



# Evaluation Report



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## **Alternative Rite of Passage Approach in Ending FGM in West Pokot, Kisii and Nyamira Counties in Kenya**

**International Solidarity Foundation  
And World Vision Kenya**

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### iii. Affirmation

The content of this ARP evaluation report, except for adequately cited external references, is the original work of the evaluation team and was conducted solely to evaluate the ARP model as part of ISF and WV's ongoing commitment to learning and improvement. We recognize that the qualitative data collected during this evaluation pertains to the lives and experiences of individuals and communities. Therefore, we affirm that ownership of this data remains with the respective communities and families, and any future use of this information must be contingent upon their informed consent.

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## IV. Abbreviations and Acronyms

AP	Area Program
ARP	Alternative Rite of Passage
CAPI	Computer Aided Personal Interview
CESP	Community Engagement and Sponsorship Plan
CoK	Constitution of Kenya
CPP	Child Protection and Participation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FY	Financial Year
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HH	Household
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ISF	International Solidarity Foundation (ISF)
KDHS	Kenya Demographic and Health Survey
KIHBS	Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey
KII	Key Informant Interview
KPHC	Kenya Population and Housing Census
MoH	Ministry of Health
MTP	Medium-Term Plans
NGCDF	National Government Constituency Development Fund
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development-Development Assistance Committee
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
WVK	World Vision Kenya

## V. Introduction

The Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) approach is a culturally sensitive intervention designed to transition individuals, typically adolescents, into adulthood while safeguarding the health and well-being of the individuals. It is often practiced in cultures where traditional rites of passage may involve harmful or dangerous practices, particularly for young individuals, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) or male circumcision without proper medical supervision. While ARP approaches may vary widely in contexts across cultures and regions, its primary objective is to preserve the cultural significance of these transitions while mitigating potential hazards. In all cultural set-ups where it is used, the approach replaces the customary cutting ritual with elements that may include part or all of the following: education, mentorship, discussions on health and reproductive rights, community involvement, and ceremonies that commemorate adolescents (typically girls) coming of age without inflicting harm. Several studies on ARP in different communities in Kenya support this fact: Abagusii (Oloo, Wanjiru, & Newell-Jones, 2011), Pokot (Hughes, 2018), Maasai (Chege et al., 2001; Graamans et al., 2019; Hughes, 2018), Samburu (Mepukori, 2016), and Kuria (Prazak, 2007; Oloo et al., 2011). ARP aligns with international human rights principles and legal frameworks that uphold individual rights and encompasses health, education, and protection against harmful practices. The approach evolves through collaborative efforts with community leaders, healthcare practitioners, educators, and advocates, striving to honor cultural customs while safeguarding individual rights and well-being.

ARP employs diverse interventions that are imperative for its efficacy and longevity. The choice of interventions and emphasis may differ in different cultures and contexts. However, generally, the approach employs interventions that focus on young girls and adolescents, parents and guardians, community leaders and elders, educators and school administrators, traditional and religious leaders, civil society organizations (CSOs), health professionals, and government agencies. The youth and adolescents are the main targets of ARP, being the primary target of harmful practices like FGM. Involving them ensures that the approach addresses their unique needs, apprehensions, and viewpoints, fostering a sense of ownership and active involvement. Parents and guardians have a significant influence on determining their children's participation in ARP interventions. Engaging with them helps cultivate trust, mitigate concerns, and secure backing for ARP efforts at the familial level. Studies indicate that the pressure to cut girls is not solely from parents but significantly from social pressures imposed by the extended family and the community (Mackie & LeJeune, 2009). This underscores the necessity of engaging the wider community in the fight against FGM. Consequently, involving the broader community in ARP interventions is crucial.

Due to their influential status and cultural authority, community leaders and elders are crucial in securing community acceptance for ARP interventions. Their involvement is essential to ensure that the community is culturally attuned, respected and embraced ARP approaches. Educational institutions are essential conduits for implementing ARP interventions, offering avenues for youth engagement and educational and skill development initiatives. Educators and school administrators can strengthen ARP efforts by incorporating them into academic curricula, organizing workshops or extracurricular activities, and cultivating a supportive educational atmosphere.

Traditional and religious leaders sway substantially over community norms, values, and customs. Engaging them in ARP interventions is instrumental in challenging detrimental traditions, reshaping cultural beliefs, and championing alternative paradigms consonant with

human rights principles and public health imperatives. Drawing upon the expertise of health professionals, encompassing doctors, nurses, and community health workers, enriches ARP interventions with insights on pertinent health-related matters such as sexual and reproductive health, hygiene, and nutrition. Their involvement ensures that ARP initiatives are grounded in evidence-based practices and cater to participants' health requirements.

CSOs champion the rights of marginalized cohorts, including girls and women impacted by injurious traditional practices. They furnish invaluable technical proficiency, advocacy reinforcement, and resource allocations for ARP endeavors, alongside monitoring and evaluating approach efficacy. Governmental bodies overseeing health, education, youth development, and gender equality harbor a vested interest in bolstering ARP initiatives to advance public health, human rights, and social inclusion agendas. Their engagement can furnish financial backing, policy advocacy, and coordination mechanisms to amplify ARP approaches and integrate them into national frameworks and initiatives.

By enlisting the above interventions, whole or in part, depending on emphasis based on the various community contexts and cultures, ARP interventions can harness diverse perspectives, expertise, resources, and support networks, thereby augmenting their efficacy, durability, and transformative impact on fostering positive societal change and upholding human rights principles.

The International Solidarity Foundation (ISF) and World Vision (WV) have independently instituted the Alternative Rites of Passage (ARP) approach within the Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot Counties of Kenya. This approach, among a spectrum of strategic initiatives aimed at addressing FGM, serves as a pivotal instrument in the campaign against the practice, offering a secure alternative to customary FGM rituals within the Gusii and Pokot communities.

In the Kisii/Nyamira and West Pokot regions, FGM fulfills distinct cultural roles. In Kisii/Nyamira, it marks the transition to womanhood, imparting cultural gender norms and values to prepare girls for marriage, aiming to suppress sexual desires to promote marital fidelity. Although FGM does not necessarily impede girls' education in the Gusii culture, it contributes to disengagement from schooling among young adolescents. Conversely, in Pokot culture, FGM signifies readiness for marriage, with circumcised girls expected to marry promptly, often concluding their education. Parents in this context highly regard circumcised daughters as assets for securing substantial bride prices, contrasting with the diminished value attributed to uncircumcised girls within the community.

ISF has facilitated the implementation of ARP in Kisii and Nyamira counties through CECOME and Manga Heart, respectively, while WV supported the approach in West Pokot. A comparative analysis of the approaches employed by WV and ISF reveals significant similarities with other ARP initiatives worldwide. In both Kisii/Nyamira and West Pokot, the ARP approach entails interventions focusing on girls' education on health and reproductive rights, life skills, community sensitization about the harmful effects of FGM, and graduation ceremonies that commemorate girls' coming of age without inflicting harm. It engages various stakeholders, including youth, parents, community leaders, educators, traditional and religious figures, civil society organizations, and government agencies in the fight against FGM.

However, the two approaches diverge in the execution of specific interventions. The ARP approach in Kisii and Nyamira targets young girls between 7 and 11 years of age. It involves them in staggered four-day training sessions during the April, August, and December school holidays, culminating in a graduation ceremony on the last day of the December training session.

The training follows a curriculum christened "Msichana Jasiri," covering topics such as the harmful effects of FGM, girls' health and reproductive rights, and life skills. The girls' holiday training is supplemented by weekly two-hour training sessions during school days involving both boys and girls. The graduation ceremony is elaborate and involves the parents, girls, their brothers, and the local community, where the parents, girls, and boys make public declarations to protect the girls' rights and condemn FGM in the presence of political and local leaders. In West Pokot, the approach employed a single one-week intensive training for girls between 11-15 years of age. The training was not modeled within a formal curriculum but covered aspects of the harmful effects of FGM, the girls' health and reproductive health, and social life skills. At the end of the training, the graduation ceremony was organized, which marked the girls' transition into adulthood, but without public declarations from parents and the girls. However, participants generally understood how to protect the girls' rights.

Whereas ARP interventions by Manga Heart and Cecome are ongoing in Nyamira and Kisii, Interventions in SOOK West Pokot have phased out. WV and ISF enlisted the services of CHIK in March 2024 to evaluate the two approaches to ascertain their relevance in the respective cultural contexts, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability, and provide ISF and WV with an evidence base to improve the effectiveness and accountability on or similar interventions and advocate for change.

The thematic evaluation employed qualitative methods to understand the ARP approach comprehensively. Data collection involved interviews, focus group discussions, document reviews, and engagement with diverse stakeholders, including girls and women undergoing ARP, their families and communities, and project staff. Additionally, consultants reviewed project documents and relevant literature to gain insight into the ARP approach. The evaluation findings will inform future programming and advocacy efforts to eradicate FGM.

## 1.0 Executive Summary

This evaluation report examines the Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) approach implemented by the International Solidarity Foundation (ISF) and World Vision Kenya (WVK) in Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot counties in Kenya, focusing on its effectiveness in combating Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The evaluation, conducted by Community Health Initiatives in Kenya (CHIK) in March 2024, employed **qualitative methods**, including **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)**, **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**, **Dyad interviews**, and **document reviews**. The study chose these methods to provide a deep understanding of the program's impact on individuals, communities, and the broader social context.

The study focused on three culturally diverse regions of Kenya, each with unique challenges and perspectives regarding FGM:

- **Kisii and Nyamira:** Home to the Abagusii community, where FGM is practiced as a rite of passage for girls, marking their transition to womanhood and preparing them for marriage.
- **West Pokot:** Predominantly inhabited by the Pokot community, where FGM is deeply entrenched as a cultural practice, often associated with early marriage, school dropout, bride price, and economic security for families.

The findings reveal that ARP has had a significant impact, particularly in Kisii and Nyamira, where it has contributed to a demonstrable reduction in FGM prevalence. This is attributed to a combination of factors:

- Increased awareness of FGM's harms.
- Shifting community attitudes.
- Empowering girls to resist the practice and advocate for their rights.

The approach is culturally relevant, strategically aligning with existing traditions and engaging diverse community members, leading to a sense of ownership and acceptance.

The ARP approach model in West Pokot targets girls who are at risk of FGM, and therefore, girls between the ages of 12 and 15 years are targeted. The approach of strategically integrating traditional rites of passage into its framework is demonstrably effective in achieving its primary objective of reducing FGM prevalence. It utilizes a range of tools and processes, including a culturally relevant curriculum, collaborative public sensitization, and a focus on challenging the cultural and gendered reasoning behind FGM. The approach also effectively fosters a strengthened community response by building a protective network for girls at risk and encouraging reporting and investigation of FGM cases.

The ARP program in Kisii/Nyamira mainly targets young girls between ages 7 and 11 years old and the parents/guardians of these girls. The approach faces several challenges, including the complexity of the Msichana Jasiri manual, which teachers find difficult to utilize effectively with the young girls, inadequate follow-up mechanisms leaving girls vulnerable during holiday periods when FGM cases are prevalent, and budget limitations restricting program expansion despite high demand. Furthermore, engaging fathers and male guardians in the program remains challenging, with limited participation in training.

In West Pokot, the ARP program encounters challenges related to the persistence of FGM despite ongoing efforts, with some girls returning to the practice even after the training. The deeply rooted nature of FGM within the community poses a significant obstacle to complete abandonment. Moreover, reaching out to and engaging out-of-school children who struggle with self-esteem issues and active participation presents a considerable hurdle. The current one-week duration of ARP training, deemed insufficient compared to the traditional, extended FGM teachings, necessitates a review of the curriculum to incorporate practical life skills training such as cooking, dressmaking, hairdressing, and baby care, complementing the knowledge and skills enhancement focus.

The study recommends a multi-pronged approach to address the ARP's challenges in Kisii/Nyamira. Firstly, simplifying the Msichana Jasiri manual by tailoring it to the comprehension level of 7-11-year-old girls, using simplified language visuals, and focusing on key messages is crucial. This should be accompanied by comprehensive training for facilitators (teachers) on effectively using the simplified manual and engaging young girls, incorporating techniques for age-appropriate communication, interactive learning activities, and addressing potential challenges.

Secondly, a structured follow-up plan for ARP graduates, including regular contact with girls and their families during holiday periods through home visits, phone calls, or group meetings, is essential to reinforce knowledge, monitor progress, and provide support. Additionally, establishing community-based mentorship programs with older girls and women who have undergone ARP training mentoring younger girls can offer invaluable peer support and guidance, fostering a sense of optimism about the potential impact of such initiatives.

Furthermore, expanding the program's reach necessitates exploring diverse funding options beyond the European Union grant, including government funding, private-sector partnerships, and individual donations. This diversification will ensure the ARP approach's sustainability and open growth opportunities. Prioritizing program efforts in areas with the highest prevalence of FGM will provide maximum impact.

Finally, engaging fathers and male guardians requires separate workshops specifically designed for them, addressing their concerns and perspectives on FGM. Involving community leaders and respected figures can influence attitudes and promote positive fatherhood. Encouraging fathers to participate in ARP training sessions alongside their daughters can foster understanding and create a supportive environment for girls.

A multi-faceted approach is required to address the ARP's challenges in West Pokot. Firstly, strengthening existing mentorship programs for ARP graduates by providing ongoing support and guidance, including safe spaces, connecting girls to education or income-generating opportunities, and building their resilience, is crucial to help them resist pressure to undergo FGM. Intensifying community mobilization efforts by engaging key stakeholders like community leaders, religious leaders, and teachers to discourage FGM and child marriage actively is also critical.

Secondly, addressing the deeply rooted practices of FGM necessitates launching community-based campaigns specifically aimed at challenging traditional beliefs and practices surrounding FGM, promoting alternatives, and empowering individuals to speak out against it. Furthermore, fostering partnerships with influential traditional leaders and encouraging them to advocate for

FGM abandonment within their communities and promote the alternative rites of passage is essential.

Thirdly, reaching out-of-school children requires implementing targeted outreach programs designed for them, working with community groups, local NGOs, and faith-based organizations to provide education and skills training. Highlighting and showcasing successful role models who have benefited from education and alternative rites of passage can inspire out-of-school children.

Finally, addressing the insufficient time for ARP training necessitates expanding the program's duration to allow for a more comprehensive and in-depth curriculum, incorporating traditional practices and knowledge alongside modern life skills and education. Offering ARP training in a modular format, allowing girls and boys to participate in different modules depending on their needs and interests, can cater to diverse learning preferences. Integrating practical life skills training like cooking, dressmaking, hairdressing, and baby care into the ARP curriculum can enhance girls' economic opportunities and empower them to contribute to their families and communities. Strengthening the focus on social-emotional skills, such as self-esteem, communication, conflict resolution, and decision-making, will equip girls to navigate challenges and build resilience.

The ARP approach demonstrates significant potential to contribute to the eradication of FGM in Kenya. By addressing the identified challenges, strengthening its implementation strategies, and securing sustainable funding, the program can achieve greater impact and create a future where girls are free from the harmful practice of FGM and empowered to live fulfilling lives.

## 2.0 Background

World Vision launched the WV Girl Child Promotion Project in Sook Ward, West Pokot County, from 2009 to 2021 to discourage FGM. The International Solidarity Foundation (ISF) and its partners have been fighting against FGM in Kisii and Nyamira counties since 2015, using Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) since 2019.

The Abagusii, a Kenyan Bantu ethnic group, dominates Kisii and Nyamira Counties. The Abagusii speak Ekegusii, English, and Swahili, which are the most commonly understood languages. Nyamira and Kisii counties depend on agriculture, and almost 80% of the Abagusii are Christians. Poverty is rampant in these Counties due to land fragmentation, unequal ownership of land, and climate change.

Gender-based violence is widespread among the Gusii community. Kisii and Nyamira counties had FGM rates five times higher than the national average of 15%, according to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (2022). Gusii culture values FGM as a rite of passage for females as a way to reduce sexual desire and improve marriage prospects.

The Pokot, a sub tribe of Kalenjin, predominantly live in West Pokot County, bordering Uganda to the West, Turkana County to the North, Baringo to the East and Elgeyo Marakwet to the South East and Trans-Nzoia County to the South. They primarily speak Pokot, Kiswahili, but English is not a common language among them. The region has harsh, arid, and Semi-Arid climates. In Sook ward, West Pokot County, where World Vision implemented the Girl Child Promotion Project, FGM, child marriage, high school dropouts, and low household income impair children's well-being and worsen poverty. Retrogressive cultural views devalue girl child education, with 74% of girls having undergone FGM (KDHS, 2019).

FGM is outlawed in Kenya and violation draws harsh penalties for the culprits, although Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot have high rates. Cultural assumptions about marriageability and economic prosperity through dowry payments perpetuate FGM. World Vision, ISF, and partners use two models to educate children, their families and communities, and government authorities, including healthcare professionals and religious leaders, about violence against girls, FGM, and the law banning it. Schools and communities host trainings, cultural events, sports, and debates to oppose FGM's detrimental consequences on girls and boys.

The ARP program is facilitated differently in West Pokot and Kisii/Nyamira, reflecting each region's distinct cultural contexts and target audiences.

### **West Pokot:**

#### **Focus on Traditional Practices & Cultural Adaptation:**

- **Community Involvement:** The program begins with community engagement. Elders, parents, and local leaders, whose wisdom and experience are invaluable, are actively involved in identifying potential participants, ensuring community ownership and buy-in. This is crucial in a region where FGM is deeply entrenched.
- **Incorporation of Traditional Elements:** The ARP curriculum incorporates elements of traditional rites of passage, acknowledging the value of cultural practices and adapting them to promote positive change. This resonates with the community and creates a sense of familiarity.
- **Engaging Elders:** Older women with experience in traditional rites of passage are actively involved as trainers and mentors, providing a bridge between tradition and the ARP model. They share stories and knowledge while encouraging girls to embrace the positive aspects of their culture.
- **Focus on Leadership and Decision-making:** The program educates and empowers girls to become leaders and make informed decisions about their lives. This is a beacon of hope, crucial to counter the pressure of conformity and challenge harmful practices.
- **Positive Masculinity:** Boys are actively engaged in the program, promoting positive masculinity and challenging harmful gender norms. They are educated on the harmful effects of FGM and empowered to become advocates for girls' rights.

The ISF approach to ARP utilizes the Msichana Jasiri curriculum, which has six units that work together to provide a comprehensive educational experience for young people in the Abagusii community. Here's a breakdown of each unit, expanding on their importance and potential impact:

#### **1. The Abagusii:**

- **Focus:** Cultural identity, heritage, and ancestral practices.
- **Importance:** This unit forms the foundation for understanding who they are and where they come from. By learning about their ancestors and traditional practices, participants gain a sense of belonging and pride in their cultural heritage. This knowledge can help them navigate the challenges of modernization and cultural change while retaining their identity.

#### **2. Human Development:**

- **Focus:** Physical and emotional development, gender roles, and rites of passage.

- **Importance:** This unit tackles crucial aspects of growing up, providing a safe space to discuss puberty, sexuality, and gender roles. Understanding their biological development and cultural expectations surrounding these changes can empower participants to make informed decisions about their bodies and health. It also helps them navigate the transition to adulthood, addressing the social and emotional challenges associated with this stage of life.

### 3. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):

- **Focus:** Understanding FGM, its cultural context, and prevention skills.
- **Importance:** This critical unit addresses a sensitive and challenging issue. By exploring the complexities of FGM within the community, the unit helps participants understand its impact, both physical and psychological. The focus on skills and strategies to prevent FGM empowers them to advocate for their safety and well-being, challenging harmful traditional practices and promoting positive change.

### 4. Education & Learning:

- **Focus:** Academic success and career planning.
- **Importance:** This unit equips participants with the tools to excel in their education and explore their career options. Through activities, teaching, and case studies, they gain valuable skills like study habits, goal setting, and critical thinking. This empowers them to envision a future beyond traditional roles and pursue their aspirations.

### 5. Health:

- **Focus:** Reproductive health, sexual and gender-based violence, and drug and substance abuse.
- **Importance:** This unit tackles crucial health concerns facing youth today. Participants learn about reproductive health, contraception, and responsible sexual behavior, promoting healthy choices, and preventing unintended pregnancies. The inclusion of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and substance abuse topics equips them to recognize warning signs, seek help, and understand how to stay safe.

### 6. Life Skills:

- **Focus:** Developing essential skills for a fulfilling life, including self-confidence, decision-making, and problem-solving.
- **Importance:** This unit builds upon the knowledge and skills learned in previous units. Participants develop personal skills, like assertiveness and critical thinking, that empower them to make informed choices and contribute positively to their community. This fosters their resilience, leadership abilities, and overall well-being.

Overall, this curriculum demonstrates a solid commitment to empowering young people in the Abagusii community. It addresses their needs, challenges, and opportunities, providing them with the knowledge, skills, and support to lead healthy, fulfilling, and successful lives.

The girls are sensitized on the harmful effects of FGM, girls' health and life skills during the April, August, and December holidays, and in weakly two hour sessions during schools days, where both the girls and boys are involved. During the graduation ceremony in december, the girls are adorned in customary graduation attire in the presence of local officials and opinion leaders. The girls, boys and their parents pledge to support the cause and end FGM. The ritual uses anti-FGM slogans, chants, and music. After graduating, graduands get certificates.

This study evaluates the ARP strategy for FGM abandonment in Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot. According to the Terms of Reference (ToR), the study examines how ARP changes the attitudes of children, families and communities to end FGM and protect girls.

## 2.1 Project goal, outcomes, Outputs & Interventions

### Sook Girl Child Promotion Project:

The goal of the project was to improve the social well-being of girls in the Sook Division.

The expected outcome of the project were as follows:

- **Reduced FGM and Early/Forced Marriages:** Decrease the prevalence of these harmful practices.
- **Increased School Enrolment & Retention:** More girls attending and staying in school.
- **Enhanced Economic Empowerment:** More women and girls engage in income-generating activities with increased income and access to financial services.
- **Strengthened Child Protection:** Improved knowledge of child rights and reporting mechanisms and increased reporting of child abuse cases.

The following were the strategies adopted by the project:

- **Awareness campaigns:** educating communities about the harms of FGM and child marriage and promoting girls' rights and ARP.
- **Training and capacity building:** Equipping stakeholders with knowledge and skills to address FGM and child protection issues.
- **Infrastructure development:** building safe spaces for girls in schools.
- **Economic empowerment:** supporting women and girls in engaging in income-generating activities.
- **Advocacy and collaboration:** Working with stakeholders to strengthen child protection systems and advocate for policy changes.

This project demonstrates how a multi-pronged approach can improve girls' lives and promote their well-being.

### Manga HEART Project:

**The goal of the project is to reduce** cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Domestic Partner Violence (DPV) in the project area.

The expected outcome of the project are as follows:

- **Increased reporting and accountability for GBV:** Community members actively report cases and duty bearers investigate and hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Empowered healthcare workers:** Medical staff champion GBV, provide support to survivors and stop performing FGM.
- **Engaged civil society and media:** Local organizations and media actively advocate against all forms of GBV.
- **Positive role models:** Uncut girls and anti-GBV champions inspire others to reject harmful practices.
- **Widespread awareness:** Anti-GBV messages reach the general public in Kisii and Nyamira counties.
- The following are the strategies adopted by the projected to realise its objectives:  
**Training and sensitization:** Building the capacity of community members, duty bearers,

healthcare workers, religious leaders, and others on FGM and GBV prevention and response.

- **Strengthening referral systems:** Connecting survivors with appropriate support services.
- **Promoting reporting mechanisms:** Encouraging hotlines, toll-free numbers, and other reporting channels.
- **Engaging local media and social media:** Disseminating anti-GBV messages and fostering dialogue.
- **Empowering girls and women:** Supporting peer clubs, role models, and alternative rites of passage (ARP) ceremonies.
- **Building collaboration:** Fostering partnerships among civil society organizations, government agencies, and communities to address GBV collectively.

The Manga HEART project demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive and collaborative approach to tackling FGM and GBV, focusing on awareness raising, capacity building, improved reporting and response systems, and promoting positive social norms.

#### **CECOME Project:**

The goal of the project is to reduce cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Kitutu Chache North, Kisii County.

- The expected outcome of the project are as follows: **Increased Reporting and Accountability:** Community members confidently report GBV cases, and duty bearers effectively investigate and hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Healthcare Workers Championing Change:** Medical staff actively advocate against GBV, provide support to survivors, and stop performing FGM.
- **United Front Against GBV:** Local civil society, faith-based organizations, and media work together to combat all forms of GBV.
- **Empowered Girls and Champions:** Uncut girls and anti-GBV champions act as positive role models and peer influencers.
- **Widespread Anti-GBV Messages:** Public awareness of GBV is increased through various media channels and campaigns.
- The project uses the following strategies to achieve its objectives. **Training and sensitization:** Building the capacity of community members, duty bearers, healthcare workers, religious leaders, and others on GBV prevention and response.
- **Strengthening referral systems:** Connecting survivors with appropriate support services.
- **Promoting reporting mechanisms:** Encouraging hotlines, toll-free numbers, and other reporting channels.
- **Engaging local media and social media:** Disseminating anti-GBV messages and fostering dialogue.
- **Empowering girls and women:** Supporting peer clubs, role models, and alternative rites of passage (ARP) ceremonies.
- **Building collaboration:** Fostering partnerships among civil society organizations, government agencies, and communities to address GBV collectively.

The CECOME project highlights the importance of a multi-sectoral and collaborative approach to tackling FGM and GBV, focusing on awareness raising, capacity building, improved reporting and response systems, and promoting positive social norms.

## 2.2 Description of target groups

The Sook Girl Child Promotion Project, Manga HEART Project, and CECOME Project all share the common goal of improving the lives of girls and women by addressing harmful practices like FGM and GBV. While each project has its specific context and focus, they all recognize the importance of targeting multiple groups within the community to achieve sustainable change.

### Common Target Groups:

- **Girls and women:** All three projects prioritize the empowerment of girls and women, providing them with knowledge, skills, and resources to protect themselves from harmful practices and pursue their full potential. In Sook, the approach targeted girl between the ages of 12-15 years while in Kisii and Nyamira the target group were girls of ages 7-11 years.
- **Community leaders and influencers:** The projects engage chiefs, religious leaders, teachers, and other influential figures to shift community norms and advocate for positive change.
- **Civil society organizations and media:** Collaboration with these stakeholders is crucial for raising awareness, advocating for policy changes, and providing support services to survivors.

### Unique Target Groups:

- **Sook Project:** This project uniquely engages reformed circumcisers in anti-FGM advocacy, leveraging their influence to shift community perspectives. From the trainings several role models have emerged and are reaching more people and thereby creating ripple effect.
- **Manga HEART Project:** This project emphasizes the role of duty bearers, such as paralegals and chiefs, in investigating and holding perpetrators accountable.
- **CECOME Project:** This project focuses on building a united front against GBV by fostering collaboration among local civil society, faith-based organizations, and media.

By targeting these diverse groups, the projects aim to create a supportive environment where girls can thrive, harmful practices are eliminated, and communities are empowered to protect the rights of women and girls.

## 2.3 Geographical Scope

The geographical scope of the assignment encompasses three counties in Kenya: Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot. These counties are in different country regions and have distinct cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Kisii and Nyamira are in the southwest, while West Pokot is in the northwest. The evaluation assessed the impact, relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of the Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) approach in these three Counties, considering each context's unique characteristics. The consultants tailored the findings and recommendations of the evaluation to the specific needs of each county that will inform future FGM abandonment interventions in these areas.

## 2.4 Evaluation Purpose, Objectives and Questions

### 2.4.1 Purpose:

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine ARP's impact, relevance, effectiveness and sustainability as an approach employed by ISF and partners and WV in the fight against FGM, and provide an evidence base that would enable ISF and WV and their partners to improve their effectiveness, increase accountability and advocate for change.

### 2.4.2 Objectives:

The evaluation's specific goals were:

**Assessing the overall performance of ARP in eradicating FGM:** This involved measuring any changes in FGM prevalence, identifying areas where the approach excelled, and extracting valuable lessons from the experience.

**Evaluating the Relevance of ARP's pathways of change:** The evaluation examined how well the approach's strategies and activities aligned with the cultural context and specific needs of the communities it targeted.

**Determining the Impact on Community Attitudes:** A key objective was to assess how the approach influenced community perceptions and beliefs regarding FGM.

**Assessing Sustainability:** The evaluation analyzed the likelihood of the approach's impact enduring beyond the project implementation period and identified factors that could contribute to its long-term sustainability.

**Documenting Best Practices:** The evaluation aimed to capture and share successful strategies, approaches, and experiences from the ARP approach to inform and improve future interventions.

**Considering Gender and Social Inclusion:** The evaluation paid particular attention to how the approach addressed the needs and experiences of diverse groups, including girls, boys and persons with disabilities.

### 2.4.3 Evaluation Questions

- Impact: What difference does the intervention make? Has ARP reduced FGM prevalence? To what extent?
- What correlation is there between ARP & FGM prevalence?
- What are the key success areas of ARP?
- Describe the subjective experiences of the girls participating in ARP (their sense of being protected, how they are seen by their families, peers, wider community etc.).
- Describe the role of boys in supporting/participating in the ARP approach/side activities.
- Is ARP reaching (all) relevant actors?
- Has ARP led to some unintended (positive or negative) outcomes?

**Relevance: Is the intervention doing the right things? (*How does ARP approach fit the context?*)**

- Identify potential weaknesses and challenges of ARP in the studied contexts (e.g. community attitudes and acceptance).
- Identify strengths and opportunities of ARP in the studied contexts.

**Effectiveness: Is the intervention achieving its objectives? (*Is FGM prevalence decreasing in the target areas?*)**

- Assess the process and applied tools (guidelines, curricula, pedagogical methods, manuals, public declarations etc.) and key messages delivered to the ARP participants/stakeholders.
- What process improvement would be required, looking at tools, messages, audiences, timing, duration etc of applied ARP process?
- What other approaches (strategies and tools) could produce better results?

**Sustainability: Will the benefits last?**

- What are the likely long-time effects of ARP?

- What are the key factors responsible for sustainability of the ARP approach?
- What are the main lessons that emerge as a result of the ARP model and that can be shared and replicated?
- What kind of strategies should be undertaken to strengthen the sustainability of ARP?

## 2.5 Evaluation Framework:

The evaluation was guided by the OECD-DAC criteria, addressed the following aspects:

- **Relevance:** Examined how well the ARP approach aligns with the needs and priorities of the target communities.
- **Effectiveness:** Assessed the extent to which the approach is achieving its intended objectives and reducing FGM prevalence.
- **Impact:** Evaluated the broader positive and negative changes brought about by the approach, including unintended outcomes.
- **Sustainability:** Analyzed the likelihood of the approach benefits lasting beyond the project implementation period.
- **Coherence:** Assessed how well the approach complements other interventions and policies aimed at ending FGM.
- **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI):** Examined how the approach integrates GESI considerations into its design, implementation, and monitoring.

## 2.6 ARP Pathways of Change

ARP approach tackles FGM by sparking interconnected changes within communities. ARP aims to equip girls with knowledge of life skills and offers an alternative to FGM practice and teachings. The approach borrows heavily from the traditional FGM rituals, and its education components mimic the traditional teachings of older women that were conducted before and after the girls are cut. This model adopts positive teachings and empowers girls with the knowledge and skills to succeed. It starts by raising awareness about FGM's harmful effects and promoting ARP as a safe alternative. It nurtures community dialogue through community sensitization campaigns, roping in community leaders and elders. Girls participating in ARP gain confidence and knowledge, empowering them to resist FGM and advocate for their rights. The approach engages boys and men in promoting gender equality and supporting girls, as well as supports and encourages the development of community structures for reporting and response. This leads to open dialogues that challenge traditional beliefs and gradually shift social norms, reducing the pressure to perform FGM. Ultimately, communities develop strategies to prevent FGM, protect girls, and hold perpetrators accountable, leading to a sustained decline in FGM prevalence. This ripple effect of individual and collective action paves the way for a future free from FGM. This pathway of change is illustrated in Fig 1 below.

The study tracked specific and measurable indicators for each change pathway to gauge the ARP approach's effectiveness in eradicating FGM. For increased knowledge and awareness, the evaluation assessed the proportion of community members who understand the harms of FGM and are aware of ARP as an alternative. To assess shifting social norms, the evaluation tracked the number of community leaders advocating for FGM abandonment and changes in community-reported attitudes toward the practice. For empowered girls and women, the assessment measured participation in ARP activities, changes in girls' self-reported confidence and knowledge about their rights, and the number of women actively advocating against FGM.

To evaluate engaged boys and men, the evaluation tracked their participation in anti-FGM initiatives and changes in their attitudes towards FGM and gender equality. To assess the strengthened community response, the approach monitored the number of active child protection committees, changes in FGM prevalence rates, and the number of reported and investigated FGM cases. These indicators provided concrete evidence of the approach's impact and guided ongoing efforts to eliminate FGM.

The study sought to understand the impact of the ARP approach on community perceptions and actions related to FGM. It explored the extent to which the approach has increased knowledge and awareness about the harms of FGM and promoted ARP as a safe alternative. The survey examined how the approach has contributed to shifting social norms and attitudes towards FGM, including the role of community leaders in advocating for change. It investigated how the approach empowers girls and women to resist FGM and advocate for their rights, as well as the barriers and facilitators to their empowerment. The survey also assessed the approach's effectiveness in engaging boys and men as allies in the fight against FGM and explored effective strategies for their continued involvement. Finally, the study evaluated how the approach has strengthened community-level responses to prevent FGM and support girls at risk, identifying key factors for sustainable community response and opportunities for further integration of ARP into existing community structures.

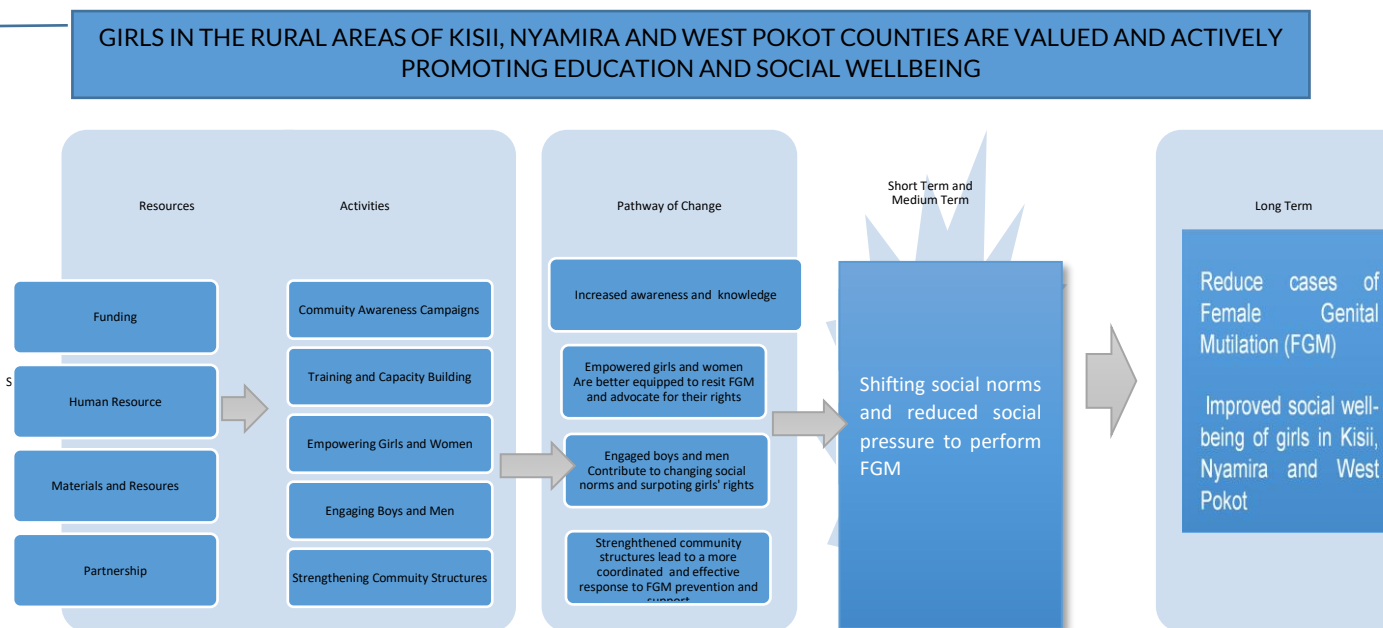


Figure1. ARP pathway of Change

### 3.0 Methodology

The evaluation of ARP approach employed a qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding of its effectiveness in combating FGM in Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot Counties, Kenya. The methodology focused on interviews and document review, engaging diverse participants, including girls, boys, men, women, community members, and key stakeholders. The study ensured representation across various contexts and demographics within the target communities through purposeful sampling. This qualitative study aimed to provide rich insights into the ARP model's impact, relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability, ultimately informing

future interventions and contributing to the goal of eradicating FGM and promoting girls' well-being in the region.

### 3.1 Qualitative Data Collection methods

Qualitative data collection constitutes a methodological approach within research endeavors aimed at acquiring non-quantitative insights into human experiences. It endeavors to delve into the intricacies of meanings, beliefs, values, and motivations underpinning individuals' behaviors. In this particular study, a multifaceted approach was adopted, incorporating Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Dyad interviews, observations, content analysis of existing materials, and documentation of exemplary practices in data collection.

The utilization of KIIs facilitated the extraction of comprehensive insights from individuals possessing specialized knowledge or expertise relevant to the research domain. Conversely, FGDs were instrumental in exploring collective experiences, attitudes, and perceptions pertaining to specific subjects. Dyad interviews, involving caregivers and girls, were conducted to elucidate their interactions, perspectives, and experiences regarding the subject matter.

The KII interviews were conducted individually by consultants, targeting participants selected purposively based on their relevance and expertise in the surveyed area. Employing open-ended questions allowed for detailed responses while maintaining thematic consistency. FGDs comprised 8 to 15 participants each, conducive to robust interaction and exploration of shared viewpoints, group dynamics, and social norms. Participant selection for FGDs was purposive, considering their relevance and potential to offer diverse perspectives. Gender-segregated FGDs ensured comprehensive consideration of perspectives, experiences, and needs across genders, addressing any existing power differentials and fostering an equitable discussion environment.

For dyad interviews, participants were purposively selected to ensure both caregiver and girl were comfortable being interviewed together and willing to engage openly. This approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of their perspectives and interactions related to the subject matter.

Overall, the employed qualitative data collection methods allowed for a nuanced understanding of human experiences and perspectives, enriching the research findings with diverse insights and ensuring thorough exploration of the research topic.

#### 3.1.1 Key informant interviews with stakeholders

This study conducted in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including project implementing staff in Manga Hearts in Nyamira, Cecome in Kisii, World Vision staff in Sook, healthcare professionals, community leaders, reformed circumcisers, and government officials. The study reached out to 36 key informants spread across the three regions of Kisii, Nyamira and Sook, West Pokot ( Table 1 ) below.

Table 1: Key informant interviews with stakeholders

Kisii	Nyamira	West Pokot
Local administrator-chief	Religious leader SDA-Manga	Priest in Chepnyal
Interview With A Nurse	Clan Elder Manga	Teacher Tindar Primary School (Female) Teacher Cheptesok Primary School (Female)
Nurse Community Health Nurse	Clinical Officer Manga	Teacher Chepkaliang' Primary School (Male)

		Teacher Cholpogh Primary School (Female)
Acting Ward Administrator Childrens' Officer	ACC	Officer Commanding Station (OCS)
Gender and Children department , Kisii County	Health worker - Nurse	Nurse in charge
ACC - Maraini Sub county- Kegogi Division (Kisii County)	Project Manager Manga HEARTS	Chief, Chepnyal location
ISF ARP Project Implementers	Monitoring and evaluation officer	Catholic Church, Catechist
Childrens officer	Reformed Circumsior	Chief, Wonyo Nakwijit location
Teacher at Mesaria Primary School	Teachers Kimera zone	Project manager Sook Girl Child promotion project
Teacher at Omogumo Primary school	Entanda Primay & JSS	Project Officer Girl Child promotion project
CECOME manager		Childrens Office -

These individuals possessed valuable knowledge about the communities' cultural context, attitudes, and challenges surrounding FGM. By tapping into their expertise and insights, the research aimed to assess how well the ARP approach aligned with the local context and identify potential areas for improvement. The perspectives of these key stakeholders were crucial in informing the approach's effectiveness and guiding future interventions for a sustained impact in the fight against FGM.

### 3.1.2 Dyad Interviews

The dyad interviews, which included pairings of mothers and daughters, teachers and students, and community leaders and community members, were carefully designed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the ARP approach's impact. The study did three interviews. The selection process aimed to balance different age groups, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds, capturing a diverse representation of the community's experiences. The study also considered the potential for dynamic and productive interaction between the dyad members, ensuring their comfort and willingness to engage in open and honest dialogue. This meticulous approach maximized the value of the interviews, providing rich insights into the ARP approach's impact on individuals and communities within the context of FGM. These interviews provided a nuanced understanding of the approach's impact on the girls' lives, family, and community dynamics. By engaging both parties, the research sought to assess the overall effectiveness of ARP in addressing FGM and generate valuable lessons for future interventions. This dual approach comprehensively explored the girls' subjective experiences and the caregivers' unique perspectives, enriching the qualitative data and contributing significantly to the evaluation's objectives.

Table 2: Dyad interviews in Kisii, Nyamira and West Pokot

Kisii	Nyamira	West Pokot
Mother & -Child	Teacher & student	Community leader & ARP participants

### 3.1.3 Focus Group Discussions

The study conducted FGDs with various community groups, including girls, boys, youth, women, men, community health workers, nyumba kumi, and elders from all the project sites. In total, the study conducted 54 FGDs spread across the three regions of Kisii, Nyamira and Sook, West Pokot.

Table 3: FGDs in Kisii, Nyamira and West Pokot

Kisii	Nyamira	West Pokot
Ragogo Catholic religious leaders	Catholic men Manga	Priest in Chepnyal
Nyumba Kumi Leaders Omora Chief camp	Kemera community leaders	Community Health Volunteers
Community Health workers Ragogo	Community members Manga Heart	Elders
Entanda Girls ARP Parents Kegogi parents Kegogi women elders	Manga HEART girls ARP (mothers)	Teachers
Community members Nyakeiyo	Kemera boda boda youth group	Aged ladies
Nyakohora Community members	Enurseri Community leaders member (women)	Girls
Metembe Parents (mothers)		Mothers
Nyamokenye community members	Motembe primary teachers	Girls
Boys Itanda primary school Boys Mitembe Primary school	Moitunya Primary Teachers	Boys
Girls Nyakohora ARP Girls	Manga boda boda youth group	Teachers
Entanda ARP Girls	Motembe ARP parents	Religious leaders
Teachers Entanda primary school	Moitunya parents Men ARP men	Fathers
Metembe ARP Girls	Manga HEARTS elders	Girls

This comprehensive approach provided a clear understanding of the ARP approach's impact and effectiveness in addressing FGM. Each FGD targeted a specific demographic group, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their unique perspectives and experiences related to the approach. Separate FGDs with girls delved into their journeys through ARP, assessing the approach's impact on their lives and perceptions. FGDs with boys provided insights into their roles and experiences in supporting or participating in the ARP approach. FGDs with youth, women, and men offered a broader community perspective, capturing diverse opinions and attitudes toward ARP. Additionally, engaging elders in FGDs tapped into traditional and cultural insights, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the approach's reception within the community. This multi-dimensional approach ensured a thorough assessment of ARP's relevance and effectiveness across different demographic groups, contributing valuable insights for approach improvement and advocacy strategies.

### **3.1.4 Case Study and Documentation of Best Practices**

The evaluation included a detailed examination and documentation of best practices within the ARP Approach. This involved capturing success stories, videos, photos, and captions that showcased positive outcomes and effective strategies for combating FGM. Through in-depth interviews and discussions with stakeholders, including community members, approach implementers, and beneficiaries, the evaluation identified and documented practices that had proven successful in eradicating FGM and promoting girls' well-being. This documentation served as records of achievements and a valuable resource for sharing knowledge and replicating successful approaches in similar contexts. This comprehensive approach contributed to a robust and informed evaluation process, fostering continuous learning and improvement in the fight against FGM.

### **3.1.5 Document Review**

As part of the evaluation process, the consultant conducted a thorough review of pertinent documents to gather comprehensive insights into the ARP approach and its implementation in Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot. This document review encompassed essential materials such as the project design documents for the ISF and partners' and World Vision (WV) Sook Girl Child Promotion (GCP) project, Project Annual Reports, Project Reflection & Learning reports, Annual Operating Plans, and the project's Proposal narrative. Additionally, the consultant scrutinized relevant materials supporting the implementation of the ARP approach, including ISF and partners' ARP Manual, as well as documents from the Kenya Anti-FGM Board such as the ARP Manual and other national and international anti-FGM protocols and studies. This comprehensive review aimed to provide the consultant with a well-rounded understanding of the context, strategies, and outcomes associated with the ARP approach in the specified regions.

### **3.1.6 Observations and Photo voice**

The evaluation process incorporated direct observations and Photo Voice methodology to enhance the depth of understanding and capture visual narratives. Through on-the-ground observations, the consultants gained first-hand insights into the realities of the ARP implementation in Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot. This involved actively observing community events, interactions, and the overall atmosphere surrounding the ARP initiatives. Additionally, Photo Voice, a participatory research method, was employed, allowing project participants, especially girls, boys, youth, women, men, and elders of the community, to use photography to express their perspectives and experiences related to ARP and FGM abandonment. This visual documentation, accompanied by participants' narratives, was a powerful tool for conveying the nuanced aspects of the intervention, ensuring a more holistic and inclusive evaluation process.

## **3.2 Selection and training of interviewers**

CHIK Consultants leveraged their expertise to train research assistants and prepare them for data collection. Research assistants were identified in the target locations through local advertisements and a rigorous selection process, considering gender and the representation of special category groups. The research assistants who were fluent in English and the local language were identified and recruited. To provide high-quality data collection, they underwent further training on ARP tools and methodologies, evaluation planning, administration, tools, sampling, and pre-testing.

Selected research assistants received comprehensive training on data collection methodologies, including interview etiquette, information-gathering techniques, and data recording procedures. This training culminated in a pre-test and a plenary session to share their experiences from the field and ensured a common understanding of the tools.

### **3.3 Field data collection**

This evaluation gathered information through various methods, including document review, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), open-ended interviews, and facilitated participatory self-evaluation and reflection. The study implemented a robust system of checks and balances to ensure data ownership and accuracy, with supervision from the consultant and key project implementers. The study primarily conducted interviews and discussions in the local language. Moderators and note-takers facilitated the FGD using a predetermined guide with relevant themes and sub-themes. The study conducted KIIs using a predetermined guide with open-ended questions tailored to specific informants.

Documentation of change stories played a crucial role in triangulating quantitative themes in this qualitative evaluation. Collecting and analyzing narratives from individuals and groups impacted by the ARP approach, the evaluation team gained more profound insights into community members' lived experiences and perspectives. These stories provided rich contextual information and illustrated how quantitative data points translated into real-world changes. For example, quantitative data might have shown an increase in girls participating in ARP activities. At the same time, change stories revealed how these activities empowered girls and transformed their lives. By comparing and contrasting quantitative themes with qualitative narratives, the evaluation team developed a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the approach's impact and identified areas for improvement. This triangulation approach strengthened the validity and reliability of the evaluation findings, ensuring they were grounded in the lived experiences of the community.

The qualitative survey sought to understand the impact of the ARP approach on community perceptions and actions related to FGM. It explored the extent to which the approach increased knowledge and awareness about the harms of FGM and promoted ARP as a safe alternative. The survey examined how the approach contributed to shifting social norms and attitudes towards FGM, including the role of community leaders in advocating for change. It investigated how the approach empowered girls and women to resist FGM and advocate for their rights, as well as the barriers and facilitators to their empowerment. The survey also assessed the approach's effectiveness in engaging boys and men as allies in the fight against FGM and explored effective strategies for their continued involvement. Finally, the survey evaluated how the approach strengthened community-level responses to prevent FGM and support girls at risk, identifying key factors for sustainable community response and opportunities for further integration of ARP into existing community structures.

### **3.4 Data quality control**

All data quality control measures were adhered to throughout the process. These included reviewing the study tools, understanding/translating them into local languages, standardizing training (with pre-testing and ensuring research assistants' familiarity with local terminologies), regular supervision, cross-checking completed tools, and data cleaning. The administered tools were checked regularly for correctness, completeness, and consistency.

Research assistants were assigned a manageable number of groups to visit daily, reinforcing the gathering of accurate information. Those entering qualitative data were supervised and given manageable workloads to ensure accuracy. During analysis compared emerging information with secondary data to address any outliers.

### **3.5 A Commitment to Ethical and Inclusive Assessment**

The evaluation of the ARP approach, aimed at contributing to the eradication of FGM, was deeply committed to ethical and inclusive assessment. Several fundamental principles guided the process. First, participants' voices and inclusivity were prioritized, employing qualitative methods like interviews and focus groups discussions to capture diverse stakeholder experiences and ensure their representation in the findings. The evaluation actively encouraged participation and created a safe space for sharing stories and opinions, even involving community members in data interpretation and recommendations. The study ensured methodological appropriateness and triangulation, combining secondary quantitative and qualitative data to understand the approach's impact comprehensively. Third, the evaluation highlighted the unique contributions of the ARP approach by analyzing data to identify specific pathways of change and comparing findings with existing literature, showcasing concrete examples of the approach's empowerment of individuals and communities to abandon FGM. Fourth, transparency and acknowledgment were maintained through a detailed description of the methodology, acknowledgment of data sources while ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, and open discussion of the evaluation's limitations and potential biases. Finally, adherence to strict ethical standards and child protection guidelines throughout the process included obtaining informed consent, implementing safeguards for interviewing children, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, establishing child protection reporting protocols, and upholding the "Do No Harm" principle. By adhering to these principles, the evaluation aimed to accurately capture the impact of the ARP approach and contribute to the global movement to end FGM, recognizing that ethical and transparent evaluation is essential for promoting positive social change and ensuring the effectiveness and benefit of interventions for the communities they serve.

### **3.6 Data processing and analysis**

During the data analysis phase, a robust quality control mechanism was implemented to ensure accuracy and integrity. Qualitative data was organized into meaningful thematic categories aligned with the evaluation objectives. Both thematic and content analysis techniques were employed to analyze the data, identifying key themes, patterns, and relationships within the dataset. The choice between thematic analysis, suitable for exploring lived experiences and perceptions, and content analysis, better for quantifying the prevalence of themes, depended on the specific research questions and data collected. Ultimately, using both techniques complementarily provided a comprehensive understanding of ARP's impact on FGM reduction. The findings from this analysis informed the development of this report. Additionally, captured multimedia materials like video clips and photos were edited and packaged for presentation in the final report and potential online dissemination.

### **3.7 Lessons Learned**

To capture valuable lessons learned, the evaluation employed a multifaceted approach. This involved reviewing project documents, conducting field observations, and interviewing various

stakeholders, including community members, project staff, and government officials. Additionally, secondary data, such as national and international anti-FGM protocols and studies, were collected to provide a broader context. This collaborative process ensured participants' contributions were captured and incorporated as essential lessons in the final evaluation report.

### **3.8 Validation Workshop**

A stakeholder validation workshop, facilitated by WVK and ISF, will be held to present and discuss the draft evaluation findings. WVK and ISF will guide the workshop's format, timing, program approach, and participant selection to ensure a diverse and representative group provides feedback. This collaborative effort will contribute to the evaluation's accuracy and foster a sense of shared ownership of the results.

### **4.0 Limitations**

1. The relocation of key project staff limited the evaluation's ability to gather first-hand information on the project activities in Sook. The study made effort to reach them on phone
2. The criminalisation and subsequent consequences attached to FGM practice made community members less open with some responses, thus compromising the authenticity of the responses.

### **5.0 Findings and Discussion**

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings gathered through qualitative research methods, examining the impact, relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of the Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) approach in addressing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) within the communities of Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot counties in Kenya. By meticulously examining the voices and experiences of girls, boys, community members, and key stakeholders, this chapter offers valuable insights into the transformative potential of ARP. It probes the nuanced realities of FGM abandonment, exploring the interplay of cultural norms, community engagement, and individual agency. It offers a rich body of evidence-based conclusions and recommendations to guide future interventions and enhance the approach's impact. This chapter demonstrates the power of collective action and the potential of ARP to contribute to shifting social norms and empowering communities to abandon FGM.

#### **5.1 Impact: Measuring the Difference**

This section examines the impact of the Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) approach on the lives of girls and communities affected by Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). It analyzes the evidence gathered through qualitative research, evaluating how ARP has reduced FGM prevalence, identified key success areas, and impacted participants' subjective experiences. The section investigates the role of boys in supporting the approach and assesses whether ARP reaches all relevant actors within the targeted communities. Finally, it explores the intervention's unintended positive and negative consequences, shedding light on the broader ripple effects of ARP beyond its primary focus on FGM abandonment. This analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of ARP's transformative power in shaping a future where girls are empowered and protected from FGM.

##### **5.1.1. FGM Prevalence Reduction: Evidence and Extent**

###### **Finding:**

The evaluation reveals a compelling narrative of positive change: the ARP initiative has demonstrably reduced the prevalence of FGM in the communities where it has been

implemented. This finding, grounded in the collective voices of community stakeholders, paints a picture of a gradual yet significant shift in social norms and behaviors. The tangible reduction in FGM incidents, coupled with a growing perception of FGM as a harmful and unacceptable practice, underscores the impact of ARP's multifaceted approach. This finding is a testament to the power of community engagement, education, and empowerment in driving a fundamental transformation toward a future free from FGM.

**Kisii and Nyamira:** Within the communities of Kisii and Nyamira, a consistent theme emerged from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): community stakeholders perceived a noticeable decrease in FGM incidents.

"There is much less talk about cutting these days," shared one elder during an FGD in Nyamira. "People are more aware of the dangers and the law." Another participant in a Kisii FGD echoed this sentiment: "I haven't seen a single celebration for the cut in my village for years. It's just not as common anymore."

This observation, shared across a diverse range of participants, suggests a favorable shift in social norms and behaviors, indicating a growing acceptance of FGM abandonment.

Photo voice activities revealed that girls participating in ARP viewed education as a key pathway to empowerment. Photos depicting girls studying, reading books, and attending school were common at the same time they were able to attend to household chores.

During photo-elicited interviews, one girl explained, 'This photo shows me studying because I want to be a doctor. ARP taught me that I can achieve my dreams.' These findings align with interview data, suggesting that ARP fostered a strong connection between education and future aspirations among girls."



**West Pokot:** While quantitative data on FGM prevalence in West Pokot was limited, anecdotal evidence gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) painted a compelling picture of a decline.

"We don't have the big celebrations for the cut anymore," one participant in a Chepnyal FGD shared. "It's all done in secret now if it's done at all."

"My daughter refused to be cut," a mother shared in an FGD. "She said she wanted to be a doctor, and she knew that FGM would stop her from achieving her dreams."

This shift, marked by the absence of open celebrations and increased resistance from girls, suggests a growing awareness of the harmful effects of FGM and an ever-increasing desire for change.

**Overall:** While the extent of the reduction varied across the three counties, a consistent theme emerged across all data sources: stakeholders, including community members, leaders, and approach implementers, agreed that FGM prevalence had decreased. This shared perception, regardless of specific location, reflects a broader shift in attitudes and practices, pointing to the growing influence of the ARP approach in challenging deeply entrenched traditions.

The prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) has shown a significant decline both nationally and in the counties of Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot between 2008 and 2022, according to data from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS). Nationally, the prevalence of FGM decreased from 38% in 2008 to 15% in 2022, indicating a substantial reduction.

In West Pokot, which has historically had one of the highest rates of FGM in Kenya, the prevalence dropped from 96.9% in 2008 to 85% in 2022. While this represents a considerable decline, West Pokot continues to have a significantly higher prevalence of FGM compared to the national average.

Both Kisii and Nyamira experienced substantial decreases in FGM prevalence. In Kisii, the prevalence fell from 96% in 2008 to 77% in 2022, while in Nyamira, it dropped from 94.2% to 75% over the same period (Figure 2). These significant reductions suggest positive progress in addressing FGM in these two counties.

The observed declines in FGM prevalence across Kenya and these specific counties offer encouraging evidence of the impact of ongoing efforts to eliminate this harmful practice. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that the prevalence remains high in certain areas, particularly in West Pokot, highlighting the need for sustained and targeted interventions. Further investigation is required to understand the specific contributing factors behind the observed changes and to identify the most effective strategies for accelerating the elimination of FGM in all regions of Kenya.

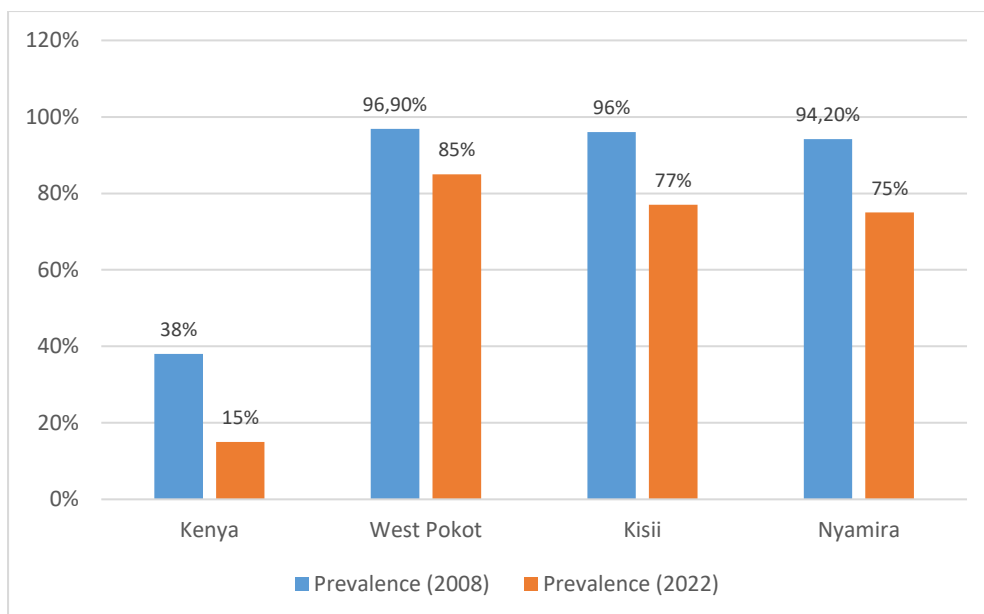


Figure 1: Prevalence of FGM (Source KDHS)

**Discussion:** The reduction in FGM prevalence is likely due to a combination of factors:

**Increased Awareness:** The success of the ARP initiative in reducing FGM prevalence is directly linked to its effectiveness in raising awareness about the harmful consequences of the practice. Data gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) revealed a significant shift in understanding among community members. Participants demonstrated a clear and comprehensive grasp of the various ways FGM negatively impacts girls' and women's lives, encompassing both physical and psychological repercussions. This increased awareness, facilitated through ARP activities, multisectoral interventions and media campaigns, has empowered individuals to make more informed decisions, challenging the traditional acceptance of FGM and fostering a greater sense of agency regarding their health and well-being. The ARP approach has effectively bridged the gap between traditional beliefs and scientific understanding, equipping communities with the knowledge necessary to make informed choices about their practices.

**Legal Deterrent:** The criminalization of FGM serves as a deterrent, discouraging individuals from engaging in the practice for fear of legal repercussions. This was reflected in statements from community members who acknowledged the fear of legal consequences associated with FGM. The Kenyan legal framework, specifically the criminalization of FGM through the FGM Act of 2011, has played a significant role in deterring the practice. This legal deterrent, while not the sole factor, has undoubtedly contributed to the observed decline in FGM prevalence. Data collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) revealed that community members openly acknowledged the fear of legal consequences associated with FGM. This recognition of potential legal repercussions has served as a powerful motivator for individuals to reconsider their involvement in the practice, further reinforcing the message that FGM is not only harmful but also illegal. The combination of education and legal consequences has created a more challenging environment for those who would perpetuate FGM, contributing to the broader shift in attitudes and behaviors towards FGM abandonment.

**Community Engagement:** The success of the ARP initiative hinges not only on education and legislation but also on the active engagement of community leaders and influencers. The evaluation reveals that the active participation of respected figures, including chiefs, elders, and religious leaders, in FGM abandonment campaigns has created a supportive environment for change within communities. This engagement, evident in the participation of leaders in barazas, sensitization sessions, and public declarations against FGM, has fostered a sense of collective responsibility for protecting girls. By actively promoting FGM abandonment and challenging harmful traditional practices, these influential individuals have effectively shifted community norms and created a more supportive environment for girls who are at risk of FGM. This demonstrates the crucial role of community leadership in driving positive social change, where individuals feel empowered to advocate for a better future for girls.

**Empowered Girls:** The ARP initiative's success is inextricably linked to girls' empowerment. The evaluation revealed that girls who have participated in ARP have gained a profound understanding of their rights and developed essential life skills, equipping them to resist FGM and advocate for themselves. This newfound confidence and agency were evident in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with ARP graduates, who expressed a sense of self-assurance and the ability to make informed choices about their bodies and futures. The ARP approach has effectively shifted the power dynamic, empowering girls to challenge harmful traditional practices and claim their rightful place as active participants in shaping their lives. This transformative impact, evident in the voices of empowered girls, is a testament to the power of education and the importance of fostering a generation of girls who are confident, self-assured, and determined to create a future free from FGM.

### 5.1.2. ARP and FGM Prevalence: A Correlation Analysis

**Finding:** There is a strong correlation between ARP implementation and the decline in FGM prevalence.

This study explored how the introduction of ARP approaches has influenced the practice of FGM in the targeted communities. FGDs and KIIs consistently reported a reduction of FGM incidences in the communities since the start of implementation. Data gathered through qualitative research underscores the significant impact of ARP interventions, which are closely tied to influencing social norms, and driving positive behavioral change. Training girls during school days and holidays has had a direct correlation with girls empowerment. Graduation ceremonies and declarations, public sensitizations, use of role models, and engagement of boys, community leaders, elders, and opinion leaders builds a community-wide support against FGM and directly challenges the traditional beliefs surrounding it. This has led to a noticeable shift in attitudes and cultural beliefs regarding FGM practices, and a shift on social norms leading to a reduction in the observed prevalence of FGM. The association of ARP interventions and the observed decline in FGM prevalence underscores the importance of continued ARP implementation and expansion to achieve sustained FGM abandonment within these communities.

**Kisii and Nyamira:** Within the communities of Kisii and Nyamira, participants in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) directly linked the observed reduction in FGM incidents to the reach and intensity of ARP activities.

"Where ARP is strong, the cut is less common," shared one elder during an FGD in Kisii. "The girls are learning, and the parents are listening."

During a KII in Nyamira, a teacher echoed this sentiment: "Since ARP started coming to our school, we've seen a real change in how people talk about FGM. It's not just the girls but the parents, too. They're starting to understand that there's a better way."

These direct quotes from participants illustrate the perceived correlation between the intensity of ARP activities and the decline in FGM prevalence. The more visible and impactful ARP interventions are, the more effectively they challenge traditional practices and shift community attitudes.

**West Pokot:** The success of the ARP approach in West Pokot is directly linked to its accessibility and the extent of its implementation. Areas like Chepnyal, which have benefited from consistent approach activity, have witnessed a noticeable decline in FGM prevalence. This is likely due to factors such as increased awareness of FGM's harmful effects, the availability of a viable alternative rite of passage, and more significant community support for girls' rights and empowerment.

However, in remote areas of West Pokot, particularly those bordering Uganda, the approach's reach has been limited by geographic factors such as poor infrastructure and transportation limitations. Consequently, these communities have continued to struggle with FGM, often resorting to clandestine practices to avoid detection and legal repercussions. This suggests that the approach's effectiveness is contingent on its ability to reach and engage with communities in a consistent and accessible manner.

#### **Discussion:**

The correlation between ARP interventions and reduction on FGM prevalence suggests that ARP has been effective in reducing FGM prevalence, by changing community attitudes and behaviours towards the practice. The evaluation findings provide a compelling case for the effectiveness of the ARP approach in influencing social norms and fostering behavior change related to female genital mutilation (FGM). The approach's impact, however, is demonstrably linked to its accessibility and the intensity of its implementation. In Kisii and Nyamira, where ARP has been actively implemented, participants in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) directly connected the observed reduction in FGM incidents to the approach's reach and intensity. For instance, one elder in Kisii stated, "Where ARP is strong, the cut is less common." A teacher in Nyamira echoed this sentiment, suggesting that the approach's presence has shifted community discourse around FGM. The direct correlation between ARP activity and FGM reduction in these regions highlights its potential for influencing social norms and challenging traditional practices.

In contrast, West Pokot presents a nuanced picture. While areas like Chepnyal, where the approach has been consistently implemented, have witnessed a noticeable decline in FGM, remote communities with limited access continue to need help with the practice. This disparity underscores the critical role of geographical accessibility in ensuring ARP's effectiveness. The approach's success relies on consistently reaching remote communities, disseminating information about FGM and its harms, and promoting the ARP model as a viable alternative. These findings suggest that expanding the approach's reach to remote areas and addressing logistical barriers is paramount to achieving widespread FGM abandonment.

This finding suggest a crucial role that ARP play in transforming social norms. It supports earlier studies by Matanda, et al, 2021 which found that culturally sensitive interventions can significantly reduce harmful practices like FGM. It is also consitstent with theories of social

change that emphasize the need for culturally appropriate interventions in transforming harmful traditional practices.

The insights from ARP approach to FGM abandonment projects the necessity for a multi-pronged approach to tackling harmful cultural practices in future interventions. Investing in resources to expand ARP's reach and address logistical challenges in remote areas is crucial. Developing targeted interventions that consider the specific cultural contexts and challenges these communities face will further enhance the approach's effectiveness. By prioritizing accessibility and tailoring interventions to local realities, future efforts can build on the demonstrated success of ARP in changing attitudes and practices, ultimately contributing to eradicating FGM in Kenya.

### 5.1.3. ARP's Success Factors: Identifying Key Strengths

#### Finding:

The ARP approach's effectiveness stems from its multifaceted approach, strategically combining cultural sensitivity, education, community engagement, and empowerment to create a more positive and protective environment for girls. By embracing a culturally sensitive approach, ARP effectively integrates traditional rites of passage into its framework, making it resonate with the communities and fostering acceptance. As one elder in Kisii shared during a Focus Group Discussion, "This ARP, it's like our own way of celebrating our girls growing up. It's not like the old ways, but it still feels right for us." This integration helps bridge the gap between traditional beliefs and the need for change, reducing resistance to the approach's message.

Alongside this cultural sensitivity, the approach provides comprehensive education about FGM, highlighting its harmful physical and psychological effects and equipping participants with knowledge about alternative rites of passage. This education empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their bodies and futures. One young girl in Nyamira expressed during a Focus Group Discussion, *"I learned so much about FGM from the ARP. I never knew how dangerous it was before. Now I know I don't have to do it, and I can be a strong woman without it."*

Furthermore, the ARP approach extends beyond individual empowerment by actively engaging the community. Parents, community leaders, elders, and other stakeholders are involved in promoting FGM abandonment and supporting girls' rights, fostering a sense of shared responsibility, and creating a supportive environment where girls can thrive. This collective effort, as a teacher in West Pokot pointed out during a Key Informant Interview, *"It's not just the girls learning, but the parents too. They're starting to understand that there's a better way."* The public declarations and graduation ceremonies associated to ARP fosters a sense of commitment by parents and community members to uphold and protect the right of the girls within the community against FGM and further solidify this shift in societal norms by creating a collective commitment to new, healthier practices.

The use of positive role models and consistent sensitization efforts ensures sustained change, gradually transforming community attitudes and behaviors towards the abandonment of FGM and the embrace of holistic, empowering rites of passage.

Finally, the approach's success lies in empowering girls with the confidence and skills to navigate their lives with agency. ARP focuses on building their self-esteem, assertiveness, and decision-making capabilities, enabling them to make informed choices and resist societal pressures surrounding FGM. This empowerment allows girls to advocate for themselves and others, challenging harmful traditions and contributing to broader social change. *"After ARP, I feel like I have a voice. I can stand up for myself and tell people to stop talking about FGM. I'm not afraid"*

*anymore,"* shared an ARP graduate during a Focus Group Discussion in Kisii. This combination of empowering girls, engaging communities, educating individuals, and embracing local traditions drives the ARP model's success.

### **Discussion:**

The success of the ARP approach underscores the importance of a multifaceted approach that combines education, awareness, community mobilization, and girls' empowerment. By prioritizing these key elements, this model effectively challenges deeply rooted cultural practices and fosters a more favorable environment for girls. The approach's effectiveness in reducing FGM prevalence in the communities studied demonstrates the power of this holistic approach.

Through comprehensive education, ARP empowers individuals with knowledge about the harmful consequences of FGM, not only physically but also psychologically. These knowledge and awareness-raising initiatives facilitate informed decision-making and promote a shift in community attitudes. Additionally, the approach's deliberate engagement of parents, community leaders, elders, and other stakeholders fosters a shared responsibility for protecting girls and challenging harmful traditional practices. This community mobilization creates a supportive environment where girls feel empowered to resist FGM and advocate for their rights.

ARP's focus on empowering girls is particularly noteworthy. The approach equips girls with the confidence, skills, and knowledge to navigate their lives with agency. It enables them to resist societal pressures and make informed choices about their bodies and futures. This empowerment allows them to advocate for themselves and their peers, challenging harmful traditions and contributing to broader social change.

The findings suggest that achieving lasting change in the fight against FGM requires a multi-pronged approach that addresses both individual and societal levels. The success of the ARP model highlights the crucial role of education, awareness, community engagement, and girls' empowerment in driving positive change and creating a more equitable and protective environment for all girls.

#### **5.1.4. Girls' Voices: Experiences of Protection and Perception**

**Finding:** ARP interventions empower girls, provide them with safety against FGM, and ensure their acceptance in society.

This study examined how ARP approaches impact girls' empowerment, protection from FGM, and improve social acceptance in the targeted communities. The evaluation reveals that ARP graduates consistently report positive experiences of safety, empowerment, and acceptance within their communities, highlighting the approach's effectiveness in fostering a transformative shift in the lives of these young women.

Firstly, ARP graduates express a heightened sense of protection, feeling secure in the knowledge that they have the information and support necessary to safeguard themselves and other girls from FGM. This newfound confidence translates into a sense of empowerment to stand up for their rights and challenge harmful practices, as expressed in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), where graduates shared their experiences of feeling empowered and safe.

Secondly, the approach cultivates a sense of empowerment among graduates, equipping them with the confidence and skills to navigate life's challenges. They feel equipped with the knowledge and resources to pursue their goals and make informed choices about their futures,

as evidenced by FGDs, where graduates shared their feelings of self-assurance and preparedness for the future.

Finally, the approach facilitates a smooth integration of graduates within their families and communities, challenging traditional beliefs and fostering greater acceptance of uncut girls. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and FGDs reveal a shift in attitudes toward uncut girls, with an increasing recognition of their value and respect for their rights. This suggests that the approach's efforts to promote education and awareness have effectively challenged harmful social norms surrounding FGM and paved the way for greater acceptance and inclusivity within the communities.

The subjective experiences of ARP graduates provide compelling evidence of the approach's effectiveness in empowering girls and creating a safer and more supportive environment. Their narratives highlight the profound impact of the approach on their sense of self, their relationships within their families and communities, and their ability to navigate the world around them confidently.

### **Discussion:**

The positive experiences of ARP graduates underscore the approach's effectiveness in fostering a sense of safety, empowerment, and acceptance for girls. They demonstrate its significant contribution to a shift in social norms and attitudes towards FGM. The approach's impact extends beyond individual transformation, effectively creating a more supportive and inclusive environment for girls within their communities.

ARP graduates consistently report a sense of safety, knowing that they have the information and support needed to protect themselves and other girls from FGM. This newfound security empowers them to challenge harmful practices and advocate for their rights, contributing to a broader change in community attitudes. For example, one ARP graduate shared in a Focus Group Discussion, *"After ARP, I feel like I have a voice. I can stand up for myself and tell people to stop talking about FGM. I'm not afraid anymore."*

Furthermore, the approach's emphasis on building self-esteem, confidence, and decision-making skills fosters a sense of empowerment among graduates. They feel equipped to navigate life's challenges and pursue their aspirations, breaking free from the limitations imposed by traditional beliefs and practices. Another graduate stated in a separate FGD, *"ARP taught me to believe in myself and my abilities. I know that I can achieve anything I set my mind to."*

The positive shifts in social norms are evident in the growing acceptance of uncut girls within families and communities. The approach's success in promoting education and awareness has challenged traditional beliefs and fostered a greater understanding of girls' rights. This increased acceptance is reflected in the positive experiences of graduates as they integrate back into their communities. During a Key Informant Interview, a teacher observed, *"The girls are now seen as important as the boys; they are allowed to be who they want."* These findings underscore the transformative impact of ARP on both individual girls and the broader community. The approach's multifaceted approach, which combines education, empowerment, and community engagement, creates a ripple effect of positive change, paving the way for a future where girls are free from the harmful practice of FGM and empowered to live fulfilling lives.

The finding supports empowerment and social change theories, emphasizing the importance of culturally sensitive interventions that educate and engage communities. It demonstrates that ARP can effectively challenge and transform traditional practices. The practical implications are

significant, suggesting that ARP approaches should be expanded and integrated into broader educational and health initiatives. Policymakers and practitioners should focus on creating supportive environments that protect girls from FGM and promote their overall well-being

#### 5.1.5. Boys as Allies: Support and Participation in ARP

**Finding:** Boys are somewhat involved in ARP activities, but their engagement needs to be strengthened.

In examining the implementation of ARP in the three counties, it was observed that the active engagement of boys is crucial for fostering family and community-wide support for the abandonment of FGM. The evaluation of the ARP approach to FGM abandonment reveals a promising yet complex dynamic surrounding the engagement of boys. While boys participate in some ARP activities, demonstrating their willingness to support girls' rights and challenge harmful traditions, their involvement often falls short of the level observed among girls. This suggests a need for more targeted interventions to foster deeper engagement and ensure that boys become active allies in the fight against FGM.

Boys participate in ARP training sessions, which equip them with knowledge about FGM, its harmful effects, and the importance of gender equality. They also engage in awareness campaigns in schools, disseminating information and advocating for girls' rights among their peers. Furthermore, their participation in public declarations against FGM signifies their commitment to ending the practice. Data collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) corroborate this involvement, with boys acknowledging their role in supporting girls.

However, both FGDs and KIIs reveal a desire for more structured and consistent engagement of boys in ARP activities. Boys expressed a willingness to take on more responsibility and play a more active role in promoting positive change. Their limited involvement, compared to girls, highlights a need for the approach to tailor interventions to address boys' specific needs and perspectives on FGM.

This suggests that the approach can effectively engage boys as active allies in the fight against FGM by developing targeted initiatives. This might include dedicated training sessions for boys, incorporating interactive learning techniques, role-playing, and discussion-based activities. Peer education approaches could empower boys to share knowledge about FGM and its harms within their schools and communities. Highlighting male community leaders and influential figures who advocate for FGM abandonment could inspire other boys to take on a leadership role. Lastly, encouraging fathers to participate in ARP activities alongside their daughters could foster a sense of shared responsibility and commitment to girls' rights. By incorporating these targeted initiatives and engaging boys' perspectives, ARP can solidify its impact and ensure lasting change.

**Discussion:** The evaluation's findings highlight the critical importance of engaging boys and men as allies in the fight against FGM, underscoring the need for more comprehensive male engagement strategies within the ARP. While approach recognizes the significance of involving boys, it requires a more targeted approach to strengthen their participation and promote positive masculinity. The finding supports the theory that gender-inclusive approaches are necessary for effective social change. It suggests that ARP approaches should integrate activities that are specifically designed to engage boys

The findings suggest that achieving lasting change necessitates addressing deeply ingrained gender norms that often perpetuate harmful practices like FGM. While women are typically

seen as the primary perpetrators of FGM, men often benefit from the practice due to societal expectations and traditional beliefs about masculinity and marriage. This underscores the need for the approach to actively challenge these gender norms and foster a generation of male allies who actively support girls' rights.

The finding supports the theory that gender-inclusive approaches are necessary for effective social change. It suggests that ARP approach should integrate activities that are specifically designed to engage boys. Enhancing boys' engagement in ARP activities could lead to broader community support and more significant shifts in attitudes towards FGM. The evaluation identified several areas where the approach can enhance its engagement of boys. First, developing dedicated training sessions for boys that address their specific needs and concerns related to FGM can be crucial. These sessions should focus on promoting gender equality, challenging harmful stereotypes, and fostering a deeper understanding of the negative consequences of FGM. Second, encouraging boys to take on leadership roles through peer education approaches and mentoring initiatives can empower them to become active advocates for girls' rights within their schools and communities. Third, highlighting male role models who champion FGM abandonment can inspire other boys to embrace positive masculinity and challenge traditional beliefs. Finally, engaging fathers in ARP activities alongside their daughters can foster a sense of shared responsibility and strengthen their commitment to protecting their daughters from FGM.

By prioritizing these strategies, the ARP approach can create a more inclusive and effective approach to combating FGM. This will ensure that boys become active partners in dismantling harmful gender norms and promoting a future where girls are free from the threat of FGM and empowered to live fulfilling lives.

#### **5.1.6. Reaching Key Stakeholders: Inclusion and Effectiveness**

**Findings** ARP interventions have left out key stakeholders, such as older women and mothers-in-law, in the fight against FGM.

This study examined the roles of various community members in FGM practices and the implementation of ARP interventions. The evaluation of the ARP approach reveals that while the approach has successfully engaged key actors within communities, older women and mothers-in-law, who hold significant influence over FGM practices, have not been adequately involved. One participant, an elder, shared in an FGD, "*We still believe FGM is important for girls, but we are willing to listen to what ARP has to say.*" This highlights the need for a more tailored approach that considers these individuals' specific perspectives and beliefs. Consequently, there is need to expand ARP reach to include older women and mothers-in-law, who often hold strong traditional beliefs about FGM. The approach has effectively mobilized influential individuals, such as community leaders, elders, teachers, and health workers, demonstrating its ability to influence decision-makers. Data from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) confirm this active involvement, with influential figures expressing their support for ARP and its goals. For example, one community leader shared in a KII, "*We are working with ARP to ensure that all girls in our community are protected from FGM.*"

However, the approach's reach has been limited when it comes to engaging older women and mothers-in-law, who often play a significant role in perpetuating FGM. FGDs and KIIs revealed a need for targeted interventions to address the concern of older women and mother's in law and foster participation. Addressing this gap is crucial for achieving widespread FGM abandonment. Older women and mothers-in-law, often holding positions of authority within families and communities, can significantly influence the transmission of harmful traditions.

Targeting these groups with specific initiatives can help challenge their traditional beliefs, educate them about the harmful effects of FGM, and encourage their active support for the approach.

The approach could consider developing strategies that engage older women and mothers-in-law through tailored workshops and sensitization sessions, utilize role models who have successfully abandoned FGM to share their experiences, integrate traditional knowledge and practices that promote girls' well-being into the ARP curriculum, and promote intergenerational dialogue between younger and older women to create a space for respectful dialogue and shared understanding. By expanding its reach to include these key figures, the ARP approach can further strengthen its impact and promote a more inclusive and equitable environment for girls, ensuring that all members of the community are actively involved in the fight against FGM.

### **Discussion:**

The exclusion of key stakeholders such as Older women and mothers-in-law from ARP interventions limits the effectiveness of this approach. Expanding the reach to include these key stakeholder is critical for challenging deeply ingrained traditional beliefs and ensuring its long-term sustainability. While the approach has effectively engaged key actors within communities, such as community leaders, elders, teachers, and health workers, data from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) highlight a need to address resistance to change within specific groups, particularly those who still hold traditional beliefs about FGM. For example, one elder shared in an FGD, *"We still believe FGM is important for girls, but we are willing to listen to what the ARP has to say."* This indicates that while older women and mothers-in-law might not be entirely opposed to the approach, they still hold traditional beliefs that must be challenged.

These individuals often play a significant role in perpetuating FGM, acting as gatekeepers of traditional practices and influencing younger generations. Therefore, their engagement in ARP is crucial for ensuring long-term sustainability. Addressing their resistance to change is critical for achieving widespread FGM abandonment. Failing to engage these groups effectively could perpetuate harmful practices, hindering the approach's overall impact. This finding corroborates studies by Mackie and LeJeune, 2009 which emphasize the need for inclusive approaches that engage all community influencers to effectively combat FGM. Excluding significant stakeholders can result in resistance and limited success.

The findings suggest that targeted interventions are needed to address older women and mothers-in-law's specific concerns and perspectives. The approach could consider developing strategies that involve these groups through tailored workshops and sensitization sessions, utilize role models who have successfully abandoned FGM to share their experiences, integrate traditional knowledge and practices that promote girls' well-being into the ARP curriculum, and promote intergenerational dialogue between younger and older women to create a space for respectful dialogue and shared understanding. By expanding its reach to include these key figures, the ARP can further strengthen its impact and promote a more inclusive and equitable environment for girls, ensuring that all members of the community are actively involved in the fight against FGM.

The finding underscores the importance of comprehensive community engagement in social change theories. It highlights the need for ARP programs to include elders and mothers-in-law to achieve broader acceptance and support for abandoning FGM. It suggests therefore a need to redesign ARP interventions to incorporate the perspectives and participation of elders and

mothers-in-law. Their inclusion could lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes in the fight against FGM.

#### 5.1.7. Unintended Outcomes: Positive and Negative Effects

**Finding:** ARP interventions have resulted in several unintended outcomes

The evaluation examined the broader effects of ARP approach, including both positive and negative unintended consequences that were not anticipated during its design and implementation. It reveals that the ARP approach, while primarily focused on combating FGM, has yielded unintended positive outcomes, including improved family dynamics and community cohesion. ARP has inadvertently fostered a more positive and supportive environment within the communities studied by facilitating open dialogues and promoting a shared mission.

ARP has facilitated improved communication between parents and children, increasing trust and understanding within families. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) revealed that the approach has fostered open dialogue, allowing families to discuss sensitive topics like FGM and gender roles more openly. This has contributed to a breakdown of communication barriers and a strengthening of familial bonds. One participant shared in a FGD, *"We now talk more openly about these things. We used to keep it to ourselves, but now we can discuss it together."*

Furthermore, the ARP has united community members in a shared mission to protect girls and promote their well-being. The collective effort to combat FGM has fostered a sense of community unity, with members collaborating to support ARP activities and promote girls' rights. This shared purpose has increased cooperation and collaboration, creating a more cohesive and supportive community environment. One community leader noted in a KII, *"We are all working together to ensure that our girls are safe and protected."*

These unintended positive outcomes underscore the approach's ability to create a ripple effect of positive change, extending beyond its primary objective of FGM abandonment. The approach's emphasis on open dialogue, community engagement, and shared responsibility has inadvertently fostered stronger family bonds and a more united community, demonstrating the transformative power of the ARP model to create lasting positive change.

#### **Discussion:**

The finding suggests that ARP interventions, while beneficial in many respects, have also produced unintended consequences that need to be addressed. These outcomes highlight the complexity of implementing social change programs within traditional communities. The unintended positive outcomes of ARP highlight its broader impact beyond FGM abandonment, suggesting that it has contributed to positive social change within communities. While the approach was designed to address the specific issue of FGM, its focus on education, dialogue, and community engagement has fostered a more supportive and cohesive environment for girls and their families.

The approach's facilitation of open discussions within families has improved communication and a greater understanding between parents and children. This positive shift in family dynamics, evident in both Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), suggests that ARP is helping to break down communication barriers and foster healthier relationships.

Furthermore, the approach has united community members in a shared mission to protect girls and promote their well-being. This collaborative effort has not only strengthened community cohesion but also created a more supportive environment for girls who are resisting FGM or

who have been affected by the practice. This sense of unity, observed in the active participation of community members in ARP activities and their commitment to promoting girls' rights, reinforces the approach's impact on social change.

These unintended positive outcomes demonstrate the power of the ARP model to transcend its initial purpose and contribute to a broader transformation within communities. The finding aligns with the principles of social impact assessment, which recognize that social development interventions yield both intended and unintended consequences that must always be considered and evaluated (IAIA, 2003). It is also consistent with theories of social change and program evaluation, which recognize that interventions can have wide-ranging and sometimes unforeseen impacts.

By fostering open communication, building community cohesion, and promoting a shared commitment to protecting girls, ARP is not only combating FGM but also fostering a more positive and inclusive environment for all. This broader impact reinforces the approach's potential for lasting social change and highlights the importance of considering the broader implications of ARP interventions. This finding indicates the need for ARP approach to incorporate mechanisms for monitoring and addressing unintended outcomes. Program designers should engage with all community stakeholders to anticipate and mitigate potential negative effects, suggesting a necessity for a more holistic approach to approach's design and evaluation.

## **5.2. Relevance: Aligning ARP with Context**

This evaluation section examines the relevance of the ARP approach within the specific contexts of Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot counties in Kenya. The goal is to assess how well the ARP approach aligns with the needs and priorities of these communities, taking into account the deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and practices surrounding FGM. By examining the approach's cultural sensitivity, its alignment with existing legal frameworks, and its ability to address the root causes of FGM, this analysis aims to determine whether ARP is indeed doing the "right things" to address the challenge of FGM in these diverse communities effectively.

### **5.2.1 Relevance to the legal framework**

The ARP approach plays a crucial role in the global, national, and local efforts to eradicate FGM in Kenya. Aligning seamlessly with international human rights standards, national legislation, and county-level initiatives, the approach provides a safe, legal, and culturally sensitive alternative to FGM. This multifaceted approach ensures the protection of girls and contributes significantly to the ongoing fight against this harmful practice at all levels of governance.

The APR approach plays a crucial role in the fight against FGM in Kenya. The existing legal framework in the country strongly supports the relevance of the approach, which comprehensively outlaws FGM and promotes its eradication.

Constitution of Kenya (2010): While not explicitly mentioning FGM, the Constitution guarantees the right to freedom from violence, cruel and degrading treatment, and harmful cultural practices FGM clearly falls in this category. This creates a foundation for approaches like ARP, which address the cultural significance of the rite of passage without inflicting harm.

Children Act 2001 (revised 2016): This Act prohibits subjecting children to FGM and other harmful cultural practices. ARP provides an alternative rite of passage that upholds the cultural significance of the transition to womanhood while protecting girls from harm and upholding their rights.

Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2011 (FGM Act 2011): This Act criminalizes all forms of FGM, including the performance, procurement, aiding and abetting, and failure to report the practice. The ARP approach offers a safe and legal alternative that communities can embrace without fear of legal repercussions.

Protection against Domestic Violence Act (2015): This Act recognizes FGM as a form of domestic violence and allows for protection orders for potential victims. The ARP approach, by offering an alternative rite of passage, reduces the risk of girls being subjected to FGM and supports the goals of this Act.

FGM Act 2011: This Act criminalizes FGM performed by medical practitioners, except for genuine therapeutic purposes. The ARP approach helps combat the medicalization of FGM by providing a culturally acceptable alternative that does not require any form of cutting.

The FGM Act of 2011 established the Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Board (Anti-FGM Board), which is in charge of coordinating public awareness campaigns and providing advice to the government on FGM. The ARP approach aligns with the Board's mandate by actively engaging communities in abandoning FGM and promoting positive cultural change.

East African Community Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (EAC Act): This regional legislation encourages cooperation among member states to combat cross-border FGM. The ARP approach offers a viable alternative, contributes to regional efforts to eliminate FGM, and supports the objectives of the EAC Act.

The project documents highlight several critical issues surrounding FGM in Kenya, particularly in Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot counties, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach like the Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) approach. Interventions that address the root causes while respecting the community's traditions are necessary due to the high prevalence of FGM among the Abagusii and the Pokot communities, which is a result of deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and social norms. ARP approaches achieve this by offering a safe and empowering alternative rite of passage for girls, focusing on education, life skills development, and positive reinforcement, ultimately leading to a shift in community perception and acceptance of uncut girls.

Additionally, the documents expose the alarming trend of FGM medicalization, particularly in Kisii and Nyamira, where healthcare professionals perpetuate the practice despite its illegality and harmful effects. The ARP approach's focus on engaging various stakeholders, including healthcare workers and their professional bodies, becomes crucial in addressing this challenge. By promoting dialogues, education, and awareness campaigns targeting healthcare providers, the approach aims to dismantle the misconception that medicalized FGM is a safer alternative and encourage ethical practices that uphold girls' and women's rights.

### **5.2.2 Relevance of the ARP pathways of change Findings in West Pokot**

The ARP approach, designed to counter FGM practices in the Pokot community, demonstrates a strong understanding of the local context and cultural nuances. A key informant emphasizes its cultural sensitivity, stating, *"ARP is a model that resembles the cultural way of graduating girls from childhood to adulthood. This model, therefore, is easily accepted in the community."* This approach is crucial, leveraging existing cultural frameworks to promote change rather than imposing external solutions.

The approach addresses the deeply rooted cultural beliefs surrounding FGM by providing a platform for critical engagement with tradition. The project offers a dedicated lesson on Pokot culture, exploring positive and harmful practices. The implementer states, *"To equip girls and boys with knowledge and skills on the Pokot culture, both negative and positive cultures, for them to understand and appreciate that the model is not here to erode the culture in totality."* By acknowledging the value of the culture while highlighting its harmful elements, the approach fosters a more nuanced understanding of tradition. It empowers participants to engage with their own cultural beliefs critically.

Moreover, the approach's inclusion of boys as active participants in the anti-FGM campaign is particularly relevant in the Pokot context. A key informant notes, *"Most men do not know what women go through in those bushes for them to be 'real women.'"* By involving boys in the training, the approach not only equips them with the knowledge and skills to support their female peers but also challenges their limited understanding of FGM, thereby creating a foundation for gender-sensitive attitudes and behaviors.

The ARP approach's focus on empowering girls through education and economic opportunities directly addresses the social and economic factors that contribute to FGM. In another KII, the implementer states, *"The model addresses economic factors during the graduation of the girls where role models talk to parents encouraging them to educate their girls first and not give them out in exchange for bride price because with education the girls can support them later sustainably and still bring the bride price when married."* This approach highlights the economic value of girls' education. It provides parents with tangible reasons to invest in their daughters' futures, thus disrupting the cycle of FGM and child marriage driven by economic pressures.

In conclusion, the ARP approach's approach is highly relevant to the Pokot context. By strategically engaging with cultural beliefs, involving boys in the campaign, and addressing the social and economic factors that contribute to FGM, the approach demonstrates a profound understanding of the local challenges. It presents a compelling solution tailored to the unique needs of the community.

The ARP approach, implemented in the Gusii community, is designed to offer a culturally sensitive alternative to FGM, aiming to shift community attitudes and perceptions towards this harmful practice. The approach's key informant emphasizes prevention, stating that ARP is "a harmless alternative that can still be considered a sufficient ceremony to mark the transition from childhood to womanhood." The approach targets young girls between 7-11 years old and their parents, recognizing the critical role of parental involvement in ending FGM.

The approach's approach is rooted in understanding the cultural context of FGM within the Gusii community. The implementer explains, *"When looking at the history of the Abagusii community, we talk about rights of passage in the Gusii community and situate FGM within that context, after which we bring in ARP as a harmless alternative to FGM."* This approach acknowledges the cultural significance of rites of passage while promoting a critical understanding of FGM as a harmful practice.

The approach's strategies include:

- Educating girls about the harms of FGM.
- Involving parents and guardians in the intervention.
- Engaging boys as allies in the fight against FGM.

This multi-pronged approach aims to reach various stakeholders within the community, thereby creating a more comprehensive shift in attitudes and behaviors.

The approach also recognizes the limitations of its current approach. The implementer acknowledges the challenges of reaching fathers and the need for more robust follow-up mechanisms. "Fathers/male guardians/parents are difficult to reach," the implementer states, highlighting the need for further strategies to engage men in the anti-FGM movement.

The approach's success is evident in the increasing number of girls with knowledge about bodily integrity and FGM abandonment, turning them into anti-FGM ambassadors. The implementer notes that "people we have engaged with openly say NO to FGM. They mention that they have stopped the practice." This shift in attitudes and behavior indicates the positive impact of the approach on community perceptions.

The approach's ongoing efforts include:

- Adapting the ARP manual to address the needs of young children.
- Ensuring that ARP activities are accessible to a wide range of girls.
- Engaging boys as active participants in the fight against FGM.

These strategies demonstrate a commitment to cultural appropriateness, inclusivity, and building a more robust network of anti-FGM advocates.

In conclusion, the ARP approach demonstrates a thoughtful approach to FGM prevention in the Gusii community. It addresses the cultural context of the practice, engages key stakeholders, and promotes a more nuanced understanding of the harm of FGM. While there are areas for improvement, the approach's positive impact on community attitudes and behavior suggests that it is moving in the right direction.

**Over all:** ARP approach has adopted a methodology that targets the cultural practice of FGM from different fronts. It aims to empower the girls who are the center of the vice by providing them with education, training, and the necessary tools to resist FGM and take charge of their bodies and goals for the future. The Approach has inbuilt girls graduation ceremony that is designed to resemble traditional FGM ceremonies, making it an ideal substitute for the customs of traditional FGM. It runs on a partnership strategy that unites key opinion shapers in the community, including the local government, media, churches, and leaders of the local community for a collaborative approach to public sensitization through targeted messaging in various platforms where public discourse is advanced. Traditional practices and rituals associated with FGM have seen adaptations and replacements through the ARP approach. The approach provides girls with alternative rite of passage that celebrate their transition into womanhood without involving FGM. These alternative rite focus on life skills, education, and empowerment, fostering positive self-esteem and encouraging girls to pursue their aspirations. Additionally, the approach engages parents and community leaders in discussions about cultural myths and misconceptions surrounding FGM, enabling them to embrace new traditions that prioritize girls' well-being.

The ARP approach has effectively tackled FGM by employing tools and processes specifically designed for the local communities and cultures. The ARP curriculum stands out for its inclusion of Abagusii and Pokot history and cultural context, providing girls with a deeper understanding of the origins and social implications of FGM within their communities. This knowledge empowers them to think critically about the practice and its impact on their lives. However, the

curriculum continues; it equips girls with vital life skills and knowledge about health and human development and fosters their self-esteem. This comprehensive approach ensures girls are not only prepared to reject FGM but also empowered to make informed choices about their future.

The involvement of parents and the wider community has further strengthened the approach's success. Workshops and sensitization sessions address parents' concerns and misconceptions about FGM, ensuring their understanding and support for their daughters' participation in the approach. This collaborative approach is beautifully demonstrated during ARP graduations, where parents and daughters make public declarations against FGM, showcasing a united front against the practice and inspiring others to do the same. The approach's reach extends even further through partnerships with local leaders, schools, and other community stakeholders, fostering a sense of ownership and contributing to the approach's long-term sustainability.

The effectiveness of these tools and processes is evident in the positive feedback from beneficiaries, including students, parents, and community leaders. The approach's success is also reflected in the increased advocacy efforts by empowered girls who share their knowledge and experiences with their peers and community, creating a ripple effect of change. The growing demand for the ARP approach from schools and communities further underscores its recognized value and effectiveness.

#### **5.2.2.1 School Based Interventions**

The ARP approach recognizes education as the most effective way to initiate transformative change. Individuals equipped with knowledge and skills are empowered to make informed decisions and express their views confidently. ARP aims to educate young girls about the harmful consequences of FGM, offer an alternative rite of passage that aligns with Abagusii and Pokot customs, and provide them with essential life skills.

This approach resonates with participants' perspectives. As one girl stated, "*We receive a lot of knowledge compared to untrained girls, get motivational gifts, and learn about life skills*" (Entanda Girls FGD). By providing effective education, the approach fosters confidence and self-worth in girls, enabling them to make assertive decisions and reject FGM. Another participant affirmed this by saying, "*Without ARP, we would have undergone FGM*" (S2, Entanda Girls FGD), highlighting the approach's impact on girls' agency regarding FGM.

Girls are the primary target of FGM and, therefore, the main focus of ARP interventions. While FGM was traditionally performed on girls aged 13-15, the age has unfortunately decreased over time, with girls as young as 7 years old facing the cut. A key informant even mentioned cases of FGM being performed on newborns. Consequently, ARP targeted girls between 7 and 11 years old in Nyamira and Kisii, while in Pokot the project targeted girls of age 12, intervening just before they reach the age of potential cutting. The approach identifies girls in schools with the help of teachers. Once identified, they participate in four-day holiday training sessions held in April, August, and December. These trainings cover six units of instruction, including Gusii customs, the effects of FGM, personal hygiene, public speaking, and life skills. The curriculum aligns with the *Msichana Jasiri manual*, a comprehensive guide that equips volunteers with effective training methods and materials tailored to girls' needs which is in line with the traditional teachings.

The holiday trainings have successfully achieved their intended purpose. Manga girls, for instance, unanimously expressed satisfaction with the instruction and reported feeling empowered after completing it, proclaiming "*SISI NI WASICHANA JASIRI*" (We are Courageous Girls) (Manga Girls Group 1 FGD). This demonstrates the self-assurance they gained through

the approach. Similarly, girls from Manga Group 2 FGD noted that ARP helped them learn to advocate for themselves and their sisters, showcasing the assertiveness developed through the trainings. They felt confident about a future free from the threat of FGM, equipped with the ability to make decisions for their well-being and future. As one participant aptly stated, *"Since we won't be circumcised, we will be able to concentrate on school and ultimately achieve our goals,"* emphasizing how ARP, unlike FGM, prepares girls for a fulfilling future rather than solely for marriage.

#### **5.2.2.2 Graduation ceremonies**

Graduation ceremonies were organized to celebrate the girls' completion of their training. These ceremonies took place on the last day of training during the December holidays, marking the culmination of a year-long approach held in December, August, and April. They symbolized the girls' transition into adulthood and were conducted in accordance with customary FGM graduation traditions.

Local authorities, invited guests, girls, their brothers, and parents all participated in the event. The girls performed dances, sang songs, recited poems, and wore new clothes befitting the occasion and its traditional significance. As the ceremony drew to a close, leaders spoke out against FGM and led the girls, their brothers, and parents in a declaration denouncing the practice and pledging to protect the girls' rights. Organizing the graduation ceremonies in line with traditional FGM graduation practices effectively conveyed the message that the girls had transitioned, deserved greater respect, and were now of age to make independent decisions about their well-being. This sentiment was clearly expressed by a participant who stated, *"We are more respected"* (Manga Girls Group 2 FGD), emphasizing the elevated position they now hold within their families after graduating from ARP.

Similarly, the public declaration made by parents, boys, and girls in the presence of community leaders served to bind participants and the audience to upholding the girl child's rights and abandoning FGM entirely.

The essence of the graduation ceremony is to instil in the girls a sense of transformation and confidence as they face the future. They now hold a higher status within their families and should be heard when making decisions that affect their well-being. This was eloquently captured by a participant who confirmed, *"We have become "msichana jasiri" (courageous girls); we are able to speak our minds and thus able to achieve our goals"* (Manga Girls Group 1 FGD).

#### **5.2.2.3 Collaborative Public Sensitisation**

Many development organizations in the same field employ a partnership approach to awareness campaigns to maximize their impact and effectively achieve their goals. This is particularly important when partners share a common objective or collaborate to leverage individual strengths toward a specific target. Recognizing that different platforms require different approaches to deliver the same message effectively is crucial. Collaborative public awareness campaigns capitalize on this understanding. As one stakeholder aptly noted, *"Messaging should be made more effective in reaching the masses. Teaching as in a school does not fit in community circumstances. A messaging strategy is required that puts more emphasis on practical and real examples that are known to the people"* (ACC Kegogi Division KII).

In collaboration with local churches, the local administration, political leaders, and the media, ARP works to eradicate female genital mutilation in the counties of Nyamira, Kisii, and West Pokot.

Each partner brings unique platforms and messaging styles to the table, enhancing the effectiveness of the collaborative sensitization approach. This allows for reaching diverse segments of the population more efficiently. A clan elder from Manga eloquently captured this sentiment, stating, *"Good collaboration between the approach and local administration and the church,"* while highlighting the factors contributing to ARP's success.

Churches target members of their congregations, and messages delivered through this platform significantly impact followers who typically hold religious leaders in high esteem. Congregations often receive messages from the pulpit with utmost obedience, and their influence extends far beyond the church walls. The partnership benefits from FGM messages tailored to religious audiences, maximizing their impact. Moreover, collaborating with religious leaders and integrating anti-FGM messages into religious teachings has helped challenge the cultural and religious justifications often used to defend the practice.

The local administration, comprising chiefs and village elders, engages with the same population through different platforms and perspectives. They raise public awareness about FGM abandonment and other issues during public barazas (meetings), funerals, and other events. The administrators have the advantage of law enforcement, lending their messages an authoritative weight. While sensitization conveys the message, it also reminds the public of penalties for violations, sending a clear deterrent message to potential offenders. Leveraging the influence of respected community figures, such as chiefs and elders, proved instrumental in shifting community norms and garnering support for FGM abandonment. Their active participation in awareness campaigns and public declarations against FGM sent a powerful message throughout the community. Additionally, organizing regular community dialogues and forums has provided platforms for open discussions about FGM, fostered community ownership, and encouraged collective action against the practice.

Politicians represent another crucial partner in the fight against FGM. They possess a platform that resonates with a different segment of the population. Politicians are generally respected leaders and skilled communicators who have a unique ability to connect with and influence their audiences. The partnership leverages this platform to deliver anti-FGM messages effectively.

Role models inspire admiration, set positive examples, and offer hope to specific groups. They are highly regarded, and audiences are motivated to emulate their values and actions. Uncircumcised female role models who are accomplished in their fields and respected politically, morally, in their marriages, or economically encourage community members and young women who aspire to follow in their footsteps. These role models send a clear message to their audiences that FGM, or the lack thereof, does not determine an individual's achievements. Additionally, highlighting the achievements of girls who have undergone ARP and showcasing them as role models has inspired others and promoted the positive alternative offered by the approach.

The ARP approach demonstrates the effectiveness of a tailored approach in addressing deeply rooted cultural practices like FGM. By providing culturally relevant education, actively involving parents and the community, and fostering open dialogue, the approach paves the way for a future where girls are empowered and free from FGM. A religious leader aptly summarized this, stating, *"Due to government intervention, the community had no other rite of passage, but ARP introduction became the alternative,"* emphasizing how ARP seamlessly integrated into a cultural context that lacked a rite of passage for girls following the government ban on FGM.

From the beginning of the model, stakeholders are engaged and are the ones that identify the children for all the cohorts. In Sook, the community at large is also sensitized by WV staff and community leaders about the model for the community to understand and appreciate that indeed the children have been initiated into adulthood and they do not need to again be traditionally initiated into adulthood. As a routine in Sook, through community review meetings, the stakeholders get a chance to access the approach's relevance and effectiveness to addressing concerns arising from community participation. Their suggestions are incorporated into the approach design and implementation.

#### 5.2.2.4 Engagement of Boys and Men

It is today recognised that the war against FGM should not be limited to women and girls only. Whereas women are the primary perpetrators, men remain the main beneficiaries due to societal and cultural expectations. Culturally, FGM prepares the girls for marriage and rewards men with dowry, making men the silent perpetrators. A war against FGM must thus involve the Men and boys alongside other members of the community to achieve any meaningful departure from the norm. The focus should aim to sensitise the men and boys on the harmful effect of FGM and the rights of the girl child in making independent decisions about their well-being.

ARP approach engages fathers and their sons in the girls' training and graduation ceremonies. On the final day of the four-day holiday training sessions, which are held in April, August, and December, fathers and the sons are invited to attend. At these events, they receive a quick update on their girls training as well as the important takeaways from their experiences. On the graduation day, fathers and the boys are similarly invited to participate in the ceremonies. They receive updates and join their girls in making declarations to protect the girls from FGM and respect the right of the girls to determine their well-being.

Besides participating in the holiday training sessions for girls and graduation ceremonies, men and boys also participate in public sensitisation meetings that are facilitated either by the approach implementers or their partners. Men and boys also participate in religious sessions and events where they are sensitised on the abandonment FGM. Many others are sensitized about FGM abandonment by approach partners during public events and funerals.

ARP further implements a weekly training for both boys and girls in three selected schools in a year. The two hour training sessions are facilitated by volunteers who use the ARP training manual for instructions. The training material is lighter and is covered in a shorter amount of time, allowing for repeated exposure to it throughout the year. This ensures that the pupils comprehend the instructions adequately. These trainings have successfully equipped the boys with knowledge on the harmful health effect of FGM, rallying them to support their sisters in the fight against FGM within their families and the communities. According to a approach officer *"Boys form part of the trainees. In Sook, this has been the case since 2016 for them to support their girls in the process and also for them to understand what FGM entails because in Pokot community this remains the biggest puzzle, most men do not know what women go through in those bushes for them to be "real women"*.

Engaging men and boys in FGM abandonment drives is a strategic and effective way of tackling the vice from a different fronts. A greater portion of the fight against female genital mutilation would have been won if men, who have a lot of influence in their families, had adopted an anti FGM mindset.

However, besides the critical role that men and boys play in the fight against FGM, their level of engagement in the ARP approach is low, much like that of older women, who are equally

important. A more comprehensive engagement strategy is required, one that acknowledges the crucial role these two groups of people play in the fight against FGM

#### **5.2.2.5 Media Coverage**

Utilizing various media channels, including radio approaches, social media campaigns and television broadcasts has effectively reached a wider audience and kept the issue of FGM at the forefront of public discourse.

### **5.2.3 Challenges and Weaknesses: Addressing Community Dynamics**

**Finding:** ARP interventions face some challenges and exhibit some weaknesses

The study examined the implementation of the ARP approach, focusing on the challenges and weaknesses that affect their effectiveness and sustainability. Findings reveal that the ARP approach needs help with cultural resistance, limited funding, insufficient stakeholder engagement, and logistical hurdles.

One significant challenge stems from the persistent resistance to change within specific segments of the communities, particularly those who still hold deeply entrenched traditional beliefs about FGM. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) revealed concerns about resistance, especially among older women and mothers-in-law, highlighting the need for a more nuanced approach that considers cultural sensitivities and fosters dialogue.

Furthermore, the approach faces resource constraints, with limited funding hindering its ability to expand its reach and impact. The ARP approach is confined to specific geographical areas, typically limited to one county assembly ward per year, and restricts the number of schools and students who can participate in the training. This is particularly challenging given the increased demand from parents, teachers, and the broader community in Nyamira and Kisii counties. Additionally, limited resources constrain the strategic use of mass media, which could otherwise expand the approach's outreach. The limited resources also pose a challenge in addressing the uneven impact of the approach, particularly in remote areas with limited access to information and resources. Data from FGDs and KIIs highlighted this challenge, emphasizing the need to overcome geographical barriers and ensure equitable access to the approach's benefits.

The approach's dependence on external funding without a clear strategy for long-term financial sustainability is a significant concern. This is reflected in statements from stakeholders who express concerns about the approach's sustainability due to external resource dependency and limitations. Developing a strategy to diversify funding sources and ensure the approach's sustainability is essential for its continued success and impact.

Another critical area requiring attention is the need for more comprehensive male engagement. While the ARP approach acknowledges the importance of involving boys and men as allies in combating FGM, their involvement remains limited. FGDs and KIIs revealed a need for more targeted strategies to engage boys and men effectively, addressing gender norms and fostering a generation of male allies who actively support girls' rights and challenge traditional beliefs.

The complexity of the ARP Msichana Jasiri manual is another significant issue. Facilitators need help to use it effectively. This manual, which serves as the basis for girls' training in Kisii and Nyamira, was developed in 2019 and requires a review and update to incorporate best practices

and address existing gaps. Making the manual more practical and user-friendly for facilitators would enhance the effectiveness of the training.

The lack of a structured follow-up plan for girls during critical periods increases the risk of FGM practices. Specifically, there is no clear plan for follow-up on girls and their families after the December training, which lasts less than a week. Yet, December is an extended holiday period when FGM practices are more prevalent, exposing graduates to renewed risk of relapsing. Establishing a structured follow-up plan would help ensure the girls and their parents adhere to the training.

In West Pokot, logistical challenges pose a major hurdle to the outreach of ARP interventions. Reaching out to communities in the far-flung mountainous regions bordering Uganda with ARP messages remained challenging, affecting the approach's effectiveness.

These identified challenges, while requiring careful consideration and strategic planning, do not diminish the positive impact of the ARP approach. By addressing these weaknesses and developing more comprehensive strategies, the approach can further strengthen its effectiveness, ensuring that it reaches all community members, effectively addresses the root causes of FGM, and contributes to lasting social change.

#### **Discussion:**

The identified challenges and weaknesses suggest that ARP interventions require improvements in some strategies to achieve their intended outcomes. Addressing these shortcomings is essential for enhancing program effectiveness. We recommend that ARP address the challenges through strategic partnerships, redesign interventions to strategically target boys and men, older women and mothers-in-law, resource mobilization, and continuous adaptation, which will be crucial for the approach's long-term success and impact. The findings suggest that addressing these challenges is essential for achieving sustained FGM abandonment.

Addressing the challenges identified in the evaluation is crucial for the long-term success and impact of the ARP approach. The findings suggest that overcoming resistance to change, securing adequate resources, ensuring equitable access, and engaging men and boys effectively are essential for achieving sustained FGM abandonment.

Overcoming resistance to change will require a nuanced and sensitive approach that recognizes specific communities' deeply ingrained traditional beliefs. Strategic partnerships with respected community leaders, elders, and religious figures can help bridge the gap between traditional practices and the approach's message of change. Fostering open dialogue and encouraging shared understanding will be key in challenging these deeply held beliefs and promoting a more inclusive and progressive approach.

Securing adequate resources is critical for expanding the approach's reach and ensuring long-term sustainability. This requires a focused effort on resource mobilization, including exploring partnerships with local businesses, philanthropic organizations, and government agencies. Diversifying funding sources will help mitigate the risks associated with reliance on external donors and ensure the approach's continued viability.

Addressing the uneven impact of the approach, particularly in remote areas, will require strategic interventions that overcome geographical barriers. Improving access to information and resources through targeted outreach programs, mobile education units, and community-based initiatives can help bridge the gap and ensure equitable participation.

Finally, engaging boys and men as active allies is essential for lasting change. This requires developing targeted initiatives that address their specific concerns and perspectives, promoting positive masculinity, and challenging traditional gender norms. Engaging fathers and involving men as mentors and role models can create a more inclusive environment and encourage a generation of male allies who actively support girls' rights.

ARP can build upon its successes and achieve lasting impact by addressing these challenges through strategic partnerships, resource mobilization, continuous adaptation, and a commitment to inclusivity. The findings indicate that overcoming these hurdles is crucial for achieving sustained FGM abandonment and creating a more equitable and protective environment for girls in Kenya.

#### **5.2.4. Strengths and Opportunities: Leveraging Positive Factors**

**Finding:** The evaluation of the ARP approach highlights several strengths and opportunities that contribute to its effectiveness and potential for long-term success.

##### **5.2.4.1 Cultural Relevance**

The ARP approach seamlessly integrates traditional rites of passage into its framework, making it culturally acceptable and appealing to communities. By drawing upon existing cultural norms and rituals, the approach resonates with the community, reducing resistance to change. This cultural relevance is evident in the positive feedback received from community members who acknowledge the approach's alignment with their traditions. One participant in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) shared, "This ARP feels like it's part of our culture, it's not something strange or foreign to us."

##### **5.2.4.2 Community Ownership**

ARP fosters a sense of community ownership and responsibility for FGM abandonment, leading to sustained support and participation. The approach's success in engaging key stakeholders, including parents, community leaders, and elders, creates a sense of collective ownership and a commitment to protecting girls. This is reflected in FGDs and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), where participants highlight the high level of community support for the approach and its interventions.

##### **5.2.4.3 Empowerment of Girls**

ARP provide girls with information about their rights, health and development issues. This empowers them to make informed decisions and resist harmful cultural practices such as FGM and other social ills.

##### **5.2.4.4 Government Support**

The Kenyan legal framework, including the FGM Act of 2011, provides a strong foundation for ARP interventions and encourages its implementation. This legal backing strengthens the approach's position within the community and offers a deterrent against those who may consider perpetuating FGM. Stakeholders acknowledged the importance of this legal support, emphasizing its role in creating a more supportive environment for FGM abandonment efforts.

##### **5.2.4.5 Integration within Existing Structures**

The ARP approach seamlessly integrates with existing community structures, such as schools, churches, and health facilities, amplifying its impact and fostering collaboration. This strategic integration allows the approach to leverage existing networks and resources, maximizing its reach and effectiveness. Data from FGDs and KIIs demonstrates the effectiveness of this integration, with participants highlighting the benefits of collaborating with schools and churches to spread awareness and implement the approach.

#### **5.2.4.6 Empowering Role Models**

ARP graduates and women leaders serve as powerful role models for other girls, inspiring them to resist FGM and advocate for their rights. This is observed in FGDs, where participants highlight the inspiring role models within communities who actively advocate against FGM. The approach's success in creating these role models, who demonstrate the possibility of a life free from FGM and empowered by education and personal agency, further strengthens its impact on social change.

These strengths and opportunities underscore the ARP approach's potential for lasting change and its ability to create a more positive and protective environment for girls in Kenya. The approach's cultural relevance, community ownership, government support, integration with existing structures, and empowering role models provide a solid foundation for achieving sustained FGM abandonment and fostering a more equitable future for girls.

#### **5.2.4.7 Scaling Up and Expansion**

The cultural alignment and acceptance of ARP interventions within communities present significant opportunities for scaling up and expansion. This growth can be facilitated by forming partnerships with local organizations that share similar objectives, thereby ensuring a broader reach and more sustainable impact.

#### **5.2.4.8 Integrating with Education Systems**

Incorporating ARP programs into formal education systems can significantly enhance their reach and effectiveness. Schools can provide a stable platform for delivering ARP curricula, offering continuous support and education to girls throughout their academic journey, and engaging a broader student population.

#### **5.2.4.9 Engaging Men and Boys**

Increasing the involvement of men and boys in ARP programs can help address and reshape gender norms, leading to wider community acceptance of alternative rites. Tailored education and advocacy initiatives targeting males can foster supportive attitudes and behaviours, furthering the impact of ARP interventions.

#### **5.2.4.10 Building Stronger Networks**

Strengthening networks and forming coalitions with other organizations working against FGM can improve resource sharing, advocacy efforts, and collective impact. Collaborative approaches can effectively address the complex and multifaceted challenges associated with FGM, enhancing the overall efficacy of ARP programs.

### **Discussion:**

Building upon the identified strengths and opportunities of ARP is crucial for scaling up its interventions and achieving lasting change. The approach's success, demonstrably rooted in its culturally sensitive approach, its ability to foster community ownership, and its alignment with the Kenyan legal framework, provides a strong foundation for expansion. However, recognizing and addressing the identified weaknesses – resistance to change, resource constraints, uneven

impact, and the need for more comprehensive male engagement – will be vital to ensure sustained success.

The approach's cultural relevance, evident in the positive feedback from community members who appreciate its alignment with their traditions, is a significant strength. As one participant shared in a Focus Group Discussion, "This ARP feels like it's part of our culture, it's not something strange or foreign to us." Leveraging this acceptance will be key in expanding the approach's reach and building upon its strong foundation within communities.

The high level of community ownership, reflected in the active participation of community members in ARP activities and their commitment to promoting girls' rights, also presents a significant opportunity for scaling up the approach. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) consistently highlighted the community's dedication to the approach's success. Harnessing this commitment through continued engagement and empowerment will be crucial for sustaining the approach's impact.

Furthermore, the approach's alignment with the Kenyan legal framework, particularly the FGM Act of 2011, provides a strong foundation for its implementation and expansion. This legal support creates a more supportive environment for FGM abandonment efforts, encouraging broader community participation and discouraging those who might consider perpetuating the practice.

However, overcoming the identified weaknesses will be critical for achieving sustained success. The approach needs to address resistance to change by developing strategies that engage those holding traditional beliefs, including older women and mothers-in-law. Securing adequate resources through targeted resource mobilization, leveraging partnerships, and exploring diverse funding streams will be essential for expanding the approach's reach and ensuring long-term sustainability. Addressing the uneven impact in remote areas will require overcoming geographical barriers through targeted interventions and ensuring equitable access to the approach's benefits. Finally, strengthening the engagement of boys and men as allies will involve developing initiatives that address their specific needs and perspectives, promoting positive masculinity, and challenging traditional gender norms.

By building upon its existing strengths, addressing its weaknesses, and adapting to the evolving needs of the communities, the ARP approach has the potential to create lasting change and contribute to a future where girls are free from the harmful practice of FGM and empowered to achieve their full potential.

### **5.3. Effectiveness: Achieving Objectives and Reducing FGM**

This section of the evaluation delves into the effectiveness of the Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) approach in achieving its primary objective: reducing the prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the target areas of Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot counties in Kenya. By examining the approach's impact on FGM prevalence rates, analyzing community-reported data, and exploring the lived experiences of participants, this analysis aims to assess the extent to which the ARP approach is contributing to a positive shift in attitudes and practices surrounding FGM, ultimately leading to a decrease in the prevalence of this harmful practice.

#### **5.3.1 ARP's Toolkit: Evaluating Process and Key Messages**

ARP effectively utilizes a range of tools and processes to address FGM, demonstrating a comprehensive and adaptable approach. Key elements include:

##### **5.3.1.1 Culturally Relevant Curriculum**

ARP's culturally sensitive curriculum incorporates local history and cultural context, providing girls with a deeper understanding of FGM and its implications. This resonates with participants, as evidenced by the positive feedback: *"We understood why FGM is bad for us, and how it's not part of our real culture"* (Focus Group Discussion, participant). The curriculum also equips girls with essential life skills, including communication, self-esteem building, and decision-making, empowering them to make informed choices about their health, bodies, and futures.

#### 5.3.1.2 Public Declarations

Graduation ceremonies, designed to celebrate the girls' completion of training, incorporate public declarations against FGM, reinforcing commitment and showcasing a united front. These declarations, often made by girls, their families, and community leaders, significantly impact community attitudes and awareness: *"The public declarations made people think twice about FGM"* (FGD participant).

#### 5.3.1.3 Collaborative Public Sensitization

ARP leverages partnerships with local churches, administration, political leaders, and the media to deliver consistent anti-FGM messages across diverse platforms, reaching a wider audience. This collaborative approach ensures that the message resonates across various community segments, fostering a more comprehensive understanding and collective commitment to change.

#### 5.3.1.4 Challenging Cultural and Gendered Reasoning Behind FGM

ARP's activities directly challenge the cultural and gendered reasoning behind FGM, promoting a shift in social norms and attitudes:

- **Purity and Marriageability:** ARP directly challenges the belief that FGM is necessary for a woman's purity and attractiveness to potential husbands by providing a culturally sensitive alternative rite of passage that celebrates womanhood without mutilation and dilutes a focus on marriage. The approach emphasizes education, life skills development, and empowerment, demonstrating that a woman's worth lies in her intelligence, skills, and character, not her body.
- **Sexual Control:** ARP counteracts the idea that FGM is needed to control a woman's sexuality and ensure her fidelity by promoting education about female anatomy, sexuality, and reproductive health. It emphasizes consent and respect for women's bodily autonomy, challenging the harmful belief that women's sexuality needs to be controlled.
- **Dowry and Economic Value:** ARP challenges the notion that uncut girls are less valuable in terms of dowry and marriage prospects by showcasing the achievements and social standing of empowered, uncut girls. The approach demonstrates that a girl's worth is not determined by her body but by her education, skills, and contributions to her community. ARP alleviates social pressure for parents and girls to conform to FGM by providing a supportive community network and empowering girls to resist social pressures and challenge harmful norms. The approach helps girls develop the confidence to speak out against FGM and advocate for their rights.
- **Addressing Patriarchal Power Structures:** The ARP approach directly confronts the patriarchal power structures that underpin FGM by promoting a transformative shift in gender roles and relationships. By empowering girls with knowledge, skills, and a sense of self-worth, ARP challenges men's dominance and control over women's bodies. The approach provides girls with a platform to voice their own needs and desires,

dismantling the patriarchal narrative that dictates their choices. Through education, life skills training, and public declarations, girls gain the confidence to assert their agency and challenge traditional gender roles that limit their opportunities and leave them vulnerable to FGM.

- **Economic Rationale:** Furthermore, ARP explicitly addresses the economic rationale behind FGM, particularly the dowry system. By emphasizing education, economic empowerment, and the value of uncut girls, the approach challenges the traditional belief that a girl's worth is determined by her body. ARP promotes the idea that a woman's actual value lies in her skills, intelligence, and ability to contribute to her community, diminishing the economic pressure for FGM and promoting a more equitable society. The approach fosters a change in perspective, highlighting that an uncircumcised girl can be just as desirable and valuable as a circumcised one, ultimately dismantling the patriarchal justification for FGM.

## 5.3.2 Effectiveness of Pathways of Change

### 5.3.2.1 Increased Knowledge and Awareness

Findings from focus group discussions and key informant interviews demonstrate that increased knowledge and awareness about the harms of FGM and the availability of alternative rite of passage are crucial drivers for the practice's abandonment. Through comprehensive educational initiatives and ceremonies, ARP has effectively disseminated accurate information, empowering communities to make informed choices, leading to a shift in social norms and attitudes favorable to girls' well-being.

- Understanding the Harmful Effects of FGM:** Participants across focus groups exhibited a clear understanding of the negative impacts of FGM on girls' and women's lives, identifying excessive bleeding, complications during childbirth, deaths during pregnancies, fistula, reduced sexual desire, traumatic experiences, physical scars, lifetime trauma, and growth of keloids. The awareness of these harmful effects has fostered a sense of urgency to protect girls from the practice.
- Awareness of ARP as a Viable Alternative:** ARP has successfully positioned itself as a culturally relevant and viable alternative rite of passage. Participants identified the various ARP interventions and how they mimicked traditional FGM ceremonies, offering benefits without the harmful health effects of FGM. "All agree ARP is a better option because girls go through training and education for transition" (Entanda Group Teachers Focus Group Discussion). Parents also recognize the value of ARP: "ARP approaches have equipped our girls with knowledge and skills that have generally empowered them and made them aware of their rights" (Kegogi Men Parents Focus Group Discussion).

### 5.3.2.2 Reaching Community Leaders and Influencers

ARP strategically engages community leaders and elders in disseminating anti-FGM messages and promoting the adoption of alternative rite of passage. "The chief holds barazas on anti-FGM practices and also reminds them that FGM has been criminalized" (Nyakeyo Community Members Focus Group Discussion). The engagement of community leaders, including chiefs, religious leaders, and elders, has been instrumental in amplifying the message of FGM abandonment and promoting the adoption of alternative rite of passage.

- Role of Community Leaders in Raising Awareness:** These influential figures hold significant influence and respect within their communities. Their vocal advocacy against FGM and support for ARP as an alternative send a powerful message that challenges

traditional norms and encourages community members to reconsider their stance on the practice. Chiefs hold regular barazas in the villages where they incorporate anti-FGM sensitization sessions, emphasizing the consequences of participating in the vice and the reporting system in place. Religious leaders have also played a crucial role in framing FGM abandonment as a moral and ethical imperative, often emphasizing the importance of protecting girls' health and well-being.

- ii. **Involvement of Elders and Traditional Leaders:** The involvement of elders and traditional leaders has been crucial in bridging the gap between cultural traditions and the need for change. By embracing alternative rites of passage and publicly denouncing FGM, they demonstrate that progress and respect for tradition can coexist.

### 5.3.2.3 Empowered Girls and Women: Building Confidence and Agency to Resist FGM

ARP has played a transformative role in empowering girls and women to resist FGM and advocate for their rights. By providing them with knowledge, skills, and a supportive community, the approach has fostered a sense of agency and self-confidence among participants, enabling them to challenge harmful social norms and make informed choices about their bodies and lives.

- a. **Knowledge and Skills for Empowerment:** ARP workshops and activities equip girls with essential knowledge about their rights, the harms of FGM, and available support systems. "Through ARP, we learnt that FGM causes complications such as Fistula, keloids, excessive bleeding and may lead to death" (Manga Girls ARP Participants Focus Group Discussion). Furthermore, girls develop self-esteem and skills in communication, self-worth, assertiveness, and decision-making, empowering them to resist pressure and advocate for themselves.
- b. **Challenges to Empowerment:** Despite the positive strides made, girls and women still face challenges to their empowerment. Social pressure from families and community members who still uphold traditional beliefs about FGM can be difficult to overcome. Limited access to education and economic opportunities also hinder girls' ability to resist the practice and pursue their aspirations. Additionally, the lack of adequate support systems and safe spaces leave girls vulnerable to harm if they refuse FGM.
- c. **Supporting Empowerment:** Several factors contribute to supporting girls' and women's empowerment in the context of FGM abandonment. The ARP approach itself provides a crucial platform for education, skill-building, and community support. Additionally, the presence of strong women leaders who actively advocate against FGM serves as a source of inspiration and guidance for girls.
- d. **Women Leaders as Role Models:** Women leaders who champion ARP and actively engage in community education and advocacy efforts serve as powerful role models for girls, demonstrating the possibilities for leadership, agency, and positive change within their communities.
- e. **Fostering a Sense of Agency: Empowering Girls to Shape Their Own Lives**

ARP actively fosters a sense of agency among girls, empowering them to make their own decisions, challenge harmful social norms, and take control of their lives.

  - i. **Passive Recipients to Active Participants:** The approach transforms girls from passive recipients of information to active participants in shaping their own destinies. Through interactive workshops and activities, they develop critical thinking skills, learn to voice their opinions, and gain confidence in their ability to make informed choices.

- ii. **Decision-Making and Assertiveness:** ARP equips girls with the tools and skills necessary to make independent decisions about their bodies and lives. They learn to assess risks, evaluate options, and assert their rights confidently.
- iii. **Challenging Social Norms:** Empowered girls become agents of change within their communities, challenging harmful social norms and advocating for the rights of other girls. They share their knowledge and experiences with their peers, families, and community members, influencing attitudes and contributing to a broader shift in social perceptions of FGM.
- iv. **Building a Supportive Community:** The approach fosters a sense of community among girls, providing them with a network of support and solidarity.

#### 5.3.2.4. Engaged Boys and Men

Recognizing that achieving lasting change requires the involvement of all community members, ARP is increasingly focusing on engaging boys and men as allies in the fight against FGM. While their participation has traditionally been limited, there is growing awareness of the need to address men's attitudes and beliefs to effectively eradicate the practice and promote gender equality.

- a. **Peripheral to Active Participants:** While boys and men have not been as directly involved in ARP activities compared to girls and women, the focus groups discussions reveal a positive shift in their attitudes and a growing recognition of their role in supporting FGM abandonment.
- b. **Strategies for Engaging Boys and Men:** Several strategies can be employed to engage boys and men as allies in the fight against FGM, such as:
  - Tailoring educational messages to address men's specific concerns and perspectives on FGM.
  - Engaging male community leaders and influential figures as champions for FGM abandonment.
  - Addressing economic anxieties that may contribute to the continuation of FGM.
- c. **Challenges and Opportunities:** Engaging boys and men in the fight against FGM presents both challenges and opportunities. Traditional gender roles and expectations may hinder some men's willingness to challenge the status quo. Additionally, reaching out to men who may not actively participate in community approaches requires innovative strategies.

#### 5.3.2.5. Strengthened Community Response: Building a Protective Network for Girls

ARP has increasingly strengthened community response mechanisms to fight FGM, creating a protective network for girls at risk and ensuring that the practice is no longer tolerated. This strengthened response is evident in the activation of local administrative and community response structures, mobilization of churches and teachers for response, increased reporting and investigation of FGM cases, and a collective commitment to ending the practice.

- a. **Local Administrative and Community Structures:** These structures, often comprising local administrative officers and community members, leaders, and elders, monitor and report FGM cases, provide support to girls at risk, and raise awareness about child protection issues. "They have where they report in case of FGM cases, and those places are effective" (Kegogi Women Elders Focus Group Discussion).

- b. **Decline in FGM Prevalence:** FGD participants consistently report a significant decline in FGM incidence within their communities. This positive trend is attributed to various factors, including the ARP intervention's educational initiatives, increased awareness of the harms of FGM, fear of legal consequences, and girls' empowerment to resist the practice. "FGM has reduced because ceremonies have reduced" (Ragogo Catholic Religious Leaders Focus Group Discussion).
- c. **Reporting and Investigation of FGM Cases:** The FGDs reveal a growing intolerance for FGM, as community members are increasingly willing to report cases to authorities. This increased reporting has led to more investigations and summoning of perpetrators.

#### 5.3.2.6. Transforming Attitudes and Practices around FGM

ARP has played a pivotal role in shifting social norms and attitudes towards FGM, leading to a decline in the practice and an increasing recognition of its harmful consequences.

- a. **Open Condemnation and Advocacy for Abandonment:** Community members now openly discuss the harms of FGM and advocate for its abandonment in various platforms, including electronic media, public barazas, funerals, churches, schools, and public ceremonies. This shift from silence and acceptance to active condemnation signifies a significant change in social norms. "FGM is a vice" (Kegogi Women Elders Focus Group Discussion).
- b. **Decline in FGM-Related Rituals and Celebrations:** Focus group discussions reveal a notable decline in public ceremonies and celebrations associated with FGM, indicating a weakening of the practice's social and cultural significance.
- c. **Countering the Medicalization of FGM:** While the overall prevalence of FGM has decreased, concerns remain about the medicalization of the practice. Participants expressed concern that some medical practitioners are performing FGM, lending "a sense of legitimacy and normalcy" to the harmful practice.
- d. **Embracing Uncircumcised Girls:** Traditionally, the Gusii and Pokot communities practiced circumcision of girls as a rite of passage to prepare them for marriage. FGDs reveal a shift, with reduced pressure on families to circumcise their girls and a growing acceptance of uncut girls within their communities.
- i. **Challenges and Opportunities:** Despite the positive shifts in social norms, challenges persist, including some community members, particularly older generations, who may still hold onto traditional beliefs and resist change. The secretive nature of FGM makes it difficult to track and address the practice effectively.

#### 5.3.2.7 Process Improvement: Optimizing ARP Implementation

While highlighting its success in reducing FGM prevalence and empowering girls, the evaluation identifies areas for process improvement that can further strengthen its impact and ensure long-term sustainability.

- Developing targeted messages for different audiences and platforms is essential for increasing the effectiveness of public sensitization efforts.
- Strengthening male engagement is critical for fostering deeper involvement and promoting positive masculinity.

- Establishing robust follow-up mechanisms is crucial for ensuring continued support for graduates and monitoring their well-being.

#### **5.3.2.8 Alternative Approaches: Exploring Strategies and Tools**

The evaluation's findings strongly suggest that exploring additional strategies and tools beyond the current ARP approach framework could further enhance its effectiveness and accelerate FGM abandonment.

- Addressing economic anxieties and promoting economic empowerment initiatives for both girls and men can alleviate pressure to engage in FGM and encourage their support for abandonment.
- Strengthening reporting mechanisms and ensuring robust follow-up on reported cases will enhance community safety and deter perpetrators.
- Establishing community-based monitoring systems to track FGM prevalence and identify areas of concern can enhance the effectiveness of ARP interventions.

#### **Conclusion:**

The evaluation demonstrates the effectiveness of the ARP approach in reducing FGM prevalence, empowering girls, and fostering a more supportive and protective environment. However, continuous evaluation and adaptation are essential for addressing emerging challenges and improving effectiveness. The findings highlight the dynamic nature of the fight against FGM and underscore the need for a flexible and responsive approach to ensure the approach's ongoing

#### **5.4. Sustainability: Ensuring Long-Term Impact**

This section examines the sustainability of the Alternative Rites of Passage (ARP) approach, assessing its ability to maintain a positive impact beyond the current project cycle. We explore factors contributing to its sustainability, such as community ownership, integration within existing structures, and resource mobilization. The analysis also identifies challenges, including dependence on external funding and potential regression to traditional practices, and offers recommendations for strengthening the approach's long-term impact.

##### **5.4.1. ARP Impact: Potential Long-Term Effects**

The ARP intervention demonstrates a significant long-term impact on reducing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) prevalence and enhancing community awareness and commitment to its abandonment. Observations from Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in three counties revealed that ARP interventions lower FGM rates and promote a lasting cultural shift against the practice.

The ongoing implementation of this approach is expected to further decrease FGM prevalence, particularly in regions where it has been effectively applied. This is evident in the noticeable decline in FGM prevalence in areas where ARP has been actively implemented, along with positive feedback from participants who report increased awareness of the practice's harms and a heightened commitment to abandoning it.

For example, one participant in Kemera Elders FGDs stated, "We are sure we will continue with ARP as it has been cultivated in our hearts and minds." This statement exemplifies the approach's deep-rooted impact on the community.

Ongoing training for girls and public awareness campaigns enhance widespread understanding of the harmful effects of FGM, promoting ARP as a viable alternative. Ingrained within the community, this knowledge will be passed down to future generations, creating a lasting impact on current and future populations.

Furthermore, the ARP approach is likely to lead to a lasting shift in social norms, with greater acceptance of uncut girls and a decreased social stigma associated with FGM. This is supported by the reported change in attitudes towards uncut girls within communities, the growing preference for marrying uncut girls, and the declining social pressure to conform to traditional practices. The approach's success in challenging harmful traditional beliefs and promoting a more inclusive and equitable environment contributes to this positive shift in social norms.

Finally, ARP graduates are emerging as agents of change within their communities, advocating for the rights of other girls and promoting FGM abandonment within future generations. This is evident in the narratives of graduates who express a sense of empowerment and a commitment to using their experiences to advocate for positive change. These empowered graduates serve as role models, inspiring others to resist FGM and contribute to a future where girls are free from this harmful practice.

The long-term effects of ARP are promising, demonstrating its potential to contribute to lasting social change. The approach's success in influencing attitudes, challenging harmful norms, and empowering girls lays the foundation for a future where FGM is no longer prevalent, and girls are empowered to live fulfilling lives.

#### 5.4.2. Sustaining ARP: Key Contributing Factors

The evaluation reveals that the long-term sustainability of the ARP approach relies heavily on several key factors. These factors demonstrate its potential for lasting impact and widespread adoption:

- **Community Ownership:** A strong sense of community ownership and responsibility for FGM abandonment is crucial for the long-term success of ARP. When communities actively participate in the approach, take ownership of its goals, and advocate for its implementation, it becomes more deeply ingrained within their social fabric.
- **Integration with Existing Structures:** The seamless integration of ARP with existing community structures, such as schools, churches, and health facilities, significantly enhances its sustainability. By leveraging established networks and resources, the approach becomes more readily accessible and embedded within the community's daily life. This integration also fosters collaboration and strengthens the approach's reach.
- **Continued Advocacy and Mobilization:** Sustained advocacy efforts and community mobilization are crucial for maintaining momentum and ensuring long-term impact. The approach's success relies on ongoing awareness-raising campaigns, community dialogues, and public declarations to keep the issue of FGM at the forefront of public discourse and encourage continued action against the practice.
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Adaptation:** Cultural sensitivity and adaptation are critical for the sustainability of ARP programs. These programs must respect and integrate local traditions and values while introducing modern educational components to gain community acceptance. By blending traditional practices with contemporary approaches, ARP programs can create a more relatable and appealing alternative to harmful rites of passage like FGM.

- **Strong Leadership and Governance:** Strong leadership and governance are pivotal for the sustainability of ARP programs. Effective leadership at community and organizational levels ensures that the programs are championed by respected and influential individuals who can mobilize resources and rally support. Robust governance structures, such as management committees, are essential for maintaining accountability and continuity, providing a framework for decision-making, resource allocation, and monitoring.
- **Government Support:** The continued support of the Kenyan government, including legal frameworks and financial resources, is essential for the sustainability of ARP. The existing legal framework, particularly the FGM Act of 2011, provides a strong foundation for the approach's implementation and encourages broader community participation. Government support, including funding, infrastructure development, and policy initiatives, can amplify the approach's impact and ensure its long-term success.

These key factors, when combined, create a robust framework for the sustainability of the ARP approach. By fostering community ownership, integrating with existing structures, maintaining sustained advocacy, and securing government support, the approach can continue creating positive change, challenging harmful traditions, and empowering communities to achieve a future free from FGM.

#### 5.4.3. ARP Model Insights: Lessons for Replication

The successful implementation of the ARP approach offers valuable lessons that can be shared and replicated to combat FGM in other contexts:

- **Culturally Sensitive Approach:** ARP's success highlights the importance of a culturally sensitive approach that resonates with local communities. By incorporating traditional rites of passage into its framework, ARP shows that positive change can be achieved while respecting and honoring existing cultural norms and practices.
- **Multi-Sectoral Collaboration:** Engaging multiple sectors, including education, health, community leaders, and the government, is crucial for achieving lasting change. The approach's success in fostering collaboration between these sectors demonstrates the power of a multi-pronged approach.
- **Empowering Girls:** Focusing on girls' empowerment, including education, life skills, and decision-making skills, is essential for combating FGM and promoting gender equality. The approach's success in empowering girls to make informed choices, resist societal pressures, and advocate for their rights highlights the importance of empowering girls as agents of change.

These lessons learned from the approach provide valuable insights for future interventions combating FGM. By embracing cultural sensitivity, fostering multi-sectoral collaboration, and prioritizing girls' empowerment, future approaches can build upon the successes of the ARP model and contribute to a world where girls are free from the harmful practice of FGM and empowered to achieve their full potential.

#### 5.4.4. Strengthening Sustainability: Strategies for Long-Term Success

Securing sustainable funding sources is crucial for continuing to implement the ARP approach. The approach's success hinges on consistent financial support to cover costs associated with training, materials, staff, and ongoing activities. Diversifying funding sources beyond traditional

donors by exploring partnerships with local businesses, philanthropic organizations, and government agencies is essential for long-term financial stability.

Strengthening the capacity of community members, including leaders, educators, and health workers, to implement and sustain ARP interventions is essential. This involves investing in training programs that equip local stakeholders with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to implement the approach and advocate for its goals effectively. Empowering community members to take ownership of the approach and its activities will enhance its sustainability and longevity.

Regular monitoring and evaluation of the approach are essential to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and adapt interventions to emerging challenges. A robust monitoring and evaluation system allows the approach to assess its effectiveness, measure its impact, and identify areas for refinement. This iterative approach ensures that the approach remains responsive to the changing needs of the communities and adapts to evolving challenges.

By implementing these strategies, the ARP approach can achieve greater sustainability and ensure its lasting impact on the fight against FGM. Securing sustainable funding, building local capacity, and employing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework will create a more resilient and adaptable approach that can continue to empower girls, challenge harmful traditions, and create a more equitable and just future for girls in Kenya.

### 5.5. Gender and Social Inclusion

This section explored the important aspects of gender and social inclusion within the implementation of the ARP approach. It examined how the approach addressed the specific needs and experiences of diverse groups, considering the unique challenges faced by girls, boys, and other marginalized individuals, including persons living with disabilities, within the communities. The evaluation analyzed the approach's efforts to promote gender equality, address discriminatory practices, and ensure the inclusion of all community members in its initiatives. By exploring the approach's strengths and areas for improvement in promoting gender and social inclusion, this section aimed to assess the approach's impact on creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for all.

**Finding:** The ARP approach has made efforts to integrate gender and social inclusion considerations into its interventions.

The evaluation of the ARP approach revealed efforts to integrate gender and social inclusion considerations into its interventions, demonstrating a commitment to creating a more equitable and inclusive environment within the communities served. The approach incorporated gender-sensitive training, inclusive participation, and targeted messaging to address the unique needs and experiences of diverse groups.

Training sessions designed for both boys and girls were crafted to promote gender equality and address harmful gender norms. This was evident in the approach's efforts to ensure equal participation and opportunities for both genders, and to challenge traditional beliefs and practices that perpetuate gender inequality. For instance, a female nurse from Manga shared, "Men are actively involved in the approach. At the community level, they are given roles to play in the sensitization and awareness creation." This demonstrates the approach's commitment to engaging both genders actively in promoting FGM abandonment.

The approach aimed for inclusivity by planning public sensitization forums, graduation ceremonies, and other activities to be accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. This

was demonstrated through the selection of accessible venues and the incorporation of measures to accommodate the needs of persons living with disabilities. A clan elder from Manga highlighted this effort, stating, "Clan elders invite all including PWDs to meetings. In some cases meetings are moved closer to where the disabled are. Usually from one area to the other." This commitment to accessibility ensures that all community members have the opportunity to participate in the approach's initiatives.

Finally, the approach employed targeted messaging, tailoring its messages to different audiences, taking into account age and cultural sensitivities. This was evident in the approach's efforts to adapt its communication strategies to resonate with specific groups, such as older women, mothers-in-law, and men. One local administrator from Kegogi highlighted this approach, suggesting, "Messaging should be made more effective in reaching the masses. Teaching as in a school does not fit in community circumstances. A messaging strategy is required that puts more emphasis on practical and real examples that are known to the people."

These efforts to integrate gender and social inclusion considerations into the approach demonstrate a commitment to creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for all community members. While further efforts are needed to enhance these aspects of the approach, these steps demonstrate a positive direction in promoting gender equality and inclusivity in the fight against FGM.

#### Discussion:

While the ARP approach has made progress in incorporating gender and social inclusion considerations into its interventions, there is a need for further strengthening these aspects to ensure equitable and inclusive approach implementation. The evaluation identified several areas where the approach can enhance its efforts to promote gender equality and address the needs of marginalized groups.

The approach's commitment to gender-sensitive training, evident in its efforts to ensure equal participation and opportunities for both genders, demonstrates a positive direction. However, the evaluation suggests that more targeted strategies are needed to fully address harmful gender norms and ensure that boys become active allies in the fight against FGM. This includes developing specific training modules that address boys' perspectives on masculinity, their role in supporting girls' rights, and their potential as advocates for FGM abandonment.

The approach's efforts to promote inclusivity by planning accessible events for people with disabilities, such as the selection of accessible venues, demonstrate a commitment to inclusion. However, the evaluation suggests that more could be done to ensure that the approach is truly accessible to all individuals with disabilities. This could involve providing sign language interpreters, assistive technologies, and tailored information materials.

Furthermore, while the approach employs targeted messaging, tailoring its messages to different audiences, further refinement is needed. The evaluation suggests that more attention should be paid to developing culturally sensitive messages that resonate with specific groups, such as older women and mothers-in-law, who may hold traditional beliefs about FGM. This will require deeper engagement with these groups to understand their perspectives and tailor messages that address their concerns and foster their support for the approach's goals.

Overall, the evaluation suggests that while the ARP approach has made positive strides in incorporating gender and social inclusion considerations, ongoing efforts are needed to enhance its effectiveness in these areas. Strengthening these aspects will ensure that the approach is

truly inclusive, equitable, and impactful for all community members, contributing to a more just and empowering environment for girls.

## 5.6. Promising Practices and Lessons Learned

This section explored the promising practices and lessons learned from the implementation of the ARP approach. By examining the approach's successes, challenges, and innovations, this analysis aimed to identify key strategies and insights that could be shared and replicated to further enhance the effectiveness of FGM abandonment efforts. The evaluation highlighted the approach's strengths, such as its culturally sensitive approach and its emphasis on community engagement, as well as identified areas for improvement, such as addressing resource constraints and strengthening reporting mechanisms. By capturing these promising practices and lessons learned, this section aimed to contribute to the ongoing global effort to eradicate FGM and promote the rights and well-being of girls.

### **Finding:**

The evaluation of the ARP approach reveals several promising practices and valuable lessons for future anti-FGM initiatives. These findings underscore the importance of community engagement, cultural adaptation, multi-sectoral partnerships, and empowering girls through education in the fight against FGM.

Firstly, the ARP approach successfully engages communities, fostering ownership and collaboration in FGM abandonment. This is evident in the approach's active involvement of parents, community leaders, elders, and other stakeholders, who are instrumental in promoting the approach's goals and ensuring its effectiveness. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) highlighted this community ownership, with participants emphasizing their commitment to the approach and its mission. One participant shared in an FGD, "We know this is our fight, and we are going to keep working to stop FGM."

Secondly, the ARP approach effectively adapts traditional rites of passage to promote girls' empowerment and education. By incorporating existing cultural norms and rituals, the approach resonates with communities, reducing resistance to change and promoting a sense of ownership. This cultural sensitivity is evident in the positive feedback from participants, who appreciate the approach's alignment with their traditions. One participant remarked, "This approach feels like it's part of our culture, it's not something strange or foreign to us."

Thirdly, collaboration with government agencies, schools, churches, and health facilities strengthens the approach's impact and sustainability. This multi-sectoral approach allows the approach to leverage existing networks and resources, maximizing its reach and effectiveness. The evaluation highlighted the benefits of this collaboration, with participants emphasizing the importance of working with schools and churches to spread awareness and implement the approach.

Finally, providing girls with education, life skills, and a platform to advocate for their rights is essential for achieving lasting change. The approach's focus on empowering girls to make informed choices, challenge harmful norms, and become advocates for themselves contributes significantly to its success. This is evident in the positive experiences shared by participants, who report feeling more confident, empowered, and equipped to make choices and stand up for their rights.

These lessons learned from the ARP approach provide valuable insights for future interventions aimed at combating FGM. By embracing cultural sensitivity, fostering multi-sectoral

collaboration, and prioritizing girls' empowerment, future approaches can build upon the successes of the ARP model and contribute to a world where girls are free from the harmful practice of FGM and empowered to achieve their full potential.

#### Discussion:

These lessons learned from the ARP approach, grounded in its successful implementation, can be shared and replicated in other contexts to support the global effort to eradicate FGM. The approach's success, demonstrably rooted in its culturally sensitive approach, its multi-sectoral collaboration, and its focus on girls' empowerment, offers a valuable model for combating FGM in diverse settings.

The approach's cultural sensitivity, evident in its integration of traditional rites of passage and its respect for local norms, provides a blueprint for addressing deeply rooted cultural practices. By adapting and incorporating existing cultural elements, approaches can build trust and acceptance within communities, making them more effective in challenging harmful traditions. For example, the positive feedback from participants in ARP, who often express appreciation for the approach's alignment with their traditions, highlights the importance of this approach. One participant remarked, "This ARP feels like it's part of our culture, it's not something strange or foreign to us."

The approach's emphasis on multi-sectoral collaboration, demonstrated through its partnerships with schools, churches, health facilities, community leaders, and government agencies, highlights the importance of a unified approach. By leveraging the strengths and resources of various stakeholders, approaches can create a more comprehensive and impactful response to FGM. For instance, the evaluation identified numerous instances where collaborative efforts between schools and churches, for example, significantly amplified the approach's reach and effectiveness.

Finally, the approach's focus on girls' empowerment through education, life skills development, and decision-making skills empowers girls to become agents of change. By equipping girls with the tools to challenge harmful norms, advocate for their rights, and shape their own futures, the approach fosters a more equitable and just environment. This is evident in the positive experiences shared by participants, who report feeling more confident, empowered, and equipped to make choices and stand up for their rights.

Sharing these lessons with other organizations and communities working to combat FGM can significantly strengthen the global effort to eradicate this harmful practice. By learning from the successes of the ARP approach and applying these principles to new contexts, a more comprehensive and effective approach to FGM elimination can be achieved, ultimately paving the way for a future where girls are free from this harmful practice and empowered to live fulfilling lives.

## 6.0 Conclusions

This chapter synthesizes the key findings from evaluating the Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) program in Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot Counties, Kenya. The evaluation sought to assess the effectiveness and impact of the ARP program in combating Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) within these diverse communities. The chapter will draw conclusions about the program's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Furthermore, it will provide actionable recommendations to strengthen the program's impact, ensure its long-term sustainability, and accelerate progress towards FGM abandonment in Kenya.

## 6.1. Overarching Conclusions

The ARP program has demonstrably contributed to a reduction in FGM prevalence, particularly within the communities of Kisii and Nyamira. This positive impact is evident in the decrease in reported FGM incidents, a shift in community attitudes toward FGM as a harmful practice, and a growing acceptance of alternative rites of passage. The program's success in challenging deeply ingrained cultural norms, promoting awareness of the harmful effects of FGM, and empowering girls to make informed choices about their bodies and futures has been instrumental in driving this positive change. The observed reduction in FGM prevalence underscores the program's effectiveness in fostering a more protective and equitable environment for girls within these communities. While the program's impact in West Pokot is less pronounced due to challenges in accessibility and persistent traditional beliefs, the findings in Kisii and Nyamira highlight the significant potential of the ARP approach to effect positive social change in the fight against FGM.

The ARP's success can be attributed to its diverse approach, strategically combining several key elements. By effectively integrating traditional rites of passage into its framework, ARP resonates with communities and fosters acceptance, making the program culturally relevant. This approach reduces resistance and promotes ownership of the change process. Public declarations against FGM, often made during graduation ceremonies and community events, serve as powerful statements that reinforce commitment and raise awareness. These declarations, made by girls, families, and community leaders, demonstrate a united front against FGM and contribute to shifting public attitudes. The approach's success is further bolstered by its active engagement of parents, community leaders, elders, and other stakeholders in promoting FGM abandonment and supporting girls' rights. This collaborative effort fosters a sense of shared responsibility and creates a more supportive environment for girls. Finally, ARP empowers girls through education, life skills training, and self-esteem building. This approach equips girls with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to navigate life's challenges, resist societal pressures surrounding FGM, and advocate for their rights. This multi-faceted approach demonstrates the program's ability to address the complex issue of FGM on multiple levels, fostering a holistic and transformative approach to change.

The ARP approach demonstrates strong potential for long-term sustainability through its deep integration within the communities it serves. This is evidenced by the strong community ownership of the approach, its seamless integration within existing structures, and its alignment with government initiatives. The approach has fostered a sense of collective responsibility among community members, including parents, leaders, and educators, for promoting FGM abandonment, indicating a solid foundation for sustained impact. The seamless integration of the ARP approach with existing community structures, such as schools, churches, and health facilities, enhances its accessibility and ensures its continued presence within the daily lives of the communities. This integration fosters collaboration and strengthens the approach's reach, maximizing its effectiveness.

Furthermore, the approach's alignment with government policies and initiatives, including the Kenyan FGM Act of 2011, provides a legal framework and supportive environment that encourages its implementation and sustainability. This combination of strong community ownership, integration within existing structures, and alignment with government initiatives suggests a robust framework for ensuring the long-term viability of the ARP approach and its continued impact in combating FGM.

The evaluation identified key challenges, including the need to address resistance from traditionalists, ensure equitable program access, strengthen male engagement, and secure sustainable funding. The ARP approach faces resistance from certain segments of the community who hold deeply entrenched traditional beliefs about FGM. Targeted strategies are needed to engage these groups, address their concerns, and foster a greater understanding of the harmful effects of FGM. The program's reach and impact are uneven, particularly in remote areas with limited access to information and resources. Overcoming geographical barriers and ensuring equitable access to the ARP approach for all communities is crucial for achieving widespread impact. While the approach acknowledges the importance of male involvement, further efforts are needed to engage men and boys as active allies in combating FGM. This includes addressing harmful gender norms, promoting positive masculinity, and encouraging men to actively support girls' rights. The long-term sustainability of the ARP approach depends on securing adequate and reliable funding sources. Exploring diverse funding streams, building local capacity for resource mobilization, and establishing long-term partnerships with government agencies and philanthropic organizations are crucial for ensuring continued program operation. Addressing these challenges effectively will be crucial for strengthening the ARP approach, amplifying its impact, and ensuring its long-term success in promoting a future free from FGM in Kenya.

## **6.2. Key Strengths of the ARP Approach**

The ARP approach demonstrates a powerful combination of strengths that contribute to its effectiveness and potential for lasting impact. It effectively integrates with existing cultural practices, fostering community acceptance and ownership. This is achieved through active mobilization of parents, community leaders, and other stakeholders, creating a supportive environment for change. Furthermore, the approach empowers girls with knowledge, life skills, and a sense of agency, enabling them to resist FGM and advocate for their rights. Finally, it leverages multi-sectoral partnerships with schools, churches, health facilities, and government agencies, maximizing its reach and ensuring a comprehensive approach to combating FGM.

## **6.3. Key Challenges and Areas for Improvement**

While promising, the success of the ARP approach faces significant challenges rooted in the distinct cultural contexts of its implementation.

In both Kisii/Nyamira and West Pokot, overcoming deeply ingrained traditional beliefs about FGM proves difficult. In Kisii/Nyamira, resistance stems from older women and mothers-in-law who view FGM as essential for a girl's womanhood and marriageability. West Pokot struggles with the deeply ingrained nature of the practice, leading to some girls returning to it even after training.

Logistical hurdles also present obstacles. Reaching remote communities in West Pokot demands overcoming geographical challenges and adapting interventions to local contexts. Despite high demand, the Kisii/Nyamira program faces budget constraints that limit expansion.

Engaging men is crucial for both locations. Strategies promoting positive masculinity, challenging harmful gender norms, and actively engaging men and boys as allies in combating FGM are essential. In Kisii/Nyamira, the limited participation of fathers and male guardians in training highlights the need for targeted approaches.

Furthermore, ensuring program sustainability requires a multi-pronged approach. Securing sustainable funding necessitates diversifying funding sources, building local capacity for resource mobilization, and establishing long-term partnerships with government agencies.

Specific to Kisii/Nyamira, the complexity of the Msichana Jasiri manual presents a challenge for teachers working with young girls. Insufficient follow-up mechanisms leave girls vulnerable during holiday periods when FGM cases are prevalent.

West Pokot faces unique challenges. Reaching out-of-school children, who often struggle with self-esteem issues and active participation, proves difficult. The brief one-week duration of ARP training necessitates a review of the curriculum to incorporate practical life skills training, complementing the focus on knowledge and skills enhancement.

Successfully addressing these challenges, specific to each cultural context, will be key to maximizing the impact of the ARP approach and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

## 7.0 Recommendations for Strengthening the ARP Approach

This chapter presents a set of actionable recommendations designed to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) approach in combating Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Kisii, Nyamira, and West Pokot counties in Kenya. Informed by the evaluation findings, these recommendations aim to address key challenges, amplify the program's impact, and ensure its long-term viability within these specific regions.

### 7.1 Expanding Reach and Tailoring Interventions

**7.1.1** Develop a dedicated strategy to reach remote communities in West Pokot, focusing on overcoming logistical barriers such as transportation and communication challenges. This could include using mobile training units, partnering with local CBOs already working in the area, and creating community-based outreach teams.

**7.1.2** Create customized ARP modules that address the unique cultural beliefs and practices that underpin FGM in different communities. This could involve incorporating local folklore, storytelling, and traditional healing practices into the curriculum.

**Example:** *Dismantle the belief that mastitis could be as a result of FGM. Provide evidence-based information about the physiology of cows, explaining that there is no scientific basis for the belief that uncut girls cause mastitis. Emphasize that mastitis is a bacterial infection, not a consequence of a girl's genital status.*

### 7.2 Strengthening Community Engagement

**7.2.1** Design specific workshops and sensitization sessions tailored to the perspectives and concerns of older women and mothers-in-law, who often hold traditional beliefs about FGM. Involve female community leaders and respected elders who have successfully abandoned FGM to share their experiences and inspire others.

**7.2.2** Facilitate structured intergenerational dialogues between older women and younger girls, promoting respectful exchange of views and understanding.

### 7.3 Enhancing Male Engagement

**7.3.1** Develop specialized ARP training modules that specifically address harmful gender norms and promote positive masculinity. Focus on educating boys and men about the harmful effects of FGM, their role in supporting girls' rights, and ways they can actively advocate against the practice.

**7.3.2** Encourage fathers to actively participate in ARP activities alongside their daughters, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and commitment to protecting girls.

**7.3.3** Identify and showcase male community leaders and influencers who champion FGM abandonment as positive role models.

#### **7.4 Securing Sustainable Funding**

**7.4.1** Explore partnerships with local businesses, philanthropic organizations, and government agencies to diversify funding streams and reduce dependence on single donors.

**7.4.2** Invest in training programs to enhance the capacity of community members, including leaders, educators, and health workers, for local resource mobilization and project management. This will empower communities to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the ARP approach.

#### **7.5 Implementing Robust Monitoring and Evaluation**

**7.5.1** Establish a system for regular monitoring of the ARP approach's progress, including tracking program participation, FGM prevalence rates, and community attitudes towards FGM. This data will provide valuable insights for program adaptation and improvement.

**7.5.2** Involve community members, program participants, and stakeholders in the evaluation process. This will ensure that the evaluation reflects the realities on the ground and build a sense of ownership and accountability among all involved.

#### **7.6 Addressing Specific Challenges in Kisii/Nyamira**

**7.6.1** Simplifying the Manual: Simplify the Msichana Jasiri manual to make it more accessible and usable for teachers working with young girls.

**7.6.2** Strengthening Follow-up: Implement stronger follow-up mechanisms to support girls during holiday periods when FGM cases are prevalent.

#### **7.7 Addressing Specific Challenges in West Pokot**

**7.7.1** Curriculum Review: Review the ARP curriculum to incorporate practical life skills training, such as cooking, dressmaking, hairdressing, and baby care, complementing the knowledge and skills enhancement focus.

**7.7.2** Outreach to Out-of-School Children: Develop strategies to reach out to and engage out-of-school children, addressing their self-esteem issues and encouraging active participation.

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### 3.0 Annex Data Analysis Plan



Data Analysis Plan  
for ARP Evaluation1.

## Tools



FGD Guide to use  
on community meml



Key Informant  
Interviews with stak



Questions for girls  
who have undergor

## ARP Videos



ARP Videos.docx