



GENERATION

AFRICA-LED MOVEMENT | MY POWER
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GIRLS ONLY SAFE SPACE CHECKLIST



Purpose: This document is a checklist for setting up and running girls-only safe spaces. It is developed under the Girl Generation- Support to the Africa-Led Movement framework to end FGM/C (TGG-ALM). The programme focuses on accelerating the pace of change and achieving results to contribute to the vision of the SDGs of a world free of FGM/C by 2030.

What is a safe space?

A safe space is defined as a formal or informal space where girls feel physically and emotionally safe. The term 'safe' refers to the absence of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence) or abuse¹. It is a space where girls feel comfortable and enjoy the freedom to express themselves without the fear of judgment or harm. Safe spaces can be critical in protecting and empowering girls if done well. A safe space can be in different shapes and forms. It is recognized that in some context girls may not be able to meet alone so it is important for practitioners to put into context these guidelines while ensuring the safety and well-being of girls. In addition, safe spaces usually have a curriculum that supports girls to increase their agency therefore having a female facilitator to support these girls is critical.

Why is it needed?

FGM/C reinforces a patriarchal system and gendered social norms, and any threat to the status quo is at risk of backlash, including potential violence and reprisals. It's fundamental that FGM/C programmes are designed with awareness of this risk at its core and continually work with girls and other stakeholders to identify obstacles and risks and put in place context specific strategies to address or mitigate these. One way of prioritizing the safety and well-being of girls is to have safe spaces where girls can meet, connect and get information on issues affecting their lives.

Background & Rationale

The Girl Generation- Support to the Africa Led Movement to end FGM/C (TGG-ALM) Programme focusses on accelerating the pace of change and achieving results to contribute to the vision in the SDGs of a world free of FGM/C by 2030. The intended impact of this Programme is an accelerated reduction in the practice of FGM/C in focus countries/regions by 2025.

One of the principles underpinning the different intervention pathways under this programme is girl centered programming. FGM/C is a practice that primarily impacts girls, so the centrality of their voice, participation and implementation at every stage of the programme is critical. In addition, FGM/C is a manifestation of gender inequality and a human rights violation. The programme aims to address the root causes of FGM/C by shifting gender norms that discriminate against girls and women. Fundamental to this, is a shift in power and gender relations and how women and girls are valued in their communities and societies and recognized as a constituent with rights and agency.

Creating a safe space where girls and young women can organize and mobilize around their protection needs plays a central role in the TGG-Support to the Africa Lead movement to end FGM/C girl centered programming. Safe spaces should protect women and girls' privacy and enable them to speak freely as they develop confidence and form connections with others (A feminist Approach to safe spaces for women and girls in Humanitarian response- ActionAid).

Key objectives of safe spaces in TGG-ALM:

- To create a space where girls can socialise, feel safe to share their experiences and speak freely without fear of judgement or harm.
- To provide a space where girls are consulted on the TGG-ALM program implementation and monitoring and provide feedback that strengthens the programs girl -centred approach.
- To offer a space where girls have the opportunity to strengthen their skills, agency and leadership, respond to their own needs including psychosocial support and access non-stigmatizing information (and humanitarian assistance if required by the context).

In some programs and contexts, a safe space can be referred to as a girl council, a girl learning forum, a girl's club, survivor leadership training etc. However, if these spaces don't comply with the TGG-ALM approach to safe spaces, it is important to review them against this checklist.

¹ UNFPA (2015) *Women and Girls safe spaces: A guidance Note Based on Lessons Learned from the Syrian Crisis*.

The TGG-ALM approach to safe spaces:

- Girls and young women-only spaces
- Led and managed by girls and young women
- Safe and secure
- Inclusive and accessible
- Confidential
- Contextually appropriate

How to establish and run a safe space

Checklist	Check / Notes
Accessibility and Safety	
Make the space accessible and inclusive for girls and young women in all their diversity (e.g. eliminate physical barriers for people with disabilities, etc).	
Ensure that the space is located in an area where girls and young women feel safe arriving or leaving	
Ensure that the space has accessible and separate toilets available for women/girls.	
The space should have a covering from weather i.e. dust, sun. This can be done using locally available resources.	
Confidentiality	
Develop a trusting and transparent relationship with the community, ensuring regular communication to discuss and address concerns.	
Ensure the space allows for privacy and confidential conversations (e.g. a school, community center, etc).	
Decision making	
Ensure girls and young women are involved in all decision- making in relation to the space and are actively engaged in the running of the space including determining the timing of activities, curriculum to be used, activities to be conducted, selection of mentors etc.), activities.	
Management	
Ensure that all activities are girl-led and that the space is protected as girl-only	
Ensure activities are held regularly and always at the same time/place so girls know when and where they can access the space including raising awareness of the existence of the safe space so that the community doesn't feel threatened by it and allow girls to attend.	
Ensure all members agree on and follow basic rules of conduct such as listening and trusting each other, supporting each other, no judging, confidentiality, etc...	

Gender responsiveness	
Offer courses and session at a time when girls and young women with family responsibilities can attend.	
Encourage the space to offer a creche or other childcare support.	
Safeguarding and referrals	
Ensure that there is a female facilitator present to support the girls.	
Ensure that complaint mechanisms are developed with girls and young women and actively promoted and that all staff and volunteers understand and adhere to TGG-safeguarding policy and code of conduct.	
Work in a survivor-centred way and establish effective referral pathways that will ensure girls and young women can access support across sectors.	
Coordinate with the government and women's organisations as well as the protection clusters and GBV coordination mechanism. This will ensure that these spaces are protected and have support from the community's legal protection structures.	
Promote self-care practices and offer additional resources for wellness and mental health support.	
Sustainability	
Plan for sustainability and/or appropriate exit strategies so that safe spaces can be maintained even after the closure of the programme – for example work with local schools or organisations that could take over the management and supervision of these spaces.	

Integration with other development or humanitarian services

TGG-ALM safe spaces can also be used to;

- Providing psychosocial support and recreational activities as a means of supporting girls and young women in distress, support recovery, mental health and wellbeing
- Providing information access and awareness raising on different issues affecting their lives
- Designing and promoting appropriate complaints mechanisms in cases of GBV including FGM
- Enabling privacy for teenage lactating mothers
- Facilitating distribution of relief items such as hygiene kits, food etc
- Facilitating referrals to GBV and other specialized services without judgment.
- A drop in space within the community where girls can come at any time to complete their homework and spend time with one another.



Aknowledgements

This Girls Only Safe Space Checklist was led by **Action Aid International** and jointly developed and compiled by Dorothy Mulei (ActionAid Kenya), Faty Kane (ActionAid UK) and Olga De Biaggio (Options Consultancy Services) as part of **The Girl Generation: Support to the Africa-led Movement to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting programme (TGG-ALM)**. A special appreciation is extended to the consortium partners for reviewing the document. This guide is meant to be read in conjunction with the programme's Girl-Centred Framework (GCF) and is designed to support programme staff and partners in ensuring that girls are at the centre of each element of this intervention.



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