



SAFE HANDS FOR GIRLS

ANNUAL REPORT



WHO WE ARE



Our vision

A world where every woman and girl is free from FGM and all forms of gender-based violence, and has the support, knowledge, tools and self-esteem to reach her full potential.

Our mission

Safe Hands for Girls exists to:

- Help end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Early Child and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and other forms of harmful traditional practices against women and girls.
- Provide support to women and girls who are survivors of these practices through healthcare and restorative justice.

Our values

- Youth-led and youth-focused
- Respectful
- Positive and pro-active
- Inclusive, accessible and engaging
- Evidence-based
- Committed to learning
- Collaborative
- Courageous

Safe Hands for Girls is registered as a non-profit in The Gambia, Sierra Leone and in the USA.

FUNDING PARTNERS



Safe Hands for Girls wishes to put on records, our sincere thanks and appreciation to various organizations for funding our 2019 programs in the USA, The Gambia and beyond. These include:

The Human Dignity Foundation
The Wallace Global Fund
The Morris and Alma Schapiro Fund
UNFPA
GOOGLE
Virgin Unite
Novo Foundation
UNICEF
The World Bank
Equality Now
The Population Council

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WHAT ARE GIRLS GOING THROUGH?

- 3 million girls are cut every year, worldwide
 - FGM is practised on girls from two weeks to 15 years of age
 - 96% of women in the Gambia have been cut
 - 200 million women and girls are living with the impact of FGM, including 503,000 in the USA
 - **Not all girls survive the procedure**
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- Every year, 12 million girls are subjected to Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM)
 - Most drop out of school early
 - Married children are more vulnerable to early pregnancy, domestic abuse and lifelong poverty

WHY WOULD PARENTS HURT THEIR DAUGHTERS?

Many parents genuinely believe FGM is best for their daughters. They act on false information around issues that are familiar to all parents:

- Health benefits
- Religious obligation
- Family / cultural tradition
- Securing her future

Survivors can experience:

Short term - severe pain, shock, haemorrhage, tetanus, urine retention, ulceration of the genital region, injury to adjacent tissue, wound infection, urinary infection, fever and septicaemia.

Long term - infertility, complications during childbirth, anaemia, cysts, abscesses, keloid scar formation, urinary incontinence and serious psychological effects.



WEST AFRICA

In the Gambia and Sierra Leone, programs focus on the eradication of FGM and CEFM.

SHfG takes a dual approach to eradicating FGM and CEFM:

1. Community-level activities that transform attitudes

- Schools outreach and youth-led advocacy
- Seasonal campaigns designed and led by local groups
- Pink Bus Tour

2. Partnering with organisations at national level

- Improve existing legislation on FGM
- Train police, MPs, judiciary to uphold laws
- Restorative Justice for survivors and families.
- Work with medical professionals and religious leaders

In 2019:



Young activists trained and active



People participate in local campaigns



Professionals trained



People pledge to end FGM

WEST AFRICA

Changing one mind at a time: grassroots projects

Attitudes and behaviours regarding FGM vary from community to community, there are commonalities throughout the Gambia and Sierra Leone.

SHfG's programs tackle three key myths and misconceptions that are rooted in the idea that a girl's health, wellbeing, education and future are less important than her ability to marry and reproduce:

- FGM will have health benefits for the girl, now and in the future – in particular, childbirth will be easier
- FGM is required by religion (predominantly Muslim)
- Unless a girl undergoes FGM, she will be rejected by the community – in particular, she will not be able to marry

"Both the Imam and the midwife tell me it is necessary for my daughter to be cut.

Why would I prevent it?"
Gambian mother

Although the populations of the Gambia and Sierra Leone are relatively small (~2.2m and ~7.4m respectively), there is significant diversity, tribal loyalty and geographic dispersal in both countries.

In some communities, FGM is already very rare, while in others, almost 100% of girls are cut shortly after birth and anti-FGM activists have been physically assaulted for speaking out against the practice.

In some villages, religious leaders are key influencers, while in others, police officers are more influential. While high-profile events raise awareness of SHfG and its work in general, and are effective in terms of disseminating headline messages, campaigns that aim to change attitudes must be highly targeted, and adapted for each community.

Our strategy gives ownership of specific activities to local groups, knowing that they are best placed to tailor campaigns to their own communities.

Creating messages, rather than just passively receiving them, also means that individuals engage with the issues around FGM and CEFM in a much deeper and more meaningful way.

WEST AFRICA

Grassroots: mobilising young people

What's the challenge?

Young people – tomorrow's parents – mistakenly believe that FGM is beneficial, not harmful.

What we have done

Mobilise young people

Our team visited 80 schools in 2023, leading assemblies and activities that engage and inspire young people, giving them facts about FGM, CEFM and their rights.

Young people, both male and female, are asked to pledge:

- never to arrange for, or allow, FGM to be practised on their future daughters
- to do everything in their power to prevent child marriage, including (for males) refusing to marry a child

Students from each school are supported to form a Safe club. Clubs were also trained to create and deliver their own activities to raise awareness of the harms of FGM and CEFM not only in school but at home as well..

What we achieved?

A young person who is 15 years old in 2023 will be 20 years old in 2028, and in our target communities, is likely to be married with at least one child.

The young people we reached now have the information and confidence to break the cycle of FGM and CEFM when they come to make decisions for their own children; they are also be powerful advocates in their communities while they are still at school.

What does success look like past, present and in the future

	2019	2020	2023	2030	Total
Young people pledging to end FGM and CEFM	3000	5,000	10,000	5M	5m
Active School Clubs	12	40	75	10k	

WEST AFRICA

Grassroots: Cutting Season campaign

What's the challenge?

The months of July, August and September are known as 'the Cutting Season' in the Gambia and Sierra Leone. This is the traditional time for girls to undergo FGM: we estimate that between 10,000 and 20,000 girls are cut each year at this time.

Although it is widespread and socially acceptable, FGM is rarely discussed openly in communities – Cutting Season is the one time of year when the issue is spoken about, making it an opportunity we cannot miss.

What we have done?

Micro-campaigns

SHfG provided small grants and support for community radio stations and other groups to create and run projects that raise awareness of the harm caused by FGM and CEFM.

What we achieved?

The micro-campaign model has proven to be extremely successful over recent years, and we will continue to refine it, providing support from regional hubs to ensure that messages are consistent and accurate.

Using local, regional and national media will ensure that messages around FGM and CEFM are highlighted during this crucial time.

What does success look like?

	2019	2020	2023	2030
Groups running micro-projects	10	22	39	91
Individuals reached	38,000	110,000	195,000	455,000

THE PINK BUS TOUR



In 2018, SHfG launched its Pink Bus – a bright pink minibus equipped with materials and equipment that make it a mobile campaigning base.

The Pink Bus travels with staff and volunteers from SHfG and local partners, visiting remote villages that might not otherwise be reached by national or regional campaigns.

Wherever it goes, the Pink Bus draws attention. Not just because of its bright colour, but also because it brings music, dance, drama and interactive games that engage communities immediately.

In 2023, the Pink Bus travelled throughout the Gambia and reached more than one hundred thousand people, raising awareness of the harms of FGM and CEFM, and asking people to pledge to break the cycle of cutting. By 2030, we hope to have five or six buses on the road at any time.



Case study: Women's Listening Groups

Since 2019, two radio stations in the North Bank Region of the Gambia were awarded a sub-grant to establish two women's community radio listening groups. Each group was given a radio and a phone.

Producers followed women in their gardens and rice fields, and recorded interviews with them. The women talked about their own experiences of FGM, CEFM and other harmful practices, reflecting on the negative impacts they had personally experienced.

These interviews were then broadcast during the listening groups' weekly meetings, enabling them to hear the program and begin a guided discussion.

The discussion was extended to a phone-in, with group members talking to the presenter about their opinions and experiences on air.

95 women participated directly in this activity. These women reported that they had also discussed the program and issues raised with their friends, family and colleagues. Overall, in 2023, more than 10,000 women have benefited

In total, an estimated 20,000 people were reached with messages about FGM and CEFM.

This micro-project was so successful that it will be replicated elsewhere in the Gambia, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

THE USA

US programs support girls and young women in Atlanta who are at risk of, or who are survivors of FGM and / or CEFM.

SHfG will continue two successful programs:

1. Direct support to girls and young women

- Individual and group mentoring
- Support with financial literacy, education and employment, health and wellbeing

2. Training professionals to support survivors

- Practical training for medical professionals and non-profits
- Advocacy at municipal, state and national levels

By 2030:

20k

Girls receive intensive support

3K

Professionals trained

150

Leaders reached with advocacy

50k

People pledge to end FGM

THE BIG SISTERS

The Big Sisters Movement is active in the Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Kenya and Somalia.

A network and coalition of organisations run by African women, who:

1. Transform their own communities and countries

- Changing laws and ensuring they are enforced
- Supporting young advocates and campaigners
- Lobbying religious leaders, media and other influencers

2. Collaborate at global level

- Sharing learning, good practice and expertise
- Advocating for effective leadership from the UN, African Union and other multi-national agencies

By 2030:



Countries represented



People participate in local campaigns



Leaders engaged



People pledge to end FGM



SAFE HANDS FOR GIRLS

Please contact us for more information on any of our programs, or to discuss how you can partner or support us.

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