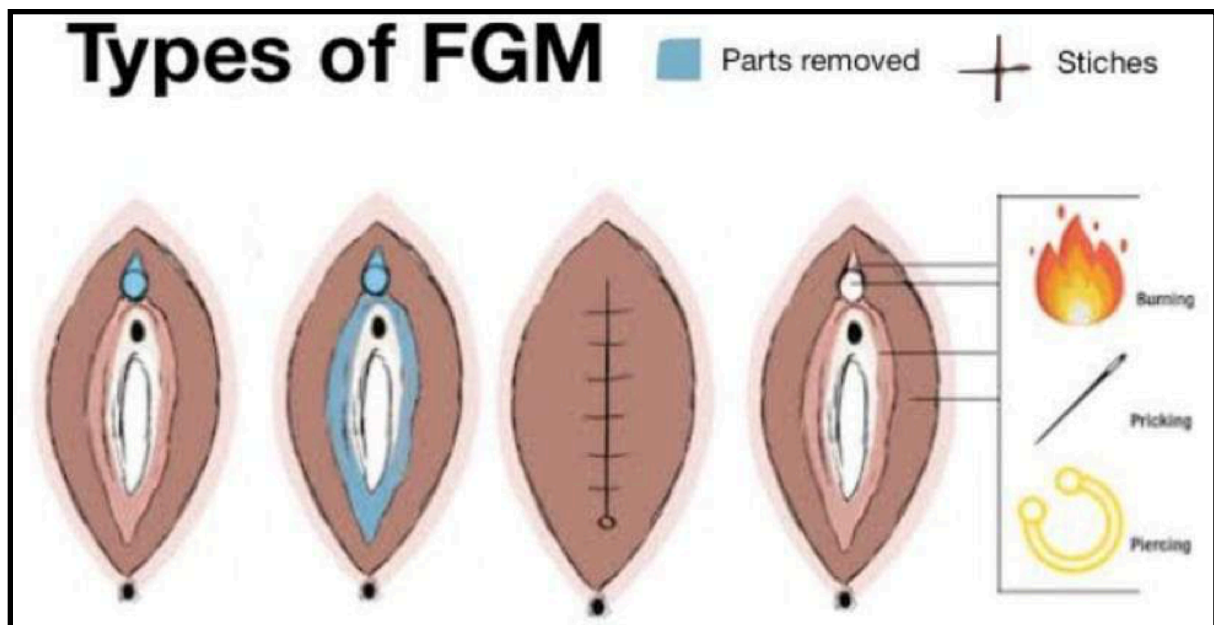


What is...

Female Genital Mutilation?

Female Genital Mutilation - also called **FGM** - is the cutting / removing of parts of a woman's genitalia. In the case of the Tanzanian Maasai women it means removing their clitoris to transform the girls from childhood into womanhood. From then on they can be traded into marriage. This still happens even though it has been forbidden by law since 1998. This is the concern of this presentation.



*This picture shows different types of **FGM**. Type no. 1 is what is practiced among the Maasai women in Tanzania*

But before elaborating on **FGM** and its consequences I will introduce the couple who are in charge of this project. They are important keys in solving and stopping the practice of **FGM** for several reasons, which will become obvious during their personal presentation.

Leah Lázaró

Leah is a young, proud and good looking Maasai woman. Leah does indeed know what she is talking about - because she has been through this painful process herself. In her



Leah Lázaró

case it was not only a question of the **FGM** which in itself is very traumatic. The prospects were even worse: She was circumcised at the age of 11 so her family could give her away for marriage without her knowing who she would marry. Her father died when she was 2 years old so her brother was in charge.

As her family belongs to the traditional Maasai culture, her brothers were pushing hard to get her married, which didn't seem as a desirable option for Leah. So she fled to another district far from home.

Through a friend, Leah had heard about a Christian woman from another tribe. This woman took Leah into care and provided her with all she needed. She even sent Leah to school, where she completed secondary school, level 4. (With level 6 you can continue education at the university).

While staying in this home, she had a friend who took her to a graduation party at the university and here she met Mois for the first time.

Shortly after Leah was sent to Dar es Salaam to the daughter of the woman who had helped her and here she carried on with her secondary school.

However, Leah and Mois had already fallen in love with each other - so they kept in touch until Mois finished his Bachelor at the university 2 years later.

Mois Sabore

Leah's husband Mois plays a great part in the project. None of them would be able to do what they are doing on their own. They are just as well fulfilling themselves in the project as they do in private life.

Like his wife Mois was brought up in a Maasai village so they had a lot in common. As an example Leah's father had 8 wives and his father had 3 wives. (His grandfather had 11 wives).

Mois grew up like any other traditional Maasai boy. He is therefore a fully trained and educated Maasai man who has completed all levels of education required to become a respectful Maasai. But he left everything behind and chose to become an educated teacher of



Mois Sabore

chemistry instead.

He also became a Christian. While he was studying chemistry for his Bachelor degree at the university he became very sick.

Several times his parents took him to worship a tree thinking it could cure him, but it didn't work. For some reason during his illness he tried to pray to God, saying that if God could cure him, he would be his follower. After a week Mois had fully recovered and he then turned to Christianity.

As soon as he had completed his Bachelor, Mois went to Leah's family to ask for her hand. It made everyone happy. He got a beloved wife and Lea's family's reputation was restored with their daughter having married a fully educated Maasai man.

What brought Leah and Mois together in their mutual struggle against FGM ?



In the struggle against FGM Christianity also has played a role

As you probably have guessed from the above, the common ground of being both Christian and Maasai clearly makes some changes compared to their origin: Christians

cannot have more than one wife and the fact that they are Christian certainly prevents them from following the traditions of **FGM**!

Teng'ena* Community Development Organization is an NGO

The Teng'ena Community Development Organization is an NGO founded by Leah and Mois and it has 25 members. Whenever they receive donations, the members will get together and decide how the donations can contribute to support the women in the small village communities.

The main purpose of the NGO is to prevent girls from being violated through **FGM** and prevent them from becoming a bargain among families, where girls and young women are forced into marriage with men they hardly know or desire, without taking their future lives into consideration.

Very often girls are forced to marry elders who are much older than themselves.

This is not a simple issue to address as the tradition also implies poor families' survival and that is how Leah and Mois come into the picture and why they need support – financially and otherwise.

The women need to find other ways of surviving. Empowerment through skills and production that can help them to create an income from the outside world or within the families.

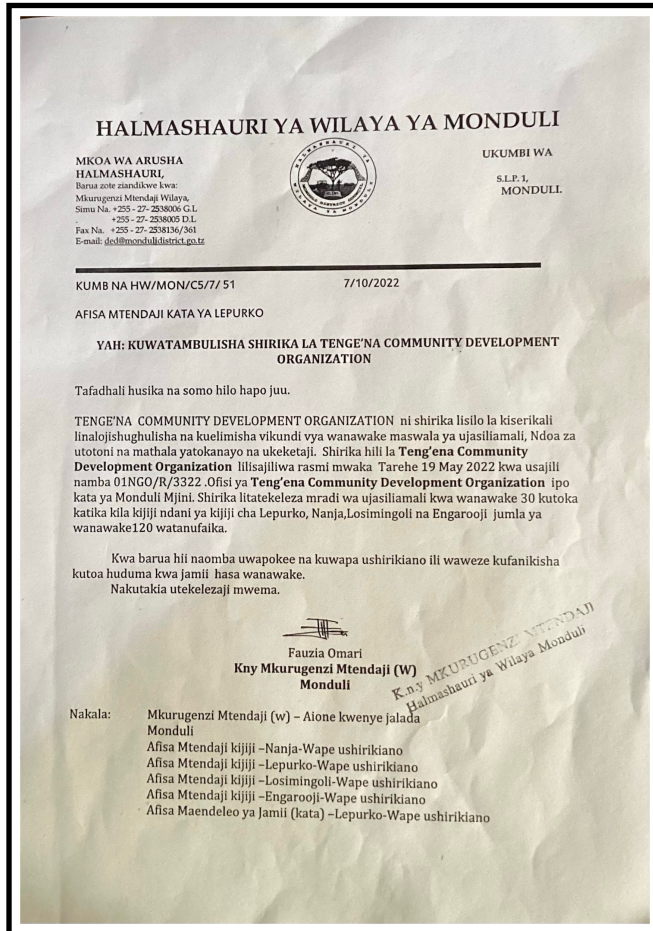
This dual background of being both Maasai and Christian is a very strong asset. It enables the couple to navigate between cultures in a very respectful way. They are able to combine the benefits of both cultures. This also means that there are no clear cuts between being both a Maasai and a Christian. They are able to mingle between when and how to share and celebrate highlights in the families. For instance 'crossing borders' at weddings could easily be done while everyone would know that traditions concerning practices of manhood and worshiping of trees should be kept apart.

Another thing that makes this NGO special is that its struggle against **FGM** comes from within the Maasai community. History has shown that pressure from the outside doesn't solve the problem. It rather pushes **FGM** into hiding and secrecy creating far too much opposition. It's worthwhile being supporters of change instead of oppressors of tradition.

In that view Leah and Mois - together with the members of the Teng'ena Community Development Organization - are excellent role models and can add far more beneficial change of culture than outsiders who may consider poor and proud Masai people primitive and backward.

* Teng'ena is Maasai language = educational

Here are the documents which certify the NGO:



Short background information about the Maasai heritage

As the Teng’ena Community Development Organization represents the Maasai community, it may be useful with a short presentation of those parts of the Maasai culture which have a direct or indirect influence on the practicing of **FGM**.

The language in Tanzania is Swahili and the language of the Maasais is Maa. Most Maasais do however speak both languages.

With the implementation of borders and real estate, the Maasai way of living has undergone a lot of change, as Maasais were originally nomads. They have less space for moving around and they mostly settle in small villages. For a living they still depend on shepherding which means that their wealth to some degree depends on how many cows, goats, donkeys etc. they have.

To extend their wealth girls / young women are objects for improving wealth. It’s a patriarchal society so fathers can use their daughters for bargaining by giving them away

for marriage or as a gift exchange in pursuit of establishing or strengthening bonds between other Maasai families. To be more precise, fathers consider it a duty to perform **FGM**. Unfortunately in the traditional understanding of Maasai culture, daughters don't have any value before they have been circumcised!

Life of the Maasais is based on conquests and tests involving the endurance of pain. Both for men and women.

The circumcision of girls is very painful. And here the pride of the Maasais becomes decisive. Not only does the girl have to deal with being cut. During the celebration she must also show bravery and not allow herself to show how painful it is. That would disgrace both her and her family.

It's also believed that **FGM** strengthens the ability to become pregnant and ensure future generations. The pressure on performing **FGM** is continuously high even though it's a criminal act.

The young Maasai men's education through childhood, warriorhood to elderhood will also have an impact on the Maasai men's view of women. They have to prove their strength in different ways. They have to learn to overcome pride and selfishness and some of the ways of doing so is by sharing their most prized possessions which could be to share their women with another member of their 'ageset'.

A Maasai belongs to an 'ageset' from birth and has to obey the rules within each particular 'age set'.

From birth to the age of 8, boys are called **INGERA**. Their main task is to play at home and take care of domestic animals. Between 9 and 18 they are called **MALAYONI**. The main job of a malayoni is to herd cows, goats, sheep and donkeys by taking them to pastures where they can find water and then bring them home in the evening.

From 19-35 years old they are called **MORANI**. To become a Morani is in itself a kind of education starting with a big ceremony where the young men are circumcised. After this ceremony, they become **SIKOLIO** and will be taught how to go to war, how to kill a lion, how to respect people and to obey the rules without breaking the Maasai customs.

The laws of the Morani are many and difficult. Though - after 6 years restrictions do become lighter. At the age of 36 this period ends with a ceremony called **ORINGERET**. From then on they are regarded as elders. As an elder you may give advice to the Moranis - but never interfere!

It is always important for Maasais to remain within the 'age set' they belong. As an example, an elder runs a risk of getting beaten if interfering in the practice of a Morani.

In charge of all matters you have the great leader called **OLAIBONI**. He is in charge of all activities including all the celebrations.



Losimingori village

Traditional food for a Maasai would be milk, meat, engitalolo*, emberere* and blood taken from cows that are still alive.

In the traditional huts they sleep on the skin of a cow, goat, sheep, lion or leopard.

* These dishes consist of corn, beans, bananas and other vegetables grown in their villages.

What issues are you dealing with when approaching FGM?

FGM links to different issues that should be addressed:

- **Dignity and status** contradicting poverty versus economical activities.
- **The medical consequences** of performing **FGM**.
- **The social consequences** concerning loss of acceptance from the Masai community and the beliefs that the lack of **FGM** has a negative impact on morality.
- **Religious consequences** because of the beliefs when not having FGM performed.
- **Psychological consequences** because of the trauma caused by **FGM**
- **The gender inequality** implied by **FGM**

How Leah and Mois approach these issues

Leah and Mois spend their lives and take every opportunity they get to educate and support the Maasai communities in the district of Monduli. And they do it in many ways:

Introducing Maasai villages

Leah and Mois receive a lot of visitors. These visitors are taken around to the Maasai villages with the purpose of giving them an insight into the Maasai culture and to show what kind of challenges the Maasai communities are confronted with both regard to **FGM**, early marriages and their living conditions. As described above, living conditions go along with changes in traditions because livelihood and economy is/has been linked to **FGM**.

It's important to create awareness of the circumstances for especially two reasons:

- To draw attention from the outside preventing **FGM** from being done secretly.
- To attract donations to secure the continuation of maintaining living standards without performing **FGM**



Maasai women dancing in Lashaine village

Education and Teaching Programmes

Education serves at least two purposes. Firstly, the empowerment of and among the Maasai women to resist being circumcised and secondly, the awareness of joining and advocating for the resistance of **FGM**. An educational visit should consist of a programme pinpointing both general and personal issues.



Teaching in the Maasai villages

The general part could be like following:

- Raise awareness with regard to the practice of **FGM** - especially among the women. This will only be strengthened if the men and the elders can take part in and support the issue.
- Let the women know that they were born in perfect bodies. There is no need to inflict unnatural harm by violating their beautiful bodies through **FGM**.
- Inform the women about the hygienic risks they are taking. It can cause severe infections - even death because of the bleeding. It can also give them problems getting pregnant and giving birth - even if they are told otherwise.

- Discuss the myths of performing **FGM**. As described above **some people** think that circumcising helps women to pregnancy and to having a lot of children. On the contrary there are also myths trying to convince people that women without circumcising will become immoral.
- It's very important to stress that **FGM** is a violation against women and children and therefore one of the main reasons why there are laws against it. It has been forbidden since 1998. Unfortunately, this has caused even more catastrophic circumstances with regard to **FGM**. The secrecy surrounding the practice of FGM often leads to an extensive use of unhygienic instruments when the circumcision takes place.



The personal part:

Personal hygiene is very important - bearing in mind the conditions in the villages. Water isn't coming from a tap but might be something it takes hours to fetch. And water plays a big role in hygienic standards and in maintaining good health.

Therefore it's worthwhile taking time to go through the importance of keeping your hair clean, washing your hands after going to the toilet and before eating, washing your clothes, and keeping your intimate parts clean to avoid infections - with or without **FGM!**

Entrepreneurship

To create goodwill in the Maasai community and replace the loss of income when women are no longer object for trade through early marriages, it's important to support the women in creating some kind of alternative income. Leah and Mois are working hard on developing new ways of supporting the women with ideas, prerequisites and material that **give** them the opportunities of having or making different kinds of projects.

For example soap production has become popular.

Leah and Mois teach the women in villages what to do and through the NGO they donate the products that the women need for starting the production.

Another project could be to donate corn for growing cornfields.

There is room for many other projects. Only the lack of donations and the imagination set limits to how far this part of their work can develop.

How is it possible to contribute and join in the battle against FGM and early marriages?

The costs of visiting the villages, hosting visitors, teaching and starting small scale businesses in the villages - some of them being very remote - set its limits to what Leah and Mois together with the Teng'ena Community Development Organization can do.

So any kind of donations - bigger or smaller - will be highly appreciated!

If you would like to contribute please use the information below:

Name of account: Tengena Community Development Org

IBAN: 03CORUTZTZ31720133733089900 / **Account:** 0133733089900

Receiver's address: Lashaine Road 17, Monduli 23402 Tanzania

BIC/SWIFT: CORUTZTZ

Name of bank: CRDB BANK PLC

On behalf of the Teng'ena Community Development Organization - thanks for taking interest in this cause.

For further information contact:

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