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Brushstrokes of Freedom: How Girls in Garissa and Isiolo Are Using Art to End FGM/C



Girls express their voices through art during a painting session in Garissa, using creativity as a powerful tool to challenge FGM/C and envision a future rooted in freedom and dignity. They are joined by Zamzam Hassan, Programme Coordinator at TGG-ALM, ActionAid Kenya

The intersection of art and activism has always wielded the power to move hearts and catalyze action. In the arid landscapes of Garissa and Isiolo counties, this potent combination is being brought to life through the Girl Generation: Support to the Africa-Led Movement to End FGM/C Programme (TGG-ALM), transforming communities and empowering a new generation of girls.

For too long, deep-rooted cultural justifications have perpetuated Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C),

casting a shadow over the lives and futures of countless girls. Traditional awareness campaigns, while vital, often struggle to penetrate the emotional and deeply personal layers of cultural practice. Recognizing this, the Girl Generation programme has strategically woven art into its engagement, creating a powerful new narrative of change.



Girls express themselves through colour during a colouring session, using art as a powerful means to challenge FGM/C and advocate for change

“We understood that to truly dismantle deeply ingrained practices, we needed to speak a language that resonates beyond words,” explains Zamzam Hassan, the Programme Coordinator for the TGG-ALM at ActionAid Kenya. “Art has this unique ability to bypass intellectual barriers and touch hearts directly. It allows for a dialogue that is empathetic, engaging, and incredibly powerful.”

Through vibrant creative storytelling sessions fused with painting, girls in Garissa and Isiolo counties are unleashing new forms of expression, bravely challenging harmful norms. These dynamic artistic platforms are shattering the silence and fear surrounding FGM/C, replacing them with resounding messages of empowerment, inviolable bodily autonomy, and the undeniable right to live free from violence.



HER SUCCESS
IS NOT
YOUR FAILURE



"Watching these girls create and share their art is truly inspiring," Zamzam adds. "Their paintings depict dreams of a future free from FGM, their paintings express strength, reclaim self-worth, and voice a powerful call for bodily integrity. This isn't just art; it's a profound declaration of their rights and a collective commitment to protecting their peers."

The impact is palpable. Girls who once felt voiceless are now confidently advocating for themselves and their friends. Communities are witnessing firsthand the transformative power of art, sparking crucial conversations and fostering a new understanding of what it means for every girl to be safe and empowered.

"One young girl, after participating in the painting sessions, said, 'My painting speaks for me. It says Stop FGM,'" recounts Zamzam, a proud smile on her face. "That's the kind of shift we're working for. It's about empowering them to find their voice and envision a future where they are respected and free."

The movement believes that art is not just a tool, but an essential force in the fight against FGM/C. By nurturing creativity and self-expression, they are building resilience, challenging harmful traditions, and cultivating a society where every girl can flourish, be respected, and be free from violence. Together, through art and unwavering activism, they are painting a brighter future for Garissa, Isiolo, and beyond.

A young girl joyfully holds a vibrant piece of colored paper, proudly displaying a message of empowerment

ActionAid Kenya Champions Equitable Land Reforms and Women's Rights at 4th Regional Research Conference 2025



Dignitaries led by National Land Commission CEO Kabale Tache Arero visit the ActionAid Kenya booth during the 4th Regional Research Conference 2025 at the Kenya School of Government, Lower Kabete, Nairobi.

At the 4th Regional Research Conference 2025 held on the 20th of May 2025 at the Kenya School of Government in Nairobi, ActionAid Kenya reaffirmed its role as a key advocate for inclusive land reforms. As national conversations on land governance intensified, the organization contributed research, experience, and grounded community insights to a dialogue that remains central to Kenya's social and economic future.

The conference brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society organizations, researchers, and community leaders. It served as a forum for reflecting on the progress made in implementing land reform policies and for identifying the barriers that continue to prevent equitable access to land.

ActionAid Kenya was recognized for its leadership in advocating for women's land rights and for fostering effective partnerships with local authorities and state institutions. In its contributions to the conference, ActionAid Kenya emphasized the need for a deeper and more honest evaluation of the country's land policy landscape. While Kenya has adopted progressive frameworks, including the National Land Policy and the Community Land Act, the lived realities in many communities have not changed significantly. Implementation gaps have persisted, with enforcement often falling short, especially in rural and marginalized areas.



Kitasi Wangi, Programme Manager at ActionAid Kenya, receives an award recognizing the organization's leadership in advocating for women's land rights and building strong partnerships with authorities.

ActionAid Kenya drew attention to these inconsistencies, highlighting the disconnect between legal frameworks and practical access to land for many women, youth, and indigenous communities.

The organization shared several examples of its work at the grassroots level, where it has supported community-led initiatives aimed at strengthening land governance. These initiatives have provided platforms for local voices to influence decisions on land use, registration, and ownership. In many cases, communities that had been excluded from formal land systems were able to organize, document claims, and engage constructively with local land authorities.

ActionAid Kenya also addressed the structural inequalities that continue to shape land access. Gender discrimination remains deeply embedded in customary and statutory systems. While there has been some policy recognition of women's land rights, ActionAid Kenya emphasized that implementation remains weak.

The organization called for greater investment in mechanisms that ensure women can not only access land but also secure and control it. This includes ensuring joint titling, simplifying legal procedures, and increasing public awareness of existing protections.

Kitasi Wangi, Programme Manager for Resilient Livelihoods and Emergencies at ActionAid Kenya, spoke on the deeper implications of land inequality. "Land represents power and wealth, but more critically, it embodies the dynamics of gender, race, and class. The question of who owns land, who works on it, and who stewards it exposes deeply entrenched inequalities. As with wealth, the absence of accurate and accessible land data remains a significant barrier to effective land reform. Research plays a vital role in creating this gap by generating evidence to inform equitable policies and transformative changes."

Throughout the conference, ActionAid Kenya reaffirmed its commitment to pursuing long-term, community-centered land reform. The organization called for reforms that are not only legally sound but also socially grounded and responsive to the realities of those most affected by land injustice. It urged policymakers to listen more closely to community voices and to recognize the knowledge and strategies that local actors have already developed in navigating complex land dynamics.

As Kenya continues to grapple with the challenges of land governance, ActionAid Kenya remains focused on supporting sustainable, equitable, and just land systems. The organization's message at the conference was clear: land reform cannot succeed without the full participation of those whose lives are most directly shaped by it.



Kitasi Wangi, Programme Manager at ActionAid Kenya, spoke on land inequality at the 4th Regional Research Conference 2025.

ActionAid Kenya Strengthens International Partnerships to Advance Women's Rights and Community Development



The ActionAid Ireland and ActionAid Kenya delegation engaged with local communities and county leadership in Taita Taveta, including a courtesy meeting with Governor H.E. Andrew Mwadime, to discuss collaborative efforts in advancing women's rights and promoting sustainable development.

In the month of May, ActionAid Kenya proudly hosted distinguished delegations from ActionAid Ireland and ActionAid Italy, further strengthening international solidarity and reinforcing the transformative impact of grassroots development initiatives across several counties.

Engagement with ActionAid Ireland in Taita Taveta and Garissa

The delegation from ActionAid Ireland engaged extensively with local communities in Taita Taveta and Garissa counties, witnessing firsthand the significant progress achieved through collaborative efforts to advance women's rights.

In Garissa, the delegation held consultations with a broad spectrum of key stakeholders, including representatives from the National Gender and Equality Commission-Kenya, women's groups supported by Irish Aid and the Irish Foreign Ministry through ActionAid Ireland, as well as prominent male and religious leaders who serve as steadfast allies of the Women's Rights Programme (WRIII). These discussions underscored a shared commitment to empowering women and promoting gender equality across all levels of society.



The ActionAid Italy and ActionAid Kenya teams pose for a group photo with community members after impactful field visits to Makima in Embu County and Isiolo County, celebrating their shared commitment to education, women's empowerment, and sustainable development.

ActionAid Italy's Visit to Makima and Isiolo

Simultaneously, ActionAid Kenya welcomed a committed team from ActionAid Italy to Makima in Embu County and Isiolo, where they engaged deeply with ongoing projects spanning education, sustainable agriculture, water access, and women's rights. In Makima, the delegation visited Irari Primary and Mburatany Primary schools, interacting with teachers and students to gain valuable insights into education initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive learning environments. In Isiolo, the visitors met with women spearheading agroecology projects and community leaders championing sustainable development.

A particularly significant aspect of the visit was a focused dialogue on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The team examined both the progress made and the ongoing challenges in the fight to protect girls' rights, highlighting the resilience and determination of communities committed to eradicating harmful practices and securing a safer future for girls.

These enriching exchanges between ActionAid Kenya and its international partners reaffirm the power of solidarity and the transformative change achievable through community-led development. By collaborating closely with local leaders and grassroots organizations, these partnerships continue to strengthen women's rights, enhance education, and promote sustainable livelihoods.

Together, ActionAid Kenya and its global allies remain steadfast in building a future founded on equality, dignity, and opportunity for all.

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