

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM) COMMUNITY DIALOGUE, 2020.



Abstract:

In commemoration of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Rego Foundation in partnership with Joy for Children were hosted by Kapchorwa Civil Society Organizations Alliance (KACSOA) to hold a community dialogue in Kapsinda sub county, Kurumbowo Village in Kapchorwa District. The aim of this event was to understand why the female genital mutilation or cutting is carried out in Kapchorwa, affected populations, the effects as well as ways to eliminate the practice.

International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation Community Dialogue.

Theme: Empowering the Youth to end FGM in Kapchorwa District

Venue: Kurumbowo Village, Kapsinda subcounty, Kapchorwa district.

Date: 06.02.2020

Speakers: Moderator: Cherukut Martine Titus – Project Officer, KACSOA
Media Personality: Mangusho Lawrence – Sabin Today
Susan Hirego – President & CEO, Rego Foundation
Panel: Kamukenje Asuman - LC I Chairperson Kurumbowo Village
Chemusto Brahan - LC II Chairperson, Kurumbowo
Nasambu Topista – LC III Secretary for gender, Kapsinda Subcounty
Satya William – LC I Chairperson, Chepkwa
Kapsiyan Hassan – LC I Chairperson, Kapkwombo

Agenda

- Opening remarks.
- Introduction of members.
- Presentation from Rego Foundation.
- Panel Discussion.
- Open discussions.
- Presentation from the Media.
- Review of the FGM Act.
- Closing remarks.
- Refreshments Break.
- AOB

1.0 Introduction and opening remarks by Cherukut Martine Titus

Globally, 6th February is recognized as the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This year, Rego Foundation and Joy for Children sought for a Partner on ground in Kapchorwa District because Kapchorwa is a home for the Sebei people who practice FGM in Uganda. KACSOA has therefore partnered with the two Organisations to carry out this event with the aim to understand why FGM is carried out in Kapchorwa, the affected populations, effects as well as ways to eliminate the practice in the area.



From left to right Mr. Kamuron Peter, Rachel Tumwizere, Susan Hirego & Deputy CAO; Mr. Robert Abia

“We as KACSOA took the initiative to introduce our new partners to the Local Government of Kapchorwa District. We visited the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer (CAO); Mr. Robert Abia, former Member of Parliament and currently Chairperson for Social Services, Mr. Peter Kamuron and the Deputy LC5 Chairperson.

I would like to emphasize that these Organisations are not here to discredit the Sebei culture but to gather information; to

understand why the practice is carried out and possible interventions; intervention for and by the community that Rego Foundation, Joy for Children and KACSOA can leverage on”, Martine stated.



Cherukut Martine Titus

The main beneficiaries of this dialogue are the local leaders in Kapsinda Subcounty; these can help us draw policies to curb the practice, The practitioners; they will help us to understand what drives them to do the actual cutting and how we can collaborate to end the practice, the victims (young women and girls); through disseminating their experiences, they can help us to design intervention programs tailored to prospective victims and act as change agents to end the practice. The goal of this dialogue is to build a foundation for collaboration with the community and all key stakeholders so that together, we can end FGM and promote development in Kapchorwa District.

2.0 Presentation by Rego Foundation

Susan Hirego; President & CEO, Rego Foundation introduced her team and, in her remarks, she notes, “Rego Foundation and Joy for Children are legally registered Non-Governmental Organisations based in Kampala & operating nation-wide. Our partnership is rooted on our membership in Girls Not Brides Uganda, an alliance of over 95 Organisations in Uganda where the Executive Director of Joy for Children is the Country Representative. Together, we address issues on violence against women and girls and promote education of the girl child.

information on the state of FGM and create partnerships with the community and leaders in order to inform plans for intervention activities. “In our previous celebrations to commemorate the FGM Day, we were advised by the Assistant Commissioner – Youth and Children Affairs, Ministry of Gender; Mr. Mondo F. Kyateka, to go on ground where the FGM practice is happening to better inform our interventions. Therefore, we came to hear from you, to understand why FGM is happening and to find out how we can help” she stated.



Left to right: Joan Nakawuma, Raccheal Tumwizere, Susan Hirego and Matilda Namutebi



Visiting KACSOA Offices

By availing information, knowledge and an enabling environment to address violence against women and girls, together, we can create an equitable society.

Susan emphasized that their visit to Kurumbowo Village was mainly to get

3.0 Panel Discussions:

Kamukenje Asuman LC I Chairperson Kurumbowo Village, started the information-sharing session by welcoming Rego Foundation, Joy for Children and KACSOA to Kurumbowo village.

“I am happy that you are here because this is the right place for FGM awareness. FGM is still being practiced here, most of it in hiding and today we have cutters, those that have been cut and those planning to be cut” he stated.



Kamukenje Asuman, LC I Chairperson Kurumbowo Village

He however requested that our intervention is directed towards education because there are no schools in Kurumbowo village, girls have to walk long miles and, on their way, they are subjected to many distractions such as older men soliciting marriage and some never even make it to school.

So today, since we are in the presence of the practioners themselves, they should advise us on how to intervene, he urged the audience.



Participants listening to the panel



One of the village elders seconding the LC1 chairperson's suggestions

Ms. Nasampu Topista, the Secretary for Gender, Chepkubal Village stated that the people living in Kapsinda Parish came to settle and found the practice of FGM, so they also practiced it. “We were cut, and we have also subjected our daughters and grand daughters to be cut, however we should all work together to eliminate this practice, it deters our development and there is nothing we have gained. To the Organisations that have come to help us put an end to FGM, I urge you to respect our culture and design interventions that will not shame us as sebei people”.



Ms. Kasampu Topista addressing participants

4.0 Open Discussions

Yepyeko Khadijah, 47years old:

"I call upon all women in Kurumbowo and all the other villages in attendance to leave the practice of FGM in order to abolish the bad name imposed on our culture. The practioners do it because of hunger, they get money out of it. If the cutters get economic support, then they can leave the practice. We need watchdogs on ground to enforce rules that whoever consents to be cut will be cut to harm, this will scare away young women and girls willing to undergo the practice.



Yapchekwel Saphina, 70years old:

"It is good you have come as partners of development and not to laugh our culture, this area has been given a bad name because of the practice of FGM. I was cut when I was younger but for several years, I have never got the urge to have sex with my husband so he opted for a younger girl". She emphasized that education is the key and fastest way to sensitize the people of Kapsinda and clean the name of the sebei people.

Cheritich Zelda, 56 years old:

Education is the key to ending this practice. I have gone through the cut, young women get pressure from their husbands to go through the cut, but if we educate women and girls, then they can understand the dangers of this practice. Young women are pressured by culture; if they are not cut, they can not escort their husbands when their sons are

going to be circumcised which is a prestigious event for all families in our culture.



Chebet Ashinam, 28 years old:

Girls in Kapsinda Subcounty walk about 17 kilometers to get to the nearest school, because of this distance, Chebet didn't make it to school and married at the age of 18. "I must admit that am among those who were planning to go through the cut so that I can be accepted in my community as a full woman. My peers often laugh at me, there are places I can not go to with my husband, it makes me feel inferior, my decision has been failed mostly by the thoughts of all the pain I have to go through, However I am grateful to every woman who has shared with me their experiences and helped me to understand some of the effects of FGM, I will never go for the cut.



Chebet Agnes, 32 years old:

“Born in this village, if there was anyone supposed to go through FGM, then it was me. However, I didn’t go through with the cut because I was privileged to go to school and I have been helping my peers, helping them to understand that a woman or girl that has been cut is not different from me who has not been cut, there is no added advantage but a lot of health issues one has to deal with for the rest of their lives. Therefore, I urge Rego Foundation and Joy For Children to support girls from this village to go to school and act as role models to other girls.



Cherop Lucy, 33 years old:

She urged the visiting partners to focus on educating girls and working with faith-based Organisations to give the sebei people a sense of direction and encourage them to seek God. As we drove through Kapsinda on our way to Kurumbowo village, there was only one church; the venue for this dialogue, Cherop

noted that her village needs more salvation than FGM.

“My sister, who was the first born in my father’s home, became an FGM advocate through an organisation that visited my village a couple of years back, but this caused my father to denounce her because having a first born girl go through the cut is prestigious in my village. So my sister fled to Kenya(which is neighboring the sebei region), while in Kenya, she was forced to go through the cut and when she returned, her boyfriend and prospective husband refused to marry her, she never meet his sexual desires now that parts of her body have been removed. She was rejected by several young men and eventually ended up in prostitution where she lost her life.

When women are cut they lose their sexual urge, men keep running away from them so most of the young women my age end up in prostitution because they want to feel desired by a man”.

Chelimo Judith, 42 years old:

“I am born to a sabini father and mutoro mother, but my mother was not cut. When I moved to Kapchorwa from my mother’s land, I was pressured to go through FGM and since I didn’t see anyone die from it, I decided to get cut. However, I have not gained anything apart from losing my body parts.

5.0 Presentation by the media:

Mangusho Lawrence from Sabin Today noted that media houses in Kapchorwa District have done a lot of sensitization about the dangers of FGM through radio talk shows and community engagements. He emphasized the danger of having a permanent scar (3 lines or dots on the hand) as a sign that a woman or girl has gone through FGM, it causes a lot of stigma, men tend to isolate such women because they don't have very low libido, young girls who wish to intermarry will be

stigmatized because they can not meet their partner's sexual needs. He urged parents to stop using offensive language against the girl child because she has not been circumcised and girls to avoid peer pressure because once you go through the cut, you can not go back later alone, all the long term health effects you have to deal with the rest of your life such as fistula.

It has come to our attention that there is a new way of practicing FGM undercover; pregnant women are taken to deliver and after delivery, they are circumcised. We as the media, we shall continue sensitizing communities and disseminating the law against FGM so you are not caught unaware.



6.0 Review of the FGM Act according to the constitution of Uganda:

In Uganda, Laws, cultures or traditions which emasculate the rights of women or their status, are prohibited by the Constitution. Harmful traditional practices are a form of torture, cruelty, inhuman and disregarding treatment.

Racheal Tumwizere, Executive Director; Action for the Woman's Pride Initiative and current Law student at Kampala International University elaborated the FGM Act to the participants. She noted that a person who carries out female genital mutilation commits an offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment not exceeding ten years, therefore, Section 4 of the FGM act states that a person who carries out female genital mutilation on herself commits an offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment not exceeding ten years.

A person who participates in any event leading to female genital mutilation (for example the practitioners) commits an offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment not exceeding five years. Parents, guardians, husbands or a person having authority or control over the victim are liable on conviction to imprisonment not exceeding eight years; consent, culture and religion not considered as defense.



“Violence against women and girls is a brutal and backward culture and nobody deserves their rights being violated all in the name of culture. Courts passing heavy sentences alone against practioners of harmful cultural

practices will not end these practices but appropriate legislation, awareness creation and advocacy to change the mindsets of our people so that they do not hide behind culture” Racheal stated.

7.0 Recommendations:

- Appoint and work with community change advocates because they understand the village better.
- There is need to target victims so that they can share their experiences, particularly the effects of Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting. This will change the mindsets of young women and girls planning to go through the cut.
- Create safe spaces for victims to share their stories to avoid stigma and isolation
- Disseminate the FGM Act to communities through various media and change agents.
- Promote education of the girl child by building a girls’ primary and secondary school.
- Give a reward to community watchdogs who report people practicing FGM
- A 72years old practioner said it was because poverty that she practiced FGM, “you are paid for every girl or women you cut but this blood money can not help in development. If we are economically empowered then we can become change agents and put an end to the practice”.



- A 65 year old former mentor (prepares women and girls for the cut) and practioner, said she grew up with her grandmother who was a mentor and practioner so this is the life she grew up knowing. However, she urged parents to advise young girls against the practice, which should start from home by letting them know that they are enough and there is no secret reward in going through the cut.



8.0 Closing remarks:

Mr. Chemusto Brahan, LC II Chairperson, Kurumbowo gave a vote of thanks to Rego Foundation, Joy for Children and KACSOA for their willingness to help the people of Kapsinda and Kapchorwa District generally. He thanked all the participants from the five villages in Kapsinda subcounty, who showed their commitment by attending the FGM community dialogue.



“FGM has negative health implications such as infertility, low sexual appetite, fistula, damaging women’s reproductive system painful sexual intercourse for the victims and heavy bleeding during child birth to mention but a few, therefore investing in health centers is one of the immediate interventions required. However, practioners have been

earning through this practice so if we can support them economically then even the ‘undercover’ practice will be abolished,” he stated.



FGM is a special occasion that calls for public celebration in sebei, but the chairperson encouraged the community to find other mediums of celebration. For instance, we can celebrate marriage of two adults, not children, graduation for our children, child birth and economic prosperity.



Partners Profile

REGO FOUNDATION

Rego Foundation is a Non-Governmental Organisation working to end gender-based violence among young women and girls in Uganda. Our programs are centered around girls' education, women's economic empowerment and ending violence.

Mission:

To end gender-based violence among young women and girls through education, advocacy and empowerment.

Vision:

A peaceful, free and equitable society where women and girls are in charge of the decisions that affect their lives.

Objectives:

- To promote awareness, prevention and care for women and girls subjected to violence.
- To build safe, healthy and enabling learning environments for underprivileged girls.
- To increase women's access to finance and development of additional livelihoods.
- To raise awareness and end harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage.

Contact: info@regofoundation.org

JOY FOR CHILDREN

Joy for Children is a Non-Governmental Organisation championing the rights of all children to live peacefully and without exploitation, to benefit from quality free education, to thrive in economic security and justice, and to prosper with access to clean water, good health care and nutrition.

Mission:

To end violence against children in Uganda through capacity building, advocacy, psycho-social and legal support.

Vision:

All children in Uganda enjoying their rights, being protected and cared for and having equal opportunities to realize their full potential.

Objectives:

- To increase awareness on the negative effects of sexual violence and influence change on related policies.
- To protect children and increase community response to harmful forms of violence against children.
- To increase psycho social and legal support for children.
- Increase enrollment, retention and achieved learning outcomes of children in schools.
- Reduced number of children especially girls getting married before the age of 18.

Contact: info@joyforchildren.org