Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change Phase III (2018-2021)

Gender responsive and/or transformative approaches

Social norms   Transformative   Youth   COVID-19

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The purpose of the joint evaluation is to assess the programme contributions to outputs and outcomes during Phase III of the Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation (2018-2021). The evaluation aims to inform the design of the Joint Programme post-Phase III in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Challenges
Defining what gender-transformative action looks like in practice at country level

Observation
There are many good examples of gender transformative activities and approaches at country level but there are also examples of potentially gender harmful activities

Action
There needs to be clear articulation and agreement at global level that FGM programming should aspire to be gender-transformative, and practical tools should be developed to support programming

Phase III of the Joint Programme is based on a solid gender responsive approach, with some progress towards a gender-transformative approach.

In recent years both UNFPA and UNICEF have progressed towards gender-transformative approaches to FGM work. Phase III of the Joint Programme had stronger gender-transformative framing than Phase II, which was rooted in gender-responsive approaches. Both UNFPA and UNICEF recognise that the issue with FGM is one of human rights and the violation of moral norms, and that programming must include the notion of eradicating the motivation behind FGM. Working within existing norms to eliminate the practice, by education about health risks, does not address the underlying gender inequality driving FGM practice.

This thematic note presents findings on FGM and gender from an evaluation of the third phase of the UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change. The note responds to two main evaluation questions: 1) 'to what extent is the Joint Programme design gender responsive and/or transformative to contribute to accelerating the abandonment of FGM? and 2) 'to what extent is the Joint Programme contributing to transforming social norms, not just for communities to abandon the practice of FGM but for communities to abandon the root cause gender inequality motivation behind the practice of FGM'?[1]

There are three headline findings which this note is structured around:

1. Work and achievements to date at the global level/core global programming approach
2. Work and achievements to date at the country level/practical community programming implications
3. Inclusion and participation – how the programme is including women and girls, men and boys, and specific demographics such as youth.

About the UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programme on FGM

The Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change (referred to here as 'the Joint Programme') is currently being implemented in 17 countries, and links community-level transformation of social norms that often drive FGM with laws banning the practice and access to quality sexual and reproductive health and child protection services for girls and women at risk of and affected by FGM. It is global in nature and began in 2008.
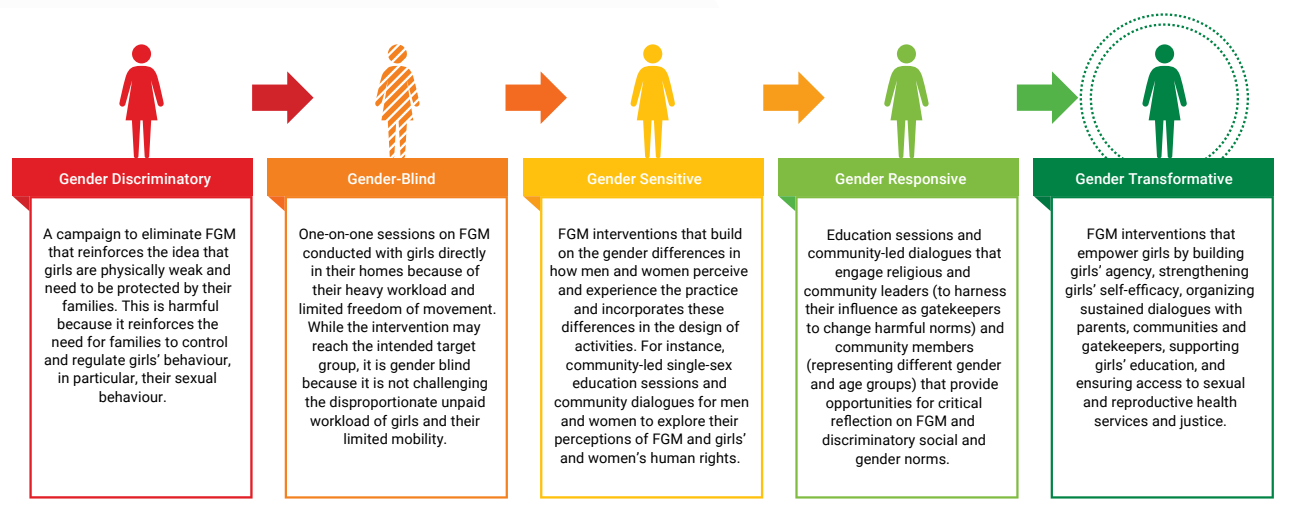
This thematic note is an output of an evaluation of the third phase (2018-2021) of the Joint Programme.

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1 Evaluation Questions 2 and 6 respectively in the evaluation report.

The problem

What is a gender-sensitive, gender-responsive, or gender-transformative approach to FGM and how do you measure it? To answer this question, some background is necessary about the different approaches. In turn, this will serve to frame an understanding of the approach adopted by UNFPA and UNICEF in the Joint Programme which has increasingly, from Phase II to Phase II, strived to move towards a more gender transformative approach. Figure 1 applies a gender scale to FGM programming and the box below provides definitions for the terms within the gender scale.

FIGURE 1: *Gender scale adapted to FGM examples[2]*

Gender Discriminatory	Gender-Blind	Gender Sensitive	Gender Responsive	Gender Transformative
A campaign to eliminate FGM that reinforces the idea that girls are physically weak and need to be protected by their families. This is harmful because it reinforces the need for families to control and regulate girls' behaviour, in particular, their sexual behaviour.	One-on-one sessions on FGM conducted with girls directly in their homes because of their heavy workload and limited freedom of movement. While the intervention may reach the intended target group, it is gender blind because it is not challenging the disproportionate unpaid workload of girls and their limited mobility.	FGM interventions that build on the gender differences in how men and women perceive and experience the practice and incorporates these differences in the design of activities. For instance, community-led single-sex education sessions and community dialogues for men and women to explore their perceptions of FGM and girls' and women's human rights.	Education sessions and community-led dialogues that engage religious and community leaders (to harness their influence as gatekeepers to change harmful norms) and community members (representing different gender and age groups) that provide opportunities for critical reflection on FGM and discriminatory social and gender norms.	FGM interventions that empower girls by building girls' agency, strengthening girls' self-efficacy, organizing sustained dialogues with parents, communities and gatekeepers, supporting girls' education, and ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services and justice.

Gender scale definitions

Gender Discriminatory: programming that reinforces harmful and negative gender norms and actively harms women and girls.

Gender Blind: programming that ignores gender differences and differing needs of women, men, boys and girls, and also ignores gender power dynamics and therefore by default tends towards doing harm to women and girls.

Gender Sensitive: programming that recognises different needs of women, men, boys and girls and acknowledges gender power dynamics but does not necessarily address these other than to try and integrate an understanding of these dynamics within programme design.

Gender Responsive: programming which includes specific action to try and reduce gender inequalities within communities.

Gender Transformative: programming which is designed around a fundamental aim of addressing root causes of gender inequality within society.

The long-term framing of FGM as a 'harmful traditional practice', similar to the framing of child marriage, has often led to FGM-practicing communities feeling that culture and traditions are being dismissed by an externally imposed moral standard. In response, there has been a growing attempt more recently to reframe the issue, and focus is increasingly placed on working with communities for social norm change with a more sensitive approach. This should be more effective and sustainable in outcomes.

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2 UNICEF. Technical Note. Gender transformative approaches for the elimination of female genital mutilation. 2020.

One contemporary school of thought is that the only way to address FGM is by working within the existing culture and social norms to understand why and how FGM is rooted in the specific cultural characteristics of a particular society. Programmes then work within this framework to reduce the practice or mitigate the harmful effects of the practice. Cultural norms dictate which activities men or boys carry out and which ones are reserved for women or girls. A key starting point for working with communities on FGM, and women's and children's health in general, is to understand how they are organised with respect to gendered roles.

In contrast, an alternative view leans towards moral norms rather than social norms, and highlights that the contemporary approach, while potentially being gender sensitive, cannot be considered as gender transformative. Furthermore, the belief that harmful practices can be understood – and implicitly excused – based on culture and tradition is not aligned with a human rights-based approach (as enshrined within UNFPA and UNICEF mandates, vision, and strategies).

These opposing views are often articulated as a conflict between 'radical cultural relativism', where culture is prioritised as the primary source of whether something is right or wrong, and 'radical universalism', where culture is immaterial to the validity of a moral, universal, norm.

FIGURE 2: *Radical Cultural Relativism vs Radical Universalism*

Radical Cultural Relativism	Radical Universalism
Cultural norms dominate	Universal human rights dominate
Universal human rights are secondary	Cultural norms are secondary
FGM can be valid cultural practice	FGM always violates human rights

This conflict over the importance of culture is inherent to FGM programming, both in terms of differing stances but also in terms of a general understanding of what is effective. One view is that working within a framework of dominating cultural norms might be the most efficient way to end harmful practices, the other emphasises that working within a framework where universal human rights are prioritised is the only way to eliminate harmful practices.

A growing body of literature emphasises that the most effective approach to reducing FGM lies in culturally sensitive, community-based programmes that encourage social norms change[3] and clarifies that *"the reasons behind the perpetuation of FGM are linked to unbalanced gender power relations and lack of empowerment of girls and women in their families/ communities."*[4] Further, the need to integrate gender transformative responses aligns with the global Agenda for Humanity, and particularly the concept of 'leaving no one behind'. UNGA 2020 stressed that *"the empowerment of women and girls is key to breaking the cycle of discrimination and violence and for the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of mental and physical health, including sexual and reproductive health."*[5]

If the ultimate goal is to address the underlying reasons for the practice of FGM, a gender transformative human rights-based approach is necessary. This sits to the right of the above scale and frames FGM entirely within the realm of gender equality. It looks at FGM as a practice motivated by the desire to control a female body and the assumption that a girl is a commodity to be owned or transferred, which must be kept 'pure' until the transfer has happened with the new 'owner' being assured of purity. A gender transformative approach tackles this underlying reason for the practice and is grounded in the notion that FGM is primarily a violation of human rights. The consequences of that violation are health and social-related, but the principal crime concerns human rights.

In recent years, both UNFPA and UNICEF have moved further towards a gender-transformative approach. In 2020, the UNFPA State of the World Report on harmful practices clearly and explicitly framed FGM as a human rights issue, and also framed solutions within the scope of gender-transformative approaches. UNICEF published a 2020 technical note on gender-transformative approaches for the elimination of FGM which echoed this UNFPA stance. Both UNFPA and UNICEF,

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3 28 Too Many. FGM and social norms. A guide to designing culturally sensitive community programming. 2019.
4 Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS). Repositioning FGM as a gender and development issue. 2015.
5 UNGA. 2020. Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation.

in these publications and beyond, recognise that the issue is one of human rights and violations of moral norms; and that programming must include the notion that the motivation behind FGM needs to be eradicated. Working within existing norms to eliminate the practice using health-risk education is insufficient to address the underlying gender inequality driver of FGM practice.

Findings

1. FGM programming across the gender scale at the global level

Finding: Phase III of the Joint Programme is based on a solid gender-responsive approach throughout the design, language and programming tools which is reflected across household, community, institutional and policy intervention areas. There is also a clear and articulated recognition of the need to move towards a more gender-transformative approach but this is yet to be fully defined in both scope and how it translates practically for the programme.

The focus on girls' and women's rights has been strengthened markedly within the design of Phase III by placing it as a core outcome area. This underscores a clear shift in thinking from Phases I and II, which were more focused on policy and legislative spheres, and social norms (in Phase II). The shift towards a consistent focus on gender norms, gender equality, and solid gender-responsive approaches is still a work in progress. This mirrors the overall evolution of UNICEF and UNFPA as agencies working across the gender scale, beyond just FGM programming. In recent years both UNFPA and UNICEF have moved further towards the gender-transformative approach.

GOOD PRACTICE: Ethiopia FGM gender equality strategy

While not an initiative under the Joint Programme, UNICEF Ethiopia has developed a programme-level FGM gender equality strategy as part of a Global Affairs Canada (GAC) funded programme, Accelerating Action to End Female Genital Mutilation in Ethiopia. The programme document highlights different strategies, informed by a gender-based analysis that used research conducted 2012–2020. These strategies address policies, FGM-related laws, and the long-standing social norms, attitudes and beliefs that maintain gender inequality. UNICEF recognizes that other structural factors also determine the prevalence of FGM, such as poverty, levels of education, or vulnerability of girls, their families and communities. Some of these wider factors, such as poverty and levels of education, are being addressed through broader government schemes and programmes. The UNICEF programme specifically addresses gender inequality issues through a multi-pronged approach, working mainly through social and behavioural change interventions with communities, skills-building of adolescent girls and capacity building of health, justice and social service workforce, at the three programme outcome levels, leveraging efforts from both the Health and Child Protection sections. All strategic interventions are in line with UNICEF's Global Gender Action Plan (GAP) II 2018–2021 that outlines the overall priority for gender equality for girls and boys and in care and support for women and children, positive gender socialization for girls and boys and empowerment and well-being for adolescent girls.

Both UNFPA and UNICEF are rapidly developing gender transformative policies and guidance, as evidenced by the UNICEF 2020 FGM technical note introducing the FGM gender scale.[6] Implementation remains more of a challenge, as evidenced by a recent UNFPA evaluation, which found that the UNFPA "gender architecture provides a foundation for gender work but it is stretched in its capacity to support a gender-responsive approach to different areas of the UNFPA mandate, let alone a more gender-transformative approach which is the organization's ambition."[7]

6 This is not a Joint Programme publication but rather a UNICEF FGM technical note.
7 UNFPA. 2021. Evaluation of UNFPA support to gender equality and women's empowerment (2012-2020).

Within the Joint Programme, and more broadly within the agencies, the gender-transformative approach remains at a developing and evolving stage. This means, for the Joint Programme, that gender-transformation has not yet been clearly defined or consistently articulated across the programme.[8]

Respondents to the evaluation have reported that there is an unsettled debate within the Joint Programme as to whether a gender-transformative approach for FGM is too ambitious, and also whether this aligns with the comparative strengths or value-addition of the two agencies.[9] In reality, however, it would appear that gender-transformative programming is set as the overall direction of both agencies, positioned within an emphasis on development assistance working towards social norm change approaches.

A more significant challenge is a lack of clarity around what 'gender-transformation' looks like in practice across different contexts, and when it is appropriate to apply the approach. Definitions, scope, parameters and boundaries all need to be defined. This is recognised within senior Joint Programme management.[10] There is a sense that at the current stage of the programme, gender-transformation is beginning to be pushed, but this is mostly at a conceptual level (e.g. the publication of technical briefs). The next step must include more focus on translating seemingly complex notions into practical guidance for operationalising the idea of gender transformation through activities at the community level. This is particularly emphasised by country and regional respondents.[11]

2. FGM programming across the gender scale at the country level

Finding: **Country-level programming still struggles with gender-transformative social norm change with regard to understanding changes in gender norms related to knowledge, attitudes, and practice (behaviours) and this is compounded by the fact that measuring FGM gender norm change remains elusive. Community engagement approaches vary across countries with a range of gender responsive and transformative approaches; there has been a steady increase and acceleration of the use of digital and social media within the programme and COVID-19 has increased the innovative use of digital platforms.[12]**

Across all country programme documents, as with global and regional level documents, there are clear, solid gender-responsive approaches outlined. There are also evident intentions towards gender transformative approaches, and **countries have evolved from traditional engagement modalities (such as community dialogues) to use different digital and non-digital platforms.**[13]

The Joint Programme is yet to release substantive guidance on what gender transformative approaches look like in practice at the community level. There has been some progress in terms of technical briefs which unpack some of the language, which have been appreciated and valued by country offices. There is also increasing evidence from the Joint Programme around the challenges which are faced.

These challenges to gender-transformative programming include: 1) the extended nature of norm change, which does not lend itself easily to measurement in annual reports, or across four-year programme cycles; 2) identifying contributing factors to any societal changes; 3) differentiating evidence of changes in knowledge, changes in attitudes, and changes in actual behaviours; and 4) distinguishing real and permanent community changes from changes that are reported under observation (surveillance).

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8 Note that this does not mean that there are not examples of gender-transformative programming within the Joint Programme: please see EQ 6 for a full discussion on this.

9 UNICEF key informants.

10 UNICEF and UNFPA key informants.

11 UNICEF and UNFPA regional and country level key informants.

12 Note that examples of specific gender-responsive and gender-transformative activities can be found under EQ6 whereas this question focuses more on the innovative use of tools and digital platforms.

13 All of these approaches engage women, men, boys and girls to differing degrees: the extent to which more traditional approaches focus on women vs male engagement is more fully discussed under EQ 6.

For instance, the Saleema initiative started in **Sudan** during Phase I of the Joint Programme in 2008 and it has only been over time that a gradual reduction in pro-FGM social norms have been observed.[14] In **Ethiopia**, respondents highlight that huge social norm shifts have occurred over the last decade, but that there is still a long way to go towards genuine gender equality. Nevertheless, the real changes that have occurred to date should not be under-estimated.[15]

> *"We have seen huge cultural shifts and mindset shifts in FGM and the programme has been integral to that. Within a decade we have seen huge shifts over a relatively small period of time working with cultural and societal norms."[16]*

In terms of understanding social norms vis à vis FGM, cultural (and religious, socio-economic, and traditional) drivers differ significantly across and even within countries. This is despite gender inequality being a foundational common cause, including how women and girls are valued within society. This heterogeneity complicates in achieving balance between the provision of global guidance or indicators, and adaptability to community-level contexts.

In **Mali**, it was prevalent for community-level respondents to perceive that FGM is not carried out with the intention of causing harm, but it is justified as one of the socialization processes to increase girls' chances of getting married.[17] It is seen as undesirable for girls not to marry. In **Nigeria**, Joint Programme staff confirm that drivers of FGM are different across different states and communities. Within some states, the primary purpose of FGM is a rite of passage for marriage, whereas within other states it is linked to chastity and virginity.[18] Despite the commonality of underlying gender inequality and power dynamics, it is clear to Nigeria Joint Programme staff that: *"we need more research on drivers to really be gender-transformative."[19]*

In addition to different packages to address social norms, and the differing drivers found across and between countries for FGM, for some countries there remains a question as to whether FGM drivers are cultural or religious. Globally and in most countries the religious linkage has largely been disproved. However, community-level perceptions often strongly associate FGM with religious requirements. Hence there is widespread engagement between the Joint Programme and religious leaders across countries: *"We have our own methodology, [at the] theological level, not just targeting religious levels but targeting the Church as an institution."[20]*

The Joint Programme faces a question of whether social norm change methodology should be more prescriptive and consistent, focusing predominantly on gender inequality as the ultimate driver. An alternative position holds that the wide range of differing intermediate drivers (religion or culture, for chastity or marriage rites of passage, based on economic situations or educational levels) are more important, and so social norm change interventions must necessarily be context-specific and differ across communities and countries. Other considerations include types of cutting (Type I to Type III); predominant age of cutting; and importance placed on ceremonial aspects of cutting.[21]

A further consideration is that gender inequality as an underlying driver of FGM is common to child marriage and Gender Based Violence in general. By contrast, the intermediate context-dependent drivers of FGM may not be clearly linked to child marriage. Hence there are communities with high rates of FGM but low rates of child marriage, and vice versa. Focusing on intermediate drivers that are substantively different requires substantively different responses. However, a gender-transformative approach requires addressing the shared underlying factor of gender inequality.

This question appears as a constant thread throughout the evaluation: is FGM programming, in this case regarding social norm change and community attitudes and behaviour, best achieved through focused FGM activities or integrated with other GBV and harmful practice issues? Evaluation Question 3 in the main report pays particular attention to this issue of coherence.

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14 Sudan and regional key informants.

15 Ethiopia key informants.

16 Ibid.

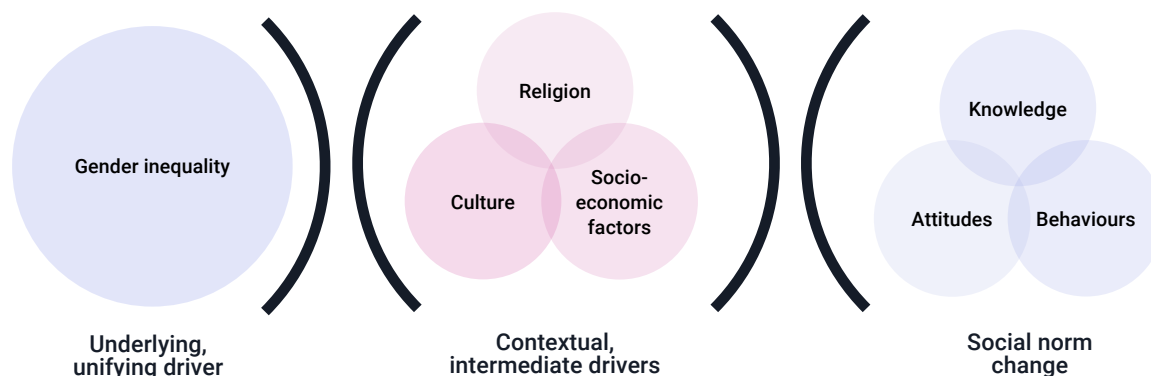17 Mali Joint Programme Annual Report 2019.

18 Nigeria key informants.

19 Ibid.

20 Ethiopia key informant.

21 Note that this conceptualisation of underlying, unified drivers and interim drivers (and the associated diagram) is not drawn from evaluation sources but rather developed by the evaluation team based on a triangulation of perceptions and information provided by key informants.

Striving to be gender-transformative in all contexts, at all times, can create undue pressure on women and girls to exhibit the agency to change circumstances when, in reality, the gender norms and stereotypes prevalent across the societies within which they live make this an unrealistic expectation.[22] This is amplified by such a wide interpretation of what gender-transformative actually means in concept or in practice across implementing partners, and Joint Programme staff at country, regional and global levels.

Across countries included in the evaluation there are plentiful examples of gender-transformative, and gender-responsive programming. There are also examples that could be viewed as gender harmful (gender blind or gender discriminatory) in some aspects. It is useful to explore these examples: a clear challenge for many evaluation respondents is knowing how to consistently translate conceptual notions from the gender scale into something pragmatic that can be understood in terms of operational activities and approaches.

TABLE 1: *Examples of gender-transformative, gender-responsive, gender-sensitive, and (potentially) gender-blind activities*

Practical application of gender-transformative approaches	
Guinea	Innovative approaches introduced since 2018 include "Model Men" and "Women Mentors", both of which seek to transform traditional gender normative roles and therefore can be considered gender-transformative in approach. Female mentors are usually former converted excisors and/or women leaders in their communities and mentor girls for their passage from childhood to adolescence. These women are supported with accompanying measures to generate income. They play the role of monitoring and watch with a view to the respect by the communities of their commitments for the effective abandonment of this ancestral practice.[23]
	Female mentors were identified and trained, and benefited from the Joint Programme support to implement their action plans in their respective villages. This mentoring program enabled the girls identified in the communities to be helped to manage the transition from childhood to adolescence (initiation without excision/ARP), and be protected against FGM, marriage, teenage pregnancy, and stigma.[24] Some of the female mentors also benefited from support for their income-generating activities for the sustainability of their actions and also serve as post-declaration surveillance and monitoring actors for the respect of the commitments made by the communities with a view to an effective abandonment of the practice of FGM.[25]

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22 Note that engaging men and boys is discussed more fully in the next finding.

23 Guinea Joint Programme Annual Report 2019, 2020 and Guinea key informants.

24 Guinea Joint Programme Annual Report 2019.

25 Ibid.

Kenya	UNICEF signed a partnership with the Anti-FGM Board, Eco-Bank and Ushanga Kenya in June 2019 for the Johari beads initiative, a national project that seeks to not only end FGM but also empower women and girls by creating a sustainable source of income through bead work.[26] Some of the redeemed traditional cutters were linked to the national government affirmative action fund and Women Enterprise Fund to create an alternative source of income.[27]
Sudan	The Saleema campaign has many aspects of gender-transformative approaches. It firstly models a comprehensive, social marketing approach. It promotes a positive image of uncut girls (Saleema meaning 'whole' or 'healthy') as opposed to more traditional FGM messaging which focuses on the negative aspects of cutting. In this way it promotes the notion of a healthy, bodily autonomous female with decision-making power over her own life and this is a transformative aspect of the programme.
Regional - African Union	The instigation of the youth ambassador programme: the Young Victorious Ambassadors' which are selected as part of the AU Saleema Initiative, demonstrates a gender transformative approach, by empowering young female mobilisers to speak out and advocate on a wider stage, and to act as role models to other young women.
Activities with elements considered to be gender-responsive, gender-sensitive, or (potentially) gender-blind	
Mali	An assessment study of the National Plan for the Abandonment of FGM (PNLE) conducted in 2019 concluded that before talking to communities about FGM it is necessary to discuss basic needs such as access to drinking water and basic social services as entry points to discussion which highlights that gender-transformative arguments acceptable to communities are quite far away.[28] Mali respondents report that before talking about harmful practices with the communities, there is the need to understand the place of the women and girls in the community which aims first of all to let communities understand the place of the woman in the development of the community, and then demonstrate how FGM can impact on that community development. This is a necessary foundation for any future gender-transformative interventions, but in itself suggests a more gender-responsive approach.[29]
Nigeria	A lot of work is conducted by the wives of governors at state level. The attention they bring to FGM as a harmful practice is laudable and in some ways this approach can be considered gender-responsive: it certainly works within the prevailing societal context and utilises the power and influence that governors' wives have. However, it also reinforces the fact that governors are male, and that FGM is not a political issue worthy of the attention of the elected – male – governors, but rather a 'women's issue' that should be delegated to the spouses of the elected men. In this way it can be considered as reinforcing gender stereotypes (men are elected officials working on more important issues, and FGM is an issue to be delegated to the non-elected female spouses). The evaluation fully recognises the value that the first wives bring to the issue and does not propose to stop working in this way, but an open discussion and recognition of where and how this approach might be reinforcing specific and harmful gender norms (perhaps entrenching the idea within girls and young women – and boys and young men in fact – that only men can be governors) would be helpful.
Kenya	Exploring other approaches to rites of passage, could potentially be considered gender-transformative if based on the positive transformation of girl to woman, but when linked to concepts of chastity and virginity until marriage it remains a gender-responsive at best, and gender-harmful at worst approach.

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26 Kenya Joint Programme Annual Report 2020 & Draft report of the mapping of women beadwork cooperatives in seven counties. 2020.

27 Kenya Joint Programme Annual Report 2020.

28 Mali key informants.

29 Ibid.

Ethiopia	The Joint Programme has, within the theme of male engagement, created men development groups to mirror women development groups within communities.[30] While male engagement is an important strategy (see next finding) it is also important to acknowledge that establishing women development groups or platforms for women to contribute to society leadership is grounded in traditional male dominance over community structure and governance. Thus, creating male development groups somewhat negates the impact and purpose of creating women development groups, and in this way can be viewed as potentially gender harmful. It is important to garner male support but, as is fully discussed in the next finding, this requires careful balance to ensure it is not gender harmful or reinforcing of gender power dynamics as it is implemented.
Nigeria	Partners reported that a focus of FGM work is to convince boys that marrying an uncut girl is best: "The men who are now empowered go for girls not cut"[31] While this is part of a male engagement strategy, it has the potential to reinforce the idea that boys and men "go for" girls for marriage, i.e. it is the male privilege to decide who to marry rather than marriage being a mutually consenting decision for two adults.

3. Community engagement

Finding: Joint Programme countries have embraced male engagement strategies within Phase III, with many stating the need to scale-up this aspect of the programme in the future: however, guidance is needed to ensure that male engagement strategies are not gender-blind or gender-harmful, reinforcing traditional male power over women and girls' bodies.

As one aspect of its community engagement work, Phase III of the Joint Programme has been focusing more attention on engaging and raising awareness of FGM among men and boys.[32] In some cases this is for information purposes; for example in Gambia it is reported that many men are not aware of what FGM is or that it is being conducted.[33] However, there is clear recognition at the global level of the care needed not to inadvertently entrench patriarchal norms within this strategy.[34] This is reiterated at the regional levels of the Joint Programme: engagement with men and boys necessarily acknowledges a reality of gender power relations at community level, so it is important to approach male engagement in such a manner that these dynamics are not reinforced.[35]

There are some good practices emerging in male engagement strategies around Gender Based Violence in general, which can be learnt from. For instance, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has developed a programming approach around 'engaging men in accountable practices' (EMAP). This is centred around a structure for *"honouring women's leadership and developing male engagement in a way that improves the lives of women and girls."*[36] UNICEF MENARO is also developing a strategy on how to engage men and boys as agents of change, and what it means in practice.

At the country level, there is still a wide range of male engagement strategies practiced, spanning across the gender scale. Some examples have been provided in Table 1 of the previous finding. Positive examples include:

- The **Sudan** Saleema initiative has good practice social marketing messaging for men and boys as well as women and girls with to 'born saleema, grow saleema'

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30 Joint Programme staff report establishing 120 men development groups.
31 Nigeria CSO key informant.
32 Global Joint Programme key informants.
33 Gambia key informants.
34 Global Joint Programme key informants.
35 Regional Joint Programme key informants.
36 https://www.emotiveprogram.org/solution/engaging-men-in-accountable-practices-emap/.

- In **Mali**, UNFPA and UNICEF have developed an action plan to better engage men and boys in the promotion of the abandonment of FGM. A workshop bringing together all the regions of Mali and the District of Bamako enabled adoption of the action plan of the 'MenEngage Network'.[37] As part of the implementation of this action plan, UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, National Centre for the Promotion of Volunteering with Spotlight funds. Strategies adopted in the targeted localities included: training of 25 MenEngage Facilitators in Bamako "MenEngage Academy" to become focal points and set up MenEngage clubs in schools in targeted regions; the establishment of MenEngage Clubs for "Young Engaged Men", and "MenEngage Clubs" in schools; the design and distribution of songs and clips on GBV with a view to transforming social and gender norms broadcasted widely on national and sub-regional television channels and international, radios and social networks; the organization of a national MenEngage campaign to convey messages on positive masculinity and femininity; the design of a Smartphone App "MenEngage" to ask questions and have answers on GBV issues, positive masculinity and femininity, the culture of non-violence, the importance of the environment supportive in families, workplaces, schools and education of young people, and adolescents; the launch of the Photovoice MenEngage Campaign (16 Days of Activism 2019) with key messages on positive masculinity. All these activities lean towards gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches

- In **Guinea**, the Joint Programme has promoted the model men approach: influential men within their communities who represent a good example of respect for women's human rights through their attitude and behaviour, encouraging others to imitate them. Role models and champions include religious, community and administrative leaders who openly take a stand against FGM and child marriage. This is considered to have a ripple-effect due to their influential positions within communities.[38] The Joint Programme also supported the technical and institutional capacities of the members of two initiatives for the involvement of men (school for husbands) in the promotion of the rights of women and girls, the fight against FGM, GBV and child marriage, and the promotion of the use of health services[39]

- In **Kenya**, the Joint Programme has a partnership with Men End FGM Foundation, that provided training on FGM to men and boys networks advocating the elimination of FGM. Men and boys were intentionally added to the survivor network membership to convey the message that FGM is not a women's issue and it has direct and indirect impacts to boys and men as members of the society.[40]

Finding: UNFPA and UNICEF both have strong youth foci which has not, to date, been fully leveraged within the Joint Programme.

Both UNICEF and UNFPA as agencies have strong expertise within youth engagement work.[41] Examples include, for UNICEF, the YPEER network, Generation Unlimited, and a focus on adolescent girls within the Gender Action Plan.[42] UNFPA has a strong youth focus[43] and leads on the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Settings.[44]

The Joint Programme works across countries with high youth populations, so contextually the settings are relevant to a strong focus on youth. However, the evaluation found only limited evidence of the Joint Programme using either UNFPA/UNICEF expertise or the contextual demographic realities to fully and consistently engage young people (female and male)[45] at any level.

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37 Mali Joint Programme Annual Report 2019.

38 Guinea Joint Programme Annual Report 2018, 2020 and Guinea key informants.

39 Guinea Joint Programme Annual Report 2018.

40 Kenya Joint Programme Annual Report 2019.

41 The United Nations defines 'youth' as being aged 15–24 years, while UNICEF and partner agencies WHO and UNFPA concur with that definition of youth but also define 'adolescents' as being aged 10–19 years and young people as 10–24: IASC. Guidelines. With us & for us: Working with and for young people in humanitarian and protracted crises. 2020. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-02/IASC%20Guidelines%20on%20Working%20with%20and%20for%20Young%20People%20in%20Humanitarian%20and%20Protracted%20Crises_0.pdf.

42 https://www.unicef.org/gender-equality/gender-action-plan-2018-2021.

43 https://www.unfpa.org/youth-participation-leadershiphttps://www.unfpa.org/youth-participation-leadership.

44 https://www.youthcompact.org.

45 Meaningful youth engagement approaches recognise both the unifying age criteria but also the differing gender aspects of youth as a demographic and should seek to meaningfully engage both female and male youth, fully applying a youth lens and seeking gender transformative outcomes as with other programming.

Despite this inconsistency, there are clear individual examples of good practice in youth engagement work, and promising opportunities at the regional level.

In **Guinea**, the UNICEF Communication for Development (C4D) approach contributed to the identification and training of young (including girls) members of platforms on essential family practices including FGM and child marriage. These trained young people later organized awareness sessions to reach out to other young people. In collaboration with the Ministries of Youth and Youth Employment, 80 young volunteers (50 per cent girls/women) identified, oriented and assigned in the 40 municipalities of convergence (CC) to support them in their various development actions according to their specific needs.[46] The Joint Programme has been collaborating with the Young Girl Leaders Club, which is committed to influence younger generations where change can come from, for an effective abandonment of FGM. These girls have created a consortium with young painters and musicians to inform and raise awareness in communities.[47] In 2018, the Club of Young Leaders of Guinea organised an intergenerational and multisector panel (health, social action, security, justice, civil society organisations, religious leaders, youth representative), as well as advocacy towards the authorities for respect for the rights of women and girls.[48]

In **Kenya**, the Joint Programme has been supporting the 'Youth End FGM Kenya', a national youth led anti-FGM network working towards eliminating FGM and child marriage in Kenya using social media, especially Twitter (which is powerful in Kenya)[49]. UNFPA has been supporting the Ministry of ICT and Youth's campaign 'Kenya Ni Mini' (Kenya is my responsibility), that has components on SRHR, FGM and Child Marriage. The campaign is giving young people a voice, it's encouraging them to be self-sufficient and make decisions.[50] The Joint Programme has technically and financially supported training on prevention and response to FGM, and how to conduct dialogue sessions and community driven behaviour and social communication change for 12 FGM networks driven by young people from age 18-24 years. Their role is to 1) raise awareness on the adverse consequences of FGM at household level and influence the abandonment process at the family unit; 2) privately and publicly support girls and women who have not undergone FGM as well as conduct community dialogues and outreach programmes to galvanize a young people movement; 3) contribute to winning the endorsement of the national policy on the elimination of FGM.[51]

Promising regional-level opportunities include the UNICEF plan to elevate YPEER to regional level and have an advisory board of active youth in the region.[52] **The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting increase in digital technologies and innovation has also increased participation of youth and could be built upon further in a post-pandemic world.** Use of digital platforms – such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube – has significantly increased during COVID-19 lockdowns, which 'forced' more innovative remote social norm change programming. This can be viewed as a positive development and an opportunity.

It is well understood across Joint Programme countries, however, that digital platforms reach some demographics (younger, urban and peri-urban, and more affluent) more effectively than others. How to continue reaching the most disconnected, disadvantaged and marginalised (including older people) must be carefully considered. In addition to this, a consideration not raised by any Joint Programme staff but worth some attention is the extent to which the increased use of digital media to reach younger generations will exacerbate inter-generational divides of perspective, and what impacts this may have on community-wide understandings of FGM.

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46 Guinea Joint Programme Annual Report 2019.
47 Ibid.
48 Guinea Joint Programme Annual Report 2018.
49 Kenya key informants.
50 Ibid.
51 Kenya Joint Programme Annual Report 2019.
52 Regional key informants.

Conclusions and future considerations

Conclusion: Phase III of the Joint Programme is based on a solid gender-responsive approach at the global level throughout the design, language and programming tools. There is a clear and articulated recognition of the need to move towards a more gender transformative approach, but this is yet to be fully defined in both scope and how it translated practically for the programme.

Country-level programming still struggles with gender-transformative social norm change with regard to understanding changes in gender norms related to knowledge, attitudes, and practice (behaviours). Community engagement approaches vary across countries with a range of gender responsive and transformative approaches. Joint Programme countries have embraced male engagement strategies within Phase III, with many stating the need to scale-up this aspect of the programme in the future. However, guidance is needed to ensure that male engagement strategies are not gender-harmful, reinforcing traditional male power over women's and girls' bodies. The Joint Programme can better leverage the strong youth foci of UNFPA and UNICEF more broadly.

Considerations for the future:

- There needs to be clear articulation and agreement at global level that (a) FGM programming should aspire to gender-transformative and (b) that this is aligned with the approaches and comparative strengths of both agencies. At the same time, it must be clearly noted that gender-transformative is not appropriate in all contexts at all times, and trying to be gender-transformative when it will do more harm than good, or claiming to be gender-transformative when not fully understanding what that means, is counter-productive.

- It would be useful for the Joint Programme to develop a checklist tool to determine optimum conditions for transitioning from gender responsive to solid gender transformative approaches.

- It would be useful for the Joint Programme to ensure definition of all male engagement strategies across the gender scale, with specific and deliberate consideration (through the use of a checklist) of every approach through the lens of how it might be gender harmful, how it might be reinforcing and entrenching harmful gender dynamics and power dynamics, and what mitigating strategies are necessary to avoid this.

- It would be useful for the Joint Programme to include a gender scale within annual reporting, so country offices can map their activities across the gender scale and Joint Programme global staff have an opportunity to capacity-develop and provide support with regard to what are genuine gender-transformative approaches.

- It would be useful for the Joint Programme to continue with scale-up of digital strategies, linking to specific youth engagement and empowerment. But also develop mitigation guidance for country offices to ensure recognition that the most marginalised are left behind with digital strategies and develop different targeted approaches to balance this.