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Editorial Team

Ezra Kiriago - Communications Coordinator
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Side-by-Side Till FGM is No Longer a Threat: Abdi's Fight to Protect His Sister



Abdi and his sister Fouzia arrive at school in Kinna, Isiolo County.

For over thirteen years, Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting (FGM/C) has been a criminal offense in Kenya. Despite this, the deeply rooted cultural practice continues to pose a significant threat to women and girls in various parts of the country. However, change is happening, driven by efforts to engage communities and shift harmful traditions.

FGM/C involves the partial or total removal of a woman's or girl's external genitalia, resulting in devastating physical, mental, and psychological damage. In Kenya alone, over four million women and girls have suffered from this harmful practice. Organisations like ActionAid International Kenya (AAIK) are spearheading efforts to create movements that combat FGM/C, engaging men, women, youth, and children in the fight.




Abdi conversing with his sister Fouzia at school in Kinna, Isiolo County.

A particularly effective strategy AAIK has adopted is the creation of boys' and girls' forums in schools across the country. These forums educate students about the dangers of FGM/C and foster a new generation that actively opposes the practice. In Isiolo County, an area where FGM/C remains deeply entrenched, these forums have played a crucial role in shifting attitudes and beliefs among the youth.

One of the most inspiring examples of this change is 10-year-old Abdi from Kinna, Isiolo. Abdi has become an unlikely but passionate advocate against FGM/C, driven by his deep desire to protect his younger sister, Fouzia, from undergoing the brutal procedure. A regular participant in the Boys Forum at Quticha Primary School, Abdi has learned about the harmful consequences of FGM/C and is determined to ensure that his six-year-old sister is never subjected to it.

"I would not want my sister to undergo FGM/C. I have been educated to understand the implications of a girl being cut. If I leave her at home or unattended, the risk of her being forcefully cut by our relatives increases. It would hurt me to see my sister suffer now and, in the future, especially knowing that I can do something to prevent it," said Abdi.



“Not only do I walk hand-in-hand with Fouzia to school to keep her safe, but I also asked my teachers if they could allow her to stay in school beyond regular hours.” He explained, “Although Fouzia’s school day typically ends at 1:00 p.m., I requested that the teachers let her remain until 4:00 p.m., sso we can walk home together after my school day ends at 4:00 p.m.”

Abdi’s actions are a testament to his unwavering commitment. He understands that keeping Fouzia in school will shield her from potential harm. This act of protection has not only strengthened his resolve but has also changed his parents’ views. Seeing Abdi’s dedication, they have joined his cause, pledging to protect Fouzia just as he does. Abdi’s words and actions have empowered his family to make the decision to safeguard Fouzia from harm.


“Seeing the steps our students are taking to ensure that girls do not undergo female genital mutilation and cutting gives us hope that FGM/C will soon be a thing of the past. Abdi’s mother and grandmother have reportedly shunned any discussions about their daughter and granddaughter

undergoing FGM/C because Abdi has made it clear that Fouzia will not suffer the cut,” said Mercy Mwangi, a boys and girls forum patron at Quticha Primary School. She added that during the long holidays, Fouzia was not subjected to FGM/C.

In communities like Kinna, where girls as young as six are often considered ready for FGM/C, Abdi’s actions stand as a powerful example of how education and awareness can empower the younger generation to protect themselves and others from this harmful practice.

Teresa Awili, a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer for the Africa-Led Movement’s The Girl Generation programme, underscores the significance of Abdi’s efforts.

“In such communities, young girls often do not understand the implications of FGM/C and therefore have no means of resisting the pressure to undergo the procedure,” she explains. “But Abdi’s actions, combined with the support of the boys’ and girls’ forums, are helping to change this.”



Abdi and Fouzia's Mum, along with her husband, have united to protect her from FGM.

Abdi's story serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative power of education and engagement with young people in the fight against FGM/C. His unwavering determination to protect his sister, even at the expense of his own comfort, highlights not only his strength of character but also the profound potential for young people to inspire meaningful change within their communities.

Through initiatives like the boys' and girls' forums, AAIK is fostering a generation of children and young adults who are not only aware of the dangers of FGM/C but also equipped with the knowledge and confidence to challenge harmful traditions. With champions like Abdi, there is hope that FGM/C will one day be a thing of the past in Kenya.

Beyond the Pain: Survivor's Journey to Empowerment



Anne at her tailoring shop in Kasigau, Taita.

Globally, nearly one in three women experience violence, with crises further exacerbating the numbers. In Kenya, gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most severe human rights violations, demanding urgent intervention and prevention.


Anne* (not her real name), a 48-year-old mother of three from Kasigau in Taita Taveta County, endured 28 years in an abusive marriage before summoning the courage to break free.

"I was used to beatings and feared that one day he would kill me," she recalls.

Initially, Anne* felt helpless, unable to report or seek assistance from authorities due to fear of retaliation and lack of trust in the system.

Her husband not only physically abused her but also controlled and squandered her earnings from dressmaking.

He eventually sold her three sewing machines, leaving her without a source of income. When he finally abandoned her and their children, he contributed nothing to their education or basic needs.

A woman is shown from the chest up, seated at a table, sewing on a piece of vibrant, multi-colored patterned fabric. She is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt and a yellow measuring tape is draped around her neck. Her hands are positioned over the fabric, which is held taut. In the background, there are various items including a blue bag with a circular pattern and some other colorful fabrics. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an indoor setting like a workshop or a home.

The turning point came one fateful night when her husband, intoxicated, threw out all their belongings and ordered them out of the house. Left with nowhere to turn, Anne sought help from a local women's rights network representative, who invited her to a psychosocial support meeting. There, she found solace in the stories of other survivors, some even more harrowing than her own.

Encouraged by the support group, Anne* reported her case to the area chief, determined to secure her matrimonial property, which her husband intended to sell without her consent. With the intervention of local land officials, a caveat was placed on the property, preventing its sale. She is now in the process of registering the land under her children's names, ensuring their future security.

Anne* opted out of the marriage for the sake of her life and that of her children but chose to fight for her rights. With start-up capital from a survivor support program, she revived her dressmaking business. Today, her business is thriving, her children attend school, and they no longer go hungry.

Through economic empowerment initiatives, Anne has not only rebuilt her life but also reclaimed her dignity and independence.

Programs that enhance women's economic empowerment, such as the Women's Rights Program (WRP) implemented by ActionAid Kenya and its local partners, supported by Irish Aid through ActionAid Ireland, are instrumental in reducing GBV. By increasing women's financial independence and decision-making power, such initiatives enable survivors to leave abusive relationships. Moreover, safe spaces where women meet and share experiences play a crucial role in transforming attitudes, behaviors, and societal norms, fostering a future free from gender-based violence.

Contact Us:

Email: info.kenya@actionaid.org

Physical Office Address: All Africa Conference of Churches Building,
Waiyaki Way, Ibium House, Second Floor
P.O Box 42814-00100, Nairobi

Office Telephone Lines: +254 (020) 425 0500 ,
+254 722518220 , +254 722207749,
+254 733333352, +254 733330053

Fundraising Hotline: 0700 653 153



@Actionaid.Kenya



@Actionaid_Kenya



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