

Interchristian Fellowships' Evangelical Mission
(IcFEM Mission)
Holy Living & Hard Work

CIRCUMCISION PROJECTS

Circumcision for teenage boys is deeply embedded in some parts of Kenyan culture and is a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood with ceremonies taking place in the Kimilili area every two years in early August although the neighbouring tribal group have annual ceremonies in December. The Mission is not trying to change the practice but to tackle the traditional cult of circumcision, which is medically unsafe and full of pagan practice and witchcraft, and to replace it with clean, clinical circumcision by trained medics.

The need for this project arose from a problem identified by the groups of Christians praying in each village. In 2002 this led to the first project when 1776 boys and men were circumcised in August and a further 800 in December (for a neighbouring tribal group), and all the material benefits mentioned below were realised. In 2004 and 2006 the season began again and the Mission geared up to meet the need performing literally thousands of circumcisions (2004=6000+) from eleven centres across the region with many other groups following the IcFEM lead and starting a similar provision.

The benefits are:

- **HIV/AIDS** - the IcFEM teams sterilise all instruments, thus reducing the chance of spreading HIV/AIDS from person to person. The traditional circumcisers do not sterilise their knives between patients i.e. the hygiene factor. Circumcision itself reduces the spread of HIV/AIDS as it reduces the amount of soft mucosal surface on the inner foreskin where the likelihood of the uptake of HIV is much greater i.e. the biological factor.
- **Medical training** - IcFEM uses medically trained clinical officers experienced in circumcision so that post-procedure complication rates are reduced. The traditional circumcisers are not formally trained.
- **Congenital abnormalities** - the IcFEM teams recognise abnormalities such as hypospadias and epispadias and make arrangements for referral for correction. In the hands of traditional circumcisers some of these boys have been permanently mutilated or have died.
- **Spiritual** - the traditional ceremony is associated with magic and witchcraft which IcFEM replaces with proclamation of the Gospel.
- **Financial** - the traditional rite is associated with "parties" for extended families, neighbours and friends. The cost for each family is between 30,000 and 60,000 KSH (approximately £300-£600) which is a huge sum of money in a poor community. This has previously resulted in children being removed from school and continuation of deep poverty in the area. IcFEM charges are low thereby saving families large amounts of money which therefore become available for education, food, housing, etc.
- **Moral and social** - the words of the traditional ceremony actively encourage the boy to prove his manhood i.e. the promiscuity factor. The result has been numerous teenage pregnancies; girls therefore leave school and rarely return. The tradition also encourages considerable alcohol consumption. During the circumcision season activities, including dancing, take place at night so with a reduction of nighttime activity petty crime tends to reduce.

- **Future** - this project offers the chance to teach communities that circumcision can be carried out at any time in a medically safe way, in a clean environment with minimal risk and at the family's convenience.

The logistics are challenging to say the least and fees for doctors and nurses, the cost of instruments, drugs, staff transport and accommodation all have to be met.