

Concept note

International Stakeholder Dialogue

“Gender transformative approaches to ending Female Genital Mutilation”

October to November 2021, virtual discussions

Background

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is internationally recognised as a violation of human rights, a form of gender-based violence (GBV) and a manifestation of gender inequality. As such, its elimination is included as a specific target within the Sustainable Development Goal 5 dedicated to Gender Equality. According to UNICEF data, more than 200 million women and girls today are survivors of Female Genital Mutilation¹.

Further research by UNFPA shows that, if current trends continue in the direction they are moving in, 68 million girls will face Female Genital Mutilation between 2015 and 2030². These new figures project that the 2015 estimates of 3.9 million girls cut each year will rise to 4.6 million by 2030, unless massively scaled-up efforts are urgently taken to prevent this from happening. The increase is due to the estimated population growth in communities affected by Female Genital Mutilation. Moreover, the current global COVID-19 pandemic is negatively impacting efforts to end Female Genital Mutilation³ resulting in an estimated two million additional cases, caused by disruption of interventions during the crisis period, which will need to be averted⁴.

Within this context, we must urgently push the international community to **scale up efforts** and **ensure that we are effectively working towards both the abandonment of FGM and the provision of adequate services for affected women and girls.**

“While communities cite numerous reasons for having girls undergo FGM, as a gendered harmful practice, it is an expression of power and control over girls’ and women’s bodies and their sexuality. FGM is a form of gender-based violence and is rooted in unequal power relations between men and women that are embedded in a system that sustains itself through discriminatory gender stereotypes and norms, and unequal access to and control over resources. For girls and women with limited skills, competencies, and assets, marriage is often a matter of economic security and social inclusion. As a result, FGM is often performed to enhance a girl’s marriageability. Although parents may be aware of the risks involved with FGM, they will often have their daughters undergo the

¹ Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Global Concern, UNICEF (2016): www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC_2016_brochure_final_UNICEF_SPREAD.pdf

² See UNFPA (2018) press release (www.unfpa.org/press/nearly-70-million-girls-face-genital-mutilation-2030-unfpa-warns) and infographic (www.unfpa.org/resources/bending-curve-fgm-trends-we-aim-change)

³ Technical note on COVID-19 disrupting SDG 5.3: eliminating Female Genital Mutilation, UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on FGM (2020), <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/covid-19-disrupting-sdg-53-eliminating-female-genital-mutilation>

⁴ Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage, UNFPA (2020), <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/impact-covid-19-pandemic-family-planning-and-ending-gender-based-violence-female-genital>

practice as the gains (economic security and social inclusion) outweigh the loss (health consequences)”⁵.

Adolescent girls and young women experience multiple and intersecting forms of violence from a young age. In addition to harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation and child, early and forced marriage, they may be subjected to different forms of intimate partner violence as well as non-partner sexual violence. Such forms of GBV may overlap throughout a woman’s life.

Whilst some progress has been made towards achieving gender equality and tackling GBV, including FGM, everyday around the world, girls and women face practical barriers, discrimination and stigma when seeking to fulfill these basic human rights.

As any other form of Gender Based Violence, FGM is closely tied to power relations between men and women. **FGM is a manifestation of gender inequality and as such it needs to be addressed.**

Programmes that aim to inform and sensitize communities about the negative impacts of FGM, and to eliminate the practice in the long run, must incorporate gender transformative approaches to inform/sensitize or even transform men and boys on the issue of toxic masculinity, which will challenge the gendered social norms, including harmful gender stereotypes, while favoring women and girls’ empowerment. Such programmes must challenge gender roles and gender power dynamics, and work to counter them both at institutional and society levels.

The International Stakeholder Dialogue

To support the development of practical and promising gender transformative approaches to ending Female Genital Mutilation, AIDOS, GAMS Belgium and the End FGM European Network, are organising a virtual International Stakeholder Dialogue (ISD) from October to November 2021, in the run up to the Donors Working Group meeting that will be taking place in November/December 2021 (dates TBC). The Dialogue will gather stakeholders from the public, private and civil-society sectors, in Africa, Europe and beyond, working towards the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation.

The dialogue is supported by the **UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation** and **Spotlight Initiative** to eliminate violence against women and girls funded- project “Building bridges between Africa and Europe to tackle FGM”.

The Dialogue builds on the **Action points of the Generation Equality Forum** that took place in Paris in June 2021. In particular, it addresses Action 1 on “Gender Based Violence” and Action 3 on “Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)”. Both of these Actions include specific indicators for the reduction of FGM and will Accelerate Progress on SDG targets.

If implemented and fully funded, they can contribute to lasting and transformative change.

⁵ GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES FOR THE ELIMINATION OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION TECHNICAL NOTE: © UNICEF/UNI287101/MOSTAFA, <https://www.unicef.org/documents/gender-transformative-approaches-elimination-female-genital-mutilation>

Participants at the Dialogue will discuss **how the above Actions may be (or are) implemented in the field, with regard to the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation**. Organisations bringing innovative feminist practices and strategies will be encouraged to participate and share their experience. Approaches may include: women self-help groups to enable participants to collectively identify root causes and consequences of FGM, to critically review gender roles, gender power relations, and enable them to oppose the practice and enter into an empowering process; girls and boys SRHR clubs; gender transformative activities as men's groups that encourage reflection on hegemonic masculinity and men's role in ending all types of GBV; training of male allies against FGM; legal clinics that support the implementation of women's rights through law, engaging male religious and community leaders^{6, 7}; Comprehensive Sexuality Education programs (CSE) that include reflection on gender stereotypes and norms⁸; women-centered, comprehensive, quality, accessible and affordable services for FGM survivors⁹. Likewise, such activities may be implemented by a range of stakeholders, including those working in the educational sector¹⁰.

In line with the Action coalitions of the Generation Equality Forum, intersectionality, feminist leadership and transformation¹¹ will be the core principles guiding the Dialogue.

The outcomes of the Dialogue will be taken forward in the future work of the [Community of practice on FGM \(CoP FGM\)](#)¹², which provides virtual spaces for collective discussion, ideas and information-sharing on Female Genital Mutilation, whilst applying a Building Bridges perspective among different geographical areas of the world. Parallel with the International Stakeholder Dialogue, the discussion will also be opened up to all members of the CoP FGM through a thematic discussion¹³.

⁶ See the examples shared during the Male engagement against FGM thematic discussion of the CoP on FGM, <https://copfgm.org/2021/05/working-with-men-to-end-fgm>

⁷ Action coalition 3, *Through gender norms change and increasing knowledge of rights, empower 260 million more girls, adolescents and women in all of their diversity to make autonomous decisions about their bodies, sexuality and reproduction by 2026; enact legal and policy change to protect and promote bodily autonomy and SRHR in at least 20 countries by 2026.*

⁸ Action coalition 3, *Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) delivered in formal or non-formal settings, promotes human rights, transforms harmful gender-norms and empowers children, adolescents and youth in all of their diversity to take responsible and informed decisions about their bodies, sexuality and reproduction. CSE contributes to the elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices, including Child Early and Forced Marriages and Unions (CEFMU), Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child sexual abuse.*

⁹ Action Coalition Gender Based Violence: action 3: *Scale up implementation and financing of coordinated survivor-centered, comprehensive, quality, accessible and affordable services for survivors of gender-based violence against women and girls in all their diversity including in humanitarian settings. In so doing, more women and girls will live in countries with multi-sectoral action plans on GBV which include provision of police, justice, health and social sector services by 2026.*

¹⁰ Action coalition 1, Action 2, EDUCATION: *Work with the education sector to prevent gender-based violence against women and girls in all their diversity by ensuring that schools and educational institutions are safe for all girls, adolescents and young women, and implement evidence-driven prevention strategies which promote gender equality, challenge gender stereotypes and foster equitable norms, attitudes and beliefs from a young age, including through gender-sensitive curricula and comprehensive sexuality education.*

¹¹ We adopt the definitions of the Generation Equality Forum: **Intersectionality**: “shedding light on the multidimensionality of people’s lived experiences in which multiple axes of identify and oppression intersect. An intersectional approach requires recognizing and analyzing prevalent power dynamics and systems of inequality, and meaningfully and intentionally working to counter them.” ; **Feminist Leadership**: “aims at the explicit and intentional redistribution of power and responsibility in a way that is inclusive, participatory, and mindful of issues of gender, age, race, social class, sexual orientation, ability and other intersecting identities. This involves a continuous commitment to keep vigilant about – and challenge – the (re)production of practices and behaviors that deter collaboration, proactive listening and that benefit a few at the expense of others.”; **Transformation**: includes “transformation-of structures, systems and power—both in terms of concrete change and also in terms of overall ways of being and working”. This requires “to build a collective vision through dynamic approaches of co-creation, centering on dialogue and shared perspective. Youth voices and leadership are critical to the transformative vision”.

¹² www.copfgm.org

¹³ The thematic discussions are organized on the Google group of the CoP FGM, in French and English. They allow any member to share experience, expertise or opinions with regards to the topic at stake.

The online dialogue will take place in the months preceding the annual meeting of the Donors Working Group on Female Genital Mutilation (DWG) and will result in a **concrete set of recommendations** for donors and key actors in the field.

Objectives of the dialogue

- Encourage the engagement of policy- and decision-makers from different countries and regions on:
 - addressing FGM within actions on SGBV and SRHR, including in CSE;
 - incorporating anti-FGM programming into all areas of public policy;
 - and focusing on programmes guaranteeing the empowerment of all women and girls.
- Encourage more donors to commit to the implementation of the GBV and SRHR Action points defined by the Generation Equality Forum.
- Encourage the DWG to make a collective commitment to significantly increase its funding by 2030 to organisations that implement gender transformative approaches for the elimination of FGM and the protection of survivors.
- Encourage donors to commit to earmark 50% of the financial commitments made in the framework of the Generation Equality Forum’s Global Acceleration Plan within Action 1 towards gender transformative actions.
- Highlight the most promising gender transformative practices and interventions against FGM that tackle the root causes of the practice by challenging imbalanced gender relations, gender roles and gender stereotypes.
- Identify the main challenges and obstacles which hinder the effectiveness of such practices and interventions and suggest solutions to overcome them
- Encourage the financial, political and programmatic support of feminist, women and girl led movements that work towards ending GBV, including FGM and promoting SRHR.

Methodology

The discussion will be structured into 2 online working groups, each held separately in English and in French. Each working group will meet 3 times, between October and November 2021 (Agenda below), with the facilitation of 1 moderator/expert. Each session will seek to meet specific objectives.

In the first meeting, the objectives and methodology will be shared and discussed with participants, the topic introduced and discussions will start. In the second session, participants will share their experiences from the field, focusing on the challenges faced. Finally, in the third meeting possible solutions to the challenges identified will be discussed.

Based on the discussions a set of recommendations for gender transformative approaches for the elimination of FGM will be set.

A single document, containing the recommendations gathered from the two working groups, will be developed and delivered to donors in the DWG. It will also be presented during a webinar which will be organized back-to-back with the DWG meeting (TBC).

Agenda of the Working Groups and Webinar

WG1 English

- Wednesday the 6th of October, 1:00 – 3:00 pm GMT (15:00 à 17:00 CEST)
- Wednesday the 20th of October, 1:00 – 3:00 pm GMT (15:00 à 17:00 CEST)
- Wednesday the 3^d of November, 1:00 – 3:00 pm GMT (14:00 à 16:00 CET)

WG2 French

- Thursday the 7th of October, 1:00 – 3:00 pm GMT (15:00 à 17:00 CEST)
- Thursday the 21st of October, 1:00 – 3:00 pm GMT (15:00 à 17:00 CEST)
- Thursday the 4th of November, 1:00 – 3:00 pm GMT (14:00 à 16:00 CET)

Final webinar back-to-back to the Donor Working Group (TBC)

Participants of the ISD

AIDOS, GAMS and the End FGM EU Network will strive to ensure a diversity of participants at the ISD. Invitations will be shared on various platforms, including through the CoP FGM. Feminist organisations from the Global South will be specifically targeted and invited to actively contribute to the discussion.