

1,000 girls rescued from FGM, construction of “Desert Flower schools” and school education instead of genital mutilation



Education is the key. Waris Dirie and her Desert Flower Foundation team made an important decision in 2016: “Education in Africa” was made the central theme of their work for the next ten years. There are over 750 million illiterates worldwide, a large proportion of whom live in Africa. Women are worst affected. According to UNESCO, 38 percent of Africans can neither write nor read, two thirds of whom are women. Africa is the only continent where illiteracy is on the rise. This is also due to the population explosion. Sad fact: Countries with the highest

illiteracy rate in Africa are not only the poorest countries, but also the countries with the highest incidence of female genital mutilation (FGM).

Human rights activist and supermodel Waris Dirie has been fighting this cruel ritual for 25 years. At the age of five, she herself became a victim of the cruel procedure. Later she used her worldwide fame as a tool against this brutal crime against children and women. That has not changed until today. She makes new plans, initiatives and campaigns. The construction of three “Desert Flower schools” in Sierra Leone (West Africa) for a total of 1,200 children is Waris Dirie’s flagship project at the moment. In addition to the schools, a so-called “Safe House” will also be built as a contact point for FGM sufferers with a school library and media centre. 94 percent of all girls in Sierra Leone are still circumcised and suffer from the traumatic consequences throughout their lives. Again and again girls bleed to death because the brutal practice with non-sterilized razor blades, glass shards or scissors is usually carried out in secret.

Our deals work. YES to school education - NO to genital mutilation! Waris Dirie and her foundation saved more than 1,000 girls from FGM in Sierra Leone alone with the program “Save a little desert flower”. In communities that had previously been persuaded to renounce the terrible ritual through targeted educational work. How does this work? The parents sign a contract for financial support: education instead of genital mutilation is the deal. Twice a year the intact condition of the schoolgirls is checked by a paediatrician on site. With the realization of the first “Desert Flower schools” in Sierra Leone, the next important, but above all sustainable step follows. “Education for girls is our strongest weapon in the fight against FGM,” Waris Dirie says. “Our education will help many girls to lead a more self-determined life in the future. Education and income for women are necessary to contain and eliminate FGM. An economically independent woman will not yield so quickly to the pressure of a community.”

Importance and power of social media. Social media have played a key role in the project since its inception. Waris posts every construction progress of the schools and thus not only keeps existing donors of the Desert Flower family up to date, it can also motivate new ones to become active. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, but also Youtube have become perfect media tools for her heart project. A “Like” and every “shared” story provide added value, especially when it comes from other influencers. Waris Dirie uses Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for her currently most important project and makes them what they want to be by their own definition: Social media!