

# Executive summary

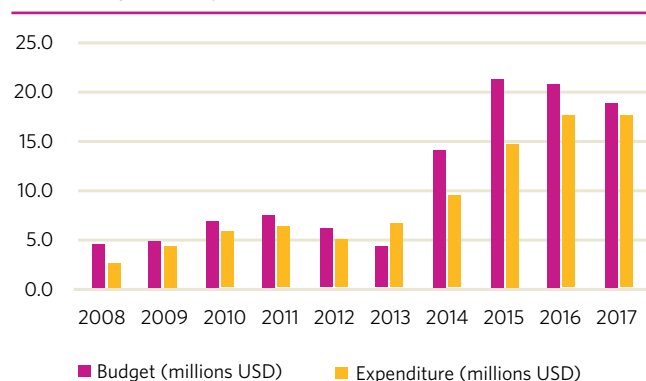
## Background and purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which, and under what circumstances, the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has contributed to accelerating the abandonment of FGM over the last ten years. The evaluation also provides recommendations on how to accelerate change to end FGM.

## About the Joint Programme

The Joint Programme was initiated in 2008 following a UNFPA-organized global consultation, which concluded that the abandonment of FGM was urgent and that commitment and action were needed. The Joint Programme has expanded to cover 17 countries: 16 of which are in Africa, and Yemen. It is based upon a pooled funding system, with a budget of United States dollars (USD) 109 million over ten years.

Annual budget and expenditure 2008-2017



Source: Atlas

## Evaluation approach

The evaluation is a theory-based evaluation, drawing on the Joint Programme intervention logic, as represented in the evolving Joint Programme results frameworks. The guiding framework used for the evaluation is an evaluation matrix, consisting of evaluation questions and assumptions. The evaluation used a mixed methods design, comprising case studies, virtual case studies, a desk review and an e-survey. A systems-based approach was used to map the key categories of stakeholders, disaggregated by human-rights roles and gender where possible. Analysis was carried out using a range of techniques, including content analysis, comparative analysis, qualitative analysis and quantitative techniques, such as financial and trend analyses. The contribution of the programme to observed results was explored using qualitative comparative analysis and contribution analysis.



## Summary of main findings

### Relevance of the design

The Joint Programme is well aligned with, and has supported the development of, global, regional, and national frameworks, targets and accountability mechanisms on FGM. The Joint Programme successfully advocated for the inclusion of FGM as a target within the gender goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Target 5.3) and provided important support to national governments to develop legislative frameworks to outlaw FGM. The Joint Programme also strengthened its alignment with both human rights and gender equality principles, and increased stakeholder participation in programme planning by shifting planning to the country level in order to be more responsive to country contexts. However, stakeholders at the sub-national and grassroots level have not been consulted as equally as those at the national level.

One of the main strengths of the Joint Programme design is its change logic, which encourages a holistic approach to social norms: working across many levels, engaging diverse stakeholders, and linking activities across thematic sectors. This design has provided catalytic momentum to increase the profile of FGM and convene anti-FGM actors and influencers. While this change logic has been successful at

creating synergies, it has not adequately addressed changes in practice (for example, executing FGM in secret, changing the ceremonial element of the practice, etc.) and the Joint Programme does not have access to sufficient evidence to understand the extent of the changing practices and the effects they have on FGM abandonment.

Countries where the Joint Programme operates largely lack adequate nationwide data-collection systems to inform FGM abandonment programming. Research tends to be carried out at the country level and is not necessarily aggregated to inform regional level discussions. Additionally, systems are not yet in place to systematically support generation and aggregation of evidence from implementing partners to inform programme design at the national and regional levels.

While programming is inherently targeted at marginalized populations, there are practical challenges in reaching the most remote areas. These challenges include the ability to access practicing communities, programming logistical considerations and security concerns.

### **Programme contributions towards the abandonment of female genital mutilation**

The Joint Programme has made significant contributions to developing and strengthening legal frameworks; however, law enforcement remains a major challenge across all countries. While 13 out of 16 programming countries now have legal frameworks in place banning FGM, the number of cases of enforcement of the FGM law (that is, the number of arrests) remains low. The specific reasons for the dissonance between social norms and legal norms are still not sufficiently well understood.

The Joint Programme has provided valuable support to national governments in the development of national anti-FGM strategies, with all programming countries currently implementing a comprehensive policy framework to address FGM. While this progress is important, the effectiveness of these commitments is constrained by lack of dedicated national budgets for programming to foster FGM abandonment. The importance of supporting national, costed plans and budgets for FGM abandonment is recognized by the Joint Programme in Phase III.

While the Joint Programme has intensified regionally led cross-border work during Phase II, its effectiveness is constrained, given gaps in law-based solutions to cross-border issues, even when “regional laws” have been pursued or countries have signed international agreements.

The Joint Programme has achieved considerable success at supporting the provision of FGM prevention and response services. While engagement with health services has been a particularly effective entry point to raise awareness about the health consequences of FGM and to promote its prevention, the provision of medical services for FGM survivors provides a less direct contribution towards FGM abandonment.

The Joint Programme has also responded appropriately to emerging trends in the medicalization of FGM in several programme countries. However, further understanding of supply-side drivers is important to inform advocacy efforts.

Community level awareness and public discourse in favour of FGM abandonment have increased markedly in targeted areas, resulting in a taboo break, to which the Joint Programme has made important contributions. However, high expectations of the Joint Programme have often led to under-recognition of this key result, even in cases of enormous success. This is due largely to a misalignment between the resources allocated and the expectation of seeing results on national prevalence, as well as the absence of intermediate targets that can measure important progress towards FGM abandonment.

Growing investment in dedicated girls’ and youth programming over the course of Phase II contributed to stronger policy advocacy on girls’ and women’s rights. While the Joint Programme has moved towards a more explicit gender-responsive approach in Phase III, it has not yet clearly defined the boundaries of this approach, and this in turn may risk spreading the Joint Programme too thinly. The progressive incorporation of specific work with men in Phase II constitutes progress, but has yet to fully address the needs and realize the opportunities for work on masculinities.

Engagement of influential actors to bring about social-norm change, particularly faith-based organizations, has brought about positive results. Even so, the engagement of the Joint Programme with religious actors could be strengthened, particularly within lower religious hierarchies, where religious actors do not consistently apply the clarified doctrine.

The diversification of programming approaches in Phase II is giving greater visibility to individuals, communities and nation states choosing to abandon FGM – with the intent of accelerating wider social-norm change in intervention areas. The Joint Programme approach, of giving greater voice and visibility to “positive deviants”, is an important strategy in the process, recognizing that changes begin at individual and community levels.

The Joint Programme has intentionally used traditional and social media to increase the profile of FGM and encourage behaviour change. However, it is unclear whether, in reality, media messages are consistently based on evidence. Additionally, the Joint Programme is yet to fully capitalize upon the potential contributions of the Communication for Development (C4D) approach when designing behaviour change messaging.

### **Synergies to accelerate efforts to end female genital mutilation**

UNICEF and UNFPA have leveraged their comparative strengths to lay the foundation for a more complete response to FGM. At the global level, coordination between UNFPA and UNICEF is thematically strong, but the relatively small

team was disproportionate to the expanded scope of the Joint Programme in Phase II. The Joint Programme Steering Committee provides a strong governance structure and is efficiently managed. Despite the harmonized reporting of the Joint Programme, additional and unplanned requests for information by donors have absorbed important management effort and resources.

At the regional level, there is improvement since the evaluation of Phase I in terms of presence and coordination through increased funds and technical staffing. However, the sustained engagement of these staff members is contingent on the agencies. Roles and responsibilities across levels (global, regional, and national) and across agencies have not been formally defined. Cross-regional reciprocal technical support is not systematized and is dependent on the initiative of individual technical staff.

The positioning of the Joint Programme at country level within child protection programming (in UNICEF) and within gender-based violence programming (in UNFPA), managed within wider portfolios, has enabled thematic linkages to be made between FGM and other relevant programmes. At a practical implementation level, however, the Joint Programme has not sufficiently facilitated the development of broader partnerships for each agency: each one is still largely working with its own network of partners.

The Joint Programme has successfully drawn on its comparative strength as a convener at the national level and has been instrumental in supporting government-led national FGM coordination committees that facilitate a coordinated national response to FGM.

### **Joint Programme management systems and efficiency**

While initial budget levels were appropriate for a “catalytic programme”, the scale and intractability of the practice alongside the need for basic capacity building in key sectors, has created significant budgetary pressures and has limited the Joint Programme scope to Africa and Yemen. While the development of a tier system has formalized funding distribution across countries, the rationale for allocations has not always been clearly communicated.

The use of a one-year funding cycle focuses country programming on short-term activities, which are insufficient for influencing behaviour change. Unpredictable resource flows and an inability to roll-over annual funding also create funding distribution delays that result in inefficient programming gaps between years.

Significant progress was made in developing a results-monitoring system. However, limited programme-wide baseline data and targets were a shortfall in Phase II and this meant that it was not possible to assess performance against targets. In contrast, in Phase III there has been significant investment in, and effort put into, the development

of a comprehensive baseline document, which also enables baselines and targets to be developed by countries.

The Joint Programme lacks formal mechanisms to: (i) gather and assess important lessons from the grassroots level and share them across countries; (ii) provide thematic exchanges at the regional level (for example, regarding cross-border issues between West Africa and East Africa); and (iii) share knowledge across implementing partners.

### **Long-term approaches for the eradication of female genital mutilation**

The Joint Programme has raised the profile of, and generated interest in and funding towards, ending FGM at both the global and national levels, thus setting a solid foundation for future work.

The approach taken by the Joint Programme to support systems strengthening encourages greater sustainability, as it builds the capacity of national systems to address the problem of FGM both today and in the future. Even though the Joint Programme has taken a much more active role in strengthening government systems to address FGM during Phase II, systems strengthening around FGM abandonment remains largely in its infancy.

The emerging focus on youth engagement and education reflects a sustainable vision focused on preparing social-norms change among generations to come. For Phase III, the Joint Programme has included youth engagement within the results framework for the first time, which will likely further encourage sustainability.

Engagement by post-declaration community follow-up committees has been strong, but overall, the Joint Programme does not yet have proven strategies and tools to support continued behaviour change once communities pass public declarations.

The Joint Programme has committed itself in Phase III to expanding a gender-transformative approach to ending FGM. The focus on the shared root cause of the practice - no matter the diversity of the context-specific drivers or age and type of cutting - holds promise for a solution sustained over generations.

## **Conclusions**

### **Conclusion 1: Added value and contributions of the Joint Programme towards FGM abandonment**

The Joint Programme has contributed to notable achievements at the global level - including raising the profile of FGM within a global discussion and ensuring its presence within the international development agenda. The Joint Programme has also galvanized the support of established and emerging actors around the issue at national and sub-national levels. It has had important successes: strengthened national legal frameworks, improved coordination among national

and sub-national actors, increased awareness around FGM-related health risks, changes in discourse related to FGM resulting in important taboo breaks, and even the final abandonment of the practice by meaningful proportions of communities within intervention areas.

### **Conclusion 2: FGM abandonment within a context of social-norms change**

The sustained commitment of the Joint Programme to social-norms change around FGM abandonment is appropriate and highly valued by stakeholders, as social-norms change requires a long-term investment. However, the aspirational goals of the programme, while useful for FGM abandonment advocacy, set unrealistic expectations around what can be achieved within a relatively short timeframe. Current targets are largely designed to measure final changes in behaviour and do not adequately capture important progress towards full abandonment. This leads to gaps in capturing results and can risk undermining achievements.

### **Conclusion 3: Making strategic choices**

Due to the magnitude of the FGM issue and limited funding, the Joint Programme is required to make strategic and sometimes difficult decisions regarding where to place its resources and efforts. During Phases I and II, the Joint Programme made a concerted and overall successful effort to draw on its comparative strengths, particularly around its strategic role as a convener of key FGM abandonment actors at the grassroots, national, regional and global levels. This was appropriate given the magnitude and complexities of the problem and the need for collective action among FGM abandonment actors to address it. However, some elements of its current programming (such as care for FGM survivors) are less clearly aligned with the Joint Programme preventative change logic.

### **Conclusion 4: Gender transformation**

The Joint Programme is placing a stronger emphasis in Phase III on explicitly situating its FGM abandonment work within a gender equality perspective. However, the boundaries and scope of this work have not yet been defined and lack clarity. The comparative strengths of the Joint Programme in terms of gender equality appear to lie within its work on supporting the empowerment of women and girls and promoting positive interpersonal relationships between women and men at the community level. However, any expanded scope of work implies managing the risk of diluting the focus on FGM abandonment in the Joint Programme work.

### **Conclusion 5: Challenges around changing practices**

Changes in FGM practice have presented unexpected and evolving challenges for the Joint Programme. While these challenges have for the most part been recognized and appear to be important issues, evidence is lacking to fully understand their characteristics, the magnitude of the problem and potential consequences. As a result, the Joint Programme has attempted to adapt its programming but, without concrete evidence, it struggles to develop formalized,

proactive strategies to address these changing dynamics.

### **Conclusion 6: Evidence gaps and capitalizing on existing knowledge**

The Joint Programme has supported important research on FGM (Phases I and II). However, there are still numerous and important evidence gaps in the FGM field that hinder the ability of the Joint Programme to make informed strategic decisions. There is ample room for more effective partnerships with research institutions and the Joint Programme has not sufficiently harnessed existing evidence on drivers of change from its implementation experiences.

### **Conclusion 7: Communications and messaging**

The Joint Programme has made an overall concerted effort to use a diverse set of communication channels to raise awareness around the harmful effects of FGM. However, messaging has taken place outside of a formal communications strategy that is not always evidence-based, that requires amplification and scale-up and that has not harnessed the potential of a Communication for Development approach. When targeting behaviour change, a Communication for Development approach has the potential to provide more relevant messages that are palatable and actionable to target audiences. Framing future advocacy messaging within a gender transformative narrative may provide renewed energy to FGM advocacy messaging.

### **Conclusion 8: Synergies across the global, regional, and country levels**

The Joint Programme reach from the global headquarters level to the sub-national community level is a key strength. This holistic approach across levels provides the Joint Programme with additional credibility, linking grassroots interventions to global advocacy. In order to optimize potential linkages and synergies across levels, efficient coordination across all levels is crucial. In response to the Joint Programme Phase I evaluation, the regional level has been strengthened through expanded staffing and increased responsibilities. However, there remains scope for the regional level to be further strengthened in order to better facilitate synergies across levels.

### **Conclusion 9: Coordination and “jointness”**

The Joint Programme structure is fit for purpose and has brought important benefits to the FGM abandonment work of both UNFPA and UNICEF. Even so, there is room to further strengthen coordination and “jointness”. In the context of United Nations Reform, the working dynamics of the Joint Programme will likely be placed under greater scrutiny as more attention within the United Nations is placed on joint programming. In a small number of countries, coordination is sub-optimal, with limited joint planning, monitoring and reporting. Investments now to strengthen the joint elements of the programme could potentially produce significant benefits for the Joint Programme as well as contribute to important learning and improvements within the larger United Nations system.

**Conclusion 10: Moving forward: sustaining the positive momentum for accelerating change towards FGM abandonment**

The Joint Programme design includes some elements that encourage sustainability, such as systems strengthening, supporting national ownership, working with religious and traditional leaders and working with youth. These are promising practices to encourage the sustainability of results.

However, the Joint Programme currently does not have a formal multi-sectoral and cross-agency approach to support governments with the operationalization of programming to foster the abandonment of FGM. The Joint Programme also does not have a plan for what will take place upon completion of Phase III, which places the sustainability of results in jeopardy. Time and planning are needed to develop a sufficient plan for post Phase III.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Taking the Joint Programme approach further

#### RECOMMENDATION 1

Continue to engage to further sustain the existing positive momentum for change at global, regional and country levels towards FGM abandonment within a long-term vision, given that actual behaviour change may take one or two generations.

### Strategic positioning within a wider transformative agenda

#### RECOMMENDATION 2

Further invest in learning to contribute towards reducing evidence gaps in key areas pertaining to FGM. Given the scope and complexity of the work, the Joint Programme is encouraged to explore innovative research solutions through the establishment and/or institutionalization of existing strategic partnerships. As a recognized global leader with strong grassroots support, the Joint Programme is well placed to advance this agenda.

#### RECOMMENDATION 3

Further refine the strategic focus of the Joint Programme, drawing on its comparative strengths to maximize its contributions towards FGM abandonment.

#### RECOMMENDATION 4

Clearly define the strategic placement of the Joint Programme within a gender-responsive framework, drawing on its comparative advantages. This would entail establishing clearly marked boundaries and strategic entry points. It should use this clarity to further secure international resources dedicated towards gender equality and gender transformation.

#### RECOMMENDATION 5

Develop a formal communications strategy that intentionally places behaviour-change messaging targeted at practicing individuals and communities within a Communication for Development framework. Advocacy messaging should be more explicitly framed within a gender equality narrative.

### Fit for purpose to accelerate FGM abandonment

#### RECOMMENDATION 6

Strengthen horizontal synergies between the two partner organizations and virtual synergies across different levels. The Joint Programme should develop an internal policy to articulate where synergies are expected between both organizations and to clearly define roles and responsibilities and information flows.

### Long-term approaches to sustain efforts and results

#### RECOMMENDATION 7

Place a stronger focus on using targets and indicators that capture important intermediate progress towards full FGM abandonment.

#### RECOMMENDATION 8

Continue to use a systems-strengthening approach to encourage long-term change and national ownership, focusing on effective law enforcement, service provision, educational awareness and data collection. This should include the development of a multi-sectoral action plan to support governments with operationalization (and the implementation of legal frameworks) and should include a plan for how to best promote sustainability beyond Phase III.