

# Morality Discourses of NGOs Working With FGM/C in Sierra Leone

The Cases of Amazonian Initiative Movement (AIM) and  
Advocacy Movement Network (AMNet)



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# Abstract

This thesis examines how moral discourse concerning FGM/C is articulated by the NGOs Amazonian Initiative Movement (AIM) and Advocacy Movement Network (AMNet) and with what consequences. It is a case study about these two organisations which uses content analysis as the main data collecting and analysing strategy. The theoretical framework describes the contemporary debate regarding FGM/C and categorises universalist, cultural relativist and mixed/alternative perspectives. The thesis concludes that the moral perspective of the organisations is evident through the design and implementation of the project as well as the various statements made by members of the organisations. AIM and AMNet articulate both universalist and cultural relativist perspectives. AIM explicitly places value in the Bondo tradition excluding FGM/C and AMNet suggests postponing FGM/C until the women are 18, displaying a cultural relativist view to the local culture. The analysis suggests that the initiatives which receive international funding are more universalist. Therefore, the design of the initiatives and the presentation of the organisation needs to be universalist in order to gain international support.

*Key words:* Sierra Leone, FGM/C, Universalism, Cultural Relativism, NGO

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# List of Abbreviations

AIM – Amazonian Initiative Movement

AMNet – Advocacy Movement Network

FGCS – Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery

FGM/C – Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

MoU – Memorandum of Understanding

NGO – Non-Government Organisation

UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN – United Nations

WHO – World Health Organisation

# 1 Introduction

The morality of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is a much-discussed, current and sensitive issue. FGM/C exists in many countries and cultures and has various motivations. In Sierra Leone, it is a central part of the culture: an initiation process marking the transition from girl to woman. The vast majority of women in Sierra Leone have experienced this initiation, or Bondo as it is called, which makes the issue highly relevant. 90% of the women in Sierra Leone have undergone FGM/C (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2013, p. 300), the 7th highest number in Africa (UNICEF, 2020). The process is secretive and the women who perform the FGM/C are respected and feared and powerful, which makes it difficult to avoid the practice or take a stance against it. The girls are typically young and are therefore vulnerable. If the girls decide not to participate in the tradition, they risk bringing shame to their families, not being able to participate in the community as before and not being able to marry.

There are various non-government organisations who work towards ending the harmful practice with different methods such as breaking the silence about it, providing non-violent options to the tradition as well as implementing vocational programs. What I found especially interesting about FGM/C is the moral discourse surrounding it and how one can see it represented in NGOs working towards ending it. In larger international organisations such as the WHO, the UN and Amnesty they are clear on their stance towards FGM/C, and they have little nuance between the motivations of the different cultures that practice it. It is therefore interesting to investigate local organisations. I am, therefore, in this thesis, examining the moral discourse regarding FGM/C and its relationship to the NGOs Amazonian Initiative Movement and Advocacy Movement Network, two organisations which are based in Sierra Leone. Current debates concerning the moral perspective on FGM/C are mainly theoretical and discusses it from a hypothetical point of view. I will discuss the practical consequences of the issue, in particular how it is articulated in and from the organisations themselves. The moral discourse surrounding FGM/C has been studied before, however, the perspective I am presenting have not and it is, therefore, an important knowledge gap to fill.

## 1.1 Research Question and Aims

### 1.1.1 Research Question

*How does Advocacy Mobilisation Network (AMNet) and the Amazonian Initiative Movement (AIM) articulate morality discourses in their work with FGM/C in Sierra Leone and with what consequences?*

### 1.1.2 Supportive Research Questions

- How do the initiatives conducted by the NGOs represent their moral perspective?
- Does external funding for the initiatives affect the moral perspectives of the NGOs?
- Which morality discourse is dominant in NGOs' work in Sierra Leone – universalist, relativist, or both?
- What does the prevalence of a particular morality discourse in NGOs work in Sierra Leone tell us about the changing practices of FGM?

### 1.1.3 Aims

The morality regarding FGM/C has been studied quite a bit, however, it has not been conducted in combination with a case study. It has mainly been about human rights as a whole and not with an in-depth look into what it means for an NGO. I, therefore, aim to tie together the theory of morals (in different schools of thought) with the implementation of this in a practical way to further increase my knowledge about the workings of an NGO and what the thought process is when planning, designing and conducting initiatives.

Since I have chosen two organisations as supplementary to each other, I have the potential to generalise my findings for other NGOs in Sierra Leone or perhaps other countries. In the concluding part of the thesis, I explain the generalisations I can draw from this case study. A possibility for further studies is to conduct a comparative case study, either of two NGOs in the same country or two in different countries.



There have been studies regarding the morals of female genital mutilation, specifically universalism and cultural relativism. These are discussed in the theory chapter of this thesis. However, there has not been a case study regarding this, and not a case study about an NGO in this sphere. I argue that this is important to figure out the relevance of moral philosophy in NGOs. The conclusions I draw may be applicable to other NGOs, most likely in the immediate sphere such as violence against women, reproductive rights and similar issues related to gender equality and women's rights.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

This section describes the definition of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) as presented by larger multi-national organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), as well as definitions articulated in academic articles. FGM/C is when a woman's genitals are altered without any gynecologically medical reasons. This includes the partial or total removal of female genitalia, external or internal (Galkayo Education Center, 2020). Most FGM/C happens to young women, typically between infancy and 15 years of age (WHO.int, 2020). FGM/C is often associated with religion, especially Islam (Human Rights Watch, 2020), however, this is a misconception. While some communities use religion as a reason for performing FGM/C, it does not have a clear connection. In the example of Islam, there is nothing in the Quran that describes FGM/C. This in combination with that it is practised in a variety of religions such as Christianity, Judaism as well as different indigenous religions (ibid). In addition to this, FGM/C has happened in non-religious purposes in the Western world as well, for example, as a way to cure nymphomania (Boyle & Hoeschen, 2001, p. 515). FGM/C can be better explained through socio-cultural conditions (Human Rights Watch, 2020). It has been a tradition in certain communities for a long time, rooted in tradition and culture preservation. Mitchum (2013, pp. 593-596) divides the motivations of the practice into four parts:

1. Religious
  - FGM/C is practised by various religious beliefs as well as some secular groups. Most commonly it is associated with Islam. However, it is not mentioned in the Quran, and can therefore not be seen as a Muslim practice. Despite this, certain religious leaders of different beliefs defend FGM/C as a vital part of their worship.
2. Sociological
  - In the communities where FGM/C are most prominent, it is a part of their culture and tradition. The practice is described as the transition from girlhood to womanhood. If a girl has not undergone FGM/C she can suffer consequences from the community such inability to marry which can cause economic consequences.
3. Aesthetic & Hygienic

- Another reason for conducting FGM/C is that the female genitalia is viewed as ‘dirty’ and ‘ugly’, or that by cutting out the clitoris or something similar may reduce the odour.
4. Psychosexual
- According to certain societies, women are sexual creatures that will succumb to their impulses if not stopped. Therefore FGM/C is a way of reducing the woman’s sexual behaviour and desire. Further, this can be a way of protecting a woman’s virginity.

Since not all FGM/C are the same, some are cut less or more, the WHO (Types of Female Genital Mutilation, 2020) have divided it into four categories:

Type I. Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans.

Type II. Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and the labia minora.

Type III. Narrowing of the vaginal opening with the creation of a covering seal.

Type IV. All other harmful procedures to the genitalia for non-medical purposes.

### 2.1.1 The Legal Status of FGM/C in Sierra Leone

There is currently no law in Sierra Leone that prohibits FGM/C (28 Too Many, 2020). There are laws regarding ‘human dignity’ and ‘equality’ but the law does not explicitly forbid violence against women or mentions FGM/C. Locally, in some chiefdoms, paramount chiefs and local Soweis have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which is a voluntary agreement to not perform FGM/C on anyone under the age of 18. MoU is further discussed in the analysis chapter of this thesis. During the Child Rights Act of 2007 (28 Too Many, 2020), the initial plan was to prohibit FGM/C on children. However, due to pressure from the paramount chiefs of practising communities, the parliament decided not to criminalise FGM/C because of its widespread prevalence and acceptance.

### 2.1.2 Bondo

Local to Sierra Leone is the Bondo secret society. The Bondo Society is a secretive and powerful society that exists locally in the communities in Sierra Leone and, in addition, provide a gateway between the politicians and the rural communities. The women who are members and leaders of the Bondo secret society - Soweis - are powerful and through the connections with politicians, they have the power to persuade women to vote one way or the other. The Bondo society is in other words

highly influential (O'Carroll 2015). Within the society there is the Bondo Bush. As described by O'Carroll (2015), a Bondo Bush is an enclosed, secluded area in the forest where the initiation from girlhood to womanhood, so called 'the Bondo initiation' or simply 'Bondo', takes place. FGM/C is usually performed as a first step in the initiation and it is a vital part of becoming a woman, otherwise, she will not be respected. Afterwards, the girls are kept in the Bondo bush for some time, it can vary from a few days to a few months, in which time they are taught adulthood skills. These skills include cooking, cleaning and caring for family members. Bondo in Sierra Leone is a complex and locally accepted practice, intricately entwined with the fundamentals of the culture. It comes to the point where some young women who have not undergone FGM/C choose to have the procedure done in order to please and look respectable to prospective husbands (Jones, 2018).

It is taboo to speak about or try to abolish the Bondo initiation . Forward (2017) describes that some women believe that they can be cursed and that demons will haunt them if they talk about it. In this way, the Bondo Society and its initiation is woven into tradition, politics, culture and religion which makes it more of cultural identity and a sisterhood rather than a club. This makes it difficult to criticise and question the practice (Forward, 2017). One of the issues regarding Bondo and FGM/C is the secrecy of the society and its initiations. According to Owolabi Bjälkander (2013, p. 1), the health implications often go unnoticed due to the silence surrounding the practice.

### 2.1.3 Soweis

As described above, Soweis are the members of the all-female secret society in Sierra Leone who performs the FGM/C and the remainder of the initiation process. The role of a Sowe is hereditary. The women are elderly and are believed to have supernatural powers which they can use to place curses on people who speak about the secret society outside the Bondo Bush. They use the fear and power to influence politics and have a central and authoritative role in the community. There are different names for Soweis depending on the ethnic group's language, in Temne, they are called Digba and in Mende, they are called Majo but they are generally called Soweis (Bjälkander, p. 14).

# 3 Theory

## 3.1 Theoretical Source Selection

I have chosen to include a number of academic articles to provide an overview of the contemporary debate surrounding FGM/C. The articles span across what the reason is that the practice is continued to what activist groups and governments are doing to eradicate FGM/C. The articles chosen are a selection of argumentative and descriptive ones. While the argumentative texts provide an overview as of what the authors themselves have investigated and where they place their personal convictions, the descriptive articles surrounding the debate contributes with more neutral views of the discussion. Since they are contributing to the debate and academia nonetheless, despite striving towards objectivity, they are important to include in the review as well. I avoid non-academic sources, or as Boyle and Hoeschen describe it (2001, pp. 513-514) ‘human interest stories (symbolism stories)’ in order to increase legitimacy. This includes articles from newspapers, where the theory and facts are of lesser importance than attracting readers. Certainly, not all articles are merely about selling papers, but the aim of this theoretical framework is to avoid sensationalism and in combination map what the academic discourse is.

One theme that arises often in the texts is universalism as opposed to cultural relativism. I have therefore chosen a number of articles debating both schools of thought, as well as the ones more focused on moving the debate beyond the concepts. Some of the articles discuss alternatives to FGM/C, such as ‘pricking’ the clitoris or performing a minor procedure under hygienic circumstances with medical professionals or opening a dialogue with the actors concerned.

To fully understand the current discourse, I will examine the historical, cultural and religious context in which FGM presents itself. I argue that it is therefore vital to include a ‘background’ section, where I discuss the act itself and where it is performed as well as how. I will include a number of sources such as the WHO, activist groups and academic articles. This will provide a holistic view of the practice which includes primary and secondary sources.

## 3.2 Clarification of Terminology

### 3.2.1 Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

I have chosen to use the term Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting or FGM/C as opposed to FGM or Female Circumcision amongst others. This formulation fits the purpose of the text as well as describes the specific meaning of the phrase. FGM is the term most widely used in current texts, for example, the WHO. However, since I am reviewing texts which critique the WHO and other official organisations, I included the variation ‘cutting’ as well which is used by some academics (Cassman, 2007; Galeotti, 2007). Despite that comparisons occur between FGM/C and male circumcision; I argue that they are different situations. Hence, I excluded the ‘circumcision’ part of the term. To conclude, to be descriptive and including of the terminology used in the politic-ethical debates surrounding FGM/C, I settled on this particular formulation.

## 3.3 Normative Discussions Surrounding FGM/C

### 3.3.1 Cultural Relativism

According to Spiro (1986, pp. 259-263), there are three types of cultural relativism. *Descriptive* relativism is the notion that the differences among people in different groups are relative to their culture. *Normative* relativism may be explained through what we view as being true or false, right or wrong. These types of judgements are dependent upon which culture they are in. For example, if one culture describes it as being right to have multiple wives and wrong to have only one, that is true within the context of that culture. They are relative to the values, standards and norms which that particular culture and society practices. *Epistemological* relativism is described by Spiro (1986, p. 261) as ‘the strong form of descriptive relativism.’ Culture is the only thing that determines why we live the way we live and determines everything in the way we act, think and believe. The sources I discuss below which have a cultural relativist perspective have a combination, partial or clear adaptation of these concepts. However, I am focusing on these concepts in

relation to FGM/C, and therefore am not analysing the specific aspect of their cultural relativism in too much detail.

### 3.3.2 Universalism

Moral universalism as it is discussed in the sources I have chosen can be referred to Immanuel Kant's theory of Categorical Imperative (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020), which states that one must follow a universal moral code, regardless of what we want to do or what our natural response might be. The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) articulates universalism clearly. The purpose of the declaration is to state that regardless of geographical or cultural context, a person has these rights. If one examines article 5. of the UDHR, one of which connects to FGM/C: "*Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.*" (The UN, 2020) they are making a universal claim to acts that happen within the context of a specific geographical location. Hence, they are taking a universalist moral statement. Through the examination of organisations such as the WHO or the UN, I could mainly see patterns of universalism in similar lists of values, the definition of the concepts and action plans.

### 3.3.3 Alternative or Mixed Perspectives

In this section I discuss the alternative and mixed perspectives academics take towards FGM/C, as well as those searching beyond the concepts of universalism and cultural relativism (Galeotti, 2007; Krivenko, 2015; Martinez, 2005; Sibian, 2013). For example, as presented by Galeotti (2007), there is a conflict in regards that the practice is still under the oppression of the patriarchy, but completely eradicating the practice is not likely. The article emphasises the feasibility of ending FGM/C completely and suggests that this idealistic pursuit is naïve and culturally biased from the west. Further, if one is discussing strategies to decrease or end FGM/C, it is simplistic to think that the practice will stop with mere legislation. According to Galeotti (2007) community work by feminist groups is needed. To compare with other issues, centres for abused women, abortion laws and education have been effective in the past. Therefore, that is needed now. Connecting with the views of Sibian (2013), by giving the women affected a voice, we can move towards ending FGM/C in a culturally inclusive way. According to her, the understanding of the culture, socioeconomic conditions, and overall provide an inclusive debate and understanding is essential in order to end FGM/C in a long-term way. In essence, she has a culturally sensitive and realistic view of the issue of FGM/C while still arguing for the end of the tradition. She, therefore, has an alternative view of the issue of FGM/C, through a universalist aim and a cultural relativist prospect of the reality of the situation.

According to Martinez (2005, p. 31), we need to move beyond discussing whether we have a universalist or cultural relativist perspective. We need to focus our research to debate the struggle that is occurring. In essence, we need to stop discussing opinions and move towards discussing their ability to provide an insightful, accurate and analytical description of the resistance to FGM/C. However, despite him stating that we need to move beyond the concepts of universalism and cultural relativism, one can see traces of the universalist perspective in Martinez (2005) reasoning as well. He connects to the campaign to end foot-binding in China (Martinez, 2005) that some outside intervention can be good. It started with missionaries, but the movement moved beyond their control since the Chinese took over it and it expanded (ibid). He states that by learning from this, one can say that it is ultimately up to the Africans if they want to end the practice, but that there is room for some insightful and knowledgeable intervention. Galeotti (2007) proposes an alternative minimalistic cutting as a middle path, whereas Martinez (2005) suggests that the practice should end if the western world starts the movement.

The articles by Martinez (2005) and Galeotti (2007) are both examples of alternative paths to thinking about the issue of FGM/C in terms of universalism and cultural relativism. However, whereas Martinez (2005) argues that we should focus on analysing the initiatives taken by different levels of governance, Galeotti (2007) suggests that we instead should find alternative ‘middle ground’ paths. These have a slightly different tone but take into account both the universalist and cultural relativist perspectives and focus on action.

Sibian (2013) discusses the merging of universalism and cultural relativism as the path to reduce/end the FGM/C practice. The merge will open a dialogue to make suggestions and have a respectful and open discussion (Sibian, 2013). Combining universalism and cultural relativism will help women voicing their stories and be better informed about their options and choices. She argues that we need a more holistic approach that addresses the underlying social-economic conditions that enable these practices which will, in turn, promote a long-lasting solution in contrast to immediate short-term solutions. In essence, Sibian argues that we need a cross-cultural dialogue which will prove more effective than a legislative approach to end FGM/C (Sibian, 2013). Connecting to legislative matters, Krivenko (2015, pp. 134-135) argues that human rights lawyers should have a better understanding of what it means to have a universalist perspective and increase their cultural sensitivity. The article revisits the tension between the universalist and the relativist, not in an attempt to resolve it but to demonstrate that the debate is still of importance in today’s human rights law and practice. Krivenko (2015, p. 108) argues that human rights law fails to handle this tension in a calm and non-imperialist manner today and that a more interactive and understanding approach to the issue is more effective.

### 3.3.4 Comparison to Female Genital Plastic Surgery



In order to place FGM/C in the context of the Western world, this section will compare and discuss FGM/C and Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery (FGCS). Comparisons to genital plastic surgery in the West is a common occurrence in the literature regarding the political morality of FGM/C. Since aspects of the different practices are quite similar, scholars often ask: how and why is it different? Drawing from articles by Johnsdotter and Essén (2004, 2010), Earp (2016), Bennett (2012), Nurka (2019) and Krivenko (2015), I will describe the debate regarding the differences and likenesses of FGM/C and Western genital cosmetic surgery. Female genital cosmetic surgery (FGCS), is when you perform an alteration of the genital area without a medical purpose for aesthetic reasons (Nurka, 2019, p. 3). There are a number of different kinds of labiaplasty (Johnsdotter & Essén, 2004, p. 612; Johnsdotter & Essén, 2010. p. 31), including but not limited to clitoral hood reduction, reduction of the inner labia, hymen ‘reconstruction’, liposuction for the mons veneris, etc. The reasons behind FGCS varies and can range from wanting to experience more sexual pleasure, look more feminine, replicate the norm presented by pornography etc.

Johnsdotter & Essén (2010) research the meaning behind gender and sex, exploring where the moments that are deemed ‘wrong’ are, and what the definitions are for the different concepts that arise from these subjects. When writing about FGM/C, they argue that there are ethnic inconsistencies in the debate. They argue that in the cases of FGM/C and FGCS, biology, medicine and culture meet (Johnsdotter & Essén, 2010, p. 29). One cannot simply talk about these subjects in a medical and anatomical way since they are integrated closely with culture and ethnic background. Earp (2016, p. 107) describes this perspective that the opposition to FGM/C is based on specific moral principles put in place by the Western moral principles. There are legislative differences, as Johnsdotter & Essén puts it, ‘Even the pricking of the African clitoral hood is condemned, while reduction of clitoral tissue in a European woman is legal and accepted.’ (Johnsdotter & Essén, 2010, p. 35). Looking at FGCS and FGM/C from a societal perspective, Bennett (2012, pp. 56-57) connects the two practices through a patriarchal perspective. Both occurrences happen due to the pressure from the patriarchal structures and the understanding regarding what is viewed as feminine and beautiful.

According to Krivenko (2015, p. 126), the women who request FGCS in Western countries are often young, some as young as 10 years of age. Adding to the controversy, one of the WHO’s reasons for labelling FGM/C as a human rights violation is that the procedure is performed on minors (Earp, 2016, p. 126). Krivenko continues by describing that a mother accompanying her daughter to the doctor to consider FGCS is not different from an African mother bringing her daughter to get cut (Krivenko, 2015, p. 112).

### 3.3.5 Concluding Thoughts

Through this theoretical framework (literature review), I have mapped the most important opinions and arguments when it comes to the morals of FGM/C. There are many ways to view the issue, whether it be that we need to change it, learn more about it, accept our differences or place responsibility. The morality of the subject is tricky, to say the least, and the more you research the subject the more opinions arise. However, the two themes I would most frequently find through my research was universalism and cultural relativism. Universalism seemed to be a common thread that could be found in most official sources such as the UN, WHO, UNICEF as well as different NGOs on levels ranging from international to local. The general consensus seemed to state that FGM/C was undeniably wrong, in any form it may come in. Whether it was a minor pricking of the genitals or infibulation, it was met with resistance from most perspectives. Other sources suggested a gentler way to approach the issue, to open a dialogue that will invite the people affected to take place. These also had a universalist perspective, i. e. they believed that FGM/C should stop, but through understanding and conversation.

The universalist texts were particularly interesting when reading the comparisons to the Western trend of FGCS. In many ways, the practices are the same, restructuring of the genitalia for non-medical reasons in order to please aesthetically. The great divider appeared to be cultural context. This is where cultural relativism provided alternative thinking. Why should we treat the traditions of another culture differently than those ours simply due to their ‘otherness’?

# 4 Method and Material

## 4.1 Research Design

### 4.1.1 Case Study

This is a case study about the Amazonian Initiative Movement and the Advocacy Movement Network. Since I aim to conduct an in-depth analysis of how moral perspectives are articulated in these two organisations a case study is the most fitting strategy. In addition, a case study opens up possibilities to use multiple data collection methods which enables me to best answer the research question. In line with Denscombe's 'typical instance' (Denscombe, 2011, p. 57), this thesis examines two organisations that are representative, in other words, likely to have similar counterparts in other countries, for example. Since they are two similar organisations, they are not an extreme instance (ibid), in other words, they are not unique and are not chosen due to their non-typical nature. Due to there being limited data in the case of Amazonian Initiative Movement (AIM), I decided to choose a supplementary case to gather more data to rely on. In this instance, I am not conducting a comparative case study, but rather an embedded case study. The cases are not analysed as two separate units, rather the larger case of morality discourses of NGOs is analysed as one cases, with these two organisations being the two data sources I chose.

### 4.1.2 Case Selection

The criteria for selecting the NGOs chosen were determined throughout my research. First, I selected the country. I originally thought about doing a study of a Somalian NGO, however, since I do not speak Swahili it was not a possible study. Hence, the first criteria selected was the language and the barriers it poses. If I would have to read and gather data from articles, academic journals and NGOs based in Somalia I would have to translate everything, which is not feasible in the study. I wanted to study Somalia due to the fact that they have the highest percentage of FGM/C in the world, approximately 98% are cut, thus the country I

selected for my study should have a high prevalence of FGM/C as well as speak English. I researched English-speaking African countries - since they have the highest FGM/C prevalence - and compared that to the percentage of FGM/C. Sierra Leone was the country best suited for my study, since the FGM/C percentage at 88% which means that it is a big part of the culture. In addition, they have English as their national language. When I had chosen my country of focus, I was ready to decide on the NGO.

I began searching for NGOs specialising in fighting FGM/C. I found that many of the NGOs were focused on FGM/C as a minor part of their organisation, while the main focus would be on women's issues in general or even human rights. To make my analysis as accurate as possible, I wanted an NGO focusing mainly on FGM/C. That way, I could assume that the moral stances they take in media and on their websites and such are related to FGM/C, and not generally about feminist issues. Through these criteria, I determined that the Amazonian Initiative Movement was the most fitting organisation for my analysis.

The Amazonian Initiative Movement (AIM) focus mainly on FGM/C and have started several projects fighting against FGM/C. They are a quite small NGO but have still managed to persuade 700 Soweis to publically stop cutting girls and they have started several educational programmes. One problem with AIM is that they do not have a well-updated website. Their social media accounts are not well updated. I had, therefore, a difficult time obtaining current primary empirical data. They are nevertheless reported in news articles, where their initiatives are described as well as a number of interviews with the founder and leader of AIM, Rugiatur Turay. Since the primary source information was limited, I decided to choose a supplementary NGO to further increase the legitimacy of my analysis and findings and I settled upon the Advocacy Movement Network (AMNet).

AMNet is a Sierra Leonean-based NGO which focuses on women's issues with FGM/C as an aspect. They are similar to AIM in their values and the structure. They are a female-lead grassroots organisation founded by Hawa Samai, a Sierra Leonian activist who has personal experience with the issues surrounding FGM/C. They have a number of initiatives targeting FGM/C, such as 'say no to child Bondo' where the communities sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) (Appendix 3) stating that they will not perform FGM/C on any girl under the age of 18 (Amnesty, 2014).

#### 4.1.3 Content Analysis

In this thesis, I am conducting a qualitative content analysis (Bryman, 2015, p. 291) within the case study. This is the best way to examine and answer the research question is to continuously interpret and analyse the data collected. I am searching for meanings, signs and categories in the documents gathered in order to find patterns relevant to the research question. The sources I choose and the data I

collected reflects upon the research question, in other words, I choose not to analyse data without moral value. The documents, news articles and social media posts, for example, I need to investigate are the ones that display the relevant factors for cases and the thesis in itself. In the theoretical framework, I discuss academic articles regarding universalism and cultural relativism. In the empirical sources I have chosen, I search for patterns of words which correlate with either cultural relativist perspective, universalist or something in between. The most important characteristic of the words or the phrases I choose to analyse is that they have a moral value. Further, I analyse the moral nature of the initiatives the organisations propose, conduct as well as what effect they have had in the community and how it has been received by the people. In the theoretical framework, I have categorised a number of moral perspectives in the context of the study as a universalist, cultural relativist or a combination of both. I use these categories in the analysis part of the thesis by reading and interpreting a document and consequently placing the moral message of the document in one of the three categories. In other words, I am interpreting the themes and patterns of the document according to the previously stated criteria (Bryman, 2015, p. 297).

## 4.2 Empirical Material

Since this is a case study, I used multiple methods of data collection and data interpretation in order to answer the research question: How does the Advocacy Movement Network and the Amazonian Initiative Movement Mobilise Morality Discourses in Their Work Against FGM/C and With What Consequences? I was considering a discourse analysis from the beginning, however, in order to answer my research question, I needed to take a deeper look into the organisation in order to find the holistic and practical picture of how the moral discourse is articulated and implemented in the organisations. I will collect whatever data I can from the organisation in terms of initiative documents, objectives, aims, motivations etc. I collected empirical data from multiple sources such as the organisations own websites, their social media accounts, news articles from different newspapers, etc. I analysed the collected data to find the moral perspectives communicated in the texts.

When I researched the organisation, their website had not been updated since 2014. I found it hard to find an organisation which had a well-organised updated website, and this was making my research process harder. I did not know if I would be able to find an organisation which is feasible to study. However, despite the fact that the website has not been updated for five years, I was able to find news stories about their projects in up to 2020.

I had email communications with Rugiatu Turay, the founder and leader of the Amazonian Initiative Movement. I wrote a message to the organisation's page on

Facebook and got a response which said that I should respond with my email address. I wrote to Rugiatu, and she responded with a brochure and a document with the description of the organisation written. Both of these documents were helpful and are included in the analysis part. I wrote to her and to Advocacy Movement Network asking to have an informal interview but I, unfortunately, did not get a response back from either of them. I relied, therefore, on the data I could gather from other sources in order to conduct the analysis.

### 4.3 Delimitations

I will not look at the administrative part of the organisation, the structure from a practical perspective for a start. Instead, I will look at the mobilisation, initiatives etc. Since I have chosen only organisations in Sierra Leone, I have delimited my study in multiple ways. The culture will not differ drastically from each case, it is mainly (if not only) the secret society in Sierra Leone called Bondo who performs the ceremonies where girls and women are cut, therefore it will be easier to analyse the situation. Certainly, the culture is complex and cannot be explained in a few sentences, but in order to compare cases to each other, it is important to have some similar factors. By looking at organisations that advocate for women's rights but especially FGM, I can focus my research more clearly on that one rather a big area of the organisation. If I would have researched an organisation which is more general, for example, 'human rights' or 'children's rights', I would have too much data to form conclusions.

### 4.4 Previous Studies

There have been studies regarding the morals of female genital mutilation, specifically universalism and cultural relativism which is discussed in the theory chapter (Galeotti, 2007; Krivenko, 2015; Martinez, 2005; Sibian, 2013; Johnsdotter and Essén (2004, 2010); Earp, 2016; Bennett 2012; Nurka 2019). However, there has not been a case study regarding the subject, and not a case study about an NGO in this sphere. I argue that this is important to figure out the relevance of moral philosophy in NGOs. In other words, I aim to find the *practical* implementation of these themes in NGOs. The conclusions I draw can be related to other NGOs, most likely in the immediate sphere such as violence against women, reproductive rights and similar issues related to gender equality and women's rights.

### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

In a subject which is as sensitive as this is, it may be hard to differentiate arguments from being indifferent to ones being realistic. Some of the sources I am discussing suggest alternative paths to reduce FGM/C instead of eradicating it. For example, performing a minimal procedure under hygienic conditions with trained professionals. The emphasis lies in that it is not feasible to end all FGM/C instantly, that in order to protect the girls about to be cut, we have to take a moral stance to choose an alternative path which may not agree with the Western moral ideologies, but is an attainable goal.

## 5 Analysis

### 5.1 Structure and Content

I will begin each section by discussing the primary sources - in other words, the information and texts found on their own sites. I will then continue by mapping the articles and news reports about them and various statements they have made to find the underlying moral discourse. Content analysis of the material chosen.

In my analysis, I have chosen to use material mainly gathered from the organisations' own websites and social media accounts as well as news articles I have found in online media. I have chosen to structure the analysis by NGO rather than by moral discourse concepts. I argue that this is the best way to examine the cases deeply enough to gather a fuller picture. Both NGOs had a mixture of universalist and cultural relativist perspectives, the sources displayed more often than not a blend of the two.

### 5.2 Amazonian Initiative Movement

The document I received from the founder and leader of the Amazonian Initiative Movement (AIM) had a number of achievements that they have made since they were founded. In this document, I have found several moral claims that they take. *“First organization to work in Rural communities and break the silence of FGM supported by the US Embassy 2003”*, this corresponds with the universalist moral claim, due to them being supported by the US Embassy. This implies that their moral values are aligned with the ones of the US, in other words, universalist since they do not have the same norms as the local culture of Sierra Leone. They take a stance towards receiving help from another cultural context than what they are from, which conflicts with the definition of cultural relativism. Since cultural relativism is the belief that the moral norm can only be understood and deemed right within the context of the culture itself, the stance that they are taking in this achievement does not correlate with that. In other words, this stance is universalist.



Several other points in the list of their achievements display universalism as well in a similar manner (document sent by Rugiatu Turay, (Appendix 2)):

#### ACHIEVEMENT[s]

- First organization to work in Rural communities and break the silence on FGM supported by US Embassy 2003
- First organization to send soweis to adult literacy for six months supported by American refugee committee 2004-2005
- Supported three villages that declared to stop FGM with agriculture supported by US embassy
- Constructed the first safe house for girls running from FGM, early/forced marriages supported by Terres Des femme
- Breaking the silence on FGM supported by Plan
- Established and operate 45 clubs of influence in schools and community level in Port Loko and Tonkolili districts
- Constructed and established a primary school supported by Global Fund for Human Rights
- Working with men, religious and traditional leaders supported by Education for Development
- Only organization to organize three public declarations with soweis signing Agreements supported by American refugee Committee, Terre Des femmes and Pfefferminzgreen
- Construct and established two schools were FGM is taught supported by Pfefferminzgreen
- Organized the First Bondo without Blood for 70 girl's age range 19 to 35 supported by Pfefferminzgreen and purposeful.
- In the advance stage of constructing a primary school in Tonkolili where used to be a Poro bush.
- Established a skills training centre for Ex-Soweis and uncut girls funding by pfferminzgreen

The words and phrasings I am referring to in this paragraph are the external organisations that are sponsoring and supporting AIM. Thus, if one simply looks at the companies that are sponsoring AIM in these projects, there is a clear pattern of universalism. Since it is only Western countries that are supporting the organisation, one can deduce that they search for validation in a universal manner in order to gain support outside the context of their own community. However, if you look at it from another perspective, it may be necessary for them to portray an initiative or a project in a certain way in order to receive funding at all. Hence, this may not be representative of what the moral values are of the organisation and the people in the organisation but is the consequences of the reality of the implementation. Therefore, the practical effect of what an organisation stands for is a universalist moral value, regardless of the idealistic values they started out with.

Further, in another document sent by Turay (Appendix 1), one can see moral values that correspond with cultural relativism. The vision statement of AIM as formulated in the document is: *“A breed of strong self-reliant women who can challenge the issues that affect them”*. By stating that the women themselves decide what happens to themselves and whether they want to take a stance correlates with the notion that morality and the norms of what is right and wrong in a society depend on the context of that culture. Another quote from the same document in the section ‘objective of aim’ is: *“Our main goal is to work with and support the communities to achieve their own developmental goals.”* This further confirms the cultural relativist theory. These are examples of how morality discourse is mobilised practically in an NGO. The idea of the communities deciding their own norms and morals in combination with community members protesting a certain norm (FGM/C in this case) creates a space between where the NGO steps in. Through this method, AIM implies that they are facilitating the affected women to make changes in the community rather than intervening in the society with their own moral justifications.

I argue that the most representative initiative AIM has done is their ‘Bondo without Cutting’ movement (Soroptimist International, 2020). The essence of the initiative is that according to Rugiatsu Turay, the Bondo culture is central to the identity of Sierra Leonians and involves more than simply cutting; *“including dancing, teaching women and girls to respect elders, how to take care of their husbands, children, and members of the family amongst others.”*(Soroptimist International, 2020). This statement places value in the local religious and cultural traditions with the exception of the FGM/C itself. This is an example of how AIM implements a cultural relativist perspective in their philosophies and, in extension, their initiatives. These are the practical consequences of the implementation of the cultural relativist belief in an initiative. The value they place in learning to respect elders and taking care of their husbands and families through a local cultural context suggests a cultural relativist point of view, in other words, they are not attempting to change the culture by changing one aspect of it.

This is further represented in an article from the Calabash Newspaper (Sahid Nasralla (De Monk), 2019) with a quote from Rugiatsu Turay: *“I want people to know that I am part of the Bondo society and I like it so much but I hate FGM because of my experience and that of other women and children which I witnessed.”* She is representing the organisation with these statements, thus portrays them as a cultural relativist organisation. The portrayal of the organisation may affect the design, execution and results of the initiatives taken.

One can further see the representation of cultural relativism in an article by the Global Citizen, which is a portrait of a village in Sierra Leone that has abolished the initiation altogether (Peyton, 2019). A former Soweï in the village explains that the money that used to be spent on the initiation, such as clothing, feasts and fees for the FGM/C itself, is now spent on farming and the children. *“I am happy because we spent a lot of our money on initiations,” said the former cutter, who has started farming. ‘Now our resources are going to our children.’”* (Peyton, 2019).

They are emphasising that the main benefit and what has been appreciated most regarding abolishing the practice has been the savings they make. The village has adopted a universalist moral perspective by ending the practice altogether. They describe the process without sentimentality with a focus on fiscal benefits. Rugiatu Turay's views on the issue are described in the interview: "*she never intended to end initiations into Bondo society altogether — just the cutting. She envisions a new kind of ceremony with no FGM, where women are taught leadership skills and menstrual health. 'We think the social aspects of Bondo are key,' said Turay. 'We don't want to lose our culture.'*" This represents her and the organisation's cultural relativist views on the matter. The cultural relativist view is mobilised in the initiative she is proposing, the 'Bondo without Cutting' as stated earlier. Again, the cultural relativist views are visible through the media presence of the organisation.

To conclude, the moral discourse and how it is mobilised in the initiatives of AIM is cultural relativist in nature. There are some universalist elements in the organisation, most evident in their list of achievements. This, however, may be due to the fact that they have been funded by international organisations and are therefore presented in a universalist manner. In the article by Global Citizen (Peyton, 2019), Rugiatu Turay explains that it is difficult to find funding to create a non-physical alternative to the Bondo initiation. After all, the initiatives cannot be conducted if there are no funds to support it. Therefore, the result becomes that they receive funding for the projects that are more universalist in nature, such as teaching the Soweis to read for example, rather than designing a local ceremony that can only be understood within the context of the culture itself. In essence, the aims and ideals of the organisation are one thing, while the design of the initiatives and the implementation of them are another, and they may change through the process of recruiting sponsors.

### 5.3 Advocacy Movement Network

The Advocacy Movement Network is the larger of the NGOs I am examining in this thesis. I found several different moral stances that were taken in the texts and interviews given by them. I have compared the news articles and their websites with the ones from large international organisations such as the UN and the WHO.

The core values of AMNet (AMNet, 2020), as stated on their website:

1. Focus on transparency and accountability
2. Focus on the disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable groups
3. Promote the volunteer ethos
4. A commitment to networking and partnership
5. Gender equality as an essential component of development

6. Commitment to promote internal learning and sharing of best practices
7. Commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and the development priorities of the Government of Sierra Leone
8. Use of culturally friendly approaches and initiatives
9. Strive to gain in-depth knowledge of local issues and realities
10. Triggering change at the grassroots and policy levels
11. Principle of do no harm

There are both universalist and cultural relativist perspectives represented in the list and I will discuss both in this section. Since a list of core moral values is most relevant for this thesis, I will start the analysis regarding AMNet using this as a starting point to map the moral discourse of the organisation.

On their website (AMNet, 2014), one can see the first indication of the universalist perspective. Their slogan is: *“Right to Basic Fundamentals of Life”*. If one pair this phrase with one pillar of their core values as listed on their site (i.e., *“Commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and the development priorities of the Government of Sierra Leone”*), one can see that they refer to the UN's definition of human rights since the Millennium Development Goals are drafted by the UN. As stated in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the UN has a clear universalist perspective when it comes to human rights and what that entails. It seems that their initial moral foundation is based on the UN and the WHO principles which have a clear universalist moral stance.

Further, the leader of AMNet, Hawa Samai, has had collaborations with the UN, which increases the organisation's indication towards a universalist value. In order to collaborate with the UN, one must share some common values with the organisation (Giraffe Heroes Project, n.d.). AMNet had, in addition, a collaboration with Amnesty where a Memorandum of Understanding (henceforth MoU) (Appendix 3) was signed in Chiefdom of Masungbala in North West Sierra Leone, promising not to perform FGM/C on any woman under the age of 18 without consent (Amnesty, 2014). Amnesty displays a clear universalist moral stance in their issues, similar to the UN and the WHO. A clear example of how this is manifested in the organisations is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which Amnesty refers to on their website (Amnesty, 2020). The UDHR is founded and formulated by the UN (United Nations, 2020) and adopted by Amnesty (Amnesty, 2020) amongst others. I argue that article 5. of the UDHR is the article one can interpret and connect most to the issue of FGM/C: *“Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”* However, the (MoU) they are referring to states that they will not perform FGM/C to any woman under the age of 18, which is a moral relativist stance. In this way, the tradition is still kept alive through a compromise. To analyse Article 5, the torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment does not limit itself to minors. They are merely delaying the cutting. To consider the ‘consent’ part of the MoU, the women may decide to not undergo FGM/C, however, there are consequences. One must consider the social pressure a woman may feel when faced with this situation. If she will not be accepted by her family, the community or will

not be able to marry, this may be enough of a reason to go forward with the cutting. Hence, she is not giving her consent in every sense of the word. In conclusion, despite AMNet cooperating with Amnesty, their signing of the MoU can be viewed as a cultural relativist compromise and I would, therefore, say that this corresponds to a co-existence of universalist and cultural relativist perspective.

If one combines the MoU act with the 8th point in t AMNets core values (AMNet, 2014), (i.e., “8. *Use of culturally friendly approaches and initiatives*”), the two documents correspond with each other, in other words, the MoU reflects the values of AMNet according to their official list of core values. One can say that they have come to a compromise with the MoU act by having firstly the *aim* for a universalist value (i. e. the absolute end of FGM/C) and that the *result* was the compromise in the MoU (i. e. to not perform FGM/C on anyone under the age of 18, and after that only with consent). In other words, their aim is largely universalist, and the result becomes a co-existence of universalist and cultural relativist perspective in reality. The effect of their universalist aims implemented practically creates mixed perspectives.

AMNet’s 9th core value (AMNet, 2014) (i.e., “9. *Strive to gain in-depth knowledge of local issues and realities*”) also correspond to a cultural relativist perspective. By learning about a situation before implementing initiatives to handle it, they display an openness to understand the reality of the situation and what it means to the people involved. Therefore, this point corresponds to cultural relativism.

A cultural relativist perspective on FGM/C is also prevalent in addressing the Maputo Protocol. The Maputo Protocol is an agreement made by the African Union which has a number of points regarding human, especially women’s, rights. Article 5 discusses “Elimination of Harmful Practices” and there is a sub-article about FGM/C. Article 5.b states:

*prohibition, through legislative measures backed by sanctions, of all forms of female genital mutilation, scarification, medicalisation and para-medicalisation of female genital mutilation and all other practices in order to eradicate them.*

Hawa Samai, the leader of AMNet, commented on this stating (Saffa, n.d.): “[*the*] protocol was looking for an African way of protecting African Women”. Hawa Samai emphasises the importance of African autonomy in these issues. Despite the protocol being clear about eliminating some traditional practices, it is not through the largest human rights groups such as the WHO or the UN. It has, therefore, tones of cultural relativism. Hawa Samai called this “an African way to protect African women”, which suggests a cultural relativist perspective. One could, therefore, conclude that Samai is in favour of the African way of protecting African girls, rather than the Western way. As an organisation fighting for women’s rights, this is a central protocol to the cause.

In conclusion, AMNet displays both cultural relativist and universalist values in the material analysed. One can see that in their list of core values, where the universalist perspective is most evident in their strive toward the Millennium Development Goals (AMNet, 2020). They do display cultural relativist views in their list as well, point 9 for example where they place value in knowing the local issues on a deeper level. From a universalist perspective, there are some instances where they articulate they are compromising when they are signing the MoU for example. AMNet is an organisation with a mixed moral perspective on the issue of FGM/C.

## 6 Conclusion

By analysing the themes, phrasings and descriptions of the two organisations, one can see moral discourse patterns throughout the texts. Both organisations display characteristics of both universalism and moral relativism, creating a mix of the two, or rather, an alternative path. Both of the organisations are founded and lead by native Sierra Leonean women which gives them a perspective not found generally in larger international development organisations such as the UN or the WHO. Both organisations articulated their mix of universalism and cultural relativism to end FGM/C without losing their culture through culturally friendly alternatives, such as AIM's 'Bondo without Cutting' and AMNet's 'Say No to Child Bondo'.

AIM's initiative 'Bondo Without Cutting' is a clear representation of cultural relativism. They are trying to maintain the Bondo culture as much as possible while still eliminating the FGM/C. The leader of AIM, Rugiату Turay, stated that the main problem with creating alternative rituals to the traditional ones is finding the funds to do so. Consequently, an organisation's attempts to articulate their moral perspectives in an initiative is in some situations altered by the lack of financing. Therefore, despite the organisation's initial moral perspective of cultural relativism, international funding is dependent on them presenting the initiatives in line with universalist values.

AIM places value in other matters that the Bondo tradition teaches young women, such as taking care of the family, respecting the elders, cooking, etc. Rugiату Turay states this while talking about one village where they eliminated the initiation altogether. Turay states that they do not aim for that, they still see the importance of the tradition despite the money being spent. The village reinvested the money in agriculture and planted crops where the Bondo bush used to be. Through a universalist perspective, this is a healthy development of a community by a number of factors. They are protecting the girls from being cut and are building a stronger financial future by investing the funds in agriculture. However, AIM's perspective in the matter is that the cultural and traditional value is being lost in the process. In other words, if the cost of financial progress is the culture, it may not be worth it. This is why AIM has the initiative 'Bondo Without Cutting'. This is how morality discourse and perspective of AIM affects and presents itself in the work they do. In their list of achievements, all but two of them were supported by international organisations and companies which indicates a universalist reality to designing and implementing projects. This is a consequence of morality discourse, despite them having cultural relativist aims they have more opportunity to complete projects with a universalist nature.

In regard to AMNet, they had more mixed moral perspectives than AIM, despite the organisations being similar in many ways. In their list of core values, as stated above, they are displaying universalist perspectives by referring to the Millennium Development Goals which are drafted by the UN. The UN, as discussed above, has a universalist moral perspective. However, a number of the initiatives AMNet lead are cultural relativist in nature, for example, their 'Say No to Child Bondage'. By postponing the procedure until the women are 18 years of age, they are altering the most troubling aspect of FGM/C according to AMNet, and through a Memorandum of Understanding, they reach a compromise. This is how the morality discourse and perspective of AMNet affects their work with FGM/C. Consequently, they represent both universalism and cultural relativism in their core values, which is how they articulate the morality discourse in their work.

Universalism may be a necessary step for these organisations in order to get funding and implement any initiative at all. If they are not supported internationally, it is difficult to have a working and productive NGO which makes a difference. These results mean that in order to get funding, an organisation may need to prioritise the most globally appealing initiatives, therefore they present in a universalist manner. In this case, one can move beyond the binary thinking of deeming an organisation as universalist or culturally relativist. Since NGOs need funding to function, one must rethink the way one views morality regarding FGM/C in NGOs. This area would benefit from further research that examines the way NGOs draw strategically from both universalism and cultural relativism in order to receive funding from larger international organisations such as the UN or the WHO. There are politics to drafting and implementing initiatives for NGOs and the initial moral stances and perspectives they have cannot always reflect in them. Perhaps one can say that in reality, it is not a question of whether universalism or cultural relativism are represented in the NGOs, but if the initiatives they suggest and conduct include compromise and culturally sensitive solutions or not and this is how moral discourse is articulated in these NGOs.

In contemporary academia, there is a knowledge gap regarding how the internal moral perspectives of NGOs is articulated in their initiatives and the effects of it. In the literature review, I mapped the current discussions and opinions regarding cultural relativism and universalism in relation to FGM/C and applied it to how it is mobilised and articulated in the NGOs chosen. Through my analysis, I have begun the process of filling the knowledge gap where it comes to moral perspectives of NGOs working with FGM/C. I hope that this can inspire future research in this area, such as case studies regarding morality discourse of similar NGOs working with FGM/C in other countries.



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# 8 Appendices

## 8.1 Appendix 1: Amazonian Initiative Movement Brochure

Awareness for capacity building effectiveness in the society.

- ✓ To promote social reintegration, trauma healing, conflict resolution, active-non-violence and reconciliation within the sub-region, particularly for refugees and Internal Displace People(IDPs)

### MISSION STATEMENT

AIM strives to promote and protect the Right of women and girls through Education advocacy and capacity building/ empowerment.

### VISION

A breed of strong self-reliant women who can challenge issues that affects them.

### AREAS OF INTERVENTION

**1. Campaign against Female Genital Mutilation.** In order to improved the health of women and the girl child FGM needs to be addressed as part of an overall strategy to improve the health of women. This includes the training of women, girl child and men who will continue to sensitise their communities.

**2. Promoting the role of women in active-non violence and peace education.** The multiple roles that women play in their communities mean that they are well placed to educate their societies on the principles of active non-violence and peace education. This involves training women, ex-combatant, police and soldiers.

### 3. MICRO-CREDIT SCHEME.

AIM is developing women's groups, and seeks to provide funds to enhance self-employment and increase further access to fund.

### 4. CAMPAIGNS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

This includes working with women, local leaders, institutes and men in order to give the same roles, opportunities and facilities to men as well as women.

### 5. INCOME GENERATING AND SKILL TRAINING.

Women have less access to training and credit. AIM is promoting the training of youths, women and disabled people in the inquisition of skills for self-employment.

### 6. LITERACY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS.

Low literacy has serious implications for development indicators, including health and economic development.

### 7. IMPROVING THE HEALTH STATUS OF WOMEN.

This includes health education, especially on issues relating to reproductive health.

### 8. SUPPORT FOR STREET CHILDREN AND PROSTITUTES.

These two groups have increased dramatically as a result of war. Their needs are vast and include shelter, education and often trauma counselling

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### AMAZONIAN INITIATIVE MOVEMENT (AIM)

#### BACKGROUND

Africa has been plagued with gruesome civil wars in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in about 20 countries. The effect of these wars on the women folk and child is yet to be accurately documented for the effective policy making of African governments. In addition to these wars, the culture of these countries have again put both women and children at a disadvantaged point making the problems of the continent much more than what is realised by governments.

The Mano River Union Countries are not an exception to the above. With it experience of years of war that left majority of women as widows and their children amputated, the culture of Africa needs to be revisited within the context of social and economic emancipation of women and children on which the future of any nation lies.

AIM Mano River Union see a vision for the sub-region only if major efforts are directed towards modernising and changing certain belief system that could be considered as obstacles to development. It is in this light a new thinking has emerged with these affected women.

AIM was established in 2000 by a group of young people to help women pursue active non-violence work, to rebuild communities, minds and bodies

## 8.2 Appendix 2: Amazonian Initiative Movement Mission and Vision Statement



### **AMAZONIAN INITIATIVE MOVEMENT (AIM)**

The Amazonian Initiative Movement, adequately abbreviated as AIM, is an independent women's rights organization founded in 2000 with its head office in Lunsar Port Loko district. It is registered with the ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children Affairs since 2003, SLANGO and Ministry of Finance, Development and Economic Planning. It was established in November 2000 by refugee women at the then Kalia refugee camp in Guinea Conakry.

It is a human right, non-governmental, non lucrative and non-political movement. AIM is a not-for-profit-making organization that works to enhance citizen's active participation and involvements in upholding and promoting human rights cultures and participatory governance at the grass root levels through effective information, disseminations, advocacy, lobbying, dialogue forums, civic education and community driven programs/activities.

While recognizing the essential role of women in national development, AIM strives to improve on their health, education, performance and commitment to fight against violence in any form abated on them.

AIM is now the chair for the Forum against Harmful practices (FAHP) an organization that comprises of over sixteen organizations including local and international.

AIM implemented the "Breaking the Silence" project supported by Plan International and was implemented in Port Loko and Bombali districts Adult Literacy project with soweis (FGM practitioners) as a way to maintain their status in society. AIM has been the only organization to have organized three public declarations with Soweis to end FGM.

A "mother to daughter change agent" was implemented in three Districts in the Northern Province by then and Scholarship were awarded to uncut girls and few cut girls who participated with their mothers on the project implementation.

#### **AIM'S VISION STATEMENT**

A 'breed of strong self-reliant women who can challenge issues that affect them' -seeing them growing in violence free society.

#### **AIM'S MISSION STATEMENT**

It seeks to promote and protect the right of women and girls through education, advocacy and capacity building /empowerment.

## 8.3 Appendix 3: Memorandum of Understanding (AMNet)

1. Introduction

1.1. This Memorandum of Understanding is between the Paramount Chief

PC Alhaji Mohamed Sama Kailahun W  
Luawa Chiefdom  
Kailahun District

(full names and addresses and position)

PC Alhaji Mohamed S.K. Banga For Kailahun District and

Advocacy Movement Network with its head office in Freetown (hereinafter referred to as AMNet).

1.2. The aim of this Memorandum of Understanding is to provide guidance, counseling and support to the Chiefs and collaborating partners handling Anti-Child Bondo and other related children's issues.

Advocacy Movement Network (AMNet) has agreed to collaborate with the Paramount Chiefs in implementing a project using a multi-disciplinary approach to address the problem of Bondo on children in the Kailahun District. This Memorandum of Understanding aims to provide clarity and agreement on the specific roles and responsibilities of the Paramount Chiefs and AMNet.

For the purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding, (Bondo) on children is defined as:-  
*The initiation of the (girl) into the Bondo Society below the age of eighteen (18) years.*

Objectives of the Project

To respond to the multiple needs of children under eighteen relating to Bondo and children's rights through collaboration with other stakeholders and ownership.

Areas of Collaboration and Coordination between the Paramount Chiefs and AMNet

1. Development of operational guidelines and sensitization materials for the stakeholders and AMNet in dealing with Bondo cognizant of provisions of the Child Rights Act 2007, the Anti-human Trafficking Act 2005 and minimum international standards to which Sierra Leone is a party.
2. Training to enhance the professional needs of collaborating partners and other stakeholders.
3. Reporting and investigating practices of Child Bondo and other child abuses.
4. Collection of data relative to Child Bondo and other child abuses. This data to include: type of offence; geographical location of offence; sex and age of survivor/perpetrator; relationship between survivor/perpetrator; time(s) and date(s) of offence(s); time period between offence and report (to either Community Heads, Police or Social Worker); manner and result of joint investigations; where perpetrator charged to court; result of court proceedings including adjournments, findings of the court and sentences (where applicable); details of protection requirement for the child (needed and accomplished), etc...



#### Responsibilities of the Paramount Chiefs and AMNet

Paramount Chiefs will work with sub-section chiefs, Community Leaders, Leaders of secret societies, Community Organizations, Local Government, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, Community Organizations and other relevant stakeholders to :-

Ensure that no girl that is below the age of eighteen years is initiated into the Bondo society and prevent the initiation into the Bondo on such girls, make and implement byelaws and other strategies to achieve this goal.

Ensure that Sowies forming part of the FSU in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs will cooperate in the investigation of all Child Bondo related cases.

Ensure that District Council, Community Heads, FSU and Ministries (MSWGCA and MOHS) staff receives appropriate joint training. This may include in-house and out of station training provided by AMNet and pertinent stakeholders.

Ensure that it receives timely and effective communication of monthly statistics collected by Stakeholders (AMNet, FSU, MSWGCA and MOHS).

Share information with AMNet, FSU, MOHS and MSWGCA concerning relevant information gathered on CHILD Bondo and other child abuses.

Share information regularly on this agreement and monthly findings at local level.

#### **will:-**

Ensure the provision of appropriate training, advocacy and sensitization materials cognizant of national laws, policies of government and minimum international standards.

Setting up of School Clubs for sensitization on:

- Child Bondo
- and other children's emerging issues

Share information with the Paramount Chiefs, District Council, FSU, MSWGCA and MOHS concerning training, sensitization, and all interventions related to the Child Bondo and other child abuses issues.

Solicit funding to jointly undertake interventions.

Provide a Local Consultant to act as the Joint Coordinator for the Paramount Chiefs, Local Council, and FSU, MSWGCA and MOHS and other pertinent stakeholders.

The representative of AMNet role would be to liaise regularly with the Paramount Chiefs, FSU, MSWGCA and MOHS to ensure standardization and quality of work methods throughout Kailahun District.

He/she would also be responsible for ensuring the timely and effective communication of monthly statistics to all Stakeholders.

Ensure that all detailed reports stay confidential.

#### Conditions

The implementation of this agreement will be in compliance with the respective administrative rules and procedures of the Paramount Chiefs and AMNet and be subject to the availability of funds (*where applicable*).

This agreement will take a partnership approach in terms of all interventions.

Both parties shall abide by all the provisions of national laws in the implementation of this MOU.

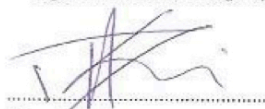
**TIME FRAME**

THIS MOU IS LIFE BINDING BUT MAY BE RENEWED AFTER EVALUATION BY THE PARTIES AND EITHER PARTY CAN TERMINATE THIS AGREEMENT BY GIVING THE OTHER PARTY THREE MONTHS IN ADVANCE NOTICE IN WRITING OF SUCH TERMINATION.

**DISPUTE**

ANY DISPUTE ARISING FROM THIS AGREEMENT SHALL BE SOLVED AS BEST AS POSSIBLE AMICABLY BETWEEN THE PARTIES AND WHERE NECESSARY AN IDENTIFIED THIRD PARTY AGREED BY THE PARTIES CAN MEDIATE A SETTLEMENT IF THE PARTIES EFFORT TO RESOLVE A DISPUTE HAS FAILED

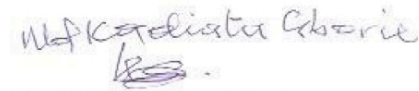
IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto or their duly authorized representative affixes their signatures/seals to signify their agreement.

  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Advocacy Movement Network (AMNet)

  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Paramount Chief

Witnesses  
  
Kailahun District Council  
Chairman

  
SIGN \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman Council of Paramount Chiefs  
Kailahun District

  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Head Soweis  
Kailahun District

  
KAILAHUN DISTRICT CSO  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE  
CHAIRMAN  
Chairman (Commissioner)  
Human Right Commission

  
The Sierra Leone Police  
Family Support Unit  
Kailahun

  
Magistrate  
SIGN \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE \_\_\_\_\_