

Sebei gears up for cultural festival



Chatting. President Museveni speaks to Mr Kalifani Chemutai, the chief executive officer of Sebei Cultural Centre (in jeans), at a festival in 2014.
FILE PHOTO

Alternatives. Sebei Cultural Centre is organising a three-days festival where girls are taught various communal values such as marriage, work, and norms, which are packaged in riddles, poems and songs.

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KAPCHORWA. Eight years after government criminalised Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), elders in Sebei Sub-region have joined the struggle to wipe it out completely.

Mr Jophan Cheptoyek, the chairperson of Sebei Cultural Centre, says having been sensitised about the law, they have now devised alternatives to FGM as a rite of passage, which initiates girls into womanhood without experiencing pain as was in the past.

"We have devised means of preserving our culture without actual mutilation so that we continue to celebrate the posi-

tive aspects of our culture," he says.

SCI was launched in 2014, to act as a centre to accelerate their efforts to fight FGM and preserve their culture.

The center in Kapkwai Parish, Chema Sub-county in Kapchorwa District, hosts annual cultural festivals and was launched by President Museveni.

Mr Kalifani Chemutai, who runs the site, says every even year, they organise an initiation camp, which attracts girls from all over the sub-region and are initiated into the Sebei culture without subjecting them to FGM. This is the same period within which girls were mutilated.

"During the initiation camp, selected elders take the girls through the same cultural practices," he says.

In the camp, the girls are taught various communal values such as marriage, work, and norms, which are packaged in riddles, poems and songs.

"The elders have got another opportunity once again to ap-

preciate their unique culture. They are now able to instill marriage and other values into girls," he says.

He says the camp attracts over 500 girls and it runs for a week.

Ms Consulate Chemutai, a health worker with Reproductive Health Uganda in Kapchorwa Branch, says FGM is no longer a threat.

"The biggest challenge now is gender-based violence in the region, which is visibly out of proportion and needs joint effort from all people,"

MS CONSULATE CHEMUTAI,
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH UGANDA
OFFICER IN KAPCHORWA BRANCH

Ms Juliet Chelangat, one of the women who went through mutilation, says more sensitisation should be directed to communities where cases are being reported.

Mr Lenny Chelangat, another resident, says the cultural festivals have proved to be a cohesive force in binding the Sabiny and other Kalenjin people together.

Mr Kalifani Chemutai, the chief executive officer of Sebei Cultural Centre, says the centre was also established to showcase the sabiny culture and create awareness of the tourism potential in the area.

He says during the cultural festivals, they organise various activities, including, among others, community sensitisation on dangers of FGM, cultural storytelling, camp fire, hiking and charity marathon.

"This is all to remain relevant," he says.

He adds that this year's cultural festival, which is expected to be graced by President Museveni and Gideon Moi, the senator of Baringo County in Kenya, is aimed at raising funds for construction of Sebei museum.

Former Kenya Ambassador to the US Peter Rono, who is also the 800 metre 1988 Olympic Champion, confirmed he would attend the fete.

The event is expected to be held on December 28, 29 and climaxes on December 30.