

Putting it all together: a case study from Nigeria



Reflections on Phase II of the UNFPA-UNICEF
Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation



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An awareness campaign about FGM by UNICEF.
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Cover:

A young girl from Ekiti, Nigeria is already calling for an end to FGM.
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The Joint Programme in action in Nigeria

Some 20 million Nigerian women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), representing about 10 per cent of the global total. Many more – nearly 10 million – are at risk of being cut by 2030.



Women of Takalafiya-Lapai village.
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With some 10 million girls at risk of FGM in Nigeria, the country's work on abandonment is crucial to meeting the global commitment to end FGM by 2030, as called for in the Sustainable Development Goals. The Nigerian case also reveals the complexity of the challenge: The country comprises about 374 identifiable ethnic groups, with the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo as the major ones. Each speaks its own distinct indigenous language, and practises a variety of forms of FGM in different contexts and with different rationales, although taming female sexuality seems to be the predominant one.

While sociocultural beliefs vary across communities, they are often sustained by the gender inequality embedded in Nigeria's mostly patriarchal cultures. FGM remains widespread in the five Nigerian states (Ebonyi, Ekiti, Imo, Osun and Oyo) targeted by the Joint Programme, with regional and ethnic variations in prevalence. In Phase II, a rigorous baseline study in 2015 analysed the social dynamics in different communities.

Pay attention to context

Paying attention to local context is particularly important in Nigeria because the country is so large, so culturally varied and so dynamic. It is one of three countries (along with China and India) that constitute 37 per cent of the projected growth of the world's urban population by 2050. Urban environments, with their distinctive media landscapes, typically require very different kinds

Nigeria comprises some 374 different ethnic groups, each with a distinct language. Many forms of FGM are practised, with many different cultural meanings.

of interventions and activities than rural communities, as noted in the 2015 baseline study. Because city dwellers typically remain close to their rural traditions and extended families, however, reaching urban centres can have wide ramifications.

The baseline study, which covered the five high-prevalence states (in addition to Lagos), comprised both a quantitative knowledge, attitudes and practices assessment and a qualitative study on social norms influencing FGM.

The assessment described and analysed community and cultural dynamics and perceptions of FGM in the different states, which informed the design of the Nigeria programme. The study provided disaggregated data on the prevalence of FGM, the drivers of the practice and the role of each stakeholder. Key findings are summarized on page 9.

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Women paramount leaders in Ife-Ife restate their commitment to end FGM.
© UNICEF, Nigeria

Bolster legal frameworks

A crucial achievement in the early part of Phase II was passage of Nigeria's comprehensive Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015, a bill that had been under discussion for years. In addition to outlawing FGM and other previously unacknowledged forms of violence, the act offers comprehensive medical, psychological, social and legal assistance to survivors. The push for the bill by the Joint Programme team and partners was intense: Key stakeholders were engaged in interactive dialogues and consultations, and briefed on the regional and global resolutions in alignment with the bill. One-on-one discussions were organized, SMS messages urged people to contact their representatives, and supportive editorials were published.

The policy challenge did not end there: Nigeria's legal landscape is an overlay of federal, state and customary jurisdictions. Harmonization of these requires many steps and can result in wide variations in applicable law, particularly regarding familial matters. Strategic partnerships with political actors and community-based organizations have facilitated adoption of the national statute at the state level. At the time of this publication, 14 of Nigeria's 36 states had passed laws prohibiting FGM, while advocacy continues in the others.

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The message that the federal government stands against FGM has been widely publicized across multiple media channels (see related story on social media, page 17), and in community forums, schools and health centres. This is a critical first step in ending impunity. More needs to be done in terms of judicial responses and enforcement, however.

The National Policy and Plan of Action for the Elimination of FGM in Nigeria (2013-2017) has been widely disseminated to ensure alignment with the provisions of the new law. Information about current laws and the mechanics of application has reached nearly 10,000 people including legislators, government actors and community members. A workshop for lawyers addressed interpretation and implementation of the new act, and 2,000 copies of the workshop report were shared with community service organizations, government partners and youth organizations. Multisector state teams, including health workers, social workers, child protection networks, social media advocates and the Federation of Women Lawyers have been engaged to work with schools and communities, fuelling momentum.

“A person who incites, aids, abets, or counsels another person to commit the offence provided for in subsection (2) of this section commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 2 years or to a fine not exceeding N100,000.00 or both.”

– Article 6, Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015

Get endorsements from the highest levels

On the 2016 International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM, the National Response Plan to FGM was launched by the Office of the First Lady in Abuja in partnership with the Joint Programme and several relevant Nigerian ministries. The launch encouraged the engagement of others. “I hear the cry of a little girl, she cries from the pain afflicted on her, she cried yesterday, cries today and may cry tomorrow, will you help me stop the pain?” said Dolapo Osinbajo, the wife of the Vice-President of Nigeria, as she issued a collective call for everyone to join the campaign to end FGM.

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