

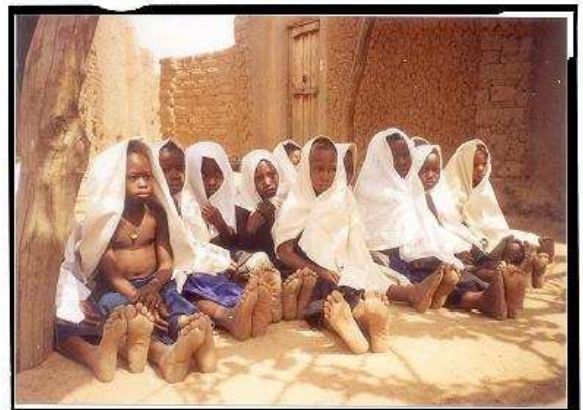
## See our World

An essential part of Plan's work is to help create spaces for children and young people to discuss together the issues which affect their lives, then ensure adults respect their views so that children may be involved in community decision-making. This communication has been prepared with and by children directly and is intended to give a general sense of the kinds of issues children discuss and how they work together.

### Our struggle against excision

Dear Sponsors,

Warm greetings from Mali! We are a group of seven girls and seven boys who make up the children's government of Dambala, a village where Plan works. We would like to share with you our experience of the struggle against female excision.



#### Excision, a problem concerning the Rights of the Child

Our parents say: "A child is a little angel. If you hurt her or him, God will repay you a hundredfold".

Unfortunately many children do not have enough to eat; many do not have access to safe water, or to education. Many children work hard so that their families can survive. Some go to beg in the streets in order to survive. Others act as guides for their parents who are blind and are beggars.

Some are victims of violence in the streets, sometimes at school and even at home, kinds of violence that, even if "the little angel" manages to survive, will mark her or him for life. Excision is a typical example.



In Mali, female excision is a very old cultural practice that people sometimes link with religion. Most often it is said that it is a way to ensure that women are clean, particularly for prayers, to increase fertility, to reduce the pleasure and therefore reduce the incidence of sexual relations before marriage.

In this way, according to our mothers, at a particular time of the year that was fixed by the appearance of certain stars, adolescent girls in the village were grouped together and excised, one after another. The woman who performed excisions was always a Moumou-mouso, that is to say, a woman of the blacksmith caste. In addition to

the cutting, excision was a ceremony for initiation of future wives to married life. The adolescent girls learned to look after their bodies better, and to cook for a family.

Nowadays, babies are often excised before they are a month old. Excision is practiced in the home by a Moumou-mouso and sometimes in health centres by nurses.

### **Koumafin C. 6 year old girl**

"From what my mother says, I was excised at the age of one year like all the girls in the family, in accordance with tradition; it was my grandmother's decision. At the age of 4, I began to have problems urinating. My grandmother thought the first excision hadn't been done properly. That is why she decided to have me excised yet again. Despite this second excision, the pain still occurred. Thanks to Plan's partner organization, I was sent to a health centre in Bamako where I had an operation that stopped the pain once and for all."

### **Our action**

With Plan's help, and through its partner organisations, our government has been trained to help us play a role in the struggle against excision. We sensitize our parents, our friends at school and in the village, religious leaders, administrative and local government authorities, on the dangers connected with excision, its long- and short-term consequences. We make radio programmes about the ill-effects of excision.



### **Our achievements**

A local proverb says "It is better to leave a community than try to abolish its traditions." Like all our traditions, excision has lasted a long time. Thanks to the unceasing efforts of Plan and its partners and thanks to the sensitization we carry out, there is no longer a taboo surrounding excision as a subject of discussion in our communities.

Most people know about its consequences now, and many victims of the complications it causes have been identified and taken to hospital for operations. Nearly half the women who practiced excision have publicly stopped their activities, that they call "setting down the knife". The number of girls who are excised and that of mothers who wish to excise their daughters has diminished considerably. We took part in the local forum on excision that was attended by some practitioners of excision, religious leaders, victims and parents of victims of excision, teachers and local government authorities.

### **Fatoumata D. 10 year old girl, member of the children's government**

"I come from an ethnic group whose children are excised very young. Two years after she was excised, one of my sisters cried every time she wanted to urinate. Because of my training about excision, I asked my mother to take her to one of Plan's partner organizations for advice. This is how she was sent to a health centre in Bamako for an operation."



They talk among themselves at the mosque or else at the market."

### **Our belief**

All mothers love their children. With the support of Plan, we will fight against the ignorance that makes them violate the physical integrity of their little daughters, their little angels. We are convinced that in the future our children will be the first to benefit from our struggle!

### **Mariam C. 12 year old girl**

"In my community, excision is practiced much less often than it was before. The subject is no longer taboo. We talk about it with anyone and anywhere. The old people say that dozens of girls were excised each year, and it was common knowledge. Now, excision is practiced in secret."

### **Ada S. 11 year old girl, member of the children's government**

"Excision was mainly practiced because our grandmothers wanted it done. Thanks to the sensitization we carry out, they are beginning to change their minds and their actions."

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This document was reviewed and edited by Plan staff.