti-FGM Act.

With the help of World Vision, the chief has been able to rescue a number of girls from the rite and early marriage, many of whom have gone back to school.

“World Vision has paid school fees for some of the girls and this has motivated many families to spare them the cut,” says Jacylin.

She explains that the main challenge remains the popularity of traditional weddings. Among the Marakwet, this remains a key component of marriage and only those who are circumcised can participate in them.

“Even as the chief I cannot attend those ceremonies, neither can my husband,” says Jacylin, adding that it is difficult to suggest an end to the weddings.



RELIGIOUS LEADERS AS CHAMPIONS



Sheikh Dido Mtoro of Masjid Mihrab mosque in Garsen, Tana River County

‘We will fight attempts to repackage FGM’

Islamic say ‘sunna’ and all other forms of FGM must be abandoned

The animated debate among the gathering of Muslim Sheikhs in Garsen town is only rivalled by the searing midday sun outside the hall. The opposing views are presented animatedly, a sign of the divisive emotions that the subject arouses.

“The fact that this discussion is taking place at all represents great progress,” says Daud Abdullahi, a programme officer at WomanKind, a non-governmental

organisation based in Garissa, North Eastern Kenya.

In a major religious and cultural shift, Muslim leaders in Tana River County have recently added in the agenda a regular session to interpret religious literature on female genital mutilation. While the majority condemn it as an antiquated practice that has no Islamic basis, others vehemently defend it as an obligation among the faithful.

During the debate, Sheikh Dido Mtoro makes reference

‘Muslim women are more likely to have been circumcised than women from other religious groups in Kenya, while the Somali have the highest prevalence rate at 94 percent’

to a booklet as well as the Koran, arguing that both the life of the Prophet and numerous opinion by leading scholars do not support the argument that FGM is Islamic.

“Nowhere is it mentioned that even the Prophet’s own daughter was cut,” argues Sheikh Mtoro.

Sheikh Mtoro is the chairman of the Coast Inter-Faith Council of Clerics and also Imam of Masjid Mihrab, the biggest mosque in Garsen sub-county of Tana River. The Inter-Faith Council deals mainly deals with social matters such as child labour, gender violence and peaceful co-existence among the Pokomo and the Orma, the two main ethnic communities in Tana River.

Female genital mutilation is a recent agenda within the Council, which brings together religious leaders from different faiths.

It is a subject that was included in the Council’s mandate following interventions by WomanKind, a grass-roots organisation that is supported by the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme to accelerate the abandonment of FGM in Garissa and Tana River.

These are two regions whose population is mainly Muslim, with the Somali population occupying much of Garissa. According to the 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, Muslim women are more likely to have been circumcised than women from other religious groups in Kenya, while the Somali have the highest prevalence rate at 94 percent.

“Our anti-FGM campaign is delivered in the context of a much broader context that covers human rights and religion as well as basic needs, especially for the girl child,” says Daud.

Daud says that their focus on Muslim religious leaders is driven by the fact that Islamic teachings govern every aspect of a Muslim’s life. “The verdict of the Sheikhs on whether FGM is Islamic or not will determine whether the anti-FGM stands or falls,” he says.

Sheikh Mtoro was one of the first leaders invited by WomanKind to attend a bench-marking mission in Egypt and Sudan, where anti-FGM advocacy work has been going on for a while. From that mission, Sheikh Mtoro and the team were able to interact with top Muslim scholars and get some literature on the subject of Islam and FGM.

“The books have been very helpful because they have given us insights into other Islamic authorities apart from just the Koran, such as the Sunnah and teachings of scholars. Those visits gave us wider access to Islamic jurisprudence regarding FGM,” says Sheikh Mtoro.

He says that their initial attempts to introduce the subject were not received very well, especially by the women who were uncomfortable about the idea of men discussing such issues openly.

The fact that WomanKind held various community dialogues and training sessions in the community where men and women sat together helped to make the subject less sensitive.

One of the strongest advocacy messages introduced by the campaign was the difference in delivery outcomes among the Orma compared with their Pokot neighbours. The latter do not practice FGM.



Sheikh Hussein Oyow, Kadhi's Representative in Sankuri location, Garissa with Daud Ahmed of WomanKind

“We the Orma had noticed that there were more childbirth-related deaths among our women compared to the Pokomo. A Pokomo woman is able to deliver and go back to her chores within two days, while many of our women are debilitated for a long while before they can be active,” says the Sheikh.

According to Daud, WomanKind, considerable progress has been made around Garsen, but difficult terrain and low levels of education deep in Tana River County decelerate progress.

“In addition, there are those who insist that the mild form of FGM known as *sunna* is harmless”, he says.

Campaigners believe this signifies a considerable mellowing of the intransigent position; from insisting on the cut to seeking consensus on the less severe pricking to draw blood. They are optimistic that the battle is half-won.

Sheikh Mtoro says that practices such as FGM that have persisted for so many years cannot be expected to die off instantly, therefore organisations such as WomanKind should target more Sheikhs with anti-FGM advocacy training.

“The more religious leaders we have who preach that FGM is not a religious requirement, the faster we will have adherents beginning to open their minds to change, he says.

His own family is a living example. It is only after he was trained that his own two daughters were saved from the cut.

“I have two daughters who are not cut. Unfortunately, my eldest daughter was circumcised long before I met with WomanKind,” he says.

The campaign by the Joint Programme in Kenya is based on the confidence that once a united front among influential religious leaders is presented in the anti-FGM campaign, regions where the practice is prevalent will begin to see sustainable change.

Sheikh Hussein Oyow, the Kadhi’s Representative in Sankuri location of Garissa, supports the call for a cohesive stand especially by Islamic religious leaders.

Before he was incorporated by WomanKind, most of his work in the Kadhi’s court involved matters such as conducting weddings and arbitration in divorce cases or domestic violence.

Following anti-FGM campaign training workshops, Sheikh Oyow has increasingly engaged Islamic preachers on the need for consensus on FGM. He says that those who insist that female circumcision is in keeping with Islam are today in the minority.

“My position has always been that it is inconceivable that the Quran would allow us to harm our girls. Some have agreed with me but there are still others who feel that the *sunna* type of cutting is harmless and should be allowed to continue,” says Sheikh Oyow.



Percentage of women age 15-49 circumcised by selected ethnic group in Kenya



'I never thought FGM was a big deal, until the day our sister narrowly escaped death'

Pastor now gives shelter to girls escaping the cut

Growing up in Nyarohanie Village in Kuria West, Pastor Tom Motatiro remembers how he used to cheerfully join in the procession as villagers sang songs while escorting girls who had just gone through circumcision.

"Our house was just next to the road and though most of the girls were clearly in pain, I never gave it a thought until it was my sister's turn," says Pastor Motatiro who now ministers at the Maranatha Faith Assemblies church.

He remembers how they had to rush his sister to hospital following excessive bleeding that could not be contained by the local traditional doctor.

"It was my uncle who suggested we take her to hospital when we realised she would die in our hands," says the pastor.

Though the incident stayed in his mind for a long time, it was not until after he finished his pastoral training that he started thinking about campaigning against the rite.

"When I joined the church I started discussing with fellow pastors what we could do. I started using Sunday school forums to tell the children to refuse the cut and soon some girls started coming to my home to escape from the cut," he says.

He remembers facing the wrath of some parents when at one time four girls ran to his house when they heard they would be cut. He decided to send them to the home of a pastor in the next village but somehow word went round that he had hidden them.

"A couple of elders were sent to me, threatening to curse me and ordering me to pay three cows for each girl that I had hidden. They knew I did not own a single cow



Pastor Tom Motatiro who is working to rescue girls from Kuria, a region with one of the highest FGM rates in Kenya

at the time, but I nevertheless I told them to come over the following day," he says.

The elders did not turn up the following day, with one later confiding in him that they suspected the pastor had more powerful charms that he would use to bewitch them.

"In the Kuria community belief in witchcraft still thrives," he explains.

Later, the Kuria office of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) heard of the work Pastor Motatiro and his team were doing and invited them for anti-FGM advocacy training seminars. It was at these seminars that they were able to establish networks with government departments for a more effective campaign.

The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on FGM is supporting ADRA to carry out activities including peer



Schoolgirls at an Alternative Rites of Passage event organised by ADRA in Kuria County

education, school fees support for girls escaping the cut and life skills training.

“This collaboration has helped because I am no longer seen as some sort of vigilante but someone working with government. Today most of the elders fear confronting me because they know I have government’s blessing. Nothing scares them more than the prospect of being in police custody,” he says.

ADRA also helped the pastor to establish the Kuria West Networking CBO to push the anti-FGM campaign and to pay for school fees for some of the girls who were forced to run away from home.

The year 2016 presents a special challenge for Pastor Motatiro and fellow campaigners. Among the Kuria, only one of the four Kuria clans conducts initiation rites for their girls in any given year.

With the number Seven being associated with a bad omen, the elders have decided that no rite will take place in 2017 so three of the four clans must cut their girls this year.

“We have already identified a large number of girls from this clan and we will accommodate them in our

churches for as long as the initiation ceremonies will be taking place,” says Pastor Motatiro, worried about the security of the girls.

Already, tension is high in the village following the arrest of four circumcisers. Insecurity is high and there are increasing cases of cattle rustling, with the stolen cattle used mostly to feed guests during the circumcision ceremonies and pay for bride price.

He says there are still some pastors who are unwilling to go against the cultural practice. These ones fear that they will lose followers to those churches that do not discuss the subject of FGM.

“Another major challenge is that some families escape across the border to neighbouring Tanzania where they perform the rites,” he says.

Pastor Motatiro points to at least 20 married women who were rescued from the cut by his CBO and over 200 girls who were rescued from early marriage and proceeded to secondary school.

“Even if these are the only ones we will ever save, our struggle in this community will be justified,” he says.

FORMER CIRCUMCISERS
AS CHAMPIONS





Former circumciser Mary Lepile

The month of August has become special for the sleepy town of Maralal in Samburu. It is the month when hundreds of local and international guests descend here for the popular Camel Derby, a fun festival featuring camel races to raise funds for various charities.

The camel has a central place for the Samburu people, for it is especially hardy to withstand long periods of time without water. Samburu, in northern Kenya, is classified as arid, and the people traditionally survive by moving constantly in search of pasture.

For 66-year old Maria Lepile, a former circumciser, August used to be a highly anticipated month too. It is the month that would bring her fame and fortune as families flocked her home to seek her services.

She no longer cuts girls, though, and today she has learned to be as enduring as the camel in her resolve to abstain from a trade that sustained her family long after the death of her husband 25 years ago.

A mother of four boys and four girls, Maria has raised them virtually on her own, and in addition she takes care of her two grandchildren.

She is one of five wives of the late Lepile and was only 15 years old when she got married to the then 55-year old man. When the husband died, each of the wives had to find a means for survival.

Having been an apprentice to her aunt, a popular circumciser in Kisima Location, Maria promptly decided to start the trade on her own.

Like the Camel Derby, every August when schools went on holiday was a key season for her, for that is when most of the circumcision ceremonies were held.

“I would be paid Sh. 500 for every girl and in a season I would circumcise about 100 girls,” says Maria.

Though the income from this trade enabled her to take care of her family, a workshop she attended two years ago organised by World Vision International convinced her to turn her back completely on the practice.

“Today I even get harassed by young men who wish to marry, they come with their parents and want me to circumcise their girls. Some even threaten to beat me up when I decline, but I have to remain stubborn, I will not break the law,” she says.

Maria is one of the ten former circumcisers who were mobilised by World Vision two years ago for training on the health and social consequences of FGM. She used to practice sunna, believed to be a safer, less gruesome method of FGM, but a video she saw during the training made her understand that all forms of FGM have risks.

It was at that training that she first learned that FGM is unlawful in Kenya and that circumcisers and parents who circumcised their girls faced imprisonment.

Though she is at times pressured to resume the practice when faced with financial hardship, she says she would rather forgo the Sh. 2,000 that is paid for every girl today, rather than risk being arrested.

“I am the only parent left to take care of the children and the suffering my family would face without me is not worth the two thousand shillings,” she says.

World Vision has now included Maria in a forthcoming round of training for alternative income-generating activities. The training will include sessions on business management, networking, and financial planning.

One of the challenges of convincing circumcisers to abandon the trade has always been the difficulty in finding

replacement activities that can generate the same income for them.

According to Jonathan Lepoora who is the World Vision Area Programme Manager for Samburu, the support from the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on FGM has helped to transform the outlook for girls in the area.

“FGM is the beginning of a lifelong cycle of problems for the girls. When she undergoes the rite, invariably she gets married off at an early age and obviously drops out of school. She then starts childbirth, which is again often risky as she is still not ready, leading to health complications for her and the baby,” says Jonathan.

A major challenge remains finding alternative means of survival for redeemed circumcisers. In many cases, this is the only trade the elderly women have known.

Some like Esther Limakoru from Nakwijit Village in West Pokot have been fortunate to move on into some form of income-generating occupation.

“They used to pay me with a goat and a jerrican of the local alcoholic brew, but after stopping the trade life was difficult for a while,” says Esther.

The 56-year old mother of three girls and a boy learned the trade just by watching others do it. The coming of Christianity and a training seminar organised by the World Vision convinced her to stop the trade.



Mary Lepile with World Vision’s David Loloju

“Today I believe that circumcision does not necessarily make one an adult because there are many girls in this village who are married yet they were not cut.

Her own daughter is one of them. After the training by World Vision, Esther decided that her last-born daughter would not be cut.

That daughter is today highly admired by many in the village. She is one of the few who completed secondary school and went on to college. She is now a primary school teacher and has already set up a small hotel for her mother.

She says what she likes most about her present occupation is that her clients leave with a happy face, unlike the pain she used to see in the girls she circumcised.

“When the time comes for my children to have daughters, I have already told them never to come to my house if they ever circumcise them,” says Esther.



Former circumciser Esther Limakoru now operates a small hotel in Nakwijit Village in West Pokot.

YOUNG MEN
AS CHAMPIONS





Samburu moran Boniface Lekaldero

We want our wives intact, say morans

The waves of modernity have relentlessly knocked at the Samburu culture, sweeping away aspects of it as they have done around many African communities. For the Samburu, though, the moran remains a defender of not only their people, but also their culture.

A young Samburu man becomes a moran – or warrior – upon circumcision. Moranism promotes comradeship,

courage, and self-sacrifice. It remains the foundation on which the pride of the Samburu community is grounded, and young boys looking forward to the day they will join the prestigious club of morans.

The elaborate circumcision ceremony takes place after about seven years, with the age-set that is circumcised serving as warriors until the next age-set.

Traditionally, morans were expected to defend the community whenever inter-tribal wars flared. They would go after stolen cattle and chase away wild animals that preyed on the community livestock.

For Boniface Lekaldero, a moran in Nairorkeju Village in Maralal, his role of defending the community has taken on a new narrative.

The first son in a family of four boys and four girls, 22-year old Boniface is one of the morans who has been trained by the Samburu office World Vision International and is now an advocate for eradication of FGM.

“Healthy and educated girls are vital for the survival of the Samburu community especially in the modern world. If we do not protect them from the harmful effects of FGM then we will not be true to our calling as defenders of the Samburu people,” says Lekaldero.

He explains that as part of the initiation process, morans are taught the meaning of sharing and unity. No moran for example is allowed to eat alone, and he says that this training inspires him to spread the lessons he got from World Vision to as many people as possible.

He says that the first time they were mobilised by World Vision’s Lorroki Area Development Programme (ADP), they did not take seriously the information regarding the harmful effects of FGM.

“We were resistant because we felt they were being contemptuous of our culture and wanted us to stop a practice we had lived with for ages,” says Lekaldero.

He says that after several sessions, the turning point for most of the morans was when they were shown pictures and videos of the harm that FGM had done to some girls.

Now convinced, Boniface is among several morans who go from house to house talking to parents and fellow morans about the ills of FGM. At times the elders dismiss them but they persist.

“There are occasional forums where morans meet with the elders to discuss communal concerns, and this is one avenue for us to discuss the effects of FGM. Some elders

are too set in their beliefs, but some of them give us a hearing especially because many of us have gone to school,” he says.

The Lorroki ADP has held one seminar bringing together morans and some village elders. During that seminar the elders were visibly shocked to see videos of the harmful consequences of FGM.

In an attempt to deflect responsibility, some of them were quick to point out that men were never present during the circumcision rite, therefore could not know what took place.

Jonathan Lepoora of World Vision says that the programme is now targeting primary school boys with mentorship programmes.

“At this age they are yet to get circumcised so we want to prepare them to avoid bad traditions associated with moranism,” says Lepoora.

Lekaldero is among the morans who have vowed publicly that when the time comes, they will be seeking to marry uncircumcised girls. While this would traditionally be a reason for public ridicule, the fact that he has gone to school means his decision is respected.

“Some young people have married girls from other tribes who are uncut, and they have gone on to live a normal life. This is helping to debunk some traditional myths regarding girls who are uncut,” says Lekaldero.

He says that as more and more girls enrol in school, they will be able to convince their families of the dangers of FGM.

He believes that because of the advocacy work of morans, even those women who have been cut have learned of the dangers of FGM and will not allow their own daughters to be circumcised.

Lekaldero believes there is still a lot of ground to be covered in making their anti-FGM messages believable.



Kenya Anti-FGM Board Chairperson Jebii Kilimo joins morans for an anti-FGM campaign event. A number of morans have made public declarations of their intention to marry uncircumcised girls.

“Especially because many in our audience are illiterate, they feel that we are propagating what they call book knowledge. It will be good if we can have laptops and CDs to carry with us when we go, because it is easy to convince them when they see the pictures,” he says.

“Those who support female circumcision say it is preparation for marriage. Now we are telling parents that we as future husbands do not want circumcised women so let them listen to us,” he says.

‘Some young people have married girls from other tribes who are uncut, and they have gone on to live a normal life’



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