

# Colmeal in Turkana West: Community Change and Institutional Adoption, 2021–2026

TOGETHER Project, Kenya • ADRA Kenya, ADRA Canada, Salanga & Global Affairs Canada

## Executive Summary

This case study documents community-led change in Turkana West, Kenya, over five years — and what happened when that change was independently taken up by a government institution outside the original project scope.

Colmeal is a community-led approach covering community-led challenge assessment and root cause analysis, change design, evidence generation, and engagement with institutions and government — on the community's own terms. Colmeal builds communities' capacity to lead their own governance and learning process, independent of any single project cycle.

### Community-level change

Beginning in 2021, Colmeal was introduced in Turkana West. Communities came together — in age- and gender-separated groups — to analyse the challenges shaping their lives. They identified teenage pregnancy, early marriage, and gender-based violence (GBV) as priorities, developed their own Theories of Change, and began taking action. Women joined community governance structures for the first time, presenting community-generated data to sub-county officials. Communities that had previously feared reporting GBV became confident advocates.

### Institutional change

In mid-2023, the Probation Office in Kakuma participated in a Colmeal training organised under the TOGETHER project. What they encountered resonated immediately. Without waiting for project approval or additional resources, the Head of Probation at the time — and subsequently her successor — began adapting Colmeal for use in rehabilitation work with people under probation. The Probation Office formed community rehabilitation committees, used problem trees to identify the root causes of offending, and created a direct communication channel between communities and the justice system. Magistrates began facilitating community dialogue rather than enforcing judgements alone. People formerly under probation took on mentoring roles as community champions.

### Beyond the original project scope

In 2025, of the 76 people serving sentences for GBV offences and due for release at Lodwar prison, 56 (73%) were formally accepted back into their communities through a community-led consent process — approximately 40 percentage points higher than in previous years. The Probation Office adapted Colmeal for use inside the facility entirely on its own initiative. ADRA Kenya, the implementing partner, learned about it after it had already happened. The Probation Office then trained a second jurisdiction — Eldoret — without requesting any resources from ADRA Kenya or Salanga. ADRA Kenya has since formally committed to embedding Colmeal as a core organisational methodology across all its programming.

*“I see in the near future Turkana West will have very few cases of GBV. Even when ADRA is gone, the legacy of Colmeal will stay in Turkana. Even us as Probation Office, we borrowed and adapted Colmeal in our work.”*

**Senior Probation Officer, Probation Office Kakuma, Turkana West — September 14, 2025**

### **Data note: The 73% acceptance figure**

**Source:** Probation Office Case File Management System, Kakuma, Turkana West. Cited by the Senior Probation Officer in a recorded interview, September 14, 2025.

**Definition:** “Accepted back” refers to formal community consent for reintegration, determined through a Colmeal-facilitated community process. Community acceptance is a condition for reintegration into the community, not for legal release from prison, which is determined separately by the justice system.

**Baseline:** The Senior Probation Officer stated the rate was approximately 40 percentage points higher than in previous years, based on the Case File Management System. Year-by-year baseline figures were not provided in the interview. Independent verification of the baseline has not been conducted.

**Caveat:** This is an administrative estimate from a single informant.

## **Community-Led Process**

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Turkana West Sub-County is one of Kenya’s most remote and underserved regions, characterized by prolonged drought, high rates of gender inequality, and limited access to services. In 2021, ADRA Kenya introduced Colmeal as part of the TOGETHER project — a six-year initiative focused on the rights and health of adolescent girls, women, and children funded by Global Affairs Canada.

The Colmeal process begins with communities doing their own structured analysis. Residents came together in age- and gender-separated groups to discuss what was driving the challenges they faced. Through structured analysis, several communities identified teenage pregnancy and early marriage as issues they wished to address.

The communities developed their own Theory of Change and action plan — and, in doing so, identified the institutions that needed to be part of the solution: the local judiciary, the Ministry of Education, and the police. These actors were not brought in by the project but by the communities themselves.

*“Communities own this Colmeal. They see it as: Let’s protect the future of our community, so our girls and boys can go and stay in school. Before this was here, communities didn’t really know their rights and were scared to report cases. Now they work together as a community.”*

**Senior Probation Officer, Probation Office Kakuma, Turkana West — September 14, 2025**

## Levels of Transformation

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### Community Transformation

Turkana West is a context where women have historically had no formal role in public decision-making. Within communities implementing Colmeal, women joined the Community Management Committee (CMC) — the community-elected body that leads the Colmeal process — alongside men, participating in structured community governance and presenting community-generated data to sub-county government officials.

In Murunga’ubuini, for example, a community member shared: “Before Colmeal, men had all the rights to make decisions. But now, women have a voice and they can make decisions. This is the best change.” This shift towards gender equality has not only empowered women but has also enriched the entire community by incorporating diverse perspectives into decision-making processes.

In Loreng, the community openly discussed why forced marriage persisted and envisioned a future where this practice no longer existed; together they decided that forced marriage had to end. With the support of ADRA and the Colmeal framework, they planned actions to drive this change. As a result of these actions the following has occurred:

- **Shared Decision-Making:** Both parents now participate in decisions about marriage, and importantly, children are included in these conversations.
- **Return to Education:** Through Colmeal sessions, the community realized that education is a far better option than forced marriage. Discussions about children's rights to education became a norm.
- **Legal Actions:** Legal measures are taken against those who perpetuate forced marriage.

- **Community Involvement:** The change involved everyone – village administration, teachers, parents, youth, CMC, Colmeal Committee, police, and church.

*“What we have seen right now, we have never seen — because of the power of people to speak freely without fear of being victimised.”*

**Police Officer, Turkana West (cited in John Ougo’s presentation at the SAMEA Conference, 2024)**

## **Institutional Transformation**

In mid-2023, Sub-County Heads of Departments in Turkana West — including the Ministry of Health, Education, Gender, Social Services, Interior, Trade, and the Judiciary — participated in a Colmeal training organised under the TOGETHER project. For probation officers whose daily work involves supervising people under probation and balancing rehabilitation with public safety, it felt immediately relevant. A question emerged from the participants themselves: could Colmeal work in justice reform? The Head of the Probation Office at the time became a driving champion of the idea — she engaged leaders across the judiciary and even proposed a justice-sector adaptation she called “JUDMEAL.”

They decided to find out. Working with community chiefs, elders, and people under probation, probation officers and magistrates began applying the Colmeal methodology to rehabilitation. They used problem trees to identify root causes of offending — poverty, peer pressure, alcohol, early marriage — and formed community rehabilitation committees that included people under probation as active members.

*“If people can truly understand the root cause of their actions, many crimes can be prevented.”*

**Senior Magistrate, Kakuma Law Courts, Turkana West**

By late 2023, Colmeal-informed rehabilitation committees were operational. Project staff observed that magistrates transitioned from their traditional role toward facilitating community dialogue rather than enforcing judgements. People formerly under probation — referred to as community champions — took on mentoring roles. The Probation Office documented the following outcomes from its own implementation:

- Reduced GBV cases as communities became more aware of rights, consequences, and reporting pathways
- Improved reintegration of people formerly under probation, through a community-led consent process determining whether and how individuals are accepted back

- Alternative sentencing applied in less serious cases, replacing incarceration with community-led accountability processes
- A direct communication channel was established between communities and the Probation Office, improving case reporting

*“Colmeal helped people to own the process of GBV prevention and reporting. They now better see the importance and the benefits for their own community.”*

**Senior Probation Officer, Probation Office Kakuma, Turkana West — September 14, 2025**

## What Spread Looks Like

Neighbouring communities not included in the original TOGETHER project rollout requested to join after observing changes in participating communities. By early 2024, the Probation Office in Kakuma had trained the Probation Office in Eldoret, West Pokot, on how to integrate Colmeal into their work with offenders — without requesting resources from ADRA Kenya or Salanga. At the 2024 SAMEA (South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association) Conference, a representative of the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics approached Salanga to request training so that government-led interventions could become more community-led.

ADRA Kenya staff have observed that ownership and trust — not funding — were the enabling factors behind institutional adoption. The Probation Office did not wait for permission or resources. It saw something that worked and built it into its own practice.

## Why This Matters

The experience suggests that community-level and institutional-level change are mutually reinforcing. Community change gave institutions something concrete to engage with. Institutional engagement created conditions for outcomes that emerged from the community-led process.

The Probation Officer’s words are the clearest statement of what sustainability looks like in practice: “Even when ADRA is gone, the legacy of Colmeal will stay in Turkana.”

### Alternative explanations considered

The TOGETHER project included components beyond Colmeal — SRHR services, referral systems, and gender-norm engagement activities — that may have contributed to community-level changes documented here. The following factors are acknowledged:

- TOGETHER’s broader service delivery (health access, referral pathways) likely reinforced community confidence in reporting GBV
- Leadership within the Probation Office: a new office lead with openness to alternative rehabilitation approaches was an enabling condition for institutional adoption

- National GBV policy environment in Kenya evolved during this period, though no specific Turkana West enforcement changes are documented
- Community-level changes in Turkana West during 2023–2025 (drought cycles, displacement patterns) may have independently affected community cohesion and GBV dynamics

**Why Colmeal remains a plausible primary driver:** The institutional adoption of Colmeal by the Probation Office was self-initiated and unfunded — it occurred without a request to or from ADRA Kenya or Salanga. The mechanism is documented (community-led consent process → reintegration pathway) and the timing aligns with Colmeal implementation. The spread to a second jurisdiction (Eldoret) and the prison application were both initiated by the Probation Office independently. No other TOGETHER component accounts for these institutional developments.

## Sources

Colmeal Mini-Survey Y3–Y4, Kenya, February 2025. ADRA Kenya / Salanga. n=99 respondents, 9 communities. John Ougo, former Colmeal Officer, ADRA Kenya (now Quality Assurance Manager). Interview and SAMEA Conference presentation, 2024.

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Loreng community case study (Loreng's Transformation From Forced Marriage to Education). Salanga / ADRA Kenya, 2023

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