**ESSAY WRITING COMPETITION**

**The Implications of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) in our Society Ways of Ending the Practice**

**Introduction**

In 2020, Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDDOC) Nigeria in collaboration with the Coalition of Eastern Non-Governmental Organisations (CENGOS) and with funding support from Amplify Change commissioned a baseline survey on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Ebonyi and Imo. This intervention was in response to evidence that FGM was still being practiced in South-East Nigeria with the highest prevalence of 35% followed by South West (30%) and lowest in the North East (6%). The baseline report quoted the NDHS (2018) to have revealed that in the South East, the distribution of FGM prevalence was:Imo = 61.7%; Ebonyi = 53.2%; Enugu = 25.3%; Anambra = 21.4% and Abia = 12.2%. The choice of Ebonyi and Imo States for intervention and indeed the Essay Writing Competition among senior secondary school students was therefore necessary to empower the youths with useful information on the subject and give them a voice to speak out against the age-long obnoxious practice.

**Participation**

The essay competition for secondary schools was limited to Ebonyi and Imo states, precisely because they were the target states for the CIRDDOC/CENGOS intervention on FGM. A total of 59 entries were received from the two participating states.

**Students with the best written essays were eligible to be selected for the finals. As represented in the table below, ten (10) students were drawn from the two states: six (6) from Imo and four (4) from Ebonyi; this is proportionate to the number of participants in each state.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **S/N** | **Name of Student** | **Sex** | **Name of School** |
| 1 | Ugboaja Samuel O. Chikwere | M | ALVANA Model Secondary School Owerri |
| 2 | Lambert Favour | F | Apostolic Faith Secondary School. Owerri |
| 3 | Ugochukwu Precious Olumachi | F | Baptist High School, Owerri. |
| 4 | Ugwuafor Divine Gift | F | Baptist High School, Owerri. |
| 5 | Nkemakolam Unique Fortune | F | Federal Girls Government College, Owerri |
| 6 | Ferdy-Mbagwu Chizuberem | F | Federal Girls Government College, Owerri |
| 7 | Ogbu Nneoma Precious | F | Arch Bishop Peter Akinola International School, Afikpo |
| 8 | Emmanuel Chikaima Praise | M | Arch Bishop Peter Akinola International School, Afikpo |
| 9 | Nwose Sopuruchi Donatus | M | Comprehensive School of Management Technology, Abakaliki |
| 10 | Okezie Ugochukwu Chiemene | M | Jesus is Lord International School, Abakaliki |

**STAGE TWO: PEN-TO-PAPER ESSAY-WRITING COMPETITION ON FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION**

The ten students selected for the final were invited on 18th of November, 2021 for the second round of the competition, pen-to-paper essay-writing. The participants were required to write on the following topic: **“Narrate the direct and/or indirect experiences you have had in your community with respect to Female Genital Mutilation”.**  This topic was intended to enable participants relate with FGM as a phenomenon in their states, rather than seeing it only from a generic perspective. The written essays were assessed by the reviewers and scores/results recorded as represented below:

**Results of Stage Two Essay Writing Competition**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **SCHOOL** | **AVERAGE SCORE** | **POSITION** |
| Ferdy Mbagwu Chizuberem | Federal Girls Government College, Owerri | 91 | 1st |
| Nwose Sopuruchi Donatus | Comprehensive Sch. of Mgt. Tech, Abakaliki | 84 | 2nd |
| Ugboaja Samuel O. Chikwere | ALVANA Model Secondary School Owerri | 67 | 3rd |
| Nkemakolam Unique Fortune | Federal Girls Government College, Owerri | 65 | 4th |
| Ogbu Nneoma Precious | Arch Bishop Peter Akinola International School, Afikpo | 57 | 5th |
| Lambert Favour | Apostolic Faith Secondary School, Owerri | 56 | 6th |
| Okezie Ugochukwu Chiemene | Jesus is Lord International School, Abakaliki | 53 | 7th |
| Emmanuel Chiamaka Praise | Arch Bishop Peter Akinola International School, Afikpo | 50 | 8th |

**The overall winner and the first and second runners up were rewarded with a laptop computer each and cash prizes of different amount with the overall winner receiving the highest amount. Other the remaining finalists also got consolation cash prizes. Each of the 10 finalists and theirs schools also got a certificate of participation.**

**Observations**

1. Most students’ responses lacked local perspectives of FGM, but rather relied on information drawn from the internet which was generic and global. This lack of domestication seemed to indicate two things: a level of ignorance among young people who have not experienced FGM in Imo and Ebonyi; or a denial and/or sworn silence either due to cultural norms or fear of stigmatization by those who have experienced it; whether directly or remotely. As such, most write-ups, did not situate FGM in the context of locality, age and understanding.
2. It is observed from the write-ups, that about 80% of participants were able to access the internet for information on FGM
3. It is observed that intellectual writing and literature skills of participants has greatly improved over the years. This skill has grown competitively and can be harnessed and nurtured to provide for key peer-to-peer story writers to develop and share critical, yet interesting narratives and story lines on issues of FGM and other forms of SGBV.
4. The promotion of the essay competition on FGM attracted the curiosity of young people, in this case students to issues of FGM.
5. Participation in the competition referenced schools in mostly urban areas with access to internet services and information.

**Suggestions**

1. Rural youths should benefit from this intervention directly. They have a lot to say.
2. Contestants should be required to indicate their sex.
3. Local context should reflect boldly in all information being shared on this. The more it is shrouded in mystery, the more difficult to stop.
4. There is need to develop internet/social media friendly information such as skits, music and short stories to capture the interest of young people who are mostly the victims.
5. Selected students should be trained, tasked and guided by a consultant to develop interesting literature on FGM and SGBV for young people. This will also build their life skills.
6. Intervention on FGM through essay-writing has created a lot of awareness and should be continued because it makes young people to search for information and leads to knowledge gathering.
7. Media outfits can develop internet content on FGM in the form of drama skits etc that will help create more awareness.