

A close-up portrait of a young Black girl with a warm smile, resting her chin on her hand. She is wearing a dark, textured headscarf. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue. The text of the report title is overlaid on the lower left of the image.

Interim Project Report **TO THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

ELIMINATING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Program / Project name	UNICEF Program for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
Grant Description	PD FGM: Combating Female Genital Mutilation Programmes 2020
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Relevant SDG Targets	Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Target 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation
UNICEF Strategic Plan Priorities (2022-2025)	Goal Area 3: Every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, and harmful practices.
Geographic focus area	Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, and Yemen
Targeted population & stakeholders	17 countries targeting girls and women at risk of and affected by female genital mutilation
Program partners	Government institutions, grassroots women and youth-led organizations, religious and traditional leaders, international non-governmental and national organizations, research institutes, and the private sector.
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ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSO	civil society organization
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
FGM	female genital mutilation
GBV	gender-based violence
SBC	social and behaviour change
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
STAR	Strategic Technical Assistance for Research
U.S.	United States
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a deeply rooted harmful practice that affects the lives of millions of girls and women worldwide. This harmful practice is a manifestation of gender inequality, rooted in social, political, and economic structures. In 2022, the world faced many challenges, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, major conflicts, energy crises, high inflation, food insecurity, debt burdens, and the devastating effects of climate change, such as floods and droughts. These interconnected crises, referred to as poly-crisis, significantly affected the lives of children and posed persistent challenges in eliminating FGM.¹

The global prevalence of FGM continues to be a deeply alarming reality affecting more than 200 million girls and women, with the majority undergoing the practice between infancy and the age of 15.² In certain countries*, there is a growing prevalence of FGM being performed on very young girls, which limits the time available to implement preventive measures effectively.⁴ However, amidst this concerning situation, there are positive trends that deserve attention. Over the past three decades, there has been a notable decline in the prevalence of FGM, accompanied by a growing opposition to the practice from girls and women and men and boys. This shift indicates significant progress in the collective efforts to eliminate this harmful practice as mandated by the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development.

- ✓ Today, girls are one-third less likely to be subjected to FGM compared to three decades ago, reflecting a significant shift in the landscape.²
- ✓ In countries where data is available, opposition to FGM is not limited to girls and women alone. Out of the 300 million men and boys living in FGM-practicing countries in Africa and the Middle East†, a staggering 200 million believe that FGM should be eliminated.³
- ✓ Girls and women with primary education are 30 percent more likely than those with no education to oppose FGM. This rises to 70 percent higher among girls and women with at least a secondary education.⁴

UNICEF'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES (U.S.) GOVERNMENT

UNICEF's partnership with the United States (U.S.) Government marks a significant step forward in the global effort to advance gender equality. As part of this partnership, UNICEF is well-positioned to align with and advance the first-ever [U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#), as well as the newly developed [U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence](#) (GBV), representing a significant milestone promoting gender equality worldwide.

Additionally, UNICEF's approach, as outlined in the new UNICEF [Strategic Plan \(2022–2025\)](#), [Gender Action Plan \(2022–2025\)](#), and the [Child Protection Strategy \(2021–2030\)](#), underscores the importance of implementing structural and normative changes to tackle the root causes of gender inequality. Within this transformative framework, the UNICEF and U.S. Government partnership strives to accelerate progress towards gender equality and the elimination of FGM as a form of gender-based violence.

* Kenya, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, Benin, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Nigeria, and Mali

† Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, and Yemen

HIGHLIGHTS OF UNICEF'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2022

In 2022, UNICEF demonstrated its leadership in implementing innovative and adaptable approaches to ensure program continuity in the face of complex humanitarian challenges. These efforts led to significant achievements in the following areas:

Promoting girls' agency

- Community surveillance structures successfully prevented **111,425 cases** of FGM, ensuring the safety of girls at risk. These structures, established after public declarations, have been vital in upholding commitments to eliminate FGM. However, the program only achieved 50 percent of its target due to programmatic challenges posed by insecurity, political transition, and effects of climate change in certain countries.[‡]
- **660,359 girls** benefitted from comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and life skills programs through girls' and youth clubs, specifically designed to empower girls in decision-making and contribute to community transformation. By actively participating in these initiatives, girls are empowered to make informed decisions about their bodies, navigate relationships, and assert their rights, contributing to their overall well-being and agency.

Promoting equitable social and gender norms

- **1,190,629 individuals** across **3,665 communities** publicly pledged their commitment to ending FGM. These commitments from diverse community members have strengthened the global movement to end FGM.
- **49,866 religious leaders and community/traditional influencers** publicly denounced FGM. The sustained engagement of these influencers over the past decade yields positive outcomes, as an increasing number of them are becoming strong advocates for ending FGM.
- Communications campaigns targeting gender equality and FGM elimination reached **18,755,529 individuals**. These campaigns play a crucial role in fragile contexts, where they contribute to raising awareness and fostering attitude change.
- **2,454,831 individuals** actively participated in community-level dialogue centered on gender equality and eliminating FGM. Additionally, **440,675 men and boys** participated in peer education sessions and dialogues that aimed to promote positive masculinities and foster gender-equitable norms.

Ensuring that girls and women access opportunities and services

- **281,595 girls and women** received essential healthcare, social, and legal services. In certain countries affected by the poly-crisis, there was a breakdown in health information infrastructure, further hindering the provision of necessary services. Despite these challenges, efforts to prioritize and deliver comprehensive care remain crucial in addressing the needs of girls and women affected by FGM in these complex contexts.
- In Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Yemen, **35,344 vulnerable girls** aged 5 to 19 years, among the most marginalized, received essential educational support. This assistance aims to

[‡] Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia

empower these girls with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive and overcome the challenges they face.

- **2,765 primary and secondary schools**, along with non-formal education programmes, successfully integrated comprehensive sexuality education and life skills training, which encompassed FGM prevention. These initiatives aimed to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to make informed choices regarding their sexual and reproductive health.

Strengthening governance and accountability

- **2,152 law enforcement personnel**, including police, judges, lawyers, and prosecutors, received FGM legislation implementation training. This figure is more than double the number of law enforcement personnel trained in 2021, highlighting the expanding efforts to enhance legal enforcement and protection against FGM.
- **174 arrests** were made, resulting in **370 court cases** and **306 convictions** for FGM. Despite 32 fewer arrests compared to 2021, there was a 58 percent increase in court cases and a 43 percent increase in convictions. As institutions gradually resume operations following the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of FGM cases are being brought to court, leading to notable convictions.

Data and evidence

In 2022, UNICEF and partners conducted studies in ten countries[§], generating new evidence in key areas such as prevalence, education, community perceptions, and intervention effectiveness. These findings will play a crucial role in shaping program learning and prioritizing efforts in 2023, enabling targeted interventions to eliminate FGM and provide comprehensive support to affected communities.

2. GLOBAL CONTEXT ON THE ELIMINATION OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

GLOBAL TRENDS IN THE PREVALENCE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Global trends in the prevalence of FGM have shown both promising progress and persistent challenges. Efforts to eliminate FGM have gained momentum, leading to significant reductions in prevalence across many regions. An estimated 200 million girls and women alive today have been subjected some form of FGM worldwide, with the highest prevalence rates found in Africa, the Middle East. Additionally, small-scale studies indicate that FGM exists in communities in at least 20 more countries around the world, where the exact number of girls and women who have experienced FGM remains largely unknown.³

Despite progress, FGM remains prevalent in several parts of the world. In some areas, cultural, social, and religious norms continue to perpetuate the practice, making it a complex issue deeply rooted in tradition. Countries such as Somalia, Guinea, Djibouti, and Egypt still have high prevalence

[§] Burkina Faso, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda

rates, with more than 90 percent of girls and women being subjected FGM.² Factors such as poverty, gender inequality, and limited access to education and healthcare contribute to the persistence of FGM. It is estimated that if current trends continue, the number of girls and women subjected to FGM will rise to 4.6 million by 2030.⁵

In 2022, over half of the countries with high risks of FGM were faced with the polycrisis, including conflict, fragility, and climate-related challenges. These crises intersect with the prevalence of FGM, with 65 percent of FGM-prevalent countries also having high climate risks for children.⁶ UNICEF has observed an increased risk of FGM in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, and Yemen, which are grappling with multiple crises.⁷ In the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' (SNNP) region in southwestern Ethiopia, trend analysis conducted by UNICEF revealed a 27 percent increase in FGM cases in 2022 compared to the same period in 2021 due to conflict, climate change, and COVID-19. Additionally, in Burkina Faso and Egypt, intermarriage between host communities and forcibly displaced people has led to the resurgence or even introduction of FGM among communities without a history of practicing it, such as Syrian refugees in Egypt.

In recent years, reduced investments towards the elimination of FGM have become a concerning trend. A world affected by megatrends and polycrisis, such as conflicts, fragility, and climate-related challenges, has led to a diversion of resources and attention away gender equality, specifically harmful practices. Underinvestment in this critical area undermines the progress made in reducing FGM prevalence and poses a threat to the well-being and rights of millions of girls and women. It is essential for governments, international organizations, and civil society to prioritize and allocate adequate resources to sustain and expand efforts aimed at eliminating FGM.

GLOBAL DECLINE IN PREVALENCE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

In recent years, there has been a significant global decline in the prevalence of FGM according to recent data from UNICEF.⁸ Progress in eliminating this harmful practice is evident in several countries. In 2022, three nationally representative surveys showed a decline in FGM prevalence: Kenya's Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) showed a decline in FGM prevalence from 21 percent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 in 2014 having experienced FGM to 15 percent in 2022.⁸ Similarly, Egypt's Family Health Survey, found that FGM prevalence among girls aged 0 to 19, dropped from 21 percent in 2014 to 14 percent in 2022.⁸ Furthermore, Mauritania also saw a decline, with FGM prevalence decreasing from 69 percent in 2011 to 64 percent in 2021.⁹ These figures demonstrate the positive impact of concerted efforts and interventions to address FGM, including community-led initiatives, education campaigns, and legal reforms.

Despite global progress, the pace of decline in FGM prevalence varies among countries. In countries where FGM is becoming less common, progress would need to be ten times faster to reach the global target of zero cases by 2030, as outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.² This highlights the importance of increased investments to accelerate the elimination of FGM within the decade of action.

COUNTRIES WHERE PREVALENCE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION REMAINS UNCHANGED

Despite global efforts to eliminate FGM, there are still countries where the prevalence of this harmful practice remains unchanged. In certain parts of West and Central Africa, FGM prevalence rates remain alarmingly high. In Guinea, for instance, UNICEF reports that 94.5 percent of women aged 15 to 49 have been subjected to FGM, a figure that has remained unchanged in recent years.² In Gambia, the prevalence is equally high, with 75 percent of women affected by FGM.² These figures

highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions, community engagement, and policy reforms to address the deeply rooted cultural and social factors contributing to the persistence of FGM in these countries.

In Somalia, UNICEF reports that almost 98 percent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 have been subjected to FGM, indicating a lack of significant change in recent years.² In Egypt, the prevalence remains high as well, with 87 percent of girls and women affected by FGM.² These statistics underline the challenges faced in changing deeply rooted cultural practices and highlight the importance of sustained efforts, advocacy, and community engagement to eliminate FGM in these countries. The data emphasizes the need for continued collaboration and investment to protect the rights and well-being of girls and women in regions where FGM prevalence remains unchanged.

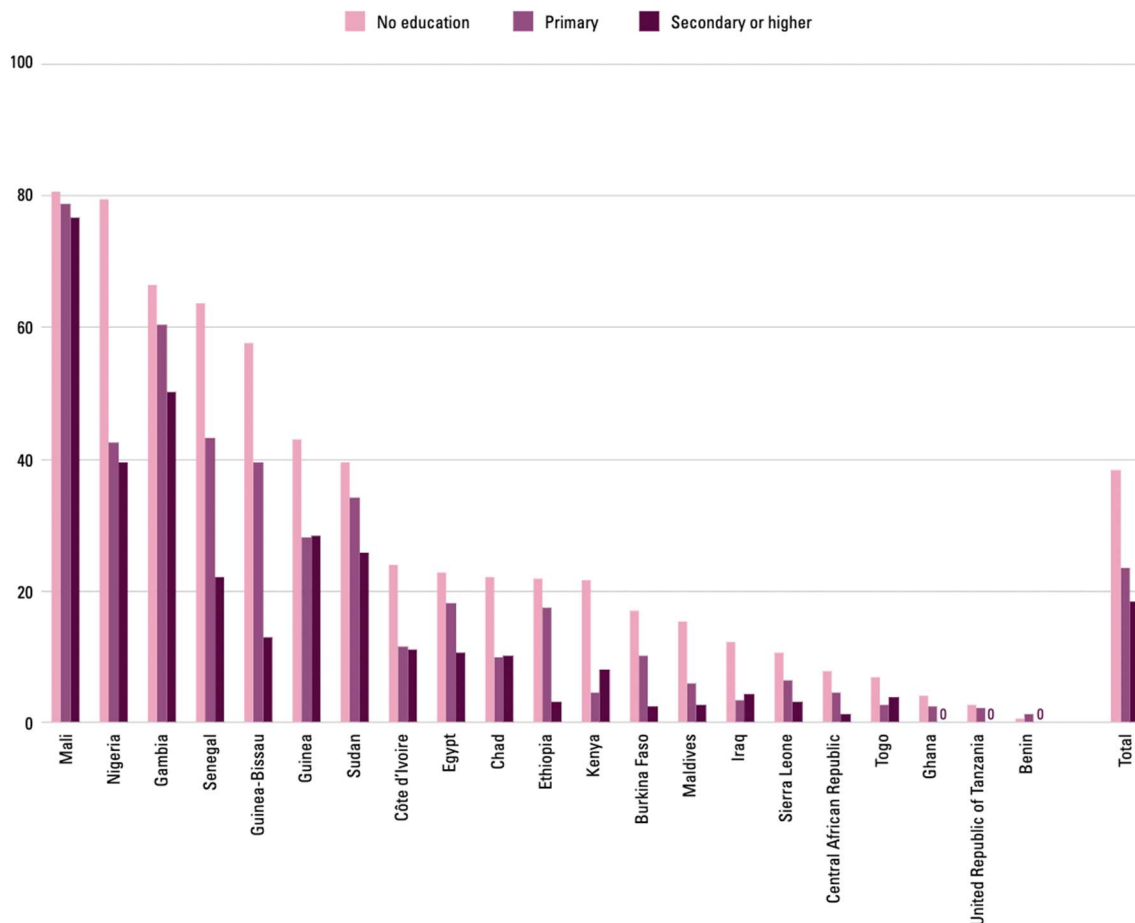
INCREASING OPPOSITION TO THE CONTINUATION OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

In the last two decades, the proportion of girls and women in high-prevalence countries who want the practice to stop has doubled, reflecting a growing global movement against this harmful practice. According to recent data from UNICEF, 62 percent of girls and women in these countries now oppose FGM, compared to 31 percent in previous years.² Furthermore, the data reveals that adolescent girls are leading the charge in opposing the practice. They are more likely than older women to stand against FGM, with countries like Egypt, Sierra Leone, and Guinea reporting that adolescent girls are at least 50 percent more likely than older women to oppose it.²

These figures not only demonstrate the growing momentum in challenging the practice of FGM but also highlight the progress being made in these countries to protect the rights and well-being of girls and women. Additionally, in most countries with data, men and boys from practicing communities are also at least as likely as girls and women to oppose FGM. In total, of the 300 million boys and men living in practicing countries in Africa and the Middle East, 200 million think FGM should stop.⁴

An emerging trend in opposition to FGM is the significant impact of education. Data reveals that girls and women with a primary education are 30 percent more likely to oppose FGM, while those with at least a secondary education are 70 percent more likely. In countries such as Kenya and Nigeria, any level of education is associated with higher opposition, while in Egypt and Sudan, higher education leads to a more dramatic shift in attitudes.³ Furthermore, the influence of education extends to the next generation, as girls whose mothers have a primary education are 40% less likely to undergo FGM than those whose mothers have no education. For example, in Ethiopia, FGM levels are 85 percent lower among daughters of women with a secondary education.³ However, challenges persist, as even some educated women have daughters who have experienced FGM, particularly in countries such as the Gambia and Mali.³ Education is a key driver in breaking the cycle and must be supported alongside other initiatives to eliminate FGM and safeguard the rights of girls and women.

Figure 1: Percentage of girls aged 0 to 14 years who have undergone FGM, among those whose mothers have undergone FGM, by mother's level of education.



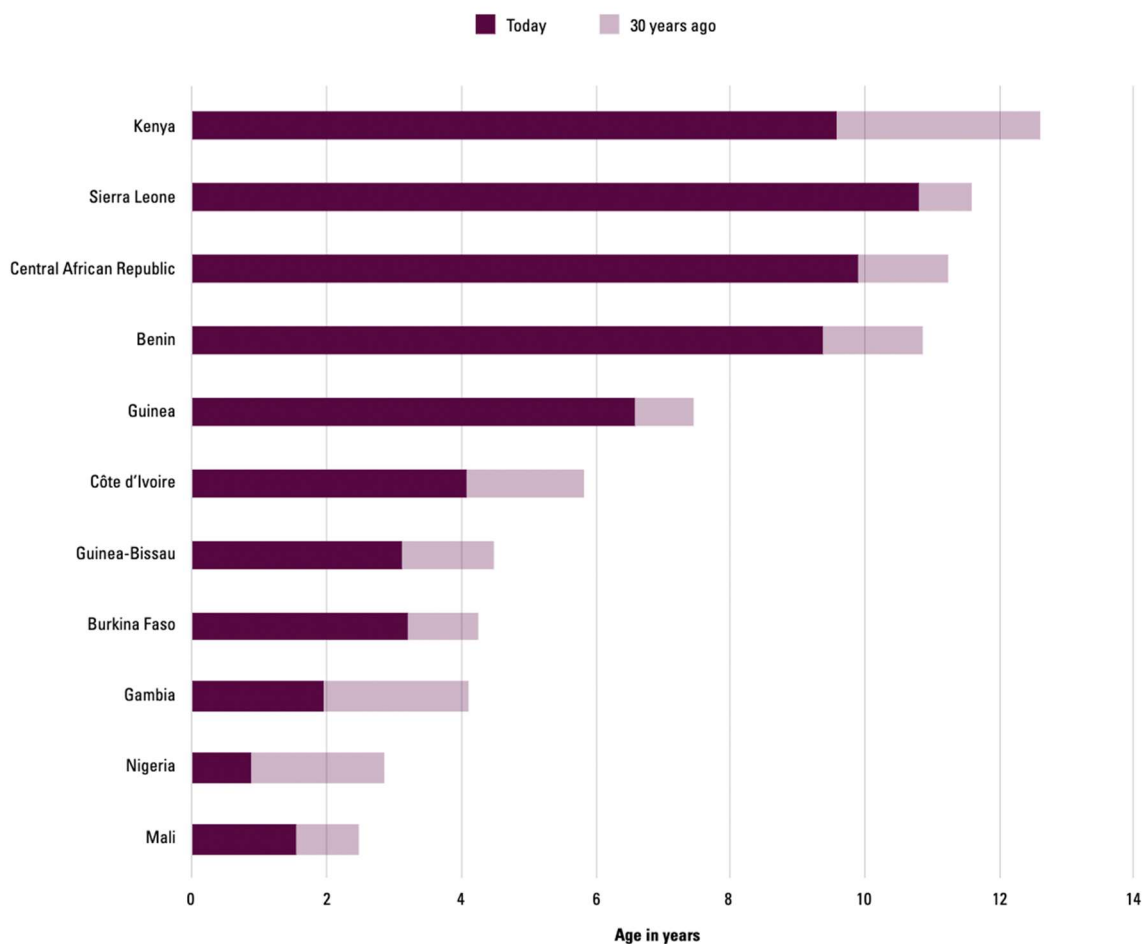
The increasing opposition to FGM signifies a positive shift in societal attitudes and a recognition of the harmful consequences associated with the practice. It also indicates the growing movement against FGM and potential for building a social movement, an area of priority for UNICEF as we race towards 2030. To sustain this positive trend and advance towards the complete elimination of FGM globally, continued efforts are crucial. Education initiatives that raise awareness about the physical and psychological consequences of FGM, community engagement to challenge harmful social norms, and targeted interventions aimed at empowering girls and women are all vital components.

GIRLS BEING SUBJECTED TO FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION AT YOUNGER AGES

Recent data from UNICEF reveals a concerning trend of girls being subjected to FGM at younger ages. FGM is practised differently within different cultures, and the age at which it is performed varies across contexts. In some countries, it is carried out very early in life, while in others it occurs in adolescence. In countries such as Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ethiopia, girls are often subjected to FGM before the age of five.³

Additionally, in approximately half of the countries where FGM is practiced, the average age at which the procedure is performed has decreased over the past 30 years. This alarming trend is evident in countries such as the Gambia and Nigeria. In the Gambia, the average age at when FGM is performed has decreased by two full years, shifting from age four to just before age two. Similarly, in Nigeria, the average age has dropped from before age three to before age one. In Kenya, the average age has decreased by over three years, declining from age 12 to age nine.³

Figure 2: Among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years who have undergone FGM, the average age at which it was performed.



These statistics underscore the urgency for early intervention and the need to address FGM at its roots. The fact that more girls are being subjected to FGM at younger ages highlights the importance of comprehensive strategies that focus on community education, positive and gender-responsive parenting, and legal protection to prevent this harmful practice. By targeting interventions at the earliest stages and engaging communities, we can effectively safeguard the rights and well-being of these vulnerable girls, ensuring they are protected from the physical and psychological consequences of FGM.

3. UNICEF's Approach to the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation

The UNICEF vision to eliminate FGM involves transforming structures, institutions, and norms that perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality. By enabling girls and women to make strategic life choices previously denied to them, UNICEF aims to achieve the elimination of FGM. This comprehensive approach is implemented through partnerships with governments, civil society, communities, and women and child rights activists.

UNICEF is currently implementing programs in 17 countries across Africa and the Middle East, including Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, and Yemen. These programs are aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 5, specifically target 5.3, which aims to eliminate FGM by 2030.

In addressing FGM, UNICEF's programs adopt gender-transformative approaches that actively challenge and transform rigid social and gender norms, as well as power imbalances. By delving into the root causes of gender inequality, these approaches prove to be the most effective in empowering girls and women, enhancing their agency and voice, and dismantling the power dynamics and structures that hinder their right to live free from violence and discrimination. Through these transformative interventions, UNICEF strives to create lasting change and ensure the well-being and rights of girls and women affected by FGM. The following outlines the four key outcomes that UNICEF aims to achieve in its efforts to accelerate the elimination of FGM.

COUNTRIES HAVE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE ELIMINATION OF FGM IN LINE WITH INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS:

- **Establishing an enabling policy framework:** To effectively address FGM, countries need to develop and implement policy frameworks that align with international human rights standards. This includes legislation that explicitly criminalizes FGM and protects the rights of girls and women to live free from gender-based discrimination and violence. UNICEF works to strengthen capacities in healthcare, social, and justice sectors to ensure the effective implementation of FGM-related legislation. This involves training healthcare providers, social workers, police officers, prosecutors, judges, and lawyers to effectively respond to FGM cases.
- **Developing costed action plans:** UNICEF assists governments in creating comprehensive and costed action plans at the national and local levels. These action plans outline strategies to eliminate FGM, including measures to ensure access to quality and responsive services. Additionally, data collection mechanisms are established to monitor progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 5.3, which aims to eliminate FGM by 2030. National action plans also foster coordination among relevant stakeholders from government ministries and civil society, promoting synergy and efficient use of resources.
- **Strengthening service provision:** UNICEF supports governments in improving access to quality services for survivors and girls at risk of FGM. This involves enhancing healthcare systems, providing counseling and support services, and addressing the long-term health consequences associated with FGM, education services, child protection and judiciary services, etc. Additionally, efforts are made to capture accurate data on FGM prevalence, interventions, and outcomes, which helps measure progress and inform evidence-based policies and programs.

GIRLS AND WOMEN ARE EMPOWERED TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS THROUGH THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS TO ELIMINATE FGM:

- **Community mobilization:** UNICEF supports community-led processes through public declarations of abandonment, marking a collective shift in social norms. These declarations serve as powerful symbols of transforming power structures and relations within the community. Establishing or strengthening local surveillance systems, such as community-based child protection committees, is vital for sustaining the commitment to abandon FGM.

These systems help track girls at risk and report cases of FGM, ensuring that progress is monitored, and interventions are effectively implemented.

- **Communication that challenges discriminatory social and gender norms:** UNICEF employs various communication strategies to challenge discriminatory social and gender norms. This includes peer-to-peer influence, community dialogues, theatre, mass media platforms like radio and television, and digital tools such as U-Report and social media. Through social norms marketing and 'edutainment,' UNICEF reaches large audiences, promoting new social norms and amplifying stories of change. By highlighting the benefits of keeping girls intact and changing attitudes towards harmful practices, UNICEF aims to scale up the adoption of new norms.
- **Gender-responsive parenting:** UNICEF recognizes the importance of gender-responsive parenting in FGM prevention. Given that most girls undergo FGM before the age of 5, positive parenting plays a critical role. Integrating FGM prevention into early childhood development programs and promoting gender-responsive parenting through mass media interventions, community engagement, and home visits are key strategies. By actively involving communities and encouraging their engagement in monitoring and supporting girls at risk, positive parenting and community surveillance efforts contribute to the prevention of FGM.
- **Men and boys as allies:** UNICEF engages men and boys as allies in the fight against FGM. Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education is provided, ensuring they understand the consequences of FGM. Men and boys are supported in becoming champions for the elimination of FGM within their communities, actively advocating for change and collaborating through activist networks and coalitions. By involving men and boys, UNICEF recognizes the importance of collective efforts in transforming social norms and ending the practice of FGM.

GIRLS AND WOMEN RECEIVE APPROPRIATE, QUALITY, AND SYSTEMIC SERVICES FOR FGM PREVENTION, PROTECTION, AND CARE:

- **Child protection services:** Child protection services are a crucial aspect of UNICEF's efforts to expand the choices available to girls and ensure their well-being. Access to services such as health, social, and justice forms an essential part of protecting girls from being subjected at various stages of their lives. These services are particularly important in providing care and support to girls who experience health consequences due to FGM.
- **Gender-responsive social protection:** Gender-responsive social protection plays a crucial role in addressing poverty and improving educational outcomes. Programs like cash transfers have demonstrated success in alleviating poverty. By adopting a gender-responsive approach, social protection initiatives can effectively prevent families from resorting to harmful practices, such as subjecting girls to FGM as a means to facilitate child marriages driven by economic insecurities and social exclusion.

COUNTRIES HAVE BETTER CAPACITY TO GENERATE AND USE EVIDENCE AND DATA FOR POLICYMAKING AND TO IMPROVE PROGRAMMING:

- UNICEF recognizes the importance of **evidence-based policymaking and program design**, which requires significant improvements in data collection and dissemination. To this end, UNICEF has made substantial investments in enhancing its strategy, committing to utilize evidence more effectively in shaping policies and program delivery. This commitment is

further underscored by a continued emphasis on evaluation, data collection, and analysis, including collaborations with government, civil society, and private sector partners.

- As a **custodian for SDG target 5.3** and all data concerning children, including FGM, UNICEF assumes a crucial role in data management and reporting. In addition to capturing and documenting good practices and lessons learned, UNICEF actively facilitates the sharing of knowledge between countries through South-South collaborations. This knowledge-sharing approach allows for the dissemination of successful strategies and experiences, fostering collective learning and improving global efforts to eliminate FGM.
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4. OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM RESULTS AND COUNTRY PERFORMANCE

GLOBAL PROGRESS

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), every child has the right to live free from inequality, violence, and discrimination. But in a world where power and choice are determined by gender, millions of girls are robbed of their childhood, education, health and aspirations due to harmful practices such as FGM. In promoting the acceleration of the elimination of FGM by 2030, UNICEF embraces a multi-level, multi-dimensional and gender transformative approach that addresses the drivers of FGM and gender inequality by enhancing girls' agency and leadership. In 17 countries, UNICEF is working across levels and within a web of support that involves families and communities, society and public structures, governments, institutions, systems and services in accelerating the elimination of FGM. The following results were achieved in 2022:

Secretary-General's 2022 Report 'Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of FGM'

- As part of the United Nations General Assembly [resolution 75/160](#) on '[Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation](#),' the emphasizes the importance of addressing the effects of global humanitarian crises and ongoing conflicts, such as climate change, environmental degradation, and the COVID-19 pandemic. It underscores the urgent need to allocate increased financial and human resources to tackle these challenges effectively. The Secretary-General's report emphasizes the importance of addressing the effects of global humanitarian crises and ongoing conflicts, such as climate change, environmental degradation, and the COVID-19 pandemic. It underscores the urgent need to allocate increased financial and human resources to tackle these challenges effectively. The report is based on updated information provided by Member States including Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Czechia, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Ghana, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jordan, Latvia, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Portugal, Senegal, Slovakia and Togo. The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM: Accelerating Change, the Spotlight Initiative, and the United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women.
- As a direct outcome of the 2022 Report of the Secretary-General, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a momentous [resolution](#) in December 2022. Co-sponsored by the U.S. Government, this resolution served as a powerful reaffirmation of the collective commitment of member states to eliminate FGM and emphasized the need for intensified efforts. The

resolution called for the enactment and enforcement of legislation, the establishment of accountability mechanisms, and the monitoring of progress at both national and local levels. The adoption of this resolution stands as a significant milestone in the global urgency to end FGM, underscoring the collaborative endeavors of the international community.

UNGA High-Level Side Event: Accelerating Investment to Eliminate FGM and Achieve Gender Equality

- During the seventy-seventh session of the UN General Assembly, UNICEF, together with UNFPA, and the Governments of Burkina Faso and Italy co-hosted the High-Level Side Event, "Accelerating Investment to Eliminate FGM and Achieve Gender Equality." Attended by representatives from Eritrea, Egypt, Belgium, Canada, Djibouti, France, the United Kingdom (UK), and the U.S., the event emphasized the urgent need for increased investment in eliminating FGM and promoting gender equality. This gathering showcased commitment, fostered dialogue, and facilitated the exchange of best practices and innovative approaches. The event highlighted the global recognition of FGM as a human rights violation and underscored the importance of sustained collaboration and investment in driving tangible progress towards its elimination and the advancement of gender equality.

Addressing the Surge of Violence and Harmful Practices in the Context of Climate Change - CSW's Call for Global Action

- During its sixty-sixth session, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) expressed profound concern over the alarming rise of violence, including harmful practices like FGM, in the context of climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters. The Commission emphasized the urgent need for governments and stakeholders to adopt comprehensive and coordinated approaches to eliminate, prevent, and respond to these harmful practices, which are further exacerbated in such circumstances. This urgent call was echoed at two high-level side-events co-hosted by UNICEF, where Member States, UN entities, and civil society organizations emphasized the importance of a global response to accelerate efforts in eliminating FGM amidst the challenges posed by climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, escalating conflicts, and population growth. The event also emphasized the need for increased investment in prevention strategies.

European Commission "EU gender action plan III: an ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action"

- UNICEF provided technical inputs in support of the development of the European Commission, [EU gender action plan III](#). The European Union reaffirmed its commitment to ending female genital mutilation through an emphasis on promoting prevention, challenging harmful gender norms, working with relevant stakeholders to ensure a survivor-centered approach, and engaging men and boys and traditional and religious leaders. Advocating the full ratification and implementation of regional human rights instruments, including legal prohibition of the practice, and supporting survivors' access to psychosocial support services and participation in economic and social life, were also promoted.

Human Rights Council Calls for Holistic Approach to Address FGM in Humanitarian Contexts

- At its fiftieth session, the Human Rights Council, in its resolution [A/HRC/RES/50/16](#) on the elimination of FGM, expressed its deep concern that humanitarian situations, armed conflicts, pandemics and other crises exacerbated pre-existing human rights violations or abuses and inequalities and led to population movements that might result in increasing

cases of cross-border and transnational FGM. It called upon States to ensure a more holistic and coordinated approach to the humanitarian-development nexus, integrating the prevention of and response to FGM into humanitarian preparedness and response plans, paying particular attention to the protection needs of refugees, asylum-seekers, migrants and internally displaced women and girls living in cross-border communities.

#InvestDontRest Campaign Spurs Global Momentum in FGM Elimination Efforts

- In February 2022, UNICEF launched the #InvestDontRest campaign on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM. This initiative served as a call to generate increased investment and commitment towards the elimination of FGM worldwide. Through a coordinated effort, the campaign successfully reached approximately 29.7 million individuals across various social media channels. The positive response and engagement demonstrated the urgency and collective determination to end FGM, raising awareness among millions and inspiring action at both local and international levels. The #InvestDontRest campaign stands as a testament to the potential of mobilizing collective efforts and resources in driving meaningful change.

Advancing the SDG 5.3 Agenda through Innovative Financing: Highlights from the FGM Donor Working Group's Annual Meeting

- In December 2022, UNICEF, in its capacity as the Secretariat of the Donor Working Group on FGM, joined forces with Luxembourg's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs to co-host the Annual Meeting. The primary objective of the meeting was to discuss innovative financing methods aimed at eliminating FGM, with a particular emphasis on exploring promising approaches. Recognizing the need for innovative financing to advance the SDG 5.3 agenda, the meeting highlighted the vital connection between innovative financing and the work of the FGM Donor Working Group, emphasizing the importance of leveraging new funding mechanisms to drive progress in ending FGM. Key action points arising from the meeting encompassed the exploration of public-private partnerships beyond Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the formulation of an advocacy strategy, along with the development of specific indicators to integrate FGM into humanitarian Areas of Responsibility.

Research Agenda: Strengthening Evidence to Drive the Elimination of FGM

- UNICEF's commitment to strengthening evidence for the elimination of FGM continues to evolve incrementally. Together with partners, UNICEF conducted a global review of evidence on the effectiveness of FGM interventions spanning over a decade. This review, in 2022, contributed to the development of [a 'Research Agenda to Strengthen Evidence Generation and Utilization to Accelerate the Elimination of FGM'](#). The research agenda identifies thematic research areas such as achieving sustainable social and gender norm change around FGM, measuring girl-centered approaches to social change related to FGM, as well as engaging men and boys as partners and allies in gender equality and ending FGM.

The thematic research areas identified in the research agenda are being explored and amplified through the [Strategic Technical Assistance for Research \(STAR\) Initiative](#), which supports UNICEF in evidence generation and synthesis, and research dissemination and uptake. The STAR Initiative provides comprehensive methodological and subject matter expertise to country and regional offices through three levels of technical support mechanisms: moderate, intermediate, and advanced. These support mechanisms encompass a wide range of capacities, including strategic guidance, literature review and

analysis, study design, capacity strengthening, development of guidelines and tools, as well as facilitation of support and reporting. This multifaceted approach ensures that the STAR Initiative offers tailored and effective assistance to meet the specific needs of each office, fostering improved outcomes and impactful interventions.

The Nexus Approach: Bridging Development and Humanitarian Efforts in Child Protection

- The urgency to adopt a nexus approach in responding to child protection issues across development and humanitarian settings has been heightened by the polycrisis. As the global community faces unprecedented challenges, including an increased risk of FGM, the importance of this approach became even more evident. In response, UNICEF conducted a reflective practice exercise with stakeholders implementing anti-FGM programmes. The exercise resulted in the development of practical tools aimed at applying the nexus approach to eliminate FGM in humanitarian settings. This toolkit ([FGM and the Humanitarian Development Nexus: Practical Ways to Support Programme-Level Implementation](#)) presents the outcomes of this reflective practice exercise. The development of the toolbox is informed by literature review, deep-dive workshops, an online survey, key informant interviews, and the adaptation of tools to support nexus implementation. This comprehensive exploration underscores the significance of bridging humanitarian and development efforts to effectively address child protection challenges.

COUNTRY PROGRAM RESULTS

UNICEF's 2022 program results are presented below based on a global program results framework that includes outcomes for the elimination of FGM by 2030.

Outcome 1: Girls' and women's agency

- In **Nigeria**, efforts were made to empower adolescent girls and create community-led interventions to address FGM. Community facilitators, trained as representatives of youth and women-led organizations, used the Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation to empower 900 adolescent girls as 'gender champions'. These champions conducted peer sessions, reaching 10,800 peers, and organized advocacy events engaging key stakeholders. Through their initiatives, over 11,700 adolescent girls-initiated conversations on FGM, reaching 23,450 girls and women. FGM Survivors Networks were also established, with 1,052 members, to sensitize communities, provide safe spaces, and advocate for the elimination of FGM. The active participation of these empowered girls and women is instrumental in the ongoing efforts to end FGM in their communities.
- In **Ethiopia**, UNICEF is actively supporting the production and broadcasting of the popular edutainment television series called "Yegna." Now in its fifth season, the show addresses various social issues, including FGM, through compelling storylines. Produced in collaboration with the Girl Effect, the series features adolescent-friendly content co-created with girls themselves. It aims to convey important messages about real-life challenges faced by teenage girls, such as relationships, menstruation, the value of education, and harmful practices. As Ethiopia's first TV drama specifically targeted at teenagers, "Yegna" has garnered a substantial audience of over 10 million viewers, effectively raising awareness and promoting positive change.
- In **Burkina Faso**, life skills programs were implemented in 2,747 adolescent clubs and safe spaces, benefiting 117,723 adolescent girls who were empowered to reject FGM and engage in family dialogues. Through education sessions promoting positive masculinities, 106,081

young boys and men pledged to actively contribute to the elimination of FGM in their communities. Additionally, 131,913 U-Reporters can access information about FGM by texting 'FGM'. The annual "Faso Youth Caravan" was launched on World Children's Day, reaching approximately 800,000 adolescents and young people across Burkina Faso through civic action, film screenings, concerts, interactive theater, sporting events, and art exhibitions.

- In **Eritrea**, UNICEF has integrated girls' and women's empowerment along with the elimination of FGM into child and social protection programs. Through home visits, UNICEF reached 41,825 households, with a particular focus on female-headed households. In 2022, the social protection program provided support to 7,865 households, with 50 percent of them being female-headed households. This support included income-generating activities and distributing school materials to promote access to education. By addressing household poverty and empowering women, the program aims to contribute to the elimination of FGM. Through community dialogues involving 20,920 individuals and home visits benefiting 41,825 families, more than 57,000 girls have been protected from undergoing FGM. These efforts promote gender equality and children's rights in the targeted sub-zones.
- In **Sudan**, girls' clubs in ten states have been instrumental in empowering young girls through life skills programs and offering a safe space for open discussions on FGM and GBV. These clubs also facilitate sports activities and promote peer learning through theater. A significant milestone was achieved as members of the girls' clubs committed themselves to actively prevent FGM in their communities by signing a pledge. The successful implementation of the Saleema Training Manual for girls' clubs led to its adoption for further expansion by Sudan's Ministry of Education.

Outcome 2: Family and community engagement

- In collaboration with CARE **Ethiopia**, UNICEF supported the development of an intervention package to engage men and boys in addressing harmful practices. Through training sessions and facilitated discussions, 28,034 boys and men were reached in 2022, surpassing the annual target. These individuals were selected from community-level youth associations and religious/cultural federations. The program has witnessed increased support from men and boys in protecting girls at risk of FGM and advocating against forced marriages. Field monitoring visits indicate a notable shift in preferences, with more men and boys expressing a desire to marry girls who have not undergone FGM.
- The Children's Parliament of **Guinea** received support to conduct a "Break the Silence" social media campaign, raising awareness about the consequences of FGM and GBV. Daily images, messages, and life stories related to FGM were shared on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, reaching over 55,000 users. Additionally, the Children's Parliament hosted two 90-minute radio programs on Radio Télévision Guinéenne and Espace FM, highlighting the significance of girls' education in ending FGM.
- In **Nigeria**, the Movement for Good (M4Good) campaign played a pivotal role in co-creating an online social movement, encouraging individuals to take actionable steps towards ending FGM at various levels, including households, communities, and the national level. To date, 520,524 individuals have pledged to end FGM through a digital platform. UNICEF Nigeria has also developed a theory of change (TOC) to guide movement building, aligning with women-and-youth led organizations and actors who are actively engaged at the community level.

- In **Djibouti**, UNICEF partnered with the National Union of Djiboutian Women (UNFD) and a network of 65 religious leaders to support community management committees (CMCs) in conducting education sessions on FGM. These sessions have reached over 94,000 individuals. The CMCs not only provide education but also play a vital role in establishing community surveillance to monitor and report girls at risk of FGM. Their efforts have already yielded significant results as 640 girls have been protected from being subjected to FGM in 2022.

Outcome 3: Ensuring girls' and women's access to services

- In **Nigeria**, efforts were made to ensure that girls and women at risk of and affected by FGM could access comprehensive services for prevention, protection, and care. In 2022, a total of 72,484 girls and women received health (24,952), social (30,943), and legal (16,589) services from trained service providers in the five focus states. UNICEF and its partners played a key role in training these service providers. Additionally, 1,052 members of the 36 FGM Survivors Networks received psychosocial support to enhance their self-awareness and emotional resilience. The health services provided included counseling on the dangers of FGM during antenatal and postnatal care, immunizations, and medical treatment for complications related to FGM. Social services included crisis information, psychosocial support, and referrals to support services, including free or low-cost legal counseling.
- In **Mauritania**, the Infant and Young Child Feeding Best Practice Monitoring and Learning Groups (GASPA) play a crucial role in providing guidance to new mothers on nutrition, health, and positive parenting. GASPA also actively promotes the prevention of violence against children, including FGM. Through follow-up activities targeting girls aged 0 to 5 years and engaging with 1,817 mothers in the Gorgol region, significant progress has been made in reducing the number of girls at risk of FGM. Specifically, 338 girls were prevented from undergoing the practice, which is typically performed on the majority of girls before their first birthday.
- In **Guinea**, the efforts of 954 women mentors, 261 women's groups, and 379 girl leaders have been instrumental in promoting the transformation of social and gender norms regarding FGM within communities. Collaborating with protection structures, NGOs, role model clubs, social workers, and community and religious leaders, these individuals actively engage in informing and raising awareness among the population. Their work includes identifying and safeguarding girls who are at risk of FGM. In 2022, their dedicated interventions successfully prevented 6,430 girls aged 0-14 years from undergoing FGM.
- In 80 villages in **Egypt**, UNICEF implemented the Dawwie initiative, which utilized a girl-centered approach to development. Through Dawwie, adolescent girls' social, health, economic, and digital assets were strengthened. The initiative focused on providing accessible and high-quality services that were tailored to the needs of adolescent girls. Additionally, UNICEF worked with communities to create an enabling environment that promoted girls' agency and leadership. Digital literacy training was provided to improve access to life skills programs and livelihood opportunities for adolescent girls. In 2022, UNICEF concluded the Meshwary program, which aimed to enhance opportunities for adolescent girls in Egypt, reduce FGM prevalence, and improve employability and community resilience. The program successfully reached over 570,000 adolescents and young people from 2018 to 2022.
- In **Ethiopia**, a total of 2,429 girls and women benefited from essential social services, including mental health and psychosocial support. Moreover, 140 individuals received vital

legal assistance concerning FGM, ensuring their rights and protection. Additionally, approximately 10,029 girls aged 5-19, who were at risk of FGM, received much-needed educational support to empower and uplift them. The progress extends to the training of 465 frontline service providers, consisting of 353 men and 112 women, who received mentoring and coaching in addressing violence against children and harmful practices. Furthermore, 272 healthcare facilities in targeted areas now have at least one healthcare provider trained in FGM prevention and response services. These facilities offer free information sessions to adolescent girls and women and provide necessary care to address the physical and emotional complications associated with FGM.

Outcome 4: Strengthening governance and accountability

- Significant progress has been made with the implementation of multisectoral, evidence-based, gender transformative policies, and National Action Plans (NAPs) in **12 countries**. These countries, including **Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda**, have developed comprehensive strategies with targets, budgets, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks to end FGM. UNICEF has played a crucial role by providing technical support to governments in the remaining five countries, where draft policies and NAPs are awaiting formal approval. This collective effort signifies the commitment and determination to eliminate FGM and protect the rights of girls and women.
- In **Eritrea**, the implementation of social protection programs has yielded positive outcomes for vulnerable households. These programs have directly benefited 7,865 households, half of which are headed by women. The impact of social protection extends beyond poverty reduction and improved access to education and income. It also plays a vital role in empowering women, granting them increased agency and autonomy in decision-making, particularly concerning FGM. By providing women with the resources and support they need, combined with efforts to shift societal norms away from supporting FGM, strategies that promote gender-responsive social protection have the potential to effectively reduce the prevalence of this harmful practice.
- In **Senegal**, progress has been made in strengthening child protection measures. Training materials on child protection, including responding to FGM and other forms of violence, were developed for justice, security, penitentiary, and social work training schools. Over 20,000 professionals from various sectors received capacity-building support, and child protection platforms were established in five departments. Policies and plans of relevant ministries were also strengthened to include protection against FGM and other types of violence. These efforts demonstrate Senegal's commitment to preventing FGM and ensuring the safety of women and children.
- In **Kenya**, UNICEF collaborated with the Anti-FGM Board, a government agency dedicated to ending FGM, to introduce a groundbreaking initiative called "PASHA." This innovative digital mobile application is designed to combat the high prevalence of FGM in the Kuria district, one of the most affected regions in the country. With the PASHA app, individuals can report and track cases of FGM through text messages or voice recordings. In cases of emergency, the app can locate a girl swiftly, while also offering the option of anonymous reporting. The launch of PASHA strengthens the existing reporting mechanisms for FGM, including the child helpline and national GBV helpline. This achievement is the result of collaborative efforts by local activists, journalists from Kenya and Tanzania, and NGO partners, who have tirelessly worked together to find effective solutions for protecting girls in high-risk border communities within the Kuria district.

Outcome 5: Generation and utilization of evidence and data

- **UNICEF MENA**, in collaboration with Equipundo, conducted a qualitative research study in **Djibouti, Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen** to inform programming strategies. The study, titled "Research-based Programming Guidance: Promoting Men and Boys' Engagement in Ending Female Genital Mutilation in MENA," focused on key aspects such as household decision-making on FGM, the intersection of sexuality and FGM, and effective ways to involve men in prevention efforts. Through discussions with UNICEF offices, as well as engagement with government officials, community representatives, and civil society organizations, valuable insights were gathered. Based on this research, Equipundo and UNICEF MENARO developed comprehensive programming guidance, consisting of one regional report and four country-specific reports. These reports synthesize the findings and provide actionable recommendations for engaging men and boys as essential partners to end FGM.
 - UNICEF published a study, a meta-synthesis that identified and described key factors, drivers, and gatekeepers of FGM in **Ethiopia** in peer reviewed journals including [Advances in Research](#) and [African Journal of Gender and Women Studies](#). The findings from the study will be used to inform the design of effective strategies for accelerating the elimination of FGM in Ethiopia.
 - UNICEF, in partnership with **Overseas Development Institute (ODI)** and **Plan International**, commissioned a literature review that informed [social norms and behaviour change approaches to challenge FGM in Mali](#). The literature review provides an overview of current FGM trends in **Mali**, the country's legal and policy environment, and drivers which explain the persistence of the practice. Findings from the literature review were used to inform the design of a mixed methods study in six intervention locations, and behavioral change tools to be used at the community, municipal, and regional levels to shift social norms towards the elimination of FGM.
 - A study conducted in **Kenya's** Meru and Kajiado counties delved into the perceptions and attitudes of men and women towards male involvement in the fight against FGM. The study, conducted through focus group discussions, revealed that despite cultural sensitivities surrounding male engagement, participants acknowledged its significance in challenging harmful social norms, gendered power dynamics, and driving the elimination of FGM. To support this cause, UNICEF's partner organization, Men End FGM, collaborated with the Ministry of Public Service, Gender and Affirmative Action, and the Anti-FGM Board in Kenya to develop and implement national guidelines on male engagement in eradicating FGM. These guidelines recognize the pivotal role of cultural, religious, and traditional leaders as influential figures within communities, capable of initiating reflective dialogues that challenge societal norms, gender stereotypes, and attitudes related to FGM.
 - UNICEF continues to prioritize measuring changes in social norms and behavioral drivers using The ACT Framework Package: Measuring Social Norms Around Female Genital Mutilation. In 2022, ACT was used to complement existing data collection tools, conduct a baseline evaluation in **Ethiopia**, and create localized measurement tools. In 2022, training was delivered to 101 participants including program staff, government line ministries, and CSOs in **Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia**. An online adaptation of the training was accessed by 2,707 users, with over 450 having already completed the course last year.
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5. Next Steps for UNICEF in 2023

Advancing gender-transformative and human rights-based approaches: In 2023, UNICEF will continue to prioritize the development of capacities for gender-transformative and human rights-based approaches in the fight against FGM. These approaches aim to empower girls and women to assert their right to live free from FGM. UNICEF will also focus on strengthening government institutions' capacity to promote and protect these rights while promoting positive masculinities by involving men and boys as partners, allies, and beneficiaries in the movement towards a world without FGM.

Mobilize capital for ending FGM: In 2023, UNICEF has prioritized the mobilization of capital to accelerate the elimination of FGM. Building on the scoping exercise conducted in 2021, which identified promising financing models, such as impact bonds, revolving funds, and endowment funds, UNICEF aims to further explore and leverage these mechanisms. By delving into the existing marketplace and partnering with international and bilateral development organizations, UNICEF seeks to harness innovative financing approaches that support gender equality and empower girls. Through mobilizing capital, UNICEF aims to drive sustainable and impactful interventions to end harmful practices like FGM and ensure a brighter future for girls worldwide.

Build coalitions and movements for FGM elimination: Recognizing that gender-transformative change requires collective power, UNICEF aims to expand purposeful partnerships and foster cooperation with women- and youth-led organizations, feminist and youth movements, and other key stakeholders. By strengthening these alliances, UNICEF seeks to create a collaborative environment where policies, institutions, and social norms that perpetuate FGM can be effectively challenged and changed. Additionally, UNICEF is committed to enhancing the agency and capacities of adolescent girls, empowering them to influence social change and amplify their voices through innovative and safe platforms and spaces. Through these concerted efforts, UNICEF aims to mobilize a powerful movement for FGM elimination and ensure meaningful progress towards a world free from this harmful practice.

Strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus: UNICEF recognizes the importance of adopting a humanitarian-development nexus approach to effectively address the immediate needs and long-term vulnerabilities of girls at risk of or affected by FGM in the context of complex and protracted crises. As the global community grapples with refugee and migration crises, natural disasters, and public health emergencies, UNICEF prioritizes the integration of humanitarian and development efforts to bridge the gap and ensure a comprehensive response. By mainstreaming the humanitarian-development nexus approach in its FGM programming and rolling out the nexus toolbox in select countries, UNICEF aims to provide timely and sustainable support to vulnerable girls, fostering their empowerment and resilience.

Strengthening data collection and the global research agenda: UNICEF acknowledges the critical role of research and data in informing evidence-based policies and interventions to eliminate FGM. To address the existing data gap and drive research efforts, UNICEF will continue its application of the Research Agenda to Strengthen Evidence Generation and Utilisation for FGM elimination, including through the STAR Initiative. The STAR initiative supports UNICEF by facilitating evidence generation, synthesis, research dissemination, and uptake. It aims to explore thematic research areas identified in the agenda, contributing to a deeper understanding of FGM and informing targeted interventions. Furthermore, UNICEF will prioritize the measurement of changes in norms and behavioral drivers using The ACT Framework Package: Measuring Social Norms Around Female Genital Mutilation. Ongoing and planned studies, including baseline studies in Ethiopia and Kenya

and the upcoming baseline study in Uganda, will provide valuable insights through mid- and endline evaluations.

6. External Media and Visibility

In 2022, U.S. media coverage highlighted UNICEF's programs contributing to the elimination of FGM, emphasizing the urgent need for action and the challenges involved in eradicating this harmful practice. The significance of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation was underscored by the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Justice. These collective voices demonstrate the crucial role played by UNICEF and its partners in advocating for girls' rights, raising awareness, and driving progress towards the elimination of FGM.

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7. Human Interest Story

In the past, girls were portrayed as damsels in distress, waiting for a prince to save them. But times have changed. Now, we see powerful female heroes who can save themselves and their loved ones. UNICEF is committed to empowering and protecting girls, especially in the face of violence. One of the most prevalent forms of violence in Upper Egypt is FGM.

Meet Yasmine, a young girl from conservative Upper Egypt, who protected her sister from the horrors of FGM. Yasmine's older sister, Aya, was subjected to FGM at a young age. The haunting memory of Aya's pain and the consequences that followed stayed with Yasmine. When it was her turn, she bravely stood up against her mother, reminding her of the suffering Aya endured. Yasmine fought for her sister's safety, highlighting the potential dangers and using religious arguments to oppose the harmful practice.

Aya, now working at a pharmacy, witnesses the aftermath of FGM, with girls experiencing bleeding and complications. She takes it upon herself to educate parents, urging them to spare their daughters from this cruel fate. Aya's determination stems from the lessons learned through personal experience.

Yasmine dreams of a future where she can follow in her sister's footsteps, finishing her education, finding employment, and having the freedom to express herself and protect others. Together, Aya and Yasmine attend seminars organized by the Association for Children and Development in Assiut (ACDA), an NGO partnering with UNICEF to eliminate FGM in multiple villages. Through this collaboration, they aim to bring about social change and encourage more families to abandon the practice openly.

UNICEF plays a vital role in supporting girls like Aya and Yasmine on their journey towards empowerment and protection. Through ongoing partnerships with organizations like USAID, UNICEF implements projects such as "Creating an Enabling Environment for Adolescent Girls in Egypt" (2018-2021). These initiatives specifically address issues related to FGM and the protection and empowerment of girls at risk. Additionally, UNICEF collaborates with the ACDA to eliminate FGM in 76 villages across six regions of Assiut. This longstanding partnership serves as a cornerstone in mobilizing society and fostering social change, encouraging more families to openly abandon the practice of FGM. Together with partners, UNICEF is working tirelessly to create a future where every girl can grow up free from violence and fully realize her potential.



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