

sahiyō

United Against Female Genital Cutting

2019
2020

Annual Report
USA



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01

Welcome from the Executive Director



Our Sahiyo staff, volunteers and advisory board are proud to present our June 2019—June 2020 Annual Report!

Since Sahiyo's founding in 2015, over the past five years, we have built our organization's theory of change, and have learned how to adapt and be more attuned to specific challenges involved in ending female genital cutting (FGC) in the United States and globally. Our strengths and challenges have shaped our organization's constantly evolving philosophy and steadfast commitment to amplifying survivors' voices through storytelling advocacy—whether it is via our digital storytelling program or our in-person activist retreats. As we acknowledge these past experiences, we also look to the future with anticipation. We will continue to build robust and lasting relationships with a diverse array of funders to ensure the growth of our organization's capacity, and be able to increase our programs' impact on ending FGC and supporting survivors here in the U.S. We believe all of us have a role to play in anti-violence work. Social change takes time, but listening to survivors and internalizing their stories of trauma and resilience is the critical first step. Please help us continue to amplify their voices. I hope you will keep in touch and stay updated on our activities via social media and our newsletter list. Please join us. Enjoy our report.

In solidarity,

Mariya Taher

U.S. Executive Director
Sahiyo—United Against Female Genital Cutting

02

Background:

Sahiyo is the Bohra Gujarati word for ‘saheliyo,’ or female friends, and reflects our mission to empower Asian communities to end female genital cutting (FGC) and create positive social change through dialogue, education and collaboration based on community involvement. The World Health Organization defines FGC as “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons,” and it can have lifelong physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual impacts on a woman.

Sahiyo’s vision is to bring an end to the practice of female genital cutting (also known as female genital mutilation or female circumcision), which has been recognized as a human rights violation by the World Health Organization, United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). We aim to enable a culture in which a woman/girl’s body and female sexuality is not feared or suppressed, but embraced as normal. Our work aims to recognize and emphasize the values of consent and a child/woman’s right over her own body.

We work with survivors of FGC, their families, and their larger religious/ethnic communities in which FGC continues as a social norm. Our organization works transnationally, with the current focus of our work being primarily in the United States and India, although we have volunteers stationed globally. Sahiyo was recognized in 2018 by the Population Reference Bureau as one of six inspiring organizations working to end FGC¹. This is unique in that within India, Sahiyo is one of only two organizations working to end FGC, and is the only organisation employing community-level initiatives to address FGC.

From June 2019 to June 2020, Sahiyo was fiscally sponsored through NGO Orchid Project in the United Kingdom and StoryCenter in the U.S. Our programs and activities are also financed through individual donations and private foundations.

¹<https://www.prb.org/six-for-february-6-commemoration-of-the-international-day-of-zero-tolerance-for-female-genital-mutilation-cutting/>

03

About Us:

Meet the Team



U.S. Executive Director Mariya Taher pursued a study titled, “Understanding Female Genital Cutting in the United States,” in graduate school for her Master of Social Work from San Francisco State University. Since then, she has worked in the field of gender violence for ten years, working on issues of domestic violence at W.O.M.A.N., Inc.; Asian Women’s Shelter; and Saheli, Support and Friendship for South Asian Women and Families. She was a 2014 Women’s Policy Institute fellow for The Women’s Foundation of California, and her team successfully passed legislation to provide low-income survivors of domestic violence with basic needs grants.

Currently, she works with the Massachusetts Women’s Bar Association on passing state legislation to criminalize FGC and build public awareness campaigns on FGC within the state. She serves on the steering committee for the U.S. Network to End FGM/C. The Manhattan Young Democrats named her a 2017 Engendering Progress honoree and she was named one of the 6 FGC experts to watch by News Deeply.



Communications Coordinator Lara Kingstone started her career in a program designed to integrate London communities and empower young people to become active and engaged citizens. Lara earned a B.A. in Political Communications at the Interdisciplinary Herzliya, while working as a journalist at The Culture Trip and producing and hosting a human rights radio program. While studying, she worked at an educational center which aimed to help young Palestinian and Israeli people learn together. Since then, she has worked in human trafficking prevention and gender-based violence prevention on the Thai-Lao border, and has worked as a community outreach coordinator to connect youth in foster care with mentors in Boston. She will receive her MSc in International Development at University College London in September 2020.



Editorial Coordinator Jenny Cordle documents human rights issues through photography and nonfiction writing. In 2016, she received a Certificate in Documentary Photography and Nonfiction Writing from Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies, with her work focusing on female genital cutting in Mali, West Africa. She researched the intersection of maternal and child health, traditional healing and spiritual beliefs in Northern Ghana through Georgetown University for her Master of Science in Global Health. She is currently advocating for labia elongation to be considered a harmful practice. She worked as a communications associate for Tostan, and is honored to continue working toward the abandonment of FGC with Sahiyo.



Grants Coordinator Tania Parks is passionate about gender justice issues and has been actively involved with a number of organizations advocating gender equality. She holds a Master in Human Rights and Humanitarian Action from The Paris Institute of Political Studies with concentrations in Middle East studies and migration studies. She has held various development and outreach roles at a domestic violence survivor advocacy nonprofit in San Francisco called W.O.M.A.N., Inc., and was the gender-based violence research intern at a women's health nonprofit based in Paris called Women and Health Alliance, International. She has published a study on Syrian refugee girls' perceptions of safety during displacement, and has participated in resettlement efforts for Yemeni refugee women in San Francisco through the Arab Community and Cultural Center.

US Advisory Board:

Aarefa Johari
Priya Goswami
Insia Dariwala
Zehra Patwa
Renee Bergstrom
Alisha Bhagat
Maryum Saiffee
Melody Eckardt
Joanne Golden
Sakina Sharp
Arefa Cassoobhoy

“Let us not be known as women who quietly suffered from the practice of khafz and looked the other way when our sisters and daughters suffered, too.

Let us not be known as women who unquestioningly perpetuated the practice on our young girls.



Rather, let us be known as women who questioned a harmful practice, putting an end to it to begin a new chapter for themselves and the community for generations to come.”

— Qudsiya Contractor

Women Deliver side event

04 Theory of Change and Mission:

Based on external research on female genital cutting (FGC) and independent research Sahiyo conducted with over 400 women from FGC practicing communities, we developed a theory of change that leads to these goals:

- 1) increased abandonment of FGC amongst future generations, and
- 2) creation of a strong network of community advocates who are raising awareness of FGC within their own communities, leading to a social norm change of abandoning FGC

Our theory of change was influenced by the social norm approach of our partner organization, Tostan. Tostan, a nearly 30-year old NGO, has utilized social norm theory to reduce FGC in Senegal.

In 2014, they reported a 69% reduction in instances of FGC over the course of 5 years.²

FGC continues because it is a deeply embedded social norm justified by cultural or religious necessity, and/or the need to control a woman’s sexuality. As such, social norm theory dictates that the threat of social rejection is very real if an individual makes different choices from those of the group.

Therefore, despite Sahiyo’s research revealing that 81% of the Bohra community does not want FGC to continue, the fear of social rejection and resulting silence surrounding the practice has allowed it to do just that.

Only by building a critical mass of voices which call for the abandonment of this practice. Obtaining community member buy-in is, therefore, the most important variable in determining abandonment of FGC. When trying to create social change, it’s critical to create safe spaces and mechanisms that allow community members to share dialogue on FGC without consequences of reprisal.

² <https://www.tostan.org/tostans-contributions-ending-fgc-highlighted-government-and-un-agencies-national-press/>

Sahiyo Guiding Principles and Values

Approachable and Culturally Inclusive:

We value diversity in many forms. We are committed to being change agents that contribute to a just and equitable society. We embrace diversity and deliver the utmost value to our stakeholders, we believe integrity is the foundation of our individual and collective actions that drives an organization of which we are proud.



Accountability:

We are effective in achieving our mission and hold ourselves accountable to our stakeholders -community, constituents, donors, board, staff, volunteers, collaborators, government, etc.



Transparency:

Definition: We pursue honorable initiatives and conduct our operations and financial management in a transparent and ethical manner.



Adaptiveness:

We employ adaptive capacity, meaning we are responsive and flexible to change.



Mutual Trust and Respect:

Mutual trust and respect are prerequisites for open communication and honest dialogue about values, goals and expectations. They require freedom of expression without fear of retribution, institutional or otherwise, and value the diversity of persons, ideas and choices differing from one's own



Effective Communication:

We use effective communication in our daily operations of Sahiyo to ensure the highest integrity of our programs.



Consensus Decision-Making:

Consensus Decision-Making allows us to have a creative and dynamic way of reaching agreement between all Sahiyo members. We strive to use consensus as much as possible to finding solutions that everyone actively supports, or at least can live with.



Teamwork/Shared Responsibilities:

We understand that teamwork is essential for all organizations and we recognize that through teamwork we are sharing our varied skills in complementary roles and in cooperation with each other. Organizations are much more likely to perform well when their people work effectively as a team. This is because good teamwork creates synergy - where the combined effect of the team is greater than the sum of individual efforts. Working together, a team can apply individual perspectives, experience, and skills to solve complex problems, creating new solutions and ideas that may be beyond the scope of any one individual.

Collaboration:

We work with individuals, organizations and coalitions in a collaborative fashion. We value and promote effective partnerships between volunteers, trustees, staff leadership at all levels of the organization. We are better together. We encourage strategic collaboration to bring out the best solutions and strengthen the fabric of our communities.



Feminist/Humanist:

We practice the philosophies of feminism and humanism in our daily interactions, recognizing that both frameworks emphasize the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively.



Muslim American Leadership Awards Gala



Africa Summit on FGM and Child Marriage

So far, anti-FGC advocacy amongst Asian communities has focused on

breaking that silence, supporting survivors, raising awareness, and seeking legal bans.

This vital groundwork has led community members to begin debating FGC with family, friends, young mothers, and mosque leaders.

These conversations are the *imperative* next step to ending FGC.

A 2018 study³ revealed that once **25%** of a social group adopts a new social norm, the rest will follow.

To reach a 25% tipping point, vast numbers of community members must have informed conversations about FGC.

Sahiyo utilizes social mobilization techniques involving storytelling to further this effort.

³ <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/360/6393/1116>

Our mission is to empower
Asian communities
to end female genital cutting
and create positive social change
through dialogue, education, and
collaboration based on
community involvement.

Women Deliver Conference



05 Programs:

We offer a variety of resources and programs to spread awareness and education about FGC along with an outlet for those affected to share their stories.

Storytelling

Storytelling is an important medium for allowing people affected by FGC to share narratives in their own words and connect with others through shared experiences. Sahiyo provides FGC-practicing communities with multiple platforms and media to share stories, such as:



Stories & Narratives

Stories and Narratives
(www.sahiyo.com)



**Voices to
End FGM/C**

A SAHIYO & STORY CENTER PROJECT

Voices to End FGM/C
(Using Digital Storytelling
for Social Norm Change).

American Public Health Association Conference



Voices to End FGM/C (Using Digital Storytelling for Social Norm Change)

This program uses storytelling and narrative work to shift gender violence norms through visual storytelling. In 2018, Sahiyo created Sahiyo Stories in partnership with StoryCenter, a community-arts organization working with grassroots groups on participatory storytelling and media arts projects for over 20 years. The initial Sahiyo Stories project brought together nine women from across the United States to create personalized digital stories that narrate their experiences with FGC.

The collection of stories is woven together with a united sentiment and a joint hope that the videos will evoke an empathic response from audiences; therefore, building a critical mass of voices from within FGM/C-practicing communities which will eventually call for abandonment of FGM/C. Visual storytelling is particularly powerful in allowing for social norm change, as communication research suggests that the viewer is more empathetic when faced with a visual representation of the issue.

This past year, Sahiyo hosted three additional workshops with twenty-seven new short films created in total. The participants also received training on how to create digital storytelling advocacy tools, so they can become leaders in advocating to end FGM/C in their respective communities. With the video collection completed, Sahiyo hopes to host screenings and events centered around the project to audiences across the country.

US Activist Retreat



*George Washington University Milken School of Public Health
Presentation on Voices to End FGM/C project*

Activist Retreats

In 2018, Sahiyo hosted Activist Retreats in both the U.S. and India to connect activists from the Bohra community working to end FGC. This came following recognition that many activists had been working in isolation, yet felt a desire to be connected with others. A 2017 Needs Assessment Report surveying anti-FGC activists found that discussion among anti-FGC activists about their own experience and the impact of their activism contributed to understanding the reasons behind their worries, and helped to identify ways of overcoming the challenges associated with advocating against FGC.

Volunteer Program

Volunteers are the organization's backbone, and Sahiyo thrives on the passion and dedication of its volunteers. Sahiyo currently has over 50 active volunteers stationed globally (i.e. U.S., India, Bahrain, Pakistan, Kenya, United Kingdom, Canada, United Arab Emirates, and Sri Lanka). As Sahiyo is a transnational organization, volunteers work with us remotely, volunteering to support our storytelling initiative via blogs, providing administrative support, and event logistical support as needed.



“

Being a part of the Sahiyo community, I feel a sense of purpose. I want to stand up for and be an ally to all the women in the community that need healing, those who need an ally. I want to bring together women who need a space to share their challenges, and heal collectively. I want to fight against this inhuman activity that continues to be a practice and a religious law. Sahiyo to me is a collective form of healing, and as a volunteer, I want to continue to expand this space by bringing more women in and helping them find a sense of belonging.

— Anonymous

”



US Activist Retreat

Community Outreach

Sahiyo offers a variety of presentations to educate the community on female genital cutting and its consequences:

1. Learning about FGC in the Dawoodi Bohra Community
2. Female Genital Cutting and Social Change
3. Incorporating Storytelling into Gender-Based Violence Work
4. Sensitively Reporting on Female Genital Cutting
5. Effective Communication on Female Genital Cutting

In addition to presentations, Sahiyo organizes community outreach campaigns such as “Each One, Reach One” or “I am Bohra.” Our campaigns encourage community participation toward the abandonment of FGC.

Research

Sahiyo conducts innovative research to bridge the gap in data that exists on FGC globally, and to bring understanding, awareness and advocacy to the topic of FGC within Asian communities.

06

Partners.



“

Fighting against FGM/C is difficult, lonely work and Sahiyo thoughtfully brings people together around this issue. Sahiyo provides space for storytelling and difficult conversations and also empowers people to speak up and take action. Through my work with Sahiyo I’ve felt empowered to act and felt supported by the community.

— Alisha Bhagat

”

07

Results and Impact:

Sahiyo has seen substantial growth in all of its programs over the past year.

A big part of Sahiyo's impact is in the realm of education and outreach. While our various programs help us achieve this impact, we also put a lot of time and resources into creating conversations and spaces for FGC education online. Our social media team has been hard at work increasing our digital presence to spread awareness and recruit new program participants.



**Our social media reach
increased 75% from
June 2019 to June 2020.**

We held many Voices to End FGM/C workshops across the U.S. in Berkeley, California; Asheville, North Carolina; and Washington D.C., and have supported nearly 40 survivors and their friends and family to create digital stories to share their experiences with female genital cutting (FGC). In all, **37 Voices to End FGM/C videos** have been shared with the wider public through YouTube and furthered our educational outreach. In every workshop, participants have expressed their satisfaction and personal growth from this program. Demand for additional workshops to support even more survivors and community members has rapidly increased.

After taking part in our Voices program, 78% of our workshop participants have also continued to stay involved with our organization and its work in various ways as Sahiyo ambassadors and volunteers.

“

They never
minimised
my voice.

—
Anonymous

”



Voices to End FGM/C workshop

All of our workshops and programs have increased in diversity with participants representing various races/ethnicities, genders, and geographic locations. Participants have hailed from Singapore, Tanzania, Egypt, Chad, Pakistan, India, Zimbabwe, and the United States. These stories span across South Asian, African and Southeast Asian identities with the powerful common thread of a hope to end FGC. Overall, this campaign has garnered media support with a total of 18 articles published in high profile publications to highlight the campaign:

FGM's #MeToo Moment - Ms Magazine

Today is Zero Tolerance to FGM day, and battle to end Bohra Muslim custom has only begun - The Print

Digital stories give voice to pain, grief, anger and some healing on day of zero tolerance towards FGM - Mid-day

These 27 Short Videos Highlight the Horrors of Female Genital Mutilation - Global Citizen

FGM survivors share their stories - Hindustan Times

Only United Voices Can Bring An End To FGM/C - Mid-day

In January 2019, we also initiated our peer support program, Saathi (partner or companion in Hindi) to connect new activists with more experienced activists for peer support, as our 2017 Sahiyo Activist Needs Assessment Study found that support systems for those opposed to FGC within practicing communities are essential to promoting abandonment of FGC.

After six months with the Saathi program, 86.7% of participants reported finding the program beneficial, and 90.9% wanted to remain with the Saathi program.

In March 2019, 21 participants attended our U.S. Activist Retreat, which is double the number of participants from our inaugural year of hosting the Activist Retreat in 2018. In April 2020, given the COVID-19 pandemic, Sahiyo hosted its annual Activist Retreat online.

“All the webinar sessions were very clear, had an easy pace, and really helped to mitigate my apprehensions about creating a video story (since video is not a format I am very comfortable with). All the participants’ needs were considered very thoughtfully.”
–Anonymous participant in Global Voices workshop

Recognizing the importance of including male voices in our work, Sahiyo instituted a **Male Ally digital media campaign in 2019. This campaign supported 40 men who have friends or family members affected by FGC to become more involved in educational outreach on the issue.** Throughout the campaign men were asked to submit short videos, audio files, quotations, or blogs that shared one thing in common: taking a stand against the practice of FGC and denouncing it. The response we received was amazing, as men from Ghana and Kenya to multiple regions of India and the U.S. stepped up to take part. The campaign allowed Sahiyo to reach thousands of viewers via social media.

Organizationally, to meet the increased demand for our programs by survivors and communities in 2019, Sahiyo U.S. and Sahiyo India became two separate entities, sharing the same mission to end FGC in Asian communities and beyond. We created a U.S. Advisory Board consisting of 11 individuals with expertise in media, healthcare, law, organizational development, and other disciplines, to help guide Sahiyo U.S. into its next phase.

Sahiyo has brought on two new part-time staff members, a Grants and Finance Coordinator and an Editorial Coordinator. We’ve also expanded our internship programs to include three Development Interns (as of June 2020), one Communications Intern, and 4 Social Media Interns.

Our Sahiyo volunteer program has also grown significantly, increasing by 70% between June 2019 and June 2020. Today, we have over 50 volunteers from 9 countries, contributing to over 40 hours of work per month.

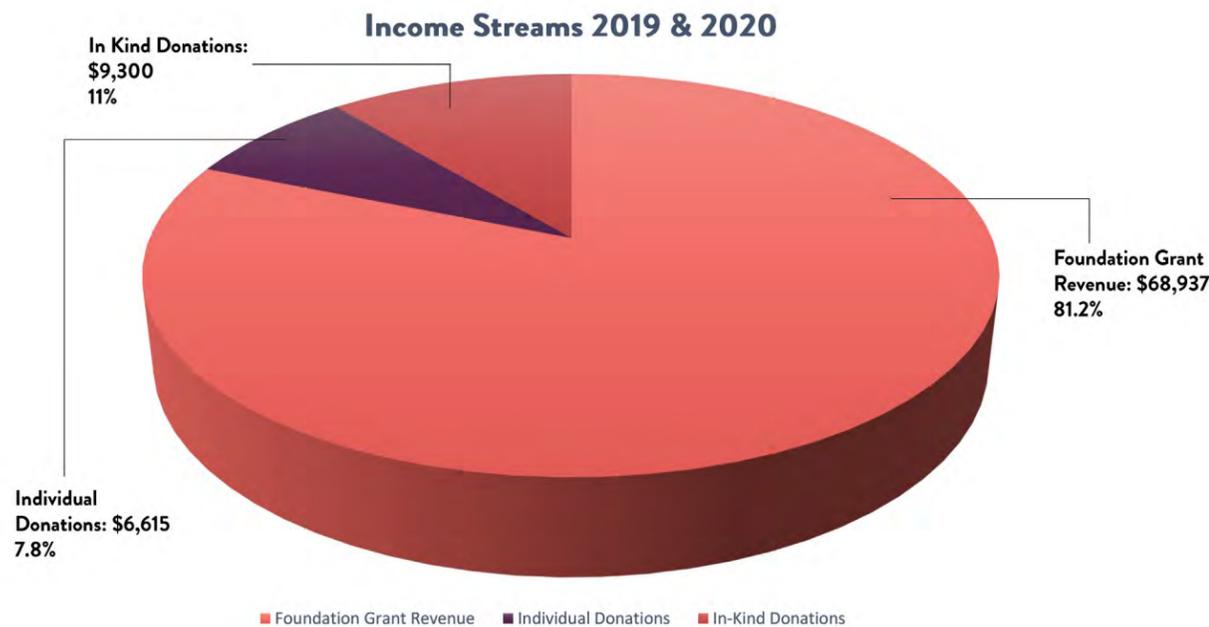
“Interesting to see the generation of the stories, allowed me to choose a topic that wasn’t being discussed by others and refocus my story in an alternative direction.”
–Anonymous

08

Finances and Funding Sources

January 2019 - June 2020

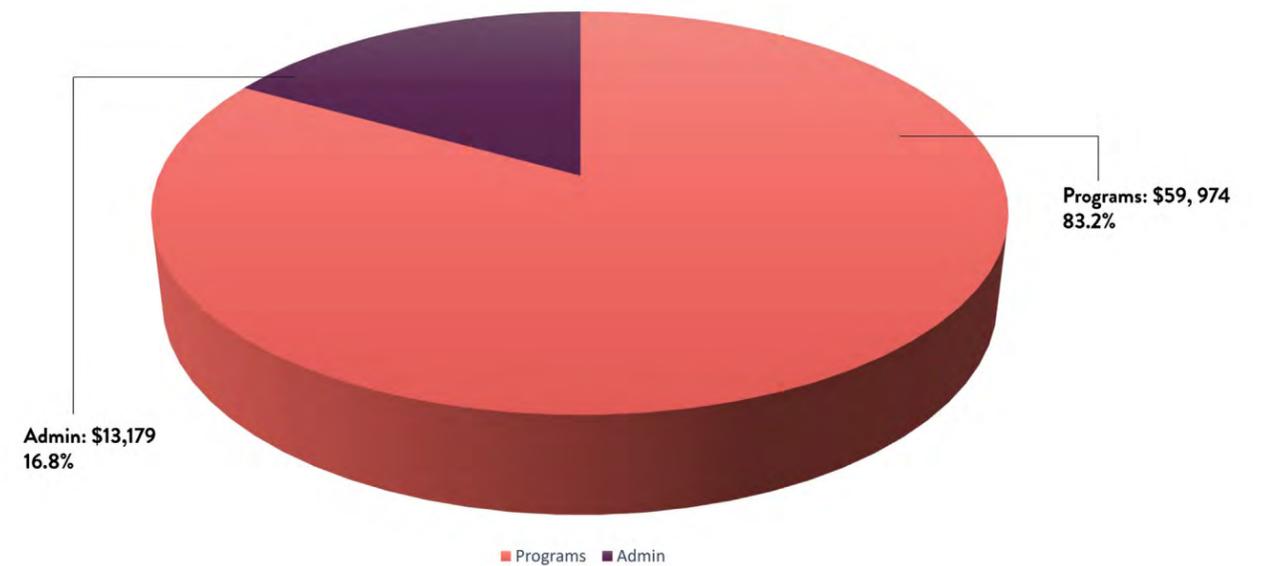
Total Operating Budget: \$84,852



Income (to correspond with the income graph):

Each year, Sahiyo continues to increase and diversify our funding streams. This past year, we received foundation funding from Wallace Global Fund, Resist.org, George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health, and ViiV Healthcare #EndFGM Positive Action Fund. Additionally, Sahiyo receives donations from our supportive Sahiyo community, and Sahiyo volunteers and interns provide in-kind contributions by providing countless hours of volunteer time to our programs.

Expenses 2019 & 2020



Expenses (to correspond with the expense graph):

Sahiyo's main expenses go toward fulfilling our programmatic mission to connect with communities and survivors to 1) Support survivors where they are at in their individual healing journeys and 2) Create a critical mass of voices within communities to support abandonment of FGC and prevent future generations of girls from undergoing it. We are proud to report that 84% of our funds go toward our programs costs that support our Activist Retreats, Voices to End FGM/C Programs, Education and Outreach programs, and more.

09 Get Involved

Sahiyo wouldn't be able to carry out our work without the support of our volunteers and generous donors. Here are various ways to get involved with Sahiyo:

Donate: Support survivors of FGC by donating to help our programs continue.

Volunteer: Support Sahiyo in our journey, using whatever expertise, interest and time you have to contribute. Volunteer work ranges from working on newsletters, to translating text to supporting at events.

U.S. Advisory Board: This board gathers experts from various fields in the U.S., such as health, law and media, to help guide Sahiyo's strategic vision forward and ensure we continue to meet our mission. If you're interested in learning more about the advisory board, email info@sahiyo.com.

Intern: Interns help with different areas of Sahiyo's work, such as development, communications, social media and programs. Sahiyo internships are currently a minimum commitment of 6 months for 5 to 10 hours per week. These positions are remote and offer fantastic career experience for anyone interested in these fields and human rights.

Blog contributor: Be part of the collective of voices speaking about their knowledge or experience of female genital cutting. Throughout the process of creating a blog piece, writers can work with Sahiyo's editorial staff for support.

Contact editor@sahiyo.com for more information.

US Activist Retreat



I learned that sharing stories creates an empowering bond among women and helps to raise our collective consciousness.

— A. Renee Bergstrom

10 Acknowledgements and Donors.

Our Donors:

Resist.org
Wallace Global Fund
Muslims for Progressive Values Boston

Special Thanks to

The Orchid Project
StoryCenter
Empowerment Works

Thank you to our volunteers from 2019-2020, from India, the U.S., the U.K., and Australia.

Our volunteers and interns have provided over 600 hours of support this year, in areas such as editing, communications and social media.

“Sahiyo has created a strong platform for women like me to come out and express their grief and opinions to create awareness.”

—Alifya Sulemanji

Special thanks to Shabana Feroze and Ancita Sherel from The Silver Kick Company for offering their graphic design and editing skills to the completion of this annual report.

Individual Alphabetized Donor List (2019 and 2020)

Lawrence Adrian	Robbie Gamble	Judith Norsigian
Fatema Akhtar	Rod St. Georges	Kay P
Fatima Akhtar	Susan Gibbs	Naira Pagan
Nisha Lauren Aoyama	Carmella Gioio	Katherine A Silva Perry
Rex Arrasmith	Mary K Giesecke	Julie Phelan
Joanne Avallon	Joanne Golden	Julia Pinces
Fatima Aziz	Amy Grier	Shelby Quast
Gouri Banerjee	Ellen Grierson	Nanci Quinn
Rashida Basrai	Cynthia Haggard	Georgina Richard
Renee Bergstrom	Nancy Herington	Roxanne Robledo
Alisha Bhagat	Nate Hildebrand	Kelly Rossi
Sameer Bhajji	Amy Hill	Sarah Rothlisberger
Linda Blood	Nicole Ifill	Jean Schindler
Tim Bohache	Husein Kapasi	Christoph Schorl
Nicole Boudreau	Ashley Kelly	Sakina Hassonjee Sharp
Suzanne Bowles	Ghada Khan	Salma Sheikhani
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Amelie Case	Masuma Kothari	Marta Stecko
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Dave Chamberlain	Susan Leibowitz	Dianne Stewart
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Maddi Cheers	Gina Li	Arsalan Suleman
Michael Christopher	Anne Lucas	Dudney Sylla
Eileen Cleary	Peggy Macunovich	Nazish Taj
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Jenny Cordle	Karen McDonnell	Duncan Tolmie
Kate Crosby	Edward McDonnell	Remy Trupin
Laurette Cucuzza	Jody Meza	Terrence Turner
Farrah Dalal	Melissa Millan	Darshan Upadhyaya
Shamina Dohadwalla	Sara Miller	Margy Waller
Miriam Dyak	Nazia Mirza	Andrew Whalley
Danniele Elizabeth	Safiya Mohamed	Susan Wickens
Ashraf Engineer	Lee Ann Moldovanyi	Aisha Yusuf
Farzana Doctor	Donald Mowry	Mario Zdybel
Lisa Fields	Danielle Naugler	Mary Zell
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	Thien Nguyen	

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 SahiyoVoices
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