



GENERATION

AFRICA-LED MOVEMENT TO END FGM/C | MY POWER MY VOICE

The Girl Generation:

Support to the Africa-Led Movement to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (TGG-ALM) programme

GUIDELINES FOR ENGAGING WITH SURVIVORS OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING

March 2024

Acknowledgments

Options appreciates its partners in The Girl Generation: Support to the Africa-Led Movement to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (TGG-ALM) programme, whose work informs these guidelines. The partners include Amref Health Africa, ActionAid (AA), Orchid Project, Africa Coordination Centre for Abandonment of FGM/C (ACCAF), and the University of Portsmouth (UoP). These organizations, along with brave survivors who've spoken out against FGM/C, have been crucial in shaping our guidelines. Their experiences and insights have been invaluable in creating a unified approach to eliminate FGM/C.

We're also grateful for the support from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), which has funded this project and helped empower survivors and amplify their voices in this important cause.

Together, we're committed to ensuring survivors lead the way in the fight against FGM/C, ensuring their participation is safe and meaningful.



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Acronyms

ACCAF	Africa Coordination Centre for Abandonment of FGM/C
AU	Africa Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CSOs	Civil society Organization
CSW	Commission on Status of Women
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
TGG-ALM	The Girl Generation: Support to the Africa-Led Movement to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (TGG-ALM) programme
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FGM/C	Female genital mutilation/cutting
NPC	New Philanthropy Capital
SLF	Survivor Leadership Fund
SLT	Survivor leadership training
SLI	Survivor leadership Initiative
SLS	Survivor Leadership Stories
SSN	Survivors' Support Network
UN	United Nations
UoP	University of Portsmouth
WHO	World Health Organization
WOW	Women of the World

Foreword

As we turn the pages of this guide, we step into a journey of both understanding and action. This document is more than a collection of guidelines; it embodies a commitment to collaboration, empathy, and the relentless pursuit to end Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C).

Our deepest gratitude goes to our partners, such as Amref Health Africa, ActionAid, Orchid Project, ACCAF, UoP and Options. Your invaluable insights and unwavering dedication have been the cornerstone in crafting a united front against FGM/C. We are also immensely thankful for the support from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whose assistance has been crucial in supporting survivors and elevating their voices in this critical cause.

This guide draws inspiration from “The Girl Generation: Support to the Africa-Led Movement to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (TGG-ALM) programme” and it is a reflection of our collective vision for a world where every woman and girl is free from violence and can fully exercise their rights. Through joint efforts in Senegal, Somaliland, Kenya, and Ethiopia, our goal is to significantly curb the practice of FGM/C.

Central to our mission is the care of survivors, whose bravery in speaking out against FGM/C not only lights our path but also ensures that their voices lead our way. By adopting a girl-centred and trauma-informed approach, we strive to offer the necessary support for survivors to heal, advocate, and drive change.

As the lead for the Communications, Advocacy and Movement-building team and a survivor of this brutal violence myself, I write this foreword with a deeply personal understanding of the journey many face. This guide aims to establish a clear and supportive framework for engaging with survivors, prioritising their safety, dignity, and well-being at all times. It is crafted for anyone involved in combating FGM/C, emphasizing a survivor-centred approach that respects each individual's unique path to healing.

In our interactions with survivors, let us be guided by empathy, understanding, and respect. Our efforts must be adaptable, tailored to meet the diverse needs and circumstances of those we support, always championing their autonomy and informed consent.

This guide is not merely a set of instructions but a call to action: to stand with survivors, to unite in the fight against FGM/C. Let it serve both as a beacon of hope and a comprehensive blueprint for action, guiding us in our collective endeavour to support survivors and eradicate FGM/C once and for all.

Dr Leyla Hussein OBE
Global Advocacy Director

The Girl Generation: Support to the Africa-Led Movement to End Female Genital Mutilation/
Cutting (TGG-ALM) programme

1. Introduction

Welcome to “The Girl Generation: Support to the Africa-Led Movement to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (TGG-ALM).” This initiative is our commitment to creating a world where every woman and girl can fully exercise their rights, free from violence, including Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). Our goal is to significantly reduce FGM/C in Senegal, Somaliland, Kenya, and Ethiopia through a united effort. Led by Options Consultancy Services and in partnership with organizations like Amref Health Africa, ActionAid (AA), Orchid Project, Africa Coordination Centre for Abandonment of FGM/C (ACCAF), and the University of Portsmouth (UoP), we’re dedicated to empowering survivors and adopting a girl-centred approach to eradicate FGM/C. In 2022, we launched a Survivors Leadership Initiative (SLI) to empower survivors with the skills and resources they need to lead the change and protect their well-being. FGM/C, a practice that harms women and girls physically and emotionally, requires our thoughtful and supportive engagement to help survivors heal and raise their voices for change, emphasizing respect, safety, and community support.

According to World Health Organization (WHO), FGM/C comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Survivors of FGM/C are women and girls who have experienced FGM/C. The term survivor is generally preferred to the term ‘victim’ because it recognises resilience and agency. FGM/C is a traumatic experience that calls for deliberate and intentional well-being approaches when engaging with its survivors. It is therefore important that survivors are supported to deal with the trauma and to access the services they need, while they are protected from further

harm and connected with each other. Respect, safety and mutual support will enable survivors to feel they can voice their needs and can contribute to a change.

2. Purpose of the guidelines

The purpose of these guidelines is to create a clear and supportive framework for working with survivors of FGM/C. They’re designed to make sure that when we interact with survivors, we always put their needs and well-being first. We aim to involve survivors in a meaningful way and to empower them to speak for themselves while ensuring their safety and protection.

The guidelines have been developed based on learnings from TGG-ALM and in particular the Survivors Leadership Initiative (SLI). They ensure that all the processes of engaging with survivors of FGM/C put the survivors at the centre so that they are meaningfully involved and empowered to lead change, that they are not exposed to any harm as a result of their engagement, and that their safety and wellbeing are treated as a priority.

The guidelines are applicable to all stakeholders engaging with survivors in prevention, mitigation and response to FGM/C. They are useful to duty bearers including state and non-state actors, civil society organizations (CSOs), medical service providers, legal service providers, donors, media, researchers, activists, community groups and all other actors who seek to engage with survivors of FGM/C in any way.

3. Why engaging survivors?

Engaging survivors is essential to strengthen their ability to effectively oppose FGM/C and overthrow a patriarchal system that too often downplays the effects of FGM/C as a form of violence. Hence, we cannot miss this opportunity to generate transformational change in a way that is embedded in the context, owned by those mostly affected and therefore sustainable in the long term.

According to UNICEF, as more survivors lend their voices to the cause, they become champions against this violation which leads to increased awareness of why FGM/C needs to stop. The effectiveness of all FGM/C interventions depends, in part, on the ability of actors to understand the cultural and religious dynamics of the communities in which they work, and survivors are among the most knowledgeable in this respect.¹

Engaging survivors in any intervention aiming to end FGM/C is an imperative. We cannot legitimately talk about FGM/C without giving voice and space to those who are directly affected by this form of violence, without recognizing their experiences, and without giving them the opportunity to claim their rights and lead a process of change. Our interventions are an important opportunity to strengthen the power that women and girls possess to enable them to effectively oppose FGM/C.

Survivors' involvement in ending FGM/C is essential because:

- It provides them with support and services that they need
- It empowers them to tell their own stories and claim their rights
- It enables them to become agents of change and role models
- It allows the identification of solutions that are based on in-depth knowledge of the context and therefore more sustainable.

4. Approaches in engaging with FGM/C survivors

When working with survivors of FGM/C, it's crucial to use methods that fully meet their needs, protect them from harm, and empower them to stand up for their rights. This involves a blend of two key approaches: the survivor-centred approach, which puts survivors' rights and dignity first, and the trauma-informed approach, which carefully considers their experiences of trauma. These methods are complementary to each other and aim to support survivors in a holistic and respectful way.

4.1. Survivor-centred approach

“A survivor-centred approach focuses on the empowerment of survivors by creating a supportive environment for healing. This approach promotes the dignity, rights, agency, and empowerment of survivors of [violence].”²

This method focuses on nurturing a supportive relationship that promotes emotional well-being, safety, and empowerment for survivors to navigate their trauma, make decisions, and claim their rights. It recognizes the huge potential of putting survivors at the centre of our interventions, while also acknowledging their potential vulnerability and lack of power in some contexts.

Hence this approach aims to:

- 1. Shift power dynamics and increasing survivors' agency** to take control over their bodies and their lives and make informed decisions.
- 2. Strengthen survivors' confidence and sense of self-worth**, through a process of healing and the creation of mutual support networks.

- 3. Empower survivors** through the acquisition of new skills and knowledge and the ability to take on opportunities and set priorities. For some survivors, empowerment includes using referrals and receiving assistance in achieving their priorities. Empowerment may also result in survivors having an interest in and ability to influence, address, and change policies, structures, processes, and institutions that affect their lives.³

In other words, a survivor-centred approach is also about putting survivors and their needs at the centre of our interventions, involving them in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of our work to end FGM/C. This implies that survivors will be able to provide useful insights, to participate in decision-making, provide feedback and take on a leadership role if and when they feel comfortable to do so, while our interventions will be able to better respond to their needs, provide adequate support and produce sustainable change in the fight against FGM/C.

“Stakeholders should engage with survivors by:

- 1. Prioritising their well-being and autonomy. This involves listening to their experiences, providing support services and involving them in decision-making processes related to policies and programmes aimed at preventing FGM/C;**
- 2. Ensuring survivors' voices are heard, respecting their cultural backgrounds and collaborating with them to raise awareness are crucial steps in creating effective and survivor-centred interventions.”**

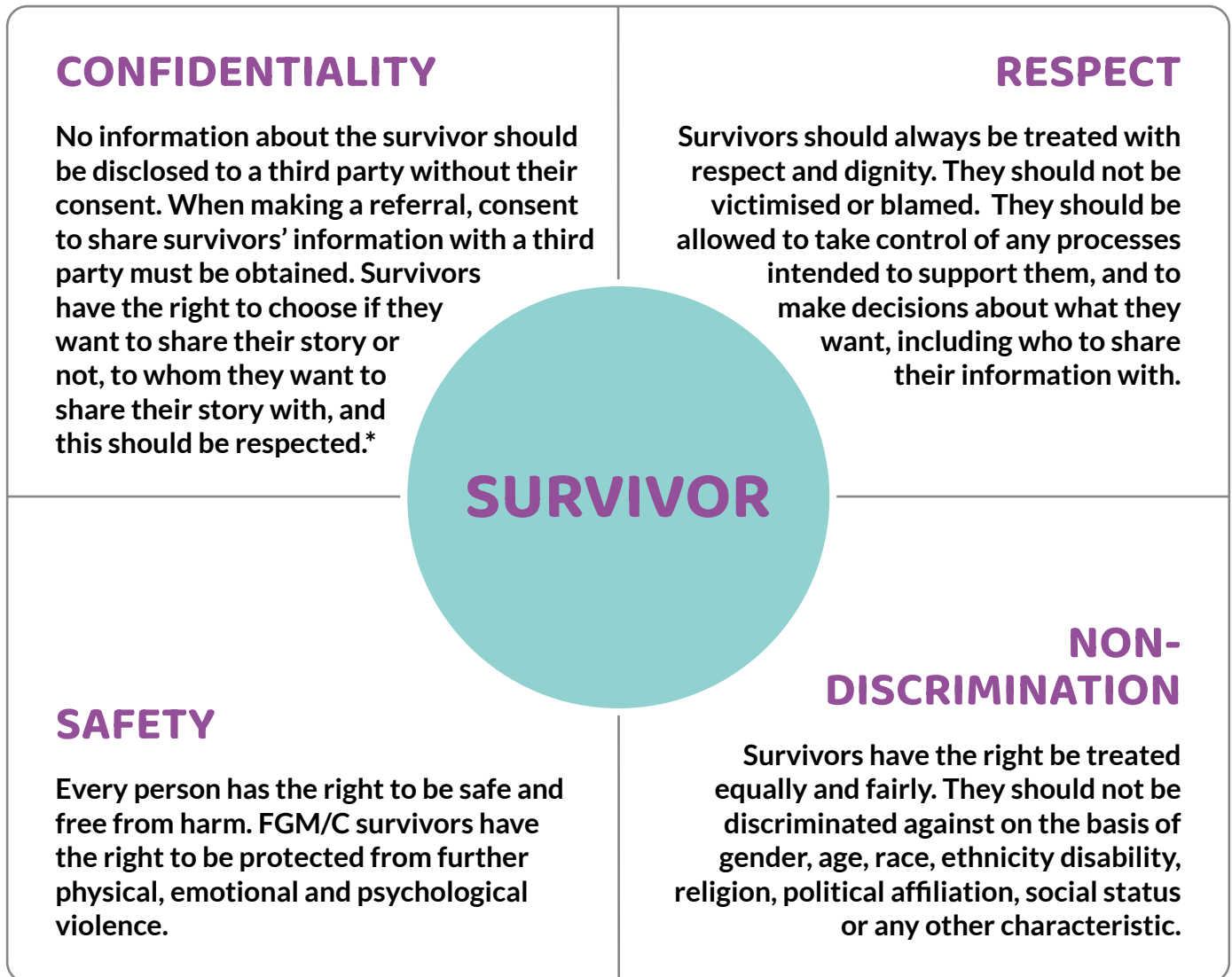
Mumina Jirmo, the Executive Director of Women Rising Initiative, a grassroots women rights organization in Isiolo County in Kenya

Guiding principles in the survivor-centred approach

The survivor-centred approach can only work if it is built on the principles of confidentiality, ensuring privacy and trust; respect, treating each survivor with dignity and understanding; safety, creating a secure environment free from harm; and non-discrimination, offering support without bias to all survivors. These

principles work together to create a supportive, empowering environment for survivors, recognizing their needs and rights at every step.

Figure 1: Guiding principles in the survivor-centred approach



*Maintaining confidentiality builds trust. It encourages a survivor to seek more help and also encourages other survivors to seek help.

Source: USAID'S Collective Action to Reduce Gender-Based Violence (CARE-GBV) How to implement a survivor-centered approach in GBV programming. Note No. 3 in a series December 2021: <https://makingcents.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CARE-GBV-03-Survivor-centered-v9-508c.pdf>.

4.2 Trauma-informed approaches

“Trauma-informed practice is an approach to health and care interventions which is grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual’s neurological, biological, psychological and social development.”⁴

It is based on the intention to offer survivors support that recognises specific needs they may have as a result of past or ongoing trauma.⁵

This approach is a key component of survivor-centred interventions. It emphasises the need to ensure that when engaging with survivors of FGM/C, we must be fully aware that FGM/C affects the physical, social and emotional well-being of women and girls. It is important to understand the short term and the long-term impact of FGM/C on the wellbeing of survivors to be able to meaningfully engage with them and support their empowerment process. We must conceptualize their concerns and coping mechanisms through the trauma lens and respond in ways that avoid inadvertently reinforcing survivors’ feelings of vulnerability and disempowerment (re-traumatization).

The trauma-informed approach emphasises understanding and responding to the whole impact of FGM/C on survivors. It’s about creating a safe, respectful space that promotes healing and empowerment, recognizing the physical, emotional, and social effects of FGM/C. This approach encourages trust, collaboration and power, aiming to understand survivors’ experiences and support mechanisms without causing further harm. The WHO highlights the psychological challenges survivors face, noting the deep and often silent suffering caused by this traumatic experience.

According to WHO, ‘Many of the lasting effects of FGM/C are psychological. The girls endure an excruciating experience perpetrated by people

they know, yet they are unable to question or even discuss it. Naturally, sometimes this leads to psychological symptoms.’⁶

“My name is Catherine Mootian. I am the Founder and Executive Director AFYAFRIKA, an organization based in Kenya. As we embark on this journey of healing up and getting safe spaces and platforms to speak out and amplify our voices, the society we live in continues to bully and stigmatise us which has made some of us go back to where we began. I call upon all institutions and organisations engaging FGM/C survivors to put a provision of Clinical psychologist and therapist to assist survivors heal and overcome the traumas, as well as also put in place measures to curb social media bullying.”

Consequences of FGM/C

Table 1: Short-term and long-term consequences of FGM/C

	Psychological	Physical	Psychosexual
Short-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional and psychological shock, particularly from being subjected to this trauma by people who are close to the girl, e.g. parents and extended family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Severe pain Infections Bleeding and/or haemorrhage Tetanus and blood-borne viruses like HIV Urinary retention Injury to adjacent tissues Fractures or dislocations as a result of being restrained Death 	
Long-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-traumatic stress symptoms, including flashbacks during pregnancy, childbirth, sex and gynaecological examinations. Depression Chronic anxiety Nightmares Low self-esteem Self-disgust, shame, or humiliation Difficulties with relationships Control issues – angry or critical towards self and/or others Intimacy and trust issues Compulsions or addictions Despair and despondency Self-harm Suicidal feelings or plans Substance misuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chronic vaginal and pelvic infections Difficulties with menstruation Urinary problems - pain when passing urine, urinary tract infections (UTIs), slow passing of urine, other urinary problems Renal failure or impairment Damage to the reproductive system, including infertility Complications in pregnancy and in the late stages of pregnancy Chronic pain; chronic body tension Disrupted sleep and eating patterns Greater vulnerability to somatic illnesses, including sexual and gynaecological issues, compounded by stress Cysts, abscesses Delivery complications that include body tears and fistulae Maternal and infant death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pain during sex Lack of arousal or pleasurable sensations Low desire due to fear of pain Low libido Loss of intimacy due to sexual difficulties Trauma flashbacks in response to touch Pelvic pain disorder Negative perception of the body or other impacts due to de-infibulation

Figure 2: Guiding principles in trauma informed approach



Source: Source: Principles of Trauma informed Care: <https://traumainformedoregon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Principles-of-Trauma-Informed-Care.pdf>.

5. Best practices in survivor-centred programming: TGG-ALM's experience

TGG-ALM is a great example of how survivor-centred and trauma-informed approaches come together to effectively contribute to the fight to end FGM/C. This comprehensive initiative has been developed with the direct input of survivors and with an iterative methodology that ensures learning and adaptation in our responses to the needs of those directly involved.

Key strategies for survivors' engagement that have been adopted as part of this programme include:

→ Providing survivors with knowledge and skills

Survivors have been supported in identifying their unique voice and broadening their understanding on FGM/C, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Through a Survivors Leadership Training (SLT) they have learned the principles of feminist leadership with a focus on self-awareness, self-care and emotional wellbeing which in turn has enabled them to reach out with support to other survivors in their communities. They have also learned about SMART advocacy projects, working with media, institutional strengthening, safeguarding, fundraising, and establishing support groups to support them in taking action and making a meaningful impact in the fight against FGM/C.

→ Supporting wellbeing of FGM/C survivors

Survivors have been given access to physical and mental health services, as well as psychosocial support tailored to their individual needs. For example, TGG-ALM integrates FGM/C prevention and response into the curriculum of healthcare providers, shares well-being tools designed for FGM/C survivors and promotes survivors' support groups that are a safe space for them to address trauma and navigate healing. Additionally, we ensure a psychotherapist is on standby in any engagement with survivors, so as to address any psychosocial needs that may arise.

→ Amplifying survivors' voices in strategic advocacy spaces

Survivors have been provided with platforms to share their stories and perspectives, allowing them to drive the conversation and inform strategies for prevention and support. As a programme, we have supported survivors not only to attend but also to meaningfully participate and engage in strategic advocacy spaces such as the Commission on Status of Women (CSW), The Nalafem Summit in Nairobi in 2023, Women Deliver Conference, Africa Union Conference on ending FGM/C, Women of the World (WOW) Festival, Regional Well-Being Summit in Senegal, Commemoration of the Zero Tolerance Day 2024 in London organized by FCDO among other platforms.

→ Ensuring meaningful representation of FGM/C survivors in decision-making

We ensure that survivors' voices are heard and respected in shaping policies and programmes aimed at ending the practice. We do this through involving survivors in the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions, such as community outreach initiatives and advocacy

campaigns. Even the SLT has been designed, implemented and evaluated in close collaboration and consultation with FGM/C survivors to ensure that it adequately responds to their needs and expectations.

→ **Putting in place safeguarding measures**

In TGG-ALM, safeguarding measures are critical to protecting FGM/C survivors from further harm or exploitation when engaging in intervention activities. This involves implementing clear protocols for confidentiality, informed consent, and ethical conduct in all interactions with survivors. TGG-ALM prioritises safeguarding in its interventions, ensuring that survivors feel safe and supported throughout their participation and that all staff are aware of safeguarding procedures and codes of conduct. For example, we ensure that survivors are accompanied by TGG-ALM staff whenever necessary as they are travelling for programme related events, especially in a new environment; travel expenses such as accommodation, bus fare ticket, visa costs and basic allowances for incidentals are catered for by the programme to ensure that financial limitations do not hinder survivors' participation; logistics such as identifying accommodation and travel routes take safety into consideration.

→ **Creating awareness for FGM/C survivors about boundaries and effective communication strategies**

This equips them with the skills to navigate challenging situations and assert their rights. Workshops and peer support groups provide opportunities for survivors to learn assertiveness techniques, boundary-setting strategies, and healthy coping mechanisms. For instance, TGG-ALM's SLT empowers survivors with skills of engaging with media and other stakeholders, and how to tell their stories to effect change.

→ **Working with media**

Media can amplify the voices of FGM/C survivors and drive momentum for change. Training programmes and media partnerships can equip survivors with the tools to effectively communicate their experiences, advocate for policy reforms, and challenge harmful social norms. At TGG-ALM, we collaborate with survivors to produce media content and participate in public speaking engagements, amplifying their voices on a global scale. Simultaneously we also engage media directly offering trainings on effective FGM/C reporting.

→ **Survivors as an integral part of the team**

Survivors of FGM/C are employed as part of the programme team at all levels, from frontline staff who live and work in the communities where interventions are rolled out, to our leadership team. This means that in implementation, planning, review and strategy processes, survivors' voices and perspectives are central. In workshops and team meetings, all staff members need to be considerate about the language and framing they use to talk about FGM/C, and be conscious of the fact that many people in the room are working on a daily basis on an issue that has affected them personally, which can be psychologically challenging. Staff members who are also survivors need extra psychosocial support from their employer and consideration from their colleagues. They may need education and support in setting clear boundaries and taking adequate breaks, particularly as survivors are often the most passionate and personally committed to the cause of ending FGM/C, and burn-out can be a real risk.

→ Funding survivor-led organizations

Supporting organizations that represent and are led by survivors empowers them to reclaim agency and leadership in the movement to end the violation. TGG-ALM considers survivors led organisations in their granting mechanism, funding them as partners in implementing end FGM/C interventions. Recently, TGG-ALM has introduced the idea of a Survivors Leadership Fund (SLF); plans to launch this are underway. The SLF will exclusively target organisations led by survivors to support them in cascading SLT in their respective communities in the countries where TGG-ALM works. Additionally, through TGG-ALM's travel grants, survivors are supported to attend events that amplify their voices in advocating for policy reforms, and challenge harmful social norms.

By investing in survivor-led initiatives, the programme has not only supported the empowerment and resilience of survivors, but also fostered a more inclusive and equitable anti-FGM/C movement, where those directly affected play a central role in shaping strategies and driving change.

6. Key considerations in engaging with survivors of FGM/C

In addition to key activities that enable meaningful and empowering participation of FGM/C survivors in ending FGM/C initiatives, survivor-centred and trauma-informed approaches require paying attention to some practical considerations that will enable the creation of a supportive space where survivors feel seen, heard, and safe.

“I would not like to see my pictures being use without my consent. Please ask survivors if they have given permission for their photos to be used in documenting FGM/C related issues”

Survivor, Somaliland

6.1. Informed Consent

Informed consent is all about ensuring survivors willingly and knowledgeably say yes to anything that involves them. It's a fundamental right for survivors and a duty for those working with them. This process is essential in every interaction with survivors, ensuring they have all the facts to make their own choices without pressure. Meaningful informed consent involves three key elements:

Voluntariness: Survivors freely give their consent.

Comprehension: Survivors fully grasp what they're agreeing to, including how their information will be used and what the potential benefits and risks are.

Authorization: Survivors explicitly agree to participate.

6.2. Do no harm

All interventions and engagements with survivors should strive to ensure that they are not exposed to any further harm. Any person or organization who engages with or implements any intervention in support of survivors has a responsibility to ensure no harm is caused to survivors as a result of their interventions.

One of the most important aspects of 'do no harm' while engaging with survivors is the **use of survivor sensitive language**. Survivors have experienced trauma and when we speak to or with them, we must think carefully before we speak, and we must speak with intention, and choose our words and the tone we use thoughtfully.

When we talk about FGM/C we should:

- Make clear that this is a human rights and child rights issue: a form of violence against women and girls that cannot be justified.
- Make sure that survivors are not presented as victims but rather presented in a positive and empowered light, that they are given a voice and are listened to.
- Be aware that some descriptions and images of FGM/C can be very triggering and therefore avoid them. If this is not possible, give a warning to allow survivors and others to stop watching or listening.⁷

Additionally, when we listen to stories of survivors who boldly speak out against FGM/C we need to be careful what type of questions we ask. Some questions or reactions by audiences of their stories or people they engage with may be intrusive and distressing. A video by BBC⁸ engaged FGM/C survivors and activists to highlight what **NOT TO SAY** to survivors:

- Isn't it the same as male circumcision?
- Isn't it a Muslim thing?
- Can you have an orgasm?
- Why do you talk about it?

Similarly to the points about language, **positive images or graphics can play a powerful role in communicating about FGM/C by challenging stereotypes, promoting empathy, and inspiring action**. Stakeholders should prioritise the use of culturally sensitive and empowering imagery that respects the dignity and agency of survivors. Positive images of empowered girls and women advocating for change can reframe the narrative around FGM/C from one of victimhood to one of resilience and strength.

6.3 Risks and safeguarding

FGM/C is a form of child abuse and violence against women and girls. It is an act that harms women and girls' genitals with the aim of controlling their sexuality in patriarchal societies where women are considered subordinate to men. Therefore, any intervention that aims at challenging existing social norms and power dynamics to eliminate FGM/C can trigger negative reactions.

We must ensure that safeguarding and risk management procedures are factored in while engaging with survivors of FGM/C. Safeguarding is the organisational responsibility to ensure that staff, operations, programmes and activities 'do no harm' to anyone who they engage or work with. Safeguarding involves putting in place internal policies, procedures and measures to prevent and respond to harm, whether intentional or otherwise, to staff, children, other beneficiaries/clients and communities.

In any intervention aiming to end FGM/C it is important to seek the guidance of a safeguarding expert to identify possible risks to girls and women at risk and survivors of FGM/C, while also putting in place mitigation strategies.

6.4 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a concept that explains how individual characteristics such as gender, age, race, class, ability and sexuality intersect with one another and overlap to become multiple layered identities.

When engaging with survivors we must understand that each woman and girl is different. Their identity is created by a number of characteristics that overlap with each other creating a unique experience of discrimination and oppression. Using an intersectional lens to understand the complex and varied experiences of survivors, their background and their needs is therefore essential to design interventions that can truly engage and support them.

Girls who experience FGM/C might belong to different ethnic and religious groups, they might not speak the official language of a country, they might be very young or adolescents, and they might have a disability. All these factors require different strategies to support them, and to engage with their communities to stop this violation of their rights.

From an intersectional point of view, it is also crucial to acknowledge the racism lens through which survivors' experiences are often viewed. There is a need to challenge FGM/C not as a cultural practice carried out by what some might see as 'uncivilized communities', but as a gross violation of girls' and women's rights, as we would for any other form of violence such as sexual violence. This recognition not only validates the survivors' experiences but

also reframes the conversation, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding that goes beyond cultural relativism. By addressing this, we confront the stereotypes and biases that overshadow the reality of survivors' experiences, advocating for a narrative that truly represents their struggles and resilience.

"I am a survivor of FGM/C from Somaliland. In my culture, girls and women are not allowed to speak publicly or to speak about their personal experience about FGM/C. This is because FGM/C is not taken as a personal issue but rather a clan's issue. So, if I speak about my experience, I am speaking about my clan. I would request that whenever I share my story, it should not be taken to [the] public with my photos or videos. I will be in trouble. And this is why is very important for everyone to understand survivors' social cultural background before they engage with them so that they do not put them to trouble."

6.5 Self-awareness

Understanding and reflecting on our own and our organization's values, attitudes, and beliefs about FGM/C is crucial. It's about being conscious of any personal biases we might hold and making sure these don't influence our actions. We're committed to maintaining neutrality, ensuring that our work benefits survivors above all else, regardless of our individual opinions. This commitment requires constant vigilance and openness to challenge our assumptions, ensuring our support for survivors is always informed, empathetic, and free from prejudice.

Figure 3: Intersecting aspects of survivors' identities



6.6. Context specific

When we connect with survivors, it's so important to make sure our approach fits their unique situation. This means looking at their cultural background, where they're from, the laws they live under, and their social environment. What works for someone in one place might not work for someone else because everyone's experiences and needs are different. It's all about finding the right way to engage with someone, that respects who they are and where they're coming from.

Dhahabo Guracha Damballa from the Trio-Hub Indigenous Women, an organization in the frontline to fight FGM/C in Marsabit County, Kenya, shares the following:

“Dealing with survivors of FGM requires a sensitive and holistic approach that takes into account both the physical and psychological aspects of their experience.”

This involves the following:

1. Ensuring safety and confidentiality

Provide a safe and confidential environment for survivors to share their experience and seek help.

2. Medical Care

Offer immediate medical care to address any immediate health complications resulting from FGM/C.

Provide ongoing medical support for long term health consequences including infections and complications during childbirth.

3. Psychological support

Offer psychological counselling and therapy to help survivors cope with their trauma, anxiety, depression and other emotional issues.

Create support groups where survivors can connect with others who have had similar experiences.

7. Conclusion

Our work with survivors of FGM/C is grounded in respect for their autonomy and understanding of their experiences. Central to our approach is placing their rights, needs, and desires at the forefront of our actions, giving them a voice and creating a space for them to speak up. Adopting survivor-centred and trauma-informed approaches means we aim to foster relationships based on trust, respect, and empowerment, ensuring emotional and physical safety.

It is crucial for survivors to be well-informed about their rights and the expectations of engagement with all stakeholders. By providing complete information, we enable survivors to actively and meaningfully contribute to discussions and decisions affecting them. Our role is to support and empower survivors, facilitating their ability to make informed choices for themselves. We stand alongside survivors, respecting their journeys and decisions, and providing support that empowers rather than undermines their autonomy.

By putting survivors at the centre of our interventions to end FGM/C we have made a great impact. On the personal level, we have seen women opening up, sharing their stories from an informed perspective, and building support networks with each other. At the community level, we have seen them taking on a leading role in discussing FGM/C with others, engaging more effectively with other stakeholders. At the regional and global level, survivors have taken a central stage in key events such as the Nalafem Summit, Africa Regional Wellbeing Summit, Women Deliver, etc. where they are compelling and influential communicators for the movement.

Empowering FGM/C Survivors in Strengthening Health Systems: A View from Somaliland

In advocating for the integration of FGM/C survivors within health systems, we heed the call of Muna Essa, Director of the MESAF Gender Department:

“In the ongoing battle against FGM/C, a profound strategy emerges—one that not only addresses the immediate health concerns but also cultivates resilience within the affected communities. As we navigate this complex terrain, it becomes increasingly evident that the voices and experiences of FGM/C survivors hold immense transformative power. Thus, it is imperative to integrate their perspectives into the very fabric of health systems, thereby forging a path towards comprehensive healing and advocacy.

At the forefront of this endeavour lies a pivotal initiative: the engagement of FGM/C survivors themselves within health systems. This entails a targeted approach, particularly focusing on women health workers who have emerged triumphant from the shadows of FGM/C. Midwives and nurses stationed in remote areas, who have not only endured but transcended the ordeal of FGM/C, stand as beacons of hope and empathy in communities plagued by this practice.

To effectuate tangible change, it is imperative to designate specially trained female doctors within health centres, equipped with the expertise and sensitivity necessary to provide

tailored care to FGM/C survivors. By affording particular consideration to their unique needs and experiences, these doctors become catalysts for holistic healing and empowerment.

Furthermore, the journey towards eradicating FGM/C necessitates a multifaceted approach, encompassing capacity building and mentorship programs tailored specifically for FGM/C survivors. These initiatives serve a dual purpose: not only do they equip survivors with the tools to prevent the perpetuation of FGM/C within their communities, but they also amplify the voices of those who have long remained invisible—ushering them into the vanguard of the global movement to end FGM/C.

By amplifying the voices of FGM/C survivor women, we illuminate the path towards comprehensive healing and societal transformation. It is through solidarity, compassion, and unwavering determination that we pave the way towards a future free from the shackles of Female Genital Mutilation.”

Munna Essa, Gender Department
Director, Ministry of Employment,
Social Affairs and Family (MESAF),
Somaliland

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TGG/ALM publications

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ANNEX 1



ANNEX 1 - TGG-ALM's Survivor Leadership Initiative

The Survivor Leadership Initiative (SLI) is a comprehensive support package for survivors of FGM/C, designed and implemented by TGG-ALM. It is aimed at empowering survivors of FGM/C by fostering their development across various dimensions and has been implemented in TGG-ALM's focal countries, with the aim of scaling it so that survivors can adapt and use it in their own contexts.

The Need for the Survivor Leadership Initiative

At its core, SLI endeavours to provide survivors with a holistic approach to healing and empowerment. This encompasses emotional well-being, equipping survivors with essential knowledge in the subject, honing their skills, and nurturing leadership qualities. The ultimate goal of SLI is to enable survivors to reclaim agency over their lives and actively participate in the eradication of FGM/C. By fostering a supportive environment and offering resources tailored to their unique experiences, SLI aims to cultivate a community of empowered individuals who are capable of advocating for change, supporting fellow survivors, and contributing meaningfully to the broader movement against FGM/C.

Survivors of FGM/C are rarely adequately supported and may be at risk of exploitation within the FGM/C movement: pressurized to share their stories in public spaces, unpaid for their work, or left feeling isolated and burnt out by the responsibility of preventing and responding to cases of FGM/C (and other forms of VAWG) as end FGM/C champions in their communities. When adequately supported and empowered, survivors can take their rightful place as effective and compelling leaders in the movement to end FGM/C.

The Survivor Leadership Initiative seeks to address these challenges and support the central role of survivors in the end FGM/C movement through the following strategies:

1. Providing sustainable emotional support for women and girls affected by FGM/C, including self-care approaches, to enhance prevention efforts and support survivors.
2. Promoting the centrality of survivors' leadership in the end FGM/C movement by equipping and empowering survivors as leaders.
3. Connecting survivor-activists with one another, and with established networks and duty bearers who can help them achieve their goals.
4. Breaking down stigma associated with FGM/C and associated emotional/mental health issues.

SLI's holistic approach

SLI has various components that are complementary to each other:

1. Survivor Leadership Training (SLT)

- The SLT aims at strengthening individual and institutional capacities of Survivor-led organizations effectively to plan, implement, and scale up social change initiatives to end FGM/C.
- The SLT curriculum was developed by TGG-ALM and initially piloted in Kenya during 2022. Subsequently, in 2023, the curriculum was implemented across the other three focal countries of TGG-ALM, namely Ethiopia, Somaliland, and Senegal.
- The training supports the burgeoning survivor-leaders (56 participants) in identifying their unique voice and broadening their understanding on FGM/C, SGBV and SRHR. It provides foundational knowledge to the survivors on feminist leadership with a focus on self-awareness, self-care and emotional wellbeing which in turn enables them to reach out with support to other survivors in their communities. SLT also provides survivors with tangible skills around issues such as SMART projects, working with media, institutional strengthening, safeguarding, fundraising, and establishing support groups to support them in taking action and making a meaningful impact.

How SLT Participants are currently practicing self-care

“Love myself first. Keep doing exercise for it leaves me fresh. Let go of the past trauma and focus on new things. Leave toxic friendship and focus on the like-minded people”
SLT Participant

“I will be doing yoga to release tension on my body. I will be considering myself first before others to have self-care.”
SLT Participants

“I will be doing yoga to release tension on my body. I will be considering myself first before others to have self-care.”
SLT Participants

2. Survivors' stories series

- TGG-ALM amplifies survivor stories through the use of digital storytelling method. This method supports survivors of FGM/C to tell their stories in a supportive and validating environment.
- This creates a digital resource that lasts and can have its impact in the long term.
- The initiative teaches participants the language and concepts needed to talk about FGM/C as a form of VAWG so they can help change the narrative, claim their rights and drive change.

"I found my voice through poetry"

Dhahabo Guracha uses poetry and spoken work to challenge gender-based violence in her community. Dhahabo uses poetry and spoken work to speak against FGM/C. SLT allowed her to gain confidence and share her thoughts through art. She wrote and presented poem on end FGM during this year's Zero Tolerance Day

3. Survivor Leadership Fund (SLF)

The SLF (to be launched during 2024) increases access to funding for grassroots survivor-led grassroots organizations. TGG-ALM's Grants mechanism is meant to catalyse survivor-led social change to end FGM/C putting resources in the hands of those who are directly affected by the problem but often marginalized by big donors and governments.

4. Survivor Learning Series (SLS)

TGG-ALM promotes learning through the survivors' learning series which enhances experience sharing on what works and what does not work in survivors' empowerment. This is through conducting evaluations with survivors to get their feedback, as well as organizing learning forums amongst the survivors including inter-country learning sessions.

5. Survivors' support networks (SSN)

The SSN aim to provide survivors with a safe space where they can share their stories without fear of any judgement, discuss their collaboration in ending FGM/C, strengthen their engagements with other stakeholders and raise their voices in demanding for change.

Catalysing End FGM Investments: SLT graduate receives USAID funding to tackle mental health challenges affecting survivors of FGM/C

Catherine is the Founder and Director of AfyaAfrika. Her organization received a \$60,000 grant to implement a USAID funded 'Scars to Stars Project' aimed at promoting emotional wellbeing for survivors of FGM/C through creating of portraiture exhibitions to catalyze social change in Narok, Kenya, with the potential for future application in many other settings. AfyaAfrika has received TGG's middle-level grant and is currently awaiting and additional \$25,000 from Hivos.

Figure 1: TGG-ALM's SLI Model for FGM/C survivors



SLI Stories of change

Inspiring leadership stories based on SLT skills

Sarafina is a survivor of FGM/C who found support and guidance through the inspiring SLT. Through this process, she has described feeling more confident and empowered in her journey towards healing and growth. One of the ways that Sarafina has chosen to channel her newfound confidence is by engaging in youth activism. Through her unwavering dedication on youth leadership for social change to end FGM/C, she has been selected to join the USAID Youth Excel Project's Global Youth Advisory Council. The council is Youth Excel's youth governance body that incorporates input from diverse youth leaders into project governance and decision-making. This is a powerful testament to the impact SLT has had on her life, and we are proud to have been a part of her journey.

"My priority at the moment is my mental health recovery. I have been on a long path to recovering so that I can start my new venture as the best version of myself, knowing that once I am ready to take the leap, I have the support and guidance from TGG along the way, which takes the fear away and leaves me only excited for what the future holds."

Sarafina Loriakwe

Mumina Jirmo initiated a mother-daughter inter-generational forum on ending FGM/C

Joining the Survivors' Leadership Training made Mumina realize that what she and her sister went through below the age of 10 was a violation of their rights and child abuse.

Having been a front-line activist against FGM/C and all forms of violence against women and girls, Mumina founded Women Rising Initiative based in Isiolo, Kenya. Mumina through Women Rising successfully received a TGG-ALM medium-sized grant. She shares her story briefly.

“With the skills I received in SLT, I started mother-daughter forums in Merti, a very interior place in Isiolo County. Merti is one of the places that are hard to reach areas in Isiolo County due to poor to almost no road networks and no access to government facilities”. See link to a Tweet by [Women Rising Initiative](#) & [TGG Fest](#)

“I said to myself, the SLT training worked for me. I can use the skills to reach other women. And it has been working out so far. The greatest challenge is the road network, and women not feeling like they are worth it. But slowly, this will change. I cannot be a voice to the voiceless, what I can do is just pass the mic until all survivors can speak on their behalf. Every survivor has a story, and every story is different.

The first time I held the Mother-Daughters forum, no one could speak for the first one hour because FGM is not something women speak about. I decided to share my personal story, then the women started to open up and I realized the torment they have been holding back. I now have a network of 230 women in Merti and an additional 50 in Kina. I meet them on regular basis. I also realized that economic empowerment is not something women have access to. We started making mats and then moved to table banking where the women borrow small amounts of money at a small interest to meet their needs. We are now doing subsistence agriculture where women now have kitchen gardens to sustain their daily needs.”

Mumina Jirmo

At TGG-ALM, we believe that every survivor of FGM/C deserves the opportunity to heal and grow. That is why we are committed to providing the support and resources that people like Sarafina, Mumina, Monicah, Dhahabo, Catherine and many more need to thrive. We are excited to continue walking alongside them as they continue on their journey and we look forward to seeing all that they will accomplish in the future. We are proud to see these young women's growth and their willingness to support their peers. We hope that their stories will inspire others who may be going through similar struggles to reach out for help, and we want to remind them that they are not alone.



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