

**TITLE:**  
**DYNAMICS OF TRADITIONAL PRACTICES:**  
**THE CASE OF *TUMNDO NE***  
***LEEL*: A COMING OF AGE CONCEPT AMONG**  
**THE KALENJIN COMMUNITY OF KENYA**

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**DYNAMICS OF TRADITIONAL PRACTICES: THE CASE OF TUMNDO NE  
LEEL: A COMING OF AGE CONCEPT AMONG THE KALENJIN  
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**BACKGROUND**

**FEMALE CIRCUMCISION IN KENYA**

Female circumcision as referred to by many writers is practiced by more than 50% of Kenya's ethnic groups. Several attempts have been made since 1940s to end the practice without success. However, current approach of introducing Alternative rites of passage by various sub-ethnic groups is likely to yield positive results for change.

The Keiyo are a sub- ethnic group of the Kalenjin Community, which practice female circumcision as a rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood. The Keiyo believe that as the boy is circumcised to graduate to manhood, the same should apply to the girl who will be married by the man after circumcision. The Keiyo of the past did not marry uncircumcised women since it was not only a taboo but was also considered as a case of immaturity by not only individuals but by the community as a whole. Taboos restricted uncircumcised women from giving birth, getting married and even indulging in sexual intercourse with circumcised men. Socially, women's sexual behaviour was deemed to be controlled by cutting of the clitoris to reduce libido. The purpose of a women's sexual organ was meant for procreation and not sexual pleasure while the male organ served both purposes.

Kenya banned the practice of female circumcision in 1990 (Danida, 1996) through a presidential directive but has continued to be carried out secretly. In most of the communities that practise the rite, it is observed that more often than not, the victim has no right in deciding whether or not to be circumcised. It is usually the parents or grandparents who decide or sometimes the society; therefore the subjects are unaware of the consequences of the operation. Pressure from the peers, in-laws and husbands also influence uncircumcised married women to undergo circumcision, through pressure from age-mates the newly married women secretly seek circumcision in order to keep their marriages.

Circumcision was about pain endurance and perseverance in preparation for future responsibilities. The psychological preparations given to the girls during pre-circumcision times psyched the initiates to accept and look forward to the operations notwithstanding the pain accompanying it. The singing and the decorative materials, the strong encouraging and cheering messages from women and men made the girls brave and determined to withstand the pain of going through the long process of actual circumcision. The process includes pulling the clitoris and stinging it with leaves of a nettle plant locally known as *Siwot* or *Kimilgichet* that caused a swelling of the clitoris. The application took several hours with such a strong pain that some initiates fainted during the process. This was followed by the actual cutting of the entire clitoris and surrounding tissue of labia minora and labia majora after smearing it with flour to create a firm grip.

It has been established that the practice is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Surveys carried out in Machakos, Nyeri and Embu districts in 1996 revealed that most

reasons why people traditionally practiced female circumcision no longer apply. It was established that female circumcision did not change the behaviour of women and most respondents considered that the practice is backward, has outlived its usefulness, has no tangible benefits and promotes useless pride in the initiates, (Radeny, et al 1996).

According to Fedders and Salvadori (1979), the Kipsigis who form the largest sub-ethnic group of the wider Kalenjin community consider circumcision for both men and women as a re-birth through initiation by act of circumcision since the rite is considered very important event in the life of a Kipsigis. Likewise all the other Kalenjin sub-ethnic groups, the Keiyo included, believe that circumcision is an outward symbol of change of attitude and behavior of an individual, a transition from childhood to adulthood.

Arguments have been put up against the rite because of the health problems faced by women and girls, but the deeply rooted cultural beliefs have persisted in support of the practice.

### **CLASSIFICATIONS OF FEMALE CIRCUMCISION**

Female circumcision is classified into four broad types or categories by a World Health Organisation, 1995 report as follows:

**Category I:** Clitoridectomy - Excision of the prepuce with or without excision of part or the entire clitoris.

**Category II:** Excision - Excision of the prepuce together with partial or total excision of the labia minora.

**Category III:** Infibulation - Excision of the prepuce and clitoris together with partial or total excision of the labia minora and stitching up except the vaginal opening.

**Category IV:** Unclassified but including:

- a) Pricking, piercing or incision of the clitoris and/or labia.
- b) Stretching of clitoris and/or labia.
- c) Cauterisation by burning of the clitoris and surrounding tissues
- d) Scraping of the vaginal orifice or cutting of the vagina.
- e) Introduction of corrosive substances or herbs into the vagina to cause bleeding or with the aim of tightening or narrowing the vagina respectively.
- f) Any other procedure that fall under the definition of female circumcision given above.

The Keiyo circumcision falls under categories I and II that is, clitoridectomy and excision. The type depends on the circumciser and the amount of tissue she could get hold of due to the slippery nature of the organ. Flour was used to reinforce the grip in order to excise tissues as much as possible.

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS ASSOCIATED WITH FEMALE CIRCUMCISION**

Some of the social beliefs and cultural factors that have sustained the practice of female circumcision include:

- To reduce sex libido in a bid to prevent promiscuity
- To enhance sexual pleasure for the husband provided for by the tightened skin surrounding female genitalia.
- Cleanliness around the vulva where there is a constant formation of gland secretion which gives foul body odour.
- The cutting off of the clitoris, which symbolises the physical separation of childhood
- To qualify for marriage
- To conform to tradition
- For beauty and aesthetic reasons
- Serration of virginity which is checked during circumcision
- Some believe that the clitoris is a dangerous organ that can kill a baby during delivery
- Some believe that it curtails sexual pleasure due to frigidity.
- The clitoris is considered a source of defiant sexual behaviour such as lesbianism.

## **DISMISSED SOCIO-CULTURAL BELIEFS ON FEMALE CIRCUMCISION**

Both experience and studies by Dr. Susan Chebet 2007 unpublished thesis show that the beliefs held by the various communities on the practice of female circumcision are just myths.

### **TABOOS**

The beliefs are reinforced and propagated through taboos placed on the various aspects of the female genitalia and reproduction. The taboos hinge on childbearing by uncircumcised woman with the myth that the clitoris kills the baby and yet no baby has ever died.

### **SEXUAL PROMISCUITY**

The cutting of the clitoris is believed to reduce sexual the urge of women. This has been proved socially that circumcised women become sexually over active as they try to get sexual satisfaction. Sexual desires are originate from the brain and not the clitoris.

### **ENHANCED SEXUAL PLEASURE FOR MEN.**

This is derived from uncircumcised women. Most men marry circumcised women for social prestige but maintain sexual partners outside marriage for their sexual pleasures.

### **AESTTETIC AND HYGINE**

The aesthetic and hygienic issues be achieved without cutting of the clitoris through maintaining of general hygiene.

### **CONFORMING WITH TRADITION**

This can be achieved through the rite of passage Programmes designed to replace female circumcision and promote initiation which is deemed necessary for graduating girls to women as demanded by traditions of specific societies.

### **PICTURE OF A GIRL UNDERGOING CIRCUMCISION**

The act of circumcision is quite painful and a girl is pinned down to allow the circumciser perform the operation. Crying or struggling is considered with contempt as it is a sign of cowardice which is discouraged by norms of society. The crowd standing witness the courage of the victim to withstand extreme and unbearable pain. The intimidating crowd humiliate the girl if she cries. If she does they sing in praise of her as they celebrate with locally browed liquor.



## **CHANGING THE APPROACH**

When campaigns in the past failed and advocacies did not convince the practicing communities to accept change, various strategies were developed as means of ending the vice. One of the strategies that seem to have survived the conservative communities is the Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) approach evolved by *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake* Organization in 1980's and 1990's. The approach though yielded little success did not fizzle out. The impact has not been felt as anticipated by the elite and the church because custodians of culture who are stakeholders did not own the approach. The ARP was treated with suspicion and described as alien which did not accommodate the values of society. It lacked the cultural component which formed the basis of the traditional initiation in the past. The new approach also did not take into consideration the specific values that are unique to particular communities. These and other differences have costed the proponent of the new approach acceptability and sustainability, taking advocates of change back to the drawing board.

The result is the localization of the ARP to give it a cultural and community specific look to serve as a rite of passage complete with initiation (teaching) and public ceremony which simulate the traditional practice except for the circumcision. A structured programme serving as curriculum has been designed for the purpose and this has enhanced acceptability for adoptability for instance among the Kalenjin community where the customized ARP in the name of *Tumndo Ne Leel* has been piloted among the Keiyo successfully.

The Kalenjin localized approach dubbed *Tumndo Ne Leel: A Coming of Age Concept* is ready for replication in other Kalenjin communities which number seven in all with a population of over 4 million people. It is expected that the new practice will be adopted as a cultural practice superimposed on the old one so that future generations will know no other practice but *Tumndo Ne Leel*. The approach can be customized to other cultures

successfully, since societies borrow a lot from each other in terms of traditions and practices.

The approach has major inter-related components which include community sensitization, dialogue, seclusion for initiation (training) and colorful graduation (coming out) ceremony which serve as public declaration that girls have crossed over from childhood to adulthood.

### **COURSE OUTLINE OF *TUMNDO NE LEEL* CURRICULUM**

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| <b>Unit One</b>   | Taboos, virtues, morals and ethics enhancing understanding and harmony in the community. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taboos are regulatory devices of society in the past</li><li>• Place of taboos in the present</li></ul>  |
| <b>Unit Two</b>   | Rites of passage and their importance to the individual and the society. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Function of attaining transition to adulthood</li><li>• Function of attaining marriageable status</li><li>• Provide social stratification of age-set</li></ul> |
| <b>Unit Three</b> | Traditional practices. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relevance of traditional practices today</li><li>• Consequences of abandoning positive traditional values</li></ul>  |
| <b>Unit Four</b>  | Initiation rites. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Blending of traditional values with modern values.</li><li>• Social norms</li><li>• Cultural values</li><li>• Education and development issues</li></ul>  |
| <b>Unit Five</b>  | Children and women Rights. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Responsibility of parents for their children</li><li>• Responsibility of the state for children-Vide Children's Act</li></ul>  |
| <b>Unit Six</b>   | Continuity and change in cultural traditional practices. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What values to retain from our culture</li><li>• Change and modernity</li></ul>  |
| <b>Unit Seven</b> | <i>Tumndo Ne Leel</i> : A Coming of Age Concept.  |

- Providing a link between the past and the present without compromising body integrity of women.

**Unit Eight**

Sexuality and sexual relationships

- Body changes, reproductive health and development
- Sexual relationships before marriage
- Sexual relationships at marriage and during old age.

**Unit Nine**

Relationships, dating, engagement, courtship, marriage and family

- Process taken to attain each of the stages in a woman's life as provided for in society's rites, values and norms.

**Unit Ten**

Family Life Education and household management.

- Care and provision for the family.
- Food, clothing and shelter
- Housekeeping and food preparation
- Diet and Nutrition

**Unit Eleven**

Building self esteem and self-concept of women and girls.

- Self is one's being: heart, soul, psyche, inner person, life force
- Esteem- respect, value, cherish, appreciate, admire, high regard
- Concept- idea start, origin, formation
- Self esteem: How do I think/feel about myself? What do other people think about me?
- Self confidence, self control, self respect

Factors influencing self esteem:

- Personal appearance
- Emotions
- Personality
- Ability to cope with pressure, criticism and praise

**Unit Twelve**

Empowerment of girls and women.

- Setting personal goals in life
- Pursuing education career, economic and social development.
- Leading fulfilled life after achieving set goals

**Unit Thirteen**

Health care, disease prevention and treatment.

- Maintaining personal hygiene
- Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections-HIV/AIDS

- Preventing malnutrition in the family
- Prevention of early pregnancy
- Drug abuse.
- Effects of mass media.
- Use and abuse of contraceptives.
- Psychological problems arising from domestic violence, spousal abuse and child abuse.

**Unit Fourteen**

Morals and Ethics by individuals

- Respect
- Courtesy
- Love
- Sympathy
- Generosity

**Unit Fifteen**

Effects and Response to Social change on girls.

- Preparing girls to face the future with confidence
- Drawing the difference between negative and positive effects of change.

**Unit Sixteen**  
society.

Contemporary and traditional practices, femininity in changing

- Morals and Ethics
- Values and Virtues
- Norms

## **WOMEN WITH CIRCUMCISION KNIVES**

The picture below shows ex-circumcisers showing off the ‘knife’ used to circumcise girls. The circumcisers participated in a workshop organized by *Tumndo Ne Leel* Support Group to sensitize circumcisers on the effects of FGM on the reproductive health of girls and women.

At the end of the workshop the circumcisers made declarations not to circumcise girls and women again. After showing off the knives, they vowed never to use them and they threw them to the ground uttering the words: “may the soil eat/kill me if I participate again in circumcision”.



**PICTURE OF TRADITIONAL CIRCUMCISERS PARTICIPATING IN A FUNCTION OF *TUMNDO NE LEEL* PROGRAMME**

During this function girls graduated from initiation without circumcision. The old women who are considered custodians of culture declare their support for the new approach and vowed not to participate in the old practice of circumcising girls and women. Their acceptance of the new approach convince the community that uncircumcised and initiated girls are as good as the circumcised and are fit for marriage. The woman in the forefront, Kimoi seems to be telling the public “this is the way”



## PICTURE OF A GRADUAND OF *TUMNDO NE LEEL* PROGRAMME

The girl in the picture below is giving testimony of the new approach where she and others 250 girls were initiated without circumcision. Her name is Stella Jepkosgei. She attends Kapropita Girls Secondary School where she joined after escaping FGM and undergoing initiation only through the *Tumndo Ne Leel* Program. Her testimony to other girls and members of the public was

“I am lucky to be in school through the initiation of *Tumndo Ne Leel*. I could have dropped out and got married if I underwent FGM. Many girls of my age are now married and have children with their tender age. I want to pursue education to the highest level and participate in the *Tumndo Ne Leel* programmes to save more girls from the harm of FGM and early marriage”.



## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME FOR *MOTIRENIK* (INITIATOR)

Women Empowerment program has been piloted at Chemoibon Location in Kerio Valley for beekeeping and dairy goat projects and at Kaptagat Uasin Gishu for passion fruits project. Training on micro-enterprise is carried out for the women prior to start of the project.



Training of women in Micro-entreprise development at RCEA Chepsirei in May 2007, Facilitated by SNV-NRP



Women Dairy Goat project in Chemoibon Location, Kerio Valley launched in July 2007.



Bee-keeping project in Chemoibon location, July 2007. (Picture of preliminary training prior to launching of the program).



Participation of *Tumdo Ne Leel* Support Group in Moi University Annual International Conference in August 2007. It was an opportunity to exhibit and market women's handworks ( beads, guards, table mats and traditional dresses).

## **THE IMPACT OF INITIATION THROUGH *TUMDO NE LEEL* CURRICULUM**

The curriculum of *Tumdo Ne leel* has been implemented since 2003, first on pilot basis among the Keiyo and replication in other Kalenjin Sub-ethnic groups such as the Nandi and the Kipsigis.

Most important to *Tumdo Ne Leel* curriculum is the institution of *Motirenik* (initiators or teachers/counselors) whose role in the past imparted knowledge of society and propagated positive values on the initiates through intensive counseling, initiation, singing, practical lessons on household management, childcare, social responsibility, religious undertaking and general behaviour change in conformity to the new status. *Motirenik* were respected individuals who were consulted for guidance and counseling on matters affecting young women in their new responsibilities at marriage. They are trained on the curriculum so as to participate in identification and initiation of girls; as 'you cannot give what you do not have'.

The use of *Motirenik* in the implementation of this curriculum is an attempt to give the new initiation the importance it deserves. The curriculum provides adequate preparation to young girls in readiness for their current and future responsibilities and undertakings upon attaining their new status. Since the program began five years ago about five hundred *motirenik* have been trained and they have successfully imparted the skills and values to over a thousand girls.

Since 2003, the demand for the program by other Kalenjin sub-groups has been very high and the members of the *Tumndo Ne Leel* Support Group have not been able to satisfy it. Those who have gone through the program pass on the concept through various wedding ceremonies and the demand has even been higher. Comments on the success of the program have been aired through the Kalenjin FM station. The strength of the concept lies on the benefits that are gained from the teachings given to the girls during initiation; this emphasizes the importance of education, societal values, sexuality and reproductive health issues, empowerment, building self esteem for strong personality traits necessary for leadership, and management positions which have been evident to the community. Retention of Girls in School and behaviour change according to community expectations parents are happy about the program the girls are motivated to aim at high in school.

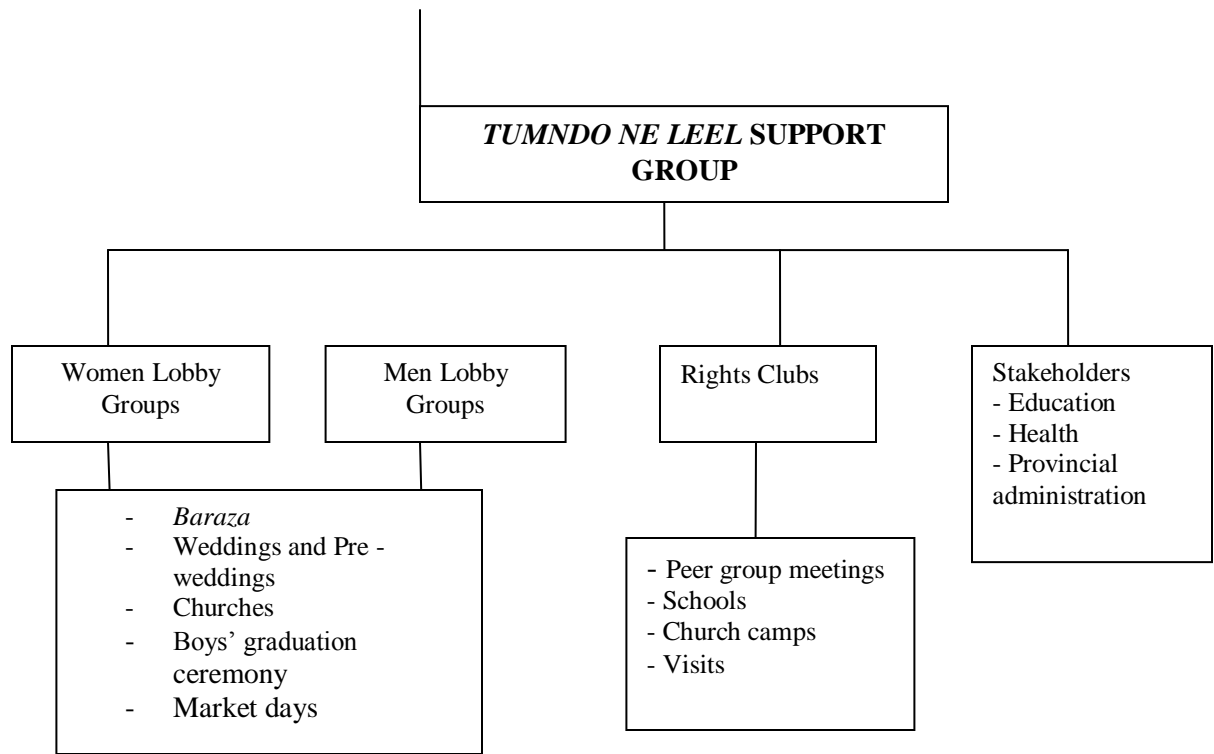
#### **SUSTENANCE STRATEGY FOR ANTI – FGM EFFORTS:**

1. Emphasize good relations between mother and daughter(s).
2. Good relationship will strengthen the teachings that girls and women received in their separate teachings.
3. Empowerment of women and girls fulfills the objective of the Women Empowerment and Community Consensus (WECC) framework – i.e. building consensus with communities and empowerment of women as strategies for ending FGM.

#### **Men Lobby Groups:**

1. Reinforce what women have learnt and advocate for abandonment of FGM/C.
2. Encourage young men to marry uncircumcised women.
3. Encourage young men to marry educated girls.

After project life, a sustenance chart for anti – FGM efforts is used to guide the processes for the various groups of people in the community to participate to achieve the desired objective of the program.



## REPLICATION OF *TUMNDO NE LEEL* CONCEPT

After the pilot programme in Keiyo District *Tumndo Ne Leel* Support Group has rolled out a strategic plan for the replication of the concept in other Kalenjin communities which number over 4 million people. The activities are as indicated below :

### Summary of Strategic Plan: Phase I 2007 - 2010

<b>2007</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of pilot stage of TNLSG in Keiyo district</li> <li>• Community Based survey on the impact of TNLSG Program in Keiyo district</li> <li>• Publishing and launching of <i>Tumndo Ne Leel: A Coming of Age Concept Curriculum</i></li> <li>• Identification and formation of anti-FGM school clubs by girls in Chemoibon Location (Keiyo District)</li> <li>• Training of women entrepreneurs in Chepsirei, Chemoibon location</li> <li>• Initiation of girls in selected areas in Keiyo and Uasin Gishu Districts</li> </ul>
<b>2008</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replication of TNLSG programme among the Nandi community.</li> <li>• Replication of TNLSG among Kipsigis community. The specific project area to be identified</li> <li>• Continuation of existing activities of the program in Keiyo district – Chemoibon location, Soy division</li> <li>• Other divisions to undertake initiation of girls’ activities annually with the support of stakeholders at the community level.</li> <li>• Continue supporting women’s Income Generating Activities through mobilization of resources.</li> <li>• To support the following pro-poor activities to help uplift the standards of living for the following groups: Poror Women Group, Neema Women Group, <i>Tumndo Ne Leel Motireen</i> Group, Emman Nursery and Day Care Centre, Mereon Star Nursery and Junior Academy.</li> </ul>
<b>2009</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out a replication of the programme among the Tugen and Pokot in East Baringo, Sigor Project area.</li> <li>• Continue maintaining contacts with existing partners for advice and guidance.</li> </ul>
<b>2010</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain contacts with all existing programmes.</li> <li>• Conduct an evaluation of the programme in Nandi, Kipsigis and Keiyo communities to determine its impact.</li> <li>• Production of evaluation report and presentation to stakeholders and partners.</li> <li>• Way forward to be determined by the results of the evaluation, recommendations from the stakeholders and partners workshop and the demand of the program.</li> </ul>