








# GHANA CASE STUDY

Review of Technology-Based Interventions  
to Address Child Marriage and Female  
Genital Mutilation

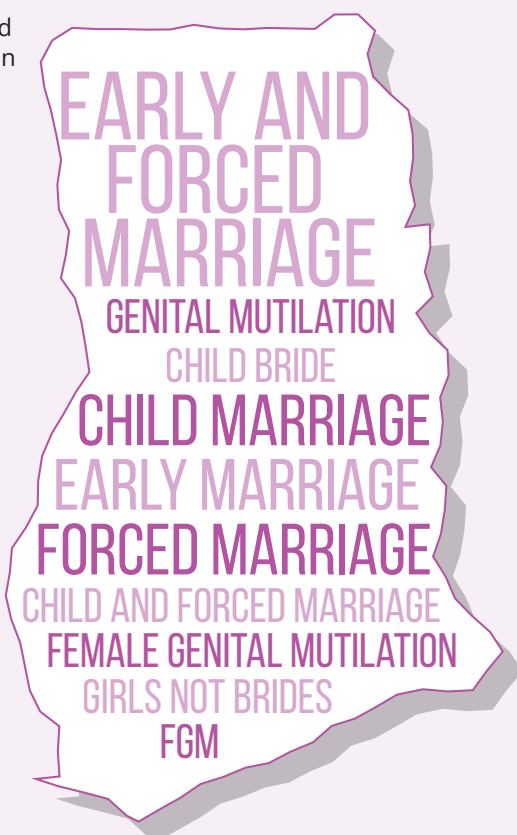
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## GHANA OVERVIEW

	<b>Child marriage prevalence<sup>1</sup></b> (girls married before the age of 18 years, as a proportion of all girls)	19%
	<b>FGM prevalence<sup>2</sup></b> (proportion of women and girls aged 15–49 years)	4%
	<b>Internet users<sup>3</sup></b> (proportions of the adult male and female populations)	81% of men 58% of women
	<b>Mobile phone ownership<sup>4</sup></b> (proportions of the adult male and female populations)	97% of men 97% of women
	<b>Level of government support for digital literacy<sup>5</sup></b> (scale 0–3) <sup>6</sup>	High: 3

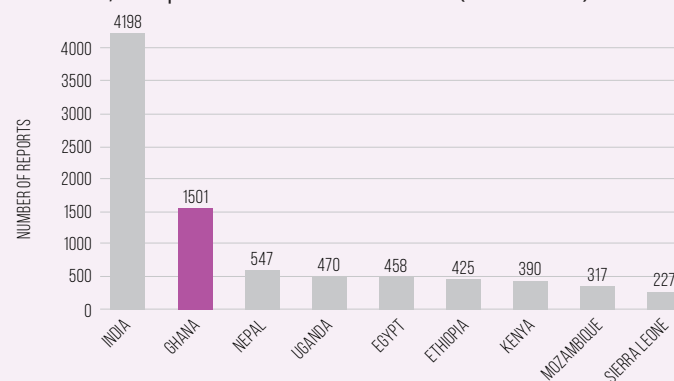
## NEWS ABOUT HARMFUL PRACTICES: WORD CLOUD MAPS AND NUMBERS OF REPORTS

**FIGURE 1.** GDELT word cloud. Most common words portrayed in the reports of the global media for both FGM and child marriage in Ghana (2014–2022)

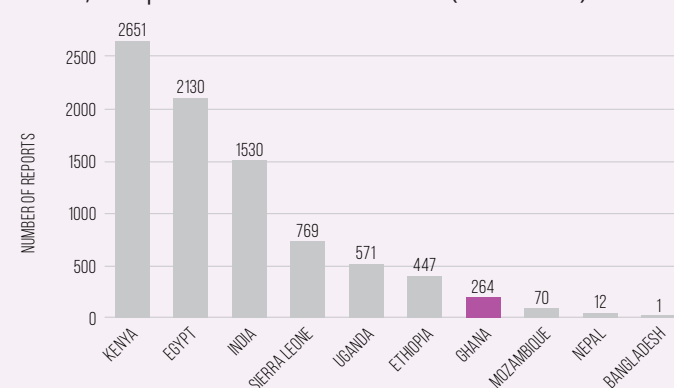


**Note:** This word cloud map was produced with data from the Event Database of the GDELT project, which monitors the world’s broadcast, print, and web news in over 100 languages; identifying the people, locations, institutions, topics, publications, sentiments, numbers, quotations, pictures, and occurrences linked to events worldwide. After filtering the database for a comprehensive pool of keywords related to FGM and child marriage and technology in Ghana, the most common words portrayed in the reports related to these issues are mapped in a country word cloud. The bigger the font size, the more frequently the word appears.

**FIGURE 2.** Number of reports covering the topic of child marriage in Ghana, compared with other countries (2014–2022)



**FIGURE 3.** Number of reports covering the topic of FGM in Ghana, compared with other countries (2014–2022)



**Note:** After filtering the GDELT project database for the actors, actions, and associated reports pertaining to child marriage and/or FGM in Ghana, it can be observed that there are a total of 1,501 reports corresponding to child marriage and 264 reports corresponding to FGM in the country.

## THE CONTEXT OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND FGM IN THE COUNTRY

Ghana has a considerable prevalence rate in terms of child marriage, but increasingly lower FGM incidence throughout recent years.

Overall, national FGM rates are close to 4 per cent for girls and women aged 15 to 45 years old.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, estimates for the northern region (where the issue is most critical) have placed the figure at around 92.8 per cent, with the upper west and upper eastern regions being the most affected.<sup>8</sup> The practice was first criminalized and prohibited in 1994 and the penalties were further strengthened in a 2007 legal amendment. There have been signs of decreasing trends over the last decade, especially when disaggregated by the youngest age groups.<sup>9</sup>

## THE TECHNOLOGY ENVIRONMENT IN GHANA

Taking into account that most technological tools and interventions require a robust technology environment, it is crucial to understand the general state of digital and technological development in the country to adequately grasp the scope, reach and potential impact of interventions. The most recent data on access to electricity in Ghana shows that coverage in the country is at an all-time high, with around 85.9 per cent of the population having access to electricity, which is reflected both at urban (94.7 per cent) and rural (74 per cent) access levels.<sup>12</sup> Although high, this figure is in contrast to the percentage of internet users in the country

For its part, the rate of child marriage in the country has shown signs of decrease during the last 20 years, but it is still considerable, considering that around 5 per cent of women in Ghana are married before they turn 15 and 19 per cent are married by the age of 18.<sup>10</sup> These figures are exactly in line with world averages. Child marriage in the country is more common among the rural population, women with up to primary levels of education and in the two lowest wealth quintiles. Although the minimum legal age for marriage is 18, as established in Ghana's 1998 Children's Act, the practice is still present in all the 10 administrative regions of the country.<sup>11</sup>

(measured by the proportion of households that have access to the internet and that have used it in the past 12 months) which currently stands at 33 per cent. This indicator is even more striking when the internet gender gap is taken into consideration: in Ghana, 81 per cent of men have access to the internet while just 55 per cent of women do.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding mobile services, 95 per cent of the population is covered by at least a 3G mobile network, irrespective of whether they are subscribers. Likewise, mobile cellular telephone subscriptions (i.e., subscriptions to a mobile telephone service) are very high with 130.2 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, meaning that there are more subscriptions than people in the country. Equally high, even after disaggregating by sex, is mobile phone ownership where 97 per cent of men and women have access to a cell phone. However, these high figures do not translate into high levels of smartphone penetration. The majority (47.9 per cent) of Ghanaians who are mobile phone owners own basic phones without features such as the internet, followed by 46.1 per cent who own smartphones, and 12.8 per cent who own feature phones that only allow for a limited access to web browsing and that entirely lack the option for app downloads. Furthermore, basic phone ownership increases to 61.3 per cent and 50.6 per cent when disaggregated by rural population and



female population, respectively.<sup>14</sup> Widespread access to electricity, internet access and mobile subscriptions has also been reflected in a steady increase in active mobile broadband subscriptions, meaning access to internet through mobile devices. In Ghana, there are 85 subscriptions per 100 people. This landscape begins to showcase a strong foundation related to main enablers for digital and technological interventions.

Underlying this increasingly promising environment is the high government support for digital literacy in general.<sup>15</sup> The Government of Ghana has a National Education Strategic Plan in place to not only increase digital literacy for students (through curriculum introduced in primary schools) but also strengthen teacher digital capacities with the use

of vocational education training.<sup>16</sup> Development of these types of strategies are a good first step in the upskilling of the population and as a result have placed Ghana over the sub-Saharan African median of digital skills indicators. On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the highest score, Ghana (4.21) is categorized as a country with a medium level of digital skills.<sup>17</sup> Although important advances have been made, Ghana's technology and digital environment is still lacking an active gender-sensitive approach towards granting women's access to internet and digital skills, which can negatively affect uptake levels of FGM and child marriage technology-driven/-enabled interventions. There are, however, bodies such as the Girls Education Unit under Ghana Education Services that incentivize women and girls to enter STEM higher education.<sup>18</sup>

## MAPPING OF TECH INTERVENTIONS

The interventions mapped in this section stem from an initial landscape exercise conducted jointly by UNFPA and UNICEF, followed by a systematic review of publicly available data and information on technology-driven and technology-enabled interventions addressing child marriage and/or FGM in Ghana. The compiled information was curated and complemented with insights emerging from key informant interviews conducted with local stakeholders.

### CODING TYPE OF INTERVENTION

- [☉] Technology-driven intervention/solution (tech is a core element)
- [🔗] Technology-enabled intervention/solution (tech is secondary to the intervention, there are other non-tech components)

## ♀ FEMINIST LENSES

The seventh column of the interventions table below identifies how organizations have included feminist lenses into the design and implementation of the interventions by highlighting four key aspects:

1 Consultation with experts and/or community leaders	Consultations with gender or thematic experts and/or local leaders were conducted during the development, implementation, and/or monitoring and evaluation of the interventions.
2 Consultations with target group(s)	The interventions incorporated, at any stage, consultations with the populations targeted, especially girls and women of different ethnicities, ages, sexual orientations, classes, and other social markers.
3 Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) instruments	Monitoring and evaluation activities were carried out to measure the intervention's progress and sustainability, and/or to generate disaggregated information, gender-sensitive/responsive indicators, and/or gender analysis frameworks.
4 Women and/or girl-led organization(s)	The intervention was designed and/or implemented, partly or completely, by a women and/or girl-led organization(s).

Additional descriptive information about the feminist lenses and potential intersectional approach (i.e., addressing ethnicity, language, class or other aspects of the target group's identity) is provided within the table, following the general description of each intervention, which can be identified by the use of this symbol [♀]. This analysis is based on information collected during semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders and/or publicly available information.

## PROMOTING ADOLESCENTS SAFE SPACES (PASS) PROJECT / 2019 – 2021/ ○

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECHNOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UNFPA</li> <li>UNICEF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Northern Sector Action on Awareness Centre (NORSAAC)</li> <li>International Needs Ghana</li> </ul>	Child marriage	Three regions (Northern, North East and Savanna Regions) and six districts (Tolon, Kpandai, Bole, West Mamprusi, Tatale/Sanguli and Mamprugu Moadugri) covering a total of 30 communities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual-level empowerment</li> <li>Family and community engagement</li> <li>Service development and strengthening</li> </ol>	Radio	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultations with experts and/or community leaders</li> <li>Consultations with target group(s)</li> </ol>

The overall goal of the PASS project is to ensure that out-of-school adolescent girls between the ages of 10 and 19 have access to safe spaces in which they are provided with the key networks, life skills and knowledge to empower them to build confidence, make informed decisions, express their voices and access services and community support to prevent and respond to child marriage. The safe spaces are led by trained facilitators (exclusively young women) from the community and take place once a week in physical spaces where girls can play, network, enjoy their childhood without risk and reflect on key topics such as girls' decision-making, consent and girls' empowerment, among others. Shortly before and during the 2020 pandemic, NORSAAC and International Needs Ghana leveraged airtime on local radio stations to reach communities in programme districts and create virtual safe spaces for girls. Small radio sets were delivered to more than 1,000 girls, so they could have access to their own device in which they could listen to the weekly topic discussion. Other technology-enabled dimensions of the project included engaging with the trained facilitators through WhatsApp in case they needed to adapt their weekly sessions or if they themselves had questions or needed clarification about certain topics to be presented. Over its three years of operations, the project has reached 13,000 at-risk adolescent girls.

♀ This intervention integrated an intersectional feminist approach through two aspects. First, the intervention has developed and tested its materials with Ghanaian girls before scaling up the project. Additionally, the selected facilitators of the safe spaces are young women that are recommended by community leaders and that can more easily relate with young girls at risk of child marriage. Finally, the women designing the content and the methodology of the PASS intervention are formally trained in feminist leadership and women's empowerment, which aids them in designing programmes that are both thematically relevant and tailored to Ghanaian culture.



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## CHILD PROTECTION COMMUNITY FACILITATION TOOLKITS / 2016 – ONGOING / ○

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECHNOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
UNICEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● UNICEF</li> <li>● Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection</li> <li>● Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development</li> <li>● NGO partners</li> </ul>	Child marriage	Nationwide 16 regions in Ghana	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Individual-level empowerment</li> <li>2. Family and community engagement</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interactive games</li> <li>● Radio</li> <li>● Digital applications</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consultations with experts and/or community leaders</li> <li>2. Consultations with target group(s)</li> <li>3. M&amp;E instruments (i.e., to assess the impact of the intervention in the target group)</li> </ol>

UNICEF has implemented (through partnerships with government and NGO actors) a set of child protection community facilitation toolkits. The toolkits are composed of training manuals, flash cards and interactive games and activities that are used by community facilitators to promote communal reflection on such topics as child labour, sexual abuse and exploitation, child marriage, teenage pregnancy, gender roles, corporal punishment and bullying, among many others.<sup>19</sup> These dialogue spaces are expected to trigger actions leading to behaviour and social change to create a safe and protective environment for children. The target groups of the intervention focus not only on community members such as children at risk, but also on parents, traditional leaders and teachers. Although in its inception the focus of these toolkits was face-to-face engagement, with the onset of COVID-19 the project began to leverage radio to carry out discussions around child protection based on the content of the toolkit. Pre-recorded messages, jingles and even TV transmissions were used to disseminate key messages and reach a wider audience. According to a representative from UNICEF Ghana, the project also uses a monitoring and reporting application that is constantly fed with information by the community facilitators to provide real-time data on the impact levels and the communities reached with the toolkits. Over 2,000 community facilitators from both government agencies and NGOs have been trained on how to use the tools effectively to engage with different target audiences since 2016. Over 3 million people in over 4,000 communities across 81 districts and 15 regions have been reached with the toolkits. These toolkits have also been adapted to reach community members through local radio.

♀ This intervention integrated an intersectional feminist approach by carefully designing and integrating toolkit material that addressed the deep-rooted gender issues that enable child protection concerns such as the risk of child marriage. Much of this content was structured by gender experts to enable gender role analyses within communities in a way that the gender inequalities in their systems could be easily understood. Also, the different backgrounds and needs of girls are integrated in the toolkit with content specifically tailored to different groups such as adolescent girls, girls with disabilities and marginalized populations within the country.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014), as cited in UNICEF (2022a), *Ghana country profile*
- 2 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014), as cited in UNICEF (2020e), *Ghana country profile*
- 3 Gallup (2020), as cited in Economist Impact (2022)
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Economist Impact (2022)
- 6 The score on government support for digital literacy, on a scale from 0–3 (low to high), reflects a government plan or strategy to address digital literacy for students and/or teachers – through the design and development of courses in ICT skills, computer science, programming or other classes for students; and through ICT capacity-building courses for teachers. A zero score indicates that the government does not have such a plan/strategy, neither for students and nor for teachers; a score of 1 reflects a plan for student digital literacy but without including teacher capacity-building; a medium score of 2 indicates a current plan for both; and the highest score of 3 reflects a plan addressing both students and teachers, and with the courses and capacity-building starting at the primary school level.
- 7 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014), as cited in UNICEF (2020c)
- 8 Fosu, Nyarko, and Anokye (2014); Alhassan and Anyinzaam-Adolipore (2021)
- 9 28 Too Many (2019)
- 10 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014), as cited in UNICEF (2022a), *Ghana country profile*
- 11 University of Ghana Centre for Social Policy Studies and World Vision Ghana (2017)
- 12 World Bank (2020g)
- 13 Gallup, as cited in Economist Impact (2022)
- 14 National Communications Authority (2020)
- 15 Economist Impact (2022)
- 16 Ghana Education Services (2021a); Ghana Ministry of Education (2018)
- 17 World Bank (2019c)
- 18 Ghana Education Services (2021b); UNESCO (2021)
- 19 UNICEF Ghana (2018)

REVIEW OF  
**TECHNOLOGY-BASED  
INTERVENTIONS**  
TO ADDRESS CHILD MARRIAGE AND  
FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

