

FORWARD Newsletter

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Editorial

Dear Friends,

It has been some time since we produced a newsletter but as you can see, we have been very busy with both our projects in Africa and UK activities.

Thank you for your continued interest and support and we would really appreciate it if you put FORWARD on your gift list. Any amount you give is very much welcomed and will really make a difference to someone's life!

We wish all our supporters a peaceful and stress-free holiday season and a happy new year.

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FORWARD in Jigawa and Kano

In 2004, FORWARD started a four-year initiative to improve maternal and child health services and raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and other STIs in Kano and Jigawa states, funded by Big Lottery Fund (UK).



Project staff in the Jahun WWCC in Jigawa State.

In June 2005 FORWARD's Programmes Officer, Karen Proudlock, took her first trip to Africa to visit the project. Both Well-Women and Children Centres are now up and running providing anti-malarials and iron supplements to girls and women of childbearing age. Trained staff give regular health talks on a broad range of maternal and child health topics and advocacy, networking and awareness-raising activities are being carried out at State and local government level as well as with traditional community leaders.

FORWARD's partner, FORWARD-Nigeria has also launched a media campaign using radio as a means of raising awareness about a range of sexual and reproductive health issues. The project also supports FORWARD's ongoing campaign to prevent Vesico-Vagina Fistula.

FGM on *The Bill*

FORWARD collaborated with ITV to raise the issue of FGM on the popular TV drama 'The Bill'. Airing on October 12th, the story line featured a Christian Coptic family originally from Egypt, living in the UK. In an effort to 'keep his culture alive' the father arranged for FGM to be performed on his daughter but the mother contacted the police and told them that her daughter had disappeared, rather than revealing that the father had taken the daughter to undergo FGM.

FORWARD welcomed the episode as an innovative way of highlighting the issue of FGM and challenging the misconception that FGM is only associated with Islam. The programme also showed how fathers may insist on their daughters undergoing FGM, reflecting FORWARD's argument that FGM is a societal concern, not only a 'women's issue', as commonly perceived. The episode also successfully discussed child protection with officers from the Child Protection Unit investigating the case. While the episode mentioned the illegality of FGM in the UK, very little mention of the 2003 FGM Act was made.

FORWARD's details were displayed at the end of the programme and we received several calls, mostly from people asking for more information.

FORWARD's message reaches the World on *Westway*

FORWARD was also very pleased to be involved in the production of a 4-day story line on FGM broadcast on the BBC World Service 'Westway' programme, a long running series based around a health clinic managed by a diverse group of health professionals. FORWARD's Director provided a half-day training to the production team before they started conceptualising the story.

The key figure in the episode was a Doctor who had been approached by a young girl who was worried that her mother was going to take her younger sister back to Sierra Leone to undergo FGM. The story reflected the concerns of UK based African, Asian and European professionals and how they were able to overcome their prejudices, lack of knowledge and fear of being labelled racist to take the necessary steps to protect the little girl from FGM. The climax of the story took place at Heathrow airport, where the doctor insisted that the Metropolitan Police used their powers to take the girl off the plane to prevent her being removed from the UK.

FORWARD acted as technical consultant for the programme to ensure that the African communities who listen to the BBC World Service were provided with accurate and up to date information on the health, sexual and human rights consequences of FGM as well as the position of the law in the UK. The episode was the last Westway ever to be broadcast on the BBC World Service.

Forum on Marriage & The Rights of Women & Girls

As a follow up to the 'Technical Consultation on Early and Forced Marriages' held in Ouagadougou in 2003, a three-day consultation meeting took place in Kenya this October. In 2003 the Forum undertook to produce an Advocacy Guide for use by groups on the ground to strengthen advocacy activities within their existing and future programmes and this year's meeting was held to discuss the draft.

The meeting was originally intended to be a small gathering of NGO's working on Child Marriage. However, it soon became clear that child marriage had captured the interest of very many organisations. Organisations from Yemen, India, USA, Ethiopia, as well as several Kenya-based organisations were all present at the meeting. Participants heard excellent presentations on research, human rights, advocacy and legal interventions. 'Empowerment' techniques to enable girls to protect themselves were also discussed.

If you wish to know more the Forum will be producing a full report of the meeting by January 2006 so watch this space!

FORWARD At The Police Gala

On 17th November, FORWARD and Somali Human Hope attended the Annual Police Gala Awards as guests of Detective Inspector Carol Hamilton and Detective Sergeant Dick Green. FORWARD has been working with the Metropolitan Police to inform communities about the 2003 FGM Act and the police's roles and responsibilities in respect of that legislation.

The Gala was a very interesting evening established to acknowledge the outstanding activities of members of the police. The 'FGM Project' was up for an award as an example of good police work in partnership with the community, in the 'Diversity' category. Nominees were not informed of the outcome in advance and it was most exciting when Nick Ross (of BBC crime watch) started describing the project that had won first place and we realised that

the winner was the 'FGM project'! In the words of a judge: 'This is an excellent project for every force in the UK to learn from. This well-deserved winner is a good example of how working in partnership with communities is the best way to tackle crimes that affect them.' Well done to Carol, Dick, the FGM project team and Said Ahmed! (Somali Human Hope).

The first prize is a certificate, a glass trophy and a cheque for £5000. We are already discussing how we can multiply the sum to do something really effective with it. One idea is to produce a short video in several languages that can be played in airport waiting rooms of flights that depart to FGM practising countries so that members of such communities are fully aware of the legislation and human rights violations inherent in FGM before they leave the UK.

If you have any other suggestions, share them with us by calling Sarah on 020 8960 4000.

Gender & Reproductive Health In Northern Ghana

A major recent development of FORWARD's Gender and Reproductive Health has been the completion of a Comprehensive Baseline Survey on the incidence, causes, effects, and manifestation of selected gender and reproductive health issues, including non-education of the girl child, early/forced marriage, widowhood rites, domestic violence, child fostering, "sister-in-bed" and Kayayoo (girl street porters).

The survey revealed some disconcerting facts about female participation in education. Overall access to education and literacy rates were low for both men and women (42% and 28% respectively) but in one of participant communities 94% of adult women had never had any form of education. Participants attributed the low level of female participation in education to pregnancies/marriage, migration, lack of role models, poverty, modernity and traditional practices.



Members of a Widows Group at a meeting.

Other findings showed high incidence rates for domestic violence including insults (40%), refusal of food (18%), beating (15%) and forced sex (11%). Attributing reasons included alcoholism, gender role expectations, attitudes and poverty. The survey reported that 52% of women interviewed were victims of child/forced marriage.

An important customary practice is "tazaba" or "yiwienzaba" which translates as ('sister-in-bed'). Among the Gursi, Nankani and Kassena peoples, because women cannot inherit property "sister-in-bed" allows a family with no male children to produce some through a female mem-

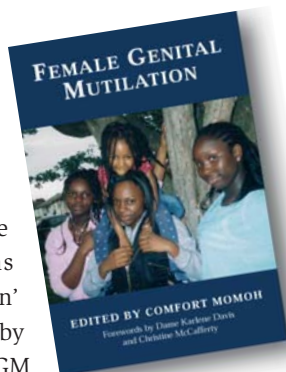
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New Publication On FGM

Female Genital Mutilation
Edited by Comfort Momoh

On Wednesday 9th November, the latest book on FGM was launched. 'Female Genital Mutilation' is a compilation of articles written by a range of people working in the FGM field and edited by Comfort Momoh (FGM Specialist Midwife).

Adwoa Kwateng-kluvitse (FORWARD



Director) contributed a chapter entitled *Female Genital Mutilation and Child Protection*. There are also contributions by a number of FORWARD associates. Mr Harry Gordon, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist (with whom FORWARD started the first ever

specialist African Well Women Clinic at Northwick Park in 1992)

contributed a chapter entitled *FGM: The*

Clinicians Experience. Former FORWARD intern Sadiya Mohammad wrote the chapter '*Legislative Action To Eradicate FGM*'. FORWARD is pleased to note that she started the research on this topic while based with FORWARD.

A full independent review of the book will be available on the FORWARD website soon. Copies of the book will be available for reference in the FORWARD office and can be purchased from all good bookshops and Radcliffe Publishing Ltd (on 01235 528820 or by email on orders@radcliffemec.com) for £19.95.

ber. A daughter is chosen to produce children with a cousin to maintain the family name and inherit property. The practice raises important questions concerning care and maintenance of the resultant children by single mothers, forced sexual relations and women's inheritance.



A student in Ghana welcomes the FORWARD Chairperson.

The survey recommends that education and poverty reduction should underpin all intervention strategies. Community ownership and commitment should be fostered by enabling men and women to become partners in promoting change.

Demands from communities and organisations for more workshops and radio discussions (currently being organised by the project partners - Association of Church Development Projects (ACDEP), Maata-N-Tudu (MTA) and Navrongo-Bolgatanga Diocesan Development Office (BDO)) - are just one indication that the project is having a significant positive impact on the lives of the communities it aims to reach. FORWARD has no doubt that this will continue to be the case for the coming years.

Recent Regional & International Developments

Maputo Protocol on African Women's Rights comes into force

FORWARD was delighted that on the 25th November the **Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa** entered into force, following the requisite fifteenth ratification. (Thank you Togo!)

The protocol affords a historic opportunity for the realisation of African girls' and women's human rights. In relation to gender based violence the protocol explicitly prohibits FGM and sets the minimum age for marriage at 18 years.



On November 25th, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, FORWARD issued a statement urging the other 38 African countries to become party to the Protocol, and calling upon civil society and the international community at large to exert pressure on African governments to uphold the rights of African girls and women.

Rabat Declaration on Children's Issues

In November in Rabat, Morocco, Ministers, politicians and religious and community leaders from almost 50 Islamic countries met for the first **Islamic Conference of Ministers in Charge of Childhood**. FORWARD is delighted with the resultant **Rabat Declaration**; "Guided by the teachings of Islam which stresses the need for taking due care of children and granting them their full rights" the Declaration calls upon Muslim States to "take the necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls and all harmful traditional or customary practices, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation."

We are excited about what appears to be increasing international acknowledgment that FGM is a violation of girls' human rights which is not justified by Islam. FORWARD urges all good Muslims everywhere to abandon the practice of FGM and to adopt the key principle enshrined in Sharia: "that all children in all situations always and everywhere have the right to live and thrive to reach their full potential."

Moolaadé

On **Monday 30th May 2005**, FORWARD was honoured to be invited to launch the UK Première screening of **Moolaadé**—an African film produced by the legendary Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene. The film, which won the Prize for Best Film in the Certain Regard section at the Cannes film festival in 2004, brilliantly tackles the controversial subject of FGM in Africa and depicts women's grass roots resistance to it.

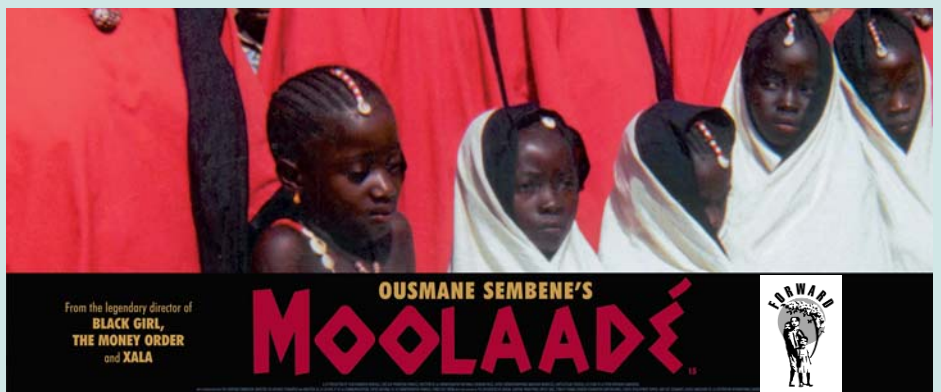
A panel discussion by development experts from around the globe followed the screening

and the opportunity was taken to launch the FORWARD FGM FUND. The funds collected will enable the scaling-up of the campaign to accelerate the prevention and abandonment of FGM in Africa.

FORWARD believes that **Moolaadé** is a great advocacy tool which can be used to draw international attention to FGM as a sexual and reproductive health and human rights issue and to promote positive change for women in modern day Africa. FORWARD has already started seeking funding to use **Moolaadé** with NGOs in Africa.



Founding Father of African Film Ousmane Sembene makes Adwoa's day signing her copy of Moolaadé.



Community Engagements

FORWARD has continued to expand our community work and in partnership with various community based organisations has run training sessions in England, Wales and Scotland. This includes working with men from FGM practicing communities, an area FORWARD intends to develop in the future.

FORWARD organised a Somali mixed group (women and men) training session in Birmingham and although initially both men and women felt that a mixed group was inappropriate, the day was a great success with participants referring to the session as a "good opportunity for both sexes to sit together and discuss FGM."

Following a training in Glasgow members of the Somali Women's Action Group told FORWARD: "We will kick off the campaign against FGM in Scotland and now it is up to the men to make up their minds and join us, we are not waiting for them!"

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FORWARD's joint paper against FGM with the UK Islamic Cultural Centre and Central Mosque is still on their website! To access the paper please visit:



www.cbservices.org.uk/newsandevents/updates/female_genital_mutilation

FORWARD'S Staff News

We are sad to say goodbye to two excellent members of the FORWARD team: Naomi Reid, Administrative and Finance Officer and Karen Proudlock, Programme Officer. We thank them for the valuable contributions they have made to the work of FORWARD and wish them all the best for the future.

FORWARD welcomes Sarah Fisher as a new staff member. Sarah joins the FORWARD team having recently completed an MA in International Studies for which she conducted research in Sri Lanka on gender based violence amongst tsunami-affected communities.

Sarah is delighted about the opportunity to work with FORWARD and excited about the challenges the new year will hold.

FORWARD would like to express our gratitude to the volunteers who have worked so hard throughout the year: Michael Coulston, Anastasia Polkovnikova, Michela Serri, Nuerki Oyortey and Sjanie Hugo.

Happy Holidays!

From the Staff & Council of Management at FORWARD

Volunteers WANTED!

FORWARD needs volunteers for a variety of tasks, including help with our resource library. If you would like to assist please call us on: **020 8960 4000** or email: **forward@forwarduk.org.uk** and leave your skills & contact details with us.

Like To Make A Difference? You Can!

- Help to promote awareness of gender-discriminatory practices. Why not write an article for a local magazine or newspaper or hold a discussion or seminar in your local area?
- Become a supporter of FORWARD. You could organise fund-raising events with family, friends or colleagues, or take part in a sponsored event.
- Write to your local MP to raise the issue of FGM. For example, ask for awareness-raising initiatives concerning the 2003 FGM Act amongst practicing communities.
- Become a Peer Educator and Community Mobiliser. Run information seminars at the community level to encourage communities to take action to discourage harmful gender discriminatory practices.

Or you can simply make a donation!



FORWARD

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Charity Reg. No 292403

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

We support the abandonment of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, and promote 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 support services for women affected by FGM and Child Marriage.

FORWARD Needs Your Support To Continue It's Valuable Work!

Help us stop discriminatory practices affecting African women & girls in the UK and Africa by becoming a sponsor today. To give a regular or single donation towards our work simply fill in and post the form below:

Yes, I want to support FORWARD's campaign to stop harmful gender based discriminatory practices. I wish to make a 1 off donation of:

£100 £50 £25 £10 £

Please enclose a cheque or postal order payable to FORWARD.

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 FGM Fund.

Banker's Order

Please fill in name and address section opposite

Please 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: _____

A Christmas Appeal

• Please note you must pay income or capital gains tax in the UK at least equal to the tax reclaimed on your donation. Declarations can be cancelled at any time.