

# Faith in Action

Faith Based Organizations' Contribution to End Child, Early & Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation in Ethiopia

## Faith Based Organizations; Reach and Influence

In Ethiopia, religion plays a significant role in people's lives. More than 96.7% of the population is a follower of a certain religious denomination (CSA, 2007). In this regard, Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) have a broad reach to mobilize the society. They are firmly rooted in communities, having a strong trust and the ability to influence the attitude and behavior of their constituencies. They not only provide spiritual guidance to their followers, they are also at the forefront in delivering social services.

Religious leaders of the different faiths are affiliated with all age groups of the society. People rely on them for guidance on many personal and family matters. Due to this, working with faith based actors has a promising potential to bring lasting and sustainable change to end harmful practices; female genital mutilation and child, forced and early marriage.

## Response on Early Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Over the last five years, faith based organizations in Ethiopia have made significant strides to end harmful practices and gender based violence. The Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and Ethiopian Catholic Church have developed theological reflections to raise awareness among their respective followers and alter long standing norms based on their religious teachings.

Between 2009-2015, the three Churches publicly declared against female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices. This has resulted in a number of achievements and lessons. Religious leaders played a key role in raising these



issues and educating communities during sermons, mass rallies, and dialogue forums. The faith based organizations incorporated issues of harmful practices and gender based violence in their respective faith based structures and systems; in the curriculum of theology colleges, bible schools and clergy centers.

As an umbrella organization of seven faith religious institutions, the Inter Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE) enabled religious leaders at national and regional level to consult on issues affecting the wellbeing of women and girls and mobilize their respective constituencies.

The seven member organizations include: the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Ethiopian Islamic Supreme Council, Ethiopian Catholic Church, Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Seventh Day Adventist Church, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and Ethiopia Kale Hiwot Church.



## Contribution for the 2025 Commitment

Beyond the declarations, faith based organizations will actively engage in social mobilization and dialogue to promote action against early marriage and female genital mutilation from the grassroots up to the national level.

- 50% of theology colleges, Qur'anic and Bible schools will incorporate the issue of FGM and early marriage in their respective curriculums;
- Inter Religious Council of Ethiopia will establish a national level multi-faith platform task group. The task group will track results and facilitate sharing of lessons among faith based organizations. This is believed to foster collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs and the National Alliance to End FGM and Early Marriage;
- 80% of religious leaders will be reached with messages of FGM and early marriage;
- 1,000 parish Churches and Mosques will discuss the issue of FGM and early marriage during their sermons and teachings;
- More than 50% of laity in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church will be reached with messages of FGM, early marriage and other harmful practices;
- 50% of faith based run schools and health facilities of the Ethiopian Muslims Development Agency, Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat and Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus will be targeted to address early marriage and FGM;
- 1,000 religious leaders and marriage counselors from Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia and Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus will be trained to guide and educate 5000 couples;
- 500 obstetric fistula cases will be identified and referred by FBOs to health facilities.
- 80% of FBOs Women, Youth and Children desks will be targeted directly to include the issue of FGM and child marriage.
- Marriage counselors' forums, theological college platforms, professional associations, and faith media will be established to mobilize resources and collectively address early marriage and FGM

## Position Statements of FBOs

During consecutive dialogue forums at national and regional levels, religious leaders have shown their commitment to end female genital mutilation and child marriage through public declaration/ position statements. The declarations will continue to be instrumental to reverse social norms and bring total abandonment of such practices.

- "We religious fathers and leaders will teach that female genital mutilation, early marriage, abduction and other harmful practices committed against women have severe consequences on the lives of our daughters, sisters, and mothers. Such practices have no support in any religious teaching. We have reached an agreement for religious admonition to be administered on all people committing such practices in violation of the call." (Joint statement IRCE, 2011 September)
- "Abducting a woman forcefully and marrying her without her consent is a forbidden act in Islam. It is also a criminal act. Her family and she have to give consent for marriage (Nikah). Any act that is conducted in between is considered as sinful (Haram)" (The Status of Women in the Teachings of Islam, EMDA, 2014)
- "The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church acknowledges the active participation of religious fathers as crucial to strengthen its campaign against female genital mutilation and gender based violence...the Church believes that males as partners are decisive to stop gender based violence and protect girls and women from Harmful Traditional practices" (EOTC Resolution on FGM and GBV, October, 2011)
- "The Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia condemns female genital mutilation because it diminishes pleasure for the woman during sexual intercourse, becomes a cause of marital difficulties, and causes unbearable pain and suffering during childbirth and serious health complications after birth." (ECFE declaration on FGM, January 2009)
- "The Ethiopian Catholic Church will continue to work to end the practice of FGM so that the integrity of the female body is respected. Therefore, we urge our Christian faithful and all people of good will to join hands to bring an end to the practice of FGM... The Ethiopian Catholic Church strictly forbids all its members from practicing FGM" (ECC declaration on FGM, February 2013).

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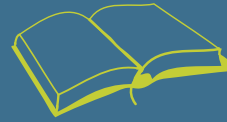
# achievements in NUMBERS



1,116

girls were rescued from gender based violence, early marriage, female genital mutilation and other forms of harmful practices through the intervention of faith based organizations

60



Theology colleges, clergy centers and bible schools of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Evangelical Churches of Fellowship of Ethiopia and Ethiopian Mekane Yesus Church have incorporated issues of harmful practices/FGM and gender based violence in their curriculum



385

Churches have been reached with messages of FGM and other harmful practices



830,352

Religious leaders, imams and faith communities were reached through trainings, archbishop rallies, and mass campaigns



10

national and regional level religious leaders' dialogue forums were facilitated by the Ethiopian Muslims Development Agency in collaboration with the Ethiopian Islamic Supreme Council

22



high level interfaith dialogue forums have been facilitated by IRCE, out of which six were conducted at national level, 14 at regional and two at zonal levels. Following the consultations, religious leaders made joint position statements against FGM and other harmful practices.



9,000,000

people have been reached with electronics and print media on FGM and other harmful practices

