

Module 1 – Session 2

Female genital mutilation: Beliefs, traditions, and values



Module Objectives

- To understand why female genital mutilation (FGM) is practiced
- To clarify the meaning of traditions, values and beliefs
- To learn how to question harmful traditions
- To understand the concept of values clarification



Presentation Outline

- Theories on FGM origin
- FGM drivers
- Meanings of beliefs, values and traditions
- Explain concept of value clarification
- Summary



Theories around FGM origins

Practiced amongst:

- Stone-age people in Equatorial Africa
- Egyptians during the fifth century (FGM type III (infibulation) was found in some mummies) 'Pharaonic circumcision'
- As part of slavery trade related to selling price
- Theory that it originated independently among different groups and spread with adoption and assimilation due to population movement



Why is FGM practised?

- FGM is a social norm
 - Social acceptance
 - Fear of being rejected by the community
- Beliefs around acceptable sexual behaviour for women to promote
 - Premarital virginity
 - Marital fidelity
- Religious rite or a rite of passage to womanhood
- Cultural ideals of beauty, femininity and cleanliness





Female genital mutilation (FGM) is considered **a tradition** supported by several **beliefs** and **values**.

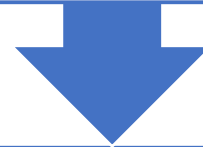
What does this all mean?



What do we mean by traditions, beliefs, and values?

Beliefs

Beliefs are ideas, assumptions, not necessarily shaped by facts



Values

Values are guiding principles, shaped by beliefs, defining what is important



Attitudes

Attitudes are opinions, shaped by values



1. Traditions



What is a tradition?

- Can be beliefs, values or learnt habits passed through generations
 - Form part of the identity, usually guarded by taboos and often not easy to change
 - Traditions can be categorized into
 - Beneficial
 - Neutral
 - Harmful
- Mix



Examples of good, neutral & harmful traditions

Good	Neutral	Harmful
Respecting and caring for elders	Wearing white or black colored clothing during weddings or funerals	Female infanticide (son preference)
Meditation	Wearing charms for luck or avert evil	Scarification
Giving gifts in occasions		Forced or early marriage
Visiting sick people		'Honour' based violence or honour killing
Condolences for those who lost a loved ones		Female genital mutilation



A story on traditions TRADITION -TRADITION!

Once upon a time, there was a kingdom known as the Land of Zanba.

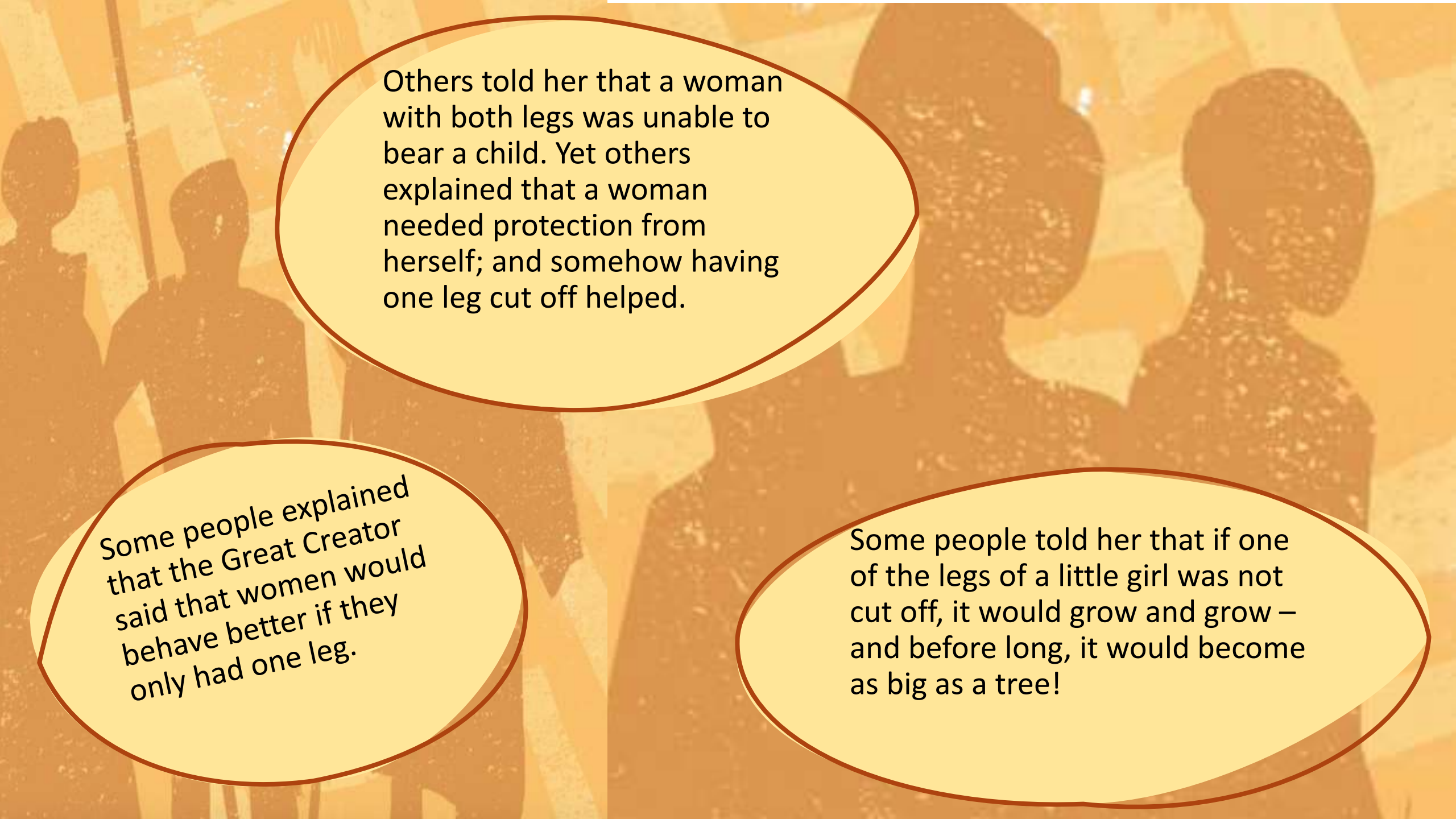
The proud people here had deep-rooted traditions.

One tradition was for the women of Zanba to be one-legged.



One day, an old wise woman arrived in the Land of Zanba. She wanted to know why women in Zanba had only one leg.





Others told her that a woman with both legs was unable to bear a child. Yet others explained that a woman needed protection from herself; and somehow having one leg cut off helped.

Some people explained that the Great Creator said that women would behave better if they only had one leg.

Some people told her that if one of the legs of a little girl was not cut off, it would grow and grow – and before long, it would become as big as a tree!

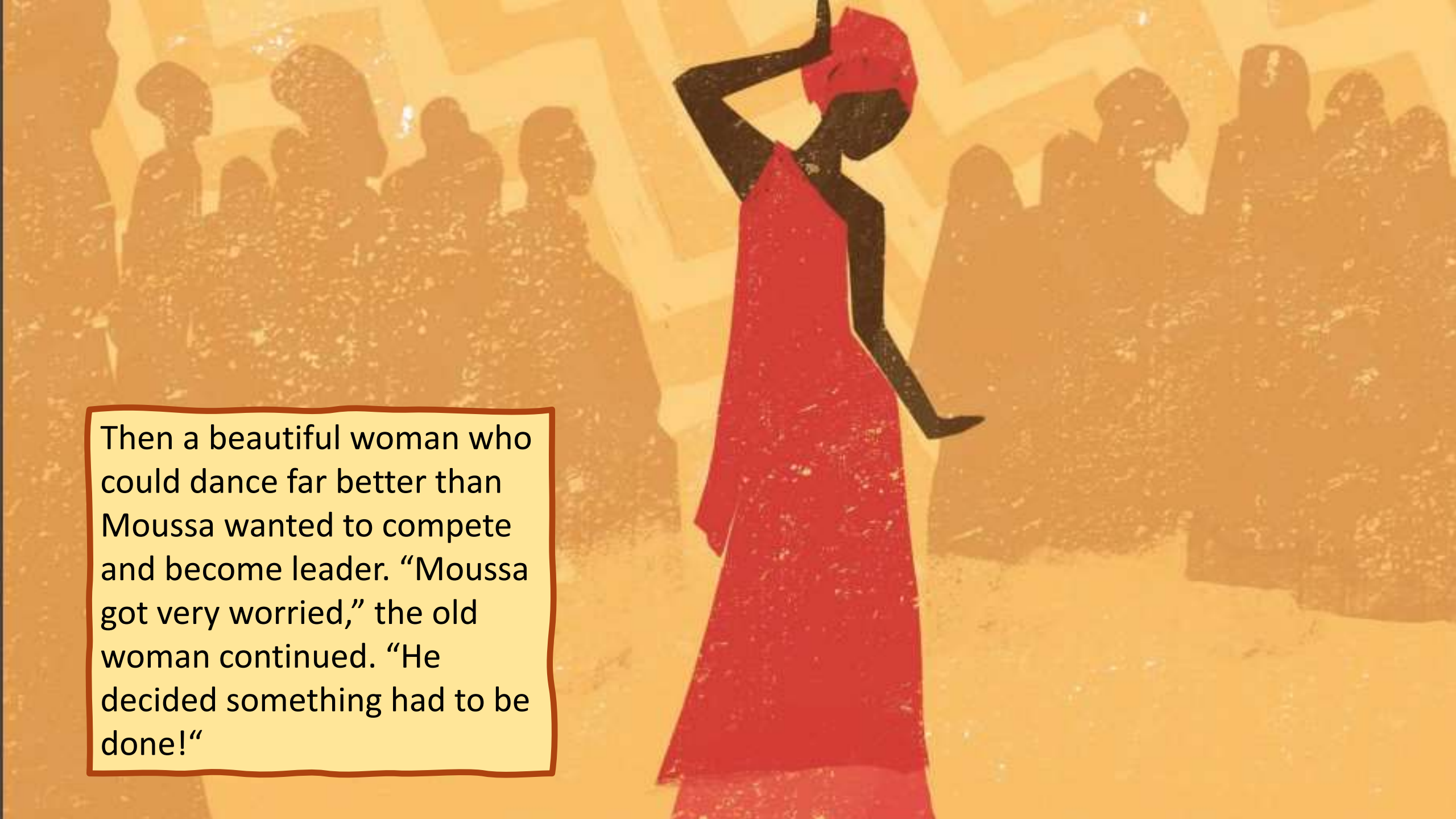


But there was one very old woman in the Land of Zanba who could remember how this habit started: “A long time ago”, she said, “in the reign of Moussa, the Land of Zanba was enjoying a period of plenty and there were great festivities.

Each year, colourful, exotic dance festivals were held to select the person who would be Ruler of the Land. In those days, men and women competed equally and the best dancer would be crowned.

“For 5 years, Moussa won all the competitions.



An illustration of a woman in a long, flowing red dress and a red headscarf, dancing in a crowd. The woman is the central figure, shown in profile, with her arms raised and one hand on her head. The background is a warm, golden-yellow color with silhouettes of other people, suggesting a social gathering or dance. The overall style is simple and stylized.

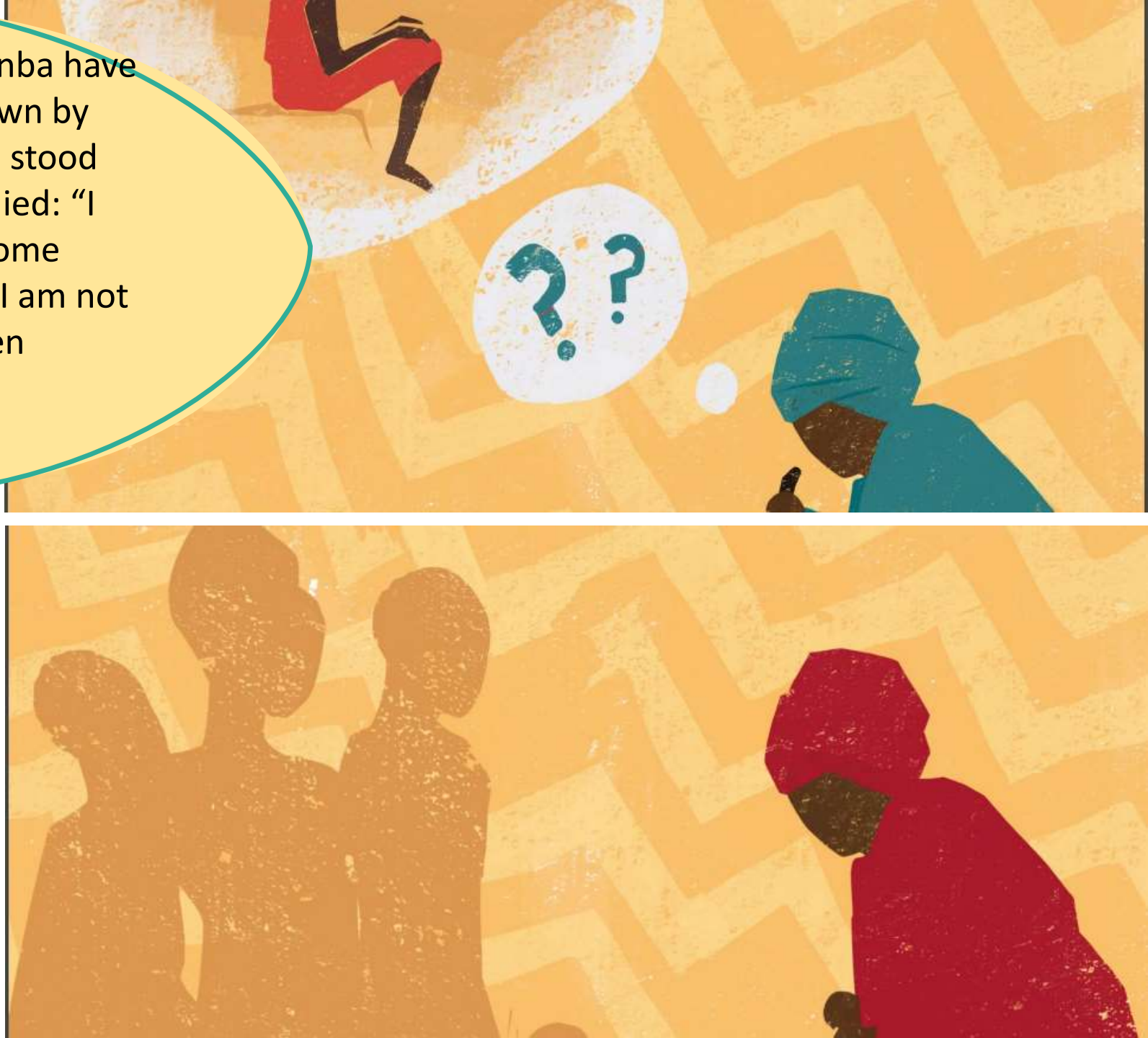
Then a beautiful woman who could dance far better than Moussa wanted to compete and become leader. “Moussa got very worried,” the old woman continued. “He decided something had to be done!”

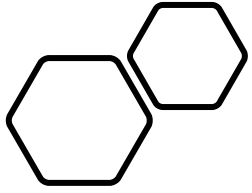
In desperation, he decided that all women should have one leg cut off. This seemed to solve his problem, for dancing on one leg put women out of the competition. Moussa was able to continue his reign for another 20 years.



“Ever since, the generations of Zanba have followed this tradition handed down by their ancestors.” The wise woman stood thinking for a while, and then replied: “I have known of many traditions, some good, some bad – as for this one, I am not sure.” Then she asked: “Are women comfortable with this tradition?”

“Oh no,” said the old woman. “We have so many difficulties carrying out our daily chores with one leg! “But when it was ordered by Moussa, everybody was afraid. Some said you could only be beautiful with one leg! Others claimed you could only be clean with one leg! Many claimed a woman could only be pure with one leg!”



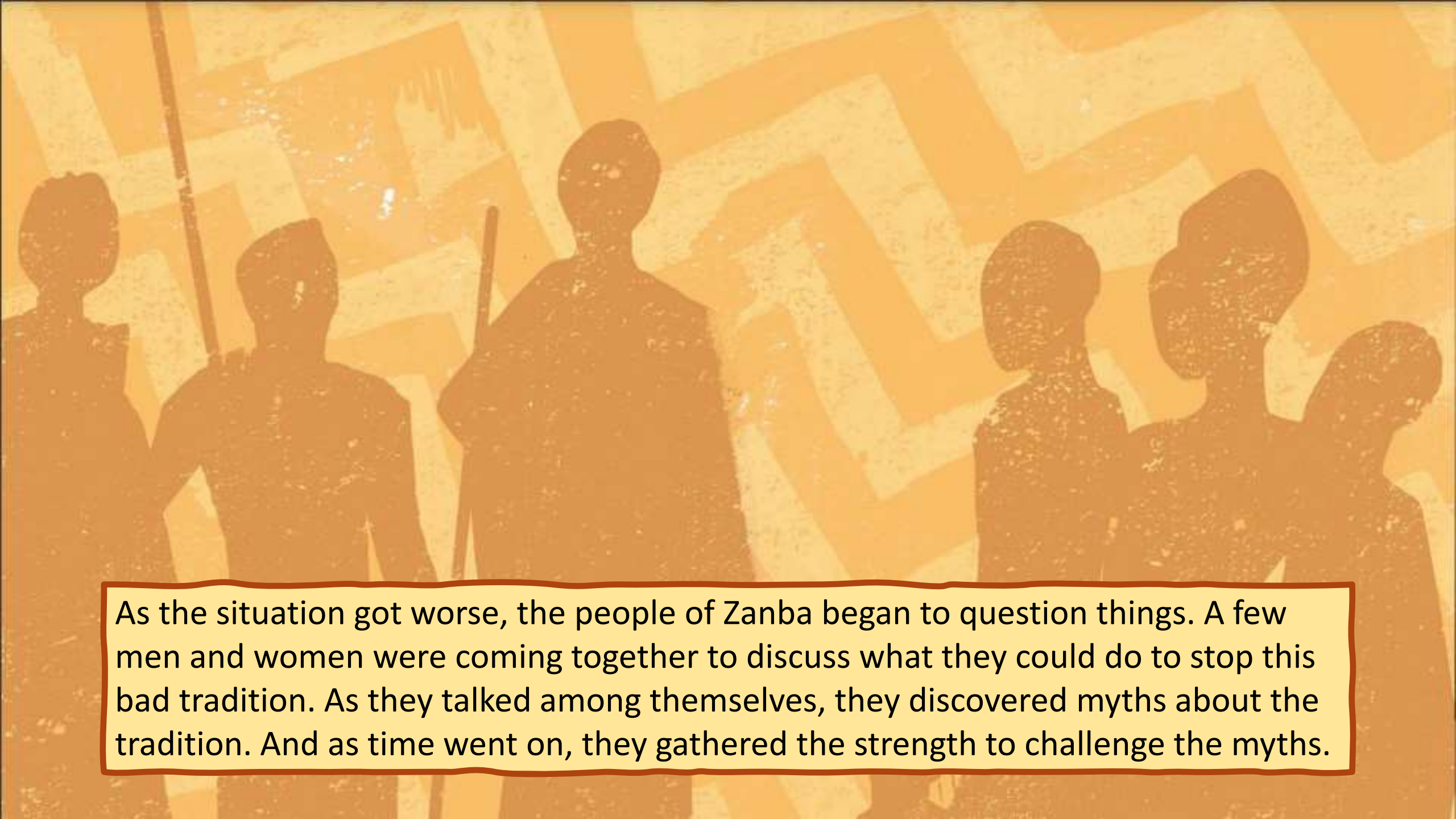


The wise woman was curious to know what the men had to say about all this. She discovered that men believed that not following the tradition would destroy family honour and dignity. Then the wise woman asked the rulers of the land if they might stop this bad tradition. But they were afraid to challenge such a deep-rooted tradition.

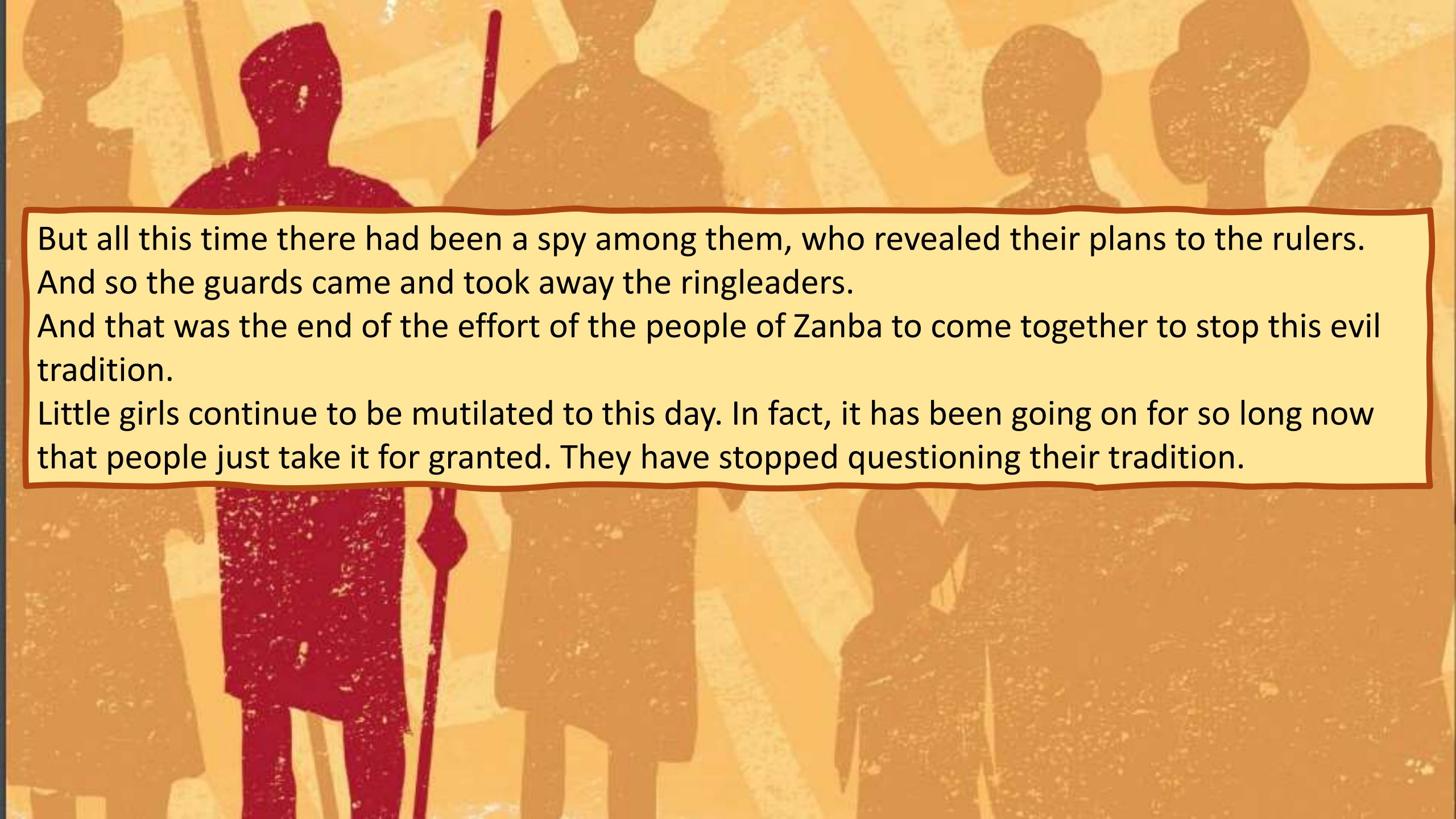




Meanwhile, the land of Zanba was stricken by drought that became worse every year. Women found it difficult to work the land and help their community.

The background of the entire image is a warm, golden-orange color. It features a faint, repeating geometric pattern of interlocking squares and rectangles, creating a textured, mosaic-like effect. In the foreground, there are several dark brown silhouettes of people. On the left, a man stands with a long staff or spear. Next to him is another man. In the center, a woman is depicted with a large, rounded headpiece. To her right, another woman is shown with a similar headpiece. On the far right, a man is visible, looking towards the group. The overall composition suggests a community gathering or a scene of social interaction.

As the situation got worse, the people of Zanba began to question things. A few men and women were coming together to discuss what they could do to stop this bad tradition. As they talked among themselves, they discovered myths about the tradition. And as time went on, they gathered the strength to challenge the myths.



But all this time there had been a spy among them, who revealed their plans to the rulers. And so the guards came and took away the ringleaders. And that was the end of the effort of the people of Zanba to come together to stop this evil tradition. Little girls continue to be mutilated to this day. In fact, it has been going on for so long now that people just take it for granted. They have stopped questioning their tradition.

2. Beliefs



What is a belief?

- Is a conviction, or an idea accepted as true or real, even without positive proof
- Some beliefs are:
 - Religious
 - Cultural
 - Formed by experience or influences
- Examples:
 - “Men should be served first and given the best portions of meals.”
 - “FGM is a religious obligation”

} Mix



Common beliefs and myths about FGM and how to respond to them

The belief	The response
FGM is a religious mandate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• FGM is not mentioned in religious texts such as the Koran or the Bible.• Many religious leaders think this tradition should end and do not practice it on their girls.
By removing the clitoris, girls will not have premarital sex	Removing parts of the clitoris does not mean a girl cannot engage in premarital sex.



Common beliefs and myths about FGM and how to respond to them

The belief	The response
FGM helps to ensure women's faithfulness/ ensures women will not have extramarital sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marital faithfulness is based on personal commitment and respect, not genital cutting.• Couples who share these values, regardless of the woman's FGM status, are more likely to remain faithful to each other.• FGM can affect a woman's capacity to enjoy a healthy and pleasurable sexual relationship with her husband or partner. It may prevent both partners from having a fulfilling sex life, thereby damaging the marital relationship.
If a girl is not cut, she will not find a husband and marry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recent surveys show that men in many communities would like FGM to end.• Globally, 63% of boys and men would like FGM to end.



Common beliefs and myths about FGM and how to respond to them

The belief	The response
Girls who do not have FGM cannot enter womanhood and become respectable women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rites of passage can take many forms and need not be harmful or dangerous to a girl's health and well-being.• In many cultures where FGM is not practised, girls take part in different rites of passage to mark their entrance into womanhood and become respectable members of the community.
FGM is no different from voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Male circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin, the fold of tissue that covers the head of the penis. It does not interfere with sexual function and pleasure.• Evidence shows that VMMC reduces the risk of female-to-male sexual transmission of HIV, and WHO and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) therefore recommend VMMC as an important strategy in HIV prevention for adult men.



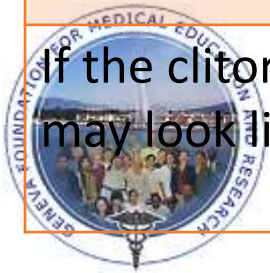
Common myths and beliefs about FGM and how to respond to them

The belief	The response
FGM has health benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is no medical indication for FGM.• FGM can cause several health complications, and some of which are life-threatening.
If FGM is done by a health-care professional, there is no long-term physical damage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health complications can arise in the short and long term, regardless of who does it.• Health-care providers who do FGM are violating the basic medical ethic to do no harm and the principle of giving the highest-quality health care.• Health-care providers are never trained to perform FGM, therefore it is not part of their competencies.
If a woman is de-infibulated (closure reversed), the baby may fall out during pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The baby grows and develops inside the uterus with its lower part the “cervix” that keeps the baby inside.• FGM does not affect the integrity of the cervix.



Common beliefs about FGM and how to respond to them

The belief	The response
A woman who is not cut cannot become pregnant	Women from parts of the world where FGM is not practised do become pregnant and deliver healthy babies.
FGM has health benefits for the baby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no health benefits to FGM, either for the mother or for the baby. • Studies by WHO and others found that babies born to mothers who have type 3 FGM are more likely to need resuscitation at birth, and have a higher risk of perinatal death.
If the clitoris is not removed, it can hurt the baby during delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The clitoris can cause no harm to the baby or the mother. • There is no evidence of this in any study.
If the clitoris is not cut, it will grow and may look like a male penis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The clitoris is a female sexual organ and an important anatomical source of sexual pleasure in women. • The clitoris stops growing after puberty.



3. Values



What are values?

- Principles that can guide and motivate people like: honesty, faithfulness, equality etc.
- Values are conveyed within families but can also be influenced by religion, culture, friends, education and personal experiences.
- Individual values vary within family, peers and community.



Examples of values?

- Altruism
 - Dependability
 - Integrity
 - Honesty
 - Faithfulness
 - Equality
 - Generosity
 - Courage
 - Gratitude
 - Support
 - Family
-



Questioning values and beliefs in FGM



Reflecting on our beliefs,
biases, values



Understanding others'
beliefs and values



Respecting others' beliefs
and values



Ensuring a rights-based
approach to SRH



What is values clarification?

An approach that helps people to clarify their goals, priorities, and values, make decisions, and implement changes in their lives.



Values clarification exercises

- Values clarification exercise is the method employed to assist in clarifying values.
- Values clarification exercises are designed to help people become more aware of their own values. It is a process.
- The process starts with the recognition of a value problem, then conducting an intervention, that aims to question and encourage self-reflection.
- The process involves a form of questioning through activities (or strategies).
- The questioning includes many different content areas, all of which help people to determine answers to value-laden problems in their lives.



The major elements of values clarification exercises

Values clarification exercises are based on four major elements:

1. Choose a value-laden matter (Like FGM)
2. Raise a question, or lead an activity
3. Make sure all perspectives are respected, therefore creating a safe space for conversation
4. Help the members to use valuing processes or valuing skills to rectify the problem at hand. This involves:

- **Understanding what one prizes and cherishes, and examining alternative viewpoints**
- **Considering the consequences of various choices in a thoughtful manner**
- **Making a choice free from undue peer or authority pressure and acting on one's beliefs**



Values clarification exercise (1)

Go over each statement below to see if you **agree**, **disagree** or **uncertain** and explain **why**. The exercise is not about finding right or wrong answers but about how you feel about each statement.

- If a tradition is very old and most people approve of it, it is better not to question it.
- FGM is an essential part of culture.
- FGM is a religious obligation.
- Doing FGM in a hospital is more hygienic and less painful for the girl.
- Some 'minor' forms of FGM are not harmful.



Values clarification exercise (2)

Go over each statement below to see if you **agree**, **disagree** or **uncertain** and explain **why**. The exercise is not about finding right or wrong answers but about how you feel about each statement.

- Health-care providers should never deliberately harm their patients.
- Girls who do not undergo FGM are not respectable.
- In life, it is important to remain open to change.
- Girls who do not undergo FGM are not respectable.
- FGM is a health issue.



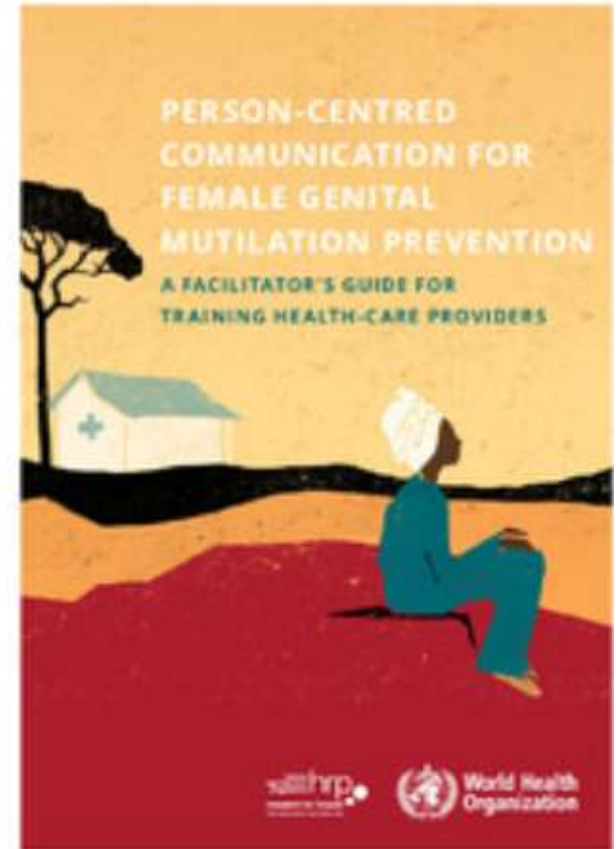
Summary

- FGM is a tradition that is based in beliefs and values about the practice.
- Understanding traditions, beliefs and values around FGM is an important step in changing harmful practices.
- Be aware of own's belief and value systems that can affect how services are provided.
- Actively explore and discuss belief and value systems with colleagues, family and community.



Acknowledgment

This presentation was adapted mainly from the Person-centred communication for female genital mutilation prevention



References

- Female genital mutilation fact sheets World Health Organization; 2022. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation> [cited 2022 Oct 27].
- Person-centred communication for female genital mutilation prevention: a facilitator's guide for training health-care providers. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/9789240041073>

