THE SI ROAD TO EQUALITY 2019-2021
SROOPTIMIST SIX
ENDFGM PROJECT REPORT

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As a part of the SI President’s Appeal 2019-21, The Road to Equality, a new project concerning female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) has been launched, in collaboration with Global Media Campaign to End FGM (GMC), called the ‘Soroptimist Six’.

The Global Media Campaign is a web of 375 media activists across 9 countries in Africa, broadcasting directly to their communities where girls are forced to undergo genital mutilation. This new generation of grassroots, digitally literate young campaigners are best-placed to end FGM in their communities. And, with relatively modest support, they can make significant change. GMC trains activists, religious leaders and journalists and teaches them to use media effectively to end FGM. The organisation provides support to them, to broadcast directly to their own communities, in their own language, using their own words. GMC brings the most influential religious and political leaders on radio, TV and social media to call for an end to the culture of cutting girls.

Through the ‘Soroptimist Six’ project, we aim to further the progress of our organisation’s work towards the 2030 SDG goals, while reaffirming our position on this issue. We have therefore identified and adopted 6 activists working with GMC in countries where we have a Soroptimist presence. The Soroptimist Six team include the following activists:

- Sadia Hussein (Kenya)
- Ayodeji Bello (Nigeria)
- Gift Abu (Nigeria)
- Rugiatu Turay (Sierra Leone)
- Lisa Camara (The Gambia)
- Ifrah Ahmed (Somalia)

These six activists will be receiving grants from The Road to Equality fund, to carry on their media activism to end FGM.

In their most recent campaigns to celebrate International Women’s Day, GMC supported 22 TV and Radio broadcasts. These broadcasts reached nearly 38 million people across the different countries where they work, producing 69 hours of broadcast content. Over Easter, GMC funded 28 media campaigns in six countries, producing over 30 broadcast hours for the Emergency Coronavirus Media Campaign, reaching more than 48 million people.
A grant of £15,000 was given to GMC in February, 2020, in lieu of the Soroptimist Six project. Since then, this money has been used by our activists to change lives and end the abhorrent practice of FGM. Our activists have undertaken campaigns which creates more awareness about the ill effects of FGM, and recently, have also focused their attention towards controlling this practice, in light of the ongoing pandemic.

Ayodeji Bello, one of our activists from Nigeria, convened a conference in February to commemorate Zero Tolerance Day for FGM. She was able to engage community and religious leaders, bureaucrats and other influential figures in her community in this programme, including Queen Naomi Ogunwusi, a queen of the Yoruba race (who was announced as the Zero Tolerance Ambassador). She was able to impress upon the Queen the gross implications of FGM, making her aware of the prevalence of the practice, and convincing her to support Ayo in her bid to end FGM. Thousands of women pledged to stop cutting girls, as a result of this event. Ayo also convened a session as a part of this programme where more than 800 adolescent girls were explained preventive measures and ways to seek help against sexual assault or any form of harmful practice. Ayo has also been on radio and TV shows a number of times during this period, and has recorded and produced several jingles in multiple languages, which has reached an audience of more than 50 million people across south-west Nigeria.
*Gift Abu*, our other activist from Nigeria has also used media in a number of ways to create awareness about FGM, including production of jingles and voxpop collection, which has reached an audience of more than 10 million people. Further, she has been involved in the production of a live TV programme on the dangers of FGM and the need to end FGM social norms. This programme puts pressure on stakeholders to enforce laws to end FGM, and punish those who continue the practice, encouraging and engaging more younger media presenters to take the lead in speaking out on their health programmes like EVERYDAY WOMAN. Media and community testimonies are also brought forward both locally and internationally, to get success stories on how cutters have abandoned the practice and reach out to share their experiences, contributing to end the practice in the Cross River and Ebonyi states, where FGM/C continues to be considered a part of the culture.

The corona virus and the resulting lockdowns in most parts of the world has put women and girls at an increased risk of FGM, as they are having to spend more time at home, and perpetrators are using this opportunity to further abuse on women and girls. As is the case in almost all natural disasters/man-made conflicts, women and girls stand most exposed and vulnerable. Our team has been using this opportunity to not only propagate safety protocols such as social distancing, regular hand-washing and covering one’s mouth and nose while coughing/sneezing; but has also implemented specific programmes to arrest increasing number of cases of FGM, which are on the rise due to reasons explained hereinbefore.

*Rugiatu Turay*, our activist from Sierra Leone, involved her organisation (Amazonian Initiative Movement, where Rugiatu serves as the Executive Director), to educate and organise orientations for Soweis (women who hold the most senior ranks in Sierra Leone societies) to ensure women’s
participation in the fight against Covid-19, and to create increased sensitisation among people about the pandemic. The rationale behind sensitising Soweis is to enable them to serve as social mobilisers in their communities, so that they are able to use their influential positions to make their voices heard louder.

Sadia Hussein, our activist from Kenya, has used her grant to repurpose media to create awareness about Covid-19, with the message that practising FGM during these times could lead to spread of the virus. She has been able to reach 48 million people across 5 countries through her extensive campaign. She has used Twitter hashtags (trending since 14th April), has designed posters with messages which have been widely circulated in markets and shops, has done several radio talk shows with religious leaders and health experts to end FGM and for the prevention of corona, has recorded videos for mainstream media and is actively promoting an online campaign (still ongoing).

Gift and Ayo (from Nigeria) have also been promoting campaigns online and through radio and TV, to dissipate information about FGM in light of Covid-19.