

Newsletter



New Resources

FORWARD received a grant from the Body Shop Foundation to produce an information pack on FGM. The information pack which will be launched in the new year contains updated information on the background of FGM, health consequences and prevalence, information on asylum, human rights, international initiatives and the situation in the UK and Europe. The pack also contains information on how to become involved with the work of FORWARD.

A wall chart on African Women's Health: Support Services on FGM/ Female circumcision is available from FORWARD. The chart which was produced in conjunction with the community gives information on FGM and details of African well women clinics in the UK which offer specialist services. The chart is in English but we plan to translate this into Somali and Arabic. The chart will be distributed widely to health clinics and community centres in areas of the country where there is a specific need. The wall chart was jointly funded by Body Shop Foundation and the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

If you are aware of a health centre or clinic where patients may benefit from this information please contact FORWARD.

FORWARD'S STAFF NEWS

Adwoa Kwateng-Kluvitse was the first of three new additions to the FORWARD team. She has been active in FORWARD's work since 1983, and has taken part in the Council of Management in various posts. Adwoa recently joined the office team as the UK Programmes Co-ordinator and Acting-Director.

Zahrah Awaleh is our new Administrative/Finance Assistant, replacing Sabrina Lee who has become our Training Project Co-ordinator. Zahrah is very excited about working with FORWARD, especially in FORWARD's plans to increase the mobilisation of men against FGM.

Elisha Jordan is FORWARD's new office trainee and will be with us for 8 months, assisting with various admin and accounting work.

We are sorry to say goodbye to two excellent members of the FORWARD team: Faith Mwangi-Powell, Acting Director and Amanda Lawrence, Training Project Co-ordinator who have left us to pursue other projects. We wish them the very best of luck in the future.

Issue 4

December 2001

Editorial

Welcome to the new edition of FORWARD's newsletter which documents new developments in the campaign against FGM and in FORWARD's work.

This issue gives an update of the progress in FORWARD Nigeria and in FORWARD's training and Peer Educator projects in the UK.

This edition also gives feedback on the the 3rd Annual Forum on FGM and the session on FGM at CSW in New York.

Greetings for the festive season to all our supporters and may we wish you all a happy new year.

Hurrah for FORWARD Nigeria

The Vesico Vaginal Fistulae (VVF) rehabilitation centre has now been running for almost two years and already made a significant impact on the lives of women in Dambatta. VVF is now openly spoken of within the Kano State and the project in Dambatta has community acceptance and participation.

FORWARD Nigeria has produced a number of advocacy materials including radio jingles, pamphlets, posters and a video drama about the project. The drama was produced using local artists and was launched at the project's first graduation ceremony in November 2000. The video has been shown several times by the Nigerian Television Authority. As a result of the project's first graduation ceremony, £5000 was raised for VVF repair operations. A second female doctor has been employed and more surgical packs and a power generator have been obtained.

After graduation small loans are provided to graduates to start businesses. In addition to farming and livestock raising, the women at the VVF Centre have also acquired skills in making soap and petroleum jelly.

Literacy classes have continued in 10 villages in the surrounding area and the centre has initiated awareness sessions on HIV/AIDS. The centre also carries out safe motherhood activities in collaboration with the local community health centres. FORWARD Nigeria has provided technical assistance to health service providers by conducting health education and nutrition talks. There are plans to establish a Dambatta Well Woman Clinic. FORWARD Nigeria along with other NGOs, is also drafting a bill that will address "Violence Against Women in Nigeria."

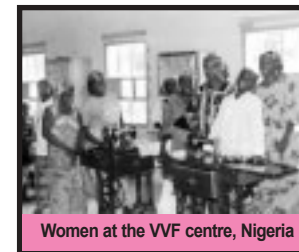
In preparation for this two further classes have started in the VVF Centre to empower women on key aspects of democracy and governance.

In November 2001 the second class at the VVF Centre graduated with much festivity. The families and relations attended in their numbers. It also attracted local and state dignitaries including the Commissioner for Health. FORWARD Nigeria has helped to transform the lives of 52 women to date.



Members of FORWARD Nigeria perform a play at the second graduation ceremony.

For further information on the project visit: www.forwardngr.com



Women at the VVF centre, Nigeria



Members of the FORWARD team with the Vagina Monologues actresses at the cheque presentation evening. From left to right: Pam Ferris, Sabrina Lee, Naana Otoo-Oyortey, Maureen Lipman, Sally Greene, Elisha Jordan and Zahrah Awaleh

The Vagina Monologues

FORWARD has recently become a beneficiary of the play the "Vagina Monologues", written by award winning playwright Eve Ensler. The play explores women's experiences of their vaginas and the mystery, the joy, the depth and sorrow that is associated with these experiences. "Your vagina is the story of your life... just by telling the story of her vagina woman is suddenly more

Best wishes for the festive season!

From the Staff and Council of Management at FORWARD

Want to make a difference? You can....

- help to promote awareness of gender-discriminatory practices. Write articles for local magazines and newspapers and hold discussions and seminars in your area.
- become a FORWARD supporter. Raise funds by organising events with friends or colleagues, or taking part in a sponsored activity.
- write to your local MP to raise the issue of FGM and encourage governmental support for intervention activities.
- help FORWARD to distribute information to health clinics, educational institutions and community organisations.
- become a 'peer educator' running information seminars at the community level to discourage harmful cultural practices.



Or you can simply give us a donation!

FORWARD needs your support to continue its work to stop gender based discriminatory practices affecting African women and girls in the UK and Africa. You can become a sponsor of FORWARD by giving a regular or single donation towards our work.

Please remember to complete the GIFT AID Declaration if applicable.

YES. I want to support FORWARD's campaign to stop harmful gender based discriminatory practices.

I wish to make a donation of £100 __, £50 __, £25 __, £10 __, £..... __

I enclose a cheque or postal order payable to FORWARD for £ _____

GIFT AID

I want FORWARD to reclaim tax on all donations I have made since 6 April 2000.

Name _____

Address _____

Post code _____

Signature _____ Date _____

YES. I would like to make a regular donation to FORWARD's work.

Banker's order

Please fill in name and address section opposite

Pay FORWARD £ _____ each month starting from ____/____/____ until further notice and debit my account:

Account Number _____

Sort code ____/____/____

Signature _____

To Manager _____ Bank _____

Bank _____

Address _____

Post code _____

FORWARD

FORWARD

is an international not-for profit organisation dedicated to promoting African women's and girls' reproductive and sexual rights.

FORWARD

supports the elimination of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage, and promotes reproductive rights, by supporting local health, socio-economic and educational programmes in the countries concerned.

FORWARD

provides training, information and advice to professionals in health, education, child protection and social work in the UK and Africa and supports services for women and children affected by FGM.

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Prosecutions in Kenya

Thirty people from the Tharaka district of Kenya have been prosecuted by a court for secretly subjecting their daughters to female genital mutilation during the school holiday period in August 2000. The East African Standard reported that Magistrate Omasa Mogambi fined the culprits 2,000 Kenyan Shillings (about 25 US dollars) each, failing which they would serve two months in prison. 20 of the accused parents pleaded guilty to the charge of mutilation
Source: Ghana Review International (November 2001)

News from Senegal

Eight women and five elderly men have been sentenced to three years in prison for permitting/assisting the genital mutilation of 18 young girls in the southern Kolda district of Senegal. Village elders who oppose the practice tipped off the police when they heard that the young girls aged between 2 and 5 years had been circumcised among a group of boys.

The arrests have sparked outrage among other village elders from the region who have demanded the release of the prisoners, and petitioned the president of Senegal.

Despite the law and the valuable work of organisations such as TOSTAN it emerges that FGM has become more prevalent among the Fulani, Mendingo and Fula tribes in the Southern Casamance Province.

Bill to outlaw FGM in Ireland

On the eve of international women's day, the Irish Labour Health Minister Liz McManus attended an event to address the issue of FGM. The meeting focused on the growing numbers of FGM cases taking place in Ireland and what legislation should be enacted to outlaw the practice. The Minister proposed a private Member's Bill to legislate against FGM. The Bill: "Act to Prohibit Female Genital Mutilation" was launched on 27th March 2001. The action raised an interesting debate in the Dail (Irish parliament). The Department of Health is taking the issue seriously, and will be issuing a circular about FGM to community care personnel and specific legislation to prohibit the practice is being considered.

FGM ceremonies in Tanzania

The Tanzanian government has allowed mass FGM ceremonies to take place despite the fact that the practice is outlawed in Tanzania. Equality Now has launched a protest action against the government of Tanzania, because the law is not effectively enforced.

Thousands of girls are subjected to genital mutilation at these ceremonies, which usually take place in December. Despite appeals from international and national organisations, the government of Tanzania has not acted to prevent these ceremonies.

FORWARD at the Commission on the Status of Women

In March 2001 FORWARD attended the 45th Session on the Commission of the Status of Women's (CSW) in New York. The session addressed HIV/AIDS and its impact on women and the girl child; and gender and racism.

FORWARD took part in the Women's National Commission (WNC) panel discussion on "Rights, Rites & Righting Wrongs: Finding Models of Good Practice: FGM/FGC". The FGM session looked at models of good practice as a stepping stone to developing the debate on proactive measures in the area of

sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls.

Chaired by Baroness Christine Crawley, the FGM session included panelist speakers: Faith Mwangi-Powell (Director of FORWARD), Christine McCafferty (MP and chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health), Faduma Hussein, (Leytonstone African Well Women clinic), and Comfort Momoh, (specialist FGM midwife, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital). All speakers brought a different aspect of the work taking place to eradicate FGM in the UK.

Lobbying European Parliament

FORWARD was invited to participate in an 'expert meeting' in Strasbourg in May 2001, to help draft a position paper for the European Parliament (EP). The paper outlined the human rights issues underpinning FGM and made recommendations to the Parliament with regard to prevention of the practice Europe wide.

The EP approved the paper on 20th September 2001. The recommendations to Member States include:-

- 1 the right to asylum of women and girls at risk of FGM,
- 1 that Member States pursue and punish anyone who takes their daughters out of Member States for the purposes of FGM,
- 1 that all states devise complete strategies to eliminate FGM, and that practicing communities must be involved so they become convinced of the need to take action.

FORWARD looks forward to the UK government response to these recommendations from the EP.

"Advancing in Unity" - International Forum on FGM in Somaliland

Black Women's Health and Family Support (BWHFS) held a pioneering 5-day international forum from 29th October - 2nd November 2001 in Hargeisa, Somaliland. "Advancing in Unity" was specifically convened to strengthen action against FGM in Somaliland and globally. Co-sponsors included Rainbo International and the IPPF.

BWHFS says that the recent establishment of a government in northern Somalia (renamed Somaliland) affords a great opportunity for the development of a sustainable FGM eradication campaign. The forum intended to: raise awareness amongst stakeholders of the degree of the problem in Africa, especially Somalia; create culturally-sensitive strategies for implementation in Somaliland; provide a forum for stakeholders to share ideas and experiences to strengthen FGM prevention, focussing on Somalia as a case study; and lastly, evaluate worldwide progress so far and discuss policies and best value strategies for prevention of FGM at the community level.

BMA Guidelines on FGM for Doctors

In August 2001 the British Medical Association issued a set of guidelines to GPs throughout the country giving advice to UK doctors on how to approach FGM prevention.

The guidelines call on GPs to do all they can to deter families from the practice of FGM as soon as they register with the surgery. If they suspect a girl may be taken away for FGM they should notify Social Service Child Protection Units.

As a result of the interest generated by the news story, FORWARD was invited to participate in several radio discussions about the guidelines in particular and the issue of FGM in general.

Copies of the guidelines are available from FORWARD or the BMA.

The Times 21st August 2001.

"I think that the police require specialist training in FGM particularly with regard to the multicultural communities which we serve."

Detective Inspector, Police.

FORWARD's training strategy is based on the premise that professionals in health, education, social services and the police have a key role to play in preventing the practice of FGM in the UK. They are in a unique position to provide support, services and education about FGM because of the frequency with which they interact with affected communities. It is therefore essential that professionals are equipped with a culturally sensitive understanding of FGM and practical skills to help women and protect young girls from undergoing the practice.

FORWARD's training project is funded by Comic Relief and the UK Department of Health and has so far involved conducting a small-scale needs assessment exercise among professionals in the London Borough of Hounslow, Cardiff, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Bristol in order to establish the level of awareness of FGM and to identify training needs. The survey revealed that, although most respondents



had heard of FGM, 43% of respondents did not know of the communities carrying out the practice. Many of the professionals were unaware of the existence of policies or procedures on FGM and 77% of respondents from the police force, social services and education did not feel adequately prepared to deal with an FGM case.

FORWARD has conducted interagency training in Cardiff, Birmingham, Hounslow and Liverpool to address this gap in knowledge and awareness. A total of 165 local professionals in health, education, social services and the police attended these sessions.

FORWARD will be conducting further training in other major cities in the UK and will also be working with Health First and The Royal College of Midwives next year.

For further information on this project please contact Sabrina Lee, Training Project Co-ordinator at FORWARD.

"We have a large population of clients with this condition. As local health workers, we should have up-to-date information management of the situation if faced with it."
 GP.

Training of Peer Educators in London

In April 2001, FORWARD initiated a programme to empower women in the community to stop the practice of FGM. A feasibility study conducted by FORWARD in the Health Authority boundaries of Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster (KCW) found that the most severe type of FGM (infibulation) is still widely practiced.

Ten peer educators have been recruited from the identified communities and have taken part in a two-day training programme to equip them with knowledge and skills on how to raise the issue of FGM within their communities to help to encourage behaviour change and the long-term prevention of FGM at the community level.

The training of peer educators has been accompanied by training of health professionals, based on the outcome of research into knowledge, attitude and care concerning FGM in the KCW area. The first training held in October was for midwives, doctors, obstetrics and gynecology consultants and specialists. A second training for GPs, nurses and health visitors took place in December. This project is sponsored by KCW Health Authority and co-ordinated by Eunice Munanie.



A Modern Forum Addresses an Ancient Rite

'Strengthening our efforts for a future without female genital mutilation'

On 19th February 2001 FORWARD held its 3rd Forum on The conference succeeded in bringing government representatives, community organisations, interagency professionals, researchers and academics from all the UK, as well as parts of Europe and Africa. Issues addressed included the UK Government's initiatives to eliminate FGM in the UK, human rights, research, and funding for FGM initiatives.

The afternoon workshops highlighted the need for greater collaboration between NGOs, statutory agencies and community organisations to develop practical and effective community programmes. The need to lobby for an amendment to the current law against FGM and the need for research on the prevalence of FGM in the UK was also expressed. The day

highlighted refugee and asylum issues, and the need for comprehensive and widespread training for professionals.

Naana Otoo-Oyortey, chair of FORWARD said, "FGM has become an extremely pressing issue in the UK, which requires greater collaboration from all professionals and the communities. This forum aims to create a space for dialogue, share experiences and help all of us to work together more effectively and move the campaign forward towards elimination of this practice which violates human rights and human dignity."

The report of the forum is now available from FORWARD.

Upcoming UK Events

The Forum on FGM 2002,
 FORWARD's 4th Forum on FGM will take place in April 2002 and aims to create positive partnerships with communities and develop effective community strategies. Topics covered will include FGM, early marriage, gender based violence and mobilisation of men in the community. Workshops will continue the above topics and work out practical strategies for prevention of gender violence in the community.

Meeting with supporters
 FORWARD will be holding a meeting with our supporters at 50 Eastbourne Terrace on Saturday 23rd March to discuss how our members can become involved in fundraising and awareness raising activities among their local communities. If you are interested in finding out more about this meeting please contact FORWARD.