



**Position Paper on the Socio-Economic Implications of Female Genital  
Mutilation in The Gambia**

## Introduction

Think Young Women (TYW) reiterates its grave concern over the proposed repeal of the Women's (Amendment) Act, 2015 which prohibits female circumcision in The Gambia. We note the sensitive debates currently spreading in our communities and on various platforms, often leading to the dissemination of misleading information and the attacks on the integrity and work of women's rights and development actors who continue to invest their energies and resources toward advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in The Gambia and beyond.

As a women's rights non-profit organisation and member of the coalition of CSOs calling for the eradication of this harmful practice, it is our position that female circumcision also known as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a perpetuation of adverse discrimination against women and girls, and a violation of their fundamental human rights. By this paper, we seek to provide a comprehensive review of the socio-economic implications of the continued practice and entrenchment of FGM in Gambian culture.

This position paper is submitted in light of the consultations currently being led by the National Assembly Joint Committee of Health and Gender on the Women's (Amendment) Bill 2024. We hope that this paper, in addition to the contributions of other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), will provide guidance to the National Assembly and bring clarity to the need to maintain and enhance current legal protections against FGM for our women and girls.

## Our Position

Our position remains that FGM is a harmful cultural practice that has no place in a progressive society. Despite its severe socio-economic implications, it remains a prevalent and deeply entrenched social practice in many parts of The Gambia. The practice not only violates fundamental human rights but also perpetuates discriminatory attitudes and economic disparities that hinder social progress.

According to the [2019/2020 Demographic and Health Survey](#) (DHS) conducted by [The Gambia Bureau of Statistics](#), 73% of women aged 15 to 49 years in The Gambia and 46% of girls aged 0 to 14 years have been circumcised. This paper delves into the multifaceted repercussions of FGM on individuals, families, communities, and the broader socio-economic fabric of Gambian society.

- 1. Discrimination and Social Marginalisation:** Uncut women face severe discrimination within their communities. They are ostracised from social gatherings, with their food left uneaten, and in The Gambia, they are subjected to derogatory names such as "solima." This marginalisation extends to exclusion from important ceremonies, impacting their social standing and sense of belonging. Mothers who have not undergone FGM often see their children devalued within society. This discrimination extends to children being viewed as less significant or unworthy, perpetuating cycles of inequality and undermining family dynamics.
- 2. Low Socio-Economic Development Indicators:** It is noteworthy that 20 out of the 30 countries where FGM is practised including The Gambia are considered "least

developed.”<sup>1</sup> This signals a possible linkage between socio-economic development indicators for individuals, families and the country and the prevalence of the practice.

3. **Child Valuation and Marriageability Status:** Due to the light in which circumcised girls are viewed in practicing communities, FGM is seen as an investment by parents to prepare their girls for the marriage market. It is a method they perceive to help preserve the virginity of girls, thus, earning them honour and pride once married. However, we continue to see over and over again in our communities, circumcised girls falling pregnant before marriage. This marriageability factor continues to propel the objectification of girls and women as commodities and not complete human beings with rights, needs, aspirations and a desire to contribute to the growth and advancement of their families, communities and country.
4. **Financial Burden on Families and Communities:** In addition to the cost of FGM itself, significant amounts of money are spent on elaborate ceremonies following the cutting, to signify the rite of passage and the initiation of girls into womanhood. These elaborate ceremonies place a financial strain on families. While these expenses cover the cost of gifts for the girl, and in some instances her mother, feeding guests attending the ceremony as well as payment or gifts for the circumciser and her team, expenses could otherwise be directed towards essential costs such as education, healthcare, or other needs of the family.
5. **Increased Burden on the Health System:** Beyond the immediate health risks associated with FGM, such as infections and complications during childbirth, the long-term socio-economic burden includes increased healthcare costs, lost productivity due to health issues, and diminished quality of life.  
The economic cost of managing FGM-related health complications further strains our already overburdened health system, thus preventing the efficient utilisation of our under-resourced health budget. According to the [WHO Cost Calculator](#), if The Gambia continues its current course of FGM prevalence, 1.3 million girls are projected to undergo FGM and the health cost related to this is projected to rise to USD 8.4 million per year. However, if we can completely eradicate the practice in The Gambia, about 870,000 girls will be protected from it and by 2047, the country will save about USD 5.7 million annually. If current trends persist, the number of girls and women subjected to FGM will significantly rise in the next 15 years, thus resulting in a rise in the national costs for health care provision to them.
6. **Diminished Quality of Life and Limited Performance in the Labour Market**  
Given the health consequences faced by women and girls subjected to FGM, their ability to contribute to economic development diminishes. Affected women who join the labour force are at risk of below-standard performance due to potential long-term health implications of the practice as opposed to women not subjected to the practice.<sup>2</sup> A study

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<sup>1</sup> Impacts of FGM/C: Reduced Life Chances <https://www.orchidproject.org/about-fgc/impacts-of-fgc/>

<sup>2</sup> FGM: The Development Costs <https://medinstgenderstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/endFGM-factsheet-EN-online4.pdf>

in Gambia found that due to FGM, one out of every three circumcised women requires a medical gynaecological examination.<sup>3</sup>

### **Research Insights and Policy Implications**

Research from sub-Saharan Africa<sup>4</sup> underscores that socioeconomic and demographic factors significantly influence the prevalence of FGM. Wealth status emerges as a key determinant, with women from poorer households more likely to undergo the practice and face exacerbated socio-economic challenges. Education plays a critical role, as higher levels of education are associated with reduced likelihood of FGM among women and their daughters, highlighting the importance of educational interventions in combating this practice.

### **Our Recommendations for Your Consideration**

Emphasising that FGM has several negative implications on women and girls subjected to it including socioeconomic implications, we appeal to the National Assembly of The Gambia to consider our recommendations in addition to other recommendations made by members of the CSO coalition against the practice.

- 1. Maintain Legal Protections:** Maintain and strengthen the current legal prohibitions of FGM and promote the enforcement of punitive measures against perpetrators. Additionally, legal provisions should prioritise protecting the rights of women and girls who refuse to undergo the practice.
- 2. Promote Community Engagement and Education:** Implementing comprehensive advocacy programs, including focus group discussions, peer teaching, and mentorship initiatives, are essential in enhancing public awareness and inspiring voluntary abandonment of harmful norms and practices. We appeal that the National Assembly through its members in various constituencies support efforts at the grassroots level to engage with the public to dispel myths and raise awareness about the harms of FGM.
- 3. Support Resource Allocation for Healthcare and Support Services:** Investing in accessible and culturally sensitive healthcare services for survivors of FGM is imperative. We appeal that the National Assembly allocates resources to provide comprehensive reproductive health services, psychosocial support, and implement programmes to address health complications resulting from the practise.
- 4. Support Research and Evidence Generation:** Given that FGM has been proven to have adverse health implications on women and girls subjected to it, it is natural that most research efforts into the practice focus on its health dimensions. However, there is a need to further study the direct and indirect implications of the practice on the socioeconomic development indicators for individuals, communities and the country. Thus, we appeal to the National Assembly to task and allocate resources to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare in collaboration with the Gambia Bureau of Statistics, to study these

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<sup>3</sup> Socioeconomic and Reproductive Health Outcomes of Female Genital Mutilation  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311269745\\_Socioeconomic\\_and\\_Reproductive\\_Health\\_Outcomes\\_of\\_Female\\_Genital\\_Mutilation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311269745_Socioeconomic_and_Reproductive_Health_Outcomes_of_Female_Genital_Mutilation)

<sup>4</sup> Ahinkorah, Bright Opoku, et al., "Socio-economic and demographic determinants of female genital mutilation in sub-Saharan Africa: analysis of data from demographic and health surveys," *Reproductive health* 17 (2020): 1-14.  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12978-020-01015-5>

socio-economic implications, thereby identifying linkages between the harmful practice and the country's development trajectory.

### **Conclusion**

The socio-economic implications of FGM in The Gambia underscore the urgent need for comprehensive, evidence-based interventions that address the root causes of this harmful practice. Efforts should focus on community engagement, education, advocacy, and policy reforms to eliminate FGM and promote gender equality and sustainable development. By addressing the socio-economic determinants of FGM, The Gambia can move closer to achieving its developmental aspirations while safeguarding the rights and well-being of its women and girls.

**Submitted and Signed**

**This 8<sup>th</sup> day of May 2024**

**To the National Assembly Joint Committee of Health and Gender on the Women's (Amendment) Bill 2024**