

# FGM is a brutal relic that must be eliminated, not revered

IT is both tragic and deeply ironic that communities in Uganda and the rest of East Africa still cling to practices like female genital mutilation (FGM), a ritual rooted in gender inequality and violence against women.

FGM, which is the partial or total removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons, was banned in Uganda in 2010 due to its negative life-changing physical and psychological consequences. However, the vice continues in pockets of the country, perpetuating cycles of harm under the pretext of tradition.

FGM is both a cultural relic and a violation of fundamental human rights. The World Health Organisation classifies it as a form of gender-based violence, linked to severe health risks, such as haemorrhage, infection, infertility and lifelong psychological trauma.

The law criminalises the practice, recognising it as a crime against humanity. Globally, over 40 countries have banned FGM, yet an estimated two million girls still face it annually.

Clinging to FGM indicates a refusal to evolve beyond harmful pre-colonial norms that devalue women's bodies and autonomy. Cultures are not static; they must adapt to uphold dignity and equality. Traditions that endanger



## EDITORIAL

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lives must be redefined as criminal acts.

The proposed East African Community (EAC) Elimination of FGM Bill, which advocates 10-year jail terms for repeat offenders and penalties for healthcare providers complicit in the practice, is a step toward ending this atrocity.

Uganda has reduced FGM prevalence to below 2% through legal frameworks and community sensitisation by the Government, civil society organisations (CSOs) like Akina Mama wa Afrika, and international partners.

However, gaps remain, as some communities evade laws by crossing borders to neighbouring countries, exploiting regional free movement policies. This calls for harmonised laws, border surveillance and regional intelligence sharing to close these loopholes.

Perpetrators must be held accountable. FGM is illegal, and those who perform it, whether traditional cutters or healthcare workers, risk severe penalties. Authorities must enforce these laws rigorously, while complementing punitive measures with education. Sensitisation campaigns must engage men, elders and religious leaders, who often promote the practice.

Soft approaches, including mentorship and dialogue, are important, but so are hard consequences, including tiered sentencing, deregistration of medical professionals involved and protection for whistle-blowers. Equally important is addressing modern threats like online promotion of FGM, which spreads misinformation and normalises violence.

FGM's eradication is dependent on collective courage. Communities must reject the myth that tradition justifies harm. The Government and CSOs have laid a strong foundation; now, every Ugandan must champion this cause.