

Shield Our Watoto (“Shield our Children”)

Der es Salaam, Tanzania, June-August 2019

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Female Genital Cutting and Peace:

Female Genital Cutting (FGC) is a particularly complex topic along the spectrum of gender-based violence and violation of human rights. It involves the total or partial removal of the external female genitalia (WHO, 2008). The practice has no health benefits, and the removal of normal genital tissue interferes with the natural functionality of the female body (WHO, 2016). FGC is not recognized as a form of persecution in practicing countries, however, because of valuable cultural and traditional ties to the practice. Community pressures and social norms play a major role in the perpetuation of the practice. Although attention given to FGC has grown in recent decades, and some progress made to counteract the practice and push for policy changes at the communal and international levels, many women remain at risk. Young girls are particularly vulnerable, as they have no say in the decision making. For these women to live peaceful lives, they must be able to fully enjoy their inherent human rights and have autonomy over their own bodies.

Project Objective and Summary:

This project aims to take a dialogue-based educational approach to eliminating FGC in practicing communities in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This approach is modeled on that used by the human rights NGO Tostan, with whom I interned in 2017. Tostan has successfully used a similar community empowerment program to reduce rates of FGC in West Africa. Currently, nearly 8,000 communities in Djibouti, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Somalia, and Gambia have publicly denounced FGC as a result of Tostan’s work (Tostan, 2017). Data collected by the Demographic and Health Survey Program indicate that 70% of women in Tanzania have been affected by FGC (DHSP, 2011). My project will recruit volunteers and community leaders to attend workshops and programs that I will lead focused on human rights and women’s health and health complications associated with FGC. These trained community members will then go out in their own communities to lead dialogue-based educational forums in which they will present the health implications of FGC on women. To achieve this, I will be working collaboratively with a nonprofit organization, Shield Our Watoto (SOW), a community-led nonprofit organization based in Dar es Salaam with a US branch in Columbus, OH. SOW works to educate communities and bring attention to issues such as FGC and child molestation. SOW’s Columbus branch works with the African diaspora community who experienced FGC and other forms of violence by offering abuse recovery treatments through counseling and prevention trainings. I’ve chosen to work with SOW because as an asylee, I cannot go back to Guinea to do similar ground work, and because Tostan has not extended its work anywhere in Eastern Africa. Specifically, I propose to:

1. Create a dialogue-based “Informal Education” curriculum, modeled on Tostan’s approach, designed to promote human rights and mentorship between the youth and adults in the community
 - a. Work with community leaders with the goal of recruiting 15 participants/session for trainings (10 must be women) from different local communities
 - b. Hold training sessions for these leaders (goal: 4 sessions over 10 weeks). I will do a presentation about women’s health and repercussions associated with the practice
 - c. Coordinate “Informal Education” community workshops biweekly (goal: 3 workshops over 10 weeks). I will co-lead hands-on activities about dialogue-based education and how participants can effectively educate their communities on the topic
2. Establish social media groups and a website to link women from all over the continent and the diaspora for empowerment
 - a. Design a website to feature weekly workshops and events
 - b. Recruit subscribers through social media and conduct two webinar meetings in 10 weeks
 - c. The website will also serve as a platform for inspiration, education, and empowerment by linking the diaspora community in Columbus to the women we will work with in Dar es Salaam through monthly webinars, mentorships, blogposts and publication of workshops offered by SOW or other local NGOs

Sustainability:

My project is designed to build SOW’s capacity to carry this work forward after my 10 weeks are up. SOW will track the prevalence of FGC in the community by collecting data on the number of communities

denouncing the practice. This evaluation plan will ensure a holistic understanding of the intervention through qualitative and quantitative data collection.

Qualifications:

As a native West African, I have experienced FGC firsthand. When I was 13 and still living in Guinea, my grandmother insisted that I go through FGC. Fortunately, my father was able to file for asylum for my sister and me, and we moved to the United States to further our education and escape the long-lasting impacts of FGC. Since coming to the US, I have become an active advocate for women who do not have the privilege to escape FGC or even understand the repercussions of the practice on their well-being. In the summer after my sophomore year at Denison, I conducted an independent summer research project which explored the physiological and psychological impacts of FGC on women in Guinea and Senegal. As part of the project, I traveled to Senegal to work with Tostan, where I learned about their dialogue-based approach described above. Through my research, I met and was trained to lead women's rights workshops by University of Nebraska professor Diane Gillespie, whose sister founded Tostan. I currently work alongside the founder of SOW in their office in Columbus, Ohio, which has exposed me to the Tanzanian communities and culture in Columbus. The founder of the organization is currently working to get her license as a counselor which she will receive by June, and she will be present during the entirety of the project. Lastly, I have substantial experience with leading workshops on campus about human rights issues and educational programs pertaining to FGC.

Timeline

April and May 2019:

1. Begin working on logistics with SOW
2. Determine necessary graphics, outreach material, and program evaluation plan and protocol
3. Finalize travel logistics

Beginning of June 2019

1. Finalize outreach materials, workshops and program curriculum, and evaluation design

Mid-June 2019

1. Travel to Tanzania and meet with SOW staff to discuss plan and logistics
2. Assist with program implementation and structural organization of the workshops; during this phase we will contact local community leaders, and SOW staff will assist with this stage as they are familiar with the community and know who are actively involved in this line of work
3. Initial meeting with participants to explain the purpose of the project; begin workshops and program

June-August 2019

1. Evaluate and analyze the effectiveness of the workshop and training sessions
2. Launch website and begin newsletter publication
3. Begin data collection about the number of communities denouncing the practice or working towards the abandonment of the practice, in order to evaluate and to make adjustments as necessary to maximize impact
4. Fly back to the US and continue to organize webinar meetings with the rest of the team and subscribers

August 2019- ongoing

1. Continue collecting data for evaluation and necessary adjustments
2. Maintain constant line of communication with SOW staff and community leaders
3. Host biannual webinar meetings to train community mentors

References:

1. Teufel, Katharina, and Daniela Marianne Dörfler. "Female genital circumcision/mutilation: implications for female urogynaecological health." *International Urogynecology Journal* 24.12 (2013): 2021-2027.
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<https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR173/13Chapter13.pdf>
3. TOSTAN 2011 Data report
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4. Shield Our Watoto
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