

Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change Phase I and II (2008-2017)



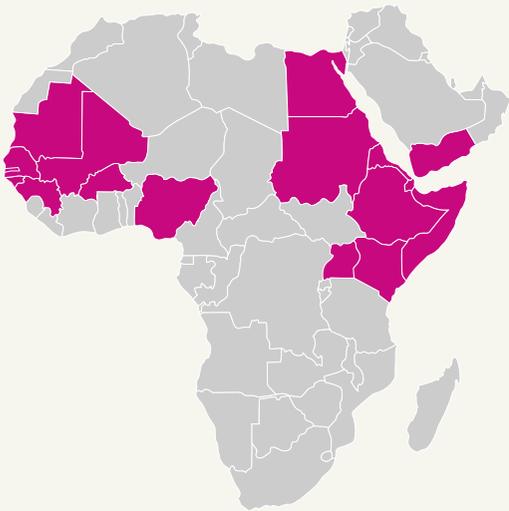
Evaluation Offices of UNFPA and UNICEF

2019

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which, and under what circumstances, the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has contributed to accelerating the abandonment of FGM over the last ten years. The evaluation also provides recommendations on how to accelerate change to end FGM.

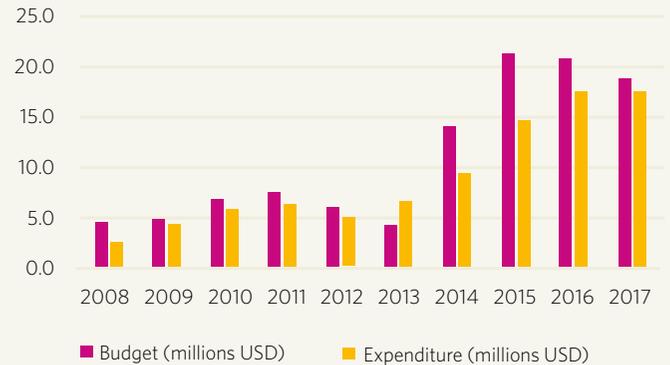
Figure: Joint Programme Phase II geographic coverage



About the Joint Programme

The Joint Programme was initiated in 2008 following a UNFPA-organised global consultation, which concluded that the abandonment of FGM was urgent and that commitment and action were needed. The Joint Programme has expanded to cover 17 countries: 16 of which are in Africa, and Yemen. It is based upon a pooled funding system, with a budget of USD 109 million over ten years.

Figure: Annual budget and expenditure 2008-2017



Source: Atlas

EVALUATION APPROACH

The evaluation is a theory-based evaluation, drawing on the Joint Programme intervention logic, as represented in the evolving Joint Programme results frameworks. The guiding framework used for the evaluation is an evaluation matrix, consisting of evaluation questions, assumptions, indicators, data collection sources and tools.

The evaluation used a mixed methods design, comprising case studies, virtual case studies, desk review and an e-survey. A systems-based approach was used to map the key categories of stakeholders, disaggregated by human-rights roles and gender where possible.

Analysis was carried out using a range of techniques, including content analysis, comparative analysis, qualitative analysis and quantitative techniques such as financial analysis and trend analysis. The contribution of the programme to observed results was explored using qualitative comparative analysis and contribution analysis.



1,436 people (60% women) consulted through in depth interviews and community level focus group discussions



Extended desk review, including remote interviews in **12 countries**



500+ documents reviewed



Global and regional interviews with key stakeholders



In country case studies in **4 countries**



Global survey of 113 representatives from Joint Programme implementing partners



Analysis of financial and programme monitoring data

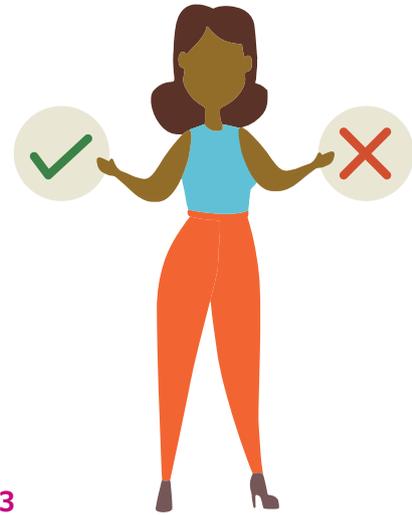
CONCLUSIONS



Conclusion 1

Added value and contributions of the Joint Programme towards FGM abandonment

The Joint Programme has contributed to notable achievements at the global level - including raising the profile of FGM within a global discussion and ensuring its presence within the international development agenda. The Joint Programme has also galvanised the support of established and emerging actors around the issue at national and sub-national levels. It has had important successes: strengthened national legal frameworks, improved coordination among national and sub-national actors, increased awareness around FGM-related health risks, changes in discourse related to FGM resulting in important taboo breaks, and even the final abandonment of the practice by meaningful proportions of communities within intervention areas.



Conclusion 3

Making strategic choices

Due to the magnitude of the FGM issue and limited funding, the Joint Programme is required to make strategic and sometimes difficult decisions regarding where to place its resources and efforts. During Phases I and II, the Joint Programme made a concerted and overall successful effort to draw on its comparative strengths, particularly around its strategic role as a convener of key FGM abandonment actors at the grassroots, national, regional, and global levels. This was appropriate given the magnitude and complexities of the problem and the need for collective action among FGM abandonment actors to address it. However, some elements of its current programming (such as care for FGM survivors) are less clearly aligned with the Joint Programme preventative change logic.



Conclusion 2

FGM abandonment within a context of social-norms change

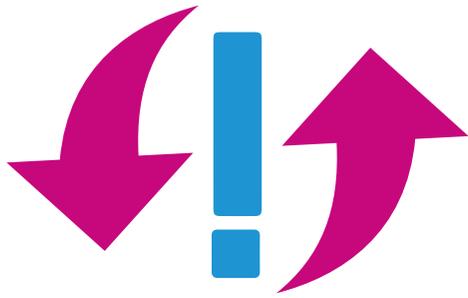
The sustained commitment of the Joint Programme to social-norms change around FGM abandonment is appropriate and highly valued by stakeholders, as social-norms change requires a long-term investment. However, the aspirational goals of the programme, while useful for FGM abandonment advocacy, set unrealistic expectations around what can be achieved within a relatively short timeframe. Current targets are largely designed to measure final changes in behaviour and do not adequately capture important progress towards full abandonment. This leads to gaps in capturing results and can risk undermining achievement.



Conclusion 4

Gender transformation

The Joint Programme is placing a stronger emphasis in Phase III on explicitly situating its FGM abandonment work within a gender equality perspective. However, the boundaries and scope of this work have not yet been defined and lack clarity. The comparative strengths of the Joint Programme in terms of gender equality appear to lie within its work on supporting the empowerment of women and girls and promoting positive interpersonal relationships between women and men at the community level. However, any expanded scope of work implies managing the risk of diluting the focus on FGM abandonment in the Joint Programme work.



Conclusion 5

Challenges around changing practices

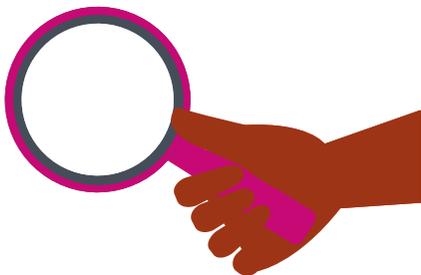
Changes in FGM practice have presented unexpected and evolving challenges for the Joint Programme. While these challenges have for the most part been recognized and appear to be important issues, evidence is lacking to fully understand their characteristics, the magnitude of the problem and potential consequences. As a result, the Joint Programme has attempted to adapt its programming but, without concrete evidence, it struggles to develop formalized, proactive strategies to address these changing dynamics.



Conclusion 7

Communications and messaging

The Joint Programme has made an overall concerted effort to use a diverse set of communication channels to raise awareness around the harmful effects of FGM. However, messaging has taken place outside of a formal communications strategy that is not always evidence-based, that requires amplification and scale-up and that has not harnessed the potential of a Communication for Development (C4D) approach. When targeting behaviour change, a C4D approach has the potential to provide more relevant messages that are palatable and actionable to target audiences. Framing future advocacy messaging within a gender transformative narrative may provide renewed energy to FGM advocacy messaging.



Conclusion 6

Evidence gaps and capitalizing on existing knowledge

The Joint Programme has supported important research on FGM (Phase I and II). However, there are still numerous and important evidence gaps in the FGM field that hinder the ability of the Joint Programme to make informed strategic decisions. There is ample room for more effective partnerships with research institutions and the Joint Programme has not sufficiently harnessed existing evidence on drivers of change from its implementation experiences.



Conclusion 8

Synergies across the global, regional, and country levels

The Joint Programme reach from the global headquarters level to the sub-national community level is a key strength. This holistic approach across levels provides the Joint Programme with additional credibility, linking grassroots interventions to global advocacy. In order to optimize potential linkages and synergies across levels, efficient co-ordination across all levels is crucial. In response to the Joint Programme Phase I evaluation, the regional level has been strengthened through expanded staffing and increased responsibilities. However, there remains scope for the regional level to be further strengthened in order to better facilitate synergies across levels.



Conclusion 9

Coordination and “jointness”

The joint programme structure is fit for purpose and has brought important benefits to the FGM abandonment work of both UNFPA and UNICEF. Even so, there is room to further strengthen coordination and “jointness”. In the context of United Nations reform, the working dynamics of the Joint Programme will likely be placed under greater scrutiny as more attention within the United Nations is placed on joint programming. In a small number of countries, coordination is sub-optimal, with limited joint planning, monitoring and reporting. Investments now to strengthen the joint elements of the programme could potentially produce significant benefits for the Joint Programme as well as contribute to important learning and improvements within the larger United Nations system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking the Joint Programme approach further

Recommendation 1

Continued engagement by UNFPA and UNICEF is essential to further sustain the existing positive momentum for change at global, regional and country levels towards FGM abandonment within a long-term vision, given that actual behaviour change may take one or two generations.

Strategic positioning within a wider transformative agenda

Recommendation 2

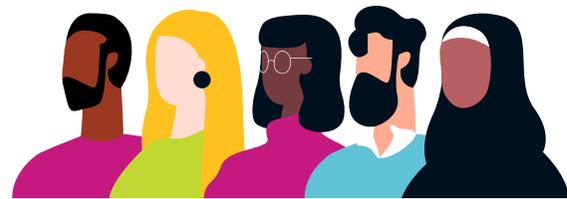
Further invest in learning to contribute towards reducing evidence gaps in key areas pertaining to FGM. Given the scope and complexity of the work, the Joint Programme is encouraged to explore innovative research solutions through the establishment and/or institutionalization of existing strategic partnerships. As a recognized global leader with strong grassroots support, the Joint Programme is well placed to advance this agenda.

Recommendation 3

Further refine the strategic focus of the Joint Programme, drawing on its comparative strengths to maximize its contributions towards FGM abandonment.

Recommendation 4

Clearly define the strategic placement of the Joint Programme within a gender-responsive framework, drawing on its comparative advantages. This would entail establishing clearly marked boundaries and strategic entry points, and to use this clarity to further secure international resources dedicated towards gender equality and gender transformation.



Conclusion 10

Moving forward: sustaining the positive momentum for accelerating change towards FGM abandonment

The Joint Programme design includes some elements that encourage sustainability, such as systems strengthening, supporting national ownership, working with religious and traditional leaders and working with youth. These are promising practices to encourage the sustainability of results. However, the Joint Programme currently does not have a formal multi-sectoral and cross-agency approach to support governments with the operationalisation of programming to foster the abandonment of FGM. The Joint Programme also does not have a plan for what will take place upon completion of Phase III, which places the sustainability of results in jeopardy.

Recommendation 5

Develop a formal communications strategy that intentionally places behaviour-change messaging targeted at practicing individuals and communities within a Communication for Development framework. Advocacy messaging should be more explicitly framed within a gender equality narrative.

Fit for purpose to accelerate FGM abandonment

Recommendation 6

Strengthen horizontal synergies between the two partner organizations and virtual synergies across different levels. The Joint Programme should develop an internal policy to articulate where synergies are expected between both organisations and to clearly define roles and responsibilities and information flows.

Long-term approaches to sustain efforts and results

Recommendation 7

Place a stronger focus on using targets and indicators that capture important intermediate progress towards full FGM abandonment.

Recommendation 8

Continue to use a systems-strengthening approach to encourage long-term change and national ownership, focusing on effective law enforcement, service provision, educational awareness and data collection. This should include the development of a multi-sectoral action plan to support governments with operationalisation (and the implementation of legal frameworks) and should include a plan for how to best promote sustainability beyond Phase III.



Female genital mutilation is internationally recognized as a harmful practice, and a violation of the rights of women and girls to physical integrity and freedom from injury and coercion

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