

16 Days of Activism: Let culture lead the fight against female genital mutilation

EDITOR: Every year, the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence challenge us to look beyond statements and campaigns and ask: What is really changing for girls on the ground?

In Uganda, one uncomfortable truth remains. Despite strong laws and low national prevalence, girls in parts of the Sebei and Karamoja regions are still being subjected to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). In these districts, FGM is not an isolated act. It is a social expectation tied to respectability, marriage and identity. Families weigh the risk of legal punishment against the very real fear of social exclusion. Too often, fear of the community wins and the practice survives in the shadows, reinforced by silence.

If we are serious about what the 16 Days of Activism stand for, information campaigns and legal frameworks, while essential, are not enough. We must shift the shared expectations that keep FGM alive.

That is the space of social and behaviour change. In this space, one of the most powerful tools has come from within the communities themselves, namely Music, Dance and Drama (MDD).

In high-prevalence districts in Sebei and Karamoja, young people, including FGM survivors, are at the centre of local groups that, with support from district local governments and UNICEF Uganda, are using MDD as a front-line resource in the struggle to protect girls. What makes MDD so compelling in this context is not only that it is familiar, but what it enables.

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