

PRESS RELEASE

UNESCO Launches a Campaign with the Maasai in Ngorongoro to Reduce Female Genital Mutilation

UNESCO, in close collaboration with the Ngorongoro District Council and the Council of Masaai traditional leaders, will conduct a large campaign to intensify efforts to address Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Ngorongoro, particularly during the FGM high season of December 2017 when girls go home from school and parents take the opportunity to circumcise them. The session is a continuation of a similar campaign held in June 2017 where trained campaigners managed to rescue four girls who were in the verge of being mutilated in Ngorongoro district.

The December campaign will consist of three clusters:

1. A school-based campaign, targeting students, teachers, and school-parent committees in 28 schools (4 secondary);
2. A community-based campaign, targeting mostly parents and caretakers in 29 selected villages in Loliondo division through parent/caretakers village/sub-village sensitization meetings.
3. A public campaign through the Loliondo FM Community Radio where a series of programmes will be broadcasted engaging community leaders, law enforcers, medical officials, religious leaders, former *ngaribas* (*circumcisers*) and young people.

Expected to reach around 70,000 people, the campaign will kick-off with a 2-day orientation workshop in Wasso on the 5th and 6th of December 2017. The workshop will bring together 65 campaigners and facilitators composed of district and ward officials, Maasai spiritual leaders and Maasai leaders to guide them on how best to deliver key messages to the targeted population as well as organize for sheltering girls in need.

In the Maasai community, the practice of female genital mutilation is deeply rooted in cultural practices and customary beliefs, part of the ritual passing from childhood to adulthood. According to district health statistics, in 2015, 90% (1,375) of the 1693 Maasai women who gave birth at health facilities were circumcised. The Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey 2015/16 indicates that Arusha ranks third nationally on the regions where FGM is practised, with a 41% prevalence, right after Manyara and Dodoma.

Since 2015, UNESCO has been collaborating with the government and traditional leaders in Ngorongoro district to strengthen the capacities of community-based structures to address sexual and reproductive health related issues including FGM and early marriage, facing girls and young women, as well as promoting girls education with a particular focus on school retention. Using the socio-cultural approach, UNESCO's initiatives has gained community support and achieved notable impact including change of mind-set of some traditional leaders and more than 30 Ngaribas who are now strong advocates against the practice.

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