





# Summary

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# Introduction

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**Regional Director of IPPF - Arab World  
regional office Message**

# Fadoua Bakhadda



« Circumcised Ladies is a paradoxical description given to women with no consent. Some consider them guardians of their families' honour, while others consider them protection in an unforgiving society. As advocates against female genital mutilation, we perceive it as a violation of childhood and a disregard for human

rights. As a woman, I usually question myself: how does GOD prohibit the infanticide of girls that leads to choking them and humans suffocating them while seated in life? What distinguishes girls buried alive, strangling in their demise, and those who remain alive but suffocate in silence?

These are the stories we share. I hoped to go for fiction drama; Unfortunately, they are real stories that uncover the hidden truth behind the veil. How can we possibly conceal the truth and reality? »

« فتيات مختنات، لقب يُطلق على الفتيات اللاتي يتعرضن لعملية الختان، وهو لقب يُعطى لهن من دون اختيارهن. يعتبر البعض الختان حصناً للشرف، ويرون أنه يضيف قيمة مضافة في مجتمع قايى. ومن جانبنا نحن، جمعيات مناهضة لختان الإناث، نعتبره انتهاكاً لحقوق الإنسان وجريمة اغتصاب لطفولة الفتيات.

أسأل نفسي كإمرأة، كيف يحل الإنسان لنفسه ما حرم الله عليه، ويتسبب في خنق بناته في حياتهن الأسرية والجنسية فيما بعد؟ وما هو الفرق بين فتيات يتم دفنهن أحياء ويمتن مختنقات، وبين فتيات لا يدفن لهن جثامينهن ويعيشن مختنقات؟

نحن نشارككم قصصاً تفصل الحقيقة، وعلى الرغم من أننا كنا نتمنى أن تكون هذه القصص قصصاً درامية خيالية، إلا أن الواقع يكشف الحقيقة المروعة وراء الحجاب. فكيف يمكن لنا أن نحجب الحقيقة والواقع؟

نحن نسعى لإصلاح هذه الأخطاء والتحريك نحو مجتمع يقوم على العدالة واحترام حقوق الإنسان. سنقدم هذه القصص بأسلوب إبداعي يلقي الضوء على الحقيقة المخفية ويشجع التغيير الإيجابي. سنسلط الضوء على المعاناة والصراعات الداخلية التي يواجهها وتعمل على توعية المجتمع وإيقاظ الوعي لمنع هذه الممارسات الوحشية وحماية حقوق الإنسان.

سنستمر في تسليط الضوء على قصص النجاح والتحديات التي تواجهها الفتيات المختنات. سنستعيد كرامتهن وندعمهن في رحلتهم نحو الشفاء والتحرر. سوف نقاوم الصمت ونجعل صوتهن يرتفع بقوة وثبات، وذلك من أجل إحداث تغيير إيجابي في المجتمع وتحقيق المساواة الحقيقية للجميع.»

# Problem Statement

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According to the World Health Organization (WHO); Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice has no health benefits for girls and women and causes severe bleeding and problems urinating, and later cysts, infections, as well as complications in childbirth and increased risk of newborn deaths<sup>1</sup>.

Current estimates indicate that around 200 million girls and women worldwide have undergone FGM, and this number continues to rise. Therefore, international and local communities must work together to combat this harmful and detrimental phenomenon.

The main steps to combat FGM include awareness and education, legal regulations, and providing psychological and therapeutic support to women who have undergone FGM. Other measures that can be taken to combat this practice include regular medical check-ups for girls and women and collaborating with religious and community leaders to change misconceptions about FGM.

Furthermore, governments and international organizations can provide financial support to local and international institutions involved in combating FGM, as well as promote women's empowerment and educate girls and women about their rights, sexual and reproductive health.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a painful and illegal practice in many countries around the world, and developing a strategy to combat this phenomenon is crucial. Here are some strategies that can be followed:



# Yemeni Association for Reproductive Health



الجمعية اليمنية للصحة الإنجابية  
Yemeni Association For Reproductive Health

In Yemen, FGM is common in some remote areas. However, thanks to education and awareness campaigns conducted by the government and non-governmental organizations, such as the Yemeni Association, the prevalence of FGM has been reduced to about 7% in some areas.



# 01 Youth innovative approach to raise awareness

Yemen's political and security divisions have amplified the health crisis, making it incredibly hard for specific communities even to access campaigns and activities that recognise the repercussions of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Evidently, this ideological offence attempts to demolish society, making it more extreme to battle against women's rights, and that is putting in danger all community members and personnel who pursue awareness projects and initiatives.

Therefore, it is essential to find and create new ways to attract community attention to vital rights issues such as FGM by innovative methods that mobilise youth, influencers, and community groups to increase awareness of the risks and harms of FGM.

The existing provision of support for the FGM survivors in YARH clinics and health centres ensures that all patients receive accurate

information about FGM and its risks and the necessary guidance and treatment in case of health problems resulting from this practice. But as awareness should continue, YARH adopted a new strategy to guarantee the continuity of its awareness programs. First, the organisation held meetings with its young volunteers and influential figures to avoid direct reactions from authorities towards YARH staff. Secondly, the youth volunteers conducted online Reproductive health Knowledge competitions. Finally, they posted several FGM-related questions Online through all available social media channels, leaving the target audience to answer them. This activity has attracted extensive interaction among the Yemeni youth.

Such an approach successfully emphasised the complementarity of service provision to awareness raising and community-focused messaging.

## 02 awareness creates heroes

The health centre in Aden Governorate and other health centres are setting an example for spreading awareness about the harm and risks of female genital mutilation (FGM). Providing appropriate healthcare, counselling, and educational services can help expand the scope of understanding regarding the harms of this practice, ultimately leading to its abolition. Women are encouraged to remain open with their healthcare providers and seek necessary treatments if they have undergone such a procedure. Healthcare service centres can even provide psychological and social support to women affected by the consequences of these practices by offering consultations. These awareness programs have effectively spread knowledge concerning the harms of this practice and the need for awareness in these centres. One doctor at the centre shared a story about a woman from Hadramaut Governorate who was targeted during one of these awareness activities. She had already undergone

FGM as a child, but she discussed her experiences with suffering due to the practice. The doctor explained the harms that came with it and emphasized the importance of mothers being informed about such practices that result in many harmful health consequences for women. This woman faced pressure from her family to have her daughter undergo FGM after birth and she is a living testimony herself, a very strong advocate, and a local hero when it comes to FGM in the village. However, through continuous awareness-raising efforts by healthcare professionals, regular check-ups during pregnancy, and psychological support, the mother became convinced of the necessity to refrain from subjecting her daughter to FGM. In doing so, she set a solid example for her family to follow and positively contributed to creating awareness about the harms of this practice within her community.

# Egyptian Family Planning Association

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In Egypt, FGM is considered a common practice in most rural and impoverished communities. However, thanks to education and awareness campaigns launched by the government and non-governmental organizations, including the Egyptian Association, Egypt has managed to reduce the prevalence of FGM to about 9% in some areas.



# 03 Awareness raising inside of the house

While everyone was waiting in One of the clinics affiliated with Kafr El-Sheikh Governorate they, the clinic's youth-led volunteers delivered a seminar on the harmful effects of female genital mutilation (FGM) and its psychological trauma on girls' health. A young enthusiastic young lady led the discussion and concluded with supportive messages to encourage attendees to reach out to her and the clinic staff if they face any FGM issues. Immediately after the end of the lecture, one woman in her twenties said, «I want to thank you for arranging this seminar today. My mother-in-law intends to have my younger sister-in-law cut. I want to know if there's a way I can prevent that from happening without causing trouble.» the young volunteer sought support from the clinic supervisor

who was also a community health worker, and asked her to accompany the next planned site visit and arrange for the team

to meet the grandmother. When the team arrived, they noticed that the family lived in an overcrowded house with many other extended family members.

At first, the mother-in-law refused to allow them entry but later relented and allowed them to enter as guests. They talked about their desire for all the granddaughters to be uncircumcised and the possible long-term bodily and psychological effects that FGM could have. Finally, after much discussion and persuasion from her daughter, the mother-in-law began to reconsider her position; she conceded that if others agreed to this arrangement, she would not force FGM or any other procedure upon her granddaughters.

# 04 awareness creation through intergenerational discussions

In the heart of Qena Governorate, amidst its rolling hills and rustling trees, a campaign aimed at curbing female genital mutilation (FGM) took flight. Braving the heat and dust, grandparents, parents, and girls from various families came together to partake in the «Dialogue of Generations. It allowed them to speak out about FGM's harmful effects. One girl bravely spoke up and shared her pain due to FGM's psychological torment. She recounted how her grandmother made the decision for her despite her pleas for help. Her voice shook as she spoke, tears streaming down her face. The room quieted as they listened. Finally, all eyes turned towards one grandmother, who had previously decided to have her granddaughters undergo

FGM. Emboldened by the dialogue, she stepped forward and apologized to the suffering girl. «I didn't realize that my words could cause such pain and trouble to my granddaughter» she said, her cheeks flushed. The discussion then shifted towards FGM's physical and psychological damage to young girls. Its participants shared stories and experiences with openness and empathy. They resolved to work together to combat this harmful practice, raise awareness of its consequences, and support women suffering from its effects. It was a momentous occasion marked by understanding, acceptance, and love. As they left the meeting ground that day, they all carried newfound courage to spread awareness on this critical issue.

# Mauritanian Association for Family Promotion



In Mauritania, the prevalence of FGM was around 70% in rural areas and reached 92% in some nomadic communities. However, in 2005, a law was enacted criminalizing FGM, and educational and awareness campaigns about the negative effects of this practice on the sexual and psychological health of girls were intensified. Thanks to the efforts contributed by the Mauritanian Association, Mauritania witnessed a significant decrease in the prevalence of FGM, with the rate dropping to about 10% in some areas.



# 05 Economic empowerment to previous cutters

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The story revolves around the radical transformation brought about by loans given to a group of women who engage in the cutting profession without adhering to basic health standards. This practice has resulted in numerous fatal cases, becoming a major issue in rural areas.

The association conducted several educational sessions and campaigns over two months to make locals aware of the reasons behind such practices. They identified that women engaged in cutting primarily because it ensures steady and substantial income for them.

The association established projects for these women with the condition that they refrain from the cutting profession, guaranteeing their economic independence.

These women also became part of awareness campaigns within their community to receive funding.

This story is a robust example of how knowledge and education can lead to social change. When alternatives are offered along with proper support, these women abandon this dangerous profession altogether. Repeated sessions played a significant role in finding suitable solutions.

To sustain this change, active participation from the local community is crucial. Encouraging women's participation in community development activities and promoting their economic independence will help preserve this change.

# 06 survivors empowerment

The tale follows the journey of a survivor of female genital mutilation (FGM). The individual had been enduring physical and mental health issues because they did not receive sufficient medical and psychological services. Professional clinicians from the association evaluated her condition, and an obstetrician and gynecologist prescribed a treatment plan. She acquired a loan to initiate a self-sufficient income-generating enterprise. Through continuing review visits, service providers noticed major developments in her financial, psychological, and physical circumstance.

The story accentuates the difficulty of finding survivors due to the hush brought about by cultural customs and beliefs. But by having survivors partake in living testimonies, they are urged to attend support centers and augment their situation.

The anecdote also reveals that all-encompassing care for FGM survivors contributed significantly towards repairing and altering

their mental and social state, as well as incorporating them back into society.

Living testimony for these victims entails relating that they have experienced FGM against their wishes, which was implemented unlawfully and dangerously, leaving them with long-term adverse effects. Those residing in countries where this practice is unlawful may document complaints with local authorizations and provide living testimonies to pertinent entities such as the police or courts. It is equally possible for them to get the essential psychological aid and counseling to heal from this trying ordeal.

It is necessary to give FGM survivors the necessary assistance and care while promoting awareness of this damaging exercise so it can be reduced in regions where it is common.

# Sudan Family Planning Association



In Sudan, FGM is a prevalent practice. However, thanks to the efforts of the government and non-governmental organizations, notably the Sudanese Association, the country has witnessed a significant reduction in the prevalence of FGM, reaching 20%. A law criminalizing this practice has been enacted, and necessary support has been provided to organizations working in this field. The government has succeeded in raising awareness within the community about this problem through awareness campaigns and education.



# 07 use of local dialects

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The importance of using local dialects in awareness campaigns for targeted tribes cannot be overstated. Speaking the same language as your audience can help to improve communication and interaction with them, resulting in more effective messages that resonate with their daily lives.

This can be achieved through partnerships with local media outlets like radio stations or even by participating in community dialogues. Moreover, it's essential to incorporate women's experiences in such campaigns, particularly when raising awareness about sexual and reproductive health among girls and young women. Disseminating information through transportation methods is also a key strategy, but it must consider

the cultural context of the area in question. To achieve maximum impact, it's crucial to expand the number of targeted dialects used and involve local communities in producing awareness messages in their own language. Such an approach will build a stronger sense of cultural diversity and inclusivity within society. However, it's equally important to exercise caution when using certain local dialects containing offensive or inappropriate words or phrases. Therefore, thorough examination and evaluation of content before dissemination is necessary. Using local dialects in awareness campaigns can promote social cohesion while effectively communicating vital messages to target audiences.

# 08

## Toll-free number

The Sudanese Association implemented a toll-free number (1700) to provide sexual and reproductive health services. Knowledgeable obstetricians and gynecologists are the ones who offer the service.

Mohammed, one of the village elders, noticed that too many women were dying from lack of access to such services and guidance, so he offered to go door-to-door in the village to help and inform them about the availability of this toll-free number.

This experiment appears promising for delivering reproductive and sexual health care to the area: it improved community awareness and introduced available services through the toll-free number (1700). Involving community leaders like Mohammed can have a beneficial impact on enhancing knowledge and reaching out to those most needing assistance.

However, there are certain points that should be taken into account in order to successfully implement this experience on

a larger scale. Primarily, an adequate amount of funding is necessary for providing reproductive and sexual health services, including awareness and education programs. It is also important to hire specialized doctors for effectively offering the needed services.

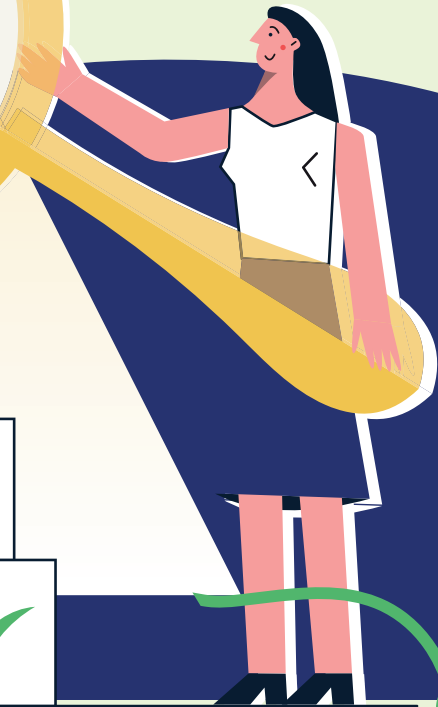
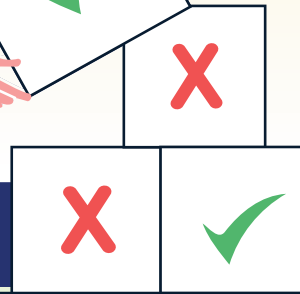
Additionally, village men should be included in the mission of informing; as they are a crucial part of the local society, they can contribute by spreading consciousness about reproductive and sexual health. Plus, making use of any local resources during planning and implementation, such as local experience, knowledge, and culture, cannot be overlooked.

Finally, affordable and accessible services should be made available for everyone's benefit in order for reproductive and sexual health care to be accessible to the greatest number possible.

# Somaliland Family Health Association



In Somaliland, the prevalence of FGM used to reach 98% in some communities. However, thanks to education and awareness campaigns launched by non-governmental organizations and the local government, including the Somali Association, the prevalence of FGM has been reduced to about 30% in some areas. A law criminalizing FGM has been enacted, and necessary support has been provided to organizations working in this field. The local government has successfully raised



# 09

## Mustafa, the village teacher

At the end of 2019, SOFHA held a Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) training workshop. The trainer discussed the various complications of FGM, and one participant asked about the link between FGM and fistulas. Could these fistulas be treated? Again, the trainer clarified what he had said earlier about treating them. In Somaliland, women suffer from FGM-induced fistulas, along with early marriage and prolonged labour. But little is spoken about it in public due to discrimination or shame. Mustafa left the workshop and returned to his village 25 kilometres away, eager to share what he had learned at the workshop.

He told the villagers that FGM-related fistulas were curable; their neighbour already suffered from such a condition. After gathering enough money, the woman was taken to a hospital specialising in treating these fistulas. There were still obstacles to overcome, such as convincing people of the treatability of fistulas, protecting those who have suffered from social stigma or exclusion, and financial hardship. Engaging different parts of the community will help shed light on this issue and tackle its challenges. And so, thanks to this learning experience, a life was saved, and hope was restored.

# 10

## Amina transformation

Amina had been a traditional birth attendant in October Hargeisa Somaliland for many years. During that time she had been practicing female genital mutilation on young girls, following in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother before her. It was part of her culture, a tradition necessary to prepare young girls for womanhood.

One day, staff from SOFHA Clinic visited Amina's village to explain how FGM can lead to serious health issues or even cause death. They also spoke about how it violated human rights, and that it was an unnecessary and harmful practice. Initially, Amina was resistant but the SOFHA staff continued to patiently talk with her over several weeks until she began to understand the danger of FGM.

Eventually, Amina agreed to end the practice in her village and became an advocate for its elimination. She spread awareness of the risks associated with FGM and started alternative rites of passage such as educational programs and mentorship initiatives.

Today, Amina is a respected community leader and a voice for change. She continues to work tirelessly to raise awareness about FGM's dangers and promote safe and healthy practices for young girls. Her transformation is a powerful example of how education and dialogue can lead to positive change and create a better future for all.

# Closure

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Highlighting the success stories of IPPF Member Associations in their daily fight against female genital mutilation (FGM) reflects the courageous work done by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) to protect girls and women from this harmful practice. In addition, those stories demonstrate the positive impact that can be achieved when people come together for a common cause.

In one story, a women's association in a rural village conducted an awareness campaign on the dangers of FGM. As a result, they succeeded in mobilizing the local community and engaging with parents, grandparents, teachers, and local leaders to improve awareness of this issue. Eventually, they managed to convince many people not to perform FGM and to protect the health and safety of girls.



In another story, another association empowered women in the community by providing education, training, and awareness opportunities. As a result, women and girls gained more awareness and the ability to protect and maintain their health.

These stories inspire and highlight the importance of collective action and awareness in achieving positive change. Indeed, much more must be done to combat this harmful practice. However, through continued collaboration and hard work, it is possible to bring about change and protect girls and women from FGM. This can be achieved by promoting awareness, education and providing necessary support to local women's associations, governmental and non-governmental institutions in the fight against this harmful practice.

Achieving change also requires the contribution and international cooperation of the global community to reduce this dangerous practice. We must all work together to ensure the rights of girls and women and protect them from FGM.



In conclusion, we hope these stories and the information in this booklet have helped you understand the positive impact of collective action and awareness in combating FGM. We invite everyone to join our efforts to reduce this harmful practice and ensure the rights of girls and women worldwide.

Our efforts to combat FGM will only end once we see a world free from this cruel practice. We need perseverance, determination, and collective action to achieve this goal. But when we look at the successes achieved by associations, organizations, and individuals worldwide in fighting this harmful practice, we realize we can bring about change and progress towards a more just and humane world.

Let us continue to work diligently and together to eliminate this harmful practice and protect the rights of girls and women worldwide. Let us be an example for future generations and ensure a world free from violence, discrimination, and injustice. Let us start now and move forward with resilience and determination until we succeed in this vital battle.

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