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Inequity in Health Persists: Should Switzerland Be Concerned?

How socio-economic empowerment can end Female Genital Mutilation

I too, I am worthy of care and kindness...

By Winfrida W. Makuru

Naomi Julius (19 years old), is a married young mother with one child. Her husband is still in secondary school. Naomi dropped out of school in standard six where her parents failed to provide for her school needs. Naomi went through female genital mutilation just like other girls in her village as the practice is part of their cultural initiation rites to womanhood.



The Tanzanian Minister of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children Hon. Ummu Mwalimu visited CDF's booth displaying products done by girls in CDF's clubs during 2018 International day of a girl child

Female Genital Mutilation is high in Tanzania

Naomi and her family live in Nyabitoju village, one of the villages in Mara Region, the Northern part of Tanzania. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), teenage pregnancy and child marriage are common in this area in Tanzania. Girls face multiple forms of violence, like physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and financial violence. Some of the practices have led to death.

In Tanzania one in three (1 in 3) girls marry before their 18th birthday about 5% of the population. 35% of women aged 15 to 46 were mutilated before the age of one (2015-16 TDHS-MIS). By 2016, one in four (1 in 4) adolescents aged 15-19 had begun child bearing (2015-16 TDHS-MIS). Research also indicates that child brides are at increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS and that they and their babies are more likely to die during labour. They are also more likely to suffer from obstetric fistula, miscarriages, preeclampsia and other complications of pregnancy and childbirth. In addition to these risks to their life and health, child brides often drop out of school and are less likely to develop professional and vocational skills (Scheibel Smed, L. and Goulds S. (2017)). In 2017, Children's Dignity Forum (CDF) a child rights organization and a lead agency in ending Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, teenage pregnancy and harmful practices that affect the wellbeing and dignity of girls and young women in Tanzania, visited Naomi's village, Nyabitoju. In collaboration with village leaders, CDF mobilized girls and young mothers to join girls club and imparted them with required knowledge on Female Genital Mutilation, Child marriage, Teenage pregnancy, life skills and entrepreneurship. Naomi came to be among the members who joined the girls group.



Young women receiving entrepreneurship skills from Evans Rwamuhuru, CDF's Head of Field operations in Mpwapwa District, Dodoma Region.

Through empowerment of girls FGM can be stopped

After intensive training, Girls group members prepared action plans aimed at mobilizing community to end FGM and sensitizing girls to start entrepreneurship activities and joining Girls group. Today Naomi has succeeded to start and run her tailoring business where she gets income and teaches other girls tailoring activities.

“I was encouraged by a village chairperson to join the club. The village Chairperson told me, our group will be under CDF, the organization that fights against FGM, Child marriage as well as empowering young women and girls. Since I am FGM’s survivor, I was inspired to join the group of 15 members. CDF trained us on FGM, Child marriage, teenage pregnancy, life skills and entrepreneurship,” Said Naomi.

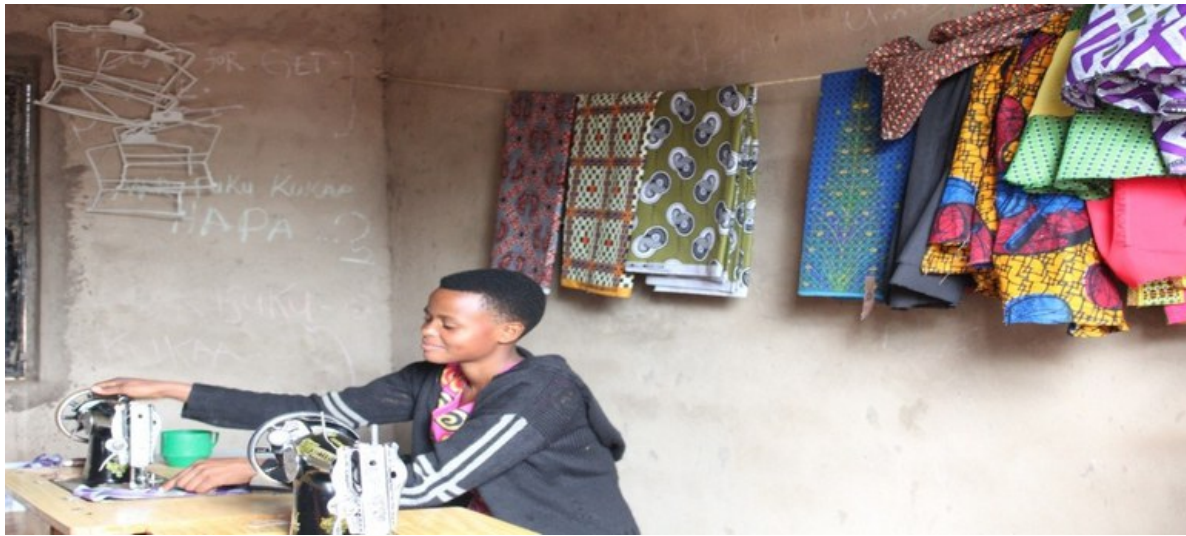
Income generating activities are vital for the self-esteem of these girls

Naomi earns an income from the tailoring business she is now running. *“I had no source of income, I am married and my husband is in secondary school. I decided to learn tailoring where I learnt from my friend. After training, I rented a sewing machine and began to work from home. Now I have bought my own sewing machine. I rented an office and I have started Vitenge (African fabrics) business where I go to Sirari (Border area between Kenya and Tanzania), to buy Vitenge (African fabrics) and sell them at my office,”* she said.

Naomi continues to explain, *“I am grateful to CDF, now I generate my own income, and make from Tsh. 20,000/- to Tsh. 30,000/- per week. I generate small profit from the business but it supports my family and I. Part of my profit I reinvest in buying more Vitenge (African fabrics) and the rest I help my husband with his school needs. Now I am able to run my life without being dependent on anybody.”*

Naomi faced number of challenges, which pushed her to the next level, then to where she is to date. It was a large task but she said through commitment and hardworking, everything became possible,” *It was not a simple task to me, I met with number of challenges including lack of capital and family issues but through commitment and working hard, I continued to thrive for the best,*” she said.

Naomi and other girls who were trained by CDF, run campaign and projects in schools and in public areas reaching young people and elders in their village advocating against the harmful practices such as FGM and child marriage.



Naomi Julius in her tailoring office.

Naomi’s story is one among many stories of girls around Tanzania who have gone through gender-based violence and resisted to give up. Despite the embedded patriarchal system in Tanzania, girls and women have thrived and continue to seek for their rights and meaningful change in their communities.

Children’s Dignity Forum has been collaborating with the Government, authorities, Police force, development partners, civil societies, Higher learning institutions and communities in safeguarding rights and welfare of the child especially a girl child in all levels across Tanzania. In collaboration with local government authorities (LGAs), CDF has developed 22 clubs for girls who are out of school in Tarime District, Mara Region. Club members are girls and young mothers affected by child pregnancy, child marriage, FGM, school dropouts and other forms of gender based violence.

In these clubs, girls and young mothers (teen mother) are trained in entrepreneurship, batik tie and dye, soap making, tailoring, and making beads products. They are also supported with loans and start up kits to run their businesses. Alongside the business management skills these girls have been getting, CDF has been training them on sexual and reproductive health education, self-awareness and life skills and reporting of gender based violence cases. CDF has been working with support from European Commission (EC) through Plan International in Mara Region supporting girls and young women’s welfare.

CDF has been implementing a project “**Supporting Child Mothers Development and Rights in Tanzania**” funded by Baillie Gifford PLC through FORWARD – UK. The project aimed to contribute to socio-economic empowerment of young mothers in Mpwapwa District, Dodoma Region.

To ensure their social-economic empowerment, the project has capacitated young mothers with entrepreneurship and business management skills. From the skills gained, young women were able to develop business ideas and start income-generating activities. Through this project, CDF supported young women with start-up capital to kick-start their businesses.

Every girl in Tanzania is worthy of care and kindness.

References

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