

## Success story

### Empowered to abandon harmful practices through productive farming

Amudat District in Karamoja Region in Northeastern Uganda is semi-arid and is prone to hazards such as flooding, drought and environmental degradation. Additionally, it is one of the districts in Karamoja where harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, hazardous child labour, and violation of women's rights are commonplace.

Before her training in better farming methods, Alice Chepkatekok, a farmer in Lobolin village, Naguliet parish, Loro sub-county, used to practice FGM. Alice said: *"I am a former traditional FGM cutter. I was the one cutting girls."* On average, Alice used to cut close to 100 girls per year and only given food stuff and alcohol as payment. The training has empowered her to abandon FGM by giving her skills for a viable, more sustainable, alternative source of income.

Alice is among the 1,500 farmers who have received training under the Building Resilience in Southern Karamoja - Phase II (BRISK-II) project, a three-year (2020-2023) intervention implemented in six parishes in Loro Sub-County. The parishes are Naguliet, Loro, Achorichori, Lobrokocha, Lopedot and Nakelei. The project targeted training 1,500 farmers organized into 50 groups of 30 members each (850 female and 650 male) to acquire knowledge and skills in growing high-yielding disease and drought resistant crops.

The group was also trained on the dangers of harmful practices like FGM, hazardous child labour, and child marriage. Cultural leadership structures such as traditional leaders, clan leaders, FGM surgeons, and local leaders were also engaged in the training conducted. The main aim of engaging these particular structures in the training was to create awareness on the dangers of the harmful practices carried out in the community, and communicate the alternative ways of income generation including farming. These leaders were also engaged to attract other community members to participate in the training since the community listens so much to such people who wield a lot of influence.



*Alice Chepkatekok (left) is pleased with the progress she has made since the TPO farmer training. She plants maize and other crops for home consumption and for sale on her 5-acre piece of land. She has been empowered to completely abandon FGM as a business.*

As a result of the different trainings and awareness sessions on the dangers of harmful practices, particularly FGM, Alice was able to realize that she was engaging in a practice which was causing harm to the children. On reflection, she questioned whether it was meaningfully gainful since she received small gifts like alcohol and food which could not even enable her provide for her family's basic needs. In addition, with the awareness created in the sub-county, Alice's business was affected; the number of girls she received for FGM reduced forcing her to abandon the practice completely and get involved in agriculture.

Alice has never regretted abandoning the practice because she has found peace with herself and great joy in agriculture which has helped her provide basic family needs and educate her children. Alice said: *"My children are going to be the first educated girls in my village and I am sure they are going to be change agents in this community. I am a change agent now and because of what I have got from agriculture, my community is engaging in production which has helped us to provide for our family needs. I am happy to say that we are now a food basket in Amudat. Thank you to TPO Uganda for the knowledge and skills you have given to us."*

The project is implemented by TPO Uganda in partnership with Dan Church Aid (DCA) with the support of the community support structures, the Amudat District Production Department and the Sub-county Agricultural Officer. TPO Uganda works in over 35 districts across Uganda. The organization supports and partners with civil society organizations and government to empower communities with the skills and tools they need to effectively address their problems. Its goal is to leave behind communities capable of resolving their own problems. TPO Uganda's programmes include mental health and psychosocial support, child protection, disaster risk reduction, emergency response, gender-based violence prevention, and HIV/AIDS prevention and services.

Alice, who learned about TPO when she joined church, said: *"We got agricultural skills from TPO extension workers. They taught us about good agricultural practices including the right way to plant seeds. TPO came with the rope and showed us how to plant the maize in a line and how many seeds to put per hole."* She adds: *"They taught us how to take care of the maize and how to dry it."*

In the context of Amudat, girls routinely underwent FGM and were forcibly married off early. Apart from growing her farming knowledge and skills as well as expanding her garden from 1 acre to 5 acres of land, Alice has also learned about the dangers of FGM and abandoned the harmful practice. Through the project, Alice and other farmers learned the value of educating children especially girls. Alice said: *"Now, I teach my group members about the dangers of FGM. People listen to me because I have been successful in farming; some of them have accepted to stop and others are still hesitant but I continue to talk to them."*

TPO Uganda partnered with ZOA Uganda, an NGO which has been working with the pastoral community in Karamoja for a longer period, in reaching FGM practitioners and connecting them to the farmer trainings. At least 20 women FGM practitioners, including Alice, have abandoned the harmful practice. The agricultural success of former FGM practitioners has encouraged others to abandon the practice as farming is now viewed as a profitable business.

This new interest in farming is evidenced by the increased number of visits to Paul Ecweru, the Agriculture Extension Officer, who reported: *"More people are coming in to get advice on disease and pest control."* He said: *"Before TPO came to Karamoja, men used to engage in alcoholism and most of the youth were idle. Women were engaged in FGM. Now, Alice a former FGM practitioner, is a farmer and a change agent and is happy with what she has become."*