





Men at a Kongamano (Community Forum) in Isiolo County

ENGAGING MEN AS ALLIES TO END FGM/C

The 2010 Constitution of Kenya protects children and women from abuse, harmful cultural practices, and all forms of violence. The Government of Kenya has enacted legislation prohibiting FGM/C, including the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2011 and the Children's Act, 2022.

ActionAid International Kenya (AAIK) programmatic and policy approaches tackle the root causes of gendered inequalities. The approaches are underpinned by the social norms change approach that promotes participatory community dialogue, leading to collective decision-making to abandon the practice. AAIK recognises FGM/C as a rights violation and injustice meted on women and girls in societies where unjust power imbalances and patriarchy exist to shape the people's norms. Therefore, we must recognize that we need to work strategically with boys and men to change entrenched views and advance women's /girls' rights.

ActionAid International Kenya (AAIK) is a consortium partner implementing The Girl Generation support to the Africa-led Movement (TGG-ALM) Programme to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). TGG-ALM seeks to accelerate positive changes in social attitudes

toward ending FGM/C, within a broader vision of a world where girls and women can exercise their power and rights, have expanded choice and agency, and are free from all forms of violence. The intended impact of this programme is an accelerated reduction in the practice of FGM/C in focus countries, Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, and Somaliland, by 2025.

AAIK implements the programme in Isiolo and Garissa counties and has intentionally engaged the 'Men for Change Network' to support women and girls in ending FGM/C. Currently, the 'Men for Change Network' has more than 1000 young men campaigning to end FGM at the grassroots.

This year's Zero Tolerance to FGM theme is partnering with men and boys to transform social and gender norms to end FGM and aligns with what Men for Change have been fronting. As culture shapers and critical thinkers, young men, and women jointly campaign to end FGM and child marriages in their spheres of influence.

Role of men in ending FGM/C

Organizing and mobilizing fellow men to understand that FGM/C violates girls' and women's rights and be the change agents.

AAIK has mobilized, and equipped men with a deeper understanding of FGM/C and its negative impacts on the lives of girls and women through various training. The training has covered various topics like the Human Rights Based Approach to development, women's rights, existing legal frameworks in protecting women and girls, safeguarding, and the role of men as allies in supporting women and girls. This has led to men reflecting on the challenges women survivors in their communities go through after FGM/C. The training has also inspired them to advocate against FGM/C voluntarily as allies.

The Men for Change champions apply different approaches to engage other men in their communities, including community outreaches and dialogues. They also personally reach local leaders and spend time explaining the adverse effects of FGM/C. Local leaders have assured the young men of their support, and have committed to partnering with them to drive local initiatives toward ending FGM/C.

"I have spotted the local leaders with whom I have had discussions, sharing their reflections and experiences on the effects of FGM/C on the women in a kongamano (community dialogue). For example, one of the elders shared that most women in our community experience health complications during and after childbirth, compared to women who have not gone through FGM/C, and they take a long time to heal and resume their normal duties," stated Abdi Male Champion from Kiina, Isiolo County

Additionally, Men for Change reaches out to young people through common areas of gathering in their communities, e.g., centers where young people gather to watch sports, and local football teams form critical spaces for sharing knowledge and information on ending FGM/C. While sharing the knowledge, young people ask questions and feel comfortable expressing themselves to the Men for Change champions as most of the champions are also young, Abdi further noted.

"We identify ourselves as men for change while engaging the students and men watching and playing sports in Kiina. The young people have supported our activities. They ask questions related to FGM/C, and we can answer as we were equipped with this knowledge in the ActionAid Kenya training. Our ability to answer FGM/C questions has convinced young people, especially young men, to join the movement.

Men as allies in a more significant movement to facilitate changes in attitude and perceptions that refute the narrative that girls should be cut to be married or be women.

FGM/C strives to maintain a gendered construction of womanhood by linking it to a mark of self-identity. It compounds a gender identity defined through prescribed maturity. Culture has defined roles, expectations and rites that often have violated the rights of women and girls. Therefore, communities must work together in solidarity to change the narrative and rally behind women and girls. The Men for change have collaborated with the Women

Rights Network (WRN) Champions, and Young Women Breaking Barriers champions to conduct community activities in the form of Kongamanos, Intergenerational dialogues, soccer tournaments and campaigns during key international days. This collaboration in activities has led to evident solidarity within the communities to advocate for the rights of women and girls.



Men For Change Champions

There is a growing collective agreement in challenging normalisation of all forms of violence against women and girls, existing gender stereotypes, and power boundaries in their communities. Girls are now confident to share their thoughts about FGM/C during the community dialogues, in front of elders, which was previously 'unacceptable' in communities.

Reflecting on their impact on their communities and for themselves after the training, the Men for Change are now recognised by local leaders like chiefs as change champions. They have also gathered the confidence to approach the leaders and engage them in anti-FGM/C conversations, which they could not do in the past. This is based on their work, such as sharing knowledge about the effects of FGM/C.

"Before the training, leaders intimidated me and couldn't have had anti-FGM conversations. The training gave me the confidence to approach and engage my local leaders in these conversations. Whenever I meet the local chiefs in the streets, they ask questions about how the men for change and myself are progressing in our attempt to end FGM/C. They always encourage men and the team to keep going," stated Abdiza

Studies continue to show that engaging men in programmes that contribute to ending FGM/C and all forms of violence against women and girls are a strategic approach. However, despite the progress shown, it is essential to clarify how men and boys are engaged and communicate clearly with them. The role of men is to support women and girls. It is not to take the lead but rather to collaborate. Men should recognise their power and privilege in society to advance women's and girls' rights. Unlike girls and women, most men are given the space to lead and practice their agency in society. It is, therefore, paramount for Men to support women and girls by encouraging agency, leadership, and bodily autonomy.



Mercy Gichengi, Programme Coordinator Youth and Governance at the Global People Power Forum.

Strengthening Social Movements to Counter Repression.

Social movements play a critical role in promoting change globally. Significant successes in political, social, and economic spheres are accredited to social activities. For example, in the 18th and 19th centuries, social movements were critical in calling for an end to slavery. Currently, these movements are being used to call for more tremendous respect for human rights, climate justice and other social courses..

ActionAid International Kenya joined representatives from various social movements worldwide to reflect on struggles and wins during the Global People Power Forum held at MS TCDC Arusha, Tanzania, from 5th to 10th February 2023. The forum attracted representatives from over 23 countries across Europe, Asia, Africa and North and South America.

The forum highlighted the need for collective action and solidarity worldwide in building and strengthening movements and countering repression. The global people power forum was organized by the ActionAid Denmark Move team.



Everlyne Atieno, Young Urban Women Leader, Mombasa at the Global People Power Forum.



Women in a Kongamano forum.

Two Girls Rescued from Undergoing FGM/C in Oldonyiro, Isiolo county.

In this case study, we'll explore the role Kongamanos play in helping communities eradicate FGM/C. It will also showcase the story of two fifteen-year-old girls who were saved from FGM/C in Longopito, a community nearby Tuale village where a Kongamano was carried out. Additionally, this case study will evaluate the successes, lessons learned, modifications made, and difficulties encountered throughout the community Kongamanos organized under the Girl Generation Support to African Led Movement to End Female Genital Mutilation (ALM-FGM) programme. The programme is implemented by ActionAid International Kenya (AAIK) in Isiolo county, Oldonyiro, Kiina and Burat wards.

The dialogues in Kongamanos aim to educate participants and make them aware of the protection mechanisms in place to allow women and girls to live freely without being subjected to harmful cultures like FGM/C. Women's rights networks, young women breaking barriers, and men for change champions frequently facilitate the Kongamanos, which encourage open discussions through reflection, storytelling, and question-and-answer sessions.

The dialogues held through the Kongamanos have created a space for women, men, and local administrators to hold open discussions and examine the impact of FGM/C on women and girls. As a result, over 450 community members in Oldonyiro ward have participated in the Kongamanos and educated other members back home. It is through the Kongamanos that the community members have committed to protect women and girls from any form of violence, especially

FGM/C. The community members are also linked with women champions from the Women Rights Network (WRNs) to report any progress that communities make on protecting the girls from FGM/C. It is also important to note that the Kongamanos held by ALM-FGM programme are girl centred.

Joseph sikoli Lesingirat, a young man from Longopito, attended a Kongamano organised in Tuale village which educated the participants about FGM/C, its effects, and mechanisms for protecting girls/women from harmful cultural practises. Longopito is a hard-to-reach village located in Oldonyiro ward, Isiolo county. It is inhabited by the Samburu community, which practices Female Genital Mutilation (FGM/C) at a prevalence of 86% (KDHS 2014).

On December 2022, two girls were rescued from going through FGM/C in Longopito by Joseph Sikoli. This was during the school holidays. Girls are vulnerable to FGM/C in holidays especially when they close schools. The two girls who are 15-year-old from Joseph's neighborhood were ready to undergo FGM/C. When Joseph learned, this was planned to happen, he went to the area chief to report the incident. After speaking with the area chief, he went on to speak to the parents of the girls to enlighten them about the harmful effects of FGM/C. He later called Amina, a WRN champion who facilitated the Kongamano which he attended to update her about the incident. Joseph said:

'Through the education I received during a Kongamano held by ALM-FGM programme through AAIK, I am now aware of the effects of FGM/C on women and girls. I have committed myself to protect them and remain vigilant in my community to end FGM/C. I believe that men, too,

can contribute to the elimination of FGM/C’.



Cultural leaders participate in a Kongamano forum.

What has changed due to the Kongamanos?

- It is a platform from different age groups and contexts to dialogue and exchange ideas on how the community will work to end FGM/C.
- Communities have reviewed FGM/C beliefs, norms, taboos, culture, benefits and how they want to end FGM/C in their communities.
- Women and young people with low confidence and who fear engaging male elders have had their voices heard.
- The community is starting to take responsibility and accountability in ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and FGM/C.
- There is increased understanding of FGM/C and how to end it through transformational processes by changing the negative social norms and attitude.

Achievements.

- Girls are being rescued from going through FGM/C by people who attend the Kongamanos.
- Increased sensitization and increased awareness on FGM/C among all age groups.
- Young men are vigilant and report cases of FGM/C and other violence against women and girls within their community.
- Community members have increased capacity in the understanding the importance of protecting and safeguarding women and children.
- Young girls are now more confident in speaking Infront of elders about ending FGM/C which was once aa taboo subject.

- Girls are at the center of Kongamanos. During the forums, the girls are given a priority to speak in the forums and the conversations.
- The Kongamanos have helped community members to raise their fears, doubts, questions and enabled them to critically reflect on the wrong beliefs which perpetuate the practice and challenge FGM/C for the better.

Emerging lessons and adaptive Learnings

- To sustain and motivate community conversations on ending FGM/C, the facilitators allow the community to discuss good cultures within their community and bad cultures that have been stopped and those that are ongoing.
- Different age groups are given an opportunity to engage and dialogue on FGM/C and other topics this increases confidence especially among young people.
- Community conversations is a key approach in engaging communities and encourage the collective abandonment of FGM/C and child marriage. When the communities come together to address identified common problems, the issue is given the attention and long-lasting solution.
- The dialogues held in communities have given young girls and women opportunity and the confidence to directly challenge men on patriarchy, GBV and FGM/C.
- Elders now recognise that decisions should be made by involving the entire community, rather than just the council of elders. This is something they wouldn't do easily in the past.

Challenges

- It is not easy to shift community perception and beliefs, especially those that are deep rooted in religious and cultural beliefs. However, we have been consistently engaging the communities in anti-FGM/C conversations. This may change their perceptions within time.
- There is limited funding for social mobilization and behaviour changes activities to challenge deep rooted negative norms. For example, some community members who practice FGM/C shift to other villages where enforcement is weak, for the fear of being reported and arrested by ALM movement partners in the communities. It would be effective if all villages within the county of operation would be included in the programme activities. This would discourage cross border movement to practice FGM/C.
- There have been instances of conflict -banditry that led to cancelling a series of meetings. We have been keen to conduct activities in places that have minimal conflict issues.

Recommendations

- Increase the number of Kongamanos.
- Map out harder to reach areas to conduct Kongamanos.
- Increase awareness of the referral mechanism.
- Chiefs should provide residents with a phone number that is readily available in case of an emergency.



Girls at Rahma catch up centre in Garissa County with numeracy learners' booklets.

Transforming Lives Through Accelerated Learning.

ActionAid International Kenya through the Education for Life (EfL) project has brought about accelerated literacy, numeracy, and life skills for the most marginalized Out of School Girls (OOSG) in underserved targeted counties by transforming their lives, and educational/ vocational attainment.

The Five-year (September 2019 and March 2023) project is funded by UKAid-Girls' Education Challenge under the 'Leave No Girl Behind window' and is being implemented in five counties in Kenya namely Isiolo, Garissa, Migori, Kisumu and Kilifi.

In facilitating increased access to education by out of schoolgirls, the EfL project developed a curriculum and teachers guide for use to educate girls at catch-up centers in the five mentioned counties. The materials developed include English Learners workbook and Facilitators guide, Mathematics Learners workbook and Facilitators guide, and Kiswahili workbook and Facilitators Guide. All these aimed at attaining accelerated literacy, numeracy, and life skills for these marginalized out of schoolgirls.

These resources have been of invaluable use to marginalized Out of School Girls (OOSG), girls living with disability, educator facilitators (teachers of this accelerated learning centers) and partners in advocating for and enhancing education. The material has also improved the quality of teaching and ensured attendance of girls in formal and non-formal learning to achieve the ultimate outcomes of learning, transition, and sustainability.

This project has enhanced life chances of Out of School Girls who have successfully completed their vocational training and have secured employment.

"Many girls have the mentality that mechanics is a trade for men and not women. They fear lying under a vehicle while doing the repairs. In mechanics we use our legs, especially where the job is too heavy for the hands, and it is okay. I am grateful to have been a beneficiary of this programme. I can now comfortably work and earn an income to support myself and my family," stated Christine Karisa, a project beneficiary from Magharini, Kilifi County.



Christine Karisa gets a helping hand while working on an engine.

Since inception, the project has benefited over 5,000 girls. The project is being implemented by three partners namely ActionAid International Kenya (as the lead) and Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) Kenya and Leonard Cheshire as members.



Community Kongamano forum in Jambele, Garissa County.

The Impact of Community Kongamanos in Ending FGM/C in Garissa County.

The Girl Generation support to Africa Led Movement to end Female Genital Mutilation programme scaled to Garissa County in its second year of operation. Kongamanos are among the interventions used by ActionAid International Kenya to implement the programme. The Kongamanos are held in hard-to-reach areas that are hard to reach and are Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting (FGM/C) hotspots. In this case study, we explore the progress that Jambele community has made in ending FGM/C. We unpack the achievements, challenges, adaptive learnings, and recommendations.

Jambele is a small village located in Bura ward, Garissa County. It is located approximately 110kms away from Garissa town. Jambele is one of the villages in Bura ward that has lagged in economic and social development. It is majorly occupied by the Somali community who rely on pastoralism and a few practices farming. The people who reside in Jambele, practice Female Genital Mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) on young girls as a tradition.

For the first time the residents of Jambele community participated in Kongamanos that intended to end FGM/C. The Kongamanos were held in a series of three. The first Kongamano addressed the issues that women face in terms of violence and women rights. The second Kongamano unpacked FGM/C, its effects to girls and other

integrated retrogressive practices that are associated with it like forced and early marriages. The third Kongamano discussed the case managements and actions the participants intend take to protect the girls from FGM/C. The facilitators ensured the voices and concerns of girls are heard, prioritized, addressed, and implemented. This is by giving the young girls an opportunity to speak during the dialogues and centering the conversations around the girls. The Kongamano activities provided a space for women, men, and local administrators(chief), elders and religious leaders to collectively have open conversations, discuss and analyze the impact of FGM/C on women and girls and to also come up with local solutions to ending FGM/C in their communities. While expressing the reasons why the community practices FGM/C, two participants said the following:

"We practice FGM/C because of our men, they don't marry girls who are not circumcised in the community. If they marry a girl who is not circumcised, they chase her away and embarrass her referring to her as a woman who has been sleeping around with other men and unchaste. It's also a culture and we are guided by our culture."

" If our ancestors practised the cut and they lived a normal life, why should it be a problem now?"

The facilitators played an important role to enlighten the communities on things that are not discussed in the Kongamanos by the participants or even by giving new information that they may not know. For example, the rights of girls and women, health complications that arise from FGM/C and referral pathways. They also encourage participants from different contexts and ages to participate in conversations. The participants had lively discussions. On one of the dialogues, an elder reflected on the impact of the Kongamanos to him. He pointed out that.

"Before I never paid attention to the procedure of doing FGM/C but now I want to thank Maka (the facilitator) and ActionAid Kenya for enlightening us on this harmful practice. During the cutting season, our wives asked for money for the process, and we provided the money not knowing that our girls are being mutilated. I am now here, wondering why our women, the ones who are the mother of girls are still perpetuating this painful practice to our girls despite knowing the how painful the process is to the girls."

What has changed due to the community kongamanos?

A few days after the kongamano sessions, a religious leader in Jambele came across a cutter who was about to carry out the practice. He immediately intervened the situation and convinced the cutter not to cut the girl. During this incident, the religious leaders reached out to the facilitator, Maka, informing her of the incident and their action.

Out of the Kongamanos, the participants in Jambele, Bura Ward have come up with the following activities:

- Weekly mosque sermons on ending FGM.

- Teaching women and girls about FGM not being a mandatory religious activity.
- Intergenerational sessions between young people and elders.
- The community members have formed SGBV working group where they have open discussions, sensitizations, and campaigns against this harmful practice.
- Community leaders have started to take responsibility and accountability in ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and FGM/C.

Achievements

- There is increased awareness on FGM/C, this can be seen through follow ups, reports, and feedback.
- Community members have increased capacity in the understanding the importance of protecting and safeguarding women and children at the community level.
- The rights of girls are now protected and safeguarded.
- The community members are now openly discussing and reflecting on the wrong traditional norms which perpetuate the practice and challenge FGM/C.

Adaptive Learnings

- Kongamanos have given girls and women the platform to directly contribute to societal matters in a patriarchal society. This was a challenge on the very first day of the three-day kongamano activity in Jambele. However, by the third Kongamano session, women and girls could freely express their opinions.
- Community elders and religious leaders are the key approach to engaging community members and encourage the collective abandonment of FGM/C.

Challenges

- Shifting community deep rooted attitude, perception, religious and traditional beliefs is a slow process and takes time.
- The community members in Jambele mostly being pastoralist, some of them were away during this activity as they had migrated to look for pasture. This is a challenge because some of the cutters were among those that had migrated.

Recommendations

- There is need to have training session for women survivors.
- There is need to support the formation and strengthening of working technical groups in communities after the Kongamanos.
- There is need to train more religious leaders FGM/C.

Student-Led Movement Breaking the Silence on Sexual Harassment in Institutions of Higher Learning.

Socio-cultural gender norms continue to cultivate gender-based violence in households, communities, and institutions, with widespread impunity for the perpetrators. As the world marked 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, CampusMeToo, a student-led, Pan-African movement was not left behind. The movement joined other stakeholders in Kenya and from different parts of the world in marking the Global 16 Days of Activism Campaign.

CampusMeToo, is a student-led, Pan-African movement that is empowering students in higher institutions of learning to break the silence on sexual harassment through creative student-led activism. This has been achieved through creating awareness on sexual harassment and mobilizing other students to put pressure on the University management to implement advocacy demands to end violence in the institutions. The movement was launched on the 19th of November 2019 by students in Kenyan higher learning institutions.



CampusMeToo snapper frames with messages on ending sexual harassment placed at select locations within the University of Nairobi.

Why an activism movement in higher learning institutions?

One in every two female students and one in every four male students has experienced a form of sexual harassment from a member of staff in Kenyan Universities. This is according to a survey done by ActionAid International Kenya in partnership with UN Women.

The study demonstrated that 66% of the student survivors were sexually harassed by a professor/lecturer.

- 49% of women experienced sexual harassment from a staff member.
- 24% of men experienced sexual harassment from a staff member.
- 66% of sexual harassment incidents perpetrated by a professor/lecturer.

- 38% of female students think it unlikely their university would take a sexual harassment report seriously.
- 33% of male students think it unlikely their university would take a sexual harassment report seriously.

CampusMeToo made a difference in my life.



My name is Annette Sidi, a fourth-year student from Kenyatta University pursuing Gender studies. CampusMeToo has had a massive influence on how I perceive things, growing up there are things that had been socialized to me as normal but engaging myself with CampusMeToo activities at Kenyatta University has enlightened me and I can easily discern the various forms of sexual harassment. I now understand that it can be verbal like unwelcomed comments regarding clothing or body and also non-verbal like licking lips from the opposite gender.

The different sessions that I have been part of have really influenced my thoughts on matters of sexual harassment and I can now confidently speak out against the vice.

Part of the students' multi-prolonged advocacy has been development and dissemination of a students' toolkit, lecturers' toolkit, and parents' toolkit to enable them to prevent, collect evidence, report and address cases of sexual harassment.

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