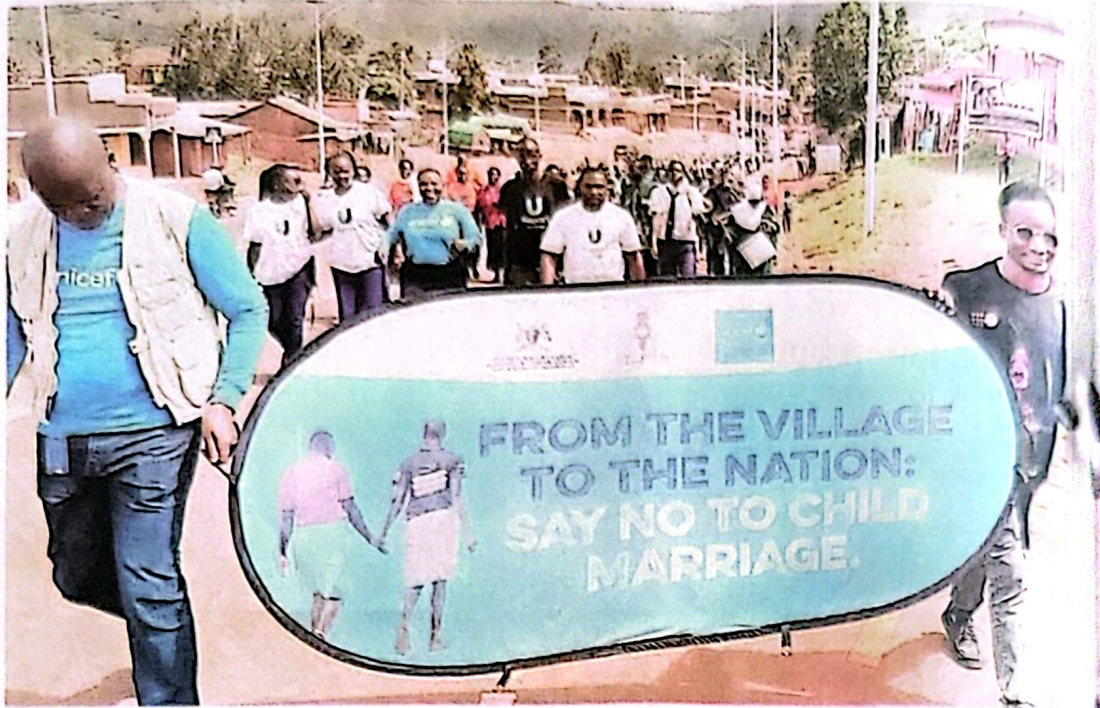


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Gen Zs lead anti-FGM efforts



Bukwo is emerging as a symbol of change, thanks, in part, to a youth-led movement powered by Unicef's U-Report platform. PHOTO/SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA.

BY SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA

Young people in Bukwo District are determined to rewrite their community's future. For decades, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) persisted among communities in eastern Uganda, deeply rooted in tradition and reinforced by social expectations. But today, Bukwo is emerging as a symbol of change, thanks, in part, to a youth-led movement powered by Unicef's U-Report platform.

From silence to dialogue

U-Report youth volunteers aged between 14 and 24 are stepping into roles once reserved for elders. They move from village to village, holding conversations in homes, schools, markets and churches, breaking the silence that long protected the practice.

"We do not just tell people to stop," says Febian Yeko, a local U-Reporter. "Instead we listen first then we talk about the dangers and the future girls deserve."

This approach has proven effective in a community where top-down messaging of ten failed to penetrate cultural resistance.

Changing minds at the grassroots

He adds that unlike traditional campaigns, U-Reporters tailor their messages to different audiences. Parents are engaged on the benefits of education, elders are involved in discussions about culture and dignity, and young boys are encouraged to rethink masculinity and marriage expectations.

"Through storytelling, drama and community dialogues, our initiative is helping families question long-held beliefs. One of the most impactful innovations has been the formation of safety circles – small, trusted groups within villages that monitor and report risks of FGM," Yeko says.

He adds that these groups act as early warning systems, ensuring suspected cases are quickly addressed.

Education as protection

Vicky Chebet, another volunteer from U-Report, says the heart of the campaign is a simple but powerful idea to keep girls in school.

"As a team, we actively encourage parents to prioritise education over early marriage and cutting, we also support families in exploring small income-generating activities, reducing the economic pressures that often drive harmful practices," she says.

She adds that once a girl stays in school, her chances of undergoing FGM drop significantly.

A cultural shift in motion

Chebet reveals that Bukwo's progress reflects a broader national trend. Uganda has seen FGM prevalence fall dramatically over the past decade, with officials crediting community engagement and youth participation as key drivers.

"Young people, once passive observers, are now leading conversations, challenging stigma, and protecting their peers. Their work is gradually reshaping attitudes, making it more acceptable for girls to remain uncut without facing discrimination," Chebet says.

Despite the progress, Chebet notes that the fight is not over. Social pressure still exists, and in some cases, the practice is driven underground or carried out across borders.

"That is why U-Reporters continue their work relentlessly, often conducting outreach several times a week, especially during traditional circumcision seasons," she says.

A generation leading the end

This has come at a time when Uganda is on

the brink of eliminating FGM, with prevalence falling sharply to 0.02 percent over the past decade, according to government and United Nations agencies.

The milestone was announced during national commemorations of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM held in Bukwo District recently under the theme "Towards 2030 no end to FGM without sustained commitment and investment."

Minister of State for Gender and Culture, Peace Mutuuzo said the country's progress demonstrates the impact of sustained interventions and community engagement.

"FGM prevalence has significantly declined in Uganda over the past decade, from 4.2 percent in 2016 to 0.02 percent in 2026, marking strong progress in the fight to end FGM," she said.

She attributed the decline to coordinated government action, strong partnerships, community sensitisation and cross-border collaborations aimed at curbing the practice.

"We must address stigma and social pressure, which continue to push some communities back into harmful practices," Mutuuzo cautioned.

Mutuuzo also stressed the importance of engaging men in the fight against FGM. "We need programmes that support men to adapt to a changing society where women and girls are educated and empowered," she said.

U-Report coverage

Since November 2025, it is U-Report platform that has spearheaded engagements across Sebei and Karamoja sub-regions, reaching more than 30,000 people in districts such as Amudat, Bukwo, Kapchorwa, Kween, Nakapiripirit and Moroto.