Reviewer's report

Title: "Promote locally led initiatives to fight Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)
Lessons from anti-FGM/C advocates in rural Kenya.

Version: 1 Date: 08 Aug 2019

Reviewer: Jacinta Muteshi

Reviewer's report:

Some of the findings may be strengthened by further analysis and reflection. For example:

* Page 13 lines 7-13: "poverty perpetuates the practice" please elaborate here what this means and the how. Your analysis of this contextual fact needs to be explored further in your discussion and some thought given to how this would or might inform interventions.

* Page 14 lines 2-3: "The role of grandmothers" there is no further reference to this group in your discussion or conclusion, yet you state it was an important contributor to the practice. Take a look at studies by the Grandmother project in Senegal https://www.grandmotherproject.org/ and see is there are any insights that may be useful. As a group grandmothers have a newly acquired increasing responsibility of children in many communities. Also see Shell-Duncan B, Moreau A, Wander K, Smith S (2018) The role of older women in contesting norms associated with female genital mutilation/cutting in Senegambia: A factorial focus group analysis. PLoS ONE 13(7): e0199217. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0199217

* It is unclear why and how women in the Meru community generally have great influence and power or why they are "taking on traditional male roles" page 14 or have "most responsibilities in the home" page 22. What has changed and why? You need to provide some context for the reader and as you explore its relevance for decision making roles and the abandonment of FGM/C.

* Page 15 Line 29-30 "social groups" I suggest a review some of the work underway by those working on social norms such as "Changing Social Norms: The Importance of "Organized Diffusion" for Scaling Up Community Health Promotion and Women Empowerment Interventions. Cislaghi B, et al. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30747395
Discussion:


* I find that there is a tendency to cite literature in this section that does not necessarily advance the point being raised from the findings. For example, if among the Meru, daughters are increasingly not being cut (line 37-8 page 27); if religious organizations have played a pivotal role in reducing the practice (line 46-49 page 27); or men are increasingly not wanting women who are cut (line 14-22 page 28) it is unclear why you choose to cite literature that challenge these statements if that literature not relevant to this Meru context. Rather literature that highlights how you might work more successfully with religious leaders, girls, and men might be helpful here.

* Line 40-55, 58-9 page 28 "lack of resources/resource constraints" will remain a perennial issue-how is this issue to be addressed? Some discussion needed here on what is, will be, or should be the role of county governments with regards to these resource challenges?

* Line 44-48 page 28 "lack of understanding of local context." it's unclear who lacks understanding and why.

* Line 48-55 page 28: "realist evidence......" the relevance of this reference is not made unclear. You begun this paper by highlighting the multitude and diversity of interventions in Meru and how some of these e.g. ARPs have been rather successful so this paragraph will be confusing to the reader. Do you need to also "contextualize" and be specific about particularly districts in Meru county with your conclusions rather than broad generalizations about Meru in your conclusions?
If this study only focused on the voices of activists (line 4-6 page 29) there is little support for the conclusion you make that "our study underscores……" (line 31 page 29) all the groups, you list unless some explanation is provided.

Provide a rationale for why you suggest a "diagnosis of readiness to change" and "systems approach" in your conclusion. Also see Dennis Matanda's work among the Kisii and Maasai in Kenya that focuses on this issue of readiness to change.

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Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

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