

Foundations of Truth Toolkit

For youth groups, educators, and communities

Community sensitisation resource on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Presented By:

African Female Voices in collaboration with
The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children
(GAMCOTRAP)





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The Foundations of Truth Toolkit has been developed by African Female Voices (AFV) in partnership with GAMCOTRAP (The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children) as a collaborative, community-informed resource for youth groups, educators, and communities. This toolkit is the result of dedicated advocacy work, participatory engagement, and shared commitment to protecting the health, dignity, and rights of girls and women.

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FOUNDATION OF TRUTH TOOLKIT BY AFV AND GAMCOTRAP

METHODOLOGY

The development of this toolkit followed a structured, participatory, and evidence-informed methodology. The approach combined evidence based research, focus group discussion, contextual analysis, and community engagement to ensure that the toolkit is grounded in existing evidence, aligned with human rights standards, and responsive to the social and institutional contexts in which FGM occurs.

Culturally sensitive and right based approaches

- Focus group discussion on the myths and truths of FGM between AFV and GAMCOTRAP on development of the toolkit.
- Consultation with Ex-Circumcisers, survivors and advocates on FGM: FGM is deeply rooted in social norms, therefore participatory methods ensures the toolkit is contextually relevant, survivor centered and culturally appropriate.
- Human Rights-Based and Gender-Transformative Framework: AFV and GAMCOTRAP ensures that the toolkit aligns with international human rights standard, national legal and policy frameworks on FGM and GBV.
- Evidence Based: This is to ensure that the toolkit is grounded in credible research, aligned with established standards and informed by proven practices and survivor stories.
- Contextual Analysis: The development of the toolkit was informed by a contextual comprehensive analysis aimed at ensuring that the content is responsive to the specific social, cultural and legal realities in which FGM is practiced. The purpose is to identify social norms, beliefs, and power structures sustaining the practice, identify prevention mechanisms and adopt strategies.

Introduction



Over **230 million girls and women** have undergone **Female Genital Mutilation(FGM)** according to the World Health Organization, with Africa accounting for the largest share of this total, with over **144 million**. FGM refers to the procedures involving the partial or total removal of the female's external genitalia, or the injury to the genital organs for non-medical reasons. The harmful practice affects girls and women, and the harmful effects involve serious health issues, psychological and social harm (pain, infection, fistula, childbirth risk, and trauma). In Africa, where the largest account of FGM is reported, more communities are shifting norms. More faith and traditional leaders are speaking out, and legislation and policy frameworks are being reinforced not only to eradicate the practice but also to support its consequences. Despite the proven harm it causes and the laws put in place to criminalise it, the practice continues to persist due to the culture and tradition of silence and secrecy that has been built around it, with some communities engaging in the practice without question, attributing it to an upholding of ancestral and religious legacy. This shows that truth matters.

Definitions and Key Concepts

What Does "Circumcision" Mean?

Circumcision literally means "to cut around" or "to cut short," and is a word used for procedures involving genital organs.

What Is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)?

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) refers to procedures that involve changing or removing parts of the external female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

FGM is recognized internationally as a harmful practice. It has no health benefits and can affect a girl's or a woman's health, well-being, and rights.

Main Types of FGM (Simple Overview)

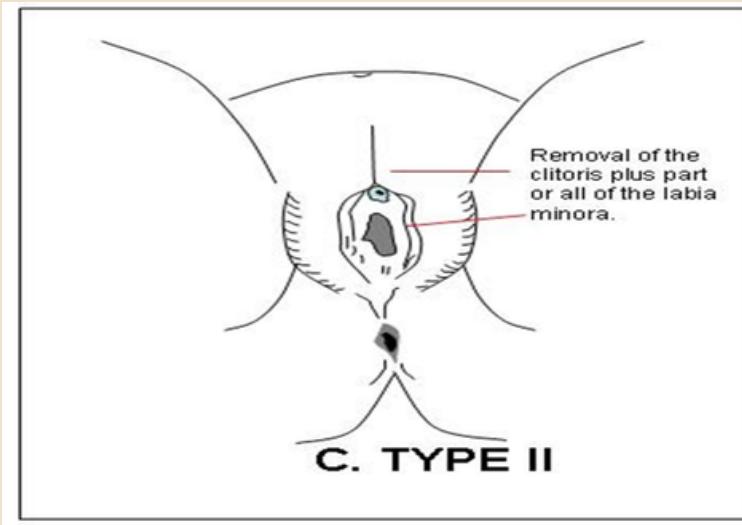
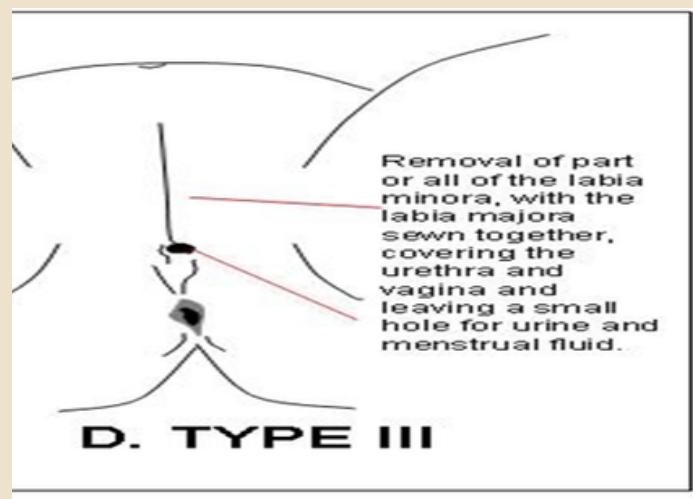
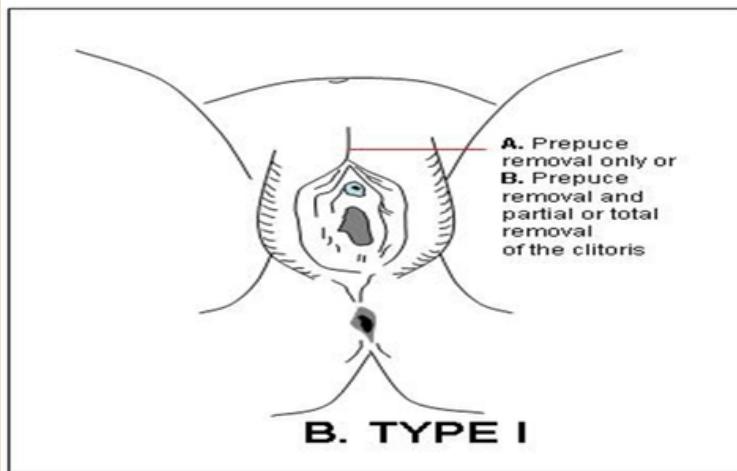
Health authorities group FGM into main types:

Type 1 – Partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or surrounding tissue.

Type 2 – Removal of the clitoris and part or all of the inner folds of the genital area.

Type 3 – Narrowing of the vaginal opening by cutting and repositioning surrounding tissue, leaving only a small opening. In some communities this is known by local names.

Other Types – Any other non-medical injury or harmful procedure to the female genital area is also considered FGM.



About Foundations of Truth

In collaboration with **The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting The Health of Women and Children (GAMCOTRAP)**, Foundations of Truth for us is about bringing out the truth, especially around violence against women, but specifically female genital mutilation. Because in the communities we work with, most people, when you talk to them about female genital mutilation, they don't know the truth around it. What they have been told since time immemorial is that this is something you should do. It is based on culture. It is based on religion. So for them, it is normal. It is unquestionable. And because they have never been exposed to the facts, they continue practicing it. Our everyday work revolves around gender-based violence, violence against women and girls, and specifically female genital mutilation. So, for us, Foundations of Truth is really about helping people understand the truth behind all these issues.

This toolkit provides information on the truth about female genital mutilation and the harmful effects of this practice. In the efforts to take action against FGM, the toolkit seeks to lay the proper foundation of truth surrounding the harmful practice, providing clear facts, dispelling myths, and sparking local dialogue. This toolkit seeks to empower individuals to partner with families, faith leaders, and legal systems to shift culture, protect rights, and promote a safer future for girls.

Who is this toolkit for?

This informative toolkit is for young people (teens & youth groups), educators, and communities throughout Africa and beyond, who are willing advocates and become allies of those who continue to fight against FGM. This toolkit guides in recognising changing norms, embracing intergenerational dialogue, and leveraging both traditional and modern influence through narratives of those affected or closely aware of FGM.

How to use this Toolkit?

This informative toolkit is a practical guide to support learning, dialogue, and reflection on issues affecting women and girls, particularly FGM. Depending on the context, the toolkit may be used individually for personal learning and reflection, or collectively in facilitated settings such as workshops, classroom discussions, community dialogues, or forums. Users are encouraged to adapt the content to specific audiences.



Safeguarding Note

Discussions about FGM can be sensitive and may trigger strong emotions. Participation in activities and dialogues should always be voluntary, and individuals are encouraged to engage only to the extent they feel comfortable. Support and guidance are available through local organisations, including:

- **GAMCOTRAP** (The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children) – Call: +220 2001020 / 7120569 | Email: info@gamcotrap.org | [Website](http://www.gamcotrap.org)

Participants are encouraged to reach out to relevant organisations for emotional support, advice, or further information.

Key Messages

- *Every girl has the right to her body, health, and future.*
- *FGM has no medical or moral benefit, only lasting physical, mental and social harm.*
- *Respect, prevention and protection are human rights; no tradition can override the safety, wellbeing, and rights of the child.*
- *Protecting girls from harm aligns with human rights, African Children's Rights Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals:*
 - *3: Good Health and Well-Being*
 - *5: Gender Equality*
 - *16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*
- *It is not about blaming communities. It is about saying this is the full truth that was hidden from you for generations, and now we are bringing it into the open so people can make informed decisions.*
- *Faith and culture can honour girls and women without causing harm.*



Myth vs Truth Table

FGM persists through fear, misinformation, silence and authority, not lack of intelligence. Addressing the myths and truths help educate, protect and empower. Once people start understanding the truth, you see the shift. Some will resist at first, but others will start questioning. And that questioning is where change begins. Below are the myths, truths and discussion prompts gathered to educate and encourage engagement and dialogue.

How to Use the Myth vs Truth Table

This table is designed as a conversation tool, not a debate checklist. Begin by inviting participants to read each myth aloud and reflect on where they may have heard it before. Encourage open discussion using the prompts provided, allowing participants to question, share experiences, and explore new understanding. The goal is not to shame or force agreement, but to create a safe space where truth replaces silence and informed choices can emerge through culturally relevant approaches.



Myth vs Truth Table

Myth	Truth	Discussion Prompt (clarify)
FGM is a rite of passage for girls that is necessary to pass down through generations.	FGM is a harmful practice and has no health or developmental benefits for girls. The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that FGM "has no health benefits" for girls and women.	How do traditions shape our beliefs about what is necessary for girls? Can we celebrate the coming of age in ways that do not cause harm to women?
FGM is required by religion	Most people believe FGM is religion, and that is one of the things that makes the fight very difficult. No major religion requires FGM. A 2023 study in Somalia by the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) found that 98% of women have undergone FGM, yet religious scholars, the Ulama, agree that the Quran, Hadith, Ijma'a or qiyas do not mandate FGM.	What do our religious texts and leaders actually say about FGM? How can we separate cultural practices from religious beliefs?
FGM is required for cleanliness and makes childbirth easier.	WHO made a summary and found multiple long-term physical, sexual and mental health complications associated with FGM. FGM increases the risk of infections, complications in childbirth and long-term health problems.	Where do our beliefs about health and cleanliness come from? What does medical evidence say about the effects of FGM?
FGM helps keep a girl's virginity and controls her sexual behaviour.	WHO and UNICEF report that FGM is a social norm and that there is no medical basis for the belief FGM controls sexual behaviour. FGM does not prevent premarital sex, neither does it guarantee "purity". Sexual behaviour is influenced by many social factors, not autonomy.	How do we define and value "purity" and "virginity"? Are there healthier ways to support girls' choices and well-being?
FGM brings honor and prestige to girls and their families.	Community dialogues highlight a growing shift in understanding honour, not as practices that harm girls and women, but as the responsibility to protect their health, dignity and rights.	What does honor mean in our community? Can we redefine honor to include protecting girls' health and rights?

Myth vs Truth Table

Myth	Truth	Discussion Prompt (clarify)
FGM is safer if done by a medical professional.	FGM is never safe regardless of who performs it. Medicalisation does not remove the risks of physical and psychological harm. When working with traditional birth attendants/escorts/companions, when we work with doctors, they have found out that these are just myths. They are not true. In fact, women that are mutilated find it more difficult when it comes to giving birth. WHO's studies reject medicalisation. Health professionals performing FGM still cause harm despite efforts of its legitimisation.	Does having a medical professional perform FGM make it less harmful? Why or why not?
Girls who are not circumcised are considered ignorant or immature.	Social pressure is real, with names being used to label girls who are not circumcised as (e.g "Solima"), causing fear for those wanting to resist, but attitudes can change. Communities are shifting away from FGM such that girls are accepted without undergoing the practice.	How can we support girls or parents who choose not to undergo or let their child undergo FGM? What can we do to change negative labels and attitudes?
Opposition to FGM is a Western idea imposed on our culture.	Human rights, including the right to health and bodily autonomy, are universal. African values are not devoid of dignity and protection, and many African and local leaders, organisations and survivors are leading the fight against FGM with that in mind. With UN agencies and WHO framing FGM as a violation of rights to bodily integrity, health and protection, Gambian activists and CSOs like GAMCOTRAP, Safe Hands for Girls and many survivor networks are leading national and transnational advocacy.	Who are the voices in our own community and country speaking out against FGM? Why is it important to listen to local experiences?



Community Voices

Change begins when we hear the truth from voices who share evidence and help us understand what we were never told. Change begins when truth is shared by those trusted and rooted in their communities. The voices below are drawn from consultations conducted by GAMCOTRAP and African Female Voices through community dialogues, focus group discussions, and direct engagement with women, youth, traditional and religious leaders, and survivors. These insights reflect lived realities and reveal how misinformation, silence, and social pressure sustain the practice of FGM. This section is designed to humanise the evidence, validate local experiences, and show how community-led truth-telling can challenge harmful norms and open pathways toward protection, dignity, and change.

Activity/Discussion Prompt:

Read the quotes together and discuss: Which belief or experience stands out most in your community? Who are the trusted voices that could help shift understanding if they shared the truth openly?

Traditionally, they will call those who didn't undergo female genital mutilation solimas – those who know nothing. Those who know nothing about traditionalism, about how to relate to people, especially elders, and how to exchange words with them. So, it becomes a harsh word. It comes to a point where nobody wants to be called a solima. And then you will accept it as a tradition, even if you don't want to. "- Halimatou Ceesay



"People listen to community and religious leaders, which is why we work closely with them. We don't just say that FGM is harmful, we show proof. This is so they can see for themselves that FGM causes harm." - GAMCOTRAP Representative

Community Voices



"Some of the misconceptions we normally find in our communities is that they have been told it is an inheritance. It was done by their great-grandparents, and to them, nothing happened to those people. Because of that culture of silence, especially from the women's side, you stay with a condition and you don't talk to anybody"- Fatou Secka- GAMCOTRAP representative.

"Most of the people in the communities are not exposed to the facts around female genital mutilation because it is their belief. It is culture. They are made to believe it is healthy for them. They are told that FGM makes them clean. They are told that when you go to the hospital, childbirth will be easier if you are mutilated." - Fatou Secka



Action Prompts

Anyone can play a role in ending FGM; Man or woman, young or old, teacher, leader, healthcare professional, or a member of your community. Refer to the resources section or appendix A in the toolkit for organisations you can reach out to and credible sources for learning.

Activities for personal learning and advocacy

- Learn the facts about FGM and its consequences. Resources are available in section 7 of the toolkit. Reflect on your beliefs and challenge the assumptions. Use the reflection questions to help. When possible, speak up respectfully to peers and family.
- Support others by listening to and understanding survivor's experiences. Encourage informed choices for young girls to model respect for health, rights and bodily integrity.
- Join or start awareness campaigns or dialogue circles. Work with leaders or a local organisation to address myths, share truths, amplify voices and promote alternatives

Activities for youth groups

- Create physical/digital posters with “Myth vs Truth” content
- Create a peer dialogue circle. Share the discussion prompts from the toolkit amongst the dialogue circle and talk about what respect, bodily autonomy, safety, and truth mean to each of you.
- Youth participants can work individually or in small groups to design posters that clearly challenge common myths about FGM using factual information from the toolkit. These posters can include short statements, symbols, illustrations, or quotes that explain why the myth is harmful and what the truth is. Posters may be displayed in schools, youth centres, hospitals, or shared on social media to raise awareness and encourage conversations among peers. Facilitators should create a safe and respectful space where young people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and questions. Using the discussion prompts in the toolkit, participants can reflect on personal values, social pressure, and the right to make informed choices about their bodies. Emphasis should be placed on listening without judgment, respecting different perspectives, and building confidence to speak up for health and human rights.

Activities for educators

- Role-play a scenario: A young person’s friend is pressured by family to undergo FGM; what can they say or do?
- Incorporate the topic of FGM into a life orientation or life sciences class using facts and local resources in group discussions.
- **Role-play a scenario: A young person’s friend is pressured by family to undergo FGM; what can they say or do?**
- Educators can guide learners through a role-play that explores empathy, support, and practical responses. After the role-play, learners should reflect on the emotions involved, identify safe adults or services that can offer support, and discuss how accurate information can help challenge harmful practices while maintaining respect for families and communities.

Incorporate the topic of FGM into a life orientation or life sciences class using facts and local resources in group discussions.

Teachers can use age-appropriate facts from the toolkit to explain the health, social, and human rights impacts of FGM. Group discussions can encourage learners to examine myths critically, understand the role of culture and tradition, and explore how laws and community efforts protect girls. Local examples and trusted resources can help make the discussion relevant and grounded.

Activities for community leaders

- Hold community dialogues or town hall meetings to discuss and share stories, myths vs truths.
- If safe and consenting, facilitate a community circle of youth and parents where those affected directly and indirectly by FGM to create behavioural change and find local solutions to end FGM (intergenerational dialogue).

- Work with religious leaders to integrate awareness of FGM messages into sermons.
- **Hold community dialogues or town hall meetings to discuss and share stories, myths vs truths.**
- Community leaders can convene open forums where accurate information is shared alongside lived experiences from community voices. Using the Myth vs Truth table as a guide, discussions should focus on learning, reflection, and collective responsibility, creating space for questions while reinforcing the importance of protecting girls' health and rights.
- **If safe and consenting, facilitate a community circle of youth and parents where those affected directly and indirectly by FGM to create behavioural change and find local solutions to end FGM.**
- These circles should be facilitated with care and sensitivity, ensuring participation is voluntary and respectful. The aim is to encourage intergenerational dialogue, reduce silence and stigma, and identify culturally appropriate alternatives that uphold dignity and wellbeing without harm.
- **Work with religious leaders to integrate awareness of FGM messages into sermons.**
- Religious leaders can play a critical role by clarifying that FGM is not a religious requirement and by promoting messages of compassion, protection, and respect for girls. Integrating accurate information into sermons and teachings helps shift beliefs, reinforce positive values, and support community-wide change.

Sensitivity, Digital Advocacy, and Allyship

Ending FGM requires care, responsibility, and respect. Conversations and actions around this issue must prioritise the safety, dignity, and voices of girls and women, while recognising cultural contexts and power dynamics. This section provides guidance on how to engage sensitively, advocate responsibly online, and act as an effective ally in the movement to end FGM.

Practising Sensitivity and Do-No-Harm Engagement

FGM is a deeply personal and sensitive issue. Many people affected by the practice may carry physical, emotional, or social trauma. When discussing FGM, it is important to approach conversations with empathy rather than judgement.

- Use respectful, non-shaming language and avoid blaming individuals or communities.
- Centre the wellbeing, dignity, and rights of girls and women at all times.
- Do not pressure survivors or community members to share personal experiences.
- Be mindful of age, gender, power, and cultural dynamics when facilitating discussions.
- Create safe spaces where people can ask questions and reflect without fear.
- Apply culturally relevant approaches when engaging with communities.

Why it matters: Sensitivity builds trust, which is essential for meaningful dialogue and lasting change.

Digital Advocacy: Using Online Spaces Responsibly

Digital platforms can be powerful tools for awareness, education, and mobilisation. When used thoughtfully, they help amplify truth, reach young audiences, and challenge harmful myths about FGM.

- Share accurate, verified information from credible sources such as the toolkit, WHO, and trusted local organisations.
-
- Use storytelling responsibly, focusing on dignity, resilience, and rights rather than shock or harm.
-
- Engage responsibly with content, context, and audience that drives the facts of the graphic contents, personal details, or images that may retraumatise or endanger others.
-
- Use positive messaging that promotes protection, choice, and alternatives to harmful practices.
-
- Encourage respectful dialogue online and avoid engaging in harassment or harmful debates.

Share photos and voices of participants or survivors with their consent.

Allyship: Standing With, Not Speaking Over

Allyship means supporting the fight against FGM in ways that uplift affected communities and respect local leadership. Effective allies listen, learn, and act responsibly.

- Listen to survivors, community leaders, and local organisations leading the work.
- Use your voice and platforms to amplify trusted voices, not replace them.
- Challenge myths and misinformation respectfully when they appear in conversations or online spaces.
- Support community-led initiatives, campaigns, and alternatives to FGM.
- Reflect on your own beliefs and biases, and remain open to learning.
- Be open to one-on-one conversations with survivors of FGM.

Being an ally is not about having all the answers. It is about showing up consistently, respectfully, and in solidarity.

"These cases are fictional and developed for advocacy and educational purposes. Any resemblance to real persons or events is coincidental."

Scenario 1: Youth Activist – Naledi in Botswana

Naledi, a 22-year-old youth activist living in Botswana, is not from a community where FGM is practised but wants to support the fight. She learns about FGM through social media, university discussions, and regional campaigns. Instead of posting strong opinions, she reads verified resources, follows organisations working directly with affected communities, and shares information to amplify survivor-led voices. Naledi also joins digital awareness campaigns and helps create Myth vs Truth posters. She avoids judgment and focuses on human rights, health, and safety.

Scenario 2: Educator – Thabo in South Africa

Thabo, a life orientation teacher, encounters students who have questions about FGM. To act responsibly, he incorporates fact-based discussions in class using the toolkit, organizes role-plays on peer pressure scenarios, and invites students to reflect on bodily autonomy and respect. He avoids blaming families or communities and instead focuses on encouraging critical thinking and empathy. Thabo also uses classroom discussions to identify local resources for students seeking support.

Scenario 3: Faith Leader – Malimuna Savage in The Gambia

Malimuna is a religious leader who wishes to support efforts to end FGM in her community. She participates in consultations and community dialogues, learning the myths vs truths, and integrates sensitive messages about protection and respect for girls into her sermons. She uses religious texts accurately to clarify that FGM is not a requirement, and encourages her congregation to celebrate cultural identity without causing harm.

Activities & Discussion Prompts

- **Youth:** How can someone outside an FGM-practising community contribute safely? Which voices should you amplify and which should you not speak over?
-
- **Educators:** What classroom activities or discussions can safely educate students about FGM? How can role-plays reinforce empathy and respect?
-
- **Faith Leaders & Community Leaders:** How can religious or traditional authority be used to promote protection and rights? How do you share accurate information without alienating your audience?

Reflection Questions

- How can we speak about FGM in ways that protect dignity and safety?
-
- What responsibility do we carry when sharing information online?
-
- What does meaningful allyship look like in our community or digital spaces?
-

Which myths or misconceptions have you personally encountered, and how can you respond with truth and empathy?

Resources

- To find out more about FGM:
 - Towards the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation – A Training Manual on FGM (Prof. Muhamed Sayed Tantawi, 2006))
 - Reaching Adolescents with Messages on Reproductive Health, GAMCOTRAP, Second Edition, February 2007
 - Female genital mutilation (FGM) is frequently asked questions by the World Health Organization.
 - Fact Sheets on female genital mutilation by the World Health Organization
 - Genital Mutilation: Addressing common myths and misconceptions by EndFGM European Network
 - Reflection Circle guide: A Handbook for a ReflectionAction Circle on Female Genital Mutilation
- Organisations you can reach out to:
 - The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (GAMCOTRAP)
 - Call 220 2001020 / 7120569
 - E-mail info@gamcotrap.org
 - Visit <https://gamcotrap.org>
 - The Gender Management Information System
 - Call 199
 - Visit <https://gbvims.africa/login> to report an incident
 - Safe Hands for Girls
 - Email info@safehandsforgirls.org
 - The Female Lawyers Association of The Gambia (FLAG)
 - Call (220) 273 4702
 - Or visit <https://flag.gm/>

Campaign Quotes

- " A woman's honor is not found in harm. Let us protect our girls, not cut them. "
- " Being uncircumcised does not make a girl lesser than. "Solima" is not her name. "
- "Solima" means"
- The complete woman created by Allah".
- " Tradition should not cost a girl her health or her future. "
- " Your voice matters. Stand up for truth and stand against FGM. "
- " A girl's body is perfect at birth. FGM adds nothing but pain. "
- " FGM has no health benefits. A safe, healthy girl is a whole girl."
- " Protecting girls is the highest honor. "

#EndFGM #MyVoiceMatters

#EndFGM #EndSGBV #EndChildMarriage #ProtectTheGirlChild #UpholdTheLaw



Appendix A - Reflection Questions

Self-awareness is the first step toward becoming an effective and responsible advocate. It helps you understand your own values, assumptions, biases, and motivations before engaging others on sensitive issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM). When you are clear about where you stand and why, you are better able to communicate with empathy, respect, and credibility. Advocacy is not only about sharing facts — it is also about listening, reflecting, and responding in ways that build trust and open meaningful conversation.

Encouraging thoughtful dialogue around FGM requires a culturally sensitive and context-aware approach.

1

What personal beliefs or experiences shape how I view FGM, and how might these views influence my advocacy?

2

Which myths about FGM do I still encounter, and how can I respond with truth and respect?

3

Who in my community can I partner with to raise awareness and create change?

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- African Female Voices (AFV): info@africanfemalevoices.com
- GAMCOTRAP: info@gamcotrap.org

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African Female Voices

Organization focused on amplifying the voices and stories of African women, promoting advocacy, mentorship, and empowerment.

Contact Details:

- Email: info@africanfemalevoices.com
- Website: www.africanfemalevoices.com
- WhatsApp: Available via contact form on the website
- Operating Hours: 09:00 – 17:00 SAST