



USAID
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TANZANIA

SUCCESS STORY

Reaching Womanhood in a New Era

Community welcomes girls into adulthood, leaving behind a traumatic tradition



Photo: Dan Craun Selka, PACT

Foibe and her mother are enjoying a new era of womanhood in Dodoma, Tanzania.

“I was slaughtered like a chicken and I didn’t want my daughter to go through the same,” said Lucy.

Fourteen-year-old Foibe walked proudly out of a red plastered hut, leading a line of other girls to join a group of men, women and children in dance to celebrate their coming of age. Adorned in their new black cotton robes, Foibe and her friends elegantly swung their heads and shoulders, smiling shyly to the crowd.

Today, they have reason to smile. After seven intense days of training, the girls have officially entered adulthood. More important, they have been spared the agony and trauma of female genital mutilation that typically is a rite of passage for Gogo girls of Tanzania’s Dodoma region. Their parents decided instead to allow the community’s respected elderly women to teach them the traditions, practices and responsibilities of a Gogo woman.

“I feel very lucky today,” said Foibe. “I have been spared all the pain which other girls have gone through. I have heard the stories associated with cutting. I’m really happy I don’t have to go through it.”

Genital mutilation is a brutal and unsanitary act that often results in infections, the transmission of HIV/AIDS or death due to shock, hemorrhage or septicemia. USAID is working with Women Wake Up, a Tanzanian organization, to end traditional practices that endanger the lives of women and children by advocating and conducting information campaigns that employ songs, dances, videos, public meetings and radio broadcasts.

After attending one of these meetings, a Gogo *ngariba* (the person who performs the mutilation) agreed to try an initiation without cutting. The girls were trained away from their homes by elder women, and at the end of the seventh day, the community came together to celebrate the successful transformation of their daughters. “I’m happy we decided to include our daughter in the group,” says Lucy, mother of 7-year-old Neema, who also was initiated. “I was slaughtered like a chicken, and I didn’t want my daughter to go through the same.”

While female genital mutilation is illegal in many African countries, it often goes unreported and is widely practiced in inaccessible villages and remote places. USAID and Women Wake Up hope to expand their campaign to other areas where genital mutilations continue to destroy the lives of countless girls and women.