



Dodzi Kofi Amenuveve Mawuli Achoribo (Kofi) is one of the UN Volunteer Population Data Fellows assigned to the UNFPA Regional Office in Dakar, Senegal, as a Data and Research Specialist in Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

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## Questioning the negative impact of deeply ingrained harmful traditional practices

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage are both recognized human rights issues affecting girls and women worldwide. They remain prevalent in 27 countries, where more than 40 million girls and women are reported to have experienced FGM and/or child marriage. West and Central Africa is a region with high rates of migration, coupled with high rates of harmful practices. Here, the cross-border practice of FGM and child marriage is an emerging trend that has presented unexpected and evolving challenges.

To tackle these challenges, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNV launched the *Data*

*and Research Fellowship Programme* in 2019. The second cohort of the programme was deployed to seven UNFPA offices in Africa to deliver on research studies related to gender-based violence (GBV) and projects that address FGM, child marriage and intimate partner violence.

Dodzi Kofi Amenuveve Mawuli Achoribo (Kofi) was selected to the second cohort of dynamic professionals supporting UNFPA’s analytical work. He was assigned to the UNFPA Regional Office in Dakar, Senegal, as a Data and Research Fellow in FGM in November 2020. A statistician and information management and computer scientist by training, Kofi has long been interested in serving the United Nations, motivated to help people in need across the world.

Prior to joining UNFPA, Kofi served in the areas of research, statistics, monitoring and evaluation, information technology management, project & programme management and management consulting with institutions like the University of Ghana, World Health Organization (WHO), AE Outreach Research Consults and West African Network for Peacebuilding.

Kofi is inspired by a quote from Dr Natalia Kanem, the Executive Director of UNFPA:

“ Trust is our greatest asset – the trust of partners, communities, and individuals. When we uphold the principles of integrity, impartiality and independence, we build the trust that makes our work as international civil servants possible. Let us never forget who it is we serve, who it is we are accountable to – the women, girls and communities who have put their trust in us. --Dr Natalia Kanem, UNFPA Executive Director

Kofi’s assignment is highly analytical, coordinating research outputs and work plans for regional FGM data. He leads innovative research and data gathering by collaborating with institutes to conduct studies and operational research on FGM, and thus fill evidence gaps on emerging issues, variations in the practice of FGM and changing social and cultural norms.

Data is critical to measuring the magnitude of the problem, understanding the various forms of violence and their consequences, identifying high-risk groups, barriers to seeking help and to ensuring appropriate interventions. It is also the starting point for informing laws, monitoring change, and targeting resources to maximize the effectiveness of interventions.

Kofi has focused on three projects: the first, providing data analysis on intimate partner

violence; the second, exploring the magnitude and drivers of cross-border FGM and child marriage in West and Central Africa; and the third, enhancing the effectiveness of collaboration with non-governmental and community-based organizations for the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, including an assessment of implementation approaches and lessons learned. Kofi has been helping to fill evidence gaps and inform programming.

Kofi says, "I have found that our research is important, especially as data collectors interact with local women and girls, observe their living conditions and understand what FGM and child marriage means to them."

“ For many women and girls, female genital mutilation and child marriage are a part of their culture. Despite its harms to their health, they don't question the negative influence of traditional practices that are deeply ingrained. –Kofi Achoribo, UN Volunteer Population Data Fellow with UNFPA, Senegal

"Our data collection team interacts with community leaders and family members of local women and girls, including their fathers, husbands, brothers and uncles, and assess their knowledge of these harmful practices," Kofi explains.

For Kofi, becoming a UN Volunteer has been highly rewarding. "I highly recommend that everyone considers contributing as a volunteer. If you can, undertake a UN volunteering journey, even as an online volunteer, and work for world peace and development in humanitarian settings.

"I firmly believe, as a UN Volunteer, that any of us can make a difference for women and girls in need and support UN organizations in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and beyond," Kofi concludes.

*This article was prepared with the kind support of Online Volunteer Helen Maccan.*



West and Central Africa

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