



Thematic Session II:

Reaching the FGM Communities: role of Outreach, Public Information and Media Campaigns

Recommendations

It is the responsibility of governments and institutions to tackle FGM in its entirety. Modern FGM campaigns aim to cause wide spread cultural change, this cultural shift cannot be achieved through legislative action alone, rather the broad and varied interventions, public education and communication strategies is also needed. The community needs to be, informed about the basic facts, engaged in participatory dialogue to challenge traditional social conventions, and persuaded to abandon FGM, which is not in the best interests of the child and violates human rights. The media was acknowledged by all participants as a vitally important and powerful agent for informing and facilitating social change. Media are often perceived as credible sources of information and can influence all levels of decision making processes. The following are recommendations for utilising the media to assist in programs working for the elimination of FGM.

Increasing the reach and scope of FGM campaigns:

1. To ensure that adequate financing is provided by governments and donors for media projects.
2. To plan FGM campaigns with strong information distribution and communication using all available media channels, private and public, to reach all levels of society. Including debates, talk shows, documentaries, cinemas, educational curricula services for radio and television, as well as more innovative, unconventional or traditional forms of communication such as music, poetry, drama, and testimonials or experience sharing between people from all backgrounds and countries. Also, fiction can help propose a change in behaviour and people's attitudes towards female genital mutilation. Some forms of media such as movies may effectively reach social groups traditionally excluded due to cultural or language barriers.
3. To make effective use of the existing cultural groups, for example religious, youth or professional groups, to spread news and advocate against FGM. Actively involving and drawing on the experience of organizations working in the field will help in the appropriate formulation and distribution of efficient anti-FGM strategies through various media.
4. Encourage governments to provide support for victims of FGM, and advertise the availability of these services. To provide awareness about services in order to meet needs of communities, to provide greater coherency between different stages of FGM campaigns; for example providing alternatives to FGM, where appropriate, and medical services.
5. To specifically target the male population, with particular focus on fathers, in FGM campaign

Engaging the press and Media:

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Conference Secretariat: telephone +202 25253349 +2012 5522852 +2016 6071442
email: cairodeclarationplus5@npwj.org



6. To build the capacity of the media and provide media personnel with training and education about FGM, particularly linking FGM issues into a wider context of development, gender inequality, reproductive and human rights, in order to overcome initial hostilities, and ideas about harmful traditional practices, and increase the quality of reporting. Acquiring the full support of the media is crucial, since they must have full conviction in order to be credible to others.
7. To acknowledge and appreciate media personnel as partners to engage with, journalists can become activists who independently promote the abolition of FGM.
8. Existing media networks should be promoted and used to facilitate the creation of further partnerships between CSOs, NGOs, government departments and the media to advocate for changes in community, policy and legislation.
9. To organise a federation or network of media practitioners, creating a critical mass of people advocating against FGM
10. To partner with professional personnel and traditional community leaders such as doctors, religious leaders, local personalities to act as role models and attract media attention and legitimize FGM activism. Engaging local leaders is instrumental to creating social change. Specialised days such as the UN designated day on the 6th of February can also be used to promote FGM projects. Religious leaders, for example could have a particularly effective and trusted influence in many layers of the population.
11. To develop a code of ethics for media people in relation to FGM campaign, including outside Africa, where often media speak about FGM practices in a way which creates a negative image of all African culture.

Strengthening the capacity of the media to fight against FGM:

12. To ensure adequate integration of information, awareness and communication activities in all projects and programs aimed at preventing female genital mutilation.
13. The content of distributed information must focus on rights, dignity and not only health issues. Messages must be consistent in order to facilitate cultural change, especially in religious matters, where leaders and scholars should be involved to avoid incorrect and obsolete interpretation.
14. To increase bridge building programmes, and give visibility and value to the positive examples of abandonment of the practice by giving them maximum importance through different media.
15. To specialise messages, programs and methods to be appropriate for particular social, age, sex and responsibility groups. Especially in reporting dramatic events.
16. To analyze successful information and communication initiatives, draw on strategies for dealing with the cultural sensitivity of the topic, societal resistance to change and to take inspiration from them in order to enable an evolution in how we approach media campaigns and facilitate behavioural change.
17. To build capacity and improve the usage of new technologies which allow an individual to interface with people from all levels of society, removed from their immediate community and social pressures. These modern media are particularly valuable as they offer an interactive communication environment which supports individuals in their choices and make visible the change that is happening in public opinion about the FGM, especially among young people.
18. To develop and provide mechanisms for monitoring and assessing the impact of media and specific media campaigns on the change of attitudes and behaviours, in relation to female genital mutilation, for example through periodic focus groups, press clippings analysis, polls etc. In particular, research needs to be done to improve ways of evaluating the influence of media programs.



19. To increase use of current networks and sharing practices or create new centres for documentation and recording of FGM programmes in a way that facilitates information sharing and exchange across country borders, for example through a website, or concrete and scientifically based manuals and suggestions. Training on documentation processes will improve the usefulness of such record.