

The Donors Working Group on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
in collaboration with

No Peace Without Justice
and
MEP Emma Bonino

**REPORT OF
SEMINAR ON FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING
A CALL FOR EU ACTION**

**1 June 2005
The European Parliament, Brussels**

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Haleh Bridi – World Bank Special Representative to the EU - explained the objectives of the meetings as follows:

- **The World Bank in its capacity as co-chair of the Donors Working Group on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) had initiated the organization of the Seminar in Brussels with the twin aims of raising awareness on the issue, and better engaging with the EU institution on the matter.**
- In view of these aims, the World Bank and the Donors Working Group welcomed the numerous participants attending the meeting, and was particularly encouraged by the large number of men in the audience.

Emma Bonino – Member of the European Parliament and fellow co-organizer on her part included the following observations in her opening speech:

- The EU had supported the Stop FGM/C campaign rights from its beginning, however over the last few years this support seemed to be dwindling. But without funding it will be impossible to sustain the campaign.
- A concrete aim of the meeting was therefore to re-engage the financial support of the EC on the issue.
- It is essential that other institutions and donors also engage themselves in order to ensure financial sustainability of the campaign.
- **Collaboration between governments, financial institutions, parliaments and civil society organizations could create useful alliances and synergies in tackling the problem of FGM/C.**

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION: THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

Dr. Doyin Oluwole - Director, Population and Reproductive Health Unit, WHO - intervention aimed to describe the gravity of the problem of FGM/C. This included the following points:

- FGM/C is defined as all procedures that involve total, partial removal or injury of the female external genitalia for cultural or non-therapeutic reasons.
- It is an intergenerational deep rooted traditional practice with debilitating and irreversible consequences for women.
- It's practiced in a wide range of countries in Africa and the Middle East and amongst immigrant communities in North America, Europe and Australia.
- Every year an estimated 2 million women experience FGM/C. This translates into 6000 cases of FGM/C a day.
- FGM/C has serious short term and long term physical, sexual and psychological consequences. Immediate FGM/C problems of hemorrhage and infection can lead to death. It is also poses a potential risk of HIV transmission.
- **The problem is linked with poverty and a lack of education amongst women. It is associated with 5 of the Millennium Development Goals (1 – poverty eradication, 3 – gender equality, 4 – child mortality, 5 – maternal health, and 6 – HIV/AIDS and malaria).**
- Examinations of prevalence across two generations of women in Africa show that the problem has not decreased over the last 20-30 years.
- Medicalization of the practice is a new trend whereby women have the procedure performed by health professionals. However this does not prevent its debilitating consequences.

- A holistic approach is required to address the problem which involves amongst other things:
 - Mainstreaming of FGM/C programmes in country programmes
 - Advocacy at all levels
 - Developing an enabling legislative environment
 - Coordination of actions from all stakeholders

- **Ms. Karin Landgren** - UNICEF Chief Child Protection Unit - supplemented Ms Oluwole's presentation by pointing out that:

- FGM/C is a child rights and human rights issue.
- Enforcing laws on FGM/C even where they exist have been ineffectual. In Africa only four African governments have brought prosecutions against FGM/C, even though at least thirteen have the laws to do so.
- There is a need
 - to break the silence surrounding the issue
 - to create a protective environment through increased commitment of governments
 - to provide access to health services for all children
 - to constantly monitor the problem
- **The pledge by governments at the UN General Assembly Special Session on children to end FGM/C by 2010 needs to be made a reality.**

THE ROLE AND WORK OF THE DONORS WORKING GROUP

- **Ms. Adisa Douglas** - Director of Programs, Public Welfare Foundation - presented the work of the Donors Working Group as follows:

- The Donors Working Group is a diverse group of development actors who came together with the aim of pooling efforts to address FGM/C.
- Its current members are the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Italian Cooperation for Sustainable Development, USAID, the World Bank, the Wallace Global Fund, Public Welfare Foundation, Ford Foundation, GTZ (German Technical Cooperation), UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO.
- Its objectives are to
 - Share Strategies on FGM/C
 - Document best practices
 - Increase effectiveness of donor support
 - Establish an overall framework for collaboration
- The Group would like the EU to:
 - Continue to expand its support to activities to end FGM/C
 - Increase its advocacy for national and global political anti FGM/C agendas
 - To participate in the coordination of activities to end FGM/C at the global level

PERSPECTIVES ON THE ABANDONMENT OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING

The primary aim of this session was for the panelists to share their different views and experiences (government, donor, European and African NGOs and health workers) on efforts made to address the issue of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting.

Ms. Layla Shaaban - Research, Technology & Utilization, Office of Population and Reproductive Health, USAID/Bureau for Global Health - included in her presentation the following remarks:

- USAID recognizes FGM/C as a harmful traditional practice that violates the health and human rights of women, and hinders development.
- USAID's approach to FGM/C is cross-sectoral, recognizing that FGM/C affects female reproductive health, the status of women, democracy and human rights. This involves:
 - Supporting culturally-appropriate and community sensitive interventions.
 - Funding research to determine the effectiveness of abandonment programs.
- Having a strong focus on documenting lessons learned

Ms. Berhane Ras-Work - Executive Director of the Inter-African Committee (IAC) on Harmful Traditional Practices - in her presentation included the following points:

- **The Millennium Development goals cannot be achieved unless millions of African women and girls are saved from practices such as FGM/C and early marriage**
- The IAC's objectives include:
 - Reducing maternal mortality and morbidity through practices such as FGM and early and forced marriage.
 - Promoting the basic human rights of women and girls through creating awareness, community mobilization, advocacy and lobbying
- IAC carried out an evaluation in four African countries: Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia. The findings include the following:
 - 68% of respondents want FGM/C and early marriage eliminated
 - 57% gave health reasons including fear of HIV/AIDS for abandoning FGM/C
 - 3% gave human rights reasons for denouncing FGM/C
 - Only 2% said FGM/C should continue to avoid promiscuity
- IAC has a plan of action based on Common Agenda for Action with the objective of 'achieving zero tolerance' by 2010.
- A major constraint in implementing this plan is a lack of human and material resources

Ms. Khady Koita - President of the European Network against Harmful Traditional Practices - informed the meeting that:

- The network was established 23 years ago to address the problem of FGM/C practiced by huge numbers of migrants in Europe.
- Its objectives include coordination and reinforcement of actions taken against FGM/C through the exchange of information and experiences.
- The network would like to appeal to donors to provide adequate resources that allow the network to evaluate its work in Europe over the last twenty years so as to ascertain the degree of the problem of FGM/C in Europe.

Ms. Giulia Schiavoni - FGM/C Program Coordinator, No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ) - outlined NPWJ's strategy as follows:

- No Peace Without Justice has a two pronged approach to address FGM/C: Bottom up – working with the grassroots, and top down working with Governments and parliamentarians.
- A key mechanism it uses is the organization of sub-regional conferences, to help boost ratification and implementation of the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, and raise awareness on the issue in the countries and regions concerned. To enter into force, the Protocol needs to be ratified by 15 African Union Member States. At present, only 10 Member States have ratified it. Article 5 of the Protocol explicitly requires Member States to "condemn and prohibit all forms of FGM". This document is important because it considers the problem of FGM as a human rights issue: while the practice clearly leads to harmful health and psychological consequences, it is primarily a violation of the fundamental right to physical integrity.
- **It is important to work with traditional and religious leaders to de-mystify FGM/C and overcome the belief that it is justified by tradition or religion.**
- NPWJ aims to mobilize governments, politicians and civil society to support them to break customs that allow this practice.

Ms. Comfort Momoh - FGM/Public Health Specialist & Midwife, African Well Woman's clinic - informed the meeting of her organizations' efforts as follows:

- African Well Woman's Clinic based in Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital in the UK provides women with support, advice, information and reversal of certain types of FGM/C.
- It also provides education on the issue for both the community and health officials
- The clinic advocates for:
 - Better legislation and communication with communities on the issues
 - FGM/C to be included in the curriculum for all health professionals

Discussion

Key points raised during the discussion included the following:

- The practice of early marriage is closely linked with FGM/C and needs to be addressed in the context of the fight against FGM/C.
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is the term that best describes the procedure in terms of its damaging characteristics. It is also a term that is most appropriate to spreading the message in the African context where direct references to sexuality are refrained from.

THE ROLE OF THE EU IN MEETING THE CHALLENGE TO ACHIEVE THE ABANDONMENT OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING

This session essentially involved panelists presenting experiences, ideas and plans with regard to EU action in addressing the problem of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

Mr. Stefano Manservigi - Director General of DG Development, European Commission - in describing the EC's work and plans on FGM/C stated the following:

- **In view of the up-coming Review of the Millennium Declaration it is important to highlight existing linkages between Female Genital Mutilation and the Millennium Development Goals.**
- To eradicate Female Genital Mutilation, the EC needs to apply an integrated approach as this is an issue which requires an extensive political dialogue and a set of concrete interventions at the country level through a wide range of instruments including financial assistance and technical support.
- FGM/C is often linked to specific instruments but not mainstreamed (e.g. into country budget lines)
- The Cotonou Agreement, the framework for cooperation between the EU and 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP countries), states that the ACP/EU cooperation aims at “the integration of population issues into development strategies in order to improve reproductive health, primary health care, family planning and the prevention of FGM.
- The EC addresses FGM/C as part of its policy to support improvements of the sexual and reproductive health in partner countries. In 2004-5 the focus of its budget line on this issue was on the improvement of the sexual and reproductive health of young people in developing countries.

Mr. Hugh Richardson - Deputy-Director General of EuropeAid, European Commission - complimented Mr. Manservisi's presentation by elaborating the following points:

- The new European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) 2004-2006 programming document specifically provides for interventions to protect the rights of vulnerable women and children. FGM/C will be eligible for support under this component.
- The latest call for proposals on torture also includes a specific mention of FGM/C.
- Activities against FGM/C can be also funded under the NGO co-financing line.
- But support to actions combating FGM/C under EC Country Strategy Papers is to a largest extent subject to the political will of the governments with whom these strategies are negotiated.
- Civil society organizations can play an important role in promoting the necessary political commitment that can be concretized in EC co-operation programmes.
- The EC will take into account lessons learnt and positive recommendations made by all organizations in this field. **The EC will also ensure a Human Rights based approach in all its programmes on FGM/C.**

Mr. Jose Zarzoso Farinos - Deputy Head of Unit for Human Rights and Democratization, DG External Relations, European Commission - gave further clarification on the EIDHR program pointing out that:

- In line with the intension to mainstream children's rights and gender equality in the EIDHR program, all project proposals are supposed to demonstrably take those issues into account.
- Furthermore, beyond mainstreaming the EIDHR program specifically aims to promote women's rights. It is in this respect that projects to combat female genital mutilation will be eligible for support.

Mr. Francisco Fonseca Morillo - Director for Civil Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, DG Justice, Freedom and Security, European Commission - highlighted efforts made to address FGM/C in the EU stating:

- The EC has worked for several years principally through the Daphne Program to stop the practice of FGM/C in the EU and to support its victims.

- Daphne has co-financed 11 projects on this topic representing around 1.5 millions Euros. This includes:
 - The establishment of a European network for the prevention of FGM/C in Europe.
 - The production of an information kit on the issue.
- In addition to the Daphne Program the EC services on asylum and migration took the initiative to draft a directive which allows women victims of violations based on sexual discrimination, including the practice of FGM, to claim refugee status and, consequently, asylum in an EU Member State. The European Council Directive on minimal rules to qualify immigrants from Third Countries as refugees was adopted in April 2004 and has to be implemented in Member States by October 2006.
- The Daphne program shows that each EU Member States needs to develop specific legislation on FGM/C if the issue is to be addressed in the EU.
- Besides the importance of addressing the issue in the EU, it is essential to prevent the practice through working closely with other partners of Development and Cooperation and with NGOs working on the field.

Ms. Ana Zaborska, Member of the European Parliament (PPE Group), Chairwoman of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

- The Women's Committee thanks Ms Emma Bonino for her support of the Committee's report on FGM drafted in 2000 by MEP Elena Valenciano
- European civil Society organizations that involve health professionals need to invest more in addressing the problem of FGM/C
- **In order to allow all types of civil society organizations to access EC funds, the EC needs to simplify its procedures and make them more transparent.**

Discussion

The following points were amongst the key points raised in the discussion:

- **The EC needs to develop expertise on FGM/C and gender at both headquarters and country delegation level to include the issue into the policy dialogue with partner countries and regional bodies to ensure that measures against FGM/C become part of country and regional budget lines.**
- **The EU's gender strategy should incorporate action on FGM/C.**
- **The issue of FGM/C should be included in the EC's statement to be made at the forthcoming UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals in September 2005.**
- The EC should identify a person to act as a focal point in working with the Donors Working Group on FGM/C.
- Possibilities for NGOs to access funding for FGM/C under EC budget lines remain difficult and seem to be diminishing.
 - The ever changing focus of budget lines in areas such as reproductive health makes it hard for NGOs to access them.
 - Furthermore the utilization of budget lines such as that for torture is not appropriate for FGM/C and promotes unnecessary competition with other actors working on torture.
- Greater efforts should be made to ensure that EC funding on FGM/C gets to grassroots organizations.
- Projects funded by EC are often too short in duration to effectively deal with the problem of FGM/C.

- Many EU Member States would like to focus EC aid on infrastructure related issues as opposed to matters like FGM/C.
- It is essential that the EC coordinates its activities with EU Member States to ensure best use of scarce financial and human resources on FGM/C.

CONCLUSIONS

Mr. Khama Rogo - Lead Specialist of FGM/C the World Bank – in the concluding remarks made the following suggestions on behalf of the Donors Working Group:

There are three dimensions in which EU action on FGM/C could be upscaled.

- The political dimension:
 - There is a need for increased advocacy and dialogue with ACP countries as provided under the Cotonou Agreement.
- The financial dimension:
 - It is evident that more funds are needed to sustain and upscale the fight against FGM/C.
 - EC budget lines directed at FGM/C seem complex and insufficient to the task.
 - Funds need to be made more accessible to civil society organizations including grassroots organizations.
 - The EC also needs to increase its efforts in engaging with civil society organizations even as it channels its funds through budget support.
 - Existing resources also need to be better used and targeted at the problem.
- The technical support dimension:
 - There is a need for more expertise, information and knowledge of FGM/C both in Europe and Africa and EC delegations and offices.
 - In Europe in particular there is a need for actions that measure the prevalence of the problem and determine the impact of work done so far on the issue.
 - There is also a need to better utilize the media in sensitizing the public on the issue.