



**UNITED
VISION**



2013/2014 Annual Report

Photos

Cover

Staff of United Vision pose for a snapshot during the final voluntary HIV screening exercise at the main motor park in Mamfe town

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FGM survivors in Eyumojock village listen to a talk on the negative effects of FGM

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Teenage mothers discuss outside after a sensitization meeting on FGM and early marriages

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Shortly after a community sensitization meeting in Eyumojock village

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The Communications and Outreach Coordinator of UV sensitizes Eyang youth on Harmful traditional Practices

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Girl children in Nfuni village aged between 3 years and 5 years old: all circumcised

About Us

United Vision is a membership women- and youth-focused organization. created on March 10, 2004 and effectively registered on June 16, 2004 by a group of professional women from different fields (teachers, accountants, economists, lawyers etc.).

Goal:

The purpose of United Vision is to empower women and youth economically, socially and politically, by helping them fight against trends and tendencies that entrench a culture of violence, exclusion, marginalization, poverty, ignorance and loss of self-esteem.

Domains of Intervention

The key areas of work for our organization are HIV-AIDS, reproductive rights, harmful traditional practices as well as political and economic empowerment.

How We Work

Our implementation strategy consists in identifying beneficiary groups, organising them, analysing their problems through participatory processes, and building their capacity and providing them the means to address the problems identified.

Our work with women involves the following:

1. Assisting them earn additional off-farm incomes through capacity -building, skills enhancement, micro-credit start-up support and market penetration;
2. Empowering them to fight against sexual and gender-based violence, gender discrimination and early and forced marriages;
3. Empowering them to raise awareness on HIV-AIDS and reproductive rights issues in their communities;
4. Emboldening them to make good political decisions by making strategic choices during elections, especially during local elections.

Foreword

This report records the level of implementation of our activities for the 2013/2014 project year (June 2013 to May 2014).

This year has been especially tasking for all of us because of the nature and location of the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) project that we implemented in villages of the Ejagham tribe and the HIV-AIDS initiative implemented very in remote parts of Mamfe Central.

FGM and other forms of harmful traditional practices are entrenched in Ejagham culture and past attempts to debase them have been regarded as a direct attack on that culture and frowned at by the victims, the practitioners and the society at large. This is what makes FGM so sensitive and complicated to tackle.

As would be expected, it was difficult from the start as our organization risked repudiation for venturing into a murky domain highly cherished by its targeted beneficiaries. But in the end we prevailed by utilising several combinations of our innovative community entry strategy that are characterised by inclusive multi-stakeholder consultations and respect for the dominant culture.

We have now come to accept that this intervention has actually

been a double-edged sword. As we succeeded in mobilising, sensitising, creating anti-FGM groups and empowering them to lead the fight against all forms of gender denigration, we are also conscious of the expectations that the project has generated among the beneficiaries, and recognize that we need to hurriedly expand livelihoods-improvement initiatives in those communities before FGM practitioners return to their old trade with even greater vengeance.

I would like to take this opportunity to give thanks to all those who made it happen. I would therefore like to commend, appreciate and offer thanks to our staff and volunteers for the exemplary devotedness and dedication to our mission. We owe every iota of success to all these dynamic young men and women.

I would, finally, also like to extend extreme gratitude to our partners, Staying Alive Foundation in London, the Mamfe Municipality, New England Bio-labs Foundation (NEBF) in Massachusetts, USA and the Rhodes Scholars' Southern African Forum (RSSAF) in Oxford, UK through whose generous financial support we have been able to carry out these interventions.

We look forward to more dedication from our staff and more programme collaboration with our partners.

Jacqueline Tabong Arrey
Board Chairperson

Our Mission:

United Vision's mission is to bridge the gender divide in traditional societies by enabling women become aware of their productive and reproductive responsibilities.

Our Vision:

United Vision's vision is a society free of gender dominance, in which women and girls, men and boys can exercise their right to a life of dignity.

Civic Education Project on the Eradication of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

INTRODUCTION

Cameroon is amongst 31 African countries where FGM is known to be practiced. Female circumcision is a long-standing cultural practice in the Ejagham tribe. Documented cases within this tribe indicate that about 20% of women and girls undergo clitoridectomy between two weeks and four weeks of age. In the same vein uncircumcised young women undergo the ritual shortly after giving birth for the first time, because it is believed that the practice initiates them into womanhood, controls their sexuality, controls birth rate and conserves their monogamous status.



Contrary to these traditional beliefs, FGM as a cultural practice marginalizes women and subordinates them into prescribed roles under the men within the family and the community. It is linked with the unequal status of women in the political, social and economic structure of the society. FGM is a gross violation of the human rights of women. It is also harmful to the health of the woman. Very little is done on FGM in Cameroon despite the various International Human Rights Conventions that Cameroon has signed and despite the negative social and health effects that have been documented.

THE PROJECT

It is within this backdrop that we initiated the Civic Education Project on the Eradication of

FGM. The project targeted 10 village communities in the Ejagham tribe and ran from January to December 2013. The goal of the project was to protect the human rights of women by sensitizing women and men on the negative fallouts of FGM. The main objective was to empower women socially, economically and politically, thereby increasing their self esteem and promoting equality with men in the communities.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

To achieve our objectives, the following activities were planned and implemented:

- 1) Community mobilization, sensitization, counseling and formation of anti-FGM groups;
- 2) Training community groups in FGM advocacy techniques and the design, production and use of sensitization materials for effective mobilization campaigns;
- 3) Equipping UV resource centre with infrastructure (internet connection, website), publications and materials on FGM issues in Cameroon and around the world;
- 4) Advocacy Workshop on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

MOBILIZATION, SENSITIZATION, COUNSELING AND FORMATION OF ANTI-FGM GROUPS:

Community mobilization and sensitization campaigns were carried out in thirty (31) village communities, with the slogan. *'Ten (10) Reasons Why We Must Stop Female Circumcision'* printed on colourful sensitization brochures in English and the local language. The project team traveled to these village communities using motorbikes, the only available means of transportation, where we held rallies and informal discussions with FGM victims (actual and prospective) and practitioners, and lobbied with the traditional leaders to lend their support to the initiative. The following activities were done:

Rallies, meetings and informal discussions

Preliminary meetings were held with the village heads, men, youth and representatives of women's groups in these villages. In all the target villages, the men admitted that while it was their culture to circumcise women, they did not carry out the act itself. Some of them confessed that they would not stand against any action to eradicate the practice. They were then educated on the health, psychological and legal implications of the practice. In all, some 6 000 persons were sensitized in 31 village communities.

Women's Conferences

Women's Conferences were held in all thirty one villages. The women shared their experiences on FGM with the team and were given insights on the real dangers of the practice. In each village, those who were convinced came together to form anti-FGM coalitions and elected an executive committee to manage the coalition.

Media Campaigns

During the duration of the exercise, we carried out extensive media campaigns through the Voice of Manyu, a FM radio station serving the locality. These campaigns were carried out in English and the local language. The Campaign was designed to bring the issue of FGM to the attention of the general public; focusing on the dangers, harmful effects and the need to outlaw the practice.



TRAINING WORKSHOP IN ADVOCACY TECHNIQUES AND THE USE OF MATERIALS FOR EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGNS



This cross-community workshop was organized in Eyumojock to train leaders of Anti FGM Coalitions in advocacy techniques and on the use of campaign materials for effective campaigns.

The workshop conducted entirely in the local language, brought together sixty-two group leaders from thirty-one Anti FGM Coalitions for a three-day intensive training in the following:

- ◇ the Harmful effects of FGM on the health of the woman,
- ◇ the Psychological consequences of FGM on the woman,
- ◇ the Legal consequences on practitioners, victims and families

Participants, comprising victims, prospective victims and FGM practitioners were educat-

ed on advocacy techniques so that they may be able to sensitize and educate the women in their various villages with the aid of posters and flyers, on the dangers of the practice of FGM. The workshop prompted the participants to discuss issues that had been considered taboo, and take common resolutions on the fight against FGM in their respective communities. Flyers, posters, T-shirts and face caps were distributed to each Anti FGM Coalition at the end of the workshop. Didactic materials were also distributed to them for use during their Anti-FGM village association meetings.

Women showed a lot of interest in the workshop. Life testimonies on the dangers some of the women suffered when

they were circumcised were made. They said their consent was never sought and recounted how they were tortured and forced to be circumcised. Some bled and went into coma and almost died. The women opened up and revealed that some women and children have actually died as a result of the practice.

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Entrepreneurial skills development was part of activities intended to create alternative income generation for practitioners of Female Genital Mutilation in the target village communities. Training was organized in two village communities; Eyumojock and Kembong, where grain mills would eventually be installed. The two locations were chosen due to their locations and relative ease of access. The mill in Eyumojock would serve sixteen (16) neighboring village communities while the one installed in Kembong would serve fifteen (15) village communities.

Fifty two FGM practitioners participated in both training workshops during which they were educated on the need for them to get involved in alternative income generating activities so as to improve their standard of living and that of their families. They were educated on the importance of engaging in self-reliant income generating activities which will give them economic independence from their husbands and thus promote their self esteem. They were also educated on the importance of working together as groups with common interests for better productivity and income.

Examples of self reliant activities like processing and commercialization of non-timber forest products and group farming were cited by participants as activities which can help the women generate income for themselves. Participants agreed that the installation of grinding mills would constitute a good source of income considering the fact that, the main meal of the Ejagham and Boki tribes is cassava that needs to be ground. They thought that every household would



make use of the mills, consequently saving women several hours labourious hand grinding as well as generate income.

In the end participants confessed that the entrepreneurial skills acquired would help them to manage the mills and hoped that would mark the beginning of the economic empowerment and independence of the Ejagham and Boki woman. The practitioners pledged that they would no longer rely on circumcision of women and girl children for income in their communities.

OBSERVATIONS

Representatives of the communities in which the project was implemented feel satisfied with the project. The project team observed that there is an urgent need for adult literacy campaigns to enable the indigenes to communicate with development organizations. That in 5 of the communities in which we worked, no woman or girl could read or write, and very few boys and men could, even though each of these villages had a primary school. This is one good reason to explain why the practice of FGM goes unchallenged.



RESOLUTIONS

At the end of the project, our beneficiaries resolved to remain committed to the fight against FGM until the practice is ERADICATED.

The project team resolved to organize adult literacy classes for the women in their various villages so as to permit them to read and write such that they will be able to manage their group activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

All the speakers at the last workshop agreed that FGM was very bad and a law was necessary to stop it.

It was suggested that United Vision should create a functional website to document its vast experience in FGM issues in Cameroon.

It was suggested that United Vision should replicate the project to other parts of the country where FGM is still practiced.

It was agreed that some alternative income-generating activity should be provided to the old women who practice circumcision, for the eradication process to succeed. This is so because they gain material and financial benefits from that pursuit and will certainly resist eradication if they have no other sources of income.

It was agreed that men should be included in the FGM eradication process for they have a strong role to play in the lives of their wives and girl children.

Difficulties Encountered:

The very indigenous nature of the target communities was a major handicap to the implementation of the project. In the five remotest villages all activities in the field were done through translators and there was no direct communication with the population. The high level of illiteracy also posed a major difficulty. Training activities could not take the conventional form because most of the participants could neither read nor write.



Capacity Enhancement Initiatives

In last year's Annual Report the Board Chairperson announced that United Vision had succeeded in securing a capacity building grant that enabled the Communications and Outreach Coordinator, Ms. Mallah Enow Tabot to pursue two training courses in Canada.

We had hinted in that report that the institutional partnerships development strategy put in place by management was bold and that it stood a chance of producing more results than had been expected. That statement has come out to be true. This year once more, another staff member has had the opportunity of benefitting from the positive fallouts of this staff development strategy.

Following on the heels of Ms. Tabot, another staff member Ms. Kareen Nyasa Bosung, was also offered admission in May 2013 to attend a two-week short course on Advocacy and Citizens Engagement at the Coady Institute in Nova Scotia, Canada. Ms. Nyasa is United Vision's Citizens' Rights Officer. She graduated with a first degree in Law (LLB) from the prestigious University of Buea. Prior to joining United Vision she was a pupil advocate with an influential law firm in the South West Regional head quarters.

Now that we have successfully started developing win-win partnerships, the Board is confident that more opportunities will be open to the organization, and expresses the wish that staff who benefit from training would use their newly-acquired skills to improve our service delivery.

Upon her return from Canada Ms. Nyasa officially presented her end-of-course certificate to management. On that occasion the Board Chairperson had this to say, amongst others things:

'Ms. Nyasa is a dependable person in whom United Vision's Executive Committee and Projects Committee are willing to invest. She is young, hardworking and incarnates the hopes of our future. Given that the main goal of United Vision is to empower women and youth, especially the disenfranchised ones, we count on you to use the skills and knowledge acquired to contribute toward sharpening our programme focus and re-directing our future intervention priorities.'

In her usual smiling manner, Ms. Nyasa expressed profound gratitude to management for giving the opportunity 'of a life time' to gain more knowledge. She promised to put the knowledge acquired to good use for the benefit of the organization and the communities we serve.

The Team Lead promised that, in line with its new strategic focus, during the next ten years UV will source for more training opportunities to all deserving staff. She intimated that all those selected to benefit from training abroad undergo a rigorous selection process that takes into account their academic qualifications and work experience. She called on interested staff to make their intentions known early enough during the pre-selection stage, to stand a chance of qualifying.