

## Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Côte d'Ivoire is one of the countries with the highest prevalence of FGM/C in West Africa, ranking at the 5<sup>th</sup> place in the sub region, after Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Mauritania. According to the preliminary results of the MICS<sup>1</sup> 2006, nearly 40% of women have undergone FGM/C in the country. The prevalence is particularly high in the North (87,8%), North-West (87,9%) and the West (73,3%).

There is a strong social consensus around these mutilations. The main reasons given to justify FGM/C practice in the country are the following: i) it is a way to test the courage and the endurance of the young girls, ii) it is a guarantee for the wife's faithfulness, iii) it is a ritual of purification and social integration (preparation to life as a housewife), iv) it is a religious requirement.

In Côte d'Ivoire, FGM/C is practiced among most ethnic and religious groups and within all layers of society, but prevalence is higher among Voltaiques (72,2 %) and Northern Mande (70,5%) ethnic groups, among the Muslim population, in rural areas and among women/girls that have not had access to education. Data show that young girls and even babies are increasingly affected by FGM/C practices, whereas the phenomenon is more and more taking an urban character, due to the recent crisis and massive population displacement.

### UNICEF ACTIONS AGAINST FGM/C

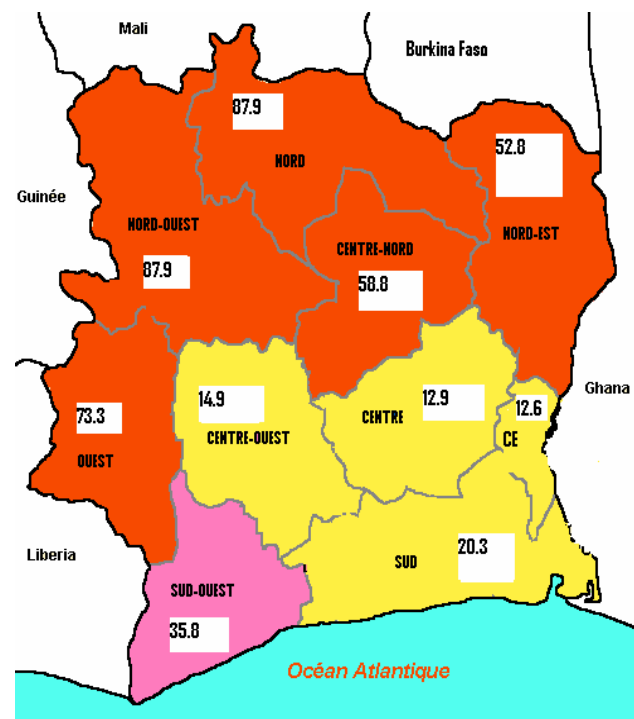
**Global Objective:** To eradicate FGM/C and to guarantee the promotion and protection of girls' and women's rights and in particular the right to bodily integrity and to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Actions developed until now by UNICEF and local partners have been focusing on information and awareness raising campaigns among communities and excision practitioners, on girls and women rights, on the consequences of FGM/C for women's and girl's health and on the legal prohibition of this practice. UNICEF strategies for fighting FGM include tough measures to reduce not only the service offer but in particular the *demand* for excision, by tackling social conventions in favour of FGM/C and by adopting an holistic approach.

In UNICEF's view, the key is to pursue the abandonment of FGM/C as part of a larger process of social change. The adopted approach is a human rights based approach to form a critical mass to bring about change and publicly declare these intentions at the community level, through capacity building of communities, public discussion and information campaigns that are non-judgmental and non-directive.

UNICEF holistic approach is based on the following elements:

1. a non-directive and non critical approach, whose principal objective is the respect of human rights and girls' and women's emancipation



Prevalence among girls/women aged 15-49 in Côte d'Ivoire

<sup>1</sup> Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

2. the realization of the harmfulness of the practice
3. the decision to abandon the practice must reflect a collective choice
4. the importance of the explicit public declaration of abandon of the practice by communities
5. experience sharing among different communities
6. a global approach which aims to support the integrated development of communities, in order to build a protective environment for girls

UNICEF actions are developed in close partnership with local civil society organizations that work in the field with grass roots groups, women and youth organizations, religious, traditional leaders, local institutions and village committees.

UNICEF intervenes in the zones with the highest prevalence rate, in rural as well as in urban areas. Since 2007, activities are carried out in 150 communities in the following regions: North (Korhogo, Boundiali, Ferkessédougou and Odienne Departments), West (Duékoué, Man, Kouibly, Bangolo, Guiglo and Bolequin Departments), Centre-North (Bouaké, Katiola and Dabakala Departments), North East (Bondoukou Department) and South (Abidjan).

### Key activities

- Establish and strengthen child protection and women's networks/committees at local and national level to promote the elimination of FGM/C and the safeguard of human rights;
- Raise awareness and inform through training of local community members, traditional and religious leaders, teachers, health workers, members of civil society who will act within the community;
- Mass and door to door sensitization campaigns;
- Awareness raising and information campaigns through local radio, TV and theatre;
- Empowering girls and women by:
  - increasing their awareness of their right to freedom from violence,
  - adopting a participatory approach,
  - using dialogue to encourage social and behavioral change and
  - by supporting girls' and women's education;
- Conduct studies and facilitate information sharing of good and bad practices at local, national and international level;
- Build capacities of local NGOs on the holistic approach
- Advocate for children and women's rights and for the elimination of gender based violence

### MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS and the elimination of FGM/C

The fight against FGM/C contributes to the achievement of MDG 3 "Promote gender equality and empower women", of MDG 4 "Reduce child mortality", MDG 5 "Improve maternal health" and MDG 6 "Combat HIV-AIDS, malaria and other diseases".

### SOME RESULTS

Indicators show that there has been a decrease in FGM/C prevalence in the country in the last years, and that the practice is diminishing with each generation. A comparison between MICS 2000 and MICS 2006 reveals that between 2000 and 2006 the national prevalence decreased from 44% to 36,4%. Moreover, the difference between the percentage of women aged 15-49 with at least one daughter circumcised (9,5 %) and the percentage of women aged 15-49 who have undergone FGM/C (36,4 %) is equal to – 26,9. This gives us an indication of the generational trend of the prevalence of FGM/C, which is strongly diminishing. However, efforts still need to be made to completely eliminate the practice.

Since 2006, with the support of UNICEF:

- More than 430 000 people have been sensitized on FGM/C
- 150 villages have been participating in the promotion of abandonment of the practice in the Korhogo, Boundiali, Odienné, Man, Guiglo, Duékoué, Bondoukou, Bangolo, Kouibly, Bloléquin and Abidjan departments
- More than 450 traditional and religious leaders have been mobilized and took active part in the fight against FGM/C
- 150 local protection committees have been set up for the promotion and protection of children and women's rights at the local level
- 437 community release have been mobilized and reinforced for sensitization against FGM in their communities
- More than 350 former women practitioners have been involved in actions against FGM/C.

#### UNICEF PERSPECTIVES/FUTURE CHALLENGES

- Increase capacity and involvement of governmental actors, facilitate and promote the adoption of a national plan of action to eliminate FGM/C.
- Increase commitment and capacity of partners including religious/traditional leaders, partner organizations, women associations, service providers and citizens to address FGM/C through training, information and experience sharing
- Strengthen mechanisms/networks at community level for the protection of girls and women
- Continue and extend Community sensitization in order to decrease the prevalence of FGM of at least 10% from here at 2013
- Promote a **human rights based** and **holistic approach** among partners. UNICEF believes that FGM/C is a phenomenon that can't be addressed without looking at the social and economic injustices surrounding women and girls and the socio-economic situation of their environment.
- Increase capacity and involvement of media to promote the rights of the girl-child and to use communication as means to promote social change
- Increase and strengthen collaboration and cooperation with development actors so as to facilitate the development of an integrated approach
- Develop and enforce policies and laws for the protection of girls and women and the promotion of their rights.

For further information please contact:

UNICEF Abidjan - Côte d'Ivoire Child Protection Section

TEL: (225) 21 21 18 50

[www.unicef.org/wcaro](http://www.unicef.org/wcaro)

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) February 2009