

# DO NO HARM

“It is a privilege, not a right, to hear someone’s story.”

Do No Harm is critical principle for empowering and protecting women and activists working to end female genital mutilation (FGM). It provides a shared vision and set of approaches to help unify and grow the movement to end FGM – and protect vulnerable groups from harm and resistance.

## In practice, Do No Harm means...



### PHOTOGRAPHY AND IMAGES

Photography and images communicate a clear message about what you believe and value.

We...

- ▶ Never use graphic imagery (e.g. bloodied razor blades or children in pain) which can prompt flashbacks for survivors and stigmatise and/or disrespect the dignity of those who have undergone FGM.
- ▶ Always share positive images of women and girls. We ask ourselves the question - does this image respect the women and children involved? Does it communicate their dignity and value?
- ▶ Make sure people in images have given their consent.



### WHAT WE SAY AND HOW WE SAY IT

We believe in the power of positive stories of change to raise awareness about ending FGM, and inspire individuals and communities to question their beliefs on the issue. However, sharing personal stories comes with some risk to those who speak out.

We...

- ▶ Celebrate success in ending FGM to show how change can happen.
- ▶ Use facts and stories to spark discussion and dialogue.
- ▶ Never force someone to tell more of their story than they want to - they should feel comfortable with what they are sharing.
- ▶ Ensure those speaking out about their experiences have access to support mechanisms.
- ▶ Make sure those speaking out know exactly how their story will be shared (on social media, in a blog, etc).
- ▶ Ask if we're writing for this community, rather than about them.
- ▶ Tell someone's story using their own words.



#### Examples of inappropriate language and imagery



#### Why it should be avoided



#### Risk of harm



FGM is a disgusting/horrific/abhorrent practice

People don't feel this language applies to them or the practice of FGM, thus closing down opportunities for debate and reflection. Language implies that those who have survived FGM are "horrific" or "revolting."

Can be insensitive and hurtful to women and girls who have undergone FGM. Can stigmatise communities and reinforce the practice of FGM as a symbol of cultural identity and resistance.

Poor little girls are subjected to FGM

Language patronises rather than empowers girls.

Can alienate individuals who might otherwise be activists for the cause.

Imagery of girls in pain, of unsterile equipment, blood, razor blades and knives.

Frames FGM as solely a health issue.

Can promote medicalisation rather than abandonment of FGM. Can trigger traumatic flashbacks for survivors.

## AVOID FOCUSING NARROWLY ON HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OR THE LAW

Focusing too narrowly on the health consequences of FGM may lead to medicalisation (health workers carrying out FGM) or shifts to types of FGM that are perceived to be less severe, rather than total abandonment.

- ▶ All forms of FGM are violence against women and girls, and an abuse of their human rights. Laws against FGM are important but do not succeed in isolation.

There is no silver bullet. A holistic response to ending FGM is required: community approaches and social change initiatives are needed to complement the law.

Think about how ending FGM can be integrated into broader efforts for child welfare, health and development e.g. child, early and forced marriages, maternal health, and education.

- ▶ Safeguard children, survivors and others

Your project might highlight health problems related to FGM, or may make people aware of the pressure for their own child to undergo FGM. Be prepared to link people to support services (such as medical services, helplines, community groups - where they are available).



### PROMOTE LOCALLY-LED CHANGE

If communities feel that change to end FGM is being imposed from afar, this may result in increased support for FGM. Effective change to end FGM is locally led, and based on deep local knowledge and visible local leadership.

Use locally-led and culturally relevant communications to spark discussion and dialogue, rather than lecturing people.



The Girl Generation promotes the **Do No Harm** principle and how to apply it across the end FGM movement.

For more information see

[www.thegirlgeneration.org](http://www.thegirlgeneration.org)