

COMBATING Female Genital Mutilation and other Harmful Traditional Practices

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Although female genital mutilation (FGM) is illegal in Ethiopia, the government does not actively enforce this prohibition or punish those who practice it. In 2013, about 74 % of women between 15 and 49 years old in Ethiopia had been subjected to genital mutilation. Women also suffer other harmful traditional practices (HTPs) such as abduction, widow inheritance, early forced marriage and rape.

An EU project implemented by HUNDEE, a local non-governmental organisation, empowered women and helped eradicate female genital mutilation and other HTPs.

This 26-month project raised awareness and brought communities together through community conversations on HTP eradication, and promotion of women's self-help groups. The community conversations dealt with issues such as women's status, different forms of violence against women and the impact of HTPs. While some started with women alone, others brought together women and men, including traditional leaders, police, community elders and local authorities.

Strengthening the already existing self-help groups and establishing new ones enhanced women's economic empowerment and strengthened their voices regarding their rights.

Empowered by their newly acquired knowledge, the community, supported by the law enforcement bureau, police and local authorities, enacted local laws against harmful traditional practices in November 2013. *Geda*, a traditional law-making process and system of governance led by the community chief, was in this way used to promote lasting behavioral change in the community.

The project has been instrumental in strengthening women's identities and the change in their level of self-confidence is clearly visible. All of the women participating in the self-help groups agree to no longer subject their daughters to FGM. Instead, many women are using the money gained through the self-help groups to send their daughters to school.