

**F=ERWARD**

# ANNUAL REPORT

**2021-2022**



**CHAMPIONING THE RIGHTS OF  
AFRICAN WOMEN AND GIRLS**

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# REFLECTIONS

## FROM THE CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**F**or over 35 years, FORWARD has been fighting for the equal world envisioned by our pioneering founder Efua Dorkenoo: a world where African women and girls live with dignity, health and freedom from violence.

Despite the difficulties of the past two years, where the dual impact of Brexit and COVID-19 has made our work more challenging than ever, we have continued to achieve incredible things for the people who rely on us.

When crises hit, it's easy for those in need to slip through the net, and we have worked hard to ensure that the rights of African women and girls are not forgotten.

Adapting to online service delivery during the pandemic has enabled us to reach many women who would otherwise have been isolated due to travel restrictions.

Throughout the past years, our community champions programme went from strength to strength, as we worked with both new and experienced champions, supporting our COVID crisis response with vulnerable community women.

This is essential in our mission to continue producing community-based research evidence to inform policy and practice. In 2023, we will build on this evidence-driven approach to continue shaping the policy agenda for gender equality.

At FORWARD, we are committed to fostering young women's leadership skills, enabling them to champion women and girls' rights within their communities. To that end, the past year has seen us forging a new partnership with the young women-led ONYX Youth Hub and expanding our TuWezeshe programme in England and Africa. This programme is also partnering with the United Nations' UNFPA on the joint UN-EU Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women.

This report contains insights and stories of change, illustrating the range of interventions and specialist support we offer to help African women and girls thrive. It's an essential mission, and we will not relent in our goal to create sustainable change in the years ahead.

As ever, our work is only possible thanks to the incredible support of the generous funders and donors. Thank you all for helping us bring our organisational vision to life. We are especially grateful to the generous trusts and foundations who have provided us with new funding opportunities and helped us adjust existing funds in a time that continues to be challenging for charities.

To the Board of Trustees, staff and volunteers with whom we work at FORWARD, we truly value your continued commitment and dedication: without you, our vital work simply wouldn't be possible. We can't thank you enough.

**"With the imminent threat of lockdowns, it was essential that we continued to provide advice and support on FGM, forced marriage, domestic abuse, sexual violence and any other form of abuse affecting women and girls."**

## Resilience in the face of adversity: A note on the impact of COVID-19

It's no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented disruption to our way of life. But women from our African communities have felt the harshest consequences, with many facing challenges on every front, from suffering domestic abuse and financial strains to childcare barriers and the sudden need for home-schooling.

Anticipating the sudden difficulties, we quickly adapted FORWARD's services. With the imminent threat of lockdowns, it was essential that we continued to provide advice and support on FGM, forced marriage, domestic abuse, sexual violence and any other form of abuse affecting women and girls. When the UK's first coronavirus case was confirmed, we contacted our service users to ensure they could access all forms of support and counselling both online and via telephone.

This swift action was undoubtedly essential, but also costly, and we would like to thank everyone who responded to our emergency COVID-19 appeal. Your cherished donations helped us run our vital online chat service and counselling sessions, fund video and telephone support calls, and help women access specialist services that could otherwise have been suspended.



**Dr Titilola Banjoko**  
Chair, Board of Trustees



**Naana Otoo-Oyortey MBE**  
Executive Director

# ABOUT FORWARD

## OUR MISSION AND VALUES

### Our Vision

We are working for the day when African girls and women will live in dignity, are healthy, and enjoy equal rights free from fear of violence.



### Our Mission

We are an African women-led organisation working to end violence against women and girls. From female genital mutilation and child marriage to domestic and sexual violence, we tackle abuse and discrimination of all kinds, enabling African women and girls to have the dignity, health and equality they deserve.

At FORWARD, we believe in addressing individuals' challenges and the bigger, structural picture. For the former, we support affected women and girls on the ground by bringing together communities, developing skills and knowledge, and nurturing the young female leaders of tomorrow. On the latter, we work strategically to challenge and support decision-makers and practitioners, conducting community research, building partnerships and creating opportunities to transform lives.

For over 35 years, FORWARD has been speaking with one voice to safeguard the rights and dignity of African women and girls, wherever they live. Together, we're working to create a world free from violence for all African women and girls – and we won't stop until we get there.



### Our Values

#### Grounded

We're led by African women for African women. This means our roots and our hearts are in the communities we work with. They set our agenda, guide our decisions and sustain the change we create together.

#### Bold

We will always speak out about the issues that face African women and girls, no matter how uncomfortable some may find them. We've been doing it for over 30 years and we're not about to stop now.

#### Nurturing

We help African women and girls see their innate strength and dignity. So they can find the courage to lead, and create the change they deserve.

#### Trusted

We're open, honest and ethical in everything we do. We're incredibly dedicated to the communities we work with – and that's why we don't jump on bandwagons or get distracted by short-term trends. We stay true to our people and our purpose.

#### Equal

We're here to make sure the rights of African girls and women are upheld, their voices are heard and their lives valued – just like everyone else's.

#### Together

We believe that lasting change has to come from within. So we don't do top-down transformations. We work with people and partners at a local level, building on their insights and sharing our expertise. So that when we're gone, the change lives on.

# WHY FORWARD EXISTS

**L**ack of urgency to end violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the world's greatest injustices. Ongoing crises affecting the world from climate change to rising living costs are exacerbating pre-existing patterns and making a bad problem even worse. Beyond the fallout from COVID-19 is a shadow pandemic where the progress made on ending VAWG is unravelling, leaving our work at FORWARD more vital than ever.

One of the world's most widespread human rights violations, the UN defines VAWG as violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman, or violence that affects women disproportionately.<sup>1</sup>

Whether sexual, physical or mental, VAWG will impact **one in three** women in their lifetime, both re-enforcing gender inequality and directly harming the victims.

The landmark UN conference resolutions of the 1990s cast a much needed global spotlight on VAWG. But decades later, an alarming number of women and girls continue to endure multiple forms of gender-based violence, including female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, sexual assault, domestic abuse, trafficking and sexual exploitation.

<sup>1</sup> UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No.19, paragraph 6.

## Female Genital Mutilation

The WHO defines female genital mutilation (FGM) as "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons." A harmful practice with no health benefits, FGM can result in long-lasting physical, reproductive, emotional and psychological trauma. It can also kill.



# 2 MILLION ADDITIONAL CASES of FGM likely to occur due to COVID-19

(UNICEF)

# BY 2030, NEARLY 1 in 3 girls will be born in the 31 COUNTRIES WHERE FGM IS MOST PREVALENT

(UNICEF)

## Child marriage

Child marriage poses serious consequences for girls, including social isolation, domestic violence and complications in childbirth. In low-income countries, maternal-related complications are the leading causes of death amongst girls aged 15 to 19 years, according to Girls Not Brides.

Prohibited by international human rights law, the practice deprives girls of their basic rights to health, education and development, and often goes hand-in-hand with FGM.



**10**  
**MILLION**  
**ADDITIONAL**  
**CHILD**  
**MARRIAGES**  
may occur before the  
end of the decade due to  
**COVID-19**

(UNICEF, 2021)

## Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is violence or patterns of violence exhibited to control, coerce, threaten, intimidate or degrade a victim. The perpetrator is usually an intimate current or former partner, but cases have also involved relatives or carers.

The problem was exacerbated by COVID-19. In England and Wales between March 2020 and March 2021, domestic abuse cases rose by 6%, with a total of 613,929 reported incidents, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). For the majority of Black and minority ethnic women in the UK – especially those with no recourse to public funds – accessing essential services was extremely challenging during the various lockdowns.



**APPROXIMATELY**  
**620,000**  
**WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE**  
**SEXUALLY**  
**ASSAULTED**  
**EVERY YEAR**  
in England and Wales

(ONS)



**613,929**  
reported incidents of  
**DOMESTIC**  
**ABUSE**

between March 2020 and March 2021  
**IN ENGLAND AND WALES**

(ONS)

## Sexual harassment and assault

Sexual violence remains widespread in both the UK and Africa, affecting women and girls from all walks of life. From catcalling and workplace harassment to unwanted sexual touching and rape, sexual violence remains a huge societal problem.

In England and Wales, the latest ONS figures show that around 620,000 women and girls are sexually assaulted every year. But despite the spread of the problem, five in six women who are rape survivors avoid seeking justice due to misplaced feelings of shame or the fear of being disbelieved, according to Rape Crisis.

# HOW WE WORK FOR AFRICAN WOMEN AND GIRLS



## Policy and advocacy

We actively engage with policy advisors, local governments and international governing bodies to help them strengthen their actions in favour of women and girls.



## Participatory research

Our participatory research contributes to the growing evidence base on how to effectively combat VAWG.



## Young women's leadership

We deliver feminist leadership training to young women in the UK and Africa to boost their confidence, leadership skills and VAWG knowledge, enabling them to fight for their rights and freedoms. Our 11 Young Women's Advisory Council members also help us shape our creative youth programmes and engagement.



## Community engagement

We engage with local communities, providing safe spaces for members to come together and discuss issues related to VAWG. We train community champions and advocates, empowering them to become agents of change in the community.



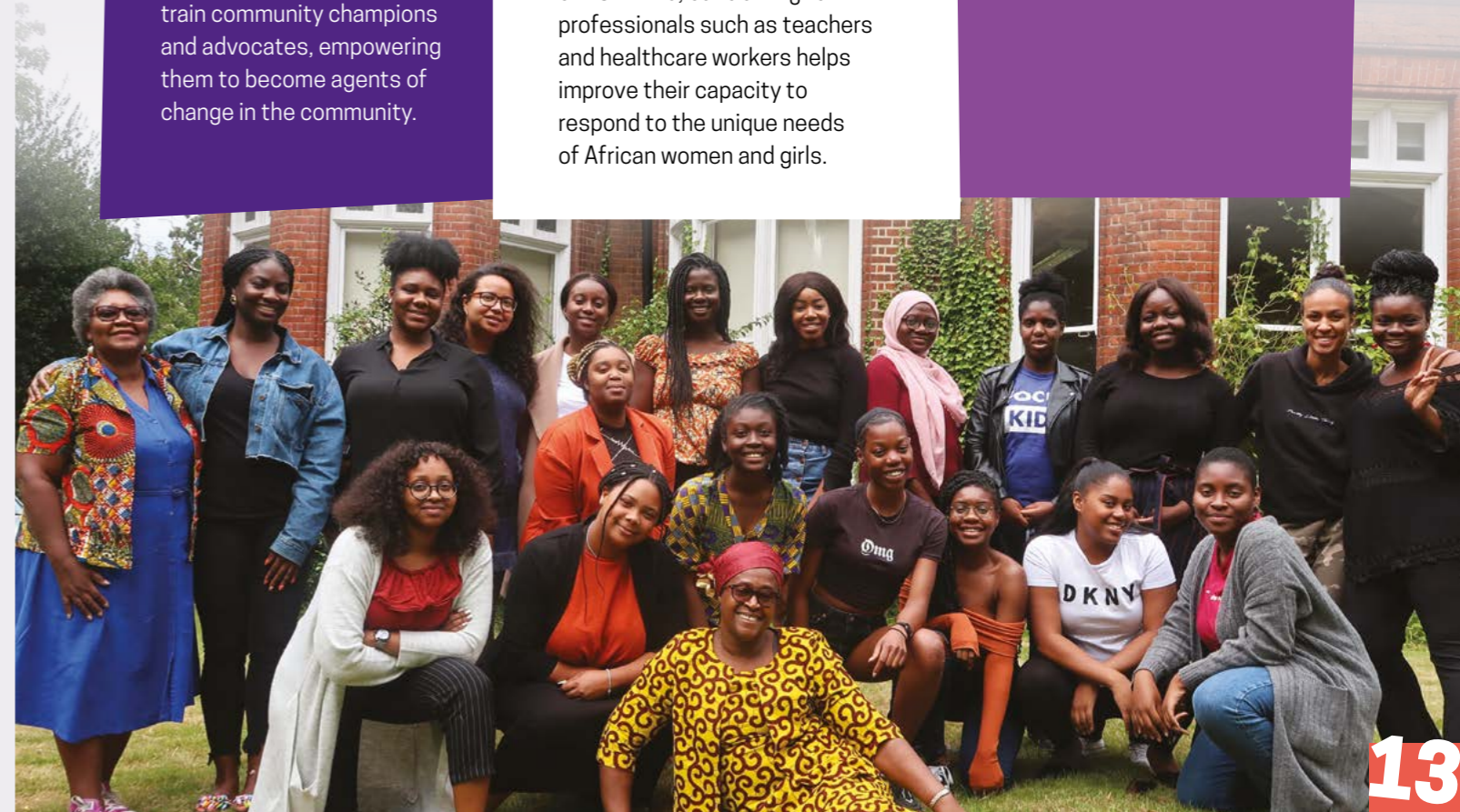
## Schools and professionals training

Our school workshops support students and educators to help them protect girls at risk of FGM. And, our training for professionals such as teachers and healthcare workers helps improve their capacity to respond to the unique needs of African women and girls.



## Specialist support services

We provide advice, one-to-one support and culturally appropriate counselling for women and girls affected by violence in the UK.



# INFLUENCING THE POLICY AGENDA FOR AFRICAN WOMEN AND GIRLS

**W**e've been advocating for African women and girls since the 1980s, when we campaigned tirelessly for the criminalisation of FGM in the UK. In the three decades since, we've continued our important work, embedding ourselves in communities to ensure that marginalised voices are heard and bringing about sustainable change – change visible both locally and in meaningful policy terms.



## Campaigning to make child marriage illegal in the UK

On 28 April 2022, our years-long policy campaign to end child marriage culminated in hard-won victory when the **Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill** passed its third and final reading in Parliament, before receiving royal assent in the House of Lords.

The bill protects children from child marriage in two crucial ways. Firstly, it removes legal exceptions which allowed children to marry in civil ceremonies at 16 with parental consent, increasing the minimum age to 18. Secondly, it criminalises any other ceremonies of marriage which take place involving a child, such as religious marriages.

This legislation change marks a significant milestone in eliminating harmful practices and protecting children's rights in the UK. We are delighted that such progress also symbolises the UK's commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and targets under UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 on harmful practices.

The end child marriage campaign was a partnership led by Pauline Latham MP, in collaboration with Garden Court Chambers, Dr Charlotte Proudman and the Girls Not Brides UK co-chairs – FORWARD, the Independent Yemen Group, Karma Nirvana and the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO).



## Engaging with policy makers to recognise holistic approaches to tackling FGM

In January 2021, FORWARD and the University of Huddersfield published a first-of-its-kind study, examining the lived experiences and impacts of the UK's FGM safeguarding policies.

Our **'Do No Harm' report**, looks at the legislative changes brought on by the amendments of the Serious Crime Act (2015), such as the Mandatory Reporting Duty of FGM, as well as accompanying safeguarding procedures in healthcare, education, and at the UK border.

Speaking with 38 African diaspora community members, and seven healthcare workers, teachers, and police officers in Bristol, we found that current measures were hamstrung by bias, profiling and an inflexible approach. These factors combine in a way that ultimately cause harm and make those at risk less likely to come forward.

In schools, for example, families with no intention to carry out FGM on their daughters sometimes faced unjustified scrutiny, and felt violated. Interventions in healthcare, meanwhile, were often seen as outdated with the presumption that girls born to mothers who had suffered FGM would inherently be more at risk.

Rather than reaching the heart of the problem, this heavy-handed implementation has led to families in Bristol feeling fearful, anxious and distressed. And, those tasked with rooting out FGM sense a disconnect from the communities they work with. Though the findings are limited to Bristol, the issues raised could well apply nationwide.

**"I think there is this idea of feeling stigmatised or discriminated against, [and] it could lead to [a] breakdown of relationships with professionals, be it healthcare or even teaching."**

– School Safeguarding Lead



**"[The policy] was designed to protect young girls. But it has been used to damage, to harass families, to profile the community, and that is very serious!"**

– Yusuf, man, Somali community

**"When children are going on holiday in the summertime, mothers face fear. The assumption is that you are going on holiday and you are doing FGM to your daughter. It's really the holiday that you were thinking about."**

– Asha, Somali community

### Key policy recommendations:

We are calling for an 8-year review of the Serious Crime Act 2015. FGM safeguarding procedures in medical care, schools, and at the UK border should receive special attention, both to improve effectiveness in tackling FGM and to eliminate distress.

Improved training for professionals is necessary – training that doesn't simply cover FGM and the safeguarding guidelines, but tackles potential biases and covers sensitive engagement with affected communities.

And, support should be considered for all families affected by FGM safeguarding, including legal, financial and emotional assistance as appropriate.

Finally, we emphasise that a top-down policy on FGM prevention can never be as effective as one that is community-centric. Involving communities in the design and delivery of safeguarding practices will help make solutions more sensitive, as well as highlighting the role everyone can play in ending FGM.



**Read the full report**

## Improving understanding of the policy needs of African women and girls during COVID-19

COVID-19 has exposed quite how unequal British society remains. Black and minority ethnic communities have been especially hard hit, while women have disproportionately felt the negative effects of both lockdowns and the subsequent economic pain. Black and minority ethnic women, of course, were impacted on both fronts.

In 2020, we launched a new study to examine the pandemic's impact on the lives of women from Black and minority ethnic communities in the UK, particularly those of African heritage. The research uncovered the unique difficulties faced by minority women in a pandemic-ravaged world.

Lockdowns and other public health measures have had a significant impact on African women's mental health. For the women we surveyed, 52% said that their mental health deteriorated during the pandemic. Lockdowns also disrupted women's relationships and support networks, with an alarming surge in domestic abuse reports and fewer avenues to pursue help.

Finances, work and living conditions were also likely to be a cause for concern. Many women surveyed faced a significant drop in household income, leading to worry over rent, mortgage payments and other debts.

The stay-at-home orders also impacted the quality of public services to which women had access. The responsibility to home-school fell disproportionately on mothers, while a lack of digital devices and stable internet access left many worrying that their children would fall behind academically. Meanwhile, remote health appointments proved a poor replacement for face-to-face consultations, especially for those without English as a first language.

Our research led us to several key policy recommendations for governments and local authorities to markedly improve the lives of Black and minority ethnic women. These include urgent financial and employment support for families affected during the pandemic; ensuring accessibility to digitised healthcare services; addressing digital poverty and the need for effective catch-up programmes for most-affected children; and funding for culturally appropriate mental health and domestic abuse services.

**“The pandemic made me feel very vulnerable and insecure. I’m usually very confident and outgoing, but the pandemic has changed the way I am.”**

– Salina, age 35-44

**“A friend of mine endured the worst financial harshness... Myself and the community had to step in to give them food and money to cope.”**

– Gloria, age 45-54



**“I have three children at the age of home schooling. This was challenging because there were not enough devices for all of them.”**

– Asma, age 45-54

**52%**  
**SAID THAT THEIR**  
**MENTAL**  
**HEALTH**  
**DETERIORATED**



**Read the full report**

# NURTURING YOUNG WOMEN TO BECOME RESILIENT LEADERS



**A**t FORWARD, we believe that building the capacity of the next generation of leaders is essential to combatting VAWG and achieving a sustainable, gender-equal world. Our young women's leadership programme, 'TuWezeshe Akina Dada' – Swahili for 'empowering our sisters' – seeks to inspire young African women to engage in both civil and political spaces and take collective action against VAWG.

FORWARD's transformational TuWezeshe programme has so far helped more than 300 young women fulfil their untapped potential as leaders in both Africa and Europe, empowering a generation of fresh voices in the fight against VAWG. Our recent TuWezeshe evaluation found the programme was highly effective, equipping participants with the skills to advocate for women's rights and effectively fight for change in their communities.

**300+**  
**YOUNG WOMEN**  
have been trained by the  
**TuWezeshe Programme so far**



**Watch the video**

**“I now value myself more and put myself first. Before the fellowship, I thought that was selfish of me. I also didn't think I was enough. But I am much more confident now.”**

- Wales fellow

# 90%

of young women say they 'value themselves more highly as a result of the TuWezeshe programme'

# 88%

of young women agree that they have become more resilient in the face of challenges and setbacks

Following the training, fellows' understanding of how social norms reinforce VAWG increased from 65% to...

# 88%

Following the training, Fellows' confidence to claim their human rights increased from 57% to...

# 90%



**“When I joined TuWezeshe I learned the true meaning of power, self-assurance, sisterhood, and leadership. The training helped me discover truths about myself and guided me through self-care. But most of all it taught me what it really means to be a leader and how I hold the potential of becoming a leader myself.”**

- England Fellow

**“I am more confident talking about gender-based violence. After TuWezeshe, I volunteered at a non-profit organisation and talked to boys and girls about gender issues, including violence. I built a lot of confidence to speak with others and defend my thoughts.”**

- Tanzania fellow

**“I used to justify violence against women. I would say things like, ‘Oh well, why was she there late at night?’ But after the training, I got to question my beliefs and to properly understand gender-based violence.”**

- Uganda fellow

# STORIES OF CHANGE

## Cynthia's story: Smashing period stigma

As part of the TuWezeshe programme, fellow Cynthia Pokuah hosted workshops with schoolgirls aged 11-14 years in London and discovered that many girls had limited knowledge about menstruation. Her answer was 'Something is Different This Morning' – a new children's **book** that challenges the social stigma surrounding menstruation and educates young girls about their periods and menstrual hygiene.

Launched on Menstrual Hygiene Day 2021, Cynthia's book informs children about periods through the eyes of Nyoka – a young black girl experiencing her first period. Joining Nyoka on her journey towards womanhood, Cynthia's book aims to empower girls to challenge menstruation myths, discuss periods with friends and teachers, manage stomach cramps, use 'period kits' and practice self-care. The book has received a very positive response and Cynthia plans on writing a sequel.



**“Periods are often spoken about in a negative light. It was important for me to create something that made girls look forward to starting their period and equip them with the right knowledge... I’m so grateful I had the opportunity to join TuWezeshe. I was able to be in an environment where my work, thoughts and passion were celebrated.”**

- Cynthia



## Praise and Sally's story: Using musical activism to end FGM in the Gambia

Our TuWezeshe training has inspired young female leaders in Africa, spanning across Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Somaliland. Last year, we ran our first TuWezeshe leadership training in the Gambia with our local partner Think Young Women, under the UN-EU Spotlight Initiative. Focused on creating long-lasting change for Gambian women and girls, we trained 25 fellows, providing them with sub-grants and mentoring support to run social action projects addressing FGM.

TuWezeshe fellows Praise Gimba and Sally Njie used their artistic and musical flair to create a powerful music video to raise awareness of the profound harms of FGM with Gambian artists Awa Bling and Maryama Cham. Striking a harmonious balance between traditional and modern musical styles, the song "Cut No More" uses English, Mandinka and Wolof languages to reach as many communities as possible. The message? FGM is illegal, harmful and a violation of human rights.

This incredible project makes a powerful call to stop FGM through the talent and creativity of young women, who are undoubtedly making history in their communities through their activism!



Watch the video

## Let's Talk Sis: The power of podcasting

In 2021, FORWARD and our Young Women's Advisory Council (YWAC) were proud to launch '*Let's Talk Sis*': a podcast for young Black and minority ethnic women to discuss important issues affecting their lives.

The series explored vital and culturally relevant topics related to VAWG, mental health, media representation and sexuality. Over the podcast's three episodes to date, the hosts have sensitively tackled controversial subject matter including race and citizenship, distorted notions of beauty, racialised fetishes and stereotypes, and the difficulty of navigating the international development sphere as African women.

This not only encapsulated the power of young women coming together to discuss important issues, but ensured the informative discussions were more accessible than ever.



# EDUCATING AND ENABLING COMMUNITIES TO LEAD CHANGE



**O**ver the past decade, we have trained 450 women across the UK to be community champions and peer educators. These brilliant women provide an invaluable lifeline to many in the diaspora community, raising awareness and tackling the stigma surrounding VAWG, as well as offering legal advocacy, service signposting and peer support to women and families who need it.

The women we trained have all made a significant difference in their communities, but have also gained invaluable leadership skills as well as the confidence to deploy them in the ongoing fight against all forms of VAWG.

When COVID-19 hit, we adapted and moved to digital engagement to maintain our support for the vital work our community champions deliver.

It was clearly the right thing to do. Our champions have been a vital channel for our effective response to the COVID-19 crisis, helping us create digital safe spaces and respond directly to the unique needs of women regardless of their location.

**450**  
women trained to be  
**COMMUNITY  
CHAMPIONS  
& PEER EDUCATORS**

**“Creating rapport with community members was really difficult in the beginning, especially when the lockdown started, because in our Somali community, we like to get together, handshake and talk with each other. So, it was hard for us to support people without seeing them. The Zoom thing was hard at first, but once we taught people how to use it, we had really amazing results. I spoke with some community members for hours!”**

– Community champion

**“I became a feminist because of FORWARD. I look at the role of women differently and all that because of the leadership training I did at FORWARD. We studied the role of women in society, and the facilitator trained us on why we do what we do and broke it down for us. This made me think a lot. I felt much empowered and I ensure my daughter is aware of this and is making her own decisions and not feel inferior to men.”**

– Community champion



# NURTURING CHAMPIONS ACROSS EUROPE

**A**cross Europe, migrant women face many obstacles in accessing culturally sensitive and tailored services. To tackle this, FORWARD teamed up with GAMS Belgium and Medico Del Mundo in Spain for the two-year ACCESS project. The fruit of this initiative included a training manual for community peer educators, as well as a resource on the “Standards for Community-based Services for Migrant Women Affected by GBV.”

In the UK, we trained 16 peer educators in Bristol and London to support migrant women affected by VAWG. Collaborating with our long-term partner, the Refugee Women of Bristol, our innovative programme provided an online chat forum, one-to-one support services and befriending support during the pandemic.

**“The ACCESS training course has been very helpful to me. [...] During the different workshops, each person was able to share their experiences, and this really had a beneficial effect. Tongues are no longer tied, and speaking has become liberated.”**

**- ACCESS participant**

**“It has been very good to connect with other peer educators. I appreciate the information on different types of violence that women can suffer. It also opened my eyes to see that, in one moment or another, in my life, I have passed through this kind of violence. And then take the courage to look for support, [and] share with other women in the future. It has been really informative.”**

**- ACCESS participant**

## Case study: Samira’s story

Samira\*, a London-based peer educator, spoke to us about what she learned from her experience of reaching out to over 250 women during the COVID-19 crisis:

*“My work as a peer educator kept me busy [during lockdown]. Helping women online made us forget the situation. I felt like I could relate to them [...] I was shocked to find out some of the things going on in my community.*

*The women we spoke to are really strong and intelligent, but they have husbands who are controlling. I discovered that women don’t have access to the right information, like their immigration rights and what to do during a divorce. I realised we needed to know more about women’s financial entitlements and how to support women on spousal visas.*

*At first, some women didn’t want to talk about [domestic abuse]. We had to assure them that it is safe, and we encouraged them to come online to chat. After the online outreach, we had so many women come forward, and even some men referred women to our space [...].”*

\*Real name changed to protect identity





# EQUIPPING PROFESSIONALS AND SCHOOLS TO SAFEGUARD WOMEN AND GIRLS



**O**ur accredited and tailored training equip professionals with the knowledge, skills and confidence to safeguard at-risk women and girls from FGM and other harmful practices. As well as training staff from leading children's organisations such as the NSPCC FGM Helpline and Barnardo's FGM Centre, we've trained over 4,000 teachers, health professionals, police officers and other frontline staff over the last decade.

The uniquely challenging set of circumstances presented by COVID-19 could have stopped this progress in its tracks. But by moving our accredited professionals' training programme online, we were able to continue our vital mission and trained more than **350 professionals** over the past year despite the restrictions.

WE'VE TRAINED OVER  
**4,000**  
TEACHERS,  
HEALTH  
PROFESSIONALS  
POLICE OFFICERS  
and other front line staff  
OVER THE LAST DECADE



"[Thanks to FORWARD's training], I have been made more aware of the issues and risk factors. We as professionals have to recognise harmful and discriminatory practices within the client group and in community projects. I found the training very informative."

- Training participant, faith-based abuse and breast-ironing session

**O**ur multi-award-winning<sup>2</sup> UK schools engagement programme is now ten years old. We are enormously proud to have delivered **over 2,000 FGM school sessions** across the UK, with over **36,000 young people** attending our FGM sessions in the programme's first decade.

Established to safeguard the rights of girls affected by or at risk of FGM, the programme raises FGM awareness amongst parents and educators, while giving students a safe space to discuss the harmful practice.

We do this through a wide range of age-appropriate and culturally sensitive sessions, training and workshops across primary and secondary schools, helping young people develop their ideas, gain skills and offer support to those at risk. We also offer safeguarding sessions for staff members and teachers.

**WE'VE DELIVERED OVER**  
**2,000**  
**SCHOOL**  
**SESSIONS**  
**across the UK**

**MORE THAN**  
**36,000**  
**YOUNG**  
**PEOPLE**  
**attending our**  
**FGM sessions**

**“We were so impressed with the passionate and well-trained FORWARD speakers and how they were able to talk in a sensitive manner and deal with questions around FGM to create dialogue.”**

– School teacher

## **Schools and Young People** **Speak out initiative:** **a 10-year review**

Our 10-year review of the programme showcased strong positive feedback from teachers, participants and project partners alike. Educators and students praised the programme for creating a safe environment where difficult topics could be discussed with assistance from highly capable facilitators. In most cases, the subject of FGM hadn't been broached in participating schools before, so the programme not only raised much-needed awareness but also helped to sensitively identify those in need of further assistance.

The feedback will inform and shape the next phase of our youth engagement work at FORWARD, but as the testimonies below demonstrate, the programme is off to a strong start.



**Watch the video**

<sup>2</sup> Community Health Development Award in the Health & Wellbeing Awards 2016. from the Royal Society of Public Health – RSPH. The Healthcare and Medical Research category award at The Charity Awards 2015



**“We were delighted that a group of our Year 8 students chose to deliver peer-to-peer work around FGM. We very much see our work around FGM and violence against women fitting within our safeguarding work in the school so that we ensure all students attend.”**

– School teacher

# PROVIDING SURVIVORS WITH CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SUPPORT

**A**t FORWARD, we work tirelessly to meet the unique needs of African diaspora women and girls affected by forced marriage, FGM, domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG. We understand the barriers that must be overcome to seek help, and outline available support avenues in a non-judgemental way. From one-to-one advice and counselling, to medical or legal referrals, we do our best to provide culturally sensitive support to all women and girls who need it.

During COVID-19, we knew that women would be hit the hardest. Many in isolation face increased risk of violence, and others with uncertain migration status will now face reduced access to economic, legal and health support. During the pandemic we provided fast one-on-one advice and support to more than 100 women from the African diaspora communities in the UK.

Knowing that national support initiatives often enforce a language barrier on those in need of assistance, our online help was offered in many languages including French, Spanish, Arabic, Somali, Tigrinya and Fula to ensure victim's needs weren't lost in translation.

**100+**  
**WOMEN**  
from the African diaspora  
communities in the UK  
**were provided**  
**fast one-to-one**  
**ADVICE &**  
**SUPPORT**

**“I was very depressed. I felt my life was worthless [...]. I sought support from FORWARD, through their online chat room. It was really helpful, and I found someone listened to me, advised me and referred me to counselling.”**

- Service user



## Wellness and advice workshops



Alongside VAWG, isolation can be a serious problem for African diaspora and migrant women, and our regular coffee mornings, online therapeutic sessions, legal advice clinics and wellbeing workshops continue to address both.

These events provide a safe space for women to share their personal experiences with others and receive invaluable advice from specialists. Topics covered go well beyond FGM and domestic violence, tackling everything from sexuality and sexual health to children's mental health and gender dynamics.

During the pandemic, our sessions naturally addressed topics especially relevant to COVID-19. These included practicing self-care in isolation, universal credit, identifying signs of control and abuse, and understanding rights and options under family law. These sessions helped women across the UK, with participants logging in everywhere from Cardiff to Birmingham.

Our workshops proved so effective that not only have some attendees introduced friends and family to FORWARD events, but others have been inspired enough to enrol as community champions themselves, raising awareness and offering help to those at risk of VAWG in their own communities.

**“Coffee morning is good because it brings women together and break isolation, and helps women to leave their home for some time to talk to other women from a similar background. [...] I have exchanged phone numbers with others, and we have since spoken on the phone many times and made arrangements to meet at various women spaces.”**

– Service user

## FGM Clinics

FORWARD helped to found several of England's eight National FGM Support Clinics via training and other support services. During the pandemic, our FGM health advocate continued to provide high-quality and culturally sensitive outreach work and support to women accessing the Hibiscus FGM Clinic in Brent. Over the last year, 32 women were supported by FORWARD's FGM health advocate at the Hibiscus clinic.

**32 WOMEN**  
**were supported by**  
**FORWARD'S**  
**FGM HEALTH**  
**ADVOCATE**  
**at the Hibiscus Clinic**  
**in the last year**

**“Before I came to FORWARD, I had depression and trauma from my FGM... Following the therapy with FORWARD, I felt a lot of change. I felt understood. There are times when you can't heal from physical things, but FORWARD has given me life.”**

– Service user



# FORWARD PARTNERSHIPS

**F**

ORWARD believes that sustainable change can only come by working with people and partners at a local level. Across all our programmes, in both the UK and Africa, we build strategic partnerships with women-led or women-focused organisations and frontline professionals working in affected communities, in order to achieve our shared dream of ending VAWG.

We support our partners' organisational needs through capacity building, financial support, advocacy, campaigning, research, network building, monitoring and evaluation.

## UK & Europe

Angelou Centre  
End FGM European Network  
Girls Not Brides  
Home Girls Unite  
Keep the Drums, Drop the Knives (KDDK)  
La Fraternite  
ONYX Youth Hub  
Refugee Women of Bristol

## Africa

African Women's Diaspora Network  
Akili Dada  
Akina Mama Wa Afrika (AMWA)  
Children's Dignity Forum (CDF)  
Girl2Girl Empowerment Movement  
Think Young Women  
Wadada Centre for Solution Focused Approach

## UN

UN-EU Spotlight Initiative  
UNFPA

# ANNUAL FINANCES

## Financial Statement 2021-22

	2021-22	2020-21
<b>Incoming Resources</b>		
Donations	57,764	64,669
Grants Receivable	955,880	728,272
Other Income	27,465	32,501
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,041,109</b>	<b>825,442</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Fundraising	6,036	7,795
Charitable Expenses	807,928	683,370
Governance	4,000	4,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>817,964</b>	<b>695,365</b>
<b>Net Incoming Resources</b>	223,145	130,077
<b>Reconciliation of Funds</b>		
Total Funds brought forward 01.04.21	350,067	219,990
Total Funds carried forward 31.03.22	<b>573,212</b>	<b>350,067</b>

## Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2022

	2021-22	2020-21
Total Assets	963,832	<b>565,537</b>
Less: Liabilities	(390,620)	<b>(215,470)</b>
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>573,212</b>	<b>350,067</b>
<b>Represented By:</b>		
Restricted Funds	96,243	<b>51,650</b>
Designation Funds	211,421	-
Unrestricted General Funds	265,548	<b>298,417</b>
<b>Total Charity Funds</b>	<b>573,212</b>	<b>350,067</b>



# THANK YOU

We would like to say a huge thank you to the following organisations for their generous support, funding and donations to FORWARD over the period covered by this report:

Act for Change  
Charities Aid Foundation  
City Bridge Trust  
Comic Relief  
Creatures of XIX  
Dr. Martens Foundation  
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation  
European Commission- Daphne Initiative  
February Foundation  
Gaskell & Wilkinson  
Lloyds Bank Foundation  
London Borough of Ealing  
London Councils  
Ministry of Justice  
Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime  
National Lottery Community Fund  
Schwab Charitable Fund  
The London Community Foundation  
The Tudor Trust  
UN Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate VAWG  
Wallace Global Fund



# TRIBUTES

## Hanna Ahmed

We are deeply saddened by the loss of one of our community champions, Hanna Ahmed. An extremely talented and resourceful community activist, Hanna worked tirelessly for Refugee Women of Bristol and volunteered for many charitable ventures pertaining to refugee women and families until her untimely passing. She will be greatly missed by FORWARD staff and the many people she helped.

## Dr Yunes Ramadan Teinaz

Dr Yunes Ramadan Teinaz is sorely missed by FORWARD staff following his passing in April 2020. A public health doctor of Libyan descent, Dr Teinaz was a fellow of the Royal Society for Public Health and a FORWARD board member for many years.

He was instrumental to our work on debunking myths about religion and FGM, and invaluable in our work with the Muslim Council of Britain producing a statement on FGM and Islam. But beyond FORWARD, he was known for his tireless work with local governments and ethnic minority communities to enforce food safety standards and health legislation. We celebrate his many achievements, but especially cherish his unwavering support of our work to combat FGM.

# OUR TEAM

## Staff

Naana Otoo-Oyortey, MBE  
- Executive Director

Toks Okeniyi -  
Head of UK Programmes

Adwoa Kwateng-Klavitse - Head of  
Global Advocacy and Partnerships\*

Amy Abdelshahid - Head of Evidence  
and Knowledge Management

Mary Otuko - UK Programme Manager

Wossenyelesh Kifle -  
Programme Development  
and Partnerships Manager

Fosdicka Crankson - Finance  
and Operations

Rita Janani - Finance and  
Fundraising Assistant

Yvette Robbin-Coker -  
Training and Development  
Coordinator

Sahar Zeinelabdin  
- Training Assistant

Katie Capstick - Communications  
and Digital Fundraising Assistant\*

Grace Livermore -  
Operations and Research Assistant

Chido Chirimuuta -  
Research and Evaluation Officer

Rutendo Mhonda -  
Research Assistant\*

Odunayo Oluwadare -  
Schools and Youth Programme Officer

Tirivashe Jele - Schools and  
Youth Programme Assistant

Mahasin El-Hasan -  
Community Support Officer\*

Parese Hibbert - Floating  
Community Programme Officer

Eshraga El-Shaikh - Senior  
Community Programme Officer

Samah Mohamed -  
Community Support Worker

Tagwa Ahmed -  
Community Support Worker

Rania Elbashier -  
Community Support Worker

Tirhas Gebreyesus Mebrahtu -  
Community Support Worker

## Trustees

Dr Titilola Banjoko- Chair

Dr Lisa Smith - Treasurer

Dr Sakaria Ali

Sarah MacDonald

Julia Klein

Joy Fraser-Amosun

Aniesha Obuobie

## Young Women's Advisory Council

Bimpe Lawal

Anjeli Shah

Catherine Onoselase

Wumi Fagunwa

Junayna Shei

Elise Crawford

Agatha-May Akora

Francess Okia-Anie

Nafisa Jones

Mayowa Osadiya

Sherifat Adeniyi

Nkechi Adeboye

Basma Kamel

# HOW TO SUPPORT US



Our amazing supporters allow us to continue championing African women's and girls' rights and inspiring young African women to become change-makers in their communities. More donations mean more learning sessions in schools, more training for healthcare professionals and increased awareness about FGM in the communities that need it.

You can support us by volunteering with us, **donating** to us on our website, and fundraising for us through our **JustGiving page**. Please email us at [forward@forwarduk.org.uk](mailto:forward@forwarduk.org.uk) for further information.

**Thank you for  
your support.**

\*Former FORWARD staff for the period covered by this report



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Instagram: [@FORWARDUK](https://www.instagram.com/FORWARDUK)

LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/company/forward-uk/](http://www.linkedin.com/company/forward-uk/)

Registered Charity No: 292403 Company Number: 01921508