



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

### EU project saves thousands of girls from female genital mutilation

Brussels, 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2012 – An innovative EU and UNICEF project has helped thousands of families, communities and countries to change attitudes and end harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) in Africa, says a report on the EU funded project ahead of International Women's Day. As a result of education and awareness raising, girls in thousands of communities in Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Senegal and Sudan are no longer subjected to this practice.

In Senegal, where 28% of women aged 15-49 have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, astonishing progress has been made. In just under a decade, over 5,300 communities have abandoned the practice, bringing the country close to becoming the first in the world to declare total abandonment, expected by 2015.

In Egypt, where 91% of women are affected by the practice, the project has also made some progress, with female genital mutilation/cutting becoming less common amongst younger age groups. The number of families signing up to the abandonment of the practice also increased substantially: from 3,000 in 2007 to 17,772 in 2011. In Ethiopia, despite high prevalence rates, the practice is similarly declining (between 2000 and 2005 rates dropped from 80 to 74%).

The project helped to raise awareness of the dangers of female genital mutilation/cutting, by encouraging large-scale community discussions and national debate on issues of human rights, as well as collective decision-making through extended social networks about gender norms. This method resulted in communities coming together for district-wide public declarations of the abandonment of these practices.

Development Commissioner, Andris Piebalgs, welcomed the results:

*"I find it totally unacceptable that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this practice, which is a clear violation of human rights, is still taking place. That is why I am so pleased to see that EU aid can make a real difference. By raising awareness on the dangers of female genital mutilation/ cutting at grassroots level, we have helped to provide young women across Africa with an alternative, as well as giving them the chance to become an active part of their own communities in the future."*

**More follows**

#### Background

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In many African countries, female genital mutilation/cutting is a centuries-old custom, believed to make girls marriageable.

Estimates show that up to 140 million girls and women have undergone some form of female genital mutilation/cutting and are living with painful complications. Each year around three million girls – 8,000 a day – suffer the results of it. The practice occurs in African countries, and some countries in the Middle East and Asia. Girls are generally aged between five and 11 and most are cut without any medical supervision, but evidence shows the age at which girls are cut is decreasing.

Across the five African countries, the EU/UNICEF project has implemented a common approach based on a comprehensive understanding of how to change social norms to bring about an end to harmful practices.

The project, implemented by UNICEF, received a total of €3,991,000 (3.9 million) in EU funding over the period 2008-2012.

### **For more info**

Website of the Directorate-General Development and Cooperation-EuropeAid:

[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm)

<http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/news/>

<http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/focus>

UNICEF website – focus area child protection:

[http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929\\_58002.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58002.html)

UNICEF Publication: ‘The Dynamics of Social Change – Towards the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Five African Countries’

<http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/618>

You can watch a video on this project at <http://www.unicef.org/eu/norms.html>