








SUDAN CASE STUDY

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

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SUDAN

THE SUDAN OVERVIEW

	Child marriage prevalence¹ (girls married before the age of 18 years, as a proportion of all girls)	34%
	FGM prevalence² (proportion of women and girls aged 15–49 years)	87%
	Internet users³ (proportions of the adult male and female populations)	17% of men 11% of women
	Mobile phone ownership⁴ (proportions of the adult male and female populations)	75% of men 65% of women
	Level of government support for digital literacy⁵ (scale 0–3) ⁶	Low: 1

THE CONTEXT OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND FGM IN THE COUNTRY

Since 2019, the Sudan has had a transitional government that has begun to have nationwide effects not only on social and economic dimensions, but also on the issues of child marriage and FGM.⁷ Nevertheless, both harmful practices are highly prevalent in the country. According to the most recent data, the total number of girls and women of all ages who were first married before age 18 is 4.7 million, meaning that approximately one in three young women were married before their 18th birthday.⁸ The main drivers of the practice in the Sudan range from religious traditions and customs such as the control of a girl's chastity, avoiding the stigma of being unmarried, preserving family honour, to reasons such as poverty or low levels of education.^{9,10,11} Girls that live in poor, rural households and whose vulnerability is further exacerbated by low education, are at the highest risk of child marriage.¹² Furthermore, the country lacks any law establishing the minimum age for marriage. According to the 1994 Personal Status Law of Muslims, girls can be granted permission by their guardians to marry if they have reached puberty or from the age of 10 with the permission of a judge.¹³ Government support

to curb this practice has been low profile. It was not until late 2020 that the transitional government endorsed a national strategy on child marriage (2020–2030), and the strategy did not receive ministerial support because child marriage was not seen as a fundamental problem in the country.¹⁴

Regarding FGM, the country has one of the highest rates on the African continent.¹⁵ The practice is widespread and prevalent across wealth quintiles, levels of education and area of residence (i.e., rural and urban), with 87 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 having been subjected to FGM. Most cases (75 per cent) take place before the girl is aged 15 years. In contrast, more than 50 per cent of women and girls believe that the practice should end. The practice is highly medicalized in the Sudan, with more than 75 per cent of cases being conducted by health personnel.¹⁶ As with child marriage, legal action on the matter has been underwhelming, and it was not until 2020 that the transitional government passed a law to criminalize FGM in the country.¹⁷

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

A GDELT word cloud and figures on reports for child marriage and FGM are not available for the Sudan. After filtering the database for a comprehensive pool of keywords related to FGM and child marriage and technology, there were no results

returned for associated reports pertaining to child marriage and/or FGM in the country. Consequently, a country word cloud map representing the most common words portrayed in the reports is also unavailable.

THE TECHNOLOGY ENVIRONMENT IN THE SUDAN

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. In the Sudan, the technology environment is still in the early development stages. Overall, electricity access is low, with 55.4 per cent of the population having access to adequate electricity. This is seen in the urban-to-rural electrification disparities where electricity access is 81.5 per cent and 41.2 per cent, respectively.¹⁸ There is also a low percentage of internet users (16.2 per cent) in the country, measured by the proportion of households that have access to the internet and that have used it in the past 12 months. As a consequence, access to the internet is low for both men and women, although the gender gap still favours men (16.9 per cent) over women (11.0 per cent).¹⁹

With regard to mobile services, 64 per cent of the population is covered by at least a 3G mobile network and only 35 per cent covered by 4G

technology.²⁰ Likewise, mobile cellular telephone subscriptions (i.e., subscriptions to a mobile telephone service) are low, with 80 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, whereas the average for the MENA region is 111.²¹ As with internet access, mobile phone ownership is not only low in the country but also presents a considerable gender gap between men (75 per cent) and women (65 per cent).²² It is also important to note that, according to 2018 data, smartphone penetration in the Sudan is only 19.7 per cent, meaning that most phones used in the country are basic or feature phones that prevent the population from adequately using mobile internet and even downloading the most basic apps from an online app store.²³ Low levels of electricity access, household internet availability, network coverage and mobile phone ownership have affected the national access rates to mobile internet, which currently is 42 mobile broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants.²⁴

The nascent technological environment of the country is further compounded by a lack of governmental support for digital literacy. As of 2020, the government of the Sudan has not developed a national policy or strategy to create and strengthen digital literacy among its students and/or teachers, either through curriculum reform or capacity-building activities.²⁵ There is also no publicly available data on the level of individual ICT skills in the country. This result underlines the scant digital learning resources at the disposal of Sudanese schools and students.²⁶ The country also has yet to develop gender-sensitive strategies to advocate for the differentiated e-inclusion of women in internet access, digital skills and STEM education.²⁷



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 the Sudan. 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.

AHFAD UNIVERSITY ONLINE GBV TRAINING COURSES / 2020 – ONGOING / ☉

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECHNOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
N/A	Ahfad University	Child marriage and FGM	Nationwide	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Individual-level empowerment Service development and strengthening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual training 	N/A ²⁸

Ahfad University in the Sudan has adapted GBV emergency training to different states nationwide, with some courses covering the topics of child marriage and reproductive rights. The materials developed for these training courses have been integrated into the university's Master's programme in Humanitarian Assistance and Post Development. The main objective is to disseminate the training module online and the target audience includes the university's 8,000 female students. Furthermore, the training course is also offered to practitioners. Currently the university is developing a platform with information on GBV, mental health support, child marriage and FGM to be accessed by partners in the Sudan.

SALEEMA INITIATIVE / 2008 – ONGOING / ○

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"> UNICEF The Sudanese Government 	National Council for Child Welfare (NCCW)	FGM	Nationwide (All 18 the Sudanese States)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Individual-level empowerment Family and community engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radio TV shows Mass media 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> M&E instruments (i.e., to assess the impact of the intervention in the target group) Consultations with target group(s)

The Saleema Initiative is an innovative social marketing campaign that focuses on promoting the discontinuation of FGM by changing social norms and attitudes towards the practice. Specifically, the campaign tries to change the way Sudanese families and communities talk and express themselves about FGM by using more positive terminology (Saleema means ‘whole, healthy in body and mind, unharmed, intact, pristine, untouched and in God-given condition’).²⁹ The project uses a variety of communications tools such as posters, stickers, children’s puzzles, multimedia kits, animated television spots, radio spaces and comic books, among others, that are presented in public gatherings in order to increase social acceptance of uncut girls and change beliefs around remaining uncut in local populations.³⁰ State-level and per capita exposure to the campaign was found to be associated with the reduction of FGM social norms.

In 2013, Saleema started using social media marketing, commercial marketing and banners to deliver the message and raise awareness regarding FGM and child marriage. Saleema started appearing in old and new media channels such as the radio, TV and social media. With the help of UNICEF, NCCW was able to air a radio drama, containing 50 episodes about Saleema, on Sudanese National Radio and some of the Sudanese states. In 2014, the Saleema website was launched and it is still active. In 2020, the website was a channel that beneficiaries used to file complaints or report FGM and child marriage incidents. Due to its success, in 2018 the African Union decided that it would adopt and replicate this project across the continent.³¹

♀ This intervention integrates an intersectional feminist approach in two ways. First, the role of Sudanese women in organizations and institutions has been prominent in the last 20 years especially in the NCCW. As such, in the NCCW and specifically in Saleema initiative, most facilitators in the community dialogues are women. Moreover, consultations with target groups are carried out as survivors also participate and share their stories with the community.

EFFECTS OF SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH EDUCATION ON ATTITUDES OF FEMALE STUDENTS TOWARDS FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IN THE SUDAN / 2019 / ○

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECHNOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
N/A	Authors	FGM	Karary locality, Khartoum state	1. Individual-level empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video screenings 	N/A ³²

This study focused on providing health education sessions to 154 female second grade students from the Karary locality in Khartoum state in the Sudan. Given that secondary school education is a critical stage in which individuals shape their beliefs and attitudes, the authors sought to assess the impact of school-based health education on FGM knowledge and attitudes of female teenagers. The health sessions consisted of 80-minute sessions that used videos, visual aids and brainstorming sessions to inform students on FGM definitions, types, causes and adverse effects. The study results showed an increase in FGM knowledge among participants and a decrease in supportive attitudes towards the practice.³³

CHANGING CULTURAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION / 2016 – 2016 / ©

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"> Swiss National Committee for UNICEF European Research Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authors Gezira State Government National Council for Child Welfare Gezira State Council for Child Welfare 	FGM	122 communities in the Sudan	1. Family and community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Edutainment Movies 	N/A ³⁴

This intervention carried out by academics from the Sudan and Switzerland used four movies to promote changes in attitudes and cultural beliefs around FGM in the Sudan. The telenovela style movies dramatize the discordant views of a family around FGM and were screened for 122 Sudanese communities. The theory of change behind the project suggests that support for cutting varies within households even before interventions are launched, and as such this household-level heterogeneity in opinions can be leveraged to effect attitudinal change with the use of entertainment tools such as movies. The intervention results showed that these movies significantly improved attitudes towards girls who remain uncut, with especially positive effects for female participants, older participants and participants that have daughters.³⁵

ENDNOTES

- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014), as cited in UNICEF (2022a), *The Sudan country profile*
- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014), as cited in UNICEF (2020e), *The Sudan country profile*
- ITU as cited in Economist Impact (2022)
- Economist Impact Estimate (2019), as cited in Economist Impact (2022)
- Economist Impact (2022)
- 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;
- UNICEF (2021a)
- UNICEF (2022a)
- Tønnessen and al-Nagar (2018)
- CMI (2022)
- UNICEF and UNFPA (2021b)
- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014), as cited in UNICEF (2020e), *The Sudan country profile*; UNICEF and UNFPA (2021b)
- UNICEF and UNFPA (2021b)
- Girls Not Brides (2020); UNICEF Sudan (2020m)
- Norbakk and Tønnessen (2020)
- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014), as cited in UNICEF (2020l)
- UNICEF (2020h)
- World Bank Data (2020m)
- ITU as cited in Economist Impact (2022)
- Ibid.
- World Bank Data (2020e)
- Economist Impact (2022)
- Newzoo (2018)
- ITU as cited in Economist Impact (2022)
- Economist Impact (2022)
- Tairab and Rong-huai (2017)
- Economist Impact (2022)
- Organization/intervention not interviewed
- Evans et al. (2019)
- Norbakk and Tonnessen (2020)
- UNICEF and UNFPA (2019c)
- Organization/intervention not interviewed
- Mahgoub et al. (2019)
- Organization/intervention not interviewed
- Vogt et al. (2016)

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

