Ineffective Outsiders to Effectively Changing Local Norms

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Topic

For this paper, I intend to discuss female genital mutilation (FGM) and the Global Media

Campaign to End FGM. I will focus on two main aspects of this program, if it is effective, and if

it is recreating colonial structures or providing a genuine benefit.

Thesis

This paper will argue that the Global Media Campaign to End FGM is ineffective as it is not

specified to individual communities, and is structured in an inaccessible way and that for

campaigns like this to be successful and effective they should prioritize the expertise of locals,

create programming on a community level, and use this programming to increase the

independence of women.

Paper Structure

Introduction

Background on FGM

    1. What are the different types of FGM

    2. Where does FGM primarily occur

    3. What are the dangers that FGM causes

        a. Medical issues

        b. Gender inequality issues

Background on Global Media Campaign to End FGM

    1. What are the goals of the campaign

    2. How are they being measured

3. What actions is this organization taking

4. What other organizations are working in a similar area and on the same issues

Why this organization is ineffective

1. It is not specified to individual communities

   a. Each community has different beliefs and practices surrounding FGM

   b. They also have different methods of performing the procedure and language surrounding it

   c. There are many different communities within each African country, as colonization did not necessarily keep communities together, or separate

   d. This organization programs on the national level, and thus is not able to target the specific motivations, beliefs, practices and languages surrounding the procedure making their programming less effective

2. It is not structured in an accessible way

   a. It does not allow for diologue between the activists, and the individuals involved in FGM

   b. This programming may cause individuals to proclaim to be agaisnt FGM, but continue to practice it, thus driving the practice underground where it is less safe and cannot be monitored

   c. The forms of transmission of information may struggle to reach more rural locations, which have the highest prevalence of FGM

How to be successful

1. Prioritize the expertise of locals

    a. Studies demonstrate that campaigns are the most effective when they target the local elites, so targeting these populations and changing their values can help to change the values of the greater community

    b. Locals can help activists to understand the specific community motivations for FGM and help to design targeted programming

    c. This can avoid re-creating structures of colonialism where outsiders tell locals what to do, which can make them increasingly resistant to change

2. Create programming on a community level

    a. Most of the programming done by activists occurs in areas where they are the least resistant to change, often urban areas. These are also often the areas where FGM happens the least, and they are the least needed. Targeting communities where it occurs more frequently can help the most girls

    b. This can help to create diologe within a community and allow them to understand the dangers of FGM in a cultrually relavant way

    c. FGM is perpetuated as it is seen as a cultual norm that and if girls do not follow they will be excluded from the community. Targeting a community and making it no longer a cultural norm will make it possible for girls to resist FGM

3. Use programming to increase the independence of women

    a. FGM is often preformed by women in the community and it is their source of income

    b. Girls often undergo FGM for fear of being unable to get married if they do not, and marrige is how they survive

c. If alternative forms of income were provided women would not have to perform this procedure to survive, and if they were more independent the fear of not being able to marry would be less pressing

Conclusion

Annotated Bibliography

Cloward, K. (2016). *When norms collide : local responses to activism against female genital mutilation and early marriage.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Cloward discusses the norm conflict that exists between international norms which see FGM as dangerous and local norms which see FGM as an important rite of passage. Cloward argues that programs designed to eliminate FGM should be conscientious of this fact and have frequent contact with locals to understand their motivations, communicate and convert local elites, and run sustained intensive programs. Cloward warns against running programs or creating laws that may motivate individuals to proclaim to be against FGM for ulterior motives, as it often results in underrepresented rates of FGM and it being practiced increasingly underground. I will use this report to examine the potential structural issues within the media campaign.

World Health Organization. "Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An Interagency Statement." *World Health Organization,* 2008. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27929.

This is a report from the World Health Organization (WHO) which provides an overview of the medical and cultural impacts of FGM. WHO outlines that this procedure is typically performed on girls aged 0-15 and is often a part of a coming of age ritual. Girls who undergo this procedure may experience complications such as include infections, decreased sexual enjoyment,

psychological consequences, PTSD, increased dangers for childbirth and chronic pain. Girls who do not undergo this procedure may face stigmatization, rejection from their communities, and may be unable to marry. I will use this report to provide background information on FGM and to outline why FGM is culturally important, and thus needs to be targeted in a culturally relevant manner.

Berer, Marge. "The History and Role of the Criminal Law in Anti-FGM Campaigns: Is the Criminal Law What Is Needed, at Least in Countries Like Great Britain?" *Reproductive Health Matters* 23, no. 46 (2015): 145–57. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rhm.2015.10.001.

Berer discusses the impact and effects of legislation designed to make FGM illegal. Berer discusses how it is difficult to prosecute individuals for FGM as it is often done secretly, and supported by the community. There are also low conviction rates for those arrested for FMG as it is often still widely accepted. Additionally, there is a fear of further criminalizing the procedure as this is likely to push it further underground, and make it more dangerous for the girls that undergo it. Berer suggests that effective measures to decrease the prevalence of FGM include community-led education initiating dialogue with communities that practise FGM and awareness-raising of the dangers of performing this procedure on girls. I will use this article to refute the common argument that legislators are in the best position to end FGM and to discuss how the Global Media Campaign needs to premote conversations, not shame in order to be effective.

Varol, Nesrin, Ian S Fraser, Cecilia H. M Ng, Guyo Jaldesa, and John Hall. "Female Genital Mutilation/cutting - Towards Abandonment of a Harmful Cultural Practice." *Australian & New*

Zealand Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology 54, no. 5 (2014): 400–405.

https://doi.org/10.1111/ajo.12206.

This paper argues that FGM is considered a violation of the rights of a child in terms of their

right to life, the right to be free of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, the right to

equality and non-discrimination based on gender. Additionally, while this act is considered

violent by the international sphere, the communities that perform it do not intend violence and

are reluctant to classify it as such. They argue that the most effective method of eliminating FGM

would be to increase the independence of women. This practice is often performed by other

women, and thus they have an interest in continuing it as it forms their source of income.

Additionally, many mothers subject their children to it due to fears that they will not be able to

marry. If women were more independent they would not need to rely on FGM procedures for a

source of income, and not being married would be less frightening as they would be

self-sufficient. I will use this article to critique the narrow nature of programs such as the global

media campaign and suggest that they would be able to provide more effective and long-lasting

results if they took a broader approach to women's rights in the communities they are working in.

Solati, Fariba. "A Postcolonial Feminist Critique of Development Studies." *Gendering*

Globalization Globalizing Gender. Edited by Gul Çalişkan. 126-141. Don Mills: Oxford

University Press Canada, 2020.

This chapter discusses the development programs implemented in previously colonized

countries. It discusses how these programs were often just the continuation of unequal relations

of power and continued exploitation which increases inequalities between the global north and

south. It argues that while women are disproportionately affected by this uneven development,

that they are not waiting for activists from the north to save them from their societies. I will use this chapter to discuss how programs relating to FGM need to avoid re-creating structures of colonialism whereby they believe that their norms are the correct ones, as well as allow locals to solve local problems without undue meddling.

Clowater, Ruth. "The Historical Role of Christianity/Theology in Colonialism and Its Continuing Influence on Racism, Gender, and Othering." *Gendering Globalization Globalizing Gender.* Edited by Gul Çalişkan. 94-109. Don Mills: Oxford University Press Canada, 2020.
This chapter discusses how colonialism was legitimated through the Christian church. It remarks how Chritisnas used the Doctrine of Discovery, and the Curse of Ham to justify their treatment of the citizens of the nations that they colonized. They also encouraged them to adopt Christian culture as they viewed their own culture as superior. I will use this chapter to discuss how programs that aim to change the values of previously colonized nations need to be careful to avoid assuming that their own culture is superior and instead recognize the value and importance that the native culture provides.