WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

Promoting awareness of Female Genital Mutilation amongst women and girls in Ethiopia

“It was all quite different when I was a child. Everything was decided then for me by my parents or men. Now increasingly children are deciding for themselves. I’ve discussed circumcision with my daughters but I’ve always let them decide for themselves. And they chose not to get cut. As for myself, I’m engaged in empowering women and am trying to empower myself by continuing my own education. Today, I feel capable of deciding my life for myself.” Bizunesh Gebre Egziabher, Angacha, Kembata Tembaro Zone, Ethiopia

IMPACT

- Promoted awareness of female genital mutilation among women, girls and health care professionals through community conversation groups.
- Psychological support and advice for legal recourse to victims of gender-based violence.
- Tutorial services provided to girls and disadvantaged women on income generation.
- Training for 90 law enforcement agents on international and national legal instruments on human rights and women’s rights issues.

CONTEXT

Bordering on Kenya in the south, the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia covers an area of approx. 110,000 square km – around 3.5 times the size of Belgium. Within its boundaries live an estimated 45 ethnic groups. A largely rural area, women in this part of Ethiopia have long been considered of low status, both economically and socially.
Girls have, in the past, been subject to female genital mutilation for ‘marriageability purposes’ – a social tradition having no root in religious beliefs. hugely reduced in the Kembata zone of the SNNPR, female genital mutilation is increasingly shunned by the present new generation of adolescent girls in the area, but work continues to be carried out to ensure it does not resurface, as well as to encourage its eradication in the whole of the SNNPR and prevent young women from succumbing to any medical complications that can arise from circumcision.

At the same time, a growing number of adult women are being trained by their peers in health and legal issues arising from female genital mutilation, as well as in how to tackle gender-based violence in the home. In recent years, EuropeAid, which is responsible for designing EU development policy and delivering aid EU aid to development, has funded two related projects in the region, with a focus on the Fuga community, who traditionally have been overlooked by society for their common ‘lowly’ occupation of pottery and tanning. The projects are being implemented by KMG Ethiopia, a local charity that has been active in empowering women in the SNNPR since 1997.

OBJECTIVES

- Empower women in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region.

TESTIMONIES

“I’m impressed when I hear women talking about themselves. And I’m happy to hear women asking officials for things. I took training via the project in women leadership and decision-making and run the Women’s League for the district.”

Bizunesh Gebre Egziabher, Angacha, Kembata Tembaro Zone, Ethiopia

“At home I talk with my parents about their traditional views – as on female genital mutilation. They used to think it was ‘right’ that a girl got cut. But in my uncut girl group, I’ve looked at it more closely – like the health consequences of circumcision, for example – and I’ve chosen not to get cut. All of my six older sisters got cut. They support my decision on not getting cut – they look at me and say: ‘You’ve survived. Well done.’”

Tsedale, 18, Angacha, Kembata Tembaro Zone, Ethiopia

“I’ve used my training to help change community attitudes – which is hard. Many women here used to be dependent on men for an income but more and more are generating their own and saving for themselves. I, for one, used to accept everything my husband told me, but now I can challenge his opinion. That’s progress.”

Tsehay Tedesse, Angacha, Kembata Tembaro Zone, Ethiopia

“Change starts at the home level. I discuss everything at the family level before I go to the community level. I discuss issues with my husband – and I’ve seen a slow improvement with him. I took leadership training and now use what I learnt to influence community attitudes. This is a difficult challenge but the training helped me take it on. At community level I am now considered a leader.”

Belaynesh Teshome, Angacha, Kembata Tembaro Zone, Ethiopia

“In my uncut girl group, we discuss harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation. And I’ve chosen not to be cut. I’m also involved in trying to set up a small livestock business at the moment with other girls. It’s all been useful – it makes me more confident.”

Rediet, 19, Angacha, Kembata Tembaro Zone, Ethiopia