



Ministry for Foreign
Affairs of Finland



Reflection on Exchange Visit Types & Sequence: Lessons from Working with Elders & Cultural Leaders in Bungoma, Samburu, & Kilifi Counties

INTRODUCTION

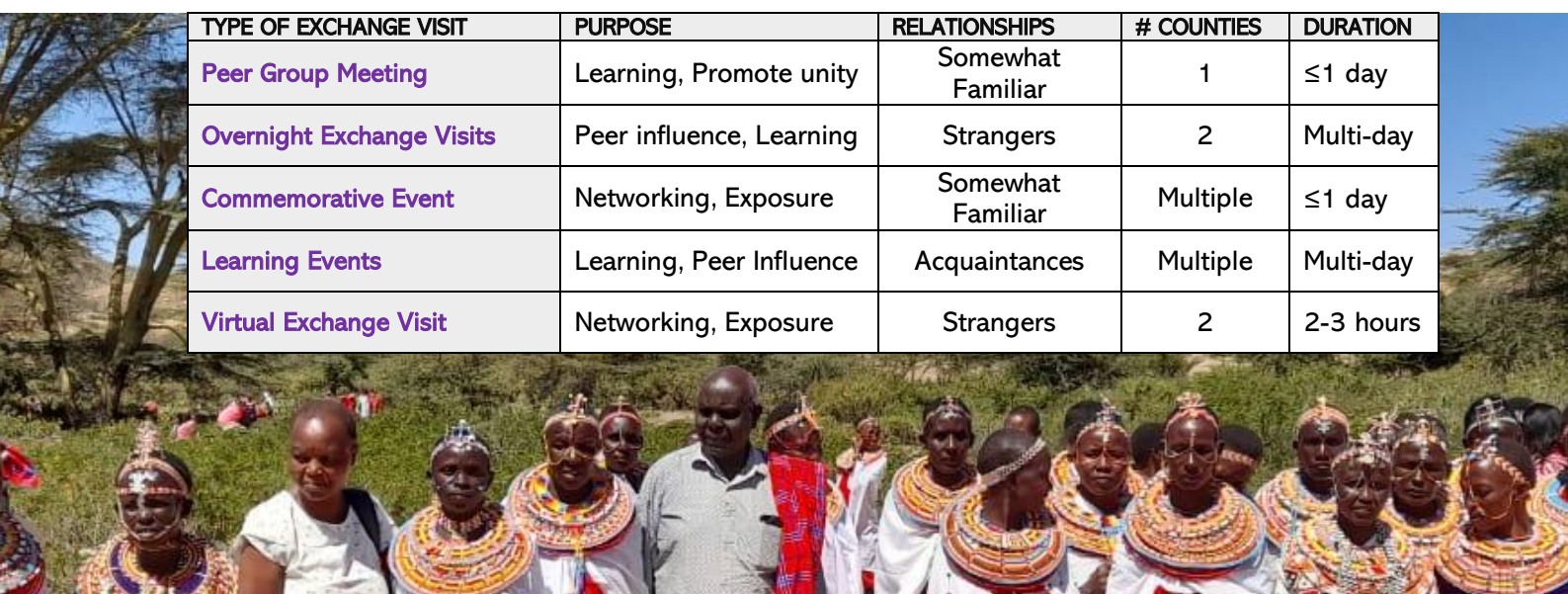
The Kenya-Finland Bilateral Programme has deployed several types of exchange visits to bring on board more Champions in the effort to reduce gender-based violence (GBV) and other harmful practices. Each type of exchange was designed to bring together stakeholders from similar socio-ecological groups to share experience and learn from each other – while also bringing attention to positive examples of transformation. This brief consolidates feedback from participants, together with observations from the Programme Management Team (PMT), to summarize the types of exchanges, their perceived effectiveness, and impact with a view to inform practice across the sector.

Exchange visits are an effective way to promote cultural exchange and understanding, and can be a powerful tool in the fight against GBV – especially female genital mutilation (FGM). By bringing together elders from different communities, for example, exchange visits can help to break down barriers and promote dialogue, leading to greater awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding FGM and GBV. This can help to reduce the prevalence of these harmful practices, and promote greater respect for human rights. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the problem of FGM, exchange visits are an important part of a broader strategy to promote gender equality and human rights. By fostering greater understanding between communities, exchange visits do help to build trust and promote cooperation, leading to more effective campaigns against FGM and GBV.

TYPES OF EXCHANGE VISITS DEPLOYED BY THE PROGRAMME

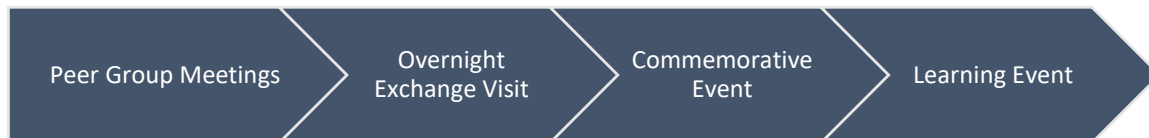
The exchange visits can be grouped into five different types, according to the purpose, nature of the relationships, number of counties involved and duration. In nearly all counties, **Peer Group Meetings** were selected to promote unity of purpose among common groups – helping the group to establish a common position/vision on the issue of GBV, with particular attention to a set of Champions or positive role models from within the group. Similarly with **Cross-county Exchange visits**, Champions from one county were invited to meet their peers in another county to share their journey while also exploring the commonalities and unifying elements across both groups. **Commemorative activities**, such as the Day for Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (pictured below) were also important in bringing attention to and celebrating a wider set of Champions and efforts, i.e. networking and exposure to help the group recognize that they are not alone and they are part of a wider effort. Meanwhile the **Learning Events**, in this context, provide space to understand how other groups have overcome the challenges they face, while also reinforcing key knowledge and information. Finally, the **Virtual Exchange Visits** were a low-cost, but exciting way (for the participants) to see and meet individuals that they would not normally encounter. See table below for summary description:

TYPE OF EXCHANGE VISIT	PURPOSE	RELATIONSHIPS	# COUNTIES	DURATION
Peer Group Meeting	Learning, Promote unity	Somewhat Familiar	1	≤1 day
Overnight Exchange Visits	Peer influence, Learning	Strangers	2	Multi-day
Commemorative Event	Networking, Exposure	Somewhat Familiar	Multiple	≤1 day
Learning Events	Learning, Peer Influence	Acquaintances	Multiple	Multi-day
Virtual Exchange Visit	Networking, Exposure	Strangers	2	2-3 hours



SEQUENCE OF EXCHANGE VISITS

In Samburu and Bungoma, counties where female genital mutilation is still practiced, the sequence of exchanges with Elders/Cultural Leaders emerged with the goal of first understanding the current initiatives and progress against FGM, followed by opportunities that responded to gaps in knowledge and practice while also inspiring individuals to identify key actions they could take to be part of prevention and response efforts. The sequence included: (1) peer group meetings; (2) overnight exchange visits; (3) participation in commemorative event; followed by a (4) learning event. This approach helped to identify which individuals and sub-groups were already knowledgeable and committed to end FGM and provided space to promote unified efforts and learning across the different sub-clans.



RESULTS

In the words of the Sabaot Supreme Council of Elders, these exchanges, with particular attention to the multi-day exchange visit with the Bungoma Elders served as “a clarion call to action”. It marked a new journey whereby the Sabaot Elders learned about the transformation underway in Samburu to end FGM while still upholding cultural practices and values that do not harm girls and women. They also learned more about the law and punishments associated with promoting and practicing FGM from the Anti-FGM Board and witnessed the Maa Declaration to abandon FGM in Laikipia, Kenya. Through these engagements, the Council set out a roadmap to educate and engage all Clans on FGM, and to secure their commitment to end the practice in Mount Elgon – which included a new round of [peer group] meetings and community-level dialogues with all Sub-tribe Elders, Sub-clan Chairmen, Women Leaders, and those who have traditionally carried out FGM. It is estimated that over 800 people have been reached through these efforts. Before the end of 2023, the Supreme Council of Elders expect to sign their own Declaration against FGM. Perhaps most importantly, they have already started taking measures to protect girls and prevent FGM from taking place in their communities.

REFLECTIONS ON TRANSFORMATION

Without dedicated studies, it is beyond the scope of this brief to indicate which type of exchange is most impactful, or whether the combination of exchanges is needed to inspire new leadership and action. However, in the spirit of thought leadership, it is possible to note unique elements in ‘how’ these exchanges were implemented which may have helped to generate such positive results, and maybe promote replication in other counties as learning points...

- **Peer Group Meetings** – start with a smaller number of individuals to establish a positive rapport and create space for a more relaxed and intimate dialogue. Then working with selected Champions from within the group, plan for further engagements with other sub-groups.
- **Overnight Exchange Visits** – create a program that provides time for socializing, celebrating the unique aspects of each culture, and entertainment – such as visiting tourist attractions, alongside the learning. Alert the participants on any speeches, songs, presentations so that they can prepare in advance.
- **Commemorative Events** – are important opportunities to recognize the new Champions and help them to connect with and learn from others.
- **Learning Events** – formal workshops that respond to the specific information needs/requests from the participants.

Conclusion

While the programme did not set out to offer five different types of exchange visits, it was a natural development in response to the social & behaviour change process inherent in bringing about new commitments to end FGM. In each instance, the programme recognized that the team was beginning a journey, learning from those already further along, with those not yet started.