Armed gangs in Kween forcibly mutilating girls

By Betty Amamukirori

A dark cloud is hanging over Kween district. Armed gangs have for the past two months been terrorising communities and are forcefully mutilating girls.

Multiple sources, including Members of Parliament from the Sebei region, told New Vision yesterday that since December 1, last year, communities in Kween are living in fear, watching helplessly as their daughters are dragged out of their homes and subjected to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in broad daylight by the menacing gang.

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Done in broad daylight

Lawrence Cherp Mangusho, the Kween County MP, described the act as a “brutal uprising”, whose trigger he does not know.

He said it started as a stealth act done at night, but steadily progressed to being done in broad daylight under the watch of everyone, including the Police.

“At first they were doing it at 3:00am, 4:00am and before we knew it, they had gathered courage and were doing it openly at 8:00am,” he said.

The gangs move in groups of about 100 people, wielding pangas, sticks and other sharp instruments, which they use to threaten whoever tries to stop them, he added, explaining that the local authorities and Police are watching on helplessly as the gangs brutalise the young girls.

“It is so bad. It is like an uprising and I do not know what is causing it. My phone is buzzing, I get calls every day that girls are being forced undergo circumcision and marriages, take place.

He explained that male circumcision takes place only in even years and before FGM was outlawed, female circumcision could take place even during odd years.

Other districts affected

New Vision has learnt that other districts in the region are also affected, though not at the same magnitude.

Reuben Paul Chelimo, the Kongoisis County MP, said since December 1, nine girls have suffered genital mutilation. Two of the girls were arrested for denying undergoing the act.

“When we took them to hospital to verify their claims, the medics confirmed that they had been mutilated. So we arrested them and their parents. They are in court. The circumciser is still in hiding,” Chelimo said.

He said the most affected area is Riwo sub-county, which has low levels of education and high poverty levels. The only primary school available is 20km away and there is no secondary school.

When Police tried to intervene, they charged at them and overpowered them,” the legislator added.

Another source, who preferred anonymity said at one time a female Police officer tried to intervene, but the gang threatened to circumcise her too.

Sources on ground estimated that over 100 girls have been forcibly mutilated since December 1, 2018.

Mangusho said the district authorities gazetted December 1 to December 31 as a month for cultural festivities in Sebei region because it is a time when everyone is at home. During the month, activities, including circumcision and marriages, take place.

However, he revealed that the Government has been losing sh96b a year paying for cultural festivities in Sebei region, who are openly encouraging Female Genital Mutilation through social media groups, such as FGMs, the Kween County and Sebei Development Initiative. “The elite Sabiny are promoting it, yet they should be the ones leading the campaign against it,” he said.

ELITE FUELLING FGM

The sub-county also borders West Pokot in Kenya and the borders are porous. Chelimo said the illiterate communities are taking advantage of the porous border to hire Transfrontiers from Kenya to conduct the outlawed act.

Each surgeon charges between sh76,000 and sh111,000 for each girl.

The vice had reduced, but I do not know why it is resurrecting,” he said.

When contacted, the Bukwo District Woman MP, Evelyn Chemutai, denied knowledge of any act of FGM in Bukwo, insisting that it is only happening in Kween district.

Museveni directs URA to install cargo scanners at border posts

By Henry Sekanjako

President Yoweri Museveni has directed the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) to install cargo scanners at border posts across the country to tax evaders by traders.

Speaking during the commissioning of the sh19b,849,523,130,000 worth of a magnificent building is equipped with the latest technology.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), FGM has physical, health and psychological consequences on the women.

The consequences include fear of sexual intercourse, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, increased risk of cervical cancer, severe bleeding, infections and infertility. The act interferes with the natural function of a girl's body.

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Police deploys in Kween to fight genital mutilation

By Betty Amamukirori

A team of crime intelligence officers have been dispatched to Kween district to counter the sudden upsurge of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Rogers Taitika, the Sipi region Police spokesperson, has said.

“We have redeployed crime intelligence officers from Bukwo and Kapchorwa to reinforce the team in Kween. They are now camped in the district to ensure the perpetrators of this act are dealt with,” he said.

Speaking to the New Vision yesterday, Taitika acknowledged that the crime had been going on, but that they had not received any complaint from the residents.

“We have not received any complaint at Kween Police Station. These people think FGM is part of their culture and hence they see no need to report it,” he said.

Taitika said the tough penalty stipulated in the 2010 anti-FGM law has driven most of the communities into silence, with many choosing to shield the perpetrators from prosecution.

“They look at the penalties under the law and weigh it against their culture, they opt to shield the perpetrators,” he said.

In Bukwo district, Taitika said the situation is normalised when one of the perpetrators was arraigned in court and sentenced to five years in jail on December 12, last year.

Old women leading gang

The New Vision has been receiving reports from Kween district that gangs, led by older women, are forcibly mutilating girls under the watch of the local leaders and Police.

Sources on ground that preferred anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, said the gangs are armed with machetes and threaten to kill whoever tries to intervene.

The sources say menacing gangs move in a group of over 100 people and the older women lead the pack, while armed men follow to provide security.

Finance and Planning Minister, David Bahati, confirmed to New Vision on Saturday that the heinous act started on December 1, last year.

According to the Ministry of Finance and Planning, the government has allocated Shs 82 billion to tackle the FGM issue.

In order to tackle the issue, the government has deployed police officers to Kween district to counter the sudden upsurge.

Superstition

Explaining the upsurge, Diana Kagere, the communication and advocacy officer at the Centre for Domestic Violence prevention (CEDOVIP), said FGM is cherished among the Sabiny and considered a rite of passage for women.

“There are many stereotypes about the practice. There is a belief that women who are not cut are promiscuous and have bad omen,” Kagere said.

She said there is also general discrimination of those who are not cut. They cannot take up leadership positions, are regarded as the cause of poverty, disease, among other bad things.

Alain Sibenaler, the UNFPA representative in Uganda, noted that the upsurge does not mean that the communities have suddenly forgotten the far reaching consequences of FGM and it does not erase the milestones made in the fight against it.

“We have over 200 communities that have abandoned the practice to date. The prevalence has also come down from 1.4% in 2011 to 0.3% according to the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS),” he said.

Sibenaler said they have dispatched a fact finding team to Kween district to counter this upsurge.

Injuring girls

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), FGM is a procedure that intentionally alters or causes injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It involves partial or total removal of the external female genitalia.

WHO notes that FGM has physical, health and psychological consequences on the women and can sometimes lead to death.

Due to the dangers it poses to the natural function of a girl’s body, it was internationally declared a human rights abuse.

In Uganda, efforts have been made by the international organisations, civil society organisations, government and faith-based organisations towards ending the practice.

What is driving FGM in Kween?

By Benjamin Mark Sabilia

Reports say between December 2018 and January 2019 girls and women who have undergone FGM are in the range of 400 in Kween district alone. What has shocked communities and local leaders is the ferocity with which FGM has taken place — in broad daylight and without fear of the authorities.

“We all believed FGM was dead and buried. I have not seen any girl or woman undergoing the practice at least in the last 20 years. However, this year has taken me by surprise. In fact estimates from the Bunyanyi area indicate that close to 76 girls/women have been cut,” Fed Tsoin, a resident of Kwobuxi I, Bunyanyi town council, said.

But what is driving this upsurge?

Witchcraft

A source alleged that cases of FGM in Kween district are due to witchcraft. “There is a woman — an FGM surgeon, who moves with herbal medicines. Whenever she sees any uncircumcised woman, they become hypnotised and go crazy until the genitalia has been cut,” the source says.

Peer pressure

For one to be taken for an adult, according to the Sabiny tradition, one must have been circumcised, irrespective of the fact that he is a man or woman.

“The Sabiny take circumcision seriously. It is what qualifies one to be an important member of society. In fact one cannot become a leader if they are not circumcised. They are not even allowed to speak in a public place... Whoever wants to be a leader in FGM must always have this in mind,” says Edward Kissa, an elder from Ngene sub-county and a Bible translator.

Superstition

According to a local leader, who preferred anonymity, the bulk of those who were circumcised in the 2018-19 season are married women who go to girls under 18.

“They believe the reason why they have not been married is because they are not circumcised, and that had they been circumcised, they would be enjoying happy marriages,” he says.

Police laxity?

According to the Kween district Police commander, Deina Musunguzi, they do not have any culprits in their custody. “We had to wait for the gravity of the problem and losing lives. If we had used our powers to intervene, several lives would have been lost. The community worked together and whisked the victims. By the time we arrived, they were nowhere to be seen. All evidence was destroyed. However, for future incidents, we have called in some reinforcement from the UPDF. We are more prepared this time round,” Musunguzi says.

Vision Group TV stations to air liberation movie ‘27 Guns’

On the eve of the National Resistance Army (NRA) 33rd Liberation Day anniversary, Vision Group TV stations will air the 27 Guns film.

“All the four television stations will broadcast the movie on Friday, January 25, 2019 at 2:30pm. A repeat will be on Saturday, January 26, 2019,” said Donatus Walungama, the group’s media manager.

Vision Group’s Uganda’s leading media house, boasts of four television stations— Bulekede TV 1, Bulekede TV 2, TV West and Urban, an English channel which targets the youth audience.

About the movie

The 27 Guns is a biopic based on true events of Uganda’s liberation struggle. The relay of the film will give the viewer a story of a young man and his group of young idealists, who left all to fight for salvation of the nation.

The young men, led by President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, set off with little more than discipline and courage, buoyed by the indomitable spirit of an oppressed people and launched a protracted guerrilla war.

Museveni organised the National Resistance Movement and National Resistance Army (NRM/NRA) to oppose the tyranny that previous regimes had unleashed upon the population.

A small group of fighters on February 6, 1981 armed with 27 guns and pistols, attacked Kabamba Military Barracks, launching an armed struggle against the regime of then president Apollo Milton Obote.

The movie tells the five-year guerilla warfare that climaxes with the overthrow of government in January 1986. The historical movie was produced by the First Daughter, Natasha Karugire and her sister Diana Museveni Kamuntu stars in it. She plays the role of her mother, Mrs Janet Museveni.

The character of the youthful president (Museveni) is actor Arnold Mubangizi, Joshua Ssebulime; Nuwewenka plays a young Salim Saleh (Gen. Caleb Ssekito and his translator). The president’s brother.

Kabamba remains a landmark in the five-year liberation war as a place where the first bullet was fired to cause change through armed struggle by a small group of daring fighters.
Police arrest 19 in Kween for aiding genital mutilation

By Betty Amamukirori

Nineteen people have been arrested for aiding and abetting Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Kween district.

According to Rogers Taitika, the Sipi region Police spokesperson, these were arrested on Monday night during a joint operation by the Police and Uganda People’s Defence Forces (UPDF).

Taitika said out of the 19 arrested, 16 were men and three women. One of the women, Irene Cherop, 50, is being accused of mentoring the girls and preparing them for mutilation. She is also believed to be the ringleader of the group.

The Police refused to divulge details of the remaining 18, saying they are still investigating, but sources say some were dancers during the violent processions.

Residents join fight

“On Monday, we opened a general inquiry file and residents have been stealthily coming here to avail us with information regarding the whereabouts of the perpetrators,” Taitika said.

He said although they are still interrogating the suspects, they have already gathered enough evidence from the communities pinning them on abetting the crime and that they are going to prosecute them under the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2010.

Under the Act, abetting FGM attracts a maximum jail sentence of seven years.

Armed gangs

The arrests follow New Vision’s exclusive report on gangs that have been terrorising villages in Kween district and forcibly mutilating women. The gangs move in groups of about 100 people, led by older women, while the men, brandishing machetes, follow at the back.

The practice started on December 1, 2018. Over 400 women, mostly the married ones, have been mutilated.

Sources on ground say the gang took advantage of the male circumcision season to cut the women. December is the gazetted month for circumcision in the Sebei region and for men, it is always done in the even years.

Before FGM was declared a crime punishable by law, the women and girls as young as 12 years would undergo the cultural practice each year, unlike the men who were confined to only even years.

Some of the areas where the practice is pronounced include Kosir sub-county, Binya town council, Kapchorwa sub-county and Kaproron town council.

During the exercise, the suspects were identified, bringing the New Vision’s 2018 Top 40 under 40 competition to an end.

Kwen County MP Manqusho Speaker Kadaqa

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), FGM is a procedure that intentionally alters or causes injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It involves partial or total removal of the external female genitalia. WHO notes that FGM has physical, health and psychological consequences on the women and can sometimes lead to death.

In Uganda, FGM has been rampant in the districts of Kapchorwa, Bukwo, Kween, Nakapiripirit, Moroto and Amudat, with the beginning age being 12 years.

Bad practice

Kween County MP Manqusho Speaker Kadaqa

Women stigmatised

The government has promised action plan to combat FGM.

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Arrests

Outlawed

Discrimination

Police arrest 19 in Kween for aiding genital mutilation

Trouw Nutrition to sponsor Harvest money expo

By Joshua Kato

As excitement about the 2019 Harvest Money expo grows, Trouw Nutrition, a Netherlands-based livestock nutrition group has come on board as one of the sponsors of the 2019 expo.

Trouw is sponsoring the expo through their local products distributor - Champirsa International Limited.

The Harvest Money expo starts on February 15 up to 17 at Mandela National Stadium, Namboole in Wakiso district.

Over 200 exhibitors have booked space to exhibit at the expo. According to the organizers, gates open at 6:00am and close at 6:00pm. Visitors will pay sh10,000 for a tour of the exhibition, sh10,000 to attend all the day’s training sessions.

“We have decided to be part of the expo because of the value it adds to the agricultural sector,” Samuel Swagagude, the technical sales manager of Trouw Nutrition Uganda said.

Other sponsors of the expo so far include the Embassy of the Netherlands, dfcu Bank, Adrites and Abi-trust.

About Trouw Nutrition

Trouw Nutrition is a global leader in animal nutrition and is part of the Nutreco Group of Companies. Trouw has been at the heart of the animal nutrition business in the world since 1931, producing nutritional products and supporting them with tailor-made models and services in poultry, ruminant, swine and fish production.

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Sabiny blame upsurge in FGM on unfulfilled promises

By Betty Amamukirori

The Sabiny have blamed the current upsurge of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the districts of Kwen and Bukwo on unfulfilled promises by the Government and non-state organisations.

The locals say that when the Government and organisations such as Action-Aid Uganda and Reproductive Health, started the fight against the practice, a lot of promises were made, but never fulfilled.

"These people came here, asked us to form women groups with promise of empowering us financially. We did all this, but all we got were sodas and biscuits on each visit. So, we went back to our old ways," says Eunice Chelimo, a mother of three.

Chelimo says they even collected money in order to register their groups and named the groups to Reproductive Educative and Community Health programme (REACH), a local civil organisation, but nothing was done.

Moses Nyokos, the assistant Resident District Commissioner, says the traditional circumcisers were promised grinding machines, through which they would earn income, but government failed to fulfill the promise, prompting them to go back to mutilating girls, which procedure earns them between sh30,000 and sh$20,000 per girl.

The locals say they were promised schools, but only the school the Government built was Kwoisi Girls' Secondary School, where education is not free.

"Money to fight FGM does not reach the villages, it is shared by a few people at the district. We are charged sh$250,000 per term at the only girls school we have in Kwoisi. People are frustrated and have decided that we continue with our cultural practices," says Ambrose Bomet, a farmer.

He says a few people benefited when the REACH programme started. However, in its fourth year, they would only give sh$500 to each person on each visit.

Stephen Barnan, the secretary for the government of Kamuli, says the locals blame the campaign against FGM to the locals, does not reach the intended audience.

"A teacher by profession, I have had no energy to move around with the campaign against FGM," she said.

The locals say other districts carry it out without posters.

The locals say that once their men realise the practice is bad, they will support their decisions not to get involved in FGM.

Pokot girls take an oath against FGM during Culture Day celebrations in Kwen district in 2010

BETWEEN THE LINES

Government passed the Prohibition of FGM Act in 2010.

According to the Act, one gets a maximum of 10 years imprisonment for committing the offence and seven years for abetting it.

FGM practice disguised

Although FGM became more pronounced recently in Kwen district, activists against the practice say other districts carry it out without being noticed.

In Kapchorwa, girls are allegedly disguised as boys and circumcised together to avoid being caught. In Bukwo district, the women are taken to Kenya for the procedure. They say in Bukwo they use Kenyan traditional circumcisers who are paid approximately $50 (about sh180,000) for each woman.

The most recent Demographic Health Survey (DHS) puts national prevalence of FGM in girls and women (aged 15-49 years) at 1.4%.

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Health Survey (DHS) puts national prevalence of FGM in girls and women (aged 15-49 years) at 1.4% (DHS, 2011). But in north eastern Uganda, a 2017 UNICEF survey found a prevalence of 27%.

Anti-FGM campaigns

Government and NGOs have been working tirelessly in the three districts to ensure that the practice stops.

ActionAid, one of the organisations that has a branch in Kapchorwa, has even built a shelter for sexual and gender-based violence victims.

However, the campaign, according to the locals, does not reach the intended audience.

Traversing trading centres and political offices, one sees no sign of an anti-FGM campaign. There are even no posters.

The locals say most of them have been left out in these campaigns. They say they mostly listen to Kenyan radio stations, which do not have anti-FGM programmes.

"When you call a meeting in the village, you need posters to explain the gravity of the practice, but we do not have financial support," a resident says.

He says the fight against FGM is failing because the local leaders spearheading the anti-FGM campaign are committed to their custom and only pretend to denounce it because they hope to get some money.

Risk of FGM practice

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), FGM involves female genitalia using unsterilised blades.

It has physical, health and psychological consequences on the women. These include over bleeding that can lead to death, infections, permanent disability, increased risk of cervical cancer and infertility.

The locals believe that with the education of girls, economic empowerment and mass sensitisation, the practice can be stopped.