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stops child exploitation

## PROJECT UPDATE (JUNE 2021)

# COVID-19: FGM PROTECTION FOR 200 TANZANIAN GIRLS

Many girls in sub-Saharan Africa grow up knowing that Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is their foreland. FGM has lifelong repercussions for the women and girls who underwent it. It is not only a breach of the law, but a violence of their rights. That is why Terre des Hommes Netherlands stands up for these girls, specifically for girls in the Kuria community in Northern Tanzania.

### “I AM VERY HAPPY TO BE SAFE FROM FGM”

Imagine your peaceful childhood is disrupted by intense pressure from your community to undergo Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). As a result, this makes your parents flee from their lifelong home to seek safety. For Rhobi, this imaginary scenario became reality.

The pressure to go through FGM started building as soon as Rhobi turned thirteen. Her relatives started pushing her parents that the girl had reached the right age and that most of her peers had actually already undergone the ritual. They added that her parents would in turn get a higher bride price for Rhobi once she was mutilated.

Rhobi was not spared either. While doing her chores around the village, women would comment how she would never get a husband if she did not get cut. Her peers who had already undergone FGM called her a coward and told her that they could never be friends as long as she had not been cut. Luckily some of her peers were kind to her and even encouraged her.

Rhobi's parents were previously pro-FGM but had been made aware of the negative impact of the practice. This changed their mind and they wanted their children to do well in school.



**“I want to help protect girls from FGM”**

Around February 2020, the demand from the villagers became so pushy that Rhobi's parents fled to Dar es Salaam for safety. Rhobi, however, could not go with them as she was about to sit for her final primary school exams.

### Covid-19 and the looming danger

The girl was left in the care of her grandmother. Once her parents had settled down, Rhobi would soon follow. She was instructed to watch out for warning signs of secret FGM preparations and that she should contact the ATFGM rescue centre when she was under threat.

The Covid-19 pandemic led to the closure of schools. The Kuria community seized the opportunity and started to mobilise girls for FGM outside the normal cutting season. Rhobi began feeling uneasy. “I was feeling unsafe when the cutting began after the school closed down due to Covid-19,” she explains. Behind her back, her grandmother was already putting everything in place for Rhobi's initiation. Rhobi noticed the signs and decided to act immediately. She pretended that she was going to fetch water and took this opportunity to escape to the ATFGM rescue centre.

The ATFGM rescue centre became Rhobi's new home for almost one year. Despite the disruption and change of environment, she successfully completed her primary examination and joined high school.

“I'm very happy to be safe from FGM. I am determined to do well in my O-level examinations. Once I start earning some income I will support my family and seek to protect girls from FGM,” Rhobi says.

In February 2021 with the help of ATFGM, Rhobi was reunited with her parents in Dar es Salaam, where she has continued with her studies. Her dream is to become a lawyer and help “people who face any kind of gender-based violence”, particularly girls at risk of FGM.