



HIVOS AND WADI CALL FOR ACTION ON FGM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Female Genital Mutilation/FGM is recognized internationally as a grave human rights violation, and was mainly regarded as an "African problem", but growing evidence indicates that it is also a common problem in some communities in the Middle East and a number of Asian countries like Indonesia and Malaysia.

Violence against women is widespread in the Middle East. Not only does it constitute a human rights violation, but it also hampers the development of the whole region. Violence against women has considerable negative effects on education, productivity and well-being of all people. Among the grave forms of gender-based violence (including domestic violence, child and forced marriage and honour killings), FGM is most neglected issue.

Only a short decade ago, it was "unimaginable" that FGM might be widespread in some communities in the Middle East and the Arab world. Gradually this information has become available. The first Arab nations where existence of FGM has been officially recognized were countries which also belong to the African continent like Sudan and Egypt. Now, its existence is recognized also in Yemen, Iraqi-Kurdistan and just recently in Iraq. But there are still limited data on the size of FGM in these countries.

FGM is a very sensitive issue, which touches the core of cultural, religious and traditional aspects of societies and communities across the Middle East. For a long time, the topic was a taboo, but slowly this veil of silence is being lifted, and the issue is being openly discussed even by a number of religious leaders in the region. In Egypt and northern Iraq there are now laws banning FGM, in Yemen there are also legal restrictions, though their effect remains questionable.

In the rest of the Middle East there are no laws criminalizing the practice. Furthermore, while legislation is an important aspect of the struggle against FGM and gender based violence, crucially important is that, the commitment to ban such practices has to grow from within communities themselves.

As the practice of FGM in the Middle East was neglected for such a long time, the lack of data, research and statistics is severe. Thus, there is an urgent need to collect information, data and existing material about FGM in the Middle East for the purpose of systematic and reliable documentation. Identification of existing regional and local initiatives dealing with this topic is a first essential step to break the silence that still surrounds the practice. From there onwards the issues can be addressed effectively.



FOCUSED COUNTRIES:

Hivos aims to have a programme in the region covering Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Yemen and Oman. The recent work of WADI – Association for Development Cooperation in Iraqi-Kurdistan and Iraq, which has already made noteworthy progress in the struggle against FGM, provides solid experience on fighting FGM. Hivos aims to learn from the struggle against FGM in Africa, and work in cooperation with those who have seen success there.

APPROACH:

Hivos recognizes that Gender-based violence including domestic violence, FGM, forced and early marriage and honour killings is at the core of the marginalization and oppression of women in the Middle East and North Africa. It has long been recognized as a major obstacle to human development in the region. To address FGM, we are committed to a holistic; rights based approach that regards the work against FGM as an element of general human, social and economic development in the Middle East. Our interventions are built on our understanding that FGM is a cultural and social practice. They aim to facilitate community empowerment and create ownership by the targeted community to end FGM.

OPPORTUNITY

The Middle East and North Africa have seen waves of political activism over the past two years since the Arab Spring erupted. It is an opportune moment to support those activists across the region to speak up and break a taboo that enabled FGM to be practiced behind a wall of silence.

The problem of FGM in the Middle East is starting to be recognized at the national and international levels. At the recent event of the Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation, the Middle Eastern context was included as a part of the global agenda. The issue is started to be openly discussed in a number of countries in the region including among religious leaders and politicians.

HIVOS AND WADI ADDRESSING THE FGM/C:

Hivos supports initiatives in the Middle East to combat FGM in Iraq and Iran since 2004 and has a history of addressing the practice in Africa and Indonesia. WADI started to work on the issue of FGM in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2004 and is present in the region since 1993. Due to the work of Hivos and WADI on FGM in the Middle East and its public recognition in the region, a number of organizations and individuals with information about the practice contacted us, from different countries in the region. As a consequence, both Hivos and WADI feel the need to build local and regional cooperation and capacity for local actors combating it. Following initial data collection in 2010 and 2011, a regional workshop to exchange knowledge and information was held in January 2012 in Beirut, Lebanon. It became clear in the meeting that there is an urgent need across the region for credible data and statistics, as well as new approaches and tools. Hivos and WADI started a desk study to collect scattered documentation and research and information on several initiatives taking place in the region. In summer 2012 both organizations started the Stop FGM Mideast campaign, see www.stopfgmmideast.org.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

- Research & data collection: for systematic and reliable documentation and designing evidenced based lobby and programs
- Direct interventions with the communities: to facilitate their empowerment through awareness raising, capacity building of community leaders and facilitate access to services and information.
- Lobby and advocacy: to adopt laws to criminalize the FGM practice and to ensure the implementation of existing laws.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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TO FOLLOW THE DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAQI-KURDISTAN SEE ARTICLES AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON:

(http://stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/fgm_study.htm)
(http://stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/fgm_study2.htm)
(<http://www.hrw.org/de/reports/2010/06/16/they-took-me-and-told-me-nothing-0>)
(http://en.wadi-online.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=71&Itemid=19)
(<http://stopfgmkurdistan.org/html/english/resources.htm>).
<http://www.unspecial.org/2013/02/the-long-road-to-the-first-%C2%AB-fgm-free-villages-%C2%BB-in-iraq/> and <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/17/us-iraq-mutilation-idUSBRE89G10920121017>)
(<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/07/25/iraqi-kurdistan-law-banning-fgm-positive-step>)
<http://www.hivos.org/news/hivos-and-partner-wadi-launch-website-against-fgm-middle-east>
<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3137/campaign-against-fgm>, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/fighting-against-female-genital-mutilation-in-iraq-8640121.html>)