



THE REPUBLIC
OF DJIBOUTI



NO PEACE
WITHOUT JUSTICE

THE MINISTER OF
HEALTH

THE MINISTER IN CHARGE OF
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT, FAMILY
WELFARE AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS



Project Proposal

*Sub-Regional Conference On the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation
“Towards a political and religious consensus against FGM”.
Djibouti, 2-3 February 2005*

1. Description

Project Scope and Objectives:

The Government of Djibouti together with the international non-profit organisation No Peace without Justice, within the framework of the international campaign “Stop FGM!” for the ratification of the Maputo Protocol, are organising of a sub-regional Conference on Female Genital Mutilation designed to stimulate the will and consensus of the government and religious authorities in favour of abandoning FGM.

This Conference has the aim of helping to develop a political and social environment favourable to the enforcement of Djibouti laws that implement the principles established in the Maputo Protocol, and at the same time, to promote a similar attitude at the sub regional level.

Brief Description of the Project:

The Conference, to be held on 2-3 February 2005 at the “Palais du Peuple” in Djibouti, will be held under the auspices of the First Lady of Djibouti, Mme Kadra Mahamoud Haid, President of the National Union of Djibouti Women. It will be organised in full collaboration with all the Ministers who are most directly involved, in particular the Minister of Health, the Minister of Women, the Minister of Justice and the delegate Minister with responsibility for Wakfs’ Assets and Muslim Affairs.

The Conference will see the participation of the highest religious authorities of the country, as well as the highest government officials, civil society and media from Djibouti as well as from bordering countries (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen) and other African countries (Kenya, Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal). Simultaneous interpretation and translation of documents will be provided in English, French and Arabic.

The Conference will also be used as an opportunity to raise public awareness of the problem through holding “side events”, namely a televised roundtable discussion, together with an art display and song performances.

NPWJ and the Government of Djibouti are currently negotiating the auspices of the African Union for the Conference, to give the event a major political impact in the sub-region.

Problem Statement:

A survey undertaken by the Djibouti National Health Programme “Safe Motherhood ”, in January 1999 shows that today 98% of Djibouti women are mutilated between the age of birth and 11. The majority of them (76%), composed of Somalis and Afars, are systematically “infibulated”, while the women in the Arabic community of Yemeni origin are mostly circumcised. Various studies conducted by international organisations and reports issued in Djibouti by WHO, UNPFA and the Ministry of Health consider the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) not only as a sexual and reproductive health problem but also as a violation of women's fundamental human rights.

In Djibouti it is, however, viewed by many in the Community as an “Islamic act” and is therefore backed by some religious leaders.

The efforts to eradicate this practice which was until very recently considered as a taboo subject, involve the participation of all stakeholders at different levels: Government, community leaders, religious leaders, men, women, youth and circumcisers, through holistic and culturally appropriate strategies.

To date, Government policy has been mainly led by the Ministry of Health through the Reproductive Health Program, which has centred on many actions at different levels, most notably at the community level. This on-site effort has been implemented by the adoption of article 333 of the Criminal Code (1995) which provides that: “Acts of violence involving genital mutilation are punishable by five years of imprisonment and a fine of 1,000,000 DJF” (4.000 EUR).

The President of the Republic of Djibouti, H.E. Ismail Omar Guelleh, as well as senior officials of the Government whose administrative sectors are concerned with the practice of the FGM and its devastating consequences, have not hesitated in condemning it, leaving no ambiguity as to the extent of Government consensus on the subject.

On 18 December 2003, the Government of Djibouti signed the Maputo Protocol, the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights in Africa, adopted by 53 Heads of State of the African Union, which, in article 5, stipulates that FGM must be prohibited and condemned. The Republic of Djibouti is already committed to ratify the Protocol by the end of January 2005, becoming one of the first Muslim countries with a dominant tradition of FGM to commit itself to the application of the principles of the Maputo Protocol. This would make ratification by Djibouti more exceptional, in particular in view of the Djibouti Conference on FGM, which proposes to highlight the provisions of the Protocol relating to FGM.

Despite this clearly stated policy and the consensus that exists in favour of ending this practice, many obstacles continue to block its abandonment. The main obstacle is found in the absence of an official and clear position of the Djibouti religious authorities concerning FGM.

It is true that a misunderstanding of the Muslim religion, as well as a poor interpretation of the Hadiths (religious texts) that make reference to excision, have constituted and continue to constitute an alibi for the maintenance of this practice. In addition, the very strong links existing between Djibouti society and communities in neighbouring countries makes the setting up of a

national policy that does not include a sub-regional plan of action difficult to implement in practice. For five years, the Ministry of Health, through the National Reproductive Health Program, has led a broad program of persuasion to political, community and religious leaders.

Educating the community in the battle against FGM was led throughout most of the country with the support of the partners in development (UNICEF, UNFPA and OMS).

2. Objectives and Expected Results

Overall Goal

The conference will facilitate the creation of an environment in Djibouti society that allows for the promotion to the public of the anti-FGM consensus already in existence at the highest levels of the Government and some religious authorities. The general objective is to reinforce, in the field, the position of all those who at an individual level are called upon to make the choice to abandon the practice of FGM.

An additional objective is to facilitate the mission of those who have the vocation to represent and to set up the official position adopted in their hierarchy, whether it be the State or the religious authority of the country. Visibility given to the official position as a result of the Conference will also reinforce the position of any organisation engaged in the campaign against the practice of FGM, thereby considerably reducing the social pressure that still governs in favour of this practice, pressure that tends to marginalise those who intend to break with this harmful tradition.

Indeed, it is by officially integrating the position of religious authorities with those of the Government that a common refusal of FGM despite this pressure can be effectively realised. At the national level, the Conference intends to gather together the largest participation of religious representatives, coming from Djibouti City and the hinterland, as well as executives of the public administration to give weight to the government's policy, as well as NGOs working in the sector. The inclusion of these participants will facilitate the development of a commonly adopted position against FGM all over the territory of Djibouti.

At the regional level, representatives of government, parliaments, civil society, media and religious leaders of countries in the region will be invited to participate in the Conference in order to spread knowledge of the effort set up by the Djibouti Government in the fight against FGM. This is aimed at facilitating the establishment and adoption of a common regional position, potentially making the Maputo Protocol an instrument capable of representing an integrated platform at the regional level.

Impacts: the long-term benefit of the project

It is expected that this Conference will contribute to government efforts for the improvement of the condition of women, by creating an environment that could eliminate the religious alibi and therefore reduce the social pressure that forces girls and children to undergo the practice. It will help making the difference in women and girl children's lives. Indeed, the abandonment of FGM will contribute to the improvement of the condition of women in the society and will also lead to a remarkable reduction of infant (under five) and maternal mortality, of which FGM is one of the main causes.

Expected Outcomes: the product of the proposed project activities.

The Conference has a number of expected outcomes, all of which contribute to the development of an environment conducive to the abandonment of FGM, namely:

- to provide an opportunity for governments of the sub-region to exchange opinions and ideas in an atmosphere of mutual support, to facilitate the adoption of a common stand towards FGM;
- to foster the effort of the governments of the sub-region to harmonise their legal instruments and implementation efforts towards FGM;
- to give positive reinforcement to the leading role of certain Countries in implementing the African Charter of Human and People's Rights, and more particularly the Maputo Protocol;
- to create a momentum ensured by the high-level participation and thereby give visibility to this extremely sensitive issue among the community of the sub-region, in order to break social conventions, which are often the main cause of the perpetuation of FGM;
- to foster the habit of consultation and cooperation, through the integration of non-governmental actors, civil society representatives, experts and the media in a constructive dialogue with Governments, and to promote internal debate within their respective national contexts;
- to encourage a process of deconstruction of the misconception that the practice of FGM is dictated by the Koran;
- to bring together key actors in the fight against FGM from the sub-region and neighbouring countries as to compare their respective experiences;
- to formulate recommendations and suggestions for follow-up and monitoring actions aimed at promoting actions for the abandonment of FGM;
- to elaborate a plan of action or other appropriate measures, at national or sub-regional level, to implement recommendations resulting from the conference.

Expected Outputs

The Conference will demonstrate that the fight against FGM represents the central axis of all governmental policy in the promotion of women's rights. It will also encourage, at the civil society level, the promotion of debate and initiatives in favour of the fight against FGM. It is also intended to attract the attention of the media, which is a critical vehicle for the dissemination of information in Djibouti, but also in bordering countries. Other direct results of the conference will be:

- The ratification of the Maputo Protocol, due also to the lobbying activity run by NPWJ as part of the pre-conference strategy;
- The revision of the national law (art. 333 of Criminal Code) consistent with the provisions of the Maputo Protocol;
- The presentation of an inventory of verses from the Koran and the Hadith, prepared by three national theology consultants, demonstrating that the positions of the Ministries engaged in the fight against FGM are in no way in contradiction of the founding texts of the Muslim religion;
- The development of Koran interpretations of the verses to act as preparations for the Friday sermons of the Imams in mosques;

- A “Declaration for the elimination of FGM in the sub-region” from political and religious leaders, affirming their common position against the practice;
- A set of Recommendations on:
 - how to include the Protocol’s implications in relevant national legislation;
 - effective implementation and enforcement of national anti-FGM legislation;
 - how to enhance national policy to combat FGM and support local initiatives in the field;
 - setting up a strategy for on-the-ground activities in districts, communities and villages to eliminate social pressures that influence not only the behaviour of girls and young women but also that of parents, aimed at the long-term result of effecting a behavioural change in society;
- A comprehensive report on the Proceedings of the Conference;
- Video documentation of the Conference;
- Publicity materials.

3. Timeframe for the implementation of the project.

The preparation for the conference, which will last for 2 days, is taking place over a two-month period, during which NPWJ is running a number of activities focused on:

- Lobbying the host and participating governments to commit themselves to ratify the Maputo Protocol or, where possible, to implement it;
- Mobilising the local and international donors’ community with the aim of facilitating long-lasting partnerships between them and local organisations working for the abandonment of FGM;
- Involving government representatives, civil society, international organisations and donors in the preparation of the conference through the creation of an organisational committee, which will strengthen the coordination among them to promote an integrated approach against FGM;
- Holding preparatory meetings among local key religious and political representatives to enhance their understanding on FGM as a form of violation against women and children’s rights and to inform them about the health damages caused by the practice;
- Running an information campaign through the involvement of the media in the period immediately leading up to the conference.

4. Risks

The major risk is that, due to shortage of funding, the conference could be downsized, mainly in its sub-regional character. In that case, the conference extent will be reduced in terms of sub-regional and international participation.

With regards to the content and the political aspects, there are no major risks that could affect the success of the Conference, since the hosting government is very committed against FGM

and has already almost finalised, in view of the Conference, the process for the ratification of the Maputo Protocol.

5. Beneficiaries and Participants

The beneficiaries of this project will be all the women of Djibouti and the sub-region, who may already be convinced of the damages caused by the practice and of the fact that the practice is a violation of their rights, but need to be supported to break the tradition. In fact, the visibility given to the problem through the public debate and the declared support of the Government and of the religious authorities will help them to abandon the practice. It will also be a starting point to delegitimise those who use the social and religious pressure to continue the practice.

The position of all the actors campaigning against FGM at national and sub-regional level will be reinforced thanks to the visibility given to the issue and the clear position and the commitment taken by political and religious authorities.

Local and sub-regional civil society, including NGOs and traditional religious and community leaders and groups, are involved in the preparation of the conference, having been invited to provide ideas and proposals on the structure of the conference and to contribute in the selection of religious participants, in particular those that after the conference could spread the message and support the work of civil society in their communities.

NPWJ and the Government of Djibouti are working together with local civil society in all aspects of the preparation and implementation of the Conference, in particular in the identification of participants, the development of the Conference program and the development and implementation of the side events.

The visibility given to FGM issues is intended to attract the interest of local and international donors, to encourage them to establish long lasting collaborations and to provide governments and local organisations with financial support.

Governments will also be encouraged to translate their commitment into concrete financial measures, such as the creation of national budget lines to support local civil society engaged in promoting the abandonment of the practice.

6. Summary Project Budget

See attached file.

7. Other resources

The estimated budget is in the region of 290,000 EUR.

UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs have already committed substantial funds for the Conference (around 50% of the overall budget is covered). The Government of Djibouti will contribute in terms of services, providing the venue and covering visa, protocol and security expenses.

8. Implementing Agency and Contacts

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