

File
Sengal /
FGM

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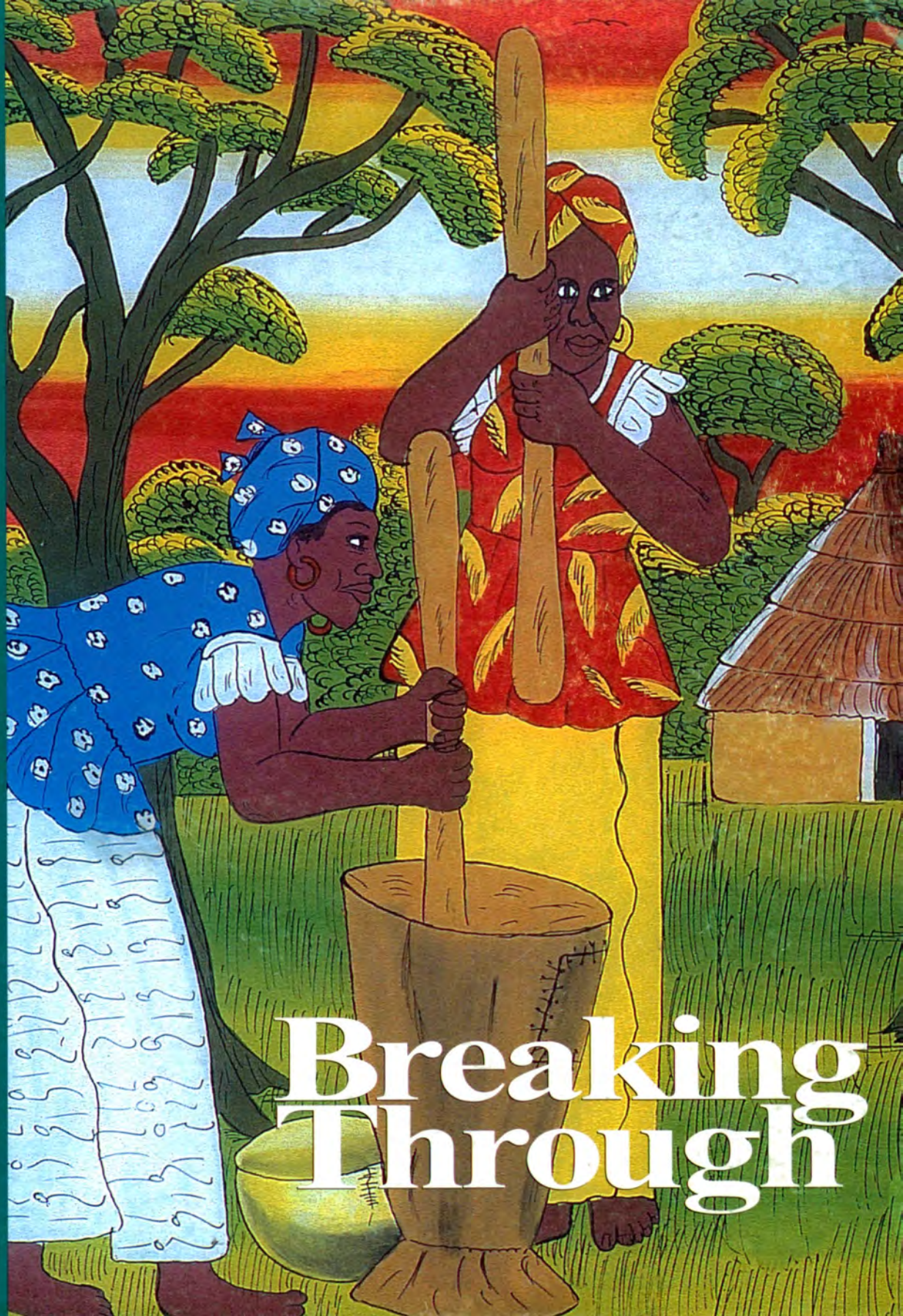
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*TOSTAN's
non-formal
basic education
programme in
national
languages in
Senegal.*



Breaking Through

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Date 9/27/95

MEMO FROM MAGGIE WILLIAMS

TO: Nicole

The attached is for your:

Information x

Advice _____

Action _____

COMMENTS:

Dropped off from Embassy info
left for HRC in China.

--Maggie



RÉSEAU **A**FRICAÎN POUR LE **S**OUTIEN À L'**E**NTREPRENARIAT **F**ÉMININ
AFRICAN NETWORK FOR SUPPORT TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

MME FRANÇOISE FONING
Présidente Internationale

B.P. 1940
Douala-Cameroun

Tél. : (237) 40-35-12
Fax : (237) 40-35-32



RÉSEAU **A**FRICAÎN POUR LE **S**OUTIEN À L'**E**NTREPRENARIAT **F**ÉMININ
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RASEF [Réseau Africain Pour Le
Soutien A L'Entreprenariat Féminin] -
ANSWE [African Network for Support to
Women Entrepreneurs] [in French] [4 copies]

RESEAU AFRICAIN POUR LE SOUTIEN A L'ENTREPRENARIAT FEMININ
AFRICAN NETWORK FOR SUPPORT TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEERS



**RASEF
ANSWE**

IVe CONFERENCE MONDIALE SUR LES FEMMES
<< ACTION POUR L'EGALITE, LE DEVELOPPEMENT ET LA PAIX >>
BEIJING DU 30 AOUT AU 08 SEPTEMBRE 1995

PRESIDENCE INTERNATIONALE
DOUALA
B.P. 1940
TEL.: (237) 40.35.12
FAX : (237) 40.46.32

SIEGE A DAKAR
SENEGAL
TEL.: (221) 22.30.55
FAX : (221) 22.31.85

THE YAOUNDE DECLARATION

Considering the present difficult context characterised by the economic crisis which requires solidarity and an innovative spirit from economic operators;

Considering Africa's industrial development delay which affects mostly women;

Considering women's vital role as economic operators;

Considering the determination of ANSWE (African Network for the Support to Women Entrepreneurs) to play an essential role in the support to women entrepreneurs by:

- relaunching inter-African trade with a view to ushering in a better development of trade among African countries;
- promoting local products;
- advising women in search of funds in financial institutions;
- setting up financial structures
- developing a data base on the economic, legal and fiscal environment in the various member States;
- providing guidance to women involved in the informal sector in order to ease their integration in the industrial sector;

The first ANSWE seminar, whose theme was "African Women and Industrial Entrepreneurship: the Challenges of Beijing 95" and which took place at the Hilton Hotel in Yaounde, Cameroon, from July 29 to August 5, 1995 brought women entrepreneurs to decide to deploy their efforts in implementation the following actions:

I. INFORMATION

- Develop African inter-State economic information exchange through the use of advanced telecommunication techniques, with African women pioneering in the promotion of technical, economic and commercial information (business exchange centres, etc.);
- Develop women-related information and bring decision makers to integrate the women

entrepreneur component in national statistics and development plans;

- Develop women entrepreneur-oriented information;
- Promote, disseminate and simplify information needed by women entrepreneurs in the financial, economic, legal, fiscal, accounting and other areas.

2. Guidance and Training

- Bring guidance structures nearer to women economic operators;
- Develop training and action plans;
- Organise seminars;

so as to enable women economic operators master management tools, which are essential for the sustainability of their businesses.

3. Access to funding

- Identify and integrate women's production in the national, regional and international growth process;
- Adjust financing mechanisms to women entrepreneurs' needs;
- Set up financing structures to deal specifically with women entrepreneurship.

4. Effective Participation in the Beijing Deliberations

Eleven themes have been retained.

Their success will go a long way to permanently establishing the African women economic operators' image in the eyes of the entire world.

In this regard, it was recommended that:

- A follow-up and coordinating committee be set up on the spot in Beijing to promote African solidarity;
- Women economic operators should organise themselves to establish useful commercial contacts for the interest of their businesses.

ANSWE, within the framework of its contribution to Africa's development, calls on NGOs, associations, governments and donors, to firmly stand by it in this decisive battle at the eve of the third millennium.

Done at Yaounde on August 5, 1995

**ANSWE PREPARATORY SEMINAR FOR THE BEIJING CONFERENCE
YAOUNDE, JULY 29 - AUGUST 5, 1995**

According to UNIDO data, Africa has registered a yearly gross national product (GNP) growth of only 1.4 % during the 1990-93 period, which is in strong contrast with other regions of the developing world. Africa's industrialization has almost followed the GNP curb: the manufactured added value has increased by a mere 0.8 %. In comparison to the nearly 5.6 % manufactured added value recorded by Asian developing countries, Africa's industrialization has been up to now very limited, which means that strategies still have to be devised to speed up the manufactured sector's take off, in accordance with the goals of the Second African Industrial Decade (AID).

ANSWE, conscious of the delay registered by the African continent, one of the reasons of which, and not the least, is the non participation of African women in the industrialization process, has decided, in compliance with its objectives, which are, among others, the valorization of local products, to lay particular emphasis on women's integration in the industrial world.

To this effect and also in order to prepare its members to fully participate in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, ANSWE is organizing a seminar in Yaounde (Cameroon) from July 29 to August 5, 1995.

PRESENTATION OF ANSWE

ANSWE is an international organization set up by women economic operators from different African countries during the Fifth African Conference on Women in Dakar (November 1994).

ANSWE's head office is in Dakar and its network is made up of national ANSWEs, that is national African entities bringing together women economic operators involved in all economic activity sectors, NGOs and associations working towards women's economic fulfilment.

ANSWE is already represented in several countries, including Senegal, Niger, Mauritania, Nigeria, Cameroon, Botswana, Central African Republic, Chad and Gabon.

National ANSWEs are in the making in a number of countries: Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Congo, Angola, Guinea Conakry, Malawi, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Mali, Togo, Burkina Faso.

Well-wishers have been identified in other African countries. The attached leaflet gives more information on ANSWE.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SEMINAR

- Knowledge of the industrial world and of its present prospects
- Inciting the African woman entrepreneur to embark on industrial ventures
- Technical preparation of the African woman entrepreneur to an efficient participation in the different workshops, round table discussions and other events organised at Beijing as well as to profit to be made out of them
- Constitution of a platform to be presented in Beijing.

GENERAL THEME

"African Women and Industrial Entrepreneurship: the Challenges of Beijing 95"

SUB-THEMES

- Knowledge of Self: Assessment of One's Motivations and Potential to Embark on Industry
- Industry: Nature, Procedure, Particular Role in the Face of the CFA Devaluation
- Industrial Entrepreneurship and International Preferential Financing for Women
- African Woman Entrepreneur and Economic and Industrial Information
- Theme Knowledge and the Mastery of Beijing's Workshops

PARTICIPANTS

Participants are ANSWE members and well-wishers from 54 countries (one person per country other than Cameroon)

PROGRESS OF THE SEMINAR

Methodology

The general theme will be developed in an exposé aimed at enabling participants to grasp the big stakes of the African woman entrepreneur in the face of the industrialisation process.

The sub-themes will be developed in general presentation form by experts and discussions and a general synthesis will follow.

The work thus carried out will yield a platform which ANSWE will present in Beijing.

PROVISIONAL CALENDAR

Day 1: Presentation of the general theme. Sub-theme 1

Day 2: Sub-themes 2 and 3

Day 3: Sub-themes 4 and 5

Day 4: Synthesis and platform drafting

Day 5: Adoption of the platform and recommendations

COORDINATORS

Coordinators will be high level experts and consultants

WORKING LANGUAGES

The working languages shall be English and French.

CONTACTS

Bureau of ANSWE International President

P.O. Box 1940 DOUALA - CAMEROON

Tel.: (237) 40 35 12

Fax : (237) 40 46 32; 42 58 49

Mrs FONING Françoise

President of the International Bureau

Mrs EPO Marie Antoinette

Consultant-Jurist Coordinator



Molly Melching <melching@telecomplus.sn>

02/04/2000 07:25:16 AM

cc: Madame
Patti
Reim
file
Senegal

Record Type: Record

To: Alice J. Pushkar/WHO/EOP

cc:

Subject: It's been so long!!!

Katy

Dearest Alice,

I can not believe that all this time has gone by and I have not even sent you holiday greetings! This is unlike me but I hope that you will understand that I was totally caught up in efforts to get the Sudanese and Malians here to Senegal to do our program and have been totally, totally overwhelmed with all the preparation! But hurray!! the training is now taking place in Thies! The logistics of getting everyone here (exit visas from the Sudan involved getting four women's departure approved by the courts!), entrance visas to Senegal were so difficult, etc. But it seems the gods were on our side and everything has worked out. The participants all love the program and feel that there is real hope for the same results of ending Female Genital Cutting in the Sudan and Mali. They are not only doing the training for the sessions, but are also visiting communities in Senegal to learn from the villagers' experiences.

There is often electricity in the air as we train - a feeling that it is the beginning of an historic movement for human rights at the grassroots level which will have as one result the end of FGC in these communities. But we know there will be much positive impact in other areas also. I feel so lucky to be a part of this whole process - and to witness the joy of all involved.

The Sudanese Embassy here in Dakar closely studied our program and decided to give their full support to Tostan's efforts to register in the Sudan. They have already written two letters of recommendation! They came to the airport to greet the participants upon their arrival and invited us to eat at the Embassy yesterday. Everyone there said that they feel this will help to promote better relations between the US and the Sudan and I was so thrilled when they said this as you can imagine. The Ambassador said how much he appreciated an American organization making all this effort to reach the people at the grassroots level, especially such a small organization like Tostan. They very much hope that after the initial five communities, the program will be extended throughout the country. Obviously, we emphasized the health content of the sessions and not the human rights!!!!

Alice, CNN has decided to do a program on Tostan and our efforts to end FGC in Africa. I told them that Mrs. Clinton had been very supportive of the village men and women who are spearheading this movement. I will be in the States to do fundraising from March 4 to March 22 and in Washington

around March 18 and was hoping to see Mrs. Clinton to bring her the yearend report for the credit program she funded (it is wonderful!!! - we are just translating it into English now) and a beautiful thank you card that all the participating village women prepared for her (with all of their signatures if you can imagine!) CNN was thrilled at the idea of filming a meeting between her and myself, so I wanted to write and see what you (Melanne and Hillary of course too) think about this possibility. At present, the issue of FGC is no longer as controversial as it was before so I think the American public would be happy to see her supporting this issue. It would help us tremendously to have her support especially at a time when so many other African countries are asking for our program and we are seeking funds to help them. It would also show how appreciative the women at the grassroots level are for her concern and support over the years. This is for the CNN program PEOPLE COUNT produced by Barbara Pyle. Should I write a more official letter to Mrs. Clinton or Melanne? Or should CNN write this letter? I would really appreciate your help in this.

Also there will be an article soon on Tostan in the Baltimore Sun - Sunday feature magazine. I will let you know the exact date. The journalist has been calling and talking for hours. I would hate to get her telephone bill!

Let me wish you a very very HAPPY NEW YEAR, late though it is!! I received a beautiful card from the Clintons and was so happy to hear from them. They are incredible people!

I hope you are doing well - hello to everyone in your office, to Melanne, Katie and of course Mrs. Clinton.

Love from Senegal!! MOLLY

for FGM
Senegal



01/06/99
04:43:36 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Katharine Button/WHO/EOP

cc:

Subject: Re: 50lc3

Katy -

Will you please see that Melanne sees this. I told her yesterday that the legislation has been passed, however, you will see from the message below that it is still one step from being passed by the National Assembly.

----- Forwarded by Alice J. Pushkar/WHO/EOP on 01/06/99 04:43 PM -----



melching @ telecomplus.sn (Molly Melching)

01/06/99 04:29:02 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Alice J. Pushkar/WHO/EOP

cc:

Subject: Re: 50lc3

Dear Alice,

Thanks so much for your email. Luckily you wrote first as I had copied your name with no capital letters and wouldn't have been able to reach you!

I will be very happy to send the papers again. We are not, by the way, a 501c3 organization, however any donation is tax deductible since our organization is classified as a school and public charity as described under Section 509 (a)(1) and 170(b)(1)(A)(ii) of the Internal Revenue Code. Again, I have a letter from the IRA which specifically states this which I will send to you soon.

Be sure to tell Melanne that the law has not yet passed but was voted by the Council of Ministers and will now go before the National Assembly very soon. I have already started working with certain friends in the National Assembly to discuss the complexities of the issue and to try to help them orient the debate! (For example, this is NOT about abolishing a tradition, this is about promoting the health of girls and women!!) I was thinking of trying to set up a meeting between some of the deputies and the women and men who have been involved in ending FGC in their villages. Anyway, it is quite interesting.

I will be writing to Mrs. Clinton soon to let her know what is happening - we are moving towards two new declarations - one in the North (70 Pulaar villages) and 10 more Bambara villages in the Thies region. We

have just opened classes for 63 villages in the Southern Region of Kolda. I am also including the article by Gerry Mackie that I told you about. My report for USAID (Population Council) entitled: Breakthrough in Senegal: the Process Used to End Female Genital Cutting in 31 Villages will be finished soon and I will of course send it to you. As I told you I was writing about the impact of Mrs. Clinton's visit on ending FGC in Africa when you called yesterday! Coincidence?

Please say hello and Happy New Year to Melanne, Katie Button and of course Mrs. Clinton. The village of Saam Njaay does community prayers for her daily and they are known for their spiritual powers, so I hope she has felt the strength of their blessings sent from so far away!!!

Warm greetings! MOLLY

Molly -

>

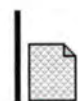
> It was a pleasure talking with you yesterday. I have checked with staff
> and we do not have the copy of the 501c3 that you sent last year. I do
> apologize and promise that we when I receive the copy this year I will
> definitely keep it on file here in the office.

>

> I told Melanne of your good news on the legislation and she was very
> pleased. She was going to inform the First Lady immediately. I explained
> that you would be sending us a copy of your report in the near future.

>

> Thank you for your patience in getting the form to us again this year.



- A Way to End Female Genital Cut

Molly Melching
TOSTAN
BP: 326-Thies
Senegal
Tel. 51.10.51
Fax. 51.34.27



melching @ telecomplus.sn (Molly Melching)
02/28/99 09:25:00 AM

File
Senegal

Melanne
I will let
Katie know
when MM will
be here.
Alice

Record Type: Record

To: Alice J. Pushkar/WHO/EOP

cc:

Subject: Meeting with Mrs. Clinton

Dear Alice and Melanne,

Hello! I was contacted by the White House last week concerning information they needed related to Mrs. Clinton's contribution to Tostan. I talked with Katie Button on the phone and told her that I would be coming to the United States in March and April and will be in Washington from April 5-10.

In the last two letters Mrs. Clinton has written me, she asked me to let her know when I would next be in the US so that we could meet. Katie told me that Mrs. Clinton will probably be in Washington at that time, so I wanted to write you to see about the possibility of setting up an appointment with her.

I will be speaking at a meeting on FGC organized by USAID on April 8 (afternoon) so any time other than this would be fine. I can also call you or Katie when I arrive in the US on March 22. (I will attend a Commission on Population and Development at the United Nations that week before going to visit my mother in Arizona from April 1-5).

I will present Mrs. Clinton several copies of the 94 page report on Ending Female Genital Cutting in 31 Villages in Senegal (I have attached in this email the New York Review of Books article by Gerry Mackie reviewing this report.)

I will also tell her how we are spending her \$5,000 donation and bring her a report of activities.

Lastly, I would like to discuss the new law with her. There was a misleading article that appeared in the Christian Science Monitor on February 4 in which I was often quoted. A similar article appeared in the Economist at a later date.

I was upset at how the journalist took my remarks out of context, making it seem as if the villagers who went to testify at Parliament spoke against the law and that I myself was against the law. This is not true.

As you know, I indeed had some reservations about a law at this particular time and was naturally worried at first, but I have always felt it is very important for the Government to take a stand against a tradition which leads to the death of young girls and negative health consequences for women. I always supported the law, but felt there should be a delay in the application. In that way, it would give time for people to do

education and media campaigns. Then the government could APPLY the law. As it stands now, with no delay in application, the government will not be able to criminalize so many people and so will probably not be able to apply the law anyway. People will then think they can continue to practice with no consequences. By announcing the law with a delay in application, the government would be saying: "We have taken a firm position against this harmful practice, will allow some time for information and education, but in one year we will definitely APPLY the law."

However, my fears have been calmed this past month and it has become more and more evident to me that the law was indeed the right way to go in Senegal. There have already been many roundtables, seminars, radio and TV programs organized about the issue because of the law. I believe it is a very necessary and healthy thing to have happen. I think people need to air their views - even if they are very negative - about the issue.

The most important thing I have witnessed in the past month is the new willingness of women to discuss the negative health experiences they have undergone related to FGC. Suddenly, the village women are recounting stories they never told before. Is it because they feel more secure and protected now that there is a law? I believe so. And I believe that these stories, never before told because of the taboo on speaking on these problems, will help to convince the religious leaders and others that they must no longer defend a practice that has such horrible health consequences in the name of religion or tradition.

At any rate, I have decided to write a letter to the editor of the Christian Science Monitor in response to the article about US and UNICEF pressure to pass the law. And when David Hecht (the journalist who wrote both articles) comes back to Senegal, I'm going to make him visit the hospital ward where they keep "incontinent" women who, because of their circumcision are unable to contain their urine and bowel movements. These women are totally excluded from society and don't want to leave the hospital because their smell is so strong. They are mortified at having such problems and have often committed suicide in the past (a very rare phenomena in Senegal). Perhaps just hearing about the death of girls is not enough and he would be more moved if he actually SAW these women. Education is critical, yes. But a strong stand by the government through a law is necessary also.

It is one of those cases where when the practice has stopped, and all the stories of women's suffering are out, people will say, "Why didn't everyone do more!!!" instead of criticizing international agencies for supporting the passage of this law!!

I also heard that Mrs. Clinton spoke of Senegal and the women of Malicounda at the Hague Forum. Do you know how I could get a copy of her speech?

Hope everyone is well there - I know you are all very busy but hope I'll be able to see you in April.

Looking forward to hearing from you - Molly



- new nyrb Gerry

Molly Melching

TOSTAN

BP: 326-Thies

Senegal

Tel. 51.10.51

Fax. 51.34.27

Breakthrough in Senegal

The New York Review of Books

Female Genital Cutting: Findings from the Demographic and Health Surveys Programs

by Dara Carr

Macro International, 94 pp., single copy gratis <http://www.macrint.com/dhs/hom1.html>

Breakthrough in Senegal: The Process Used to End Female Genital Cutting in 31 Villages

by Molly Melching

The Population Council, 98 pp., single copy gratis

Female Genital Mutilation: An Overview

by Nahid Toubia and Susan Izett

World Health Organization, 73 pp., \$23.40

<http://www.who.int/dsa/cat98/fgmbook.htm>

by Gerry Mackie

Malicounda, a village in Senegal with a population of 3000 from the Bambara ethnic group, announced to the world on July 31, 1997 its decision to abandon female genital cutting (FGC) and urged other villages to follow its example. This was a public and collective commitment to stop the practice, and local media and dignitaries attended the unprecedented event. A neighboring village, Nguerigne Bambara, decided to renounce FGC forever on November 6, 1997. Another neighboring village, Keur Simbara, decided that they needed to consult with their extended family, among whom they married, in ten other villages near Joal. All 13 of these villages then joined together to enact the Diabougou Declaration announcing "a firm commitment to end the practice of female circumcision in our community" on February 14 and 15, 1998. The Clintons met with and congratulated the women of Malicounda on April 2, 1998, during their state visit to Senegal. Next, in an entirely different region, and among an entirely different ethnic group, the Fulani, 18 villages met together and, citing the example of Malicounda, enacted the Medina Cherif Declaration on June 1 and 2, 1998 which decisively renounced the practice of female circumcision. More such mass declarations will emerge shortly. As a result, Senegal enacted legislation against FGC on January 13, 1999 (there is hope that the government will emphasize needed education rather than counterproductive coercion).

FGC affects up to 136 million women in 28 countries across Africa. The practice is distributed more or less contiguously from Senegal in the west to Yemen in the east and from Egypt in the north to Tanzania in the south, and with explainable exceptions is unique to that zone. Rather than receding with modernization, this painful and

dangerous practice is expanding as population expands. In some places FGC has even spread to new groups or has increased in severity. An estimated two million girls a year suffer the operation, according to the authoritative overview published by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Twenty-five years ago the wide prevalence of this perplexing tradition was barely suspected, often went unmentioned or was even denied by its practitioners, and was disregarded by international development agencies. Since then there have been an abundance of international and national meetings, publications, declarations, and plans of action. Opposition to FGC is now part of American human rights policy, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is assisting the African organizations working to promote its abandonment, as is the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WHO and other agencies. Despite a surge of international publicity over the last five years, and new funding not so spectacular as the publicity, results have been disappointing. There have been individual abandonments, sometimes among the most cosmopolitan segments of the population, and also as a consequence of various programs, but these are collectively marginal. That is why the unequivocal, collective and contagious abandonments of FGC in a series of villages in Senegal in the last year and a half are of such great importance.

These dramatic events arose after women in lead villages participated in a basic education program conducted by a nongovernmental organization called Tostan (which means breakthrough in Wolof, the primary language in Senegal). Tostan did not directly intend to end FGC. This innovative "literacy-plus" program provides a background of information and skills that facilitates autonomous changes in community health, education, and welfare. Participants say that a consequence of the program is that one is able to *tiim sa xel*, "to look down upon one's mind." Tostan never tells people what to do. It was the women of Malicounda themselves who decided to end FGC, as did the remainder of their village, and then their neighbors and kin who joined in. Indeed, the Tostan staff were surprised and sometimes even worried as the movement unfolded. Change was not slow and incremental, but rather was swift and general. The story is told in **Breakthrough in Senegal**, written by Molly Melching, director of Tostan. This publication describes the sequence of change, and the narration is vivid and often of rich human interest.

* * *

Clitoridectomy involves the removal with the aid of a sharp instrument of part or all of the clitoris, and excision the removal of the clitoris as well as part or all of the labia minora. More than 80% of FGC is of this type. Less than 20% of FGC is infibulation, which includes clitoridectomy and excision and adds incision or removal of the inner walls of the labia majora. Then, the raw edges of the labia majora are stitched together or adhered by tying the legs together so that the opposite sides will heal into a wall over the vaginal opening. A small opening is left at the back. Typically, urination and later menstruation is difficult, upon marriage penetration is dreadful to accomplish, and reinfibulation follows childbirth. Sealing is a poorly understood variant that might be

classed under infibulation: it involves at least incision of the infant's labia which then are healed together by coagulated blood from the wounds. FGC may take place from a few days after the girl's birth to after the birth of her first child, depending on local custom, but most often seems to be performed on girls around ages six to ten, safely before puberty. Except recently among the affluent, the operation is inflicted without painkiller or antiseptic precautions. Potential complications are numerous and sometimes severe. The immediate risks of any FGC include bleeding, infection, and death. The more severe practice, infibulation, entails more prolonged risks as well, such as repeated infections, keloid scarring, dermoid cysts, obstructed menstruation, pelvic infections, and obstructed labor, among others. FGC has sexual and psychological consequences as well.

* * *

Why? Why all this suffering and death? There are some distinctive clues that suggest an answer. Where practiced, FGC is nearly universal within a group whose members marry one another. In such a group FGC is persistent from generation to generation. The most common reasons given for FGC is that it is tradition and that it is required for proper marriage. Most puzzling is that in a number of places people who oppose FGC nevertheless feel constrained to practice it. These generalizations are supported by the most thorough survey research on FGC, findings from fresh demographic and health surveys in seven countries, summarized by Carr. For example, in Eritrea, 95 percent of women are treated and 90 percent of mothers report that their eldest daughter is cut. Yet, the continuation of FGC is opposed by well more than half of urban dwellers, and by well more than half of those with any education.

All this suggests that practitioners of FGC are trapped within a certain kind of "convention," as that concept was developed by the game theorist Thomas Schelling. Almost all adherents say that FGC is required for proper marriage, and many say that it is required for the virtue of the woman, or for the honor of her family. FGC is the conventional prerequisite of marriage. However the custom originated, as soon as women believed that men would not marry an uncut woman, and men believed that an uncut woman would not be a suitable partner in marriage, the convention was locked in place. Moreover, because FGC is locally universal, many have been unaware until recent years that other peoples do not practice FGC, and many have believed that the only people who do not do FGC are unfaithful women or indecent people. Like many outsiders I find FGC horrifying to imagine, but for an insider FGC is more like orthodontia than it is like violence.

FGC is a matter of proper marriage. An individual in an intramarrying group that practices FGC can't give it up unless enough other people do too. FGC is a certain kind of convention such that what one family chooses depends on what other families choose. To understand, imagine that there is a group that has a convention whereby audiences (at the cinema, at plays, at recitals) stand up rather than sit down. Sitting has been forgotten. Standing is both universal and persistent. An outsider comes along and explains that elsewhere audiences sit. After the shock of surprise wears off, some

people begin to think that sitting might be better, but it would be better only if enough other people sit at the same time. If only one person sits, she doesn't get to see anything on the stage. If only one family abandons FGC, its daughter doesn't get married (because of the belief that only unsuitable women forgo FGC). However, if a critical mass of people in the audience can be organized to sit, even just a column of people who are less than a majority, they realize that they can attain both the ease of sitting and a clear enough view of the stage. This critical mass then has incentives to recruit the rest of the audience to sitting, and the rest of the audience has incentives to respond to the recruitment. Similarly, if a critical mass of people in an intramarrying group pledge to refrain from FGC, then the knowledge that they are a critical mass makes it immediately in their interest to keep their pledges, and in their interest to persuade others to join in, and after persuasion makes it in everyone else's interests to join them. Without an understanding of the underlying mechanism, the abrupt end of such an entrenched practice by means of a mere public declaration would seem to be nearly miraculous.

A peculiar characteristic of a convention like this is that even if each individual in the relevant group comes to think that it would be better to abandon the practice, no one individual acting on her own can succeed. Every family could come to think that FGC is wrong, but that is not enough; FGC would continue because any family abandoning it on its own would ruin the futures of its daughters. Enough families must abandon it at once so that their daughters' futures are secured. One way to do this is to declare a public pledge that marks a convention shift.

* * *

The convention model explains the binding of women's feet in China, both the former universality and persistence of footbinding and its sudden demise. At about the age of eight, the mother would bend the toes under her daughter's feet, force the sole to the heel, and tightly wrap the girl's foot so that as she matured her feet remained tiny, perhaps a mere five inches in length. Footbinding was painful, dangerous, and disabling. Why did the Chinese do it? Again, it was necessary for a proper marriage, for the virtue of the woman, for the honor of her family. Footbinding and FGC are essentially equivalent practices, and originate from similar causes. Footbinding and FGC persist because of the same convention mechanism. Footbinding lasted for a thousand years, was universal among all "decent" Chinese, and was undented by liberal agitation and imperial prohibition in the 19th century. The most optimistic reformers in 1899 thought that it would take several generations to end, but to everyone's surprise footbinding ended for the vast majority by 1911. In localities where it did end, it ended quickly and universally, just as the convention model predicts. Therefore, the methods used to end footbinding in China, properly adapted, should work to end FGC in Africa.

The work of the antfootbinding reformers had three aspects. First, they carried out a modern education campaign, which explained that the rest of the world did not bind women's feet. The discovery of an alternative is necessary but not sufficient for

change. Second, they explained the advantages of natural feet and the disadvantages of bound feet in Chinese cultural terms. Credible new information about health consequences, again, is necessary but not sufficient for change. Third, they formed natural-foot societies, whose members publicly pledged not to bind their daughters' feet nor to let their sons marry women with bound feet. The problem is that if only one family renounces footbinding their daughters are thereby rendered unmarriageable. The pledge association solves this problem ñ if enough families abandon footbinding together then their children can marry one another.

The pledge technique had not been applied to the problem of FGC in Africa. The technique was reinvented by villagers around Malicounda, with explosive results: collective and contagious abandonments as with footbinding in China. I believe that the practice in Senegal supports the convention theory, and reformers there believe that the theory supports their practice. I recently completed a two-week visit to Senegal where I visited nine villages.

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The country of Senegal is at the westernmost tip of Africa, where the savanna meets the Atlantic. It is an unusually open, democratic, and materially impoverished country. Its capital, Dakar, used to be the capital of colonial French West Africa, and is cosmopolitan in its own way. French tourists swarm the coast over the winter holidays. The Wolof ethnic group, which does not practice FGC, is almost half of Senegal's population. Some of the other major ethnic groups are the Bambara and the related Mandinka, and the Fulani and the related Tukolor, all of whom practice FGC. The country is 95% Islamic. The flat savanna unfolds as far as one can see, covered with scrub, and accented by the uncanny baobab tree, the national symbol. Large villages dot the countryside, each of a few hundred to several thousand people. Men and women dress in gorgeous, flowing clothing on most occasions. Villagers live in circular structures topped with conical thatched roofs, along dirt lanes lined by mango trees, lively with children, chickens, sheep, goats, and ass-drawn carts. Women congregate at the well in the morning, and village meetings take place under a shade tree in the crossroads of the village, just as in Rousseau's portrayal. People grow peanuts, cotton, millet, sorghum, rice, maize, calabash, keep cattle, and catch fish. Almost everything is grown or made locally. People work hard to get by, and women are always busy - fetching water, tending crops, shelling peanuts, pounding millet, drying fish, cooking meals, minding children. Rural literacy is rare or recent.

I went south of Dakar near the coast with Demba Diawara and his nephew Cheikh Traoré to some of the villages around Malicounda that had joined in the Diabougou Declaration. The practice in these Bambara villages was often sealing. Diawara is the imam of the village of Keur Simbara and a former student in the Tostan program. He is a gentle yet magnetic figure, much admired, with a gift for turning the right phrase at the right time, and is an energetic 66 years of age. The women of Malicounda heard that cuttings were being organized for the village of Keur Simbara, and went there to put on their play about a girl who dies from the operation, followed by public discussion of the

issue. The problem, as Diawara said, is that "Keur Simbara is a small village but it is a very large village." It was Diawara who realized that for Keur Simbara it was necessary for the whole marriage pool to discuss the issue amongst themselves and coordinate on an end, culminating in the Diabougou Declaration. "Only when all members of the extended family agree will we assure that uncircumcised girls will be free from prejudice and able to find men to marry," he explained to Melching.

Over three months Diawara and Traoré went one by one to Keur Simbara's ten sister villages. This required courage, as there was a belief that even to mention this tradition would bring doom to all concerned. The wrong approach would provoke serious trouble. That the Malicoundans had succeeded at a collective abandonment and had avoided bad consequences proved a powerful message. Also, because FGC was locally universal, its connection to negative health consequences was unrecognized. When the connection was credibly presented, people immediately recognized the causal relation, and were motivated to change. Diawara agreed with my formulation: "The people who do FGC are honorable, upright, moral people who love their children and want the best for them. That is why they do FGC, and that is why they will decide to stop doing it, once a safe way of stopping is found."

We asked if there had been any cuttings since the declaration. Absolutely not. You couldn't hide such things in a village! The public declaration makes it a matter of honor. A committee is established to monitor compliance. Anyone cutting would be taken to the police. They are determined to prevent a single exception as they want to assure the declarants that the reputations and marriageability of their daughters are secured. One hot afternoon we were meeting the influentials in Samba Diallo, one of the Diabougou villages. A man in his twenties edged up to the circle and said, loudly, "We heard you people were going to be here, so we made it a point to come over from Fimela to visit our relatives here today. You know, the Bambara are one family, and what happens to one part of the family affects the whole family." "Uh-oh," I thought, "here comes trouble." "What we want to know," he continued, "is why weren't we invited to the declaration?" People are not forsaking the declaration, but are clamoring to join in. Many Bambara villages and neighborhoods have made the same request, and Demba Diawara is organizing a new declaration. I looked at his notes. When he goes to a village he records the name of every individual, which indicates his or her conditional commitment to the declaration. It is important that everyone knows that everyone else will stop.

Trustworthy new information, the opportunity for a critical mass to form, a period when the critical mass conducts persuasion among the remainder of the population, climaxed by a coordinated decision on abandonment, the news that a positive alternative can be safely attained, followed by replication of the process among neighbors: this parallels Chinese events and supports the convention hypothesis for FGC.

Much reform activity across Africa is simple education and publicity about health consequences of FGC, which helps, because there must be some critical level of attitude change before convention shift can be organized. Harsh propaganda or criminal prohibition have been shown to backfire. One strategy is to compensate the

cutters, but such programs have not yielded abandonments of FGC, since it is the concern of the parents over their daughter's marriageability, not the incidental benefit to the cutters, that maintains the practice. Another strategy understands FGC as essentially an initiation rite, though it is not over much of its range. Even where initiation and FGC were once found together, usually initiation has faded but FGC stubbornly remains. These strategies were discussed at the Diabougou Declaration, according to Melching. A former cutter told the meeting, "I have heard that some cutters have asked for projects or money to stop this practice. I don't ask for money, I ask for *forgiveness* for having caused girls and women such suffering in their lives. We will now be like all the other women in the village who together must work to create income generating projects." The declarants also unanimously opposed substitute initiation rituals. One said, "We need to do away with these rites altogether. We need a means of controlling what goes on and if you have the drumming and singing, it will be associated with cutting. People will use this pretext to cut in secret. This must end." Another said, "Let's be honest, we were cutting our girls at 2 weeks to 3 months over the past years so this was not even part of the ritual any longer. This is a romantic notion you westerners have and want to impose on us now!"

* * *

We also journeyed to the region of Kolda, beyond the Gambia in the southeast of Senegal, to the Futa Jallon where the Fulani dwell. We arrived in distant Medina Cherif three hours late because of a punctured radiator (one of three breakdowns in the bush of our decrepit 1988 Toyota - Tostan employs 48 staff and educates thousands of people on a budget equivalent to the expense of posting a single western aid official abroad). Nevertheless we were welcomed with enthusiasm. I have seldom seen, anywhere, such a group of confident, determined, organized, and articulate women. Before the education program, women hereabouts did not speak at meetings. Lala Baldé, head of the women's group, told me that the day the class first understood the contents of the lesson on FGC, which included the Diabougou Declaration, they sat down together and cried. Her daughter Mani was in very good health before cutting, but she bled badly, and she's had many health problems since then because of that. They thought of girls who were the same age, and realized that the smaller and sicklier were those who had hemorrhaged at cutting. Also, "to be honest, it had killed many girl children." Once they worked through the connection, they devised a plan to end the practice. Right after class they went to the chief and asked him to call a meeting. Meanwhile, they went to the other women in Medina Cherif with the news.

They held a big village meeting, with both women and men. "We decided to call the men, especially the young men. They are the future husbands. If they were not involved in the decision then they would refuse to marry uncircumcised women. We had to show them that circumcision has nothing to do with marriageability." The women put on their play about a girl dying from cutting. At the beginning of the discussion there was some opposition, mostly from some men, but the women had rehearsed their facts and arguments. The defenders of FGC said one reason we do this is to prevent

premarital sex, and if you stop then girls will go running wild. The women answered that, as is too well known, there is no evidence that circumcised girls are able to avoid pregnancy. The way to keep girls from getting pregnant is to give them education, not circumcision. Finally, since women were the victims of this practice, their views should count most. That was the end of it. Everyone understands and agrees now because of the public deliberation. The Medina Cherif women then took their message on FGC to the women of a second village, Saré Moody, and women from both those villages went to Saré Kadri, and the three villages had a meeting on it, and this extended to a further 15 villages, then all 18 villages met to enact the Medina Cherif Declaration, and now more villages want to join in.

They said they were sure that all the declarants had stopped. One village didn't join in the declaration. They did their circumcision rites this year and a girl hemorrhaged and died, just like in the theater we did. Then they stopped! Because now they know that the death is from the cutting and not from bad spirits." Melching asked if the men had anything to say. One said, "I don't know, this is a women's meeting." Lala Baldé said, "This is a democracy, the men can speak too." The man continued, "I was worried about the cutters. They got money for this and I thought they would never stop. But the cutters themselves said they would stop, and they did, we check up on it. It is incredible that this has happened!"

The day before, we had visited Mampatim, a very large village that joined the declaration but has not yet undertaken basic education. There we met privately with a respected grandmother. She provided several reasons why it had been easy to stop FGC, and why the decision will stick. She added, though, that the women miss the circumcision ceremonies, a special time for them to get together, dance, and sing. I asked the women of Medina Cherif the next day how they would answer her concern. One said, "The class replaces that experience. At the learning center we sing, we dance, we do learning games, but at the same time we learn about child development, nutrition and health." A second said, "Those ceremonies were a big waste of money. Now we can spend that money on something important: the education of our children." A third added, vehemently, "Suppose you have your ceremony and the girl dies. What about that? When death comes to the little girl, what good is your singing and dancing then?"

- See my "Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account," *American Sociological Review*, 1996, 61:999-1017.

- I discuss heterogeneity in meaning and form of FGC, and alternative reform strategies, in "Female Genital Cutting: The Beginning of the End, in "Female Circumcision: Multidisciplinary Perspectives, edited by Bettina Shell-Duncan and Ylva Hernlund (Lynne Rienner Publishers, forthcoming).