

# TAKE ACTION: WALK ON MY OWN



In 1998, the village of Keur Simbara, Senegal, was among the first communities to publicly abandon the traditions of female genital cutting (FGC) and child marriage, traditions that had been practiced for centuries. In her film, *Walk on My Own*, 13-year-old Ndèye Fatou Fall tells how the profound changes that occurred when her village abandoned these traditions have affected her life. Through Ndèye Fatou's eyes, learn how the women of Keur Simbara and the surrounding villages were inspired by the teachings of Tostan, a human rights education non-profit based in Senegal, and how they, with the support of their imam, were able to change deeply entrenched social norms. Through these interviews we see how the hardships these women endured helped create an inner strength that inspired them to become advocates for the empowerment of women, because when women are empowered the whole community benefits. When thinking about these issues of safety, physical health and personal freedoms, consider Articles 3, 5, 6, 7, and 16 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

*Article 3.*

*Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.*

*Article 5.*

*No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.*

*Article 6.*

*Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.*

*Article 7.*

*All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.*

*Article 16.*

*(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.*

## **For Teachers: Research**

Ask your students to consider the cultures and/or countries around the world that still impose violent and controlling laws on women. What do all these societies have in common? From where do these controlling laws originate? Consider other deeply entrenched social norms, such as foot binding in China which was abandoned after a grassroots social movement took place. Then consider the broader implications that anti-women traditions, whether by legislation or by culture, might have on their communities in general—not just on the female citizens but on the males as well. What are the implications

on a society when the women and girls are weakened or marginalized? What happens when women and girls in a society grow up without access to education or self-determination? How does this relate to the UNDHR's call for equality before the law?

## For Students: Reflect

In her film, Ndèye Fatou interviews male and female leaders in her community about their experiences living in Senegal before the cultural norms began shifting, allowing girls a voice and a choice in their own lives. Much is made of the concept of tradition. Reflect on your own culture—consider the representations of both genders that are all around you—on television, in film, in popular music. There are traditions for male circumcision. How is this similar? How is it different? Do a study on female genital cutting- what are its origins and where is it practiced? Why do some view it as an act of violence while others view it as an act of love? Consider how women and men have been represented throughout history in literature and art. What is the “ideal” man—physically, emotionally? Similarly, what is the “ideal” woman? How do archetypes evolve, and why do you think they have done so? How do these gender representations help and hurt people of both genders? How might policies that negatively affect one gender or the other evolve when a society's gender stereotypes are extreme? Choose an artistic representation of women—a song, film, work of art or piece of literature. Explore the gender representations in that piece. Consider them in the context of Ndèye Fatou's film, and of the women and girls she depicts in it. How is your culture similar to Ndèye's Fatou's? How is it different?

## For All Of Us: Respond

1. Check out the Center for Reproductive Rights at <https://www.reproductiverights.org>. This organization is working hard on every continent to protect the rights and the health of women around the world.
2. Sign a petition or start one of your own to raise awareness of FGC, support policies and legislation that make FGC illegal, and protect the rights of women around the globe at: [change.org](http://change.org)
3. Host a community or private screening of *Walk on My Own* to raise awareness of the dangers that face women and girls around the world, including the prevalence of FGC and arranged marriages for underage girls, and how grassroots education can be a powerful tool to end these harmful practices. Email [info@bykids.org](mailto:info@bykids.org) for more information on showing *Walk on My Own*, as well as <https://www.tostan.org/contact/> for more information on its education method.
4. Tostan is BYkids' non-profit partner, working in Senegal and across eight African countries, reaching more than five million people in conversations about human dignity. Tostan's method of engagement starts with listening and centers on respect—for tradition, difference, and point of view. Learn more at [Tostan.org](http://Tostan.org) as a way to imagine creating a space for social change in your life using Tostan's method of non-formal grassroots education. What traditions would you change? How can listening help you change behaviors?
5. Become a global organizer! Learn more about how you can be a catalyst for positive social change in your community, and create more awareness around issues of human rights globally by volunteering with Tostan at <https://www.tostan.org/get-involved/become-global-mobilizer/>

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