

Report to Hivos:

Four Female-Led Mobile Teams in Kurdish Northern Iraq

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1. Introduction

This programme is part of a concerted and multi-faceted approach to combat violence against women and support the implementation of Law No. 8, the newly adopted Law against domestic violence including FGM. The Mobile Teams were at the heart of so many successes in recent years and have become an indispensable part of Wadi's activities.

This year again, the Mobile Teams accomplished important work and broke new ground. Apart from their usual awareness and assistance activities in remote villages, the Mobile Teams were responsible for the implementation of the *FGM-free communities* network¹ - a pilot project funded by the US State Department. Thanks to good and trustful relationships to the local communities – women and men alike - , the project became a stunning success on which even Reuters reported.² Wadi is currently planning its extension, also beyond the borders of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Meanwhile, the continued efforts of the Mobile Teams to teach about the negative effects of FGM and encourage a stop of the practice, start to bear fruits in those areas that were targeted almost from the beginning (i.e. 2004 when Mobile Teams first discovered FGM being practiced throughout the region): Garmyan and Pishder. According to data recently collected by the teams, in both areas the rate of young mothers who still intend to practice FGM on their daughters is in sharp decline. This very encouraging trend must be attributed first and foremost to the activities of the Mobile Teams. For Wadi it is proof that its multi-faceted approach is working: Strenuous efforts to raise awareness in the villages, lots of discussions on the ground, face-to-face education for local women, combined with significant media attention, finally yield a measurable effect on a regional scale.

The teams were involved in several public events, PR actions and demonstrations, as organizers and as active participants. They organized meetings, held seminars, distributed flyers, brochures and other awareness materials, and established contact to other, hitherto unknown, villages.

Members of Mobile Teams were also part of a delegation to the parliament which demanded certain concrete steps towards the implementation of the Domestic Violence Law.³ The visit was covered intensively by the media. In September, the government agreed upon putting into effect these steps.

¹ <http://www.eyeseeonline.com/2011/11/iraqi-kurdistan-free-yourself-from-fgm-%E2%80%93-a-new-approach/>

² Reuters report: „Fighting female genital mutilation, one Kurdish village at a time”, by Patrick Markey, Oct 17, 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/17/us-iraq-mutilation-idUSBRE89G10920121017>

An earlier Reuters report on Al-Arabiya: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/09/16/238406.html>

³ <http://kurdistantribune.com/2012/petition-calls-for-krp-parliament-fully-implement-law-against-domestic-violence/>

2. Outcome

FGM rate dropped:

As a result of the mobile team's continued intervention on the ground, FGM rates have dropped dramatically in certain regions where Wadi has been operating intensively since many years. Garmyan and the Raniya area have been in the focus of Wadi's awareness activities since 2004 when it became known that FGM is widely practiced in Iraqi Kurdistan. In Garmyan the FGM rate was around 70% and in Raniya close to 100%⁴. Two years ago the Garmyan team found out that only a small minority of young mothers is still willing to practice FGM on their daughters. Recently the Raniya team reported the same. This is clearly a result of Wadi's long-standing efforts: Directly through face-to-face awareness activities, and indirectly through media reports about the ongoing campaign against FGM.

These results are confirming Wadi's strategy of combating FGM on different levels in which the mobile teams play a crucial role. They provide individual help, advice and awareness, they address the community with seminars and other events, and they even engage in PR and contribute to media reporting.

The teams are so effective because they live and work in their own communities. They are trusted by the locals, they know the local dialect and they are familiar with the prevalent cultural code.

Significant media coverage:

Wadi managed to raise considerable media attention, mainly on the topics FGM, gender-based violence/honor killings, and the new Domestic Violence Law. The Mobile Teams contributed substantially to these publications, proving that they are not only effective on the local community level, but also manage to engage in nationwide discussions and influence public opinion.

Positive reactions from the government:

In September, the Prime Minister office, the Judiciary Council and the High Commission of Women's Affairs had a summit at which they decided to start first practical steps towards the implementation of the Domestic Violence Law. (see also *Output*)

The practical steps agreed upon were the following:

- Establishing a special court for cases of violence against women.
- Establishing a special police force dealing with cases of violence against women.
- Starting an awareness campaign by the High Council of Women's Affairs .
- Improving the service in the women's shelters.

⁴ FGM in Kurdistan. An empirical study by wadi.
http://stopfgmkurdistan.org/study_fgm_iraqi_kurdistan_en.pdf

3. Output

Support and awareness:

The four teams informed an estimated 5,000 women in countless villages in their respective regions about female health, pregnancy, family planning, FGM, women's rights, GBV, and other issues of concern. They focused on the new Law No. 8 against FGM and domestic violence and explained its implications. When the government kept silent about this law, Wadi strived to make the new law and its implementation a matter of discussion in the media and among people.

The teams presented the FGM awareness film and engaged in subsequent discussions. They supported women and girls and provided social, legal and psychological aid and knowledge. They collected data to assess the respective situation on the ground (see [App. III](#)). They provided lectures and seminars, sometimes with an external legal or medical expert, on healthcare and women's health, child raising, the contents of the new law, women's rights, and related issues. Please refer to [App. II](#) for a list.



FGM awareness in schools

Managing the FGM-free communities:

Handling the FGM-free communities has become an important task of the mobile teams. Since 2011, step by step seven villages joined the FGM-free villages/communities initiative. In exchange for stopping the practice of FGM, they received small community rehabilitation projects. Supervising these villages requires extended presence and close contact to the communities. There is a bond of mutual trust between the team members on the one side and the women and the village chief (anjuman) on the other side. Under these conditions empowerment is maximized and "cheating" is unlikely to happen.



Road sign pointing to a FGM-free village

The project has proven a full success so far. All villages stuck to the rules; not a single mutilation has taken place ever since. Other villages nearby heard from the project and also stopped FGM. There were several local and international media reports – one even by Reuters.

Internal activities:

Training workshop with international anti-FGM activists in Beirut

Training workshop on "Gender-Specific Trauma, FGM and Sexualized Violence", offered by the Kirkuk Center for Torture Victims

Regular meetings of all Mobile Teams take place in Suleimaniyah every month. The teams exchange information and discuss progresses and obstacles, problems and challenging situations. In addition, they engage in group supervision to monitor and adjust their professional and personal development by dealing with the emotional content of the work and how reactions to the content affect the job. Wadi is also providing psychological counseling when applicable.

Supervision enables and supports the team members to build effective professional relationships, develop good practice, and exercise both professional judgement and discretion in decision-making. In its meetings, Wadi aims on providing a dynamic, empowering and enabling atmosphere. By promoting reflexivity and self-perception Wadi intends to contribute to the development of a learning culture to ensure continuing professional development.

Since June, two experienced professional midwives from Sweden and the Netherlands are accompanying the teams. They provide counseling and medical advice.

PR and activist activities the Mobile Teams were engaged in:

- From 15th to 20th of January, Wadi – together with Hivos – held the first conference on FGM in the Middle East in Beirut, Lebanon, with participants from Iraqi Kurdistan, Central Iraq, Yemen, Indonesia and Egypt. Three Mobile Team members participated and were engaged in an international workshop about awareness strategies on the ground.
- In cooperation with the local NGO *Wtdo*, Wadi had printed 15,000 leaflets which were then distributed to girls attending Secondary schools all over Iraqi Kurdistan. The leaflets contained information about two new laws: The Family Violence Law and the law against stalking and misusing telecommunication means for insults and threats. Contrary to the former, the latter is indeed implemented and applied, and some victims have already benefited from it. Nevertheless, this law, like the Family Violence Law, is still widely unknown to the public. Young women and girls are a preferential target of assaults covered by these laws. It is vital for them to know the legal means available to protect and defend themselves.



Awareness leaflet for distribution in schools

The teams often have difficulties to get access permission to schools, but *Wtdo* is an organization affiliated with the government and hence has almost unlimited access. This makes it a good choice to cooperate with them.

- On March 8, the International Women's Day, Mobile Team members of Wadi staged a small demonstration together with other activists in front of the courthouse in Suleimaniyah. The demonstrators demanded prosecution of those suspected of committing "honor killings" and

other acts of violence against women. The event was covered extensively by the media.⁵ See also the women's rights supplement, bottom left.

- After the adoption of the new Law No. 8 (Domestic Violence Law) the regional government remained inactive and kept silent about the existence of this law. Wadi printed more than 50,000 copies of the booklet containing the complete law in Kurdish, Arabic and English. With the mobile teams, the booklet was widely distributed throughout the operating range of Wadi.



- Members of mobile teams were involved in organizing an event in support of Law No. 8: the Law Against Domestic Violence. More than 50 people gathered in Sulaimani, Iraq on Tuesday, May 8, to discuss a serious plan for the law's implementation.⁶ The meeting, "Lobbying for the Implementation of Domestic Violence Law No. 8 2011", was one of the first of its kind. It was sponsored by Wadi, WoLA, and the KRG Department of Domestic Violence – Sulaimani Office.



In September, the Prime Minister office, Judiciary Council and High Commission of Women's Affairs had a summit at which they decided to start some practical steps towards the implementation of Domestic Violence Law No. 8.⁷ These were exactly the main demands of the delegation.



⁵ For a list of links, see <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/3/state5965.htm>

⁶ http://en.wadi-online.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1045:womens-rights-advocates&catid=15:presseerklaerungen&Itemid=109

⁷ Local press reporting on the results of the summit:

<http://www.awene.com/article/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%DA%AF%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%83%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A8%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%AA%DB%8C%DA%98%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%85%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D8%B2%D8%B1%DB%8E%D8%AA>



Assembly at the graveyard



The protesters demand No Tolerance for the perpetrators who are usually given mild sentences and are then released in the annual amnesty



Press statement – many channels were attending



Mourning and protest at the grave

- According to WADI's assessment based on day-to-day experience of its Mobile Teams, there is a considerable need for (anonymous) information and help among the victims and prospective victims of FGM. Therefore, in July Wadi launched its FGM Hotline project with support from CliffordChance. The hotline is providing social, psychological, medical and sexual advice to FGM-affected women throughout the region.



4. Outreach

Until Nov. 15: 5048 women and girls

Expectation for the whole year: 5500 women and girls

Mobile Team activities focus on women and girls as direct beneficiaries.

3211 beneficiaries are from rural areas and remote villages .

1837 women and girls are from cities and towns.

5. Conclusion

The mission 2012 achieved/yielded some key objectives and should therefore be considered a striking success:

- FGM rate reduction
- Increased public/media awareness
- Increased awareness/commitment of those in charge

These achievements underline the efficiency of the Mobile Teams concept.

The FGM-free communities project was a challenging new initiative, however the Mobile Teams were perfectly capable of managing, and it was a good decision to start the project.

Since the staff cannot handle lots of additional FGM-free villages, in case the project is extended they will pass on their experiences to cooperating NGOs.