

A group of women, likely in Iraqi Kurdistan, are shown in a close-up shot. They are wearing traditional headscarves in various colors and patterns, including black, white, and gold. The women have serious and concerned expressions, looking towards the left of the frame. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

w a d i

***A HANDFUL OF ASH:
THE CAMPAIGN TO ELIMINATE
FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION
IN IRAQI KURDISTAN***



Free FGM Village

قەزاي رايونى

گوندى قەلا سەيدا

گوندى سۈرە بىنە

رېڭخراوى وادى پروژىسى كۈتايىپېنشان بە توندىتېرى و خەتەنە كىردىسى
مىيىنە نە نىجام ئەدات كە بىك دىت لىسە پروژىسى ھۇشيارى درىزخاين
و خزمەتگوزارى بە بىس رىكەوتىنى ئىوان رىڭخراوو لىسە نىجەمىنى
گوندى . 2011 .



wadi



**SIGN POSTED AT THE
ENTRANCE OF AN 'FGM FREE VILLAGE'
SUPPORTED BY WADI**

“Since I heard from TV that it is banned, I haven’t cut my daughters, and I told many that you can go to jail if you do it.”, said T. S. (42).

Wadi’s groundbreaking FGM projects began in 2004, providing hard data that Female Genital Mutiliation was being practiced in Northern Iraq and breaking the longstanding idea that FGM was only an African problem. Wadi worked relentlessly to break the social and cultural taboo around talking about FGM publicly. Our team members put themselves at risk by going on TV shows, and radio programs and publicly talking about FGM. In a conservative country women bravely sharing their personal experiences was a real risk to their personal reputation (possibly their safety) in order to get the message out there and change public perception.

Through our FGM projects through the years we have had many different activities, events, and experiences but our vision, goals and values were always the same. To eliminate the practice of FGM, to change the cultural narrative around the body and the the idea of self ownership – ‘my body belongs to me, not my parents, my village or anyone else, my

fate is in my hands, and I have the agency to change things’. Change is slow, but possible. Societies don’t change all at once, they change as a result of people choosing to do things differently. Those choices happen after hours, weeks, and sometimes years of discussion, debate, arguments, and they need a chance - in the form of freedom of the press, civil society, freedom to even entertain change.

To go from proving the existence of FGM to having the government pass a law banning it in under 10 years is unheard of. Wadi lobbied on a local and international level to put the spotlight on FGM in Northern Iraq, this was not easy, and many NGOs and agencies working in the field expressed disbelief at the findings. The idea that FGM existed in the Middle East was not readily accepted, in fact international bodies such as the UN did not take Wadi’s petition to add Northern Iraq to its list of countries, seriously. As we reflect we also look forward to our vision for the future is one where FGM is banned in all of Iraq and much more is done to end the practice in the rest of the Middle East and Asia.



**FGM AWARENESS SEMINAR IN A VILLAGE,
LED BY A MOBILE TEAM MEMBER**

2004

FGM IS NOT JUST 'AN AFRICAN PROBLEM'

In 2004, in a discussion with women, a mobile team realised that FGM was being practiced in the area of Garmain - a very poor rural area in Kurdistan. The mobile teams were in the area providing basic medical (first aid) training and had built a strong rapport with the community. With this initial anecdotal evidence Wadi set up a pilot research study, and found that 60% of women were circumcised. This discovery was surprising to Wadi staff, who till

then had always thought of FGM as an 'African problem'. This was a whole new world, but the evidence did not lie.

An early awareness/fact finding effort led by our mobile teams went to villages all over Northern Iraq and included FGM in their regular educational program, they also used this chance to collect information. These early discoveries were shocking: FGM was being practice by female family members or midwives on girls as young as 4 and as old as 12. This initial probe was met with much resistance. Resistance came from religious clerics, government officials, and members of the public at large. The questions after we had data and proof were: how do we break this deep societal taboo? How do we get people talking? How do we reach men and women? How

do we convince donors that this will be a 15-20 year commitment? How do we convince international bodies (UN) and the international community that this is a real and serious issue? Is this happening in neighboring countries and regions? We had so many questions and discussions, but we were committed, even if we had little or no support we were not going to let this issue go.

2005

LAUNCH OF THE STOP FGM KURDISTAN CAMPAIGN

Wadi started systematic FGM awareness activities in Kurdish villages – first in Garmyan, later on other regions followed.

AFTAW (66) was opposing FGM and mentioned that she heard of an older woman who cut a girl randomly in various areas of the genitals because of her poor eye sight. She also added *“...in Saykhalil village, I heard about a girl who was mutilated and after 4 months she passed away. People said it was caused by the cutting.”*

The STOP FGM Kurdistan campaign was now in full swing, our teams were so passionate and motivated. At great personal risk to themselves they started speaking out in public, on the radio, on TV! This was unheard of and really shocking for women to speak about such intimate and personal topics in the public sphere! But it was necessary to start to break the wall of silence that surrounds FGM.

The topic of FGM started to enter into the society, people were talking, and writing about it, asking questions, arguing, and the first phase of the campaign to bring awareness to the topic and break the silence was working. Wanting to reach more people, in 2005, ‘A Handful of Ash’ the first film about FGM in Kurdistan by Nabaz Ahmed was released. The 30-minute documentary is in Kurdish and shares experiences of FGM survivors and decries the practice as being harmful and unnecessary. It was taken village to village, town to town, and screened in homes and schools, with a generator and a projector, on a wall. After a screening our team members would engage with each community in long discussions, answering questions, talking, and encouraging people to stop. But we always were careful not to vilify or blame people for what had happened. Our goal was to change minds and attitudes, involve not only women, but men too, and not to blame or punish.

2006

FIRST IRAQI CONFERENCE AGAINST FGM

WADI organized the first Iraqi conference against FGM in Erbil, the event succeeded in attracting the interest of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). That same year Wadi's STOP FGM in Kurdistan petition, (part of a campaign of the same name) gathered more than 14,000 signatures, and the petition was presented to the KRG. In cooperation with local lawyers WADI drafted a law against domestic violence which included a ban of FGM.

2007

DRAFT LEGISLATION TO END FGM PRESENTED

The petition and draft law was presented to the KRG and to the Kurdish women's parliamentary group in the spring of 2007. This is where things became a bit complicated. At first parliamentarians were hesitant to even discuss the topic, as it was so taboo. Clergy intervened and rejected our claims, the government also claimed FGM could

not exist. This was incredibly frustrating, and as a result legislative efforts languished, and were not taken very seriously. Also at that time international bodies such as the UN did not take our petition to add Northern Iraq to its list of countries seriously.

The film 'A Handful of Ash' was released at European women's film screenings to raise awareness. At this point we had very little international support, and because our petition to have UNICEF/UNFPA add Iraq to the list of countries where FGM is practiced was ignored and rejected it was difficult to find funding, we felt that the international community was not listening.

But locally we could feel the effects were working. Even if the parliament had rejected the draft law, it was becoming a hot button topic in society. Wadi knew that we just had to keep going, and continue to work directly with women, with men, with midwives, with communities to change the narrative.

SHEREN KARIM (32) mentioned that when she used to live in Zamawanga village, all the girls were gathered and cut collectively: *"They collected all the flesh that had been cut and threw it in the pond close by"* she added.



**WADI TEAMS MEET WITH LOCAL MEN,
PROMOTE FGM AWARENESS**



**WADI TEAMS CONTINUE TO RAISE
AWARENESS ON FGM**

2009

**UN ASSISTANCE MISSION
FOR IRAQ
REPORTS ON FGM**

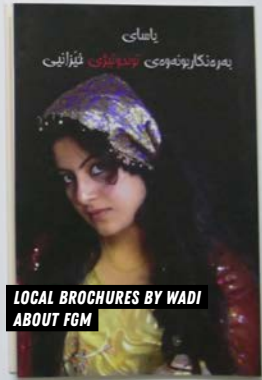
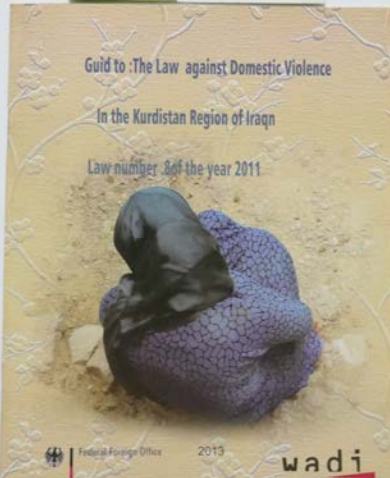
UNAMI (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq) reported about FGM in Kurdistan for the first time. UNICEF Erbil followed. Although it was just a mention in a report, we hoped that this would finally change the perception that FGM is just an ‘African issue’. We also hoped that the UN would fund or conduct a study to determine the rates of FGM in central Iraq. Wadi continued its campaigning at the local level, and worked with other NGOs to keep this topic at the forefront.

2010

**WADI SUPPORTED BY
HRW PRESENTS
LARGE REGION-WIDE STUDY**

Wadi presented the results of a large region-wide quantitative study it had been conducting since 2007. It showed that FGM was equally widespread in urban and rural areas (overall rate of 72%). Human Rights Watch subsequently published a report titled “They took me and told me nothing”, which confirmed the results found by Wadi. Finally in 2010 with the support of Human Rights Watch we presented joint findings on FGM which put a lot of pressure on the Kurdish Regional Government. That same year, the Health ministry of the KRG published its own findings on FGM, it found that 40% of women were mutilated. This institutional recognition of the facts was really important. It amplified our momentum and forced people to admit that FGM was happening. You can’t push to pass a law to stop something unless you first all agree that it exists and is detrimental.





2011

**LAW BANNING FGM
PASSES & LAUNCH
OF FGM FREE VILLAGES**

Was a landmark year for the STOP FGM Kurdistan campaign. Finally in June 2011 KRG parliament adopted a comprehensive law (Law No 8 of 2011) against many forms of violence against women and children, including FGM. Parliament voted for the law - against the wish of the government. This history does highlight the important role of democratic processes in successfully





WOMEN'S HEALTH AND FGM AWARENESS

passing legislation. It's important to keep in mind that no such law was passed in central Iraq. Wadi in cooperation with the women's organization Pana continued to lobby for a similar law banning FGM in central Iraq. However there remained many obstacles: little international interest, little funding for research, the complicated government situation.

Now that we had the law on our side Wadi reflected on how to best convince people to abandon the practice 'en masse'. Working closely with different villages Wadi launched the „FGM-free Village“ programme. In the years to follow, a total of 13 villages publicly declared themselves free from FGM and opposed to this practice. The FGM-free village concept was developed to sup-

port communities ready for change, and we work to make their voices heard, thus encouraging others to follow. The idea was also to involve the entire community, not just women, but men as well. And the concept worked as Deutsche Welle reported: “Since Twtakal became a “Free FGM-village,” between 10 to 12 girls have escaped the fate of circumcision. But more importantly, the village opened up to the world, children could get an education and Twtakal set an example for its neighbors.”

“At first the other villages joked about Twtakal,” says Falah Murad of WADI. “About the sign of an FGM Free Village, the change of old traditions. But then they saw the small services we provide, and the bigger ones by the government. Now other villages want that too. So

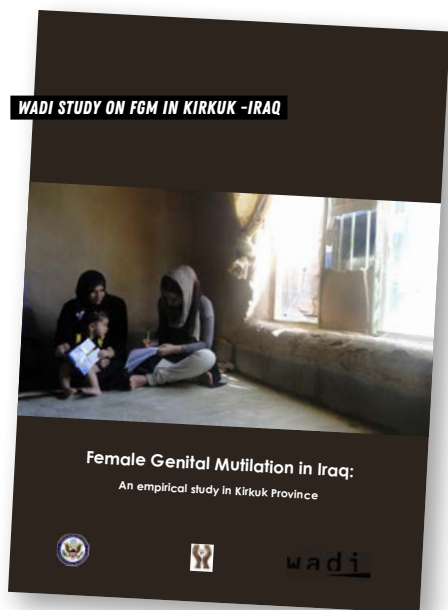
now it's time for the government to pick this up." Kak Sarhad is proud. The revolution started with his village, he says. "We have taken it to the forefront. We moved forward, we are more open-minded. I am happy it started from here." Villages that decide join the network and receive support for a small community project in exchange for publicly committing themselves to stop FGM and all violence against women and children. On the local level, the FGM-free villages has had a tremendous impact on neighbouring communities. Many of them asked to become part of the programme as well, and when, due to limited funds, our staff had to decline, they assured they would abandon FGM anyway, since they had been convinced it is harmful and unnecessary.

2012

LAUNCH OF STOP FGM MIDDLE EAST & ASIA CAMPAIGN

Although the law had been passed, Wadi knew that a law that is not implemented is not meaningful. Therefore Wadi started a new campaign for the implementation of the law. In cooperation with the government, Wadi conducted awareness seminars for traditional midwives, leading police officers, teachers and nursery school staff. With regards to legal frameworks we also trained hundreds of policemen, lawyers and judges on how to implement the law. This was done in close cooperation with the Department of Domestic Violence – a government body which was created only after the law was passed. Although there had been no cases taken to trial with the law, the threat of justice was a powerful deterrent. When our mobile teams train midwives, they have to sign a contract that they will stop practicing FGM. Our trainers tell them: "You didn't know so far. But now you do. So we will take you to court if we hear that you are not complying with the law."

Wadi established a FGM Hotline to provide social, psychological, medical and sexual advice to FGM-affected women throughout the region. Although this seemed like a great idea, it was not very



successful in reality and was abandoned after just 1 year. The topic of FGM is really difficult, and it takes a lot of time to build enough trust for a woman to talk to someone about it, and that just did not translate well into a Hotline.

The initial Stop FGM Kurdistan campaign was really groundbreaking in northern Iraq but also received positive feedback from activists in other countries such as Iran and Oman (not to mention Asian countries) who were facing similar difficulties in having their findings taken seriously. This was a sort of momentum, that Wadi embraced and out of that came the Stop FGM Middle East and Asia campaign, and in 2012 the First conference on FGM in the Middle East, organized by Hivos and Wadi took place in Beirut.

IN TAPAKURA VILLAGE, Halabja, a woman mentioned that in the past, men had no choice but to endure their wives when they were cut and had no feelings in sex life. She said *“Now if a woman does not satisfy her husband, he will just marry an Arab woman”*.

In 2012 Wadi staff member presented the campaign at the FGM/C Panel hosted by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton with UNFPA and UNICEF represented. This was part of our continued effort to bring global attention and support to the fact that FGM is not just an African issue, and highlight the need for more funding and research for Kurdistan, Iraq other Middle Eastern and Asian countries.

2013

**INTERNATION MEDIA,
MIDWIFE TRAINING,
AND LOBBYING EFFORTS
CENTRAL IRAQ**

Wadi and Hivos launched the project „Stop FGM Middle East“. The project aimed at networking activists from the whole region, collecting data about FGM in the Middle East and Asia and distributing information to journalists, UN and international NGOs. The persistent myth of FGM being ‘an African problem’ continued unabated, and activist from Iran, Malaysia, Oman, Singapore, India and even Saudi Arabia were not being taken seriously. We hoped that this platform as well as yearly conferences would ‘boost’ the topic.

From Ashes to Phoenix: FGM in Kurdistan

From Ashes to Phoenix: FGM in Kurdistan

From Ashes to Phoenix: FGM in Kurdistan



بو کچه کوردەکان، نەرفیتیکێ کۆنی پێ نازار

پێژێری بەرزبۆی سولهتەکردن نازارنەن بۆ لایبکۆوری عێراق. تێشک دواتە سەر لێو هەرزەمکە دیتەتۆوه. لێو هەرزەمکە لێو کۆنی لایبکۆوری بەهەرزەمکێ تێشکۆتۆ

TIME

End to Female Genital Cutting?

In Kurdish Iraq, women strive to end scourge of genital mutilation

MPJ Publication date 14 January 2011 | US 14 ICT

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النساء لا يزال منتشرًا في العراق رغم للعانة

Genitalverstümmelung - ein globales Problem

Genitalverstümmelung - ein globales Problem

Täterin: „Ich bereue nichts!“

BILD-Reporter besuchen ein Dorf im Nordirak und erzählen die Geschichte einer langen Tradition der grausamen Genital-Verstümmelung

INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL MEDIA ABOUT WADI'S FGM CAMPAIGN OVER THE YEARS

The BBC and The Guardian released the documentary 'Dropping the Knife' about the efforts in Kurdistan of the STOP FGM Campaign. The documentary explores the dramatic changes that have come about in society as a result of the campaign. The negative effects that FGM has on couples intimate lives, the growing societal debate about FGM and its role as a tool to control women's sexuality, as well as the cultural and religious significance of the practice.

Wadi conducted workshops for more than 100 midwives (former professional cutters) to improve their medical skills and teach them about the new domestic violence law which prohibits FGM. We continued to hold trainings and new data gathered by Wadi showed that the FGM rate was dropping rapidly, especially in Halabja and Garmyan. Positive signs that our approach was having a real impact.

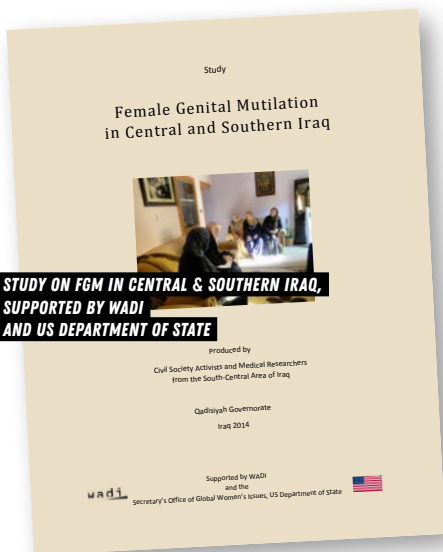
Wadi started lobbying for a law to be passed by the Iraqi parliament in Baghdad, in cooperation with the NGO PANA. Wadi submitted draft legislation, as well as an open letter to the members of parliament explaining the importance of banning the practice.

2014

MIDDLE EAST & ASIA CONFERENCE ON FGM

Second Middle East & Asia Conference on FGM, organized by Hivos and Wadi was held in Istanbul where more than thirty activists and researchers from Iraq, Egypt, Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia and India met as well as representatives from UNICEF Iraq, Orchid Project (England) and Terre des Femmes (Germany).

At the conference it became very clear, that the issue of FGM has to be tackled in the Middle East and Southeast Asia as well as its current core area in Africa. For example at the time no nationwide studies had been undertaken in Indonesia and Malaysia, but local studies suggested that the prevalence could be between 80 or even 90%. This would mean that Indonesia alone with its world larg-





THE BBC DOCUMENTARY 'DROPPING THE KNIFE'
ABOUT THE STOP FGM CAMPAIGN.

BBC WORLD NEWS LIST WHOSE NEWSPAPER HAS MADE FROM

est Muslim population has a potential of over 100 million victims and endangered girls, which are so far not counted when NGOs or the UN speak of 140 million victims worldwide.

The conference also highlighted the different realities of the practice in each country and suggested a need for specific approaches for each country or even for each region in a country. The continued dismissal of the realities of FGM globally by the international bodies was a source of frustration for activists many of whom put themselves in personal danger to bring awareness to the issue.

Due to the turbulent political realities with the invasion of ISIS in 2014, Wadi paused their efforts lobbying for the banning of FGM by law in central Iraq.

2015

SUPPORT FROM UNICEF

Wadi's continuous FGM awareness raising and lobbying for proper law implementation caught the attention of UNICEF. They wished to support these efforts. For Wadi this was a great opportunity to extend the campaign and bring awareness to even more people throughout the region. Wadi was able to produce high quality FGM awareness clips, and have them broadcasted on local TV repeatedly. Additionally other local women's rights organizations were contacted and asked to join in. Eventual-



WADI TEAMS MEET WITH LOCAL CLERICS AND DISCUSS FGM AND RELIGION

ly, five organizations sent their staff. First they were trained by Wadi's experienced FGM awareness teams, then they accompanied them on their field trips, and later they went on their own to raise awareness in their respective local areas. This approach brought the campaign to a whole new level.

JAMILA (67), who was an Arab IDP in Dwanza Emam village, mentioned that FGM is not part of their culture and they do not practice it, *"It is mainly among the Kurds"* she said.

2016

**CONTINUING TO
INCLUDE MEN
IN FGM AWARENESS**

Wadi continued its FGM awareness seminars, and continued to focus on involving men often holding meetings at local gyms and cafés and other places where men often congregate. Wadi had always encourage male voices since the start of the campaign in 2004, and provided spaces for men to also discuss the impact that FGM has had on them and their relationships with their wives. In-

cluding men is essential, and has had a net positive effect in encouraging families to stop the practice on their young daughters.

2017

SELF HELP GROUPS, INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARIES, AND WORKING WITH CLERICS

In 2017 ‘The Cut: Exposing FGM Worldwide’ a feature length documentary by director John Chua was released. The film visits 14 countries and features key interviews with FGM survivors, activists, cutters, doctors and researchers. Wadi piloted the concept of self-help womens groups for women living with FGM in these groups which are led by one of our trained team members, women can safely share their experiences and frustrations. These groups have been very well received, and led to the start of some couples counseling sessions.

GULIZAR MUHAMMED (45) said that she had not mutilated her 13-year-old daughter because of Wadi. *“I attended your seminar, you talked about the damages. I decided not to cut my daughter”,* she said.

Moreover Wadi worked to establish trust and build connections with local Clerics. Even though the practice was banned by law in 2011, there is still debate among religious scholars and clerics about the validity or not of FGM in Islam. Although the Sheikh of Al Azhar issued a fatwa banning the practice in 2007 (Sunni) and prominent Ayotallah (Shia) also issued a fatwa against it, there is still a deeply held belief that FGM is part of the Hadith. Therefore Wadi continues to hold discussions with local clerics to inform and encourage them to speak against FGM.

2018

REGIONAL COOPERATION

At a conference on FGM in Egypt, the KRG, in cooperation with the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), announced a new action plan to eradicate the practice in the Kurdistan Region by 2028. A KRG official present, confidently pledged it would be completed in just five years. ‘As part of the program, the KRG Ministry of Health would train staff in primary health care units to inform parents about FGM when they are doing vaccinations, and the Ministry of Education would arrange training with teachers and parents.’ Wadi staff were also present at this conference, welcomed this commitment, and would later consult

on what would be announced as the COMBI plan in 2019. As of 2022 we have sadly not seen the steps or commitment follow through.

2019

KRG ANNOUNCES COMBI PLAN - OMAN BANS FGM

The resonance of Wadi's STOP FGM Kurdistan and STOP FGM Middle East and Asia continued to be felt and in a unexpected but welcomed news in 2019 Oman banned the practice.

The 'Female Genital Mutilation COMBI Plan for KRI 2019-2020' was announced. The plan was a cooperation between the High Council of Women Affairs (KRG) and UNFPA, supported by the European Regional Development and Protection Program for Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq (RDPP). The COMBI plans goals were to have an 18 month intense public communication plan that involved: an ad campaign, governmental training, ministry of religious affairs issuing fatwas, ministry of interior investigate reports of FGM, holding monthly press conferences, ministry of justice brining select FGM cases to trail, ministry of education asking teachers to hold meetings with parents of kindergarten aged children about FGM, ministry of labor and social

affairs training all social workers and contacting at risk families, ministry of health training all antenatal care nurses to engage mothers on FGM, multiple high profile press conrences held by the prime minister to push this topic on all media, as well as public service announcements, a web page, and facebook page, coordination with local NGOs and businesses. Wadi was thrilled when the COMBI plan was announced in late 2019, the impact of such coordinated messaging was something we were looking forward to seeing, especially as we had provided consultancy on many aspects of this plan.

Sadly, as we write this in 2022 there has been little to no activity related to the COMBI plan, we have not been able to find the website, there have been no press conferences, no reports of success stories, no impact statements or implementation updates, nor reports of trainings, no fatwa has been issued, and the program officially ended in 2020, and we are still having trouble locating the final activity report.

R.K. AGE (24) supports the law no.8 which is legally banning FGM. *"My aunt and my mother are guilty for doing FGM on me. However, they are my relatives and no one will sue their own relatives. It is good that the law exists and will scare people from doing it."*, she said.



MOBILE TEAMS HOLD MEETINGS FOR LOCAL WOMEN ABOUT FGM

2020

**GARMYAN DECLARED
FGM FREE**

Garmyan Region declared free of FGM after fifteen years of intense campaigning. In a happy event celebrated on February 6th the International day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation Wadi announced that in 2019 no new cases of FGM were found or reported in the Garmyan region.

“It is a historic and happy day for all people of Germian because they are pio-

neers in zeroing FMG. This is an achievement and an honor. We hope that the other areas will take the same step,” – Iman Nuri (Wadi Team member)

Combating FGM was never an easy task but with attention on the current worldwide Coronavirus pandemic, the spotlight on FGM and other violence women and girl’s face within the walls of their houses, has been diverted. We believe in the value of women getting psychosocial help and counseling, a face to face meeting, especially when it comes to FGM which helps to increase awareness on combating the act in terms of prevention and protection. The lockdown is necessary on a public health front, but has a high economic cost, and a high cost for women and children living in volatile and unsafe situations.



MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN AN FGM FREE VILLAGE, SUPPORTED BY WADI

With the new reality of online work, we faced new challenges. Wadi teams continued to fight to provide awareness through any means possible through direct phone calls and social media. Our concern as we monitored the situation, is that domestic violence in general is on the rise, and FGM could also escalate.

R.F. (30) expressed her wish to have a medical option to receive treatment for women who are mutilated. *“I am sure most of Kurdish women will come and do the treatment, because only women understand the pain that comes with FGM.”*, she said.

16 years into our FGM campaign our breadth of experience has confronted our staff with the realities of women who are living with FGM. Many of these women shared the difficulties they had physically with childbirth, enjoying sexual relations, with menstruation, but also the many emotional difficulties. This is why at the end of 2020 we launched the the “Living with FGM” programme, as there is a considerable need for advice and help among those affected by FGM.

This program is a pilot project and takes place in the villages that have committed to abandoning the practice of FGM, have spent a lot of time with our teams engaging in discussions about women’s rights, women’s health, social problems, domestic violence, and even more diffi-

cult and taboo topics such as women's sexuality and marriage. The women in these areas are aware of their rights as women, and don't want to inflict FGM on their daughters, they are in a different stage of awareness than women in areas where FGM is encouraged. They see not only the immediate negative effects that FGM has had on their own lives and bodies, but also the larger societal effects such as many men choosing to take on second wives –who are uncut– and the problems that polygamy brings to their communities. These women have been asking our teams for information and support in dealing with their realities as FGM survivors. The negative effects of FGM also affect men, many complain of their wives being unable to enjoy sex and the strain this puts on a marriage. This is a complex issue, with many layers of negative effects that FGM has on an individual and societal level, but there is research from African countries where FGM is prevalent that FGM does not have to be the end of woman's sexual life.

A WOMAN FROM SARSYIAN village in Ranya asked counseling from Wadi teams. She told them though she loves her husband, she cannot feel anything during intercourse because of mutilation. *"I wish there was a cure"*, she said. The team advised her on the psychological level and encouraged her to communicate well with her husband.

2021

HALABJA DECLARED FGM FREE

Halabja declared free of FGM after fifteen years of intense campaigning, Halabja also reported that the region is in principle FGM-free. No new case has been reported in the past year.

Wadi continued anti-FGM campaigning, and we worked with many medical and mental health experts to train our teams to better help women participating in the Living with FGM project. Because of the continuing Covid situation these trainings were online, but our team members felt prepared and confident when then later meeting with women living with FGM and working with them.

THE FUTURE

As we look to the future, Wadi would like to see the reality that FGM is not a Kurdish problem, but one that affects all regions of Iraq be acknowledged. New research should be conducted to see what the current rates of FGM in central and south Iraq are. We hope to see a law banning FGM passed in Baghdad, and will campaign hard for that to happen.

We also would like for FGM in the Middle East and Asia to finally be taken seriously by the international community. Millions of lives are actively being damaged by the practice and we cannot tolerate that so little is being done on an international level to stop it.

We will continue to work with women who are living with effects of FGM, to support them and to work with medical and mental health professionals to find new ways of providing treatments.

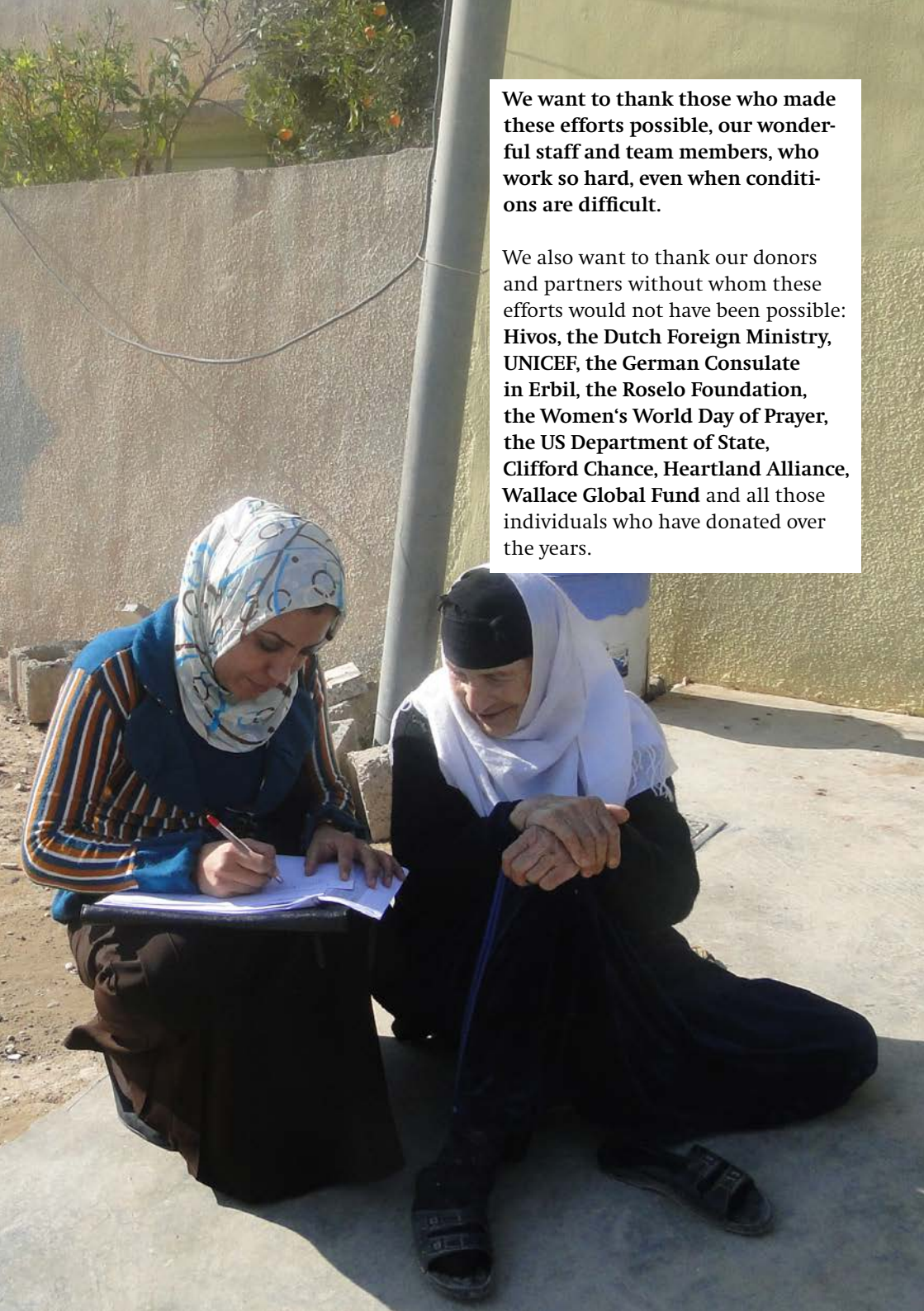
We will continue to campaign to end the practice of FGM in Kurdistan until there are no new cases at all.

Imprint:

wadi e.V.
Herborner Straße 62,
60439 Frankfurt/Main
Amtsgericht Frankfurt, Nr. 0176
info@wadi-online.de
www.wadi-online.de
Text written by:
Isis Elgibali (English)
& Bakhan Jamal (Kurdish)

We want to thank those who made these efforts possible, our wonderful staff and team members, who work so hard, even when conditions are difficult.

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**WADI HAS BEEN FIGHTING TO
ELIMINATE FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION
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SINCE 2004, ALTHOUGH MUCH HAS BEEN
ACHIEVED, THERE IS STILL A LONG WAY
TO GO.**

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