

## FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/ CUTTING IN ETHIOPIA

Percentage of Ethiopian women who have undergone Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting (2005):  
**74%<sup>1</sup>**

### ISSUE

Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting (FGM/C) is a violation of human rights under international and Ethiopian law (the Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No.414/2004). The Convention on the Rights of Child, as well as many other world agreements, explicitly recognizes the harm this practice can inflict on girls and young women.

In Ethiopia, the age at which girls are made to undergo FGM/C varies from region to region. In Amhara and Tigray, it is done during the first ten days of life. In Somalia, Afar and Oromia, girls are subjected to FGM between the ages of seven to nine, or just before marriage between the ages of 15 to 17. Female genital mutilation is considered a part of societal norms and values. Three types of mutilation/ circumcision are practiced throughout Ethiopia.

In Somaliland, Afar, Harari and some parts of the Oromia Region the most severe form of mutilation, *Infibulation*, is practiced. Societies remove anything from half to all of a woman's external genitalia before sealing the remaining opening with long thorns.

There are a variety of reasons why communities continue to practice FGM/C:

- Communities believe it is important to regulate a woman's sexual desire. Many feel it is the only way they can ensure fidelity in marriage. To perpetuate this, a woman is told she must undergo FGM/C to fulfill a rite of passage into adulthood, without which a girl cannot be accepted as a woman in some communities.
- It is believed that circumcision has personal hygiene benefits. This has no basis whatsoever. In reality, a newly circumcised woman runs the risk of catching an infection after being operated on.
- Many communities also believe that women who are not circumcised are prone to break household goods. Taboos against uncircumcised women handling grain, serving food and drinks or elders or respected people of the society put additional pressure on women to undergo circumcision.

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<sup>1</sup> Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (Central Statistics Agency, 2005)

## ACTION

UNICEF is working in partnership with other NGOs to encourage communities and women to abandon all HTPs (Harmful Traditional Practices). The subject is gaining ground as a major public issue resulting from strong social mobilization campaigns.

### Partners:

UNICEF Ethiopia is working with grassroots organizations, national associations and the government to prevent the continued practice of FGM/C.

The National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia (NCTPE) and the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association are both UNICEF partners.

Since 1992, Women's Affairs Offices (now under the direction of the new Ministry of Women's Affairs) have been set up in eleven of Ethiopia's regions.

UNICEF hopes to increase partnerships with NGOs working at the front line of FGM/C protection.

### Advocacy

Ethiopia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Ethiopia's Women's Policy and the Constitution of the Federal Democratic of Ethiopia also affirm the protection and the well being of children and women. The implementation of these conventions and the constitution remains a major challenge.

Advocacy programs are being rolled out through the country to help victims and most importantly to prevent the continuation of FGM/C. In May 2005 the Ethiopian Woman Lawyers' Association, in partnership with UNICEF, published a small booklet in five languages outlining essential legal rights for women.

The booklet contains legal information on HTPs taken from the Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No.414/2004. This Proclamation became law in 2005. Government and other organizations now have increased power to deal with HTPs.

This information is available at Women Affairs' Offices in Ethiopia, The National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia as well as schools and colleges. Human Rights are now an essential part of all Programming and Community Capacity Building projects in the country.

### Education

Education is crucial. A woman accepts her fate when she sees no alternative. In Ethiopia, over half of all women who undergo FGM/C have no education at all. In comparison, only 25% of women who have received secondary education or above continue the practice<sup>2</sup>.

In 2003, UNICEF created the Facilitator training initiative. Key personnel in communication skills, HIV/AIDS, the legal aspect of HTPs and family planning embarked on a nationwide training scheme.

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<sup>2</sup> Innocenti Centre, 2004

Personnel are trained at regional levels by professionals from Addis Ababa. At the nation's regional capitals these personnel in turn train more people from the surrounding woredas (districts). They train people from local villages within those woredas. Through community dialogue, Facilitators aim to make communities publicly pledge to abandon HTP practices.

## IMPACT

Achievements have been made in areas dialogue and awareness. Latest studies reveal that in 2005, out of the 15,000 women surveyed across Ethiopia, only 25.5% still supported the FGM/C practice. This is down from sixty percent 5 years ago<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (Central Statistics Agency, 2005)