



# High-Level Continental Dialogue on The State of World Population (SWOP) Report 2020 and Launch

*Against my will: Defying the practices that harm women and girls and undermine equality*

REPORT

STATE OF WORLD POPULATION 2020



**WE HAVE THE TOOLS TO  
END THESE HARMFUL PRACTICES.**

 STATE OF WORLD POPULATION 2020

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## Acknowledgements

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Contact:  
United Nations Population Fund Liaison Office to the  
African Union and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNFPAELO)  
Menelik II Avenue  
Addis Ababa Ethiopia  
Tel: +251115444064

More information about the State of the World Population (SWOP) Report 2020 is available at <https://www.unfpa.org/swop>

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background and Information	1
Opening Session	2
Interactive panel discussion – 1: Moderated by Mr. Mabingue Ngom, Regional Director, UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO)	
Discussion Points	
• Ending harmful practices in Africa will need the concerted efforts of a wide-range of stakeholders. What key steps has the Government of Kenya taken to mobilize the different actors needed to bring about an end to harmful practices such as female genital mutilation?	3
• Based on the work and experiences of Equality Now, what will you say are three imperatives for eliminating harmful practices in Africa?	4
• How is Burkina Faso working to end harmful practices against women and girls? Are there any lessons that other countries can learn from you?	5
• Often, some people use religion as justification to carry out various practices that harm women and girls and infringe upon their human rights and development. How are you working to address this? In particular, how do you convince other religious leaders to abandon such practices?	6
Interactive Panel discussion – 2: Moderated by Dr. Julitta Onabanjo , UNFPA Regional Director, UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO)	
Discussion Points	
• Men and boys have an important role to play in ending harmful practices against women and girls. What are some of the key actions men and boys can take to be allies in the fight to end these practices?	6
• UNICEF is working closely with UNFPA and AUC on two joint programmes to end child marriage and female genital mutilation. Why is it so important to eliminate these practices if many societies feel they are important parts of tradition and culture of some communities?	7
• What role can young people play in ending FGM in their communities? If you have 3 main things to share with governments on how to end FGM, what will they be?	7
Key Recommendations	8
Social Media Outreach	9

## Background and Introduction

In October 2018, the first continental launch of UNFPA's flagship report, the State of World Population (SWOP) was held in Addis Ababa led by the UNFPA's Deputy Executive Director – Programme and African Union Commission's Deputy Chairperson in the presence of the diplomatic community in Addis Ababa, international development partners, civil society representatives, among others. In 2019, a continental commemoration around the 25th anniversary focused on the 2019 theme of the State of the World's Population Report and was led by the Executive Director of UNFPA and the President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. These continental events have provided an important platform to disseminate the report and show at a very high level, the leadership and political pull of UNFPA on issues of population and development in Africa.

It is against this background that the UNFPA Liaison Office to the African Union and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNFPAELO) convened a High-Level Continental Dialogue for the launch of the State of World Population Report (SWOP) 2020 in Africa. The virtual meeting was held on the 28th of August 2020 and gathered over 120 participants from different backgrounds. The dialogue was significant in providing a platform for partners and stakeholders to assess the findings of the SWOP 2020 report in relation to the trends on harmful practices, which revealed that child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and son preference were regrettably still prevalent and commonly practiced in most societies including in the African continent. The meeting also sought to investigate the remaining gaps in addressing harmful practices and possible solutions to these challenges even in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. The dialogue proposed a list of concrete actions and recommendations to be taken which included: strengthening inclusion and engagement of men and boys in addressing harmful practices, increasing advocacy efforts aimed at

yielding strong political commitment, enforcement and formulation of laws that address harmful practices and the reinforcement of the implementation of a strong and robust multi-sectoral response to harmful practices from grassroots level to the continental level.

This report provides a summary of the presentations submitted during the webinar and evaluates discussions and key recommendations that were proposed during the panel discussions and in the chat boxes dedicated to specific questions around the topic from participants in attendance. The appendix will provide an overview of the social media platforms outreach during the event.

## Opening Session:

The opening session of the high-level continental dialogue was chaired by Ms. Ngonze, (UNFPA Resident Representative to the African Union and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and Chief). The opening segment of the dialogue included remarks from Dr. Diene Keita, (United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA), H.E. Mrs. Amira El Fadil, (Commissioner for Social Affairs of the African Union Commission), and Dr. Morissanda Kouyate, 2020 United Nations Nelson Mandela Prize Laureate and Executive Director of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC).

## Introductory Remarks



In her opening remarks, Dr. Diene Keita (United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA), began by highlighting findings of the State of World Population (SWOP) Report 2020 and revealed that despite the report noting 19 harmful practices against women and girls, three practices persisted namely: child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and son preference. She further explained that these three harmful practices were deeply rooted in gender inequality and the desire to control women’s bodies and life. Dr. Keita also revealed that the SWOP report indicated that in the year 2020 alone over 4 million women and girls would be subjected to genital mutilation and out of the 200 million women and girls who have undergone female genital mutilation, almost 60% of these women and girls were all living in the Africa. She also emphasized that child marriage was another prevalent harmful practice in the African continent as evidenced by the report which also revealed that Sub-Saharan Africa had the second largest number of child brides with 115 million women and girls who were married as children.

Dr. Keita underscored the importance of inclusion and engagement of men and boys in advocacy efforts for equal rights and treatment of women. She called on everyone to step up investments to “Respect, Protect and Fulfill” rights of all women and girls in order to bring real change and real results in regard to cultural attitudes and practices that dehumanize and commoditize all women and girls. She encouraged all stakeholders including African Heads of state and Government to enact and enforce laws against harmful practices including female genital mutilation and child marriage.

Dr. Keita concluded by reiterating a strong commitment from UNFPA to continue assisting the African Union in realizing all 7 aspirations of Agenda 2063 for a prosperous Africa which relies on the potential of Women and Youth and added that eliminating harmful practices was at the heart of the quest to build the, “Africa We Want”.



H.E. Commissioner Amira El Fadil (African Union Commission, Department of Social Affairs) commended UNFPA for its critical role in convening multiple stakeholders at all levels – globally, regionally and locally - and facilitating consensus to solve common challenges and threats faced by women and girls in regard to inclusive development and equal rights for all. She further acknowledged the long-standing partnership between the African Union Commission and UNFPA, which is a collaboration of shared commitment to equality, advancement of health, wellbeing and empowerment of women and girls. Her Excellency recalled the 2018 SWOP report which ran under the theme “My Choice” and connected how this year’s report “Against my will” resonated with and reflected lifelong

trauma and complications women and girls are subjected to. Commissioner El Fadil further reiterated that the African Union aligned itself to the UNFPA’s message and also firmly stood against inequality.

The Commissioner concluded by commending UNFPA and the various divisions within the department of Social Affairs for their ongoing collaborative work being carried out through the four flagship projects that UNFPA and the African Union Commission are currently implementing, namely the Campaign to accelerate reduction of maternal mortality in Africa (CARMMA), the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage, the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on FGM, and the African Union’s Saleema Initiative to eliminate female genital mutilation (FGM). H.E. Amira El Fadil called on stakeholders to accelerate efforts in addressing harmful practices against women and girls despite the Covid-19 pandemic whose impact would reverse the progress made in past decades .



Dr. Morissanda Kouyate: The 2020 Nelson Mandela Prize Laureate, Dr. Morissanda Kouyate, emphasized that harmful practices in Africa were deeply rooted in their justification as cultural practices. He emphasized that culture is often a set of positive practices that give respect and dignity to everyone; however practices of female genital mutilation and child marriages are practices that do not reflect any positive acts as they undermine the rights of women and girls. In his presentation, Dr. Kouyate called on the accelerated elimination of harmful practices to secure good health and wellbeing of women and girls which is also a significant lever for societal development. In order for the world and the African continent to end harmful practices, he recommended the implementation of a strong multi-sectoral response and coordinated, effective implementation of existing policies and programs. He concluded by reiterating the need for a strong commitment to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment for women and girls in Africa and the world.

## Interactive panel discussion – 1: Moderated by Mr. Mabingue Ngom, Regional Director, UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO)

Ending harmful practices in Africa will need the concerted efforts of a wide-range of stakeholders. What key steps has the Government of Kenya taken to mobilize the different actors needed to bring about an end to harmful practices such as female genital mutilation?



Ms. Faith Kasiva, Secretary for Gender in the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs of the Republic of Kenya, shared the experiences and challenges encountered by Kenya in addressing harmful practices in particular female genital mutilation (FGM). At the onset of her presentation, she stated that female genital mutilation was a gross violation of human rights which no woman or girl should ever be subjected to. She went on to state that in recognition of these human rights violations multiple stakeholders in Kenya embarked on a journey to address and end these harmful practices and norms that undermine women and girls right to equality. This included the government of the Republic of Kenya which showed its commitment by prohibiting FGM nationally in 2011 through the enactment of a comprehensive legal and policy framework, as well as a Presidential commitment by H.E Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta to put

an end to female genital mutilation by the year 2022. She also added that data in the Kenya Demographic Health Survey conducted in 2014 indicated a gradual decline in cases of FGM. However, despite the decline, she stated that FGM remained unacceptably high and prevalent in many communities. In her presentation, she also elaborated on various measures that have been put in place by the government of Kenya in its efforts to end FGM by 2022. The three-pronged approach emphasizes on the need for, “enforcement of the law, sensitizing communities and strengthening multi-sectoral interventions”.

Ms. Kasiva underscored the importance of strengthening multi-sectoral interventions as a one of the best practices that helped Kenya in achieving a gradual decline in FGM cases. She also urged other stakeholders and partners to adopt this model in their efforts against harmful practices such as FGM. She further revealed that the government of Kenya had also embarked on a massive behavior change program meant to alter negative social norms about women and girls in 22 counties, through massive deployment of “Change Agents” at community level who would raise awareness about the negative effects of FGM to the general public. She added that these programs were implemented with the assistance and inclusion of young people, civil societies and community gate keepers including religious and traditional leaders, which made the programs a success. She also highlighted that in its bid to end FGM structurally, the government of Kenya has included anti-female genital mutilation information in most of the school curricula and also regularly works with development partners to build capacity of teachers to effectively communicate the subject matter to learners.

She concluded by stating some of the challenges that are being currently faced by the government of Kenya in its efforts to end FGM by 2022. These included: poor enforcement of laws that address harmful practices, as well as the outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya which caused a reduction and, in some cases, stopped government-initiated programs aimed at addressing female genital mutilation. She further revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic had created an enabling environment for increase of harmful practices, especially FGM, due to various aspects of lockdowns and restrictions of movement, closing down of schools, and access to essential Sexual Reproductive Health (SRHR) services. She went on to state that Kenya had witnessed an unusual spike in cases of female genital mutilation over a 4-month period of lockdown and movement restrictions.

### Based on the work and experiences of Equality Now, what will you say are three imperatives for eliminating harmful practices in Africa?



Ms. Mwangovya, Equality Now Organization, began by reiterating the importance of political will as a yardstick in ending harmful practices in Africa. She continued to emphasize that political will was significant in creating an enabling environment that would guarantee much needed resourcing for all actions and programmes to finally succeed in criminalizing harmful practices such as FGM and Child Marriage. She recalled the well-coordinated response of Republic of Kenya that had been presented beforehand by Ms. Kasiva and backed the idea of a multi-sectoral approach in the formulation and implementation of policies and laws to address harmful practices including FGM and Child Marriage. She underscored that this model of a multi-sectoral response would warrant enhanced enforcement of laws and policies and would result in drastic reduction of cases of harmful practices.

In her second suggestion, Ms. Mwangovya proposed adoption of gender transformative approaches that seek to ensure structural gender equality. She added that harmful practices were caused by an ideology of patriarchy and therefore needed to be addressed through dealing with the root causes of inequality by reshaping unequal power relations and also increasing awareness to all people. Ms. Mwangovya commended the different

continental frameworks and policies that were put in place by governments and development partners with the aim of addressing harmful practices which include: Maputo Protocol and African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa and other relevant frameworks. She, however, added that there was a need to contextualize other global instruments against harmful practices to apply to the living realities of heterogeneous African communities.

Lastly, she recommended all stakeholders pull together sufficient resources to sensitize communities on harmful practices and formulate messages that resonate with the different communities during the advocacy campaigns. She concluded by reiterating the significance of a bottom-up approach in advocacy and called on all partners to direct much of their efforts at grassroots level first.

### How is Burkina Faso working to end harmful practices against women and girls? Are there any lessons that other countries can learn from you?



In her remarks, Madame Madeline Ouedraogo, Director for Gender Promotion, Ministry for Women, National Solidarity, Family and Humanitarian Action, Burkina Faso, highlighted the commitment of His Excellency Mr. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, President of Burkina Faso, to eliminate FGM, particularly in his designation as the AU Champion for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation.

She indicated that Burkina Faso was the third country in the continent to legally ban FGM in 1996, with the National Committee to Fight the Practice of Excision (CNLPE) equipped with a Permanent Secretariat to improve operational efficiency. The SP/CNLPE has at least a presence in all of Burkina Faso’s 45 provinces. In the 17 provinces where FGM is most prevalent, the committee has deployed 22 special patrols that are supposed to reach remote areas and report cases of FGM. But more important, in an effort to change “hearts and minds” about the practice, the SP/CNLPE has put in place a grassroots-based system for educating the public about the harm caused by FGM to women and their unborn children.

The law has been accompanied by campaigns to raise awareness about the problems caused by FGM. The gendarmerie is included in doing patrols. A group of gendarmes, social workers and sometimes people from the local radio go out into the villages and do awareness-raising. She indicated that in 2003, Burkina Faso began implementing the Integrated Communication Plan (PIC), in which the SP/CNLPE uses regional- or provincial-level radio stations to broadcast information about harmful traditional practices including FGM. And as part of PIC, 4,840 local volunteer activists located in 868 communities have been trained to discuss the consequences of FGM in order to convince communities to abandon the practice. Despite many challenges, the SP/ CNLPE’s records show a gradual increase in the numbers of FGM prosecutions over the years. While the FGM law is important, the downward trend in the incidence of FGM in Burkina Faso, although gradual, is almost certainly the result of shifting attitudes about the practice and its consequences.

### Often, some people use religion as justification to carry out various practices that harm women and girls and infringe upon their human rights and development. How are you working to address this? In particular, how do you convince other religious leaders to abandon such practices?



Dr. Oti, Senior Pastor of House of Kings and Priests as well as State Chairman of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), began by reiterating his commitment in addressing harmful practices. He further went on to highlight a list of activities that he and other religious leaders carried out which included a series of focused group discussions with other religious leaders from different denominations and backgrounds. The main aim of these discussions was to raise awareness on the negative impact and the dangers of FGM physically and psychologically. He underscored the importance of advocacy dialogues in creating a solid foundation for the wide scale dissemination of information on FGM. He further went on to explain that trained religious leaders would use their influence in society and on their congregants in mosques, churches and other religious gatherings to also inform them of the dangers of FGM. He emphasized that in Nigeria, the general public respected and obeyed religious leaders more than they even obeyed the national constitution itself and therefore it would be a big mistake to leave out religious leaders in addressing harmful practices.

Dr. Oti commended collaboration with scientific professionals such as doctors and psychologists in addressing harmful practices. He added that this would help in dissemination of information that was scientifically accurate. Dr. Oti went on to give examples of his collaborative sensitization programs that he and other religious leaders carried out with medical doctors and psychologists on various platforms which included television, radio and social media platforms. He stated that all these advocacy programs were successful and assisted in providing much needed information due to these partnerships. In conclusion, Dr. Oti emphasized that neither the Bible or the Koran or any other holy book supports harmful practices like female genital mutilation and Child marriage and therefore there was no justification at all for harmful practices that undermine women and girls' rights in public and private spheres.

## Interactive Panel discussion – 2: Moderated by Dr. Julitta Onabanjo, UNFPA Regional Director, UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO)

Dr. Julitta Onabanjo, in her remarks, stated that there was no justification at all in either religion or culture for performing harmful practices that curtail the rights of women and girls in public and private spheres in Africa. She commended the panel discussants for their efforts and passion in addressing harmful practices in Africa and proceeded to open the interactive session with a presentation from Rev. Bafana Khumalo.

**Men and boys have an important role to play in ending harmful practices against women and girls. What are some of the key actions men and boys can take to be allies in the fight to end these practices?**

In his intervention, Rev. Bafana Khumalo, Sonke Gender Justice, also backed the recommendation made by Dr. Diene on inclusion and engagement of men and boys in the efforts to address harmful practices against women and girls. He went on to state that, inclusion of men and boys was one of the most important elements still missing in the discourse for equality of women and girls. He stated that most of the harmful practices were carried out by society to benefit men yet with time most men and boys are realizing that these harmful practices are in no way beneficial to them. He added that this



revelation was enough justification to engage men and boys to assist in educating and raising awareness on the negative physical and psychological effects of harmful practices.

Rev. Bafana then called on all stakeholders working to address harmful practices to engage men and boys in the conversations around harmful practices which include female genital mutilation, child marriage and son preference. He concluded by providing an example of the advocacy activities against harmful practices that he coordinated in Kenya, where he and his team engaged a men's network that comprised of community gate keepers like traditional chiefs and religious leaders. He revealed that he was so impressed with the level of cooperation and support that he received from these leaders, showing that men are willing to cooperate in the fight against harmful practices but must be engaged and sensitized on the subject.

**UNICEF is working closely with UNFPA and AUC on two joint programmes to end child marriage and female genital mutilation. Why is it so important to eliminate these practices if many societies feel they are important parts of tradition and culture of some communities?**



Ms. Nankali Maksud, UNICEF Senior Global Advisor, expressed her gratitude for the long and fruitful partnership that has existed between UNICEF and UNFPA especially in regard to the Joint Programmes on Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage that have been running for almost 10 years now. She emphasized that cultural rights were human rights but were not unlimited. She went on to provide examples of multiple cases in Kenya where certain individuals have taken the government to court stating that abolishing female genital mutilation went against their rights to practice their cultures. She however highlighted that according to international statutory instruments these cultural rights were not unlimited as they limited and infringed on other human rights of women and girls. In her intervention she quoted one of the renowned Nigerian author, Chimamanda Ngozi, who asserted that, "culture does not make people, but people make culture". Based on this assertion, Ms. Maksud underscored the importance of

working with communities to challenge harmful social and gender norms that sustain harmful practices using various advocacy methods that are dynamic and contextualised to the needs of the specific community. She concluded with a call to keep all girls in schools as these institutions provided a safe space for these young people, minimizing the risk of FGM and Child Marriage.

**What role can young people play in ending FGM in their communities? If you have 3 main things to share with governments on how to end FGM, what will they be?**

Dr. Mariam Dahir, Chairperson, Youth Anti-FGM, from Hargeisa Somalia, began by providing a brief background of how difficult it was back in 2012 for women in Somaliland to be vocal in society about any issue, especially speaking out against female genital mutilation, which was considered a taboo. She further added that she began advocacy in 2012, despite all these challenging circumstances, because she was driven by passion to see equality for all women and girls. She went on to encourage other young people to always speak up and speak out against inequalities in their respective societies. The



proposed solutions to ending harmful practices that she recommended included young people playing an active role in sensitizing their communities about harmful practices such as FGM and Child Marriage. Secondly, she also emphasized the importance of inclusion and participation of women in decision making processes from a national level down to grassroots level. She encouraged women to get into parliament and also seek the highest office of presidency in their countries. She highlighted that participation in these platforms would assist in formulation of policies and laws that were in line with the practical needs and strategic interests of women and girls. She ended her presentation by underscoring the importance of using mass media during the Covid-19 pandemic to reach people with messages that assist in addressing harmful practices. She recommended the use of television, social media and radio platforms to reach a wider audience in countries.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

- Strengthen inclusion and engagement of men and boys in addressing harmful practices which include female genital mutilation (FGM), Child Marriage and Son Preference.
- Increase advocacy efforts aimed at achieving a strong recommitment and political will to end harmful practices by African Leaders.
- Strengthen implementation of laws and policies against harmful practices at member state level.
- Reinforce implementation of a strong and robust multi-sectoral response to harmful practices from grassroots level to the continental level.

## Closing Session

H.E Commissioner Amira El Fadil presided over the official launch of State of World Population (SWOP) Report 2020 in Africa. She encouraged all stakeholders to ensure that they use the findings of the report to guide their work in the fight against harmful practices in Africa.

Dr. Julitta Onabanjo then gave the closing remarks. She thanked everyone on behalf of UNFPA for their commitment to end harmful practices in Africa and concluded by stating that the key take-away from the dialogue against harmful practices was the need to “Respect, Protect and Fulfill” the rights of women and girls. She finally called on all stakeholders to join hands in the fight for a better Africa.

## Appendix 1

### Social Media Outreach Background

UNFPA Liaison Office to the AU and ECA, in its bid to increase visibility around the launch of the 2020 State of World Population (SWOP) Report in Africa, conducted a social media outreach campaign using mainly the twitter platform to engage all stakeholders including other UN agencies, civil society, young people, women and girls in Africa. The campaign began on the 24th of August and ended on the 27th of August 2020. At the onset of the campaign, the messages that were posted on the timeline mainly consisted of information related to the event such as zoom registration links, Save the Date digital poster and infographics related to the event. On the 28th of August 2020 during the event, the office made outreach to a wider audience through posting live tweets of the event proceedings as they happened, including of the various opening sessions, interactive panel discussions and the closing segment. This move assisted in generating increased traffic to the UNFPA-LO timeline. After the event the Office also decided to run a post webinar outreach on the 29th of August 2020 highlighting the discussions and key outcomes of the dialogue.

### Twitter overview

A snapshot survey by Google analytics revealed that the UNFPA Liaison Office twitter account generated a total of 379.1K. impressions which increased the number of impressions from previous engagements by over one thousand five hundred and seventy three percent. In the same period the account had a total of 101 visitors, this also reflected an increase of over four hundred and ninety four percent and lastly the account due to these engagements gained an additional 14 followers. The table below shows a summary of the account’s major Tweet impressions.

Twitter Handle	Tweet Impressions
@UNFPANigeria	104.8 K
@UNFPA_Zimbabwe	56.3K
@nomoreslaves	46.7K
@UNFPA_ESARO	35.9K
@diakatop10	30.2K
@DrDahir	28.2K
@UNFPAKen	26.4K
@JulittaOnabanjo	17.8K
@UNFPAELO	17.1K
@EducateGirlsNow	10.7K
@UNFPAEthiopia	5.0K
TOTAL	379.1K

## Twitter Videos

@Nigina\_Muntean posted a promotional video of DJ Switch advocating for an end to all forms of harmful practices. **276 views**



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United Nations Population Fund Liaison Office  
to the African Union and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa  
(UNFPAELO)  
Menelik Avenue  
Addis Ababa Ethiopia  
Tel: +251 115 444064