

## **Kingsdale Foundation School - Guidance on Female Genital Mutilation**

An estimated 200 million girls and women have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), a human rights violation that can lead to health consequences that affect girls' and women's physical, mental and sexual health and well-being. As a gendered harmful practice, FGM is a manifestation of gender inequality deeply entrenched in social, political and economic structures. It also represents society's control over girls and women and perpetuates normative gender roles that are unequal and harmful.

For more than two decades, global consensus has been that the elimination of FGM contributes to the achievement of gender equality. Working in 22 countries across Africa and the Middle East, UNICEF advocates for and takes concrete action to eliminate FGM by promoting gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women, particularly those most left behind by ensuring they are educated, healthy, and free from violence and discrimination.

Education plays a critical role in ending the cycle of poverty and preventing FGM in contexts where the practice is associated with marriageability for economic security and social inclusion. While education may not prevent girls being subject to FGM at a young age, it has the potential to positively affect future generations. Educated women are less likely to support the continuation of FGM

The approach by UNICEF's to eliminate FGM is outlined below:

***For every girl, a voice***

***For every girl, a choice***

***For every girl, agency***

***#EndFGM***

***Empower a girl, change the world***

The rights of girls will be realised through:

- Equal access to education, health care, nutrition and protection
- Recognition of the rights of girls to be free from FGM
- investing in gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment
- addressing gender discrimination and ending all forms of gender-based violence including FGM
- the launching of ambitious actions for accelerating the achievement of gender equality an end to violence against women and girls, and the elimination of harmful practices by 2030 (part of UNICEF's Decade of Action to achieve Generational Equality)
- strengthening the voices of girls and women through greater participation and representation in decision-making processes to build their leadership skills to influence social change and thereby exercise their rights to education and improved livelihood opportunities

- protecting and promoting children's and women's rights, and its access to spaces and places of influence
- embracing men and boys as allies through the provision of opportunities in safe spaces which enable critical reflection and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education targeting men and boys, so they understand the consequences of FGM
- holding intergenerational discussions with community members at household and community levels will contribute to breaking the silence about FGM and building trust and stronger relationships between girls and their parents, while also improving protection for girls in their households and communities

(one woman's story illustrates the power of personal testimonies - "I became an anti-FGM activist after I gave birth to my first kid...I had a lot of difficulties giving birth and had to undergo a caesarean section. This got me thinking a lot about FGM...that my difficulties in giving birth could be partly attributed to the fact that I had been undergone FGM when I was just 7 years old...")

- Engaging men and boys as allies to champion the elimination of FGM is essential, if change is to be brought about within a generation
- recognising that the movement against FGM is an effective strategy for enabling girls and women and their allies to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order - *girls are powerful agents of change*
- strengthening child protection systems to ensure access to essential services to include healthcare, social welfare and legal services to girls and women who are at risk of or have undergone FGM -provision of services contributes to promoting positive social norms that keep girls healthy and intact, as service providers share information and provide counselling to girls, women and other community members about the consequences of FGM.
- access to services ensures girls are protected from undergoing FGM throughout their different life stages and provided with care in cases where they face health consequences as a result of the practice
- championing the elimination of FGM by participating in the development and implementation of national and local strategies for ending the practice, and holding governments accountable
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**\*For further information on FGM and the expectations of school staff, please refer to Keeping Children Safe in Education – September 2023**