



## Intergenerational Dialogue

A big step towards ending female genital mutilation (FGM)

# INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

## A BIG STEP TOWARDS ENDING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

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'I thought that at my age no one could teach me anything anymore. But this has transformed me. In fact, I don't really know what I should do. I have so many things I need to think about and I thank you.'

El Hadj Fodé, aged 75, after participating in an Intergenerational Dialogue at Labé, Guinea.

**INTERGENERATIONAL  
DIALOGUE:  
A BIG STEP  
TOWARDS ENDING  
FEMALE GENITAL  
MUTILATION**



For many years now, government and non-governmental organisations have been engaged in efforts to overcome FGM. One of the priorities was to educate and raise the awareness of target groups. This has extended people's knowledge, but in most cases has not made them behave any differently.

What then is the key to changing people's behaviour and hence to ending female genital mutilation? The Intergenerational Dialogue process designed by GIZ starts where awareness-raising and education generally end: with the dilemma of families who are aware of the harmful effects of FGM and at the same time conscious of the stigma to which they expose their daughters if they decide against it.

By targeting this gap between knowledge and actual changes in individual and collective behaviour, Intergenerational Dialogue has proved to be a

valuable tool in a great many countries over the years. Studies and independent evaluations have confirmed changes in the attitude and behaviour of the target groups - and thus validate the method's success.

**Basic assumptions of the method**

If social change leading to the end of female genital mutilation is to be possible, people have to perceive it as an opportunity and not as a threat. Social conformity and fear are often major obstacles. People conform to their social environment to a greater or lesser extent and follow traditional rites and practices to demonstrate that they belong to their community. In traditional societies in particular, failure to comply with practices and rituals frequently leads to sanctions that leave the person concerned stigmatised and discriminated against. Fear of social exclusion in turn leads to conformity and consolidates societal structures, making it difficult to effect change.

Moreover, change in itself can also appear threatening. For the older generation in particular, the irreversible social changes brought about by processes such as globalisation translate into a loss of direction, leaving them destabilised and insecure.

## INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE – A DEFINITION:

Intergenerational Dialogue is a participatory method for ending female genital mutilation. It goes beyond IEC campaigns (information, education, communication) and aims for concrete changes in behaviour.

The method is built around a moderated, respect-based dialogue process across sexes and generations and is specifically designed to empower target groups to change their behaviour by strengthening their ability to take action.

These skills are subsequently put to the test using binding, dialogue-driven pledges in which the different generations and sexes undertake to make realistic efforts to change.

The desire to keep things the way they are or to restore the old status quo is immense. Practices and rituals are therefore defended in the name of tradition. This even holds true when - as in the case of FGM - they are harmful and constitute a serious violation of women's and girls' human rights.

Today we know that raising people's awareness is not enough on its own to transform these social structures and patterns of behaviour. In order to end female genital mutilation, a community has to engage in a collective process of change. To do so requires communication. Many years' experience with processes of social change has shown that a lack of communication blocks development and change. Intergenerational disputes, conflicts between the sexes along with a lack of understanding for the other person's viewpoint are essentially due to a lack of communication.

Intergenerational Dialogue initiates a joint process of communication and change that participants carry forward together. Across generations and sexes, people are encouraged to talk, listen to and learn from each other. Everyone has their say. Everyone's opinions are respected. Intergenerational Dialogues are moderated by trained facilitators and take place in a safe environment. Opening up to another person's point of view helps people put their own opinions into context. Mutual respect opens the door

to change. And change itself becomes less threatening. In the dialogue process, a joint vision evolves of what a better society looks like. Together, participants get a clear picture of the contributions people can make to this 'better world' by changing their own conduct. Intergenerational Dialogue empowers people to arrive at joint solutions that are important for their lives. In most cases this includes a process towards ending female genital mutilation.



Without words, the world would stand still...  
Dialogue across sexes and generations is a precondition for social change.

## INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE: RESULTS FROM DIFFERENT AREAS AND AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

### Greater impact

Experience to date shows that IEC campaigns (information, education, communication) have a limited impact: they have made target groups more aware of the damaging effects of FGM, but they have not brought about changes in people's behaviour. Intergenerational Dialogue makes this possible as it has a wider aim than traditional IEC approaches: to develop people's capacities.

### Capacity development

Intergenerational Dialogue develops people's communication and self-reflection skills. Participants gain valuable insights into the viewpoints, needs and desires of the opposite sex and the other generation. They learn how to bring about changes themselves and how to let change happen. A woman who has been told about the detrimental effects of female genital mutilation and who has been empowered to engage in constructive dialogue with her husband may be able to prevent her daughter from being circumcised, whilst fear of reprisal might force another woman to bow to tradition even against her better judgement. Only when knowledge and capacity development come together does behavioural and social change become possible.

### Empowerment

Intergenerational Dialogue empowers people, both at an individual and at a collective level. The combination of dialogue workshops and public discussion meetings with community members and representatives of decentralised government structures is key to strengthening civil society. Intergenerational Dialogue empowers young people and women in particular to become 'Agents of Change' and to stand up for their rights.

### Networking

Intergenerational Dialogue establishes a results-oriented and sustainable exchange between civil society actors and representatives of decentralised government structures. Concrete action such as realistic improvements in health or legal services is planned jointly and communicated at public meetings. The participatory process and the visibility of change happening in the community create real commitment.

### Bottom-up instead of top down

Participants in an Intergenerational Dialogue pro-actively shape their own development under professional guidance. In contrast to conventional IEC approaches, Intergenerational Dialogue does not regard target groups simply as being at the receiving end of education and awareness-raising messages. Instead, the conventional 'sender-receiver' set-up in which target groups are informed via pre-formulated messages about, for instance, the consequences of FGM, becomes obsolete.

### Sustainability

Intergenerational Dialogue is based on the understanding that development can only take place if the target groups are in the driving seat and in control of their own development. By promoting stakeholder ownership of development processes, a basis for sustainable change is established.

### Transferability

Intergenerational Dialogue has proved to be an effective approach for various issues and in a range of cultural and geographical contexts. In addition to successes in Mali, Kenya and Guinea, where Intergenerational Dialogue is being used to overcome FGM, this method has also proved its worth in

## THE IMPRESSIVE IMPACT OF INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE IN MALI

An evaluation carried out in 2009 clearly shows the positive developments in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour amongst the target groups.

74% state they have taken steps to put an end to FGM in their community (as opposed to 0% in other communities). ■

66% know of families who no longer practice FGM in their community (in contrast to 10% in other communities). ■

83% of community members who have participated in an Intergenerational Dialogue believe that FGM has no benefits (as opposed to 29% in communities that did not engage in dialogue). ■

74% know about the immediate or subsequent consequences of FGM (as opposed to 27% in other communities). ■

38% state that the reasons for FGM (religious, cultural or traditional) are still valid today (in other communities, this figure was 97%). ■

79% are of the opinion that FGM is bad (compared with 4% in other communities). ■

94% state that they will not subject their daughters to FGM in the future (in contrast to 17% in other communities). ■

the water sector in Yemen and in the field of sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS in Namibia. However, despite the method's flexibility, sound preparation and implementation are crucial factors in ensuring the standard of quality and thus the effectiveness of the approach.

### Complementarity

There are a lot of conceivable options in combining Intergenerational Dialogue with other approaches for a greater impact. The approach can be used, for example, in conjunction with lessons on FGM in schools or with IEC campaigns. Combined approaches have proven to enhance the impact of efforts to overcome FGM.



## THE INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE PROCESS

### Time frame and outreach

In processes of social change, such as efforts to overcome FGM, longer-term interventions are necessary to bring about behaviour change. However, Intergenerational Dialogue's high level of effectiveness provides value for money. Its strong multiplier effect gives the method a broad outreach to a substantial number of people. Experience in Mali has shown that one participant reaches an average of 28 others and that his/her capacity benefits the community as a whole.

How long the process from preparation to results evaluation lasts, has to be defined individually based on the country, the programme capacities and the FGM-specific context. For example, if a programme has never worked on the issue of FGM in a community before, it has to do more preparation work than a programme which can already rely on an experienced set of trainers and the trust of the community.

### Preparation and prerequisites

- Stakeholder workshop
- Training of Trainers (ToT)
- Identification of partner organisations and communities in which Intergenerational Dialogue is to take place
- Preparatory talks at community level
- Training of community-based facilitators. The trainers teach them how to use the method and empower them to act as moderators. Facilitators are supported and supervised by trainers.

### Implementation process

An Intergenerational Dialogue consists of six stages. These include community-level meetings, workshops and dialogue in families and in the community.

#### Stage 1:

##### Community consultations 1

Prior to each dialogue, the community is consulted to determine how it perceives relations and communication between the generations and sexes, family structures, traditional practices such as FGM. These focus group discussions, held separately according to generation and sex (young men, older men, young women, older women), ensure that all parties involved can express themselves freely. The results of the community consultations provide a qualitative description of the situation at the outset and are used as baseline data to monitor the results.

#### Stage 2:

##### Intergenerational Dialogue workshops

The workshops take place in groups separated according to sex. They are conducted with around 24 participants per group; 12 from the younger generation and 12 from the older generation. Participants are





selected based on their communication and dialogue skills and their standing within their own peer group. It is also important to select a wide range of participants from religious or traditional leaders to traditional practitioners of FGM, health personnel, teachers, parents, youth, etc.

The participants are encouraged to engage in a constructive debate with each other. This takes place using proven, graduated exercises, each of which builds on the one before. Depending on the context and the specific conditions prevalent in the country concerned, the men's and women's groups are brought together at the end of the Intergenerational Dialogue.

Intergenerational Dialogue workshops focus on the following subject areas:

- active listening and dialogue skills
- family structures and paths through life in the past, present and future
- traditional practices (including FGM) - then and now
- formulating wishes and making personal pledges.

### **Stage 3:**

#### **Public Meeting 1 - Presenting pledges and requests**

Following the workshops, the participants present the results of their dialogue to the community, their traditional and religious leaders, representatives of decentralized institutions and other key stakeholders. The participants tell everyone in the community what they would like to change and what they will change about their own behaviour. At the same time, they express requests to the community and to institutions (such as health centres and local services). The facilitators help participants to formulate their pledges and wishes as realistically and specifically as possible - in keeping with the motto: 'Modest and realistic rather

than ambitious and doomed to fail'. At the public meeting, people are informed that another public meeting will take place to determine the extent to which these wishes and pledges have been upheld.

### **Stage 4:**

#### **Follow-up period**

After the first public meeting, the participants work as 'agents of change'. They report back to the facilitators who encourage and support their efforts to put the desired changes into practice. Processes of change are documented by using special monitoring forms.

### **Stage 5:**

#### **Public meeting 2 - Assessing changes**

In the second public meeting four months later, representatives of both sexes and generations, as well as representatives of authorities and institutions, report on the changes that have taken place and what they did to make them happen. The central point of reference for this assessment is the wishes and personal pledges that were made at the first public meeting. The event strengthens any initiatives that people have generally been found to start during this period and that will continue to impact beyond the implementation period of the Intergenerational Dialogue.

### **Stage 6:**

#### **Community consultations 2 and results assessment**

Shortly after the second public meeting, the second community consultations are conducted. Here, the concrete results of the Intergenerational Dialogue are discussed with the various stakeholder groups and documented. Comparing these results with the data from the first community consultations is one tool that can be used to determine the impact of the Intergenerational Dialogue.

## **KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

### **Intergenerational Dialogue**

■ is a participatory approach that invites participants to share their experiences and pool their knowledge

■ generates open communication and a framework for discussing sensitive issues

■ improves communication and conflict-management skills

■ creates a bridge between generations and sexes

■ helps communities arrive at a consensus

■ advocates changes in behaviour that are conducive to ending FGM

■ is adapted to the participants' specific interests and skills

■ focuses on spoken communication, written support and tools are avoided

■ favours traditional literary customs (tales, parables, sayings and proverbs)

■ takes place in the local language.

## WHAT IT TAKES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE TO SUCCEED

### Implementation

- need for a local programme run by an established national organisation or international governmental or non-governmental organisation that wishes to work with Intergenerational Dialogue and is able to invest in the resources and capacities

- local NGO capacities on hand for participatory community work (or the programme is prepared and able to develop these)
- a local contact person responsible for the preparation and coordination process
- trainers and facilitators interested and motivated to learn the Intergenerational Dialogue method and to put it into practice

### Quality assurance, results monitoring and sustainability

- commitment to ensuring the quality of the approach through supervision at all levels of implementation by the programme and partner organisations
- results monitoring at all stages of the process
- programme structure aiming to strengthen cooperation between civil society and decentralised state structures (sustainability).

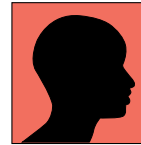


'I've seen a lot of things in my life and I've taken part in many projects. But believe me, what we've started here is really important. We've got something going in the communities that can no longer be stopped.'

Madeleine Tolno,  
Intergenerational Dialogue trainer, Guinea.

## WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

We can provide you with more information and help you to prepare, adopt and implement Intergenerational Dialogue.



We provide

- a manual on management, methods and training (MMT)
- experienced instructors for Training of Trainers (ToT)
- consultancy and back-stopping along with networking services
- publications, such as evaluations, empirical documentation, baseline documents and best practices
- the opportunity to co-finance interventions implemented by experienced GIZ programmes

You can reach us at:

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