



**EXPANDING
SOCIAL
PROTECTION**

The Senior Citizens Grant helps me to fight Female Genital Mutilation in my community





Abraham Egwaluk and his son Musa Kreninyo.

My name is Abraham Egwaluk. I am 70 years old. I have been the Local Council I chairman of Atirir Village in Amudat Sub County, Amudat district for the last 20 years. I had 4 wives, unfortunately one passed away. I have 14 older children; 6 of these are girls and 8 are boys. I have younger children but in my culture younger children are not counted because they are not considered people yet, until they grow up and can make their own decisions. I am a beneficiary of the Senior Citizens Grant.

Over the years, I have seen how women suffer from the effects of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). I have seen young women die from over bleeding or infections, following circumcision. I have seen women struggling to give birth and die in the process because of the mutilation. People always ask why we men in this area marry many wives. The reason is that both we and our wives, who have been circumcised, share bad experience during intercourse because of the pain they go through. So our wives encourage us to marry other women. Because of this, we also end up having many children.

As a leader and member of this community,

I see that men occupy a special position in society where they can influence the end of this bad practice of FGM. For example, when our daughters want to go for circumcision, traditionally, they are required to come to ask us the fathers to give them permission and our blessing. After the girls are circumcised, we the fathers, are the ones who organise a ritual in our culture called, *Sakwapochemeri*, where we organise a feast for the community to come and celebrate the circumcision of the girls. It is also we the fathers who organise for the marriage of our daughters by negotiating and receiving the dowry. All of these are good opportunities for us to fight against the practice.

As fathers, we have a role to play. I do this starting from my own family – and out to the wider community. With support from the Government of Ireland, the National Women Association of Uganda (NAWOU) have organised us into a local activist group for fighting FGM known as Community Based Action Teams (COMBATs). So I am a COMBAT. In my own home, I encourage all my sons not to marry circumcised women.

The reason I do this is to show that contrary to our culture that denigrates girls who have

not been circumcised, I want to build the understanding and confidence that uncircumcised girls can be married and make good wives. Besides, both husbands and wives in such a marriage enjoy good sexual relations. The women's reproductive health is good and lowers risk for both mother and child during birth. Besides, most men who marry women who have not undergone FGM have only one wife and fewer children, so they are more progressive in society.

The money I receive from the Senior Citizens Grants, though little helps me a lot. I use it to support my children, especially to pay for them to go to school. I also use this money in my mobilisation work because I use it to repair my bicycle with which I am able to go to different places in the villages to create awareness against FGM. During the same visits, I monitor the communities to see if there are any parents who have performed FGM in hiding, so that I can report them to the police so that they can be arrested.

The Senior Citizens Grant also provides me a good opportunity because every time we go to receive our payments at the pay points, I get a forum where I talk to fellow older persons- both women and men to stop the practice. We older persons are important in

this fight. The older women are the surgeons who cut the girls. If we can convince them to stop the practice, then nobody will cut the girls. We the older men can also play our role by stopping to approve our girls from going through the practice. We should take our girls to school and keep them in school.

We need to continue creating more awareness in the community against FGM. Before, we were living in the bush, we thought we were doing the right thing, but now we have been conscientised, we have seen how bad FGM is. We need the elders to continue talking to the younger ones so that they stop this practice. I am also happy that now there is a law that outlaws FGM. This law has helped us because it provides for punishment for those who are caught perpetuating the practice.

In my community of Atirir, because of these efforts, we have not had a case of FGM in the last 5 years. As a community, we encourage our boys to marry only uncircumcised girls. We are working together with our boys who are now also COMBATs.

As told to Simon E. Omoding, translated by Merab Alosikin



COMBATs in Atirir.

Note: COMBATs is a village level initiative of community mobilisers against FGM in the Karamoja region in eastern Uganda. COMBATs was initiated by the National Association of Women Organisations of Uganda (NAWOU)- a women NGO network, with funding from the Government of Ireland. The Senior Citizens Grants is a social grant programme implemented by Uganda's Ministry of Gender, Labour & Social Development under its Expanding Social Protection Programme. Under this scheme, older persons receive a monthly grant of US\$ 25,000 (US\$8). The social protection programme is funded by the Government of Uganda, Irish Aid and UKAid.



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