

THE OPENING

Fighting FGM through drama in Amudat District



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A close-up, profile view of a woman's face, showing a pained or distressed expression. Her eyes are closed, and her mouth is slightly downturned. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light, possibly from a window or natural light source.


NANGIRO PRISCILA NAKOLIO (40YRS)
farmer and member of Natukuman drama
group from kamikithen village, lochengenge
parish Amudat district

In Lochengenge village, a 43-year-old Nakolio Priscilla Nanagiwo was one of the people who endured the cruelty of the knife before she could be regarded as an adult. Lochengenge village is part of the Lochengenge parish, of Amudat sub-county, in Amudat District. In the past, Priscilla had been a major advocate for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Today, she is an agent of change, championing the end of what she can only describe as a painful and dehumanizing experience.

“Everybody was surprised when I openly started talking to members of the community and calling for an end to FGM; they thought that it was a joke, until I mobilized fellow community members and we started a drama group to educate our people on the dangers of FGM.”

Female genital mutilation is not only a disturbing practice, but it also makes the woman hate herself. She hates herself because FGM often results in challenges such as fistula and difficulties in childbirth. The practice is also associated with the narrowing of the woman's vagina and the surgeons in collaboration with the woman's paternal aunt use a horn to forcefully widen her vagina, as a way to pave way for easy penetration by the man or her husband.

Priscilla is known as a community activist and has been trained by Communication for



Development Foundation Uganda (CDFU). She reached out to fellow women within the community, including a surgeon, who is now reformed and a member of the Natukuman drama group. The group is made up of 14 women and 1 man, and through their skits and dramas, they deliver the message of change to the people in the area, mainly targeting the Pokot community.

One can tell that on a very personal level, Priscilla is enjoying the benefits of being trained because it not only empowered her to do the work in the community, but it also gave her the confidence to approach and engage her husband and speak out about the future of their family. She is very proud that the husband is making efforts to reduce alcoholism, fighting, and returning home late in the night.

The cultural practices in Priscilla's community put women in compromising situations because marriage, in that area, is associated with parting with many cows and men tend to feel powerful once they have paid the bride price, as if they have now earned the right to do as they please with the newly acquired property – the woman. Bride price in the Pokot community ranges between 40-50 heads of cattle and these are paid to the woman's family. This practice reduces women to slaves since a woman must, on arrival at

her new house/home, do all household chores, grow food for the home, brew alcohol for the husband, in addition to providing money for the husband's drinking outside of the home. The situation is made worse by the fact that the woman, going forward, has no say in the decisions made for the home.

In this community, the practice of paying many heads of cattle for dowry has led to many girls dropping out of school at a very early age and forced into marriage by their families, who are in search of dowry. Some of these girls are married off before they even experience their first menstruation.

Priscilla feels that there is more that needs to be done, including holding dialogues with the youth, community elders, and religious leaders so that they too can understand the importance of working together to end violence against women in Pokot.

"Going out to more members of the community through barazas is one of the best ways to reach the people thus creating a great impact on the ground." Barazas are community dialogues. Priscilla is also focused on raising support to facilitate the drama group's movement throughout the area and community, as well as and having more spot messages on radio to raise awareness.