



## Anti-Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Champions in Samburu, Kenya Lead Campfire Dialogue with Morans: Key Highlights & Lessons to Guide Programming

### INTRODUCTION

On the International Day of the Girl Child, the Gender, Culture, Youth and Sports Department for Samburu County organized two activities in Ngilai Village, Samburu East– an isolated, hard-to-reach location with limited infrastructure and services. Due to reported cases of Beading<sup>1</sup> of young girls in this particular community, the National and County Government sought to hold two major events there. This first event - supported by a number of international and national organizations and programmes – was designed to bring attention to the rights of girls and women. Approximately 350 members of the community participated in the talks held by Elders, Civil Society, and Government – see photos below.



The second event revolved around a dialogue with Morans, a group of young men aged 13 to 17 known as warriors (Lkiseku) due to their nomadic and traditional lifestyle, and which was attended by 100 adolescent boys and men and facilitated entirely by Elders/Cultural Leaders who are leading efforts to end FGM. The Samburu County Gender Sector Working Group (GSWG) identified the need to engage this particular group of men because the practice of FGM influences their marital decisions, as well as promotion through the cultural ranks. This brief will highlight some of the key ways that the programme has begun engaging with this target group, along with lessons and recommendations that other partners could adopt to maximize reach and effectiveness.

<sup>1</sup> Beading traditionally involves selecting a girl in the community who will be available for Moran male within the clan as a sexual partner. Girls who are beaded are limited in their choices, cannot make decision on their sexual rights and are shamed if/when they become pregnant.

## ADAPTING OUR APPROACH TO MEET THE MEN

The Programme engaged key Samburu Elders (recognized AFGM Champions) to select the time and location of the meeting, and the Elders led all aspects of the gathering. Culturally, the Morans respect and recognize their Clan Leaders, and recognize them as the gate-keepers on culture<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, as cattle keepers, a primary concern among the Morans is finding water and pasture for their cattle so a meeting in the evening hours was essential when their animals were resting, along with choosing a space where they could monitor their animals as well as ensure their own security. As such, the meeting was held between 8:30pm to 11.00 pm on community lands used for grazing. There was a large bonfire and goat roasting.

## KEY TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

The discussion, facilitated by a Senior Chief (and AFGM Champion) took place around the campfire and covered the following topics: Child beading; FGM; Child Marriage; and promoting education for boys and girls.

## CRITICAL ISSUES/OBSERVATIONS EMERGING FROM THE DISCUSSION

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| <p><b>Prevailing belief that Morans must marry a girl who has undergone the ritual (FGM)</b> – all the participants highlighted cultural traditions which they were taught and fears about their standing among other men in the community if they do not follow this tradition.</p>  | <p><b>Samburu boys &amp; men need assurance from Elders/ Cultural Leaders.</b></p>                |
| <p><b>Re-emergence<sup>3</sup> of beading in isolated communities in Samburu.</b> The men also acknowledged that bride price has been paid for girls who have been beaded and they will need those assets to be returned. At the same time, some girls who have been beaded are unwilling to take another life path, i.e. returning to school or seeking marriage.</p>  | <p><b>Need information and enforcement of the law.</b></p>  |
| <p><b>Child marriage is routine across Samburu</b> – the men acknowledged the benefits of education and allowing girls to complete their schooling before marriage. At the same time, they are concerned that girls who are educated may not be willing to marry them due to their traditional lifestyle. Marrying girls at a young age has assured them that they will have a family.</p>  | <p><b>Access to education &amp; economic alternatives are needed for both boys and girls.</b></p> |
| <p><b>Recognition that sexual relations differ when girls/women have not be circumcised</b> – some Morans shared experience where sex with a woman who has not undergone FGM is more pleasurable for both partners. They believe that ‘those who are cut’ do not enjoy sex.</p>   | <p><b>Norms around reproductive health &amp; rights may be changing.</b></p>                      |
| <p><b>Awareness on the Kisima Declaration among Morans is low</b> – most boys/men are not aware of the formal stance of the Elders/Cultural Leaders; they acknowledged they respect the Elders and will follow their guidance. However, they need assurance that the women they marry will be blessed by the Elders.</p>  | <p><b>Elders &amp; Cultural Leaders continue to be very influential.</b></p>                      |
| <p><b>Office of the Chief is vacant<sup>4</sup></b> - the absence of this public service function in this location creates fear and uncertainty in the community, especially given that the nearest Police station is 40 km away and there is no public transportation in the area. This Office plays a key role engaging with Cultural Leaders/Elders on matters of peace and security and helps to facilitate reporting on GBV.</p> | <p><b>Engage government on the process of filling this vacant post.</b></p>                       |

<sup>2</sup> This includes making determinations on the rites of passage for girls and boys which traditionally was marked by FGM in the case of girls, and male circumcision for boys.

<sup>3</sup> The Morans acknowledged that three girls below age 11 had been beaded in the community where the meeting was held.

<sup>4</sup> The former Chief was sentenced in court on charges of GBV– which included subjecting his wife to burns and other forms of physical violence.

## PROMISING PRACTICE TO REPLICATE

Post-meeting reflections noted the importance of having Elders read the Declaration Against FGM/ Child Marriage, to address prevailing rumours and misinformation. Educational videos explaining FGM are impactful – boys and men when they understand female anatomy and the nature of the procedure typically commit to ending FGM. Elders are respected in Samburu and are the right people to transmit messages that will be accepted by the community – especially boys and men. Finally, community events that showcase common traditions around gathering and food provide a safe space for discussion.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO CONTINUE ENGAGEMENT WITH THIS KEY GROUP OF BOYS AND MEN

The Morans would like more time to meet with Elders to continue the dialogue and learn more about what is expected of them. They requested that the meeting be carried out in the forest where they can care for their animals, but also have adequate privacy during the daylight hours.

*\*Morans are struggling economically given the increasing challenges in their traditional nomadic lifestyle - difficulties in caring for their cattle amid the climate crisis, changes in land access, and continuing insecurity in some locations due to cattle rustling. While they have not explicitly made this request, education and alternative livelihood opportunities are needed to improve overall security in the County, while also helping the Morans to recognize and support the education of their children and meet their family needs.*

## ADDITIONAL ACTIONS NEEDED

- Girls below age 18 who have been beaded or married (and their families) need alternatives to enable them to chart another life course; families & communities are reliant on the economic gains from these practices and are therefore unwilling to stop, report or seek justice.
- The protective and preventive benefits of education cannot be realized in remote parts of Samburu without alternative learning opportunities, such as evening classes. Morans, and child/teenage mothers are unlikely to prioritize education if they themselves have not benefitted; efforts to break the cycle of drop-out are urgently needed.
- Elders/Cultural Leaders are seeking new ways to support safe alternative rites of passage for girls to retain positive cultural practices and halt those that are unsafe and harmful to women and girls. Partners should continue to embrace and support Elders to lead this transformation.
- Education on the law is vital to bringing about an end to FGM. In Samburu, where there is high respect for authority and law enforcement, increased awareness translates into greatly impacts behaviour.

