



Frontline Women's Fund
Sisterhood is Global Institute

ACTIVITY REPORT

BRIDGING GENERATIONS: WORKING TOGETHER TO END FGM AS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AFRICA



**NOVEMBER
21-23, 2024**

LOCATION

**TRADEMARK SUITES,
NAIROBI, KENYA**

INTRODUCTION



The "Bridging Generations" convening organized by African Women Rights Advocates (AWRA), Equality Now, and the Frontline Women's Fund (FWF) brought together **40 participants from 13 countries**, representing a diverse coalition of activists, donors, and stakeholders committed to ending Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) within the broader framework of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The purpose of the convening was to address the critical need for a unified, intergenerational, and collaborative approach to eradicating FGM. The event was intended to lay the groundwork for a coalition capable of addressing FGM in tandem with other harmful traditional practices, ultimately forming a strong movement to combat VAWG in Africa.



This unique gathering fostered intergenerational and intersectional collaboration, emphasizing survivor-centered approaches, community-driven strategies, and sustained donor engagement. Participants engaged in reflective sessions, panel discussions, and action planning to explore historical milestones, address emerging challenges, and identify adaptable strategies for FGM advocacy within an evolving social and political landscape.



DAY 1: HISTORY, DIALOGUE, AND REFLECTION

Moderated by Taina Bien-Aimé, Director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), the first day was a closed-door meeting that began with a historical contextualization of the fight against FGM. The session opened with a presentation by Jessica Neuwirth, Director of the Frontline Women's Fund, and Faiza Mohammed, Director of Equality Now Africa Office. They outlined key milestones in global FGM advocacy, and described the work of Equality Now which was formed in 1992. The launch of the Fund for Grassroots Activism to End FGM by Equality Now in 2000 (subsequently renamed for Efua Dorkenoo and run now by the Frontline Women's Fund) was highlighted as a critical initiative to direct resources toward grassroots women's organizations at the forefront of anti-FGM work. Both speakers emphasized the importance of survivor-led initiatives and integrating community-based approaches with legal reforms to achieve meaningful change.

A portion of the discussion focused on the role of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices (IAC). IAC president and Director of Voix de Femmes, Mariam Lamizana, led the conversation about the current state of IAC programs. Participants collectively examined the IAC's successes and failures, highlighting its instrumental role in lobbying the African Union for a treaty on FGM, culminating in the Maputo Protocol. Many of the convening participants emphasized the urgent need for a coalition. The discussion also acknowledged the pioneering role of Efua Dorkenoo, whose relentless advocacy was instrumental in getting FGM recognized as a human rights violation and shaping a holistic approach to ending the harmful traditional practice. Opening the discussion with historical context for the fight to end FGM provided a foundational understanding of the movement's trajectory before transitioning into a deeply personal and intergenerational discussion. Activists and survivors shared their struggles, experiences, and insights in an honest and supportive space, fostering trust and solidarity across generations.

Participants reflected on the effectiveness of current interventions, noting legislative progress but identifying challenges such as societal resistance and limited resources. Success stories of grassroots mobilization, including engaging religious leaders and educating communities, were shared as effective strategies. Structured discussions between veteran and emerging activists revealed the value of linking historical milestones, such as national laws and regional commitments, with youth-led movements that leverage digital tools and social media to challenge societal norms. The day's key takeaways included the need for culturally sensitive and holistic advocacy frameworks, the benefits of intergenerational collaboration, and the importance of regularly evaluating interventions to adapt to societal changes.

DAY 2: REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND SECTORAL COLLABORATION



The second day began with the continuation of the discussion facilitated by Taina Bien-Aimé. The meeting was joined remotely by lifelong FGM activist and Kenyan politician Agnes Pareiyo who made history by becoming the first woman MP in Narok North Constituency. Young and veteran activists shared personal experiences, with younger participants expressing appreciation for the mentorship and leadership of their predecessors. In the afternoon, Dr. Tapiwa Nyasulu of UNFPA delivered a presentation on the organization's role in combating FGM across East and Southern Africa. The presentation emphasized the achievements of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme for the Elimination of FGM, which operates across 17 countries in Africa and the Middle East. Since its inception in 2008, the program has reduced the likelihood of girls undergoing FGM by one-third over the past 30 years and achieved significant declines in prevalence rates in countries like Kenya and Tanzania. Adolescent girls are emerging as a powerful force against FGM, 50% more likely than older women to oppose the practice. The program's partnerships with religious leaders, men, and youth-led movements were highlighted as critical drivers of change.

Despite these successes, challenges such as rapid population growth, pushback against anti-FGM laws, and the threat of medicalization continue to hinder progress. Dr. Nyasulu emphasized the need to intensify current efforts 27-fold to achieve the global goal of ending FGM by 2030. Participants called for cross-regional coordination, enhanced data collection, and strengthened cross-border interventions to address FGM in communities along porous borders.

A panel discussion on building bridges across intersections and sectors, facilitated by Muthoni Muriithi, brought together experts including Dr. Costly Aderibigbe from Nigeria, Domtila Chesang from Kenya, Rugiatu Touray from Sierra Leone, and Mariam Lamizana from Burkina Faso. They discussed the intersection of FGM with broader VAWG issues and underscored the importance of contextualizing legal frameworks to ensure community acceptance. Innovation in advocacy, stronger funding models, and the importance of empowering grassroots organizations were highlighted as key factors in sustaining anti-FGM efforts. Personal experiences were shared, including Mariam Lamizana's media campaigns in Burkina Faso, Domtila Chesang's emphasis on community-driven solutions, and Diaka Camara's insights into private-sector engagement for funding.



DAY 3: FUNDING, PARTNERSHIPS, AND NEXT STEPS

The third day centered on the sustainability of anti-FGM efforts and the mental health challenges faced by activists, as presented by Joyce Maina. This session underscored the emotional toll on activists, who often internalize the trauma of survivors while navigating systemic barriers, such as cultural resistance and insufficient legal support. Financial strain and unsustainable workloads were identified as major contributors to activist burnout.

To address these challenges, recommendations include:

- Allocating dedicated funding for mental health programs.
- Training activists in self-care and financial literacy.
- Creating safe spaces for sharing experiences.
- Integrating trauma-sensitive practices into advocacy work.

These recommendations were integrated into reflection sessions, where participants discussed practical strategies for strengthening donor relationships and crafting collaborative action plans. Sema Gornall and Mamlisa Camara presented case studies on leveraging diaspora connections, innovative funding models, and fostering global allyship to support grassroots initiatives. A critical examination of funding challenges was also explored during the session led by Susan Gibbs of the Wallace Global Fund, revealing a need for innovative donor engagement strategies. Susan emphasized the importance of equitable resource allocation to grassroots and survivor-led efforts through Africa-led intermediaries as a viable solution. She also highlighted the need for impactful storytelling and accountability mechanisms to build trust and strengthen donor relationships.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Over the three days, several critical insights and actionable strategies emerged:

STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES

- 1. Intergenerational Collaboration.** Bridging generational gaps is essential to sustain momentum. Experienced activists provide historical context and expertise, while youth-led movements bring innovation and energy through the use of digital tools and social media.
- 2. Survivor-Centered Approaches.** Survivors' voices and leadership must remain at the heart of all interventions. Creating safe spaces and incorporating trauma-sensitive practices were highlighted as priorities for meaningful survivor engagement.
- 3. Integrated Advocacy.** Addressing FGM as part of the broader VAWG framework enables holistic approaches that connect social, economic, health, and educational factors.
- 4. Cross-Border Coordination.** Strengthening regional and cross-border initiatives is crucial to tackling FGM in communities living along porous borders, such as those between Kenya and Tanzania or Uganda and Kenya or Mali and Burkina Faso and Niger and Mali.
- 5. Movement building.** Movements are important to making collective milestones. The history of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices (IAC), was shared as a point of learning as the first African network to engage in FGM and mobilized national committees across 29 countries on national and continental advocacy. This led to the AU pronouncing itself against FGM, accelerated the adoption of national laws prohibiting FGM across different countries, and of resolutions against FGM at the AU and UN, as well as the recognition of February 6th as Zero Tolerance Day amongst others.
- 6. Visibility and media.** Visibility is important for the campaign against FGM. A well-known example of the need for improved visibility is the Ethiopian couple that got married in 2022 and wore placards saying that they were happy the wife was not circumcised. The wedding was televised and this gave visibility to the campaign.
- 7. Mental Health and Well-Being.** Activists and survivors face significant emotional and psychological burdens. Prioritizing mental health, self-care, and support systems is essential for the sustainability of advocacy efforts.
- Data and Accountability.** Improved data collection and monitoring that are grassroots-led are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and ensure accountability at community, national, and regional levels.
- 8. Implementation of law.** For effective implementation of the law, communities need to know that the law and its provisions exist by sensitizing them through the channels that they use and in the language that they understand. Additionally, all the actors responsible for implementing the law should understand the provisions of the law. In this way, FGM cases can be prioritized.
- 9. Community Engagement and Education.** Addressing cultural beliefs and societal norms through targeted education campaigns, as well as the involvement of religious and traditional leaders, is necessary to drive long-term change. The community needs to be consulted at the inception of programmes and such sensitization programmes need to be long-term to ensure social norms change; otherwise, community members are quick to resume the practice of FGM when programmes are ineffective and short-term, as observed during the COVID pandemic. Further, it is important to bring parents and the community on board to fight FGM: it would mean that FGM would no longer be used as part of a political agenda, and politicians would have no other choice but to heed the needs of the community.
- 10. Strategic litigation.** Strategic litigation plays an important role by giving visibility to the issue. In Kenya, two sisters in Eldoret took their father to court and got protection orders, the first time such orders were given in the country. This case led to 14 more cases being filed by girls in court. It later led to the criminalization of FGM for children and, finally, to the adoption of the present Anti-FGM Act.

FUNDING AND RESOURCES

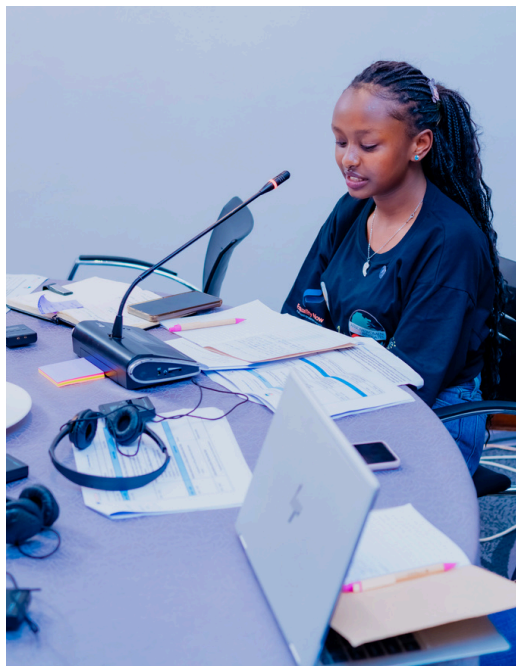


* **Innovative Funding Models:** Grassroots organizations need flexible, unrestricted funding to address local challenges effectively. Diversifying resources through private sector partnerships and innovative mechanisms such as social innovation toolkits was strongly emphasized.

* **Innovation in fundraising:** With the global drop in funding for gender equality, it is important to employ innovative ideas to fundraise for FGM and GBV programs e.g., using creative arts. Vavangers has used such a strategy by connecting their work with celebrities in the creative industries e.g., actors to raise funds for their organization or film. Equally, they had to rebrand their website to make it more interactive for their visitors. Another idea raised for fundraising is for charities to have commercial income. Finally, communication on FGM needs to be more girl-focused and survivor-focused to bring out the fact that the work done is life-saving and necessary.



* **.Fund grassroots organization:** It is important to fund the grassroots organizations that are at the frontline of ending FGM to ensure that resources are effectively utilized for interventions and are not being lost in donor or international organizations' administrative costs. Equally, funding requirements for grassroots organizations should not be stringent and difficult to apply for: these organizations do not have the same capacities or strong internal structures as international or national organizations; therefore, such requirements lock them out of the funding systems.



NEXT STEPS AND COMMITMENTS

The convening concluded with clear commitments to advancing the fight against FGM as part of the broader VAWG agenda. Key next steps include:

Amplifying survivor voices and prioritizing community-driven solutions as central to advocacy efforts.

Advocating for flexible funding and aligning FGM advocacy with broader gender justice goals to ensure sustained support.

Continuing to build intersectional alliances by leveraging the strengths of veteran and youth activists through a series of curated online discussions and engagement with key stakeholders.





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