

FNF Human Rights Podcast

Episode 4 – “Making the Cut”.

Female rites of passage –who made me worthy?

[00:00:00] **Masehaba Mdaka:** This is an FNF disclaimer. We advise our listeners that content for this episode has a graphic nature, and discretion is advised for sensitive and underage listeners.

[00:00:16] **Nice Nailantei Leng'ete:** Over 200 million girls under the age of 15 years have been subjected to female genital mutilation. In some counties, communities have turned to secret missions to continue with this practice, despite the missions put in place to end it. Four girls in west PCO county have been admitted to hospital after they were forced to undergo female genital mutilation. The four were part of seven pupils in a primary school who got circumcised on Tuesday during a secret rite.

[00:00:48] **Masehaba Mdaka:** Making the cut. Today we hone in on the scourge of female genital mutilation, also known as FGM or female genital [00:01:00] cutting: FGC.

[00:01:04] A child's innocence is one which is treasured and should be protected. Any harm or torture done to a child from any society should be severely judged and not go without impunity. Yet to this day, young girls, as young as four years old are forced to undergo female circumcision or as it should rightfully be labeled female genital mutilation. All of this in the name of upholding age-old tradition and culture, which sexualizes the very essence of female biology as a means to control and subjugate the female gender.

[00:01:47] What is even more heartbreaking is that this practice takes place under the guidance and leadership of other much older women. As a continent, where do [00:02:00] we come from with this practice as African people? What we do understand

from this prescriptive right of passage is that without fail, it causes lifelong ramifications and sometimes the death of young girls.

[00:02:16] According to the United Nations Population Fund features statistics on FGM in February, 2022, FGM is still practiced in 14 African countries, which are predominantly in the west, east and horn of Africa regions. As part of aspiration six priority 51 of the African Union agenda, 2063, it aims to eliminate all forms of gender based violence and discrimination against women and girls.

[00:02:50] Political leaders are playing their own critical part. The African Union has appointed the president of **Burkina Faso** **Mark Christian Kabore**, [00:03:00] as the champion for the elimination of FGM and launched the Salima initiative in 2019. Perhaps our starting point should be the definition of what FGM is and why it is considered a human rights violation, especially for young women and girls.

[00:03:21] What has made this practice necessary? And furthermore, what has sustained its practice with much resistance and defense to uphold it in the name of cultural practice?

[00:03:34] **Voice Notes:** I came here because of some reason of some cases, because in our community they are facing some challenges like FGM, early marriages and early pregnancies and after I realized this or after I faced some challenges, eh, because women have no voice in our community. I was brought up the same way other guys were brought up by my father, my [00:04:00] mother, they cherished mercy culture.

[00:04:02] They love it. It has been part of them since I was very young. My elder sisters have undergone the cut, which is female genital mutilation. Since I was very young, I've been observing them. I've been with observing them undergo circumcision and then they were given out for marriage. Two of my friends, closest friends were pregnant and I was afraid thinking that anything might happen to me next.

[00:04:32] **Masechaba Mdaka:** Today, I am pleased to be joined in studio and in person with Nice Nailantei Leng'ete, a Kenyan hu-

man rights activist advocating for an alternative right of passage or ARP for girls in Africa and campaigning to stop FGM. Nice Nailantei Leng'ete founder at Nice place leadership academy and safe house for girls [00:05:00] and author of the girls in the wild victory.

[00:05:05] As a proud Maasai woman, Nice has challenge the social norms of the male dominated community from the age of eight in her quest to end the harmful practices of FGM and child marriage. Through her own efforts and with the support of Amraf health Africa, nice educated elders boys, and the young men known as Morans in her community with new messages about sexual and reproductive health and rights. Over time, the Morans accepted her as a leader.

[00:05:42] Which enabled her to work with women, girls, Morans, cultural leaders, and elders to eliminate the practice of FGM C and replace it with alternative rights of passage for girls that maintained the cultural celebration [00:06:00] of the transition into womanhood. Today, Nice is a respected community advocate and recognized global youth leader. An April, 2018.

[00:06:13] She was named in time magazine's hundred list of the most influential people in the world. Africa, youth awards listed her among the hundred, most influential young Africans in September, 2018 and she was honored as one of three BBC outlook inspiration award recipients in June, 2018. We take a personal journey with nice on this topic, her story growing up, being faced with FGM and her passion to stand up for survivors.

[00:06:45] And be part of the galvanized effort to bring this ruthless and dangerous phenomenon that is an unfortunate reality so many young women and girls face. Nice, indeed a pleasure to be [00:07:00] seated face to face for this episode's feature. Welcome. As a young girl, born into the Maasai ethnic group in Kenya, growing up, what was life like in your community?

[00:07:11] **Nice Nailantei Leng'ete:** Uh, I was born in the Southern part of Kenya. Uh that's Kajado south. Uh, I come from a community where I like saying I'm from the heart of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Now mount Kilimanjaro is not in Kenya, but we enjoy the beautiful part. And, uh, uh, it's a very beautiful community. We live close to the national park.

[00:07:34] Uh, we live, uh, with a lot of white animals and all that, but they're part of us and, uh, just like any other girl growing up there. Um, it was beautiful. Uh, when I was with my parents, I could go to school in the morning, uh, together with my elder sister and brother, and, uh, life was good there, but also as a Maasai girl, when you grow up.

[00:07:59] When you are [00:08:00] at the age of six, you have to attend ceremonies for other girls who are facing a circumcision as a way to prepare you. Because remember, as a young girl or, uh, when you're supposed to undergo circumcision, there are things that you're not supposed to do. One of them is crying or moving your body or your eyes.

[00:08:20] You are called a coward, or there is no man from that community who is going to marry you. That's why our mother would wake us up as early, as early as 3:00 AM or 4:00 AM together with my sister to go and witness other girls when they're undergoing the cut. And I attended many ceremonies. I saw my friends, I saw my neighbors.

[00:08:42] It's not like I was going to witness girls I didn't know. And out of that, I will say it was a very traumatizing experience. Out of seeing many girls, I saw death out of, uh, a female genital metha-tion. I saw girls dreams being taken away. These are girls, I was in [00:09:00] school with, they were my cousins or neighbors or friends.

[00:09:03] And it means, uh, once you under undergo the cut, it's a rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood. Even if you're 10 years, you're 12 years or eight, as long as you've undergone the cut, to them, you're considered a woman. It means you're ready for marriage. You are ready to become a mother when you're still a child, because once you are married, you're expected to have your own children and take care of your family.

[00:09:29] And I was not ready for it. I said, I don't want to die like so, and so I don't want to leave school like my friend. I don't want to be married by someone who is not even my choice because it's an old man that, uh, the family or, or your father decides for you. But it was not easy to convince my community at that time.

[00:09:52] So at the age of eight years old, uh, uh, seven, sorry, I lost my father and mother in [00:10:00] a span of one year. And I went and lived with my grandfather. And when I lived with my grandfather, because he was old, we didn't have anyone to take care of us. I had a chance to go to a boarding school and that's when I started to interact with girls from different communities.

[00:10:15] That's when I knew female genital mutilation is not done to every girl because where I was coming from, my mother, my aunties, my neighbors, you know, everyone around me has undergone the cut. So that was the life I knew. And, uh, by interacting with girls from different communities, it was not easy. Cause we used to shower together in big bathrooms.

[00:10:38] And if they know you come from the Maasai community, when you are showering, they want to see you. They make jokes. They laugh at you. Why did your family do this to you? Because they wouldn't understand why it was done. They come from different communities and that traumatized many girls that some of them had to drop out of school.

[00:10:56] And I started having that conversation with my teacher. I told [00:11:00] her my family wants to organize a circumcision for me and my sister, but I don't want, I want to stay in school. And I also don't want to be treated with my fellow girls the way I see them treating other girls. But my teacher was a teacher.

[00:11:16] Caroline, uh, was not Maasai and she told me Nice if you want to be a teacher like me and stay in school - because I wanted to be a teacher when I was there - you have to run away from the cut. Don't agree. I said, my family threatened me. They wanted to do it to me forcibly. They're telling me, cause there are a lot of myths around female genital mutilation.

[00:11:38] That if you don't agree, you will not be able to give birth. There is no man from that community who is going to marry you, or when you give birth, you're going to die. So they try to tell you all those things. And as a young child, or as a young girl, at some point I was scared, but I'm happy I had my teacher that I would ask her those questions every time.

[00:11:59] [00:12:00] So our time came, woke up as early as 4:00 AM together with my sister. We had to shower with cold water. Cause that cold water is supposed to act as anaesthesia. Remember, you're not given any injection. You shower, the cold water that has slept outside for two days. And, uh, as I said before, there are things you're not supposed to do, like crying or moving your body, your eyes.

[00:12:24] So we woke up as early as 4:00 AM. We joined our two cousins and when we were showering, I remember telling my sister, I want to stay in school. I don't want to die. I don't want to be married young. My sister was telling me the same. So we planned on how we are going to escape. We went outside our uncle's home.

[00:12:43] There was a tree. We climbed there and we stayed there for some time and because it was late, we couldn't go down. There were wild animals. We had to stay there for some time, but when there was light, we had to go down and we walked for more than 15 kilometers together with my sister. And [00:13:00] again, we couldn't go through the road because if we passed the road, they might come with motor bikes and bicycles and they will find us.

[00:13:07] So we just had to walk through the bush and later on, after a week or so Uh, because we went to our mother sister's place. We were found there and our uncle and a group of men, we were beaten and threatened and we had to promise that, uh, next time we'll not run away. So we came back, went to school.

[00:13:27] Schools were closed again. Our circumcision ceremony was planned again, cause they had already circumcised our three cousins. We had to wake up again as early as four am. Showered with the cold water. And I remember telling my sister,

we need to run for our safety again, even if it means a hundred times or a thousand times, we have seen the pain that it has caused in our community.

[00:13:51] We have seen what it has done to our friends, neighbours, and even family members. Uh, but my sister told me, Nice look, we [00:14:00] can't be running away every time. The other time we were beaten and threatened. So maybe this time they will do something worse to us. Uh, but because I'm, uh, older than you. Just go, I will stay.

[00:14:13] And I will not tell anyone where you are. I will just go to the same tree. And, um, I, I, it was very hard for me because I tried to convince my sister, but it was not easy. So I went to the same tree, but, uh, being in that tree, it was very difficult for me. Every time I was like, what if she dies? What will happen to her?

[00:14:35] Now my sister will be considered a woman and she's not able to go back to school. But then again, I couldn't go back because if I went back, they will do it forcibly to me. So my sister was not lucky. She got circumcised and married afterwards. And, uh, I think it is still one of the most difficult moments for me.

[00:14:57] But out of that, I decided I will not [00:15:00] go back to my mother's, uh, sister's place or go back to school, explain to my teacher what has happened. It has been difficult for me because every time I was like, I wish I could save her. I wish I could do something for her. But, um, I also said at some point I need to make peace with myself.

[00:15:19] And I would need to be there and try and support other girls. I couldn't do it for my sister, but it doesn't mean I have to keep quiet. I have sisters all over the world. Sisters, all over Africa, uh, all over Kenya who still every day have to undergo what my sister underwent and that's how I decided. Now I need to come out and speak up not only for myself and, uh, but also stand up for the rights of other girls.

[00:15:46] And after staying in school for some time, I had to go back home because school is not my home. And I started having

conversations with my grandfather. I don't want to die, like so, and so I don't want to live in, uh, uh, uh, I don't [00:16:00] want to be married when I'm still young. And I told my grandfather, after having those conversations many times with him, I will run away, become a teacher and never come back because I also tried to bargain with him that I am still young, give me more time so that I have a chance to stay in school.

[00:16:18] But later on, my grandfather agreed to support me. He called my family members and he said, uh, let's just allow her to stay in school. Whenever she's ready, she'll come back. So I've never gone back to my family to say, I want to be car because I've seen how it, she, the pain it has brought to the lives of many girls, uh, that I knew.

[00:16:40] And I think from that, uh, growing up in that community again has not been easy because there are all those names they give to uncircumsized girls. You know, people thought you can't be anything because you went against the wish of your community and your family members. But I think the whole experience, uh, the whole series of [00:17:00] events I've undergone, it toughened me up.

[00:17:02] And to always remember that I can stand up and, uh, And running away is also not a solution. Cause remember we have girls with disabilities who cannot see, who cannot walk, where will they run to? It's also not a solution to every girl. And that's why I decided to have a conversation with our community members.

[00:17:21] I decided to have this conversation with elders. Cause also as a woman, you're not allowed to talk in front of men, but I knew I cannot make change in that community if you are not involving men, uh, especially elderly men and the younger men in these conversations. And, uh, that's how the journey started.

[00:17:38] **Masechaba Mdaka:** Nice, I, I listen to you in this very moment, as you are documenting your experience as a survivor of FGM and it's in this moment as well that I, as a mother of two young girls, myself, um, the vividness of the picture that you have

[00:18:00] painted and the memories that, you know, one can quite, um, audibly and visibly see, you know, still very much, um, make up a lot of, um, some of the trauma you experienced around that time.

[00:18:13] Um, which again, speaks to, you know, the unfortunate reality in this moment in time, as we sit here, having this exchange that it is happening to another young girl somewhere, um, not just in Kenya, but in, uh, some of the other parts of our continent. In 2014, um, the Maasai elders declared an end to this practice of FGM.

[00:18:38] Is this still the case? And if you think of beyond the borders of Kenya, um, would we perhaps see similar actions, transcending, uh, favorably, um, towards the ending of the practice of FGM,

[00:18:52] **Nice Nailantei Leng'ete:** you know, ending FGM takes a lot of time because I, uh, changing culture is not [00:19:00] easy. You know, it's, uh, it's about changing mindsets.

[00:19:04] It's about changing attitude. It's about changing behavior. That's a culture that has been there for hundreds or thousands of years. We don't even know from when, even though our great grandmothers or grandmothers, you know, he has been there for long. And if you look at the history of Maasai, uh, uh, or the origin of FGM, they said, uh, Maasai people, we keep animals.

[00:19:29] We keep cattles so we move from one area to another, uh, in search for greener pastures, like right now, you know, it's, uh, drought season in Kenya. So it means they're in different villages or places, even in Tanzania, sometimes or different areas in Kenya, uh, in search for, uh, grass for their cattles. It's men and boys who move with cows. Women and children are left behind.

[00:19:58] And, uh, uh, [00:20:00] what they say is that, uh, when they moved with their cows for some time, uh, when they came back after months, they found their women pregnant. And they said, we need to find a way of punishing our women so that when we're away, they don't sleep around with other men or they don't

become prostitutes so is it was a way of making sure that their women don't enjoy sex or don't become prostitutes.

[00:20:26] They want to keep their women for themselves. And they say that one thing we need to do is to look for a way of punishing them so that they don't Uh, uh, they don't, uh, continue having sex with other men and that punishment was female genital mutilation. They say, we need to cut all of our women. And that's why I'm saying changing that behavior, uh, because it's a practice that has been there and that's what they believe in, it's not easy.

[00:20:57] We all know it's a right of passage from girlhood [00:21:00] to womanhood. You're not accepted by the community. You're not anyone in that community if you have not undergone the cut and, uh, but to us, any achievement, any little step we make, uh, we feel like it helps us, uh, when it comes to ending female genital mutilation. One of the things is denunciation from the cultural leaders.

[00:21:23] That was there in 2014. Having our men or our elders coming out and saying, we do no longer want our girls or our grandchildren or our daughters to undergo the, the cut is something big, but it has not come easy. It has gone a long way with a lot of conversations, a lot of dialogues, uh, together with them.

[00:21:47] And I want to bring in the issues of alternative rights of passage that we've been working on, that we are simply saying, let us keep what is beautiful in our culture. Let us, uh, [00:22:00] because if you look at the Maasai people, how we dress, how we sing, how we stay together, the generosity love and unity that is in that community.

[00:22:09] You cannot get it anywhere because it's the only community whereby culture teaches you to share the small that you have. You can't eat and your neighbor is sleeping hungry. We are the only community that we are not divided over small things. We have our own ways of, uh, solving our problems. And as a young warrior, you can't walk alone.

[00:22:30] You can't eat alone because they have to teach you how to share the little you have. And, uh, those are the things we are saying. Let's keep what is beautiful in our culture. We don't have to do away with. Let's embrace. There's also a culture that is taking away the dreams of these girls. There is a culture that is not just a physical cut.

[00:22:53] It's a cut of their dreams. It's a cut of human rights and it, they're not able to go back to [00:23:00] school. They're considered women at the age of 12. You leave school, you get married. and every child, they have ambitions, they have dreams. They want, they have whatever they want to be when they grow up, they want to be lawyers.

[00:23:12] They want to be teachers, professors, or anything they aspire to be. But if we have a culture like that, that is denying those girls, uh, an opportunity to take, to get an education, then it'll not be easy, uh, to have a developed community or a developed, uh, uh, uh, county or continent. So what we try to do is to ensure that, uh, we are talking to our elders and we are talking to everyone to the community.

[00:23:41] They need to understand it's not only affecting their health, but it's affecting the lives of girls, uh, in whole.

[00:23:49] **Masechaba Mdaka:** Nice. Just to hear you speak about, um, you know, thinking about exactly where this practice emanated from and how far back [00:24:00] we can trace it. Um, it's interesting to find out again, uh, something that we even said in the introduction that, you know, this sexualization in terms of subjugating women and controlling them, um, How we actually see that now having turned into something of a practice of culture, something which is now accepted and something even which one could consider has formed part of some form of industry, um, at the, at the expense of so many young women and girls and their dreams, their lives even.

[00:24:33] Nice, let's take it back slightly. Why are definitions such as female genital cutting and female circumcision used to replace FGM? Why the need to euthanise it do you think? Why are

we protecting, um, the, the, the, the gruesomeness with words by trying to beautify it in some way?

[00:24:57] **Nice Nailantei Leng'ete:** Yeah. Uh, I think, [00:25:00] uh, that conversation has been there in different, even global forums for FGM. Uh, theirs a saying we go: by the term female genital mutilation because it's mutilation. We don't give, want to give it a better name. Uh, we're simply manipulating our girls and let's call it that way because that's how it is. And, uh, for some culture that works, but other, other communities are saying.

[00:25:31] Uh, to us, it's mutilation, it's a cut. And as I said, uh, the, one of the reasons they give, they say we are not doing it because we hate our girls or our daughters, we are doing it out of love. We want them to be accepted. We want them to feel like they're part of that society. And that's their identity.

[00:25:52] That's who they are. and, uh, and, and, and that's why nowadays most of, uh, uh, uh, places [00:26:00] whereby you go, you see, they say female genital, mutilation / cutting, because they want to ensure that, uh, all, all communities feel like, uh, you know, we are taking their concerns and all that. So it's, it's a very, uh, uh, different conversation because there are.

[00:26:18] others who prefer let's say, mutilation and others prefer let's call the cutting. And, uh, to them, they say to us, it's a cut. It's not mutilation. So it's not really easy to say. We go by the word mutilation or cut. I think it's what fits with the community because we also like being sensitive. We, it took culture and to what people want, uh, because, uh, they have different reasons on why they're doing female genital mutilation.

[00:26:45] The reason we are doing it in Kenya is not the reason they are doing it in Ethiopia or Senegal, any other country that is practicing female genital manipulation. So I like saying, uh, whatever that people feels like it relates with their [00:27:00] culture or what they do. That's what they should, they should, they, they should use and, uh, remember it's good not to be judgemental.

[00:27:09] Uh, it's just good to be sensitive and allow people, uh, use whatever term they feel like resonates with them.

[00:27:19] **Masechaba Mdaka:** For those who are listening to this topic for the first time or who might be unfamiliar, let us go through what happens when a young girl is face to face with the procedure. Can you talk us through that?

[00:27:31] **Nice Nailantei Leng'ete:** Uh, female genital involves or it's a traditional harmful practice that involves a partial or total removal of external, uh, female genitalia or any other injury to female genital mutilation organs for non medical reasons. Uh, remember other communities say it's because of religion. That's why we they're doing it, but we have all seen because we've done meetings even with, uh, uh, uh, religion leaders.

[00:27:59] And they [00:28:00] said it has nothing to do with religion. That's definitely it's because of culture. And, uh, so there's no one reason to each community. I think they all have different reasons on why they're doing it, but, uh, all we all know is that, uh, it's a violation of human, uh, uh, uh, it's a violation of human rights and, uh, we all know that it does not have any medical benefits.

[00:28:25] Others say it has, but we all know that it has not. Uh, remember it brings a lot of pain and injuries, you know, we've seen even other girls bleeding, bleeding to death so it has a lot of consequences, not only on their health part, but also socially and economically, cause remember their dreams are taken away.

[00:28:47] They can't continue going to school. They become women, or they become, uh, uh, brides when they're still children. They become mothers when they're still children. And, uh, it means if you are not [00:29:00] educating our girls, if you are not educating the community, we cannot have, uh, um, we cannot have, uh, Uh, a society, uh, that is well developed.

[00:29:13] **Masechaba Mdaka:** Do you think we hide behind culture to endorse the things we cannot explain or justify

[00:29:19] **Nice Nailantei Leng'ete:** mm-hmm I can say maybe in a way, yes. Uh, uh, because a good example is where I come from. We had cultures, that way back, we thought they were important, but now it has changed though though it has taken time because a lot of things that we really feel are important to us.

[00:29:40] We have, we, we keep on saying it's because of culture. This is what culture says. It's important to us. It's our identity. It's what makes us who we are. That's why we are special and all that. And, uh, that's why also for us in our work, we decided to have a cultural solution to end female genital mutilation because we [00:30:00] know how important culture is, but we are simply saying.

[00:30:04] A culture that has no meaning is what we need to stop. A culture that has been there and we found it, uh, you know, people have different reasons on why they feel is important, but we all understand because of the experiences, the stories, the difficult stories from girls and women from these communities.

[00:30:25] We, we are coming from, uh, the horrors they had to go. So we, we, we all know, uh, the consequences, uh, but uh, we want to use culture in a good way because also there is what is beautiful as I said before, in our culture, and not only the culture that I come from, we have a lot of different cultures in, in Africa that is beautiful.

[00:30:51] A lot of people travel from different places just to come and see their way of living, what they do, their culture and everything. And that's what is beautiful. [00:31:00] And we are saying, let's embrace what is good, but what has no meaning is what we are saying, let's do away with.

[00:31:07] **Masechaba Mdaka:** I wanna pick up from that point, Nice. You speak about, you know, the younger generation starting to, to pick up on, on some of these practices, what we call culture, tradition. And, uh, we were having a conversation earlier, um, before we started. And, um, you speak about time, the time that has passed from the time that you were six years old and you came to realize this is part of your reality and where you are now.

[00:31:37] In your womanhood. Um, we speak of time and change. How have you been received in Kenya and maybe even in the region or the continent for your outward and outspoken views on FGM. And I'm referring specifically here, Nice to any kind of name calling or attack on your [00:32:00] Africanness, so to speak,

[00:32:02] **Nice Nailantei Leng'ete:** uh, definitely growing up in that community it was not easy and it's not only when I was growing up. Uh, because at that time people felt like, why are we ending FGM? I think it's an important right of passage. Why are we trying to change that? Uh, and to them it's important and it's something they wanted to keep. So they're like you are coming here to change culture, to find culture.

[00:32:27] So they look at you as an enemy, not as someone who is trying to make positive change in that community. And also remember for the younger men, we call them Morans. Uh, it means if girls are married, younger, uh, sorry. If they're circumcised younger, they're married younger, and they want that. Even the elderly men, they are marry the younger girls because to them, they're not children, they're grown women, even if they're 12, 10 years old.

[00:32:56] So it means when you are having these dialogues with the [00:33:00] community, girls are seeing the importance of staying in school and they are seeing why they should be in school. They're now realizing that it's, it's a harmful practice that should not be done. It damages their, their lives. And they start saying, we don't want to be circumcised.

[00:33:20] You know, if you're not circumcised. It means you're delaying your marriage. It means you have a chance to continue, uh, uh, with your education. It means you'll be able to choose whom and when to marry, because once you're educated, you are empowered. You can make better and informed decisions for yourself, whether you want to be married or not.

[00:33:39] That's up to you. Because you are empowered at that time. No one will do it forcibly to you. And it means there's no mar-

ket for these men. There are no girls, younger girls, they wanted to marry, but they'll be able to marry now because they're in school. So it means they see you as an enemy.

[00:33:59] They're saying you are taking their women or their wives away from them. So there will not be that there's a lot of resistance. And I think in my work, I've seen a lot of resistance with the younger men and with the elderly men, it was easy to have this conversation with women and girls. They were, they wanted to be part of that change.

[00:34:19] They have seen the pain, they've seen the damages. They have seen how they're left behind because of a tradition that has no meaning. And they were eager to, to make change. They wanted to see their daughters in school. They, they see amazing stories from other different communities. How girls have been able to.

[00:34:38] Really develop their homes, supported their families, and they wanted the same, you know, important people in the society in government positions, political position in different spaces. So they wanted that for their daughters. But now on the other end, men are saying. We, you are taking our women away from us because if they're in school, we don't have people to marry.
[00:35:00]

[00:35:00] Exactly. And, there was a lot of resistance from them. And I remember there was a time I rescued a, a girl, uh, in Southern part of Kenya that was like, uh, maybe seven years. And that girl, uh, she was supposed to be married. She was, uh, 10 years. She was supposed to be married by a very influential, uh, leader for the warriors.

[00:35:26] because they have their own chiefs or their own leaders. So that was a very sensitive case because he's very influential. He can say anything against you and all that. It's a case that we even had to talk to different people from government authorities. It was quite difficult, but at the end of the day, we were supposed to rescue.

[00:35:44] We were able to rescue that girl. And I remember him saying we would not want to see you here again. Don't come and change our culture. Don't come and, uh, you know, make our girls not listen to us. So at that point you cannot [00:36:00] go back at the same time. It takes time, as I said, because you also have to reconcile them back.

[00:36:06] You have to talk to them. You have to say, we are not doing it, uh, to harm the community. In fact, we love it. We love our culture, but we are just doing it to make sure we are saving our girls. And we are not only saying we want to empower girls. We want to empower both boys and girls because, uh, remember we have, we come from a community whereby we are saying, beating your wife is a way of showing them love.

[00:36:31] You know, speaking up as a young girl, it's a way of showing disrespect. So if we don't talk to the younger men, the younger boys, their fathers are their role models, whatever they see them doing, they will still do it. That's why we are not in our conversation or dialogues. We also have what we call the mother-to-girl forum.

[00:36:49] And the father-to-son forum. We sit down with fathers and their sons and we talk to them. Cause those boys in future will be fathers. Uh, [00:37:00] they, they will be, they'll be married to these women. Uh, they will have daughters, so we have to change that conversation and they ensure that as they grow up, they know that they also need to respect women and they need to protect them, uh, from these harmful practices.

[00:37:17] **Masehaba Mdaka:** Nice, why should we consider FGM a human right violation? And are we winning the battle?

[00:37:25] **Nice Nailantei Leng'ete:** It is a violation of human rights. One, we all know it's against the law and almost in all these African countries whereby uh, FGM is a problem. We have, uh, laws in almost all of them. So we, we know it's done to children.

[00:37:41] It's, you know, it's done to children under, depending on the community we are coming from under the 10 of years, we

have countries whereby it's even done to newborn babies who will never even know that FGM has been done to them. And, uh, uh, and I think that's why it's [00:38:00] important, uh, it's a violation of human rights, but it's important to have these conversations with everyone.

[00:38:06] Women, men, young and old, leaders, because we also have leaders who are not supporting it. Remember it's a cultural issue. They also fear they're going to lose votes. They, they also fear that the community will say, we don't want to elect you because you're going to change things and that's not what we want.

[00:38:24] So, uh, I feel it's something that everyone needs to know that it's their responsibility to talk about. It's their responsibility to take care of these rights of girls that it's affecting them.

[00:38:43] **Masechaba Mdaka:** Nice place foundation. Let's delve deeper into the incredible work your foundation is doing in line with empowering young girls to achieve their rightful place in society as adults, through advocating for the end of FGM, child marriages, and also the promotion of [00:39:00] education for young women.

[00:39:02] **Nice Nailantei Leng'ete:** Yeah, that has been my dream project and I'm happy now that it's a reality and Nice place foundation is a leadership academy for girls and a safe house for girls. So we have different programs there and one of them is the leadership program cause as I said, when we want to even end FGM or any other issue that is affecting the, uh, the lives of these girls.

[00:39:32] We need to empower them with information. We need to ensure that they're advocates or they're leaders in whatever conversation that we are having. And at the leadership academy, we have a curriculum that there it's like a two-and-a-half months program whereby they're trained on leadership skills, how to be a leader.

[00:39:51] They're trained on advocacy. They're trained on personal development, where issues of life skills, sexual, and produc-

tive, and their rights are there [00:40:00] you know, who you are, how do you realize yourself? You know, where do you want to be? A lot of empowerment is also there. Also have what we call, uh, the other topic is on computer and coding.

[00:40:12] We all know how technology is important. So we have girls who have finished, uh, form four who have been to school, but they don't have access to computers. How do we also ensure that we give, uh, them, uh, you know, computer skills or computer education and for the ones probably who have done computer in high school, uh, who are interested in advancing.

[00:40:34] We get them into coding. So we have a full-time young lady instructor there who is really, uh, quite good in that and who is really empowering those girls with that. The other thing is also, uh, we come from different communities. Remember in that community where we are, where our center is. They are so good in making jewelries necklaces, you know, their traditional, uh, [00:41:00] way, uh, with their traditional beads.

[00:41:02] Mm-hmm we also have, uh, agriculture is another thing that they do, we are now trying to come up with a demo farm that people need to know, going to the farm is not punishment. Actually, you can make a living out of it. The beautiful jewellery is how do we ensure we are doing, uh, good quality, proper branding so that we don't only empower those girls, but also the women economically and ensure that, uh, they can afford the living out of that?

[00:41:30] **Masehaba Mdaka:** Nice, You are unequivocally a freedom ambassador, an advocate who has had to overcome the threats of confronting, not just your own, but uh, other people's freedoms and their rights to get help. Um, you've created an enabling environment through the Nice Place Foundation, which has. We have come to read and I will see when I take that journey with you, um, to make [00:42:00] such an impactful change in people's lives that, um, people can start reimagining their societies, which are free from FGM.

[00:42:10] And on that note, I would like to have your final concluding comments regarding, you know, we'd love to hear about your hopes and dreams for the future. What do you want to see? In your lifetime?

[00:42:28] **Nice Nailantei Leng'ete:** Uh, yes, my dreams and hopes, uh, I think I'm still dreaming because, uh, uh, I don't think I'm done with everything, um, I wanted to do.

[00:42:37] Yes, I'm happy. A Nice Place Leadership academy and safe house is there. And, uh, the book was wild that I always wanted to do. And, uh, because I also realized I can't be in every place to share my story, to give girls hope, to give people hope, but I can't be in every store where people can. You [00:43:00] know, uh, get the story read and see whether it's going to, to, to, to help them.

[00:43:06] Uh, but also a nice place. We want to ensure that we are taking it to other communities whereby we know girls, uh, having the same problem. Cause what I want to see is a world whereby there is freedom for these girls to make choices, but they know yes, culture tells them that silence is a way of showing respect, but speaking up also is okay.

[00:43:32] And we want them to have that freedom, not only to make choices, but to speak up and say, or tell the world what they want as girls, how do they want to be treated? What do they want Uh, uh, uh, how do they want to be supported? Cause I think they're bold, beautiful, and they can always aspire to be anything they want to be.

[00:43:55] **Voice Notes:** That day that Nice came to me, she renewed my ambition. [00:44:00] She enabled me to dream again. She empowered me. She gave me voice to speak for my right, that the thing that I know FGM is not good in our culture. FGM is stopping them from achieving their dreams. Nice took me to school. I was able to, I was admitted in form one.

[00:44:19] I went there in school. Put a lot of effort knowing where I'm coming from and wanting to change the community that I'm

coming from. So after I gave birth, I, I heard from a woman who was there saving girls. So she told me about nice place foundation. I came to nice place foundation when my baby was six months, I left her back at home with my mother.

[00:44:40] So I came to Nice Place foundation, at Nice Place foundation I was taught about self-awareness about. Safe sex, aborting pregnancies and about having a clear perception of yourself. And I also learned about entrepreneurship skills. Through the entrepreneurship skills, I, I learned how to make soap and now I make soap. The money I get from soap helps, helps me to raise [00:45:00] my child, helps the situation back at home.

[00:45:03] And to Nice Place foundation. I would like to say thank you because it has helped me become a better woman. It has helped me grow as a woman. It has helped me have courage and know myself even better. The way I came in to Nice Place foundation is not the way I got out of this place. And to young girls, I would like to tell you that everything is possible and you also have a bright future. [00:45:22] Don't give up. It's not over yet for you.

[00:45:26] **Masechaba Mdaka:** This episode's journey has taken us down a very important road for us as people, not just for women and girls, but for us as people collectively to notice and realize the importance of dismantling the architectures that hold us back and which also imprison us. From the heart of Kilimanjaro this has been an impactful story and a good reminder.

[00:45:55] That my right. Your rights are [00:46:00] right. Humanity is for us all. This has been our fourth episode of the third season of Let's Talk Human rights, the FNF Africa podcast, exploring human rights issues. We trust you have been touched and informed by it. The Freidrich Naauman Foundation, sub Saharan, Africa, FNF is an independent German organization that is committed to promoting liberal ideals in politics in Africa, such as human rights, the rule of law, democracy, innovation, digitization, and free trade. By conducting campaigns, media events, seminars, workshops, study tours, cultural happenings.

[00:46:45] And training courses, the foundation promotes human rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of the press children's rights, and LGBTQIA+ rights and engages against the violence against women [00:47:00] and capital punishment. If you are interested in our activities, follow us on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

[00:47:08] Simply check for Friedrich Nauman Foundation Africa.