



## DELIVERING AS ONE – How UNFPA AND UNICEF ARE WORKING TOGETHER TO ACCELERATE THE ABANDONMENT OF FGM/C

The Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting (FGM/C), launched in 2007 and implemented in 12 African countries, demonstrates how effectively two UN agencies can work together as equal partners to achieve one goal. In many countries, the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme is a model of the close collaboration, knowledge-sharing, mutual support and synergy envisioned by the UN Inter-agency Statement on the Elimination of FGM within a Generation, signed by 10 UN agencies and launched by the Deputy Secretary General in 2008.

FGM/C is a deeply ingrained cultural tradition with devastating medical, social, emotional, legal and economic repercussions in the lives of young girls and women. Its abandonment, therefore, requires nothing less than a transformation of the societies that practice it. This transformation is being supported and accelerated by the concerted efforts of UNFPA, with its focus on women’s rights and reproductive health, and UNICEF, with its focus on children’s rights, safety and development. The combined expertise of these two agencies is exactly what is needed in this campaign.

The collaboration of UNFPA and UNICEF in the Joint Programme takes different forms in each of the countries where it is active. One country where it is particularly effective is the small West African nation of Guinea-Bissau. There, Candida Lopes, UNFPA’s FGM/C Focal Point and National Programme Officer for Reproductive Health Com-

modity Services, and Sonia Polonio, UNICEF Child Protection Specialist, are showing how “delivering as one” should be done.

A glance at the agencies’ Joint Work Plan for 2010 illustrates just how carefully crafted and balanced this collaboration is. While the total funding of the eight planned objectives is evenly shared between the two agencies, the contribution of each to the activities that support these objectives depends on each agency’s specific expertise and experience in the country.

The programme funding may come from two agencies, but they function as one. For example, UNICEF already had an infrastructure to handle an information, education and media campaign for the abandonment of FGM/C, so UNICEF took on the entire funding of these activities, which completely supported the objectives of UNFPA as well. UNFPA had the staff and the expertise to support the inte-

**Table 1. How programming is shared between two agencies**

OBJECTIVE	UNFPA	UNICEF
Legislation for the abandonment of FGM/C	30%	70%
Knowledge dissemination of socio-cultural dynamics of FGM/C	56%	44%
Collaboration with global partners framework for abandoning FGM	64%	36%
Evidence-based data for programming and policies	33%	66%
Consolidation of partnerships and forging of new partnerships	75%	25%
Media campaign emphasising FGM/C abandonment process	0%	100%
Integrating implications to FGM into reproductive health strategies	100%	0%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>50%</b>

gration of the implications of FGM/C into the government's reproductive health strategies, furthering UNICEF's agenda as well. UNICEF had already been working with the government on legislation banning FGM/C, so UNICEF took the lead in that work. UNFPA has longstanding relationships with parliamentarians, so it builds on those relationships in promoting the new legislation. Synergy is at work in every case, and the two agencies present a united front.

"When other institutions or donors ask about our work, we don't explain what we did with UNICEF's money and what we did with UNFPA's money," says Sonia Polonio of UNICEF. "It's a joint programme. We don't go into all those details about who pays more for which activity."

The result of working together is that everything goes more smoothly. "There's less stress," says Sonia. "Working together helps us plan better and control the money better. And we talk with our partners with one voice. They get the same message from each of us. So I think we create a better image of the agencies when we work with our partners."

At the time the Joint Programme was launched in Guinea Bissau in 2008, the two agencies already had a track record of working together in the country on issues such as youth, HIV/AIDS and even FGM/C. Since 2006 they had been supporting projects in reproductive and maternal health and projects for young people through the same local partner organizations and youth networks. So even before the Joint Programme was launched, the two agencies had established a pattern of working together. "In the past we used to contact each other often to find out what the other agency was doing with this partner or that partner, in order to avoid duplication of activities," says Sonia.

But when the Joint Programme on FGM/C began in 2008, the two agencies started planning activities together for the first time. They present a united front to other UN agencies and NGOs, making it clear to everyone that the Joint Programme was one programme with two implementing agencies.

"From the beginning we created the annual work plan together," says Candida Lopes of UNFPA. "There were no problems in terms of the

division of the funds or the activities. Whatever each of us is doing, we tell the other one, so it's clear. And we remain in constant touch about how the programme is going. If either of us receives a request for funding to carry out activities, we let the other know right away. Then together we decide how we will allocate the funding."

"First of all, we divide up all the activities of the programme, to decide which activities each one is going to do," says Sonia. "Then we present it to our supervisors so that everybody can agree. It's clear; everybody knows what everyone's role is. There are not two separate plans of action. And that's a good thing because there's a lot of money and a lot of activities to manage."

The two conduct joint meetings with the representatives of their agencies so that even at the highest national level, the programme functions as one. "Both of us meet together with the representatives of UNFPA and of UNICEF," says Candida. "We talk about any problems we have and the representatives tell us what to do. This works without any problems."

In fact, in many ways the two are virtually interchangeable. "If Sonia isn't there and UNICEF calls me with a question, I'll give them the answer because I know everything that's going on with Sonia. And she also knows everything that's going on with me," says Candida.

The schedule of field visits to the programme's partner organizations is shared as well, so that during the course of a year, both agencies visit and observe all of the activities of the programme. "And when we're in the field, if we need any information we call each other," says Candida. "I will tell her, 'Sonia, I saw this. What do you think about this?' That's how we work." Even vacations are planned so that one of the agency is always on hand to monitor the programme. The annual country reports and semi-annual reports are written jointly—Sonia writing in Portuguese or English and Candida writing in French. The final product is translated into English.

The two agencies function as one when it comes to their implementing partners. For example, each agency has projects that they fund with the NGO Tostan, but all the contractual agreements with Tostan are tri-partite, signed by both agencies and

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Tostan. “I know that UNICEF gives money for Tostan’s activities and I also give funding for Tostan,” says Candida. “There’s no duplication, there are no problems. If there is good will it’s really easy.”

And since the implementing partners all know that UNFPA and UNICEF consult together on everything, they are also more open and transparent, sharing with each agency the substance of their contacts with the other.

The same holds true when it comes to working with the national government. UNFPA and UNICEF together supported the drafting of the National Strategy and Plan of Action for the Abandonment of FGM/C. “UNICEF had agreed to fund this in the context of the Joint Programme, but actually divided the work between us,” says Candida. “We were together in all the meetings, we coordinated all the work together and even now we con-

tinue to support all the activities that come out of this plan. So the government knows that everything is coordinated and we end up with good results. This way of working together produces good results. We really urge other people to try it!”

Coordination between the two lead agencies results in better coordination among the implementing partners as well. Originally, the partners had different approaches to the campaign to abandon FGM/C, some of which were more effective than others. But now that the two lead agencies speak with one voice, they are more persuasive in helping their partners to improve. “Now we have the same clearer approach about how we need to work in the communities where FGM/C is concerned,” says Sonia. “This helps us a lot in the relationships with our partners and also in the message we give out. Now we have the same message.”