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Breaking Harmful Traditions, Building Futures



Esther Takule speaks to us during an interview at her home in Elang'ata Wuas, Kajiado County.

When we arrived in Iloodokilani, Kajiado County, the sun had already risen over the hills, and the heat was starting to settle in. Despite the intense sunlight, the landscape was surprisingly lush, an unexpected burst of greenery brought on by three weeks of heavy rainfall. The once-arid terrain had transformed into a vibrant expanse of green grass and thriving shrubs. I was accompanied by my colleagues: Catherine Mbiti, the Local Rights Programme Coordinator, and Samson Kutata, the Local Rights Programme Driver.

We had come to listen to the stories of women whose voices carry the weight of raw, painful, and powerful experiences. These women are not merely survivors; they are warriors. Through their courage and resilience, they are reshaping a community that once clung tightly to harmful traditions.



Mary Nasieku, FGM Champion during our interview at her salon in Maili 46, Elang'ata Wuas, Kajiado County.

The journey toward change began in 2013, after tragedy struck the region. A young girl died following Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and her death left an indelible mark on the community. This event, the women told me, became a turning point. “That moment changed everything,” Takule said quietly. “We couldn’t stay silent anymore.”

According to the 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS), the national prevalence of FGM has declined from 38% in 1998 to 15%. However, in regions like Kajiado, rates remain alarmingly high, up to 78%. This stark data underscores the pressing need for continued intervention to end this harmful practice.

With support from ActionAid Kenya, the women began raising awareness about the dangers of FGM. However, the road was not easy. They faced immense challenges, including being stoned while speaking out. Yet, they risked their safety and well-being to protect future generations.

“It was the backing from local chiefs who embraced the End FGM message, a few elders, and the unwavering support from ActionAid Kenya,” said Esther Takule, a Women’s Rights Champion. “Our determination was key. FGM wasn’t just a cut, it was a sentence. Girls dropped out of school, were married off, and lost their futures.”

Mary Nasieku shared her personal story:

“I was almost circumcised,” she recalled. “But thanks to the Iloodokilani women’s network and ActionAid Kenya, I was rescued. The school talks changed everything. I realized I had a voice. I had the right to say no.”

The awareness these courageous women created turned into tangible action. Teachers joined their efforts, holding school forums that educated and empowered girls. These sessions weren’t merely lectures; they were lifelines.



Sanchoine Nkede during our interview at her home and parcel of land in Elangata Wuas, Kajiado County.

Working with the Iloodokilani women's network, we educated parents and the community on the importance of ending FGM and ensuring that girls stay in school. Today, girls are completing their education and advancing to secondary school, a rarity in the region, thanks to the strong collaboration between stakeholders. The partnership has been essential," said Josphine Letia, Head of Oololera Taegong School.

But the challenges did not stop with FGM. Climate change has also had a profound impact on the community. With men often moving with cattle, women are left behind to shoulder the burden of childcare, with little food or income.

We had to find ways to survive," said Irine Nashipae.

"ActionAid Kenya trained us in beading and provided us with seed capital. Now, I run my own business. I even bought a small piece of land. My children eat, go to school, and have hope."

The fight was not solely economic. Many women also faced domestic violence and were excluded from land ownership. In Maasai tradition, land belonged to men, and women's names were rarely placed on title deeds. Sanchoine Nkede's story stands as a testament to resilience.

"I inherited my father's land as the eldest child because my father did not have sons," she explained. "But the group ranch leadership, in cahoots with an unscrupulous land buyer, tried to push me out. Even with the documents my father shared before he passed, they didn't want to accept them. ActionAid Kenya supported me, and I took the matter to the High Court in Nairobi, where I won." Her eyes sparkled with pride as she added, "Justice finally came."

Today, the Iloodokilani Women's Network, chaired by Mary Likama, works in partnership with local chiefs, police, and the county government to rescue at-risk girls and support survivors of abuse. Their network is stronger than ever. As our conversation drew to a close, Esther Takule offered a sobering reminder:

"We've come a long way, but there are still remote villages we haven't reached. We need unity and support. Only then can we end FGM and gender-based violence for good."

ActionAid Kenya continues to stand alongside women and girls across the country, empowering communities to end harmful practices like FGM, combat gender-based violence, promote economic independence, and secure land rights through legal support, education, and grassroots mobilization.

We call on supporters, donors, and partners to stand with us. Together, we can eliminate harmful practices like FGM, promote gender equality, and build a future where every woman and girl can thrive.

ActionAid Kenya Hosts Councillor Naima Ali for Continued Collaboration to End FGM



Naima Ali, along with ActionAid Kenya's Executive Director, Susan Otieno, during her visit to ActionAid Kenya's offices in Nairobi, Kenya, engaged in meaningful discussions

ActionAid Kenya hosted Councillor Naima Ali, the Mayor of Southwark, UK, at its Nairobi offices for the second time, following her initial visit in September 2024. A passionate advocate for the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), Councillor Ali's ongoing dedication to the cause has significantly strengthened the fight against this harmful practice.

This visit marks the beginning of an exciting collaboration between ActionAid Kenya and Councillor Ali, whose End FGM Initiative has made significant strides in raising awareness and pushing for legislative change in the fight against FGM. During the visit, Councillor Ali engaged in meaningful discussions with ActionAid Kenya's Executive Director, Susan Otieno, and Programmes and Strategy Lead, Samson Orai.

Together, they explored strategies to strengthen efforts to protect girls and communities from the devastating impacts of FGM.

Samson Orai, ActionAid Kenya's Programmes and Strategy Lead, expressed his enthusiasm about the visit:

"It is an honor to work with Councillor Naima Ali and her End FGM Initiative. Her advocacy and commitment bring a powerful voice to our shared goal of eliminating FGM. With her support, we believe we can make even more impactful progress in protecting girls across Kenya."



Naima Ali held a discussion with ActionAid Kenya's Programmes and Strategy Lead, Samson Orao, during her visit to ActionAid Kenya's offices in Nairobi, Kenya.

Councillor Naima Ali, reflecting on the collaboration, emphasized:

"This issue is personal to me, and it has been a privilege to partner with organizations like ActionAid Kenya that are making real change in communities. I'm committed to continuing this important work with ActionAid Kenya, and together, we can ensure that girls grow up free from the dangers of FGM."

Susan Otieno, ActionAid Kenya's Executive Director, also highlighted the importance of this collaboration:

"The work we're doing together is more crucial than ever. FGM is a practice that has caused untold harm to generations of girls. Through our partnership with Councillor Naima Ali, we aim to accelerate change in the communities most affected. Her commitment to the cause will help us amplify our efforts and ensure that more girls are protected from this harmful practice."

ActionAid Kenya remains dedicated to its mission to end FGM and ensure the rights and well-being of women and girls across Kenya. With continued support from global allies like Councillor Naima Ali, the organization is confident that a future free from FGM is within reach.

Empowering Communities and Driving Change in Marafa



Representatives of Sauti Ya Wanawake chapters engage in a strategic meeting with Chief Ndundi Chula in Garashi, Marafa, Kilifi County, to discuss community-led efforts to address gender-based violence. They are joined by ActionAid Kenya's Community Development Facilitator, Velma Kagonya, to strengthen collaborative approaches for safer communities.

In Marafa, Kilifi County, women have long endured severe challenges, including widespread gender-based violence (GBV) such as physical and sexual abuse. These injustices are often worsened by economic dependency, limited access to education, and a lack of leadership opportunities.

According to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS) 2022, the situation in Kilifi County, where Marafa is located, remains dire. The survey reports that 20.1% of women and girls aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, while 12.2% have experienced sexual violence. These alarming statistics underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to protect women and girls in the region.

To tackle these deeply rooted issues, ActionAid Kenya, in partnership with local organisations like Sauti Ya Wanawake Magarini, is driving transformative change in Magarini Subcounty. Sauti Ya Wanawake, a grassroots network comprising nine active chapters, is at the forefront of the fight against GBV, uniting women from diverse backgrounds to speak out and demand justice.



Merciline Kadii (centre), Chairlady of Sauti Ya Wanawake Magarini, shares a moment of discussion with Secretary Esther Mumba (left) and Treasurer Bibiana Salim (right) following a community engagement meeting in Garashi, Kilifi County.

Through this initiative, ActionAid Kenya supports women's advocacy groups that play a critical role in helping survivors report abuse, access psychosocial and legal support, and reintegrate into their communities with dignity. Sauti Ya Wanawake also provides safe spaces for survivors while working to dismantle harmful gender norms, promote financial independence, and deliver leadership training to build resilience against violence and exclusion.

Chief Mr. Ndundi Chula of Garashi has acknowledged the programme's significant impact, citing a visible shift in community attitudes and the rise of empowered women leaders. These women are not only challenging violence but also influencing others in the community to do the same.

The programme's inclusive approach is a cornerstone of this transformation, engaging men, boys, and traditional leaders to foster a more supportive and protective environment for women. By raising awareness of women's rights across entire communities, the programme is helping to shift long-held cultural perceptions and reduce tolerance of violence.

Still, work is not without obstacles. Merciline Kadii, Chairlady of Sauti Ya Wanawake, shared that activists often face threats from perpetrators.

"This remains one of our greatest challenges," she said. "But we continue working closely with the police to ensure these individuals are brought to justice."

ActionAid's holistic strategy recognises that economic empowerment is key to enabling women to escape abusive situations and assert their rights. The programme promotes financial literacy, supports income-generating activities, and facilitates access to savings groups, providing women with the tools they need for independence and stability.

In addition, by strengthening women's leadership in community governance and resilience-building efforts, the programme ensures their voices are heard in decision-making spaces where violence prevention and protection policies are crafted.

In a region long burdened by gender-based violence, ActionAid Kenya's Marafa programme is paving the way for lasting change. By empowering women socially and economically, supporting survivor-led networks, challenging harmful cultural norms, and fostering inclusive community engagement, women in Marafa are not merely enduring these challenges, they are at the forefront of advancing a safer and more equitable future for their communities.

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