



Abidé Awesso - Maternal Health & FGM Eradication Coordinator



Hodalo Katakouna and her baby, Alaffia

THE FGM ERADICATION PROJECT

As part of our **Maternal Health Initiatives**, Alaffia aims to educate women about the dangers of **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**, or excision. FGM includes procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons and is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. The procedure can result in severe bleeding, infections, life-threatening complications in childbirth, and increased risk of newborn deaths. (*World Health Organization*)

Abidé Awesso, our *Maternal Health & FGM Eradication Coordinator* in the Bassar region of Togo, has been working with Alaffia since 2012. **Hodalo Katakouna** was one of Abidé's first patients and one of the first women to be supported as part of our Maternal Health and FGM Eradication project. Following, Abidé recounts Hodalo's story:

"I had just started in my position with Alaffia's Maternal Health Project, and was on one of my very first village field visits. I was headed to the health clinic in Tchatchaminadé, a small village along the rocky road from Bassar to Bafilo through the Chain du Togo mountain range. I was going to Tchatchaminadé for a meeting with village officials and maternal health participants on the adverse consequences of female genital mutilation.

While driving my motorcycle along the one lane path to the village, I saw a pregnant woman sitting on a rock writhing in pain. I stopped to see what was wrong. She explained since the beginning of her pregnancy, she had not been feeling well. She had not been to see a doctor because she couldn't afford it, but seeing how her health was declining more and more each day, she decided that morning to go to the clinic in the nearby village. Sadly, she didn't even have someone to come with her, and after walking 5 miles, was too tired and ill to continue her journey. I decided to bring her with me on my motorcycle even though it would make me late to my meeting. We traveled to the Tchatchaminadé clinic together where she received medical attention and was able to rest.

After she rested and was feeling more comfortable, with the permission of the clinic's doctor, I examined her myself (I am a trained midwife). During my examination, I noted that Hodalo had undergone female genital mutilation as a child, and had a serious chronic pelvic infection as a result. Her infection was so advanced that it made me concerned for her pregnancy and even her life. The infection, resulting pain, and physical stress were the source of her sickness. Together, the clinic's nurse practitioner and I decided to refer her to the *Regional Hospital of Bassar* where she would receive better care.

Hodalo's infection was so serious she required intravenous antibiotics. Because of this, and that we were worried for the health of the baby, she remained hospitalized for two weeks. All medical expenses were covered by Alaffia for the entire stay. During her stay at the hospital, Hodalo received more information about Alaffia's program which she had benefited from. She accepted the offer to join the program, and began taking part in the meetings with Alaffia and other women who were participating. All Alaffia maternal health participants meet regularly to discuss hygiene, nutrition, and how to end FGM practices in their communities.

Three months after Hodalo's hospitalization, she gave birth to a little girl. Thankfully, she had a complication-free birth, and I was able to deliver her child easily and safely. Afterwards, she presented the child to me as a sign of gratitude and said, "This child is ours now because without the help of Alaffia, neither myself nor this child would have survived. I will call her **Alaffia**."

