

HOW TO INVOLVE MEN AND BOYS TO END FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION



WELCOME

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1 WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO INVOLVE MEN AND BOYS

When dealing with gender-based violence (GBV), it is often expected that the entire responsibility for solving the problem will be placed on the shoulders of women and girls. Activities for empowering women and girls are great, and indeed these contribute quite a lot to tackling GBV in all its forms. However, **GBV is usually performed by men - or in their interest** - and therefore, they need to commit to ending it too. It is not fair to ask women and girls to do all the work to change something they don't want, and which is not up to them.

When it comes to female genital mutilation (FGM), it is even more challenging. In fact, unlike other types of GBV, FGM is often (but not always!) practiced by women in the family and/or community. As a result, in early programs dealing with FGM, men were often sidelined. More recently, however, activists working to tackle FGM have come to understand the fact that since **FGM is rooted in gender inequality and power imbalances**, it is crucial to work on these in order to put an end to the practice. Hence, gender equality can't be built by just one side of society. Women are already doing the majority of the work, and **men must question their position and privilege**.



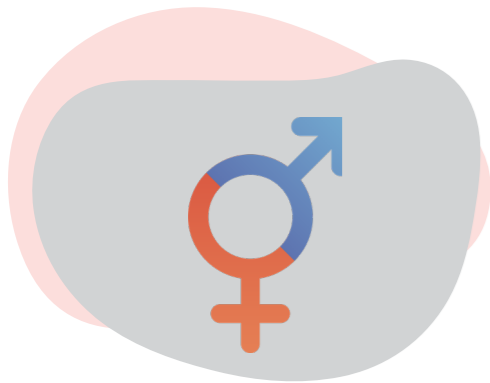
This can be fostered in a number of ways, one of which is by **deconstructing gender stereotypes**, especially with young people in formal and informal educational settings, or by organising workshops for adults to **tackle toxic masculinities**. It is, of course, important to remember that for change to happen interventions need to be put in place at all levels: not only at individual, interpersonal or community levels, but also at **systemic level** and within institutions, policies, and society as a whole. However, each and every participant in the anti-FGM movement can play their part and organisations working at community level can, among other things, involve men and boys in a meaningful way in order to contribute to the abandonment of the practice.

Involving men and boys in the abandonment of FGM poses a series of challenges and therefore interventions need to be carefully designed and carried on. This small brochure offers some tips and inputs that can be useful when developing and implementing activities involving men and boys.

Good luck with your work!

2 WORKING WITH MEN

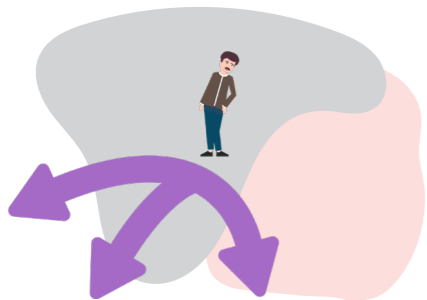
The process of working with men and boys for sustainable change in addressing FGM and GBV can entail:



Working on masculinities: promoting a positive masculinity model, co-constructing alternative ways to live masculinities, and reflecting on the role of men as allies



Debunking myths: emphasizing how to involve men to end FGM by demystifying false myths about the roles of men and women in these practices



Involving men and boys with a gender transformative approach: deconstructing gender stereotypes and challenging gender roles and norms within educational and sensitisation activities, including with mixed groups



Involving communities with a gender transformative approach: giving special attention to communities, promoting inclusion, participation, empowerment, and autonomy to create sustainable changes in social norms and power structures, particularly concerning FGM



To know more about gender transformative approaches to ending FGM, watch [**this video**](#) by AIDOS



3 GET PREPARED TO INVOLVE MEN AND BOYS

1. IDENTIFY AND MOBILISE

- ✓ Identify the challenges/obstacles that may prevent the achievement of the objective
- ✓ Define how to identify and mobilise the public
 - ➔ Target men/boys already active in any cause
- ✓ Make personal contact first

2. BUILD CONFIDENCE/LOYALTY

- ✓ What can you put in place to interest/motivate the target group and build a relationship of trust? Take an interest in them and their well-being, provide a framework for expressing emotions and address what they are most interested in focusing on

3. RAISE AWARENESS

- ✓ List the subjects that need to be addressed in order to raise the gender inequality issue and bring men to question themselves concerning their position within the family and society
- ✓ Define how to bring up these subjects



4. SUPPLY TOOLS

- ✓ Make FGM known in detail through participatory/facilitated workshops
- ✓ Give men tools that will help them to communicate and deconstruct the justifications for FGM

5. SHARE KNOWLEDGE

- ✓ Define a strategy to share knowledge: What actions should be put in place?
 - Sharing reflections with family (through horizontal communication and not speaking as a head of the household)
 - Organising actions for the community: awareness campaigns, leaders' sensitization, child protection
 - Targeting public institutions

TIPS FOR FACILITATION

Feel **comfortable** addressing the subject (discomfort shows in non-verbal cues and might reinforce participants' discomfort)

Use **humour** (it relaxes and lightens the mood) – demystify sex

Emphasise the importance of addressing the topic for the **well-being of the group** (if the group is closed)

Give **time and space** to allow the group to question the weight of socio-cultural expectations as men

Prepare statements about the topic and ask if participants agree or not. This creates a **positive distance**, which is beneficial, because it is easier to initiate discussion by talking about “what others do”

Find out **how the topic is approached in the community** and use those channels initially (understand the codes, images, and expressions)

Dare to share your own personal journey before reaching the comfort of discussing the topic (we have all had a moment when we were uncomfortable with the subject due to our upbringing)

Have a male figure in facilitation and, if possible, do it in pairs (male-female). Unfortunately, before reaching the stage we desire, we must rely on inequalities in order to engage participants and achieve the change we are aiming for. Ignoring this reality hampers our efforts

Discussing FGM can be a very effective entry point to talk about sexuality (especially partner communication). Many men have limited knowledge of the subject. By approaching it interactively, you capture their attention. **FGM cannot be discussed without talking about sex and sexuality**

Invite participants to reflect on the concepts of desire and **sexual pleasure** (this can be done with playful exercises). You can also start with a more straightforward question about what is commonly expected in a sexual relationship – procreation – and then ask if it can be accompanied by pleasure. If it is acceptable to talk about it, how can it be done? Have follow-up questions

5 TALKING ABOUT SEXUALITY AND PLEASURE

As we know, talking about sex in public is not easy. Even in areas where sexuality is visually omnipresent, openly discussing it is difficult. This difficulty arises from how sexuality is associated with everyone's intimacy and from the cultural and religious teachings that tend to consider it as something dirty, a sin, etc. Even where it is tolerated, it is often limited to its reproductive function, with pleasure considered the work of the devil that needs to be guarded against.

However, the subject is not as taboo in many communities as one might think: "I usually say it's just encoded; you need to know how to decode it while respecting the sensitivities of the communities." This is true in many communities in Africa. It is rare to follow an informal discussion of a group (especially if it consists only of men) for an hour without sex emerging as a topic. It might not be very in-depth, but it is an indicator showing that it is possible to discuss sexuality publicly with men.

As with any topic one wishes to address within a specific group, it is preferable to let the group itself introduce it, even if it is not necessarily a demand coming from the group initially. To involve men in the process of FGM abandonment in communities where normative gender relations are the rule, it is essential to discuss sexuality.

**Seydou Niang, trainer and member
of the Community of Practice on Female Genital Mutilation (CoP FGM)**





DEBUNKING FALSE MYTHS


Myth	Reality	Why
FGM is a women's issue	<i>No, it is a gender issue</i>	FGM aims to control women's bodies and sexualities while maintaining rigid gender roles and power imbalances among women and men
Women are violent, too	<i>There is not a single place in the world where violence committed by women is systemic and constitutes a severe problem that affects the entire society. Male violence is widespread everywhere</i>	The large majority of violence is committed by men against other men or against women and children
It is the women who carry on FGM	<i>Yes, but it is done for men</i>	FGM is often performed for marriageability and social acceptance. The opinion of men is crucial in the continuation or abandonment of the practice
You want women to be against men!	<i>No, we wish everyone could be against toxic masculinity and free from violence</i>	Men can be powerful allies in the process of abandonment of FGM and in tackling GBV. Toxic masculinity limits both women's and men's rights and well-being
It is a Western issue, in Africa, women and men want to stay in their traditional roles	<i>In Europe too, some men and women want to stay in their traditional roles</i>	Everyone should be free to do as they prefer, but gender stereotypes and expectations actually prevent people from making free choices

Myth

Reality

Why

The only way to end FGM is to have men speak up against the practice, because they are the ones with the power to influence others	<i>Men can be important allies, but it is ultimately women's and girls' agency that can put an end to FGM</i>	Providing additional space for men to talk and influence opinions publicly can reinforce the power imbalances between women and men, which are the root causes of FGM
Boys will be boys	<i>Gender stereotypes are a social construct</i>	Masculinities are influenced by factors such as culture and education, and can vary considerably from person to person
It is better to involve just the leaders, because they will reach a larger audience	<i>Yes, they must be involved too. However, working with men and women at the community level will bring more results and gender-transformative change in the long-term</i>	People may follow the leaders just to conform, but this often does not entail an actual change in awareness, attitudes and behaviours



Myth	Reality	Why
We don't need men to end FGM!	<i>Men also have an important role to play as allies in ending FGM</i>	As members of their community, it is important that they speak out about their desire to end FGM and participate in the awareness raising process, also by challenging their privileges
The honour of the family rests on the woman, and sometimes she has to be cut	<i>The honour of the family doesn't rest solely on the woman and FGM is never to be justified</i>	Family honour should be based on equal values, where the physical and emotional integrity of each individual is respected, without resorting to harmful practices such as FGM
We are not real men if we don't have our daughters cut	<i>Masculinity should not be based on harmful acts such as FGM</i>	Positive masculinity lies in promoting human rights, gender equality and the well-being of all members of the community by challenging oppressive and harmful social norms
As a man, I don't have the legitimacy to talk about FGM	<i>The alliance between men and women strengthens the efforts and collective capacity to end this human rights violation</i>	It is essential that all members of the community, no matter their gender, become actively involved to promote the abandonment of FGM. Legitimacy comes from a willingness to challenge oppressive norms, promote gender equality and help create a world free of FGM

Myth	Reality	Why
How can we be sure that a woman will be faithful/stay a virgin if she is not cut?	<i>FGM can't guarantee fidelity or virginity</i>	Fidelity does not depend on a person's physical integrity, but rather on trust, mutual respect, and communication in a relationship, regardless of gender
If they are not cut, women will be our rivals!	<i>Equality between women and men is not a threat, but rather a step towards a more balanced society that respects human rights</i>	Gender equality is a condition for societies to thrive
Ok, let's end FGM but not forced marriages	<i>Both practices are violations of the human rights of women and girls and part of the continuum of gender-based violence that often women have to face</i>	Forced marriage constitutes a violation of individual rights, including the right to freedom, autonomy, and personal decision-making. Encouraging mutual consent in love and marital relationships is crucial to promoting healthy and equal partnerships. Marriages based on individuals' free will foster respect, dignity, and personal fulfilment



7 KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Strategies to abandon FGM must include sustainable involvement of boys and men. As a societal issue, FGM cannot be dealt with by only one side of the community.
- While working with mixed groups, it is crucial to be aware of power dynamics. In the context of an FGM awareness-raising workshop for men (young and old), the community leaders, who are generally older men, could take up too much space in the debates, discussions, and in the positions taken.
- Workshops conducted with boys and men must go beyond the issue of FGM and incorporate gender issues. The aim is to ensure that the men understand the consequences of FGM and reach a good understanding of the unequal gender relations and gender norms that are harmful to the health, freedom and life of women in general and eventually challenge them.
- Workshops should not only be held with men, but also with children, girls and boys. It is important to deconstruct gender stereotypes which are the root causes of gender inequality, starting from a young age. In this sense, educational participatory activities can be very effective in both formal and informal educational settings.



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