

Unicef: Support needed to end female genital mutilation

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The Unicef report says progress to reduce female mutilation is slowly being made

Intervention programmes to end female genital mutilation (FGM) can only succeed if they address the needs and wishes of the community, a report says.

UN children's organisation Unicef has released a report on ways in which communities can be encouraged to end the practice.

The report looks at five African nations and at the prevalence of mutilation elsewhere. Unicef regards FGM as a major human rights violation.

Girls who suffer it endure pain and, often, years of ill health, it says.

An estimated three million girls and women in Africa are at risk each year - but interventions from Western aid agencies motivated by outrage are unlikely to succeed, Unicef says in a new report.

Communities which practise FGM often believe they are doing the best for their daughters, the report points out.

'No quick fix'

Parents fear their daughters will be ostracised, or remain unmarried if they do not undergo FGM.

"A family's decision to practise or abandon FGM/C is influenced by powerful social rewards and sanctions," said Gordon Alexander of Unicef.

"Understanding the diverse social dynamics that perpetuate FGM/C is changing the way in which abandonment is approached. There is no one answer, no one way, and no quick fix. But there is progress. These efforts need to be scaled up to bring change in the lives of girls, now."

In the five African countries surveyed - Egypt, Senegal, Sudan, Kenya and Ethiopia - the most successful projects aimed at ending FGM built up local trust by reinforcing positive aspects of local culture, and they incorporated development projects into their work with local communities as well.

This takes time, Unicef says, and changing long-standing social behaviour will not happen overnight.

Nevertheless, in each of the five countries, rates of FGM are falling slowly, it says.

Attitudes towards the practice are changing too: a [Unicef film on video-sharing website YouTube](#) shows that, increasingly, women say they think the practice should end

In communities which have abandoned FGM, parents now say their main reason for doing so is because they want the best for their daughters.