

S.A.F.E.'s GUIDE TO SOCIAL CHANGE

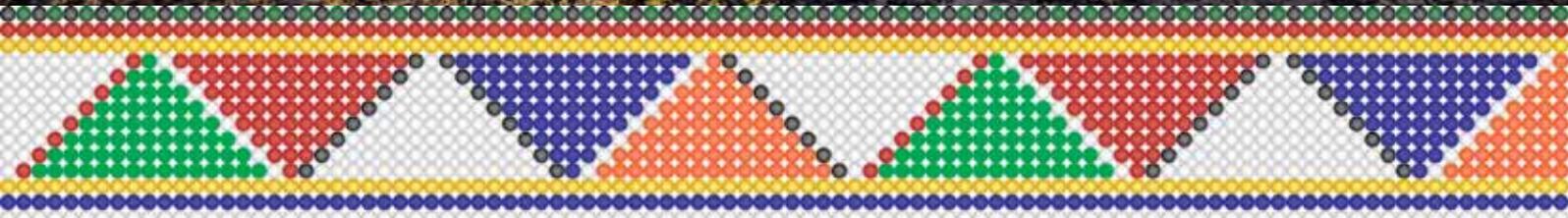
Promoting community led,
culturally centred programming,
which delivers long term and
sustainable abandonment of FGC

S.A.F.E.

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Welcome to S.A.F.E.'s social change resource. S.A.F.E. is a Kenyan NGO and UK Registered Charity, working in some of the most hard to reach and under-served communities in Kenya, we use arts and community projects to inspire and deliver, health, social and environmental change.



Introduction

About S.A.F.E.

S.A.F.E. is an art for social change Kenyan NGO using theatre, film, and education to inform, inspire and deliver social, health, and environmental change. S.A.F.E. works in hard to reach and vulnerable communities focusing on sexual health, gender-based violence, clean water and sanitation, countering extremism, peacebuilding and the environment. Three local teams deliver these projects: SAFE Pwani in the coastal counties, SAFE Maa in Loita and Olderkesi (Narok) and SAFE Samburu in the Westgate Conservancy and Nyiro (Samburu County).

Our vision is to be a leading regional NGO creating social change through art in vulnerable and marginalised communities.

Our mission is to harness the power of art to advocate for and support holistic behaviour change, creating healthy, peaceful, and prosperous communities.

SAFE Maa



SAFE Maa, the all Maasai S.A.F.E. team, was founded by Amos Leuka, Sarah Teno, and Nick Reding in 2005. Originally, SAFE Maa educated the community about HIV/AIDS. Traditional songs, a well-known way of communicating in Maasai culture, were used to spread information about HIV throughout the community. Such was the impact of this method of delivering health messages, that Project Manager, Sarah Teno, approached the team in 2008 and suggested that they take on the much more difficult topic of FGC, which was, at the time, a complete taboo.

The SAFE Maa team is composed of two Project Managers, one male and one female and a team of project officers and outreach officers.



The Loita Maasai

The SAFE Maa team hail from the Loita Hills which is home to the Loita Maasai and the famous *Loita Naimina Enkiyio Forest (The Forest of The Lost Child)*. The Loita Maasai are one of the few communities in Kenya that have kept their culture intact during the rapid development of the last few decades. The social fabric of the community has remained strong and the traditional leadership and age set structures continue to punctuate every aspect of Maasai life. The culture is a source of great pride in the community and is one of their key strengths. However, women are not traditionally given leadership roles, and harmful practices such as Female Genital Cutting (FGC) and early marriage are seen as integral to the culture. This is making some youth turn away from their traditions, as the harmful aspects overshadow the good.

Definitions

Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs):	Women in the community who assist women during labour and carry out FGC on girls.
Morans:	The warrior age set, young men approximately 16 to 30, who are traditionally responsible for providing security for the community. The Morans are seen as the guardians of the culture. Morans usually marry shortly after graduating to Junior Elders, and are therefore the future husbands of girls of a cutting age.
Cultural Leaders:	An all-male group made up of the most respected leaders in each of the different age sets. These men lead their age set, and together, the rest of the community in all matters relating to culture. To be selected as a cultural leader, a man has to come from a family who has followed all of the cultural rituals, for example – a cultural leader’s mother has to have undergone FGC.
Council of Elders:	An all-male group made up of the most respected elders in the community, they are from well-respected families and are selected by the community.
Traditional Circumcision:	This is type 2 ¹ circumcision and it is the most extensive form of FGC which is practiced in the Loita Community. It involves the removal of all the external flesh of the labia including the labia majora, labia minora and clitoris. It is carried out within the home by TBAs.
Kisasa:	Meaning ‘new’ or ‘modern’ in Swahili, Kisasa is the broad definition used by the Loita Community to define a lesser, symbolic cut which is similar to type 1 ² circumcision. Type 1 circumcision is the removal of the clitoris. The severity of kisasa changes depending on the family. It is considered to be less dangerous than the traditional cut.
Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP):	This is the term broadly used for any interventions which aim to mimic the role of FGC without any cutting. An ARP intervention differs greatly between different communities and organisations.

1 Type 2 circumcision is characterised by the WHO as the removal of the clitoris, the labia majora and the labia minora.

2 Type 1 circumcision is characterised by the WHO as the removal of the clitoris, although, it is known in Loita as kisasa, the definition of Kisasa changes from community to community.



Loita Rite of Passage (LRP): Is the alternative girls' graduation ceremony that keeps all of the traditional elements, but replaces the cut with the pouring of milk on a girl's thigh. This ceremony was created by the SAFE Maa team in partnership with the TBAs and cultural leaders.

Cutting season: The time of year when most families graduate their daughters, and therefore when most cases of FGC happen. This has traditionally been in December and January during the long school holidays when there is time for girls to be cut, recover and then go back to school.

Female Genital Cutting (FGC)

There is a global debate amongst FGC activists as to whether the practice should be referred to as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Female Genital Cutting (FGC). Upon consultation with the project teams who are from, and work in practising communities, S.A.F.E. made the decision to use the term FGC in this resource. This decision was made because it reflects the respectful and non-judgemental approach which is at the heart of S.A.F.E.'s work. The S.A.F.E. team were concerned that using FGM would be a barrier to open and honest conversations within the community.

FGC is the umbrella term for the entire practice. In this resource we will also refer more specifically to circumcision, to the different types of circumcision broken down by the WHO and the terms recognised by the communities we work in.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO):

Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

- FGM can cause severe bleeding and problems urinating, and later cysts, infections, as well as complications in childbirth and increased risk of newborn deaths.
- More than 200 million girls and women alive today have been cut in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia where FGM is concentrated .
- FGM is mostly carried out on young girls between infancy and age 15.
- FGM is a violation of the human rights of girls and women.
- WHO is opposed to all forms of FGM, and is opposed to health care providers performing FGM (medicalization of FGM).
- Treatment of health complications of FGM in 27 high prevalence countries costs 1.4 billion USD per year.



FGC in Kenya

An estimated 21% of women and girls aged 15–49 in Kenya have undergone FGC³. In the Maasai and Samburu communities that S.A.F.E. work in, FGC is practiced as a rite of passage to adulthood. FGC is an essential part of the graduation ceremony that promotes a girl to a woman; a celebration that is an immense source of pride for the whole family. Once promoted, she is then able to marry, have children, and fully take part in the community cultural life as an adult. The FGC prevalence rate in these communities is much higher than the national average, Maasai 78% and Samburu 86%⁴, but in some remote areas it is thought to be as high as 99%⁵.

FGC is illegal in Kenya. *The Children's Act of 2001* criminalised FGC on minors, and the law was later reinforced by *The Prohibition of FGM Act of 2011*. The 2011 act made FGC illegal for adults, regardless of age or consent. The Act is much more far-reaching than most national laws on FGC and criminalises not only the performance of FGC, but also procuring, aiding and abetting the practice of FGC; procuring a person to perform FGC in another country; allowing the use of premises for FGC; the possession of tools and equipment for the purposes of FGC; failure to report awareness of FGC to a law enforcement officer, whether the procedure is in progress, has already occurred or is planned; and the use of derogatory or abusive language against a woman for having not undergone FGC or against a man for marrying or supporting that woman (articles 19 to 25). Penalties include imprisonment for a minimum of three years and/or a fine of at least 200,000 Kenyan shillings (close to USD 2,000). In the case that FGC results in death, the maximum sentence is life imprisonment.

In addition to this, President Uhuru Kenyatta made the eradication of FGC in Kenya a key priority for his tenure and committed to end the practice.



3 This data is from the DHS 2014. There had previously been a decrease in national prevalence from 2003 (32%) to 2014 (21%), therefore, it is likely that the national prevalence is now lower than 21%. However, anecdotal evidence has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic put many girls and women at risk of FGC, this combined with the secrecy around the practice, makes it hard to calculate an exact national prevalence.

4 A profile of Female Genital Mutilation in Kenya, UNICEF, 2020

5 This is based on SAFE Maa's estimated prevalence of Loita in 2008.



Introduction

This guide is a blueprint of S.A.F.E.'s Female Genital Cutting (FGC) abandonment project, developed by the SAFE Maa team in the Loita Hills in Kenya and replicated by the SAFE Samburu team in Samburu County. The methodology for this project is built on learning and experiences from S.A.F.E.'s teams across Kenya.

The guide is intended for artists, activists and community led organisations who are looking to start a conversation about, and bring change to harmful cultural and social practices such as FGC within their community. It lays out the guiding principles and key activities that SAFE Maa has used to create change. The resource explains how the team's project is flexible, reactive and completely led by the needs and perspectives of the community.

S.A.F.E. understands that every community is unique and therefore, a 'one size fits all' approach cannot be used in social change programming. Therefore, whilst explaining SAFE Maa's approach, the guide also pulls out key themes and learnings that can be applied across different contexts and communities.

When SAFE Maa started their journey in 2010, 99%⁶ of the women in Loita were undergoing what the community call 'traditional' circumcision. What is more, FGC was a completely taboo subject, no one would speak about it, and the few people who came to the community to provide education were chased away.

Over ten years of project implementation, SAFE Maa successfully broke down the taboo around FGC, and in Loita, conversations about FGC are now not only acceptable, but are commonplace. In 2020, an internal survey showed that 64%⁷ of the community were supportive of FGC abandonment. In addition, 26%⁸ of girls who graduated into adulthood, graduated through an alternative ceremony which involved no cutting at all. Although 69% of girls still underwent FGC, most underwent 'kisasa' (Type 1 circumcision). This is thought of by many as a less harmful alternative to traditional FGC and as a stepping stone to total abandonment. Only 5% underwent the 'traditional' circumcision (Type 2 circumcision).

The following is SAFE Maa's journey with the community so far, and the activities and initiatives which have got them to a point where there is community buy in and support for FGC abandonment. The journey is not yet complete, as a change in community behaviour of this magnitude takes time, but, this project will continue until total abandonment has been achieved.

6 This figure was estimated by the SAFE Maa team in 2008 as they started their work. Official data was hard to gain due to the sensitive and taboo nature of FGC in Loita at that time, therefore the team used their lived experiences to estimate the prevalence of FGC.

7 This figure was taken from data collected in December 2020 through Focus Group Discussions in Loita.

8 These figures (26%, 64% and 7%) were collected in January 2021 through investigation into the content of the ceremonies that were used to graduate girls.





S.A.F.E.'s Guide to Social Change



SAFE Maa's Journey

Initial awareness raising and starting the dialogue

SAFE Maa began their FGC project in 2008. Initially, it took the team two years to gain permission from the all-male Council of Elders to even approach the community about the topic of FGC. However, finally, in 2010, approval was given and the team started their intervention. This permission from the community leadership was a critical first step, and while it was a frustrating delay, it was essential because the Council of Elders have decision-making power over all aspects of community life. Their support, not only meant that SAFE Maa had their blessing to carry out activities, but also added weight to the FGC abandonment messaging, as the community take instruction from this group on all matters.

To start the conversation and break down the taboo around FGC, SAFE Maa drew inspiration from their work on HIV/AIDS, and used their successful methodology, of spreading awareness through traditional Maasai songs and stories. A performance was created where two groups, (both comprised of men and women) debated each other about FGC abandonment, presenting the two sides of the argument within the community. One group, who represented those who supported FGC, sang about the importance of FGC to the culture, how it ensures that a girl can be married and participate in the community fully as a woman. The other group, representing those who wanted to abandon FGC, sang about the effects of FGC, the fact that it is illegal, and advocated for change. As the two songs went on interrupting each other, the proponents of FGC started to join those calling for abandonment, singing to their friends to do the same. In the end, both groups agreed to continue the conversation about how FGC abandonment could be achieved.

Key Learnings:

- Using a culturally appropriate means of opening the discussion about FGC made the topic (and therefore the project) accessible to the whole community.
- Representing both sides of the argument made supporters of FGC feel heard and understood, allowing them to come forward and give their views without fear of judgement.

Building the Project framework

The performance was the catalyst for community dialogue around FGC abandonment. SAFE Maa took their performance to many different villages within Loita. Each performance drew large crowds and provided information that was not only in a language that was accessible, but was also entertaining.

These performances still happen now. They generate a lively debate while giving people the vocabulary necessary to start conversations about FGC in their own homes and villages. The idea that this subject could be debated publicly was unimaginable before SAFE Maa's culturally appropriate intervention.

SAFE Maa successfully created an environment where discussion could take place and additional follow-up activities were accepted and even encouraged by community members. These follow-up activities, alongside the performance tours, remain cornerstones of the project.



Community Workshops:

SAFE Maa holds workshops that allow the community to receive further education and delve deeper into the challenges FGC abandonment presents. At first, workshops were carried out with the men and women separately. This was necessary due to the sensitive nature of the topic of FGC, and the strict social set up. Workshops are carried out at a village level, ensuring that people do not need to travel to receive information.

In their separate workshops, men and women can talk freely, about FGC abandonment and how it affects them, their concerns about abandonment and finally about the role that their age set and gender can play in ending the practice. These spaces are especially impactful for the women, as they traditionally do not have decision-making power and they are not often invited to spaces where important community issues are discussed.

As the conversations progressed, and the project expanded, the community was split further into its social groups to deepen the conversation. This was needed to ensure that the process of abandonment meets the needs of each and every part of Loita society.

- ▶ Traditional birth attendants (TBAs) who are also the community circumcisers, are engaged in workshops to learn and discuss the effects of FGC, and how TBAs could be central to a new, non-harmful graduation to adulthood for girls. This maintains their role and income in the community, whilst abandoning cutting.
- ▶ Morans, who are the young men in the warrior age set, are engaged in discussions about the marriageability of uncut women, and how, within their role as guardians of the culture, they could influence the community through their support of FGC abandonment.



- ▶ Youth are engaged to discuss their hopes and concerns for the future. They are able to discuss the power dynamics within the community and think about what power and influence they have, and how they can use their voice to bring about abandonment in the families and in the community as a whole.
- ▶ Mixed sessions are now carried out as the stigma around FGC has decreased and women are comfortable speaking in a mixed setting. These sessions bring together the views and perspectives of the above groups and help create consensus within the community.

Key Learnings

- Providing a space for every community member ensures that the project meets everyone's needs, and that no group is left behind.
- Conducting the workshops at a village level contributes to the accessibility of the activities, allowing for women and others who are not able to travel to central locations to receive information and take part in the conversation.
- Bringing groups together for mixed workshops accelerates attitudinal change as the participants are able to hear the thoughts and opinions of others, and become empowered through seeing others making changes.

One-on-one interventions:

To further support the community through change, SAFE Maa's outreach officers carry out one-on-one interventions. In this activity, outreach officers interact with community members on an individual basis in their village or even homestead, discussing FGC and helping people to work through their fears and reservations about abandonment.

Such is the power of these one-on-one interventions, the team trained a group of influential women, known as the Focus Group, to continue the work, so more people could have these powerful conversations with members of their own community.



Outreach officers and the Focus Group engage with families who have daughters of cutting age. They provide education about the effects of FGC and discuss issues such as the myths and misconceptions about uncut women. They advocate for a non-harmful rite of passage, or for a delay in the ceremony and a focus on education, until the family are comfortable with FGC abandonment.

Key Learnings:

- The one-on-one interventions go one step further than the workshops in providing information and support at the village and even household level. This boosts the gender inclusivity of the project as women and girls partake whilst carrying out household chores.
- One-on-one interventions and the Focus Groups feedback give SAFE Maa unparalleled insights into the changing attitudes in the community, allowing them to adapt and respond to the latest developments.



School Health Clubs

SAFE Maa work closely with the schools to engage the students, both empowering them to embrace FGC abandonment and supporting them to finish their studies. These students are either at risk of FGC or, the future husbands of girls of a cutting age, making their input into the campaign invaluable. Through these school clubs, SAFE Maa not only talk about FGC, but all other challenges facing young people and preventing them from finishing their education. This means holding sessions on early pregnancy, drug abuse and sexually transmitted infections.

Key Learning:

The educated youth are listened to and are seen as a voice of truth within the community, therefore information given to them moves through the community quickly and with authority. By supporting educated youth with a holistic programme including life skills, sexual health education and other information, SAFE Maa are giving them what they need, and in return are asking for their support in FGC abandonment.



Building new activities and developing the project in response to Community Feedback

Each of the community activities gives space for community groups to discuss FGC and what it would take for them to abandon it. With this information, SAFE Maa are able to develop activities that will give the community what they need to leave FGC behind. New activities are created from the suggestions given out in these workshops.

1. Creation of the Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP)

A key piece of feedback given by the community was that although there was a desire for abandonment, there was a bigger fear of a loss of culture. Cutting is linked to many other cultural and social practices, and the abandonment of cutting was seen as a threat to the entire social fabric of the community. The community said that in order to embrace abandonment, they needed something to replace cutting. Therefore, driven by the community, the SAFE Maa team saw the need to create an alternative ceremony (ARP), where all of the cultural and social roles of FGC were fulfilled, but the cut was dropped. In order to create this alternative, the team engaged the Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) within their workshops.

In the traditional ceremony, there are three key aspects that promote a girl to adulthood; The Chain 'Emonyorit', the Blue Shuka 'Enanka pus' and the cut. Recognising that the cut specifically represented the 'cleansing' of the girl, the TBAs advised that within the culture, milk has cleansing and fertility properties. Therefore, it was decided that all of the other ceremonial aspects of the ritual should be kept, but that the pouring of milk on a girl would replace the cut.



Importantly, in this proposed new ceremony, the TBAs retained a central role, and would therefore not miss out on the income and status brought about through this work. Therefore, their support for the ARP was secured.

In partnership with the TBAs and the Focus Group, SAFE Maa took this idea to the community. They used their workshops, an updated performance and one on one interventions to spread awareness of the ARP and its role in sustaining the culture whilst protecting girls. These activities gave the community space to debate whether it did indeed serve this purpose, while asking questions of the team and the TBAs.

Although a significant number of families started to adopt the ARP within a couple of years of its creation, the majority of practising families did not feel able to abandon FGC completely and instead moved to 'kisasa' (Type 1 circumcision or similar). The community reported that this was their preferred transition to adulthood because blood was still shed, but the cut was not so severe, and was perceived as less dangerous, some saw it as a stepping stone to total abandonment.

As SAFE Maa continued their performance tours, workshops and one-on-one interventions, they delved deeper into this issue. It was clear that families were not willing to take the risk of moving to the ARP completely, until they had seen uncut women, happily married with children and taking part in community rituals.

There are also many myths and misconceptions about women and girls who are not cut, which were, and continue to be rife. Some believe that if a girl is not cut, her clitoris will continue to grow long. There are also rumours that uncut women smell bad, can not give birth to sons and are promiscuous. Many families also believe that an uncut daughter is a bad omen for the whole family. SAFE Maa counter these myths in workshops, but it is also powerful for the community to see women who are not cut, and also have families who are prospering.

Key Learning:

The SAFE Maa team found that there are many challenges with creating and implementing an ARP. It has been a long process to get it accepted by the leadership, and to persuade individual community members that girls who have graduated through the ARP will be allowed to take part in every aspect of Maasai cultural life. Myths and misconceptions remained rife, and the importance of shedding blood remained a key argument against FGC abandonment.

Although there were these challenges, the ARP was well received. Community members liked the idea of it, and gave the team positive feedback about how it had been created. They appreciated the opportunity to be involved, and approved of the TBAs decision to include milk as the cleansing agent in the ceremony.

SAFE Maa's experience showed that the implementation of an ARP is a long term activity, and that the process of creating, and how much community consultation there is, is essential to its eventual acceptance.



2. The creation of SAFE Moran

But one of the community's biggest fear was that unless their daughters were cut, they would not be able to find a husband and fully take part in community life. Therefore, the team started to look for passionate and engaged Morans (young male warriors) within the workshops, who could take on an active role in the project. Initially, the Morans were nervous and did not want to go against the culture of their ancestors, and risk ridicule within their age set and the wider community. However, in each workshop, there were individuals who stood out. SAFE Maa identified these active Morans, trained them in facilitation and created a Moran performance.

This engaged group of Morans became SAFE Moran and joined the SAFE Maa team on the performance tours, in workshops and youth forums, as well as carrying out their own one-on-one interventions. During these interventions, the Morans are able to reach out to other Morans and girls within their age set, these are people within the community that the Maa team are not able to have open conversations with due to the strict age set structure. They are also two groups whose confidence in the ARP is essential in its acceptance by the community.

Key Learning:

Similar to the TBAs, the Moran's acceptance of the LRP was essential to the parents and girl's confidence in the ceremony. The Morans public announcement that the LRP is able to graduate a girl to adulthood, and that they recognised girls who were not cut as women and would marry them – was hugely powerful.

3. The Declaration of Abandonment

A new crackdown in August 2018 by the authorities enforcing the law on FGC was pushing the practice underground and families were cutting their girls in secret at night. Not only did this deny girls the opportunity to celebrate their transition into adulthood, but it created fear around discussing FGC, which made it difficult for the SAFE Maa team to have open and honest conversations with the community.



During the December 2018 'cutting season', and for the first time, families were not willing to share information on FGC with the SAFE Maa team. The team also saw a halt in progress towards abandonment, as the community felt their culture was under attack.

This development was a direct threat to both the Maasai culture and SAFE Maa's FGC abandonment project. Therefore, the team decided that it was time to challenge the leadership to provide the community with a clear way forward through a Public Declaration. To this end, the team engaged with the Loita Cultural Leaders and the most influential women's leaders in Loita. The Loita Cultural Leaders are made up of the leaders of each age set within Loita. Women do not traditionally have a decision-making role in cultural matters.

Traditionally, events such as this would have been left to the male leadership alone, however SAFE Maa saw the influence and the contribution made by the female leaders and the TBAs thus far in the project, and saw it was essential they were given equal participation in the Declaration.

SAFE Maa encouraged the leaders to look at the ARP as a way to protect tradition, and maintain the culture, as police crackdowns were causing cultural rituals to get lost through secret cutting. The leaders recognised the power of the ARP and embraced the opportunity to promote abandonment in a format that protected the culture. At the initial inception meeting they took the additional step of blessing the ARP, showing that they supported it as Loita's way forward. This act ensured that any woman who had undergone the Loita Rite of Passage (LRP), could not be denied participation in cultural events, such as graduation ceremonies, as wives and mothers of Junior Elders and Morans.

The SAFE Maa team spent one year mobilising and preparing the community for the Declaration Event, holding meetings with the local leaders, village representatives, youth representatives and school leaders. Both SAFE Maa and Moran used their outreach work and one-on-one interventions to speak to community members about the upcoming Declaration of Abandonment. Throughout this time, the team met as many people as possible, understanding that the success of the event hinged on the active participation of as many members of the community as possible.

The Loita Hills Declaration of Abandonment took place on the 6th February 2019.

The Declaration of Abandonment was the first of its kind in Loita. It was an event celebrated by many, and



was the culmination of almost ten years of work by SAFE Maa and the Loita Community. It was unique in the fact that it was not only the leadership gathering to Declare Abandonment of FGC, but that they also publicly blessed the ARP – giving the community a structured way forward.

The Declaration changed the FGC landscape in Loita. Those who had cautiously and privately adopted the LRP, now felt able to do so with celebration and in public. Those who had not thought of FGC abandonment as a serious issue, started to pay attention after an event dedicated to FGC abandonment mobilised so many people, including local and national leaders. The Declaration that FGC was no longer culturally acceptable made the community sit up and consider if continuing to cut was worth going against the will of their leaders, or if the LRP could truly eliminate the need for the practice.

Declaration Follow Up

SAFE Maa created a series of Declaration follow-up activities, both to ensure that the messages from the Declaration were heard from those in the community who were not able to attend, and so that SAFE Maa could monitor the reactions to the event, and respond.

Alongside the positive reactions to the event, SAFE Maa also encountered resistance in these activities. Some members of the community reported that they felt trapped; Kenyan Government Law and the police were preventing them from openly practising FGC, and now their own cultural law prohibited it too. A great deal of the opposition to the Declaration was coming from those living on the border regions of the community, who live close to other communities who still practice traditional FGC. These community members are influenced both by their Loita neighbours and by their neighbours from other communities, and are conflicted as to how to proceed.

In the youth activities, girls reported that they supported FGC abandonment, and did not want to be cut. However, they were still concerned that they would not be married unless they went through it. They also feared not being helped during labour by the TBAs due to the stigma that still existed about women who have not been cut giving birth. They lacked the confidence to collectively be the first generation of women to graduate through the LRP, and without the cut.

To respond to this pushback and build confidence in the LRP, SAFE Maa focused on areas with the most resistance to change and delivered workshops in partnership with the Cultural Leaders and the TBA's – disseminating the messaging from the event to make sure no one was left behind.

The team also created new activities to respond to the continued opposition to change. These included activities that empowered young women and challenged the traditional gender norms for women, contributing to an environment in the community where FGC abandonment could be embraced.

Key Learning:

The longitudinal approach to the Declaration, both in the build-up and in the post event activities was essential. The team were therefore able to quickly identify the areas of opposition and start responding to them. Flexibility was also key, as SAFE Maa were able to pivot activities to the areas that needed them the most.



Continued messaging and longitudinal programming in partnership with stakeholders

The Declaration of Abandonment, and the blessing of the LRP accelerated FGC abandonment, but it did not achieve it. There remain some community members who either do not support FGC abandonment, or who support abandonment and still do not have the confidence to embrace the LRP. The majority of the community are either delaying their graduation, or choosing 'kisasa'.

The COVID-19 Pandemic, and the containment measures brought in by the Government also affected the progress of the project. The school closures left girls idle in the community, and the economic downturn effected family income increasing the reliance on bride price as a source of income. These two factors have deepened girls' anxieties about their futures because they were unsure if they could return to school. Marriage then became more important and unmarried girls who had not undergone FGC found themselves the victims of peer pressure and bullying.

The team are continuing to listen to the needs of the community. They are adapting the project and the activities to respond to the changing needs and context of the community, continuing the journey towards FGC abandonment in partnership with the Loita Community.

The current new initiatives are:

▶ **Sponsorship of girls' education:**

This initiative supports girls at risk of FGC and early marriage through their education. School going girls have more agency and are viewed as more knowledgeable than their peers who have not attended school, therefore they are often allowed to choose when and how they move through their rite of passage. Not only are girls given support for school fees, but SAFE Maa are supporting these girls with mentorship and guidance, giving them the confidence to say no to FGC.

▶ **Young women's focus group:**

To further give young women the confidence to embrace FGC abandonment. A focus group, made up of empowered and influential young women is providing girls with positive peer influence, and is building confidence in the LRP. These young women are not only providing education about FGC, but are also providing information to the community about climate mitigation and land management, proving that women have an important role to play outside of marriage and motherhood.

▶ **Cross Border Activities:**

Workshops and the training of representatives are being carried out in neighbouring communities, enabling them to follow the example of their close neighbours in Loita and abandon FGC. These activities also support abandonment and the take up of the LRP in the border regions, where SAFE Maa have seen the most resistance.



Guiding Principles

Creative Excellence:

A key part of the power of the approach is the powerful creative work which captures people's imagination and allows for difficult and culturally taboo issues to be presented. The creative aspect of the work underpins other key guiding principles such as the non-judgmental, inclusive and culturally sensitive approach which makes S.A.F.E.'s FGC abandonment project unique.

Community Led:

S.A.F.E.'s work is innovative as it is intrinsically local and has foundations in the genuine participation of communities. By employing the most talented local activists, leaders and educators, S.A.F.E. is able to fully understand the community debate before it presents the information in a way that is considered familiar and unthreatening, and enables staff to sensitively engage with people on taboo issues.

S.A.F.E. provides space for community members to have open and honest conversations about the issues presented. This feedback informs the next phases of the project, the strategy that the Maa team use, and the different activities that are carried out.

Culturally sensitive:

All performances and activities are delivered in the local language, making the work both literally and emotionally accessible - people can better relate to humour, understand nuances and assimilate the educational messages when they are communicated in their language.

S.A.F.E.'s project harnesses traditional culture in order to pass messages. Not only does this effectively spread information through the community, but it shows the community that SAFE Maa are respectful of the culture, reinforcing the message that FGC abandonment can be achieved without a loss of culture.

Longitudinal:

S.A.F.E. believes in depth not breadth and understands that changes to social norms take time and perseverance. FGC abandonment will change one of the fundamental aspects of a community's culture, therefore, providing people with the time and space they need to understand and embrace the change that you are asking them for is essential to the success of the FGC project.

Gender Transformative:

S.A.F.E. ensures that women are equally represented in leadership and implementation positions within the team, and within the network of community representatives. Through ensuring women's representation, the project is also ensuring that abandonment is achieved as per the needs of women, making the change sustainable.



In addition, SAFE Maa empower positive female role models who are proof of the leadership capacity of women, opening up opportunities which were not traditionally available to them in the patriarchal community. Transforming the perceived roles of women brings about gender equality which is important to the sustainable abandonment of FGC.

Inclusive of the needs of all community groups:

Just as FGC has a different meaning for different communities, it also has a unique value to different groups within the community. Therefore, S.A.F.E.'s project understands and meets the needs of different community groups, and ensures that activities geared towards them are reflective of their unique perspective

Holistic approach to FGC abandonment:

S.A.F.E.'s project supports the community's development, with a particular emphasis on young women and girls. The team start each activity by asking participants to narrate their challenges, both in relation to FGC abandonment, and other social, health and environmental issues affecting them or the community as a whole. This approach sets SAFE Maa up as a friend of the community, interested in their development as a whole, not just the abandonment of FGC, which increases trust overall.

Non Judgemental Approach:

S.A.F.E.'s project is driven by the understanding of why the community continue to practice FGC, and the team ensure that they create safe spaces where all views and opinions are welcome and discussed without judgement. This allows the team to have a full understanding of the situation on the ground, and respond accordingly.



Loita Hills Stakeholder Analysis

One of the key successes of SAFE Maa’s project is the ability to react to the needs of the different groups within the community, and create activities which truly meet the needs of everyone. This is particularly important when formulating the curriculum for the workshops and meetings and planning how to approach an individual during the one on one interventions.

The below table shows the different stakeholder groups in the Loita Community, their relationship with FGC abandonment and their fears of abandonment as narrated by them through SAFE Maa’s activities.

Who?	What does FGC represent for them?	What is their influence?	What do they need to embrace FGC abandonment?
Adolescent Girls	The girls in the community are most negatively affected by FGC, but in Loita, this does not automatically mean that they support its abandonment. To a lot of girls and women, FGC is a painful, but necessary part of life. FGC represents entrance into adulthood, marriage and motherhood and acceptance into Maasai society. Although some girls would prefer not to be cut, they see it as preferable to the alternative social isolation.	Although daughters in the community are celebrated and believed to be a source of wealth they have very little power. Traditionally, they have little say in their rite of passage, but this is improving. However, they heavily influence each other, and peer pressure is often cited as a reason that girls choose to be cut.	Knowledge that they can be married, accepted as women, helping during child birth and able to take part in all aspects of community life if they are uncut.
Women (mothers) and FGC survivors	The women, although the majority of them have been through the cut themselves, are sometimes the most opposed to abandonment. As survivors of FGC, some believe it is necessary to make them women, and as mothers they believe that it is necessary both for the marriageability of their daughters, and for the good health and fortune of the whole family.	Older women and TBAs also play their part in influencing a girl to be cut, the threat of not being helped during child birth or socially accepted as a woman can be a significant factor in a girl deciding to be cut.	Women need to be able to relate the health issues they suffer, and the possible loss of sexual pleasure, to the consequences of the cut. And they need to be empowered to know this is not a normal part of life. They need to be assured that their daughters will be accepted and married without undergoing FGC.



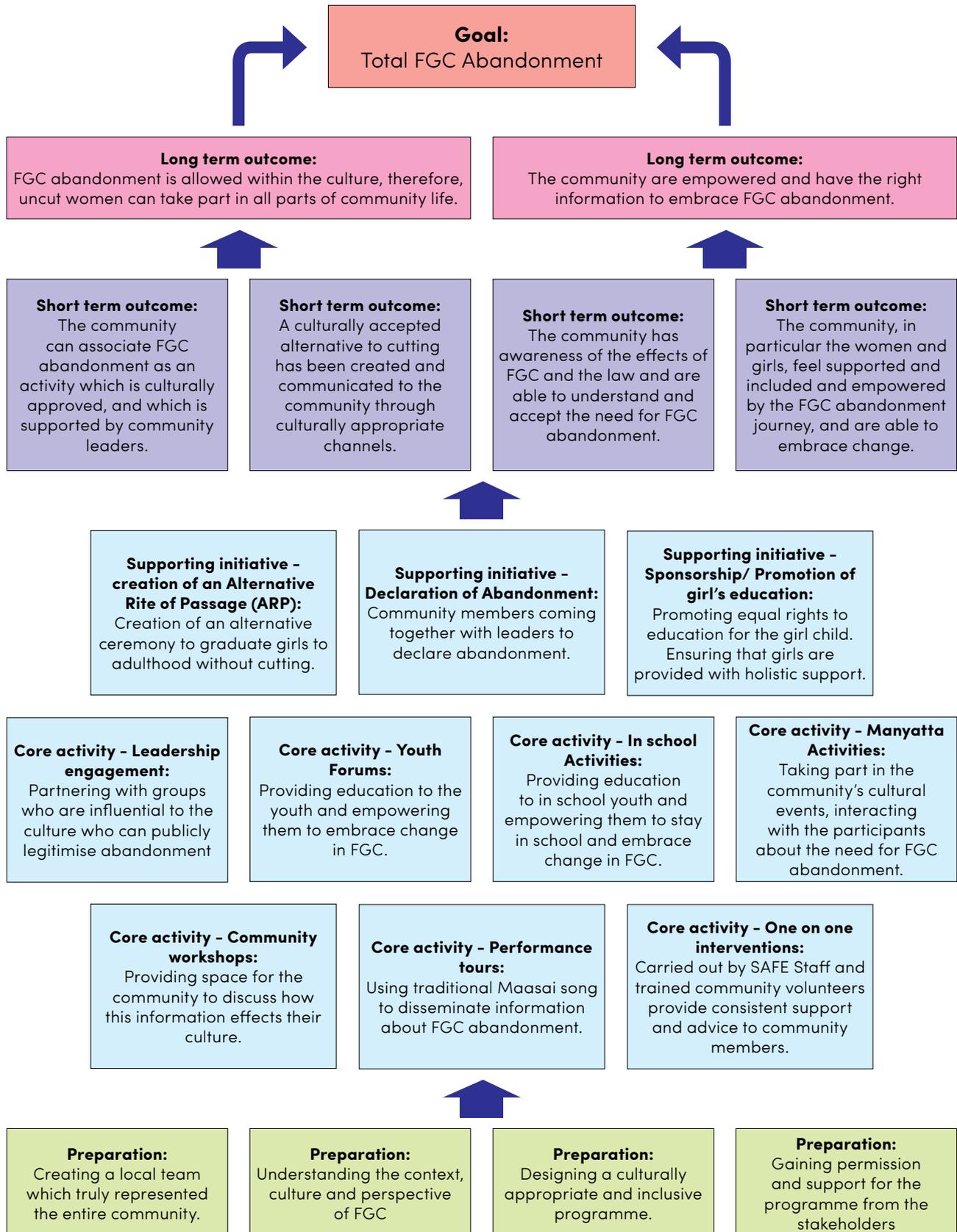
Who?	What does FGC represent for them?	What is their influence?	What do they need to embrace FGC abandonment?
Men (fathers)	Often, a daughter's perceived value to her father is through the income she can bring in through her bride price upon her marriage. With FGC so closely linked to marriageability – the practice is closely linked to income.	Men often will say that they have no role in FGC, that it is a woman's issue and problem. However, as the main decision makers within their household, most men have the final say on their daughter's rite of passage. Although he is the main decision maker in the house, men are sometimes influenced by their wives and daughters. As more parents are arrested by police, they are leaving the decision of whether to be cut or not to the girl herself.	Reassurance that their daughters will still be married, accepted in the community and will be able to bring income to the family if they are not cut. The men also need to see the benefit to them and the family of investing in their daughter's education, and that the girl can contribute to the family ways other than marriage and the bride price.
Cultural Leaders	FGC represents a core part of Maasai culture, a culture that is at risk from many interlocking factors and that they have the responsibility of protecting and promoting.	As leaders, they are the ultimate decision makers in all aspects pertaining to the culture, although they can make decisions, the community are not forced to follow.	Assurance that the culture will be maintained and protected through any change in FGC practices, or any other social or cultural norm.



Who?	What does FGC represent for them?	What is their influence?	What do they need to embrace FGC abandonment?
<p>Morans (Young men/ future husbands)</p>	<p>The Morans are not only the guardians of the culture, but they are also the future husbands of girls of a cutting age. They have a duty to uphold all aspects of the culture, including FGC. If a moran marries a woman who has not undergone FGC, there are important ceremonies and rituals that they cannot take part in as a couple. Therefore, the practice also represents social inclusion for them, as well as their wives.</p>	<p>Morans are an incredibly influential group, in a community where marriageability is a key concern for parents considering FGC abandonment. Although Moran’s families also have a say in their choice of wife, they hold considerable sway within the household.</p>	<p>The morans need to be made aware of the effects of FGC, and be given information on the law and why FGC is illegal. They then need to feel secure making a change within the age group, and know that any change of behaviour would be allowed within the culture, and be respected by those who came before them.</p>
<p>Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs)</p>	<p>Alongside their important role as birth attendants, these women are also the community circumcisers. They gain both status and income through this work, it is often a job which is passed down through important families. FGC abandonment presents a significant issue to them as they will lose part of their occupation and livelihood.</p>	<p>TBAs are well respected within Loita and have strong influence over others. TBAs have been known to influence the type of FGC a girl undergoes, sometimes even making an agreement with a girl and her mother to pretend to cut, creating an illusion for the father.</p>	<p>They need assurances that they will still have an active role in girl’s graduation and that any ARP be created in partnership with them, maintaining their role and income.</p>



S.A.F.E. FGC project theory of change





Resources

FGC Facilitation Guide

Activities that provide space for discussion and dialogue, either in a one-on-one situation, or in a larger group, allow for significant attitudinal change. When a non-judgemental space is created within an activity, the community members have the opportunity to convey their fears about abandonment to each other and build a consensus about acceptable alternatives. The below are suggestions for creating an environment for a meaningful dialogue, and questions to get people talking about the different issues around FGC.

Setting the environment

Location of the workshop

A core principle of all of S.A.F.E.'s activities is that they are accessible. SAFE Maa goes to the people, delivering activities in the villages, this allows them to engage with those who are not normally involved in development activities because they cannot travel to central areas. The local nature of the activities also allows for a more gender inclusive response, as women, whose duties stop them from being able to travel far from the home, are able to attend.

Who is attending?

These activities can be carried out in gender/ age specific groups, to allow participants to talk freely, and can also be carried out in a mixed setting to allow for sharing between different community groups.

In addition, it is sometimes beneficial to include community leaders or government representatives in the activities to add legitimacy to the messaging, and to support dialogue between leaders and the community. However, this can also stifle the conversation, as participants can feel unable to speak openly in front of them. The team will assess the benefits and the drawbacks of having leaders present in the activities before carrying out mobilisation.

The team will often engage with a mixture of new and repeat participants, acknowledging that it takes multiple interventions and engagements, and time, to achieve attitudinal change.



Mobilisation

Mobilisation begins with the performance tours, the team find that such is the power of the performances, that even those most opposed to FGC abandonment are willing to attend the workshops out of intrigue, this means that workshops are often oversubscribed.

SAFE Maa also work in partnership with the local village leaders and members of the focus group (project representatives involved in one-on-one interventions) to mobilise people for an activity. These local mobilisers are given a personal specification for who should be attending the workshop, depending on the target group for the activity.

Facilitation tools

Icebreakers and games:

These can create energy and build trust between the facilitators and the group. SAFE Maa use local Maasai songs and dance to energise the group, and often ask members of the group to lead these – continuing to promote the active participation of the whole group.

Open Questions:

Open questions at the beginning of the session can ensure that the facilitator can understand the current level of knowledge and attitudes of the group, and build on this. The Maa team lead people through what they know, and then fill in their gaps of knowledge, therefore, sessions do not feel like a lecture.

Group discussions and presentations:

Group work is a powerful tool to bring the quieter members of the group into the conversation, and also to allow for more intimate discussions between participants. SAFE Maa have found that the group work is especially impactful when the participants are being asked to come up with solutions and a way forward for the community.



Creating your curriculum

Below are suggestions of the different sessions which can be delivered as part of dialogue activities. These sessions have been created over the years and adapted to suit the changing nature of the conversation around FGC in the community.

Introduction and setting expectations

The Maa team ensure that the participants are sitting in a circle, this ensures an openness in conversation, and that there is no hierarchy within the workshop.

The SAFE Maa team use the introduction time to outline their expectations to the participants, and hear the participants' expectations, then together, they plan a way forward for the workshop. With a subject as sensitive as FGC, a facilitator needs to make it clear that they are there to share information and listen to the community, not to make arrests, dictate or make judgement. In this time, icebreakers and games are also played.

Questions for facilitators to generate a discussion

Effects of FGC

1. Open question: What are the different types of FGC around the world, which is practiced within the community?
2. Group work and presentations: What are the effects of FGC for women?
3. Group work and presentations: What are the advantages and disadvantages of cutting?

Facilitator to provide education on the factual effects, and counter any myths and misconceptions associated with the cut which arise from the group discussions and presentations.

Myths and misconceptions about FGC/ uncut women and girls

1. Open Question: Have you seen or heard of uncut women in the community?
2. Open Question: What are the myths and misconceptions about women who are not cut?
3. Group discussion and presentation: What are the advantages and disadvantages of women remaining uncut?

Facilitator to address and dispel any myths and misconceptions which arise out of the conversation.

Questions for facilitators to generate a discussion

The Law about FGC

1. Open Question: What does the Kenyan Law say about FGC?
2. Open Question: What does Maasai cultural law and Kenyan Government Law say about FGC?
3. Group work and presentations: How can we reconcile Maasai cultural law and the Kenyan Government Law.

Facilitator to provide information on the law, what it says and why it was brought in.

Peer pressure and stigma

1. Open question: Is there peer pressure/ stigma within the community?
2. Group work and presentations: Who is responsible for this peer Pressure/ stigma?
3. Group work and presentations: What role can each person/ group within the community play in ending peer pressure/ stigma?

Facilitator to provide information on the role of peer pressure/ stigma in maintaining FGC, and encourage positive influence in the community.

Different roles in maintaining FGC

1. Group work and presentation: Who is responsible for maintaining FGC in the community (men, women, girls, Moran's etc)?
2. Group work and presentation: How can the community come together to protect girls from FGC?

Facilitator to encourage people to think about their own responsibility in ending FGC, and how they can work with others to achieve this goal also.

FGC and the Culture

1. Open question: Why is FGC important to the culture?
2. Group work and presentations: Can the culture change? Are there examples in the past of cultures changing?
3. Group work and presentations: Can FGC be abandoned within the culture? How?

Facilitator can lead the group towards remembering cultural changes in the past, and guide them towards solutions to FGC abandonment which allow for the culture to continue (such as an alternative rite of passage).



Way forward (e.g. Creation of an Alternative Rite of Passage)

This session follows on well from the above session on culture. When building consensus about a way forward in the community, SAFE Maa engaged as many community members as possible on this subject and kept a record of their suggestions. As the workshops continued they were able to bring in suggestions from other workshops, giving the participants an idea of what others in the community had suggested.

4. Open question: Can FGC abandonment be achieved without any loss of culture?
5. Group work and presentation: What role/ function does FGC play in a woman's life?
6. Group work and presentation: What alternative within the culture could fulfil this role/ function?
7. Open question: Who needs to be involved/ lead the creation of an alternative?

Discussions to monitor the project or a specific intervention (E.g. Declaration/ ARP)

1. Open question: Have you heard about the intervention/ Project?
2. Open question: Did you take part in the intervention/ Project?
3. Open question: What do you think about it/ how does it make you feel?
4. Group work and presentation: What impact has it had in the community good and bad?
5. Group work and presentation: What can be done to build on this/ address the issues raised in the future?

The SAFE Maa team have used these sessions to gain feedback from the community and ascertain the progress and impact of the project and of the different interventions. It is this that informs the direction of the project and the new activities which are brought in.

Way Forward

1. Group work and presentation: What do you think should happen now after this workshop?
2. Open question: Who are you going to talk to within your family/ community?

Facilitator to guide the participants towards sharing information, and having conversations about FGC abandonment within their families and their wider community.



Key arguments for FGC abandonment

The suggested questions in the guide inspire and generate discussions within activities. The facilitator can then lead the participants towards certain conclusions, creating arguments for change based on the participant's position within the community, and their relationship to FGC. Detailed below are a few of the key arguments for change that SAFE Maa have found successful in creating attitudinal change.

The team have found that no one approach or argument can successfully create attitudinal change, and it has been a combination of the below arguments which have had an impact on the community.

Physical and psychological effects on women and girls

FGC has serious long term, short term and potentially life-threatening effects on women and girls. Effects range from immediate infections and bleeding as a direct result of the cut, to difficulty during labour and lifelong back pain⁹. Although knowledge of the effects alone does not bring about an immediate attitudinal change, it can be a very effective argument for the need for the community to prioritise FGC abandonment. SAFE Maa has also seen that knowledge of the effects of FGC, can make parents delay their daughter's graduation, until a safer alternative, such as an ARP, can be found.

In some cases, focusing on the effects of FGC alone has increased medicalisation or a move to the lesser cut (type one/ 'kisasa'). Therefore, in these conversations, SAFE Maa emphasise that all types of FGC are dangerous for women and illegal.

Effect on girl's education and livelihood

FGC in the Maasai Community is seen as a prerequisite for marriage, once a girl is cut she is often married and this will almost always mean the end of her education. Delaying FGC, or leaving a girl uncut improves her chances of finishing school and contributing economically to her family and the community.

One key myth that is often used as an argument to maintain FGC is that uncut girls and women are promiscuous. However, youth in SAFE Maa's workshops have reported that once a girl is cut, she feels like a woman and is more likely to engage in sexual activity, putting her at risk of early pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). This direct contradiction of a firmly held belief about women who are not cut, forces people to question their preconceptions and instead focus on lived experiences.

⁹ More information on this can be found at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>



FGC as a threat to Culture

To many, FGC abandonment is seen as a threat to their way of life, just as laws which prohibit FGC, and moves to enforce those laws are viewed as an attack on the culture. However, SAFE Maa argue that it is secret cutting, when girls are cut at night with no ceremony or celebration, which is the real threat to the culture. SAFE Maa present FGC abandonment and the alternate rite as the only solution to maintain the culture, stay within the law and protect girls. This is a powerful argument because it positions FGC abandonment as a positive move towards preservation of a community's way of life, and not a threat.

Sexual Pleasure

Often when discussing FGC with women, the SAFE Maa team hear that FGC is just another painful, but necessary part of being a woman, similar to childbirth. But, some have also volunteered that they experienced a loss of sexual pleasure as a result of FGC, a loss they regret. The desire to understand the female orgasm is common in SAFE Maa's workshops. However, this is not the experience of every woman, some do not recognise the difference, and many are still able to enjoy sex after FGC.

In SAFE Maa's experience, these discussions, alongside discussions of the other physical effects of FGC, have helped participants to realise that FGC is not essential or a necessary part of the experience of being a woman.

Men have also reported that they enjoy sex more with a woman who has not been cut. SAFE Maa have used this feedback in workshops to gain the support of men for FGC abandonment, showing how it will positively affect them and their sexual partners.

Although the subject of sexual pleasure is an important conversation, it is also an extremely sensitive and delicate discussion for women. When having this discussion, it is important not to assume this is a negative experience for all women, and to ensure women who have undergone FGC are not made to feel inadequate in comparison to those who have not.



Tips for the Facilitator

Be careful not to make participants feel like their beliefs are inferior or unimportant

Remember that even though you want the participants to see things from your point of view, understand that there are reasons why they believe in what they believe in.

Communication should feel more like a conversation and less like a lecture

A facilitator should not be the centre of knowledge, ask questions to discover what the participants know, and lead them from what they do know, to what they don't.

Ensure that the content of the activity does not discriminate or traumatise women who have undergone FGC

When describing the effects of FGC, and talking about the need for abandonment, be sensitive to the experiences of people within the workshop and create an environment where the participants feel able to let you know if they are uncomfortable with a certain topic.

Acknowledge the biases that you have as an individual or as an organisation

These biases should then be checked when delivering projects as they may affect how you interact with the community and how you react to their feedback on the project or what information you are sharing with them.

Be ready for questions and resistance

Critical feedback is a sign of a healthy dialogue. Encourage people to open up and show the community that they are right in raising their concerns and voicing their opinions. Respect these opinions and answer all questions without judgement.

If you do not know the answer to a question be open and honest about it

Seek clarification on the matter before answering. NB: Try and get the feedback to them as soon as possible.

Learn the customs of the participants to avoid unconsciously offending the community members

Engaging with community leaders and representatives in the design and delivery of your programme will greatly assist in this area.



Creating an Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP)

Each community is different, and FGC has a different value depending on the context, therefore an ARP will have different components, depending on where and with who it is being implemented. An ARP should be created in partnership with the community, and should strive to meet the same social and cultural needs and standards of FGC. The creation and dissemination of an ARP should be a long-term activity that addresses a collective shift.

STAGE 1: Create an environment where an ARP can be accepted

Ensure that the community is ready for FGC abandonment, and has requested an alternative ceremony. The evidence that the community is ready for such a step can be seen through their reactions to questions about the way forward, and alternative rites of passage. SAFE Maa were requested by the community to give them something to replace FGC, and this inspired the creation of the LRP.

STAGE 2: Creation of the ARP

- Gather the expectations of all community groups on what an appropriate ARP would be for them.
- Empower groups most involved in girls graduation ceremonies (girls, mothers, TBAs) and ask them what they would need in an ARP, and what they would need to have confidence in a new ceremony.
- Engage the community leaders, and leaders of the culture to give ideas about what could replace cutting, a non-harmful action which could have the same cultural role as FGC.
- Use this information to create a draft ARP which can be taken to the community.
- Use dialogue activities to present the ARP to the community for further feedback and approval.



STAGE 3:

Implementation of the ARP

- Engage the cultural and community leadership to legitimise and publicize the ARP.
- Inspire role models to pass through the new ARP to prove its effectiveness to the rest of the community.
- Use social and cultural events to have discussions about, and promote the ARP.

STAGE 4:

Follow Up

- Continue to follow up on the progress of the uptake of the ARP through networks of community leaders and representatives
- Continue to provide space for the community members to discuss the ARP and ask questions.
- Continue to use social and cultural events and networks to promote the ARP alongside messaging about the need for abandonment.
- Continue work with role models to increase the confidence in the new ceremony.

Advantages of creating an ARP as part of an FGC Abandonment Project

- ▶ It provides an alternative way for girls to graduate to adulthood, preserving that important ceremony, making FGC abandonment more attractive to community members.
- ▶ It can give former circumcisers a continuing role and income within the community - making them more supportive of abandonment.
- ▶ In some communities, it can actively preserve traditional culture, as communities are able to keep all of the rites and traditions surrounding FGC, whilst abandoning the cut itself.

Challenges with ARP Interventions

- ▶ The ARP does not automatically change other social and cultural practices which negatively effect girls, such as early marriage. Therefore, an ARP intervention needs to be delivered alongside initiatives which promote women's and girl's rights.
- ▶ S.A.F.E.'s model requires individual families to embrace the new rite as role models for the rest of the community. In communities where social life is defined by cultural practices, this is a big ask. Only when it is seen to work in practice would the majority of the community consider adopting it. Moving the rite from the stage where it is created to where it is implemented by the community at large is a long journey.





Thank you to everyone who has made this project possible. There have been too many supporters, partners, and champions of our work to name everyone individually - but a few special thank you's must be made. To SAFE Maa's partners in the community who have tirelessly and passionately supported the SAFE Maa team and their goal of total FGC abandonment. To our Kenyan and international partners and donors who have provided unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey, in particular, the JAC Trust, Orchid Project, the Brown Source Trust, and Exodus Travels. And finally to the whole Loita Community for such valuable contributions which have allowed this project to be truly guided from within.



S.A.F.E.