

Girls and Grandmothers Hand-in-Hand

Dialogue between generations for community change



Lessons learned from the “Girls’ Holistic Development” project to eliminate early and forced marriage, teenage pregnancy and female genital mutilation, implemented by World Vision Senegal with technical support from The Grandmother Project



What I find most interesting is the way that the Girls' Holistic Development project has strengthened intergenerational dialogue, especially between grandmothers and adolescent girls. This strategy has at the same time contributed to strengthening grandmothers' self-confidence and motivated them to change traditional practices, particularly related to early and forced marriage of young girls and female genital mutilation. This project is bringing about changes in social norms and is producing significant benefits for girls' development and upbringing.

Fatuma Hashi
Gender and Development Director,
World Vision International

Everything we know today about sexuality, teenage pregnancy and life in general, we owe to our grandmothers. We now know the value of a grandmother. We share with them our most unbelievable problems and they always have a solution for us.

Mariama, young girl from Saré Boulel

Culture for a people is like water for a plant. What strikes me the most about the approach used in the GHD project is the respect for and attention given to culture. This is what made it possible to put in place a system of horizontal communication between the generations, which at the same time preserved the respect and hierarchy that exists within the family and community. The gap between the generations and between the sexes was bridged, and in this process both the individuals and communities were valued.

Siradio Diao, secondary school teacher, Velingara

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GMP works in partnership with other NGOs, government departments and training institutions that promote the well-being of children, women and families. GMP provides technical assistance to other organizations in the areas of formative research, program development, training, evaluation and organizational learning.

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The mission of The Grandmother Project (GMP) is to improve the health and well-being of women and children in developing countries. The key elements in the GMP methodological approach are: actively involving grandmothers as “resource persons”; strengthening intergenerational communication; and using communication methods that foster critical reflection and problem solving rather than dictating to communities which actions they should adopt. The GMP strategy aims to build the capacity of other organizations to implement community programs that integrate the principles of our methodological approach.

Implementation of the Girls’ Holistic Development (GHD) Project, in partnership with World Vision Senegal, from 2008 to 2011, was an opportunity for The Grandmother Project to apply its approach to improve the well-being of young girls. In the Velingara area, as elsewhere, school-aged girls dream of their future as women, mothers and active members of society. However, today they face a range of challenges and constraints, such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy and female genital mutilation (FGM). They need to be supported and encouraged on their road to the future and certain social norms need to be changed if they are to realize their full growth and potential.

The GMP methodology used in the GHD project is quite unique. Rooted in communities’ culturally-defined values and roles, the core aspects of our approach are community dialogue and strengthened intergenerational communication. After 33 months, the results of the experience using the GMP approach are very encouraging in terms of changes in attitudes about early marriage and FGM. In addition, we have also observed a significant decrease in the number of teenage pregnancies in an area where this serious problem caused devastation in past years. These very positive results can be attributed largely to the efforts of grandmothers.

Once again, grandmothers have surprised everyone with their open-minded willingness to reconsider certain traditions that were passed down to them by their grandparents and with their commitment to be involved in the upbringing and supervision of girls, in particular, and of children, in general. Grandmothers are definitely an essential resource that, unfortunately, is often under-used. Few programs have fully appreciated and acknowledged the resource they embody. We very much hope that this report will enable readers to better understand the extent to which grandmothers can serve as a resource for the well-being of girls, families and communities.



Judi Aibel

Co-founder and Executive Director of The Grandmother Project

Preface

World Vision's dream is that each child can thrive and fully develop. Yet, this is far from the case for many children, especially for girls. After a 25-year presence in Senegal, World Vision has understood that this dream cannot be realized without taking into account the cultural aspects of development.

All individuals are conditioned by their culture. In most cases, boys and men can escape certain cultural constraints, but this is often far more difficult for women and girls, who are expected to respect and perpetuate certain socio-cultural norms.



World Vision previously collaborated with The Grandmother Project in the context of an infant-feeding program which involved grandmothers. Results from that experience were very positive. In 2008, we called on The Grandmother Project once again to help us develop a strategy to tackle the important issue of girls' development, which, like nutrition, is closely linked to cultural realities. Hence, the Girls' Holistic Development Project was born. The approach used in this project is based on several key components:

- Assessing positive aspects of local culture in order to improve the well-being of children, and especially girls, in collaboration with community members;
- Acknowledging and encouraging cultural practices that can contribute positively to the development of girls, while also addressing existing problems, such as teenage pregnancy and early and forced marriage, which are among the causes of high rates of school drop-out;
- Identifying models for change in local cultures that communities are already familiar with in order to adapt and integrate them into modern approaches to raising children, including schooling, in order to promote the well-being and full development of girls;
- Catalyzing a process of "in-depth dialogue" with communities and providing them with ongoing support.

After having experimented with this approach for three years, the results are very encouraging:

- A bridge has been created between the more "traditional" generation of elders and the more "modern" younger generation;
- The perceived loss of traditional values (conveyed through stories, folktales and songs), in favor of "modern" values (conveyed through television and other media) is less evident, and children are now learning from both worlds;
- Communities are changing certain traditional practices, including early and forced marriage and FGM, thereby decreasing these risks to which girls are exposed; and
- Girls have discovered that their grandmothers can be supportive allies as they face issues related to sexuality, love, pregnancy and many other issues.

This is only a beginning and one that promises sustainable results as we move forward together on the path laid out by The Grandmother Project.

Esther Lehmann-Sow
Director, World Vision Senegal



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Executive Summary

The Girls' Holistic Development (GHD) Project was implemented through a partnership between The Grandmother Project and World Vision from 2008 to 2011 in the Velingara area of southern Senegal. The goal of the project was to strengthen community capacity to promote the health and well-being of girls. The two project objectives were to promote positive cultural values and traditions that contribute to girls' upbringing and development and to discourage certain harmful traditional practices, specifically early marriage, corporal punishment and female genital mutilation, and also to decrease teenage pregnancies. In the GHD project an innovative methodology was used with the following characteristics: a holistic approach to girls' development, encouraging positive cultural roles and traditions, active involvement of elders, particularly of grandmothers, and strengthening communication between generations. The core feature of the project strategy is ongoing community dialogue between community members based on culturally-designated roles and values.

The objective of the strategy is to catalyze discussion on issues related to the well-being of girls and children in general, through various gatherings that involve different age and gender groups and use existing communication channels within the community. The aim is to encourage community members to arrive at a consensus on strategies that families and communities can adopt to ensure the health and well-being of girls and children in general. Other activities include gatherings of grandmothers, mothers, religious leaders and traditional community leaders, teachers, health workers – all with the same objective of encouraging dialogue on GHD.

The project challenged community leaders to continue discussion of the issues addressed during the community forums with other community members. As a result, grandmothers organized informal gatherings with adolescent girls and young children to share traditional knowledge and values. Religious leaders (Imams) organized intergenerational evening gatherings to discuss religious values and their application to modern life. Teachers encouraged children to think about their cultural identity through participatory learning materials developed in the project, and men revitalized teaching of traditional games to children.

After three years, project results are very promising according to the final project evaluation. First, there have been positive changes in attitudes regarding early marriage and female genital mutilation and also a significant decrease in teenage pregnancy. Second, there have been positive changes in actions undertaken by families, communities and schools to promote appreciation of positive cultural values and traditions on the part of young and adolescent children. Two critical factors that have enabled communities to mobilize and undertake these actions are increased communication between generations and increased social cohesion within families and the community at-large. The evaluation and documentation data all support the conclusion that the positive changes observed are associated with the methodology used in the GHD project.

According to Mamadou, an elder in Saré Faremba, "Grandmothers are teachers of both couples and children. It is since the grandmothers have resumed their traditional role in the upbringing of girls that teenage pregnancies have greatly decreased."¹ Both grandmothers and adolescent girls credit the grandmothers for bringing about the changes observed in all communities. According to grandmother Dado, "The other programs did not involve us. We are at the center of the action in the GHD project. Before the project, it was as though the grandmothers were shut up in a dark room. Now we are out in the light." And Syraiel, an adolescent girl, admits that "Before, we spent lots of time watching television and we didn't know anything about our cultural traditions. We have realized that it is much more beneficial for us to spend more time with the grandmothers from whom we can learn so much."

The strong sense of community ownership of the GHD project is another factor that has directly contributed to project results and that increases the prospect of sustainability of those results. The village headman from Sare Couna village, Hamady Baldé, comments on the sense of ownership that exists in the GHD project: "We have great respect for this project which has helped us to bring back our positive cultural values and re-examine those traditions that are no longer appropriate. We must continue these activities even after the project has ended."²

I. Introduction

The well-being of girls in developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, depends on a combination of factors related to their physical, intellectual, emotional and moral development. In many of these contexts, the well-being of girls is threatened by early marriage and teenage pregnancy, which often result in their dropping out of school, and also by violence against them, including female genital mutilation, a common practice in many places in Africa.

Ensuring an environment that promotes girls' protection and development is a concern shared by the Senegalese government and development organizations whose programs target girls and women. This priority is in response to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),¹ as well as other international conventions targeting the protection, health and development of girls and women.²

Although there is broad consensus on the need to prioritize the development of girls and women, finding the best implementation strategies that allow them to reach their potential is a complex and ongoing process. Development aid programs aimed at the well-being of girls tend to specifically, and sometimes exclusively, address them. They often overlook the fact that girls evolve in socio-cultural contexts where the roles, interactions and decisions made by others within families and communities have a decisive influence on them. In addition, many programs do not adequately use "resource persons," who are part of the girls' family environment and who can support their development. For the Girls' Holistic Development (GHD) Project, we adopted a system approach that helped identify and then involve all actors who may influence girls' upbringing and development.

In African societies in the past, grandmothers were in charge of educating young girls on various topics, including sexuality. Over time, young people, parents and even grandmothers began to believe that "traditional" advice from old moms was "outdated" in the "modern" world. This negative thinking has been reinforced by many development programs that have tended to focus on young people and consequently contributed to neglecting grandmothers' potential to promote positive changes in social and cultural norms that benefit girls.

The GHD project used a community approach based on local cultural values and roles, thus giving elders, in general, and grandmothers, in particular, a central role. The methodology aims to acknowledge and encourage positive practices and values (for example, traditional stories, proverbs and peer-group learning) and to discourage harmful practices and values (including early marriage, female genital mutilation and corporal punishment). "Community dialogue" lies at the heart of the approach. This involves a process that promotes collective reflection between different gender and age groups at various points in time and encourages communities to decide for themselves what to do to ensure the optimal development of girls, who will become the women and mothers of tomorrow.

Many development programs focus on various "target groups" within the community by implementing activities aimed at improving or changing their attitudes or skills. However, few programs explicitly set out to strengthen communication dealing with the community's priority issues **between** different age and gender groups to promote the sharing of ideas and understanding among them. Using participatory learning methods from adult education, the GHD project strengthened dialogue between genders and generations on a range of issues related to GHD. The results of this process were increased social cohesion and greater ability of communities to reach consensus on the



Future women, mothers and citizens

need to abandon certain harmful practices while promoting positive values and traditions for the development of girls and boys.

The purpose of this publication is to present the innovative methodology used in the GHD project to other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations and other development actors, as well as to Senegalese government officials, so that they can understand this very promising approach and consider the lessons learned from the project and their possible application in future programs.

The report is divided into chapters addressing the following topics:

- Context of the Girls' Holistic Development Project
- Basis for the Girls' Holistic Development Project
- Project methodology and implementation
- Girls' Holistic Development Project results
- Lessons learned from the Girls' Holistic Development Project.

It analyzes the experience and results from a project implemented in Senegal, but we are convinced that the lessons drawn from this experience can benefit other development organizations conducting projects in other African countries and elsewhere. The methodology of the GHD project targets the development of girls and children. However, the overall approach, emphasizing community dialogue and building on local culture, could undoubtedly be applied to other projects aimed at improving the well-being of children, women, families and communities.



Grandmother Bodiel, Madou Ba, a teacher, and Binta, a trained midwife, dance together and sing praises to grandmothers

Revival of Story-telling through the GHD Project

Communities in the Fouladou region of Senegal share social norms, values, beliefs, customs and practices that are all part of their culture. Culture is so important that the elders refer to it as “the soul of the people”, in Pular, the local language, «fittaandu leñol». In one way or another, this system of cultural values is ingrained in each individual in the society. And it is replicated over and again in successive generations, each one using it in its interaction with others in daily life. The intergenerational forums in the GHD project are the starting point for helping communities to reexamine their cultural identity. Traditional story tales play a critical role in the transmission of culture, though they are even more important in the moral education of the younger generations. It has always been the role of grandmothers to tell stories to children and to assure the protection of all family members from threats to their health and from mystical forces. The GHD project has helped to revive all of those roles. Now, in the evenings children gather together with the grandmother to listen to story tales. The stories often deal with issues that are of great importance in children’s upbringing and that develop positive habits that will help them to take their place in society in a responsible way.

Madou Ba, teacher and promotor of cultural values, Vélingara

II. Context of the Girls' Holistic Development Project

1. Overview of the project area

The GHD project was implemented in the Velingara Department of southern Senegal, in the Upper Casamance or Kolda region, also known also as the Fouladou area. Economically, the region's population combines growing dry-season crops and market gardening in the off-season with extensive livestock and trading activities. The majority of households are poor; education rates are low and daily survival is an ever prevalent issue. The 20 villages included in the GHD project are located in the rural community (*communauté rurale*) of Kandia.¹

The majority of the population are Pulaar (Halpulaar), followed by Mandinka and Soninke groups. Throughout the project area, the extended family is the norm, with several generations sharing the same family compound. In all of these cultures, male and female elders have authoritative status in the family. They are the guardians of tradition, and they influence decisions made by other family members. As long as the grandparents are alive, they live within an "extended family" which can include children, parents, aunts, uncles, co-wives, etc. In this setting, all issues concerning the supervision

and well-being of women, children and adolescent girls are the responsibility of grandmothers given that all family members recognize their expertise in these areas.² Kandia is located in one of Senegal's least educated regions. The gross enrollment rate for Velingara Department is a relatively low 56% when compared to the national average of 70%.³ For children 13 to 18 years old, depending on age and gender, the rate drops dramatically with considerably greater gaps for girls, whose enrollment rate drops from 66.2% at age 7 to only 8.2% at age 18; for boys, it drops from 65.3% to 31.5%. The high levels of school drop-outs are associated with a number of factors related to the education system; but for girls, there are also several gender-specific factors that contribute to this phenomenon, namely early and forced marriage, teenage and unwanted pregnancy, household work and lack of supervision.

There are other major problems that hinder girls' development in the project area, notably the practice of excision and corporal punishment, which is still widely used with children, regardless of gender. These problems constitute serious problems for children, and in particular for girls who aspire to live in an environment that fully supports their well-being and the protection of their rights.

Grandmothers, a Learning Institution

Grandmothers are present in all cultures and communities... they have considerable experience and influence related to all aspects of child development, and they are strongly committed to promoting the well-being of children, their mothers and families. [...] The core roles of grandmothers appear to be universal, whereas much of their knowledge and practices are culturally specific. [...] Some of grandmothers' practices are beneficial for child development, whereas others are not. Most of grandmothers are open to increasing their knowledge in "modern ideas" about child development. Some of grandmothers feel that their status as adviser in child and family development is diminishing.

Judi Aubel,

Grandmothers: A Learning Institution, USAID, 2005

Core Roles of Grandmothers in Halpulaar, Soninke and Mandinka Societies

- > Mediators in case of conflict
- > Guardians of cultural values and traditions
- > Supervisors of young married women
- > Confidantes to and teachers of girls on traditional values
- > Co-managers of children's education and hygiene
- > Managers of family food resources
- > Managers of women's domestic work
- > Advisors on family health
- > Advisors to husbands on the well-being of children and women
- > Spiritual protectors of the family home

2. Major problems facing girls in the project area

Early and forced marriage

Early marriages still persist in Senegalese society, especially in rural settings.⁴ In the Kolda region, the project area, the average age of marriage of girls is 17.6 years,⁵ while in most of Senegal's other regions, the average age is close to or over 20 years of age, and the national average is 21.3 years. Specifically, in the Velingara area, the baseline study conducted in 2008 for the project revealed an average age of 15.6 years for marriage of girls.

In Halpular society, girls were traditionally married off at a very young age. The fact that girls are now sent to school seems to contribute to maintaining the tradition because parents fear that if they continue to attend school beyond puberty this may lead to pregnancy. Hence, families prefer to take girls out of school and give them away in marriage rather than running this risk, which, in their view, would be a source of great shame for the family and would spoil girls' chances for a "good marriage."

Teenage pregnancy

According to the 2005 EDS, 15.3% of mothers are adolescents (15–19 years old). There is a high prevalence of early marriages and teen pregnancies⁶ in the project area in comparison to other regions in Senegal. A study conducted in 2010 in the larger city of Kolda identified only 111 cases of teen pregnancy while 157 were identified in Velingara.⁷ Frequently, girls and families face the problem of teenage pregnancy by retreating into a shamed silence, thereby contributing to the persistence of this phenomenon and its repercussions. One of the consequences is girls' dropping out of school, in spite of a 2009 presidential decree authorizing young mothers to stay in school until they are close to delivery time and to return to school after they give birth.⁸

It is girls who go to school who are at greater risk of becoming pregnant before marriage. This is explained by several factors. On the one hand, girls who are going to school are far away from family supervision and control; and, on the other hand, a high percentage of pregnancies (40%, according to local officials in Kolda) are caused by relationships with teachers.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

According to the 2005 Demographic and Health Survey⁹, over one-quarter of Senegalese girls report that they were cut (28%). In comparison, in the Kolda area, this rate reaches 94%, due to the presence of ethnic groups that still have strong connections to this tradition, such as the Halpulaar, Soninka and Mandinka. Although 64% of women in the area have at least one daughter who had undergone female genital mutilation, 20.7% reported having no intention of cutting their daughters in the future, a promising sign of positive social change.

Female genital mutilation is an ancient cultural practice in which grandmothers play a central role. The qualitative baseline study for the GHD project indicated that since the national law prohibiting the practice was enacted in 1999, FGM has been practiced in secret with grandmothers' consent and in collaboration with mothers, in most cases on little girls in their first months of life.

Corporal punishment

In the Fouladou region of Senegal, when people talk about raising children and the importance of "punishing" them, they invariably refer to the need to whip them in order to have properly disciplined children. For the communities in this area, as elsewhere in Senegal, it is a disgrace to have a "naughty child" who dishonors the family. From time immemorial a widely used adage in the Fouladou says that "to love well is to punish well". Most community members revere corporal punishment as an ancestral rite because they believe you must spank children in order to raise them properly.

During the initial research in the preliminary phase of the GHD project, it was revealed that parents are now afraid of hitting children, because it is now against the law. However, at the same time they are frustrated because they do not see any alternative strategy for punishing children without hitting them.

“I believe that this is a big problem in Senegal, that people have always thought that children should be beaten instead of teaching them right and wrong. I think we need to change our ways and talk more to our children rather than beating them all the time.”

Kandia Binta Sabaly, grandmother and midwife

III. Basis for the Girls' Holistic Development Project

1. Justification for the intervention

World vision (WV) has worked with communities in the Velingara area in southern Senegal for 10 years in integrated development programs.¹ WV programs focus on the well-being of children and have a special interest in girls' development and education. Its work supports the Senegalese government health and education programs and provides various types of support to girls to ensure their health and school attendance. Therefore, school drop-out rates among girls caused by early marriage and teen pregnancy are also major concerns of WV. The high prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) has been a major concern of WV, but given its complexity, the organization had not previously developed a specific strategy to address it. Thus, WV decided to initiate a project to promote the well-being and development of girls, paying attention to early and forced marriage, teen pregnancy and FGM. WV called upon The Grandmother Project (GMP) to provide the technical support to the WV team and local partners from the health and education sectors.

In 2006, GMP coordinated an 18-month preliminary phase of dialogue and consultation with communities to identify a culturally-appropriate strategy to address the development and well-being of girls with an emphasis on abandoning harmful traditional practices, namely early and forced marriage, FGM and corporal punishment and also the contemporary problem of teen pregnancy among schoolgirls. Following the initial phase, a three-year project, called the Girls' Holistic Development Project (GHD), was developed and implemented starting in 2008 in 20 villages in the rural district (Communauté Rurale) of Kandia, in Velingara, with funding mainly from WV Canada and USAID Senegal.

2. The Grandmother Project approach

The Grandmother Project is a non-governmental organization that works in developing countries to address various issues related to the well-being of children and women. GMP's experience with and

lessons learned from action-research conducted in several countries² led to the development of an innovative approach that respects culture while promoting change.

The approach developed by The Grandmother Project is based on three core concepts:

- > Recognition and inclusion of grandmothers and elders;
- > Strengthening intergenerational communication; and
- > Using participatory communication and education methods to strengthen the capacity of leaders and groups to mobilize their communities for positive change.

► Inclusion of grandmothers and elders

In developing countries, elders are respected for their experience and the support they provide to younger generations. Grandmothers play a specific role in teaching and caring for children and women. GMP sees grandmothers as a cultural resource and as key actors in all development programs dealing with women and children.

► Strengthening intergenerational communication

Many cultures are experiencing a widening generation gap, and this affects the well-being of families and communities. GMP uses intergenerational dialogue to promote mutual understanding and social cohesion so that community members can work together to address issues related to the development and well-being of all.



Grandmothers are an abundant and under-utilized cultural resource

► **Using participatory communication and education methods to strengthen the capacity of leaders and groups**

In order for communities to be able to solve their problems and to promote the well-being of women and children, they need competent and committed leaders. GMP uses participatory adult education methods to strengthen the capacity of community leaders and groups in participatory techniques for decision-making, problem solving and collective action.

3. The GHD project's preliminary phase: Listening to the community

In both the GMP and WV approaches, community participation is a key component during the design phase of any project. Hence, in the GHD project there was a preliminary phase that aimed to:

- Understand local actors' viewpoints on girls' development and well-being;
- Understand the interaction and decision-making systems within families and communities;
- Encourage community members to propose strategies to respond to problems that hinder girls' well-being;
- Ensure that strategies developed would be culturally adapted and responsive to community priorities;
- Strengthen relationships between development workers and communities; and
- Increase the sense of ownership of the proposed strategies.

The preliminary phase of the project was carried out in two steps:

1. A rapid qualitative listening study
2. A series of dialogue-forums with community representatives.

In the preliminary phase, over 500 community members were involved. During the listening study and community forums, information was collected on community attitudes and concerns related to GHD.

3.1 Community concerns

Through community participation in the qualitative listening study and in the intergenerational forums, community members identified three major concerns relating to the upbringing and development of girls, in particular, and of children, in general:

- **Lack of communication between young people and adults, especially between young people and elders;**
- **Loss of traditional values and cultural identity;**
- **Lack of involvement by parents and grandparents in children's upbringing at home.**

► **Lack of communication between young people and adults, especially between young people and elders.**

In the preliminary community study, the majority of the community interviewees identified problems related to:

- Children spending little time with parents and grandparents because they spend most of their time either at school or with their friends;
- Parents often resorting to corporal punishment to "teach" their children; an approach which does not encourage communication between them.

“*Nowadays there are not many young people who benefit from the knowledge of elders because there is little interaction between young people and elders. For me, it's not easy to talk about my problems with elders because I feel ashamed. I prefer to share my problems with my friends. But it's important that we communicate more with them, otherwise we can't benefit from their knowledge. I think that it's up to the elders to encourage communication with young people.*”

Fodé, a young father, Saré Faremba

► **Loss of traditional values and cultural identity**

All community interviewees expressed the feeling that there has been a significant weakening of moral and cultural values and traditions within families which has had a direct influence on the upbringing and development of children in general and girls in particular. During the dialogue-forums, participants identified 12 key values that are being lost.

“*We are no longer really black except by our skin colour. We are not white either. We have ceased being ourselves and we no longer know who we are.*”

Diabou Baldé, grandmother

According to communities, the most important value for the younger generations, and the basis for all others, is "respect of elders." Participants often mentioned this value during the community study and in the initial community forums too.

“*Positive traditional values are being lost because elders are no longer listened to or revered in our society. Children no longer communicate with parents, which explains why they are not well mannered. Nowadays, the words of elders' are treated like a gust of wind.*”

Kounkandé Diao, village headman, Mountoumba

“The forum is an old African tradition. It is nothing more than young people and elders gathering under the palaver tree to discuss and to solve community problems. Nowadays, youth and elders have few opportunities to talk to each other. The intergenerational forums are a way to revive this ancient practice.”

Mamadou Coulibaly, teacher and facilitator in the GHD project

What is an Intergenerational Forum?

The dialogue-forum, also called the intergenerational forum, is an approach developed by GMP to bring together around 20 community members of both genders and various ages to elicit dialogue on identified issues. Using a pedagogical approach based on adult education methods, and with an experienced facilitator, participants are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and opinions, as well as new knowledge that is shared with them. The goal of the dialogue-forum is not to “convince” or “persuade” people to accept a given idea or to think in a specific way. Rather, the goal is to catalyze reflection among participants so that they analyze alternative attitudes and situations and decide themselves what to do. Dialogue is often facilitated by group exercises related to each issue under discussion. The discussion takes place first in separate homogenous groups, by age and gender—for example, between grandmothers—followed by a plenary session in which different gender and age groups continue the discussion together. The main objective is to elicit dialogue and exchange of ideas during the forum and to encourage participants to continue the discussion once they return to their communities.

Community members identified the following reasons for the weakening of these values:

- Tension between traditional values and behaviors expected from children at home and the values and behaviors accepted in the school setting;
- Children’s decreased respect for elders;
- Decline in the moral, cultural and religious education of children in the family and community, including less use of folktales and abandonment of girls’ traditional education groups;
- Loss of traditional cultural events, ceremonies, music, and;
- Negative influence of modern music and television on children.

“Now, children no longer know anything about our traditional values. But it is not their fault. As I see it, it is the elders who no longer fully play their role in educating children.”

Bocar Mballo, father, Saré Adja

► Lack of involvement by parents and grandparents in children’s upbringing

A third problem identified by community members is inadequate involvement of parents and elders in the formal and informal teaching of children, especially girls. The rapid qualitative study clearly showed that communities do not have a clear understanding of the complementary roles that should be played by families and teachers in children’s education. Findings revealed that:

- Many parents and elders think that schools alone should be responsible for “educating” children;
- Parents and elders underestimate the importance of passing on traditional values to children;

- The “rights of the child” approach that minimizes the “duties of children” is perceived as imposing inappropriate foreign values.

“It is because parents and elders have abandoned their role in raising their own children that children behave as they do today. Young people don’t make any distinction between right and wrong. They behave as they like and no longer have any points of reference. Parents and elders must take back their role as educators in the family before it is too late.”

Ansou Baldé and Mamadou Sabaly, village headmen of Kandia and Saré Yéro Meta

“There are many things that we don’t know about our cultural values. And no one is teaching us these values.”

Djénaba Mbalo, 14 years old girl



Participants at the end of the dialogue-forum in Koukandé

12 Priority Values Identified by Communities

- > Respect of elders
- > Love of your neighbor
- > Honesty
- > Love of work
- > Modesty
- > Solidarity
- > Generosity
- > Patience
- > Hospitality
- > Speaking respectfully
- > Decency
- > Respect of family kinship ties

3.2 Solutions suggested by communities

During the dialogue-forums, communities collectively discussed possible strategies to overcome these three major problems. The proposed solutions were:

- Re-establish confidence among parents in their own roles as educators;
- Actively involve grandmothers in all community programs for the well-being of girls and boys;
- Clarify the concept of the “rights” and “responsibilities” of children in families and schools;
- Discuss with parents and communities methods for raising and disciplining children that promote dialogue rather than authoritative repression;
- Strengthen communication between schools and communities;
- Promote understanding of traditional cultural values and expressions in schools (stories, music, games and songs);
- Increase the use of folktales and proverbs in families, communities and schools; and
- Organize community forums to identify ways to reduce the negative influence of television and modern music and to acknowledge and promote local musical traditions.



Satisfied participants at the end of the Kounkandé forum

Community members who participated in the initial forums had very positive feedback on this activity. All community actors said that they had never participated in a community gathering where men and women, young and old all participated together. They expressed their strong appreciation for this approach.

“During the forum, we shared ideas and learned from one another. Peace prevailed during our discussions. We didn’t discuss the law against excision, and our traditions were not criticized. Nobody told us that we had to stop excision. We received new information on it, and then we were encouraged to discuss it among ourselves.”

Demmo Sabaly, grandmother leader, Saare Yero Gano

The results of the preliminary phase of the listening and dialogue with communities became core elements that guided the development of the GDH strategy. Both community concerns and community-proposed solutions were woven into the three-year project. We are convinced that the strong community interest in and support for the GHD project was partly due to the fact that from the start the strategy incorporated community concerns and suggestions.

4. Respecting culture and promoting change

“First and foremost, you need to embrace your own roots before opening up to the values of others.”

Léopold Sédar Senghor, first President of Senegal

Most programs aimed at improving the condition of young people target first and foremost this age group. However, this approach is not really consistent with African cultural values: According to Oumarou Diallo, a young man and a community development worker at World Vision, “It’s not African to start with young people.”

The unique feature of this project is its emphasis on the cultural context in which children, and specifically girls, grow up. In all African societies there is a hierarchical system within families in which parents and grandparents have a decisive influence on all decisions regarding children and where young people cannot make independent decisions. In the approach adopted in the GHD project, elders play a central role and senior women are accorded a special role given that in the family they are consulted by all other family members on all issues concerning women and children and, more generally, those related to running the household.

“The success of the GHD project lies in the respect accorded to cultural values. That was the basis for the strong sense of community mobilization and owner-

ship of project activities that we have observed. Many programs do not respect and involve the elders, which is a great source of frustration to them. In this project the elders were respected and involved.”

Moussa Mballo, elder and community leader, Velingara

“ In this project, we have given special attention to something that has been forgotten in past programs, namely our cultural roots. One aspect of the approach that I appreciate very much, that comes from our culture, is the recognition and involvement of grandmothers. Grandmothers have an important influence on children’s upbringing. The project strategy which brings grandmothers and children together will give them the opportunity to learn from grandmothers, who have so much to teach them.”

Patrice Diatta,

World Vision Coordinator, Velingara (until 2008)

Building on the cultural reality, the GHD project explicitly targets older women as catalysts of change, while at the same time involving other key community members, such as village headmen and other community and religious leaders who jointly have a decisive impact on social norms. Grandmothers in particular play a central role in decisions

regarding marriage of young girls, and whether or not to cut young female children. It is also important to recognize that traditionally they acted as advisors to young girls.

“I believe that culture is a very important part of sustainable development. I don’t know of any people in the world who could confidently progress and embark on the future without having a culture to support them.”³

Wangari Maathai (2004), Nobel Peace Prize recipient



An exercise to discuss the lessons drawn from proverbs (in Pulaar)



Grandmothers: Custodians of African Culture

In African societies, men are the custodians of power which is rooted in and legitimated by tradition. This power is acquired through a series of trials and learning experiences that take place either in formal schools, in the school of life or during initiation ceremonies and isolation. Generally, during all this time, women, who are destined to remain in the home, follow another path. They do not participate in decision making, nor do they exercise authority or get involved in managing community affairs.

However, while staying at home, women, girls who were nurtured by the aunts, grandmothers, etc. progressively learned the foundations of their culture that the grandmothers passed on to them and they saw this heritage growing each day. By staying with children and sometimes being inactive, they rely on culture to protect and teach their children and to help them

thrive. Hence over time and once they become grandmothers, they are able to fully assume their role as culturally designated guardians of the rich African culture.

Children spend time with their grandmothers and thereby forge their cultural identity which prepares them for their future. As yesterday’s mothers and today’s grandmothers, they are closer to, more sensitive to and more experienced than anyone else regarding issues affecting children and the household. They are also the best training schools for young women.

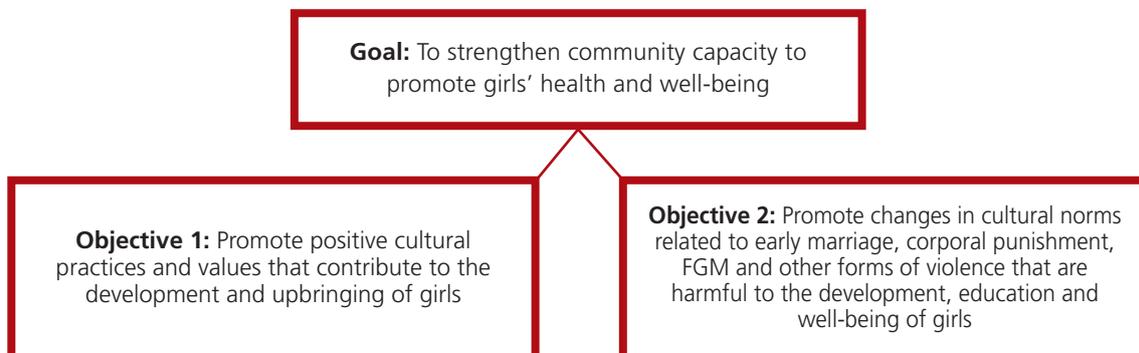
For these reasons the experience of the grandmothers is a resource that should not be overlooked when seeking a solution to any community problem, because they are better equipped than anyone to identify solutions to community problems, be they economic, environmental or social, provided by the limitless African culture. Whether it is a question of preventing or solving conflicts, there is no way that these situations can be handled without involving grandmothers.

Falilou Cissé, Community Development Advisor, GMP

4.1 Goals of the GHD project

Dialogue with communities during the project's preliminary phase provided a basis for formulating one overall goal and two main objectives for the GHD project framework. The formulation of the project objectives was also influenced by the in-

sightful idea of the Malian philosopher, Amadou Hampaté Ba. He proposed in 1985 that traditions that are no longer useful should be abandoned, whereas those that are beneficial in preserving cultural identity should be actively promoted.



4.2 GHD project actors

Five key groups of people were involved in carrying out project activities. They came from both inside and outside the community and participated in the various activities promoting dialogue on GHD. The most influential and respected community representatives participated in the intergenerational fo-

ums; all community members participated in other community gatherings; children and young people were involved in the school activities; and grandmothers and women attended non formal education organized with each of these groups of women. All of these actors are listed in the table below:

Grandmothers, a Great Resource for School Teachers and Students



From my experience I can compare the GHD project with other programs that have aimed to improve the educational system in Senegal. The innovative aspect of this approach is that it involves senior women, or grandmothers, who are a cultural resource that is found at the heart of all African communities and who play a central role in the social fabric of the society. Within each family they are the ones who orient other family members while always ensuring that equilibrium and harmony are maintained. When a family is well supervised the whole community benefits.

When grandmothers were asked to come into the schools to “teach” children, immediately we were able to see the benefits of this strategy. If we are talking about bringing up children, helping young people to develop, promoting the positive cultural traditions in our culture, none of this can be done without the grandmothers. This approach is in line with the concerns of the Senegalese government in terms of children’s development and learning. It is essential that we provide young people with programs that allow them to feel that they belong in their own society, that they learn the values that underpin their own culture while at the same time they are informed about the wider contemporary world. In the past, there was a gap between the elder and younger generations, they were no longer communicating with each other. Intergenerational communication, which is the foundation upon which this program is built, has made it possible to re-establish the links between the generations.

The other positive aspect is that communities have developed a much closer relationship with the schools, simply because they now feel that schools are useful to them rather than viewing schools as a foreign element in their midst. The GHD project created a sense of solidarity between community members and teachers. Schools are no longer viewed as a place that alienates children from their own cultural environment but rather as a place that contributes to local development, and that helps to preserve our positive cultural traditions.

Mamadou Coulibaly, Teacher and Program Officer, GMP

The Girls' Holistic Development Project Actors

Community members

- Grandmothers
- Women
- Religious leaders
- Village headmen
- Elders/grandfathers
- Trained midwives
- Teachers
- Adolescent girls
- Men
- Adolescent boys



Institutional partners

- Departmental Education Office (IDEN)
- District Health Office



Project team

- Community development workers
- Coordinator



Cultural actors

- Musicians
- Singers
- Sages
- Actors
- Writers
- Praise singers
- Local radio announcers



GMP technical support team

- Facilitators
- Methodology advisor



4.3 GHD project implementation steps

The steps followed in the process to catalyze and support ongoing community dialogue on girls' holistic development are described in the following table. The project team implemented each of these steps in approximately this order to elicit and con-

tinually expand community dialogue on an ongoing basis. The team also encouraged the community to initiate their own series of activities to continue to promote positive traditional practices and discourage harmful ones in an ongoing fashion.

Steps	Activities and Approaches
1. Identify influential community members within each segment of the population: traditional leaders and elders, religious leaders, grandmothers, men and women, and teachers	Rapid qualitative listening study Community visits
2. Establish trust with "influential persons" from each category of community actors	Informal meetings with individuals Informal meetings with individuals Recognizing and valuing each category of actors; and Eliciting their viewpoints and concerns related to the GHD project
3. Facilitate the "self-selection" process of villages that will participate in the project	Community meetings A series of meetings with each community to inform them about the project and then let them decide whether or not they want to participate.
4. Initiate intergenerational dialogue—between elders and adult men and women—on the GHD project	Intergenerational forums (every six months) Dialogue on community traditions and knowledge and on priority issues related to GHD, early marriage, teen pregnancy, corporal punishment and FGM
5. Catalyze discussion within the community-at-large on the issues concerning GHD addressed during the forums	Post-forum community meetings Follow-up visits to each community to maintain contact with influential persons, or leaders, and encourage them to continue the dialogue on GHD issues with other community members
6. Elicit dialogue on GHD with groups of grandmothers and groups of women of reproductive age	Communication/education sessions use of stories-without-an-ending on issues related to GHD during sessions
7. Reflection among teachers on children's education at school and at home	Teacher workshops on the role of the school and of families in children's education and upbringing (two times per year)
8. Encourage reflection among children on their cultural heritage and modern life	Participatory learning activities in primary schools Use of materials dealing with cultural values and identity at school (songs, games, "The Role of Grandmothers" booklet) Informal discussions at school led by grandmothers and grandfathers about traditional stories and traditional values
9. Strengthen community reflection on activities they can undertake on their own to promote GHD	Creation of a Local Monitoring Committee in each community Orientation and training workshops for Local Monitoring Committees
10. Catalyze dialogue between community health workers, midwives and grandmother leaders	Participatory workshops with community health workers and grandmother leaders Reflection on issues concerning GHD
11. Catalyze dialogue between villages on the promotion of GHD	Creation of an Inter-village Committee with representatives from each village
12. Encourage sharing and dialogue between grandmothers from different villages	Praise of grandmothers days GMs from different villages gather for a day to share experiences on promoting GHD in their respective villages Young girls share the traditional knowledge they have learned from their grandmothers (songs, stories, dances)
13. Encourage dialogue between village headmen, Imams and teachers of Arabic and religion	Participatory workshops to exchange ideas on GHD Dialogue between representatives of various communities on cultural and religious values related to excision

5. Community dialogue and culture

The innovative characteristics of the approach used by GMP are first, its emphasis on dialogue and second, the fact that the cultural values and heritage of the communities are the basis for all interventions aimed at supporting positive social change. In the communication and education approach used in the GHD project, the concept of “*dialogue*” is based on the notion of encouraging individuals or groups to share experiences and points of view vis-à-vis various situations or problems. The approach does not involve “persuading” or “convincing” community members what they should do. Rather, it involves listening to and respecting community members’ points of view, sharing information, eliciting critical reflection through questioning and encouraging them to work together in considering the best strategies or solutions to address specific issues—for example, girls’ education, pregnancy among schoolgirls or how to punish children without hitting them.

In the GMP approach two complementary aspects of culture are taken into consideration:

- **Social norms:** They determine a community’s attitude and practices; and

- **Social organization:** This defines the designated roles of different family systems and community actors, as well as, the communication networks and patterns between them.

“*This project gives communities the opportunity to re-examine their culture and to revive positive aspects, such as the role of elders, and especially of grandmothers. It uses modes of communication which are culturally grounded. I very much appreciate the fact that in the project, culture is perceived as a resource for change.*”

Dr. Joyce Olenja, anthropologue anthropologist, University of Nairobi, Kenya

A Word of Caution

It is important to realize that eliciting dialogue between gender and age groups, who are not used to talking to each other and/or who have conflicting opinions on specific issues, **may lead to greater understanding between participants but may also lead to greater disagreement.** This is why skilled facilitators are required to initiate dialogue between and within the different gender and age groups who are not accustomed to communicating with each other in an open and respectful way.

Community Dialogue

Key facets of community dialogue to promote community-driven change in socio-cultural norms and practices



5.1. The seven key principles of the GHD project

The GHD project in Senegal is based on GMP's three core concepts discussed above and also on a number of other principles that suggest how the approach differs from that used in many other programs with a similar goal of improving the health and well-being of girls, and children in general. The seven key principles that underpin the GHD project methodology are:

N° 1: A holistic approach that promotes all aspects of girls' development: intellectual, spiritual, cultural, physical, psychological and moral

N° 2: Strengthening positive cultural values and traditions and discouraging harmful traditions

N° 3: Recognition and inclusion of grandmothers, in particular, and elders, in general

N° 4: Acknowledgement of and partnership with influential people and respected leaders in the community

N° 5: Strengthening of intergenerational communication: children, adolescents, adults and elders

N° 6: Use of participatory communication and adult education methods to catalyze community dialogue for action

N° 7: Consensus building within communities to bring about lasting change of social norms.

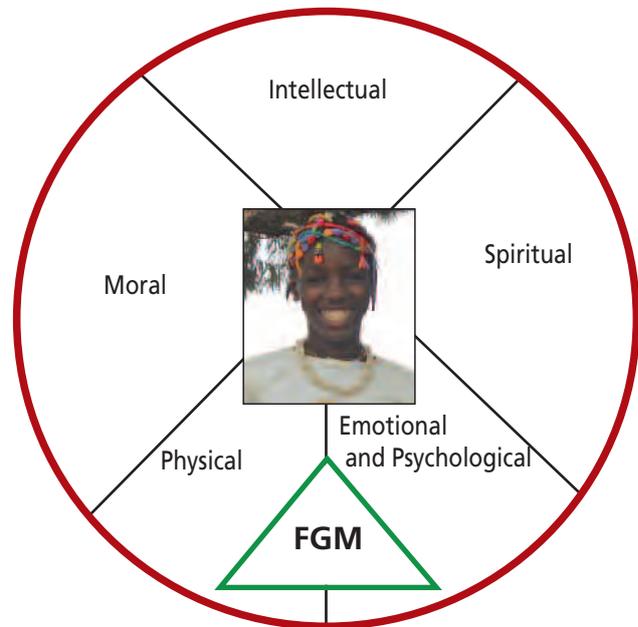
Each of the principles is described below with an explanation of its importance to the GHD project and comments from the community.

N° 1. A holistic approach that promotes all aspects of girls' development: intellectual, spiritual, cultural, physical, psychological and moral

Often programs that aim to promote the well-being of girls or women single out one aspect of their development to be addressed, such as early marriage or FGM. During the project's preliminary phase, community members clearly expressed their concerns about a variety of problems related to the

upbringing and development of girls and boys. Based on these inputs from community members, it was decided that a holistic approach taking into account all facets of girls' growth and development would be adopted.

Multiple Aspects of Girls' Holistic Development Addressed in the Project



“What is really important in this approach is that it supports girls' integrated development. If the project had come to just talk about FGM, we would have rejected it.”

Demba Baldé, grandfather

“It's like when you harvest your crops, you keep the good part and you throw away the bad part.”

Waly Baldé, a young man



A grandmother explains her understanding of girls' holistic development



Young girls have rediscovered their cultural roots

N° 2. Strengthening positive cultural values and traditions and discouraging harmful traditions

“Be rooted in your own culture. Preserve positive traditional values and let abusive customs disappear.”

Amadou Hampâté Ba, “A Letter to Youth”, 1985

This quote from Amadou Hampâté Ba was frequently used throughout the project to give communities confidence in their cultural heritage by acknowledging and encouraging positive traditions and stimulating reflection on harmful ones. As early as the project’s preliminary phase, the loss of cultural identity, particularly among youth, was noted as one of the communities’ main concerns. Both grandparents and parents, as well as young people strongly expressed their concerns about the “tragic loss of cultural values”. An important lesson drawn from international development programs is that when they are built on existing social-cultural systems, they have greater prospects of influencing social norms and, therefore, of having a lasting impact.⁴

Building on the cultural realities of each society is a central concept in the methods developed by GMP. In the GHD project, it is not only a question of respecting cultural values and roles but also of actively promoting those that are beneficial to the development of girls and children in general. Specific examples of this tenet include acknowledging the role of elders, praising grandmothers, and promoting traditional stories, music, dances, games and crafts.

In the GHD project communities, all of these traditions were being lost and the project worked to revive them. The fact that positive traditions and cultural values were explicitly promoted is a significant difference between this approach and those of many other organizations.



A grandmother named Mama tells traditional stories to young girls

“Elders are the only ones who can bring back the beneficial traditions and teach them to children because they are the only ones who know them. If children don’t have the benefit these traditions, it will be an enormous loss for all our communities.”

Yoba Mballo, village headman, Saré Boula

N° 3. Recognition and inclusion of grandmothers in particular, and elders in general

Taking into consideration the social organization of communities and the roles played by various family and community members is the foundation for the GMP methodology. In all African cultures, elders play an important role in families and communities as educators and advisors to younger generations. However, the authority and power they assert can have either a positive or negative effect. Both grandfathers and grandmothers play these important roles. But it is the grandmothers who have greater responsibility for advising, supervising and supporting young children and girls, based on the gender-specific roles. GMs are also very influential in decisions made by parents concerning their children, especially regarding issues related to schooling, marriage and particularly FGM.

A widespread phenomenon in African societies is that communication between grandmothers and young girls is generally easier than between young girls and their mothers. The more open relationship that exists between grandmothers and their granddaughters is an important aspect of family communication systems that programs dealing with adolescent girls have not often recognized. For all of these reasons, inclusion of grandmothers in project activities is beneficial because they can play a role as a catalyst for change in families and communities.



A teacher-facilitator listens with respect to grandmothers’ ideas

“The first important ingredient for girls’ development is the grandmothers.”

Mama, grandmother from Saré Adja

“Grandmothers are the ones who take the girls to be cut, and parents only find out afterwards. A project that deals with FGM in a community must involve grandmothers because they are the ones who make decisions about FGM in the family, and they are the ones who have the strongest attachment to this practice.”

Bebel, woman of reproductive age



Binta, a highly respected grandmother and midwife in the community and a key actor in the GHD project

mal and informal leaders. An important principle from the field of community development is the need to identify and involve such influential individuals whether their status is formally or informally recognized. For the development and well-being of girls, these influential people may include: village headmen and elders, religious leaders, grandmothers and, specifically, grandmother leaders. Often, these are not the people who will change the fastest, but once they decide to adopt a new attitude or behavior, they will usually have significant influence on other members of the community and on community norms.



A skit on excision presented by community members from Saré Coly Tennegh

Working with grandmothers requires adopting an approach that is adapted to both the culture and the psychology of these women. Recognizing and involving grandmothers does not mean excluding other community actors. On the contrary, support from grandfathers, community leaders and fathers and mothers is essential in promoting and sustaining changes to community norms.

“I very much appreciate the fact that this project is working to revive positive values and cultural practices and that grandmothers play a central role in the activities. In this approach, grandmothers are no longer seen as the problem; instead, they are perceived to be part of the solution.”

Dr. Joyce Olenja, anthropologist, University of Nairobi, Kenya

N° 4. Acknowledgement of and partnership with influential people and respected leaders in the community

In all communities, certain people are highly respected, listened to by their peers and have an influence on the attitudes and practices of others. Some of them, both men and women, are formally recognized as leaders, whereas others may not be called “leaders” but nevertheless they are respected and have influence on others. In collectivist African societies individuals are usually very much influenced by the socio-cultural norms that prevail in the community. And these norms tend to be strongly influenced by the attitudes of both for-

It is also important to involve leaders from youth groups who have significant influence on their peers and can promote responsible behavior, particularly regarding the issue of teen pregnancy.

“I came to this forum with my village headman. We have been discussing the question of early marriage of our girls. I think the information has fallen on the right ears.”

Ladde Mballo, grandmother leader, Saré Faasi Pathi

“It’s good to involve traditional community leaders and religious leaders because when decision-making is involved; they play a determining role.”

Thierno Baldé man from Kandia

N° 5. Strengthening intergenerational communication: children, adolescents, adults and elders

In the preliminary phase of the GHD project, community representatives strongly lamented and emphasized the lack of communication between adults, adolescents and children. Those initial discussions allowed the project team to discern the depth of the generation gap.

In the GHD project, the approach used to encourage intergenerational communication is based on traditional modes of imparting knowledge between elders and the younger generation. It is based on respect for elders and their experience, while at the same time encouraging

discussion by all ages of contemporary issues experienced by youth.

“What I really like in this project is that it unites all social and age groups who come together to debate problems affecting their development, in general, and the girls’ well-being, in particular.”

Babacar Ndour, health program manager,
World Vision, Velingara

In order to achieve lasting changes in community norms, there must be broad consensus between family and community members. Everyone must be involved, especially if the norms are related to early marriage, corporal punishment, FGM or behaviors that contribute to teenage pregnancy. Intergenerational and cross-gender communication allows for sharing opinions on fundamental issues related to girls’ development and contributes to intergenerational learning. Mutual respect and communication between children, adolescents, adults and elders are prerequisites for understanding and solidarity within families and communities.

“There is often an obstacle in our society because the various segments of society do not openly speak to each other. It’s beneficial to put men and women and various age groups together so that each can learn from the other.”

Mamadou Alpha Mballo, elder and former
Senator of the Republic, Velingara

“I am 46 years old and I have never sat on the same mat on the floor next to him as you see me doing right now. He’s my husband’s older brother. Before, I would have been ashamed to do so because he’s my brother-in-law. Now, I’m more comfortable participating in discussions with him and with others. I couldn’t have done this before the GHD project.”

Hawa Mballo, grandmother leader, Saré Boula

N° 6. Use of participatory communication and adult-education methods to catalyze community dialogue for collective action

Development programs often use communication strategies that emphasize the dissemination of “messages” in order to “sensitize” and “persuade” people to adopt prescribed practices. GMP has developed an approach that encourages horizontal dialogue, critical analysis of issues related to community well-being, respect for and acknowledgement of everyone’s knowledge, and experience of all participants. Communication is at the heart of the GHD community project, the primary objective is to stimulate dialogue and reflection among the various community groups (elders, youth, women and men) as well as between them. In a series of ac-

tivities (forums, workshops, community meetings and small group sessions) a process of facilitated dialogue enables participants to assess the advantages and disadvantages of both existing practices and of new information and it catalyzes reflection among community groups to identify their own conclusions and solutions.

“In the past, I attended many meetings on various topics. With other projects, it was always like a teacher coming to impart his knowledge. My role was only to listen. In GHD, every time the facilitators encourage me to give my own opinion.”

Bassirou Diao,
community health worker, Kandaye

In fact, in the project there are no “messages” that tell people, for example, that they must abandon early marriage or FGM. Information is shared, but the project team is very careful never to tell communities what they should do.

“FGM is a cultural practice that came from our ancestors. This is why we must discuss it with great respect for the points of view of community members’ and accept that there are varying opinions. I appreciate your approach because you have not come to convince us to abandon this practice. You just stimulate discussion between us. I really encourage you to continue using this approach that promotes discussion among people.”

Thierno Boubacar Diallo, Imam, Kerouan

The pedagogical methods used in the DHF project, inspired by experiences carried out in Latin America by Paulo Freire,⁵ involve an analysis of real situations, particularly through stories without an ending, theatrical skits and other group exercises where facilitators do not offer a solution.

N° 7. Consensus building within communities to bring about lasting change of social norms

The influence of social norms on individual behavior has been well documented in development projects that target harmful practices like early marriage or FGM.⁶ Senegalese society, like other African societies, is collectivist and its members like to behave within the social norms. Therefore, an individual tends to conform to the behaviors of his or her peer, or reference group. In light of this reality, programs that seek to improve girls’ upbringing and development should aim to promote consensus among community groups that influence norms related to GHD. The GHD project promotes both dialogue and consensus within the different social groups, first and foremost among grandmothers, and then mothers. But the dialogue and consensus building was not limited to these groups. It in-

Paulo Freire:
Changing the Development Paradigm

Freire critiqued Third World development projects that use a “banking approach” to transfer solutions to communities, thereby reinforcing their dependency on outsiders. He called instead for programs to promote critical thinking on the part of communities that leads to community decision-making and empowerment, decreasing dependency on outsiders to solve community problems.

cluded all other key groups of influential community actors including sages, Imams, teachers and community health workers. In many community programs, in order to promote change within communities, alliances are developed with community members who are judged to be more “modern” and “open to change” as a strategy for getting them to encourage others to change. Often these are younger, better educated people but they may not necessarily be respected by other community members, particularly influential community leaders and others who have more experience. The reasoning behind the GHD project on how to promote change within communities was somewhat different. It was based on the premise that the impetus for change in community norms and practices related to GHD should indeed come from

within the community. But the assumption was that those who could best catalyze re-examination of certain culturally and socially-rooted phenomena, (e.g. early marriage and FGM), are “opinion leaders” from within the local community or the area, who are firmly rooted in the socio-cultural fiber of the society but who themselves are more “open minded” than others on the GHD issues addressed. These opinion leaders, also viewed as community resource persons, included: 1) certain imams who were either from the rural area adjacent to the villages involved, or from Velingara town; 2) several trained midwives, who were also grandmothers; 3) a self-taught sage on local culture; 4) an elder who is the president of the departmental association of parents and teachers; 5) more experienced teachers; and 6) local artists (musicians and actors) who were involved in producing cultural material related to GHD topics. It took time to identify these resource persons and to establish relationships with them, but over time they played an ever more important role by sharing their points of view on the various GHD topics and by encouraging communities to reflect on both existing norms and practices and new, or alternative ways of thinking about those issues. The following table presents a comparison of the predominant approach used in many programs that target girls and the approach adopted by GMP in the GHD project.

Improving the Lives of Girls: Contrasting Approaches	
<i>Characteristics of the predominant approach to girls’ development</i>	<i>Characteristics of the GMP approach to girls’ development</i>
Many programs address only one facet of girls’ development (for example, FGM or early marriage).	The program addresses multiple facets of girls’ development (early marriage, teen pregnancy, corporal punishment, moral and intellectual development, etc.)
Culture is given limited attention and it is often viewed as a barrier to be overcome.	Culture is perceived as a central pillar of society and as an important resource to be respected and utilized.
The main goal is to discourage inappropriate attitudes and practices and to encourage the adoption of appropriate practices.	The goal is first, to promote positive cultural values and practices and second, to discourage harmful cultural practices.
Many programs focus specifically on girls, and sometimes their mothers, but rarely involve elders, men or GMs.	A central role is accorded to grandmothers and elders who are encouraged to actively participate.
Activities are primarily aimed at specific target groups but do not explicitly aim to strengthen communication and relationships between different categories of community members.	Activities catalyze and strengthen communication and relationships within and between different categories of community members.
Communication is based on transmitting messages and convincing people to change their behavior.	Communication is based on dialogue and collective reflection, <i>vis à vis</i> past experiences and new information, so that community members reach their own decision on what they want to do or not to do.

IV. Project methodology and implementation

1. Project methodology

Communication lies at the heart of the process of social change in the GHD project. The process is elicited within and between peer groups through the acknowledgment and strengthening of the communication channels that exist within the community. Communication relationships are created between segments of society that do not usually communicate on sensitive or complex issues such as early marriage, teen pregnancy or FGM. With a view to changing community norms, and taking into account the structure of society and the influential role of elders in defining and communicating social norms to other members of the society, most of the activities led by the project team involve elders, grandmothers and grandfathers. Other activities involve teachers and health workers.

Participants Involved in Community Dialogue

- > Grandmothers
- > Grandfathers
- > Women
- > Men
- > Adolescent girls
- > Religious leaders (Imams)
- > Community leaders, village headmen
- > Teachers
- > Community health workers
- > Organizations of adolescents
- > School-aged children

Examples of Community Dialogue Activities



Elders discuss with the Imam



The game "Who Are We?" which stimulates children to reflect on their cultural identity



Inter-village gatherings of grandmothers



A discussion between young men

The goal of these various activities is to get adults and elders, as well as education and health sector field staff, to discuss and decide what actions can be taken to promote the well-being of children and adolescents in families, schools and communities.

In the GHD project the aim of community dialogue is to encourage communication in both more structured and informal contexts between different generations and within and between men’s and women’s groups. The goal is to **catalyze dialogue** to promote collective reflection and consensus-building regarding priority actions to improve the well-being of girls and children, and of the entire community.

The concept of **catalyst** in the GMP strategic approach (see also diagram on page 19) refers to a facilitator or activity that triggers community examination of well-known community problems or concerns and that can lead to a collective decision that results in social change. The diagram

below shows the process of community dialogue and the anticipated outcome of this process: community action to promote positive practices and to discourage harmful ones.

Various activities (listed in the table on the next page) were organized by the project to catalyze dialogue, which is then extended into the community-at-large by participants. For example, the forums provide a framework for elders, grandmothers and grandfathers, married and unmarried women and men to discuss — sometimes for the first time—these sensitive issues. Adolescents and children are not involved at this level but participate in organized school and community activities. After the forums the dialogue continues in the community within the age and gender groups and between these groups. The ultimate objective is for each community to reach a consensus on what actions can be taken to strengthen positive traditional practices and also how to abandon those that are not.

Girls’ Holistic Development Project Methodology: Community Dialogue



Madou Ba, teacher and facilitator, discussing corporal punishment with elders



A group of grandmothers discuss a history-without-an-ending about early marriage

The following table lists the various activities that promote dialogue on GHD issues within the community. In the left column, activities initiated by the project are listed, which involve adults and

children of different ages. In the right column, a series of activities that were spontaneously initiated by adults with the younger generations are listed.

Community Dialogue Activities

Activities initiated by the project

- > Intergenerational forums
- > Participatory education/communication sessions with grandmothers' and women's groups, attended by representatives of the village council of elders
- > Praise of grandmothers days
- > Workshops with village headmen, religious leaders/Imams and Islamic teachers of religion and Arabic
- > Workshops with primary-school teachers
- > Grandmother participation in classroom activities
- > Participatory learning activities with students in primary schools
- > Establishment of Local Monitoring Committees in each village
- > Workshops for community health workers, grandmother leaders and members of Local Monitoring Committees
- > Establishment of Inter-village Coordination Committee



Activities initiated by communities

- > Gatherings of adolescent girls with grandmothers to teach them traditional stories, songs, dances and advice
- > Evening story-telling sessions of grandmothers, children and young people
- > Cultural activities: community story-telling nights, cultural days, "dairas" (meetings to discuss religious and cultural values) organized by Imams with the participation of grandmothers, women, men, youth and children
- > Groups of men and boys (adolescents and children) meet to play traditional games

Reflections of an Imam on the Process of Community Dialogue

This project has used a participatory approach. Through communication it has strengthened tolerance and acceptance of others. The project has promoted introspection and self-criticism. Before, there was a communication breakdown between neighboring villages, between members of the same village and between generations within the same family and community.

Each generation blamed the other for all the problems, but they were unable to talk together about these problems. The young were afraid of the elders, believing they could harm them through their mystical powers. The elders said that young people didn't respect them or spend time with them and that they lived in a separate world. The social fabric was beginning to be torn apart. For a long time, grandmothers were not allowed to speak. It is in this context that the GHD project was implemented.

Amazingly, the project facilitated the reconciliation between the generations who now accept, understand, respect, tolerate and spend time with each other. Communication has been restored between them. Grandmothers have regained their rightful place in society. Once again they are actively involved in educating girls and passing onto the younger generation the fruits of their experience. Now the younger generation trusts the elders' experience and wisdom and is learning a lot from them.

Personally, the project taught me a lot. I have realized that in order to change anything in society we must communicate with each other through peaceful and respectful dialogue. Cultural values have been revived and everyone is pleased about that. Harmful practices are being abandoned. I have no doubt that if the process of community dialogue and community initiated action continues, it will lead to benefits in all aspects of local development.

Oustaze Baldé, Imam and religious and Arabic teacher, District Education Office



1.1 Building on culture: values, tools and cultural actors

Development programs can try to impose changes in a predetermined direction, but communities often resist these efforts because they challenge cultural values that are cherished by communities. Cultural revitalization¹ is central to the GHD project approach. This involves bringing back or reinforcing positive cultural roles and practices that are part of communities' cultural identity. It also means simultaneously abandoning or changing other traditional practices that affect girls' development negatively. Various facets of the GHD project strategy contributed to the revival of cultural roles and traditions. For example, only the local language of the Fouladou region, Pulaar, was used.

The project builds on the indigenous communication system and involves local cultural figures, such as musicians, poets, religious leaders, actors and writers whose compositions and performances draw on local cultural methods and traditions and address the issues discussed in forums and among community groups. Identifying these individuals is a critical step since they must be people who not only have a strong cultural identity and who are respected by others, but who are also open to the changes needed to improve the situation of girls.

“There are many programs that have come to our village to build a health hut or a classroom, to tell us to send girls to school or how to avoid diseases. But this is the very first time that we have seen a project that came to help us reflect on our culture and what we must do to avoid losing it. This is extremely important for us.”

Abou Kande, Imam, religious and Arabic teacher at Kael Bassel primary school

The project uses and builds on existing cultural modes for transmitting culture, such as proverbs, riddles, music, stories, dance traditional games and group discussions, which increase community ownership of and commitment to the project activities.

For a long time people in rural communities have realized the importance of communication to ensure the effective functioning of society. All societies have developed communication tools to help them deal with the issues they face. In West Africa these tools include: skits, story tales, proverbs, songs, etc. The advantage of using such tools in development programs is that they are familiar to people. This increases community interest in them while at the same time contributes to recognition of the local culture.

Abderhamane Djire
Community development specialist, Mali

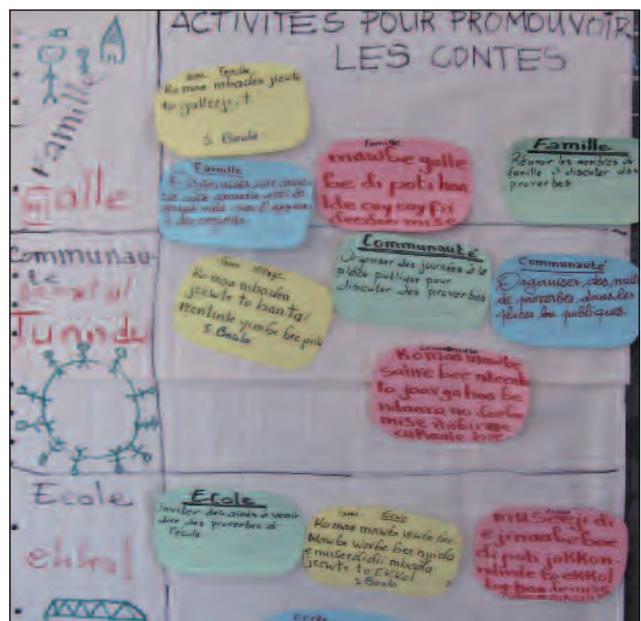
Traditional Communication Systems

Long before modern mass media, including radio, print, film and television, began to penetrate villages and urban audiences, indigenous communication systems existed. These include town criers, traditional entertainment modes and traditional gathering places like tea shops, market squares, churches and mosques. In every village and community throughout developing countries, there are indigenous forums of social exchange. If ignored, such indigenous communication systems can transmit messages which oppose and undermine development programs.

Reference: Nat J. Colletta, “Tradition for Change: Indigenous Socio-cultural Forms as a basis for non-formal education and development”, in: R. Kidd and N. Colletta (eds.), *Tradition for Development: Indigenous structures and folk media in non-formal education*, German Foundation for International Development and International Council for Adult Education, Berlin, 1980



Acknowledging and encouraging musical traditions



Results of a small group exercise during an intergenerational forum on how to promote traditional story-telling in families, communities and schools

Some of the educational and facilitation tools used in the project were created by project team members with the help of cultural resource persons based on traditional methods for transmitting knowledge. These include:

- Stories-without-an-ending, based on community situations and problems and
- Songs of two types: songs in praise of grandmothers and educational songs containing information on priority GHD issues.

The GMP approach explicitly aims to acknowledge and enhance communities' cultural identity, while at the same time encouraging critical examination

of traditional practices. Below is an example of one of the songs praising grandmothers. It was written in Pulaar, the local language, and has been translated into English. Cultural actors and project team members contributed their talents to develop this and other songs. Communities especially appreciated the songs in praise of grandmothers. Many stated that they had never heard songs that explicitly recognize and encourage grandmothers in the important work they do every day to ensure the well-being of children and families. The grandmothers have been particularly touched by the songs of praise on their behalf, as stated by grandmother Bodiel below.

Song in Praise of Grandmothers: "Maama Jaara"	
Pulaar	English
Maama a ! Maamaa jaara	Grandmother! Grandmother!
Allah ya juutu balde	May God grant you long life
Maama an! Maamaa jaara	Grandmother! Grandmother!
Allah ya booy e aduna	May God keep you in this world for a long time
Maama lootay-la	Grandmother, you're the one who bathes me
Maama bambay-la	Grandmother, you're the one who carries me on your back
Maama ñaminay-la	Grandmother, you're the one who feeds me
Maama aminay-la	Grandmother, you're the one who makes me dance
Allah yaa juutu balde	May God grant you long life
Maama an! Maamaa jhara	Grandmother! Grandmother!

“The song shows how useful a grandmother is. She bathes the baby and rocks her to sleep. She plays an important role in children's upbringing. A house without a grandmother is like a herd of cattle without a shepherd.”
Bodiel, grandmother

1.2 Facilitating dialogue between community members and between generations

A key element of the GMP methodology is the role played by GHD team members as catalysts and facilitators of communication between community



Teachers are taught how to play "worri", a traditional game by a grandmother

members in order to create a synergy between the different groups. Group activities are facilitated in a way that enables participants to simultaneously reflect on existing attitudes and norms and on new ideas and perspectives introduced during various meetings and through various channels. "Facilitation can be seen as a series of dynamic functions that are carried out before, during and after a meeting to help a group achieve their objectives."²

In the context of the project, the facilitator's role is based on adult education principles. The fundamental element in facilitation of adult learning is respect for participants by acknowledging them as individuals who have vast experience and knowledge of issues related to children, families and communities.

“The facilitators made everyone feel very comfortable during the forum discussions. In fact, you couldn't tell the facilitators from the participants.”

Malang Sagna
 Director of Kael Besel School, IDEN

Facilitation of the community dialogue process depends to a great extent on the facilitator's personal commitment, attitudes and behaviors.³ The essential characteristics of an effective facilitator are:

- Having a good understanding of and sensitivity to the communities' cultural values;
- Being committed to the community's development;
- Encouraging the participation of shy participants (including grandmothers);
- Building relationships with community members based on trust;

- Seeing facilitation as an ongoing learning process for the facilitator him/herself;
- Maintaining a sense of humility in the group and not trying to impress other participants with his/her knowledge; and
- Mastering the techniques of active listening and questioning that foster critical thinking.

In the community dialogue approach adopted in the project, the facilitator's role is to consistently challenge community leaders and groups to come up with their own strategies and solutions.

“The approach used during the forums is very interesting because the entire discussion is set in the context of the culture and is based on the idea of encouraging the good things in our culture and discouraging the bad ones. In the past, educated people (in development programs) often came and criticized our traditions and proposed foreign ideas. We are very comfortable in the forums because the facilitators began by acknowledging our traditions, and they never directly criticized any of our cultural values or beliefs.”

Bassirou Diao, community health worker, Kandia

Examples of Intergenerational Activities



An intergenerational and cross-gender discussion



Young girls demonstrate what they have learned from grandmothers



Grandmothers and women sharing their points of view during the dialogue-forum

Theory Supporting the GMP Approach

The GMP approach draws its inspiration from a range of models and concepts from various fields of research and practice, namely: adult education, communication for development, community development, anthropology and social psychology. Key concepts from each of these areas that had a significant influence on the development of the approach used in the GHD project are presented here along with the references for each, for those interested in knowing more.

Anthropology

Key concept → Collectivist versus individualist societies

Anthropology describes the structure of African societies as collectivist rather than individualist. Several characteristics of collectivist societies should be given serious attention when developing programs that seek to promote changes within families and communities: 1) Elders have an authoritative position in society based on their age and experience; 2) Knowledge is transmitted from elders to youth and not vice-versa; and 3) Decision-making is more collective than individual.

Key concept → The role of elders in non-western cultures

In the non-Western societies in Africa, Asia and Latin America, seniors/elders have a culturally designated role as teachers and advisors of the younger generations. Development programs do not often take these roles into consideration. In addition, elders can be a resource for bringing about sustained social change.

Reference: Aubel J., "Elders: a cultural resource for promoting sustainable development", in *State of the World*, World Watch Institute, Washington DC, 2010; Fuglesang, A., *About Understanding: Ideas and Observations in Cross-cultural Communication*, Uppsala Dag Hammar skjold Foundation, 1982.

Social and community psychology

Key concept → Social norms and conventions

Social norms and conventions have a strong influence on the practices or social behavior of community members. These two phenomena have a strong influence on family attitudes and practices. Norms and conventions can perpetuate harmful practices such as FGM because individuals and families generally prefer to conform to them to avoid criticism from other community members. Understanding these dynamics is important when developing programs that aim to promote the abandonment of certain social practices.

Reference: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, *Changing a Harmful Social Convention: Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*, UNICEF, Florence, 2005.

Key concept → Social networks

Community members have close relationships with people who are part of the social networks to which they belong. These informal groups are influential in either perpetuating or changing social norms and they exert a strong influence on the practices of their members. Programs that aim to bring about lasting change in social norms need to work with and through social networks.

Reference: C.A. Heaney & B.A. Israel, "Social Networks and Social Support," in: K. Glanz, B.K. Rimer & K. Viswanath (ed.), *Health Behavior and Health Education*, Chapter 9, 4th printing, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2008.

Adult education

Key concept → Learning through dialogue

The Brazilian educationalist, Paulo Freire posited that "education is dialogue." According to his philosophy of *learning through dialogue*, the learning process consists of catalyzing discussion within a group of learners on a given topic with the aim of encouraging them to reach consensus on what action to take. The participants are asked to reflect critically on their past experiences as well as on new information provided to them relating to the topic being addressed. The stories-without-an-ending, widely used in the GHD project, are inspired by the work of Freire. The stories depict real life situations dealing with GHD and require participants to discuss alternative solutions.

Reference: Freire, P., *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Continuum*, New York, 1970.

Key concept → Constructivism

A predominant line of thought in education is constructivism. From a constructivist vantage point, the learning process requires that individuals "construct" their own lessons or solutions based, on the one hand, on analysis of their own past experiences, and on the other hand, on information provided to them. In methodological terms this implies that learning activities should involve learners in discussion of real life situations and of how they can integrate past experiences learning with new information.

Reference: J.D.Mezirow. *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1991; Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1994.

Key concept → Experiential learning

The ideas of David Kolb, educational psychologist, on learning, are similar to those of Mezirow and Cranton. He maintains that any learning process must be based on learners' past experiences and allow them to decide if and how new ideas can be combined with existing experience and knowledge. The experiential learning cycle is a methodological tool that supports this process.

Reference: D. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1984.

Key concept → Situated learning

An important area within adult education that provides insights into how best to promote adult learning and change is that of "situated learning", also referred to as "situated cognition". From this perspective, retention of content by individuals is not the goal of learning activities. Rather, the objective is for groups of learners to interact and investigate together problematic situations that can occur in real life and to come to a consensus on how to deal with them. By embedding subject matter in the ongoing experiences of learners, knowledge is acquired and learning transfers from the classroom to real life situations.

Reference: D. Stein, "Situated learning in adult education", in ERIC Digest no. 195, ED 418250, 1998

Communication for development**Key concept → Communication methods should promote dialogue**

Bessette critiques the dominant models in communication based on *sensitizing people, diffusing messages and using persuasion* to make them change. He recommends an approach to communication based on dialogue between participants which aims to involve them in solving a problem or achieving a specific goal.

Reference: G. Bessette, *Communication et participation communautaire*, Les Presses de l'Université de Laval, Ottawa, 2004.

Key concept → Community dialogue for collective action

The seminal work of Figueroa and colleagues deals with *communication for social change*. They maintain that when communities are confronted with issues of concern or problems, in most cases they do not spontaneously initiate discussion and take action on their own to search for a solution. These authors argue that a missing element in the communication for development literature is the need for a catalyst, either from within or from outside the community, to trigger dialogue and subsequent action.

Reference: Figueroa, M. E., D. L. Kincaid, M. Rani and G. Lewis, *Communication for Social Change*, Working Paper No. 1, Rockefeller Foundation and Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs, New York, Rockefeller Foundation, 2002.

Community Development**Key concept → Collaboration with community leaders**

Community development programs have a greater chance of success if they are based on relationships of trust and collaboration with formal and informal community leaders, men and women, and include both younger and older community members. Identifying these people and developing close relationships with them can increase the relevance of community programs, increase community commitment to them and increase community capacity to sustain the development activities over time.

Reference: Kretzmann, J.P. & J. L. McKnight. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*, ACTA Publications, Chicago, 1993.

Key concept → Modes of traditional education in Africa

In Africa, transmission of knowledge from generation to generation uses methods that include: proverbs, traditional stories, songs and dance as well as group discussion. Community education programs should use these methods, which are both familiar to and appreciated in African societies.

Reference: Fasokun, T., A. Katahoire, and A. Oduaran, *The Psychology of Adult Learning in Africa*, Pearson Education South Africa with UNESCO Institute for Education, Cape Town, 2005.

Key concept → Unconditional positive regard to promote change

According to psychologist Carl Rogers, an attitude of total acceptance of another person makes him or her more open to change. Fully accepting another individual, regardless of his or her beliefs, increases that person's self-confidence, making him/her more willing to question and consider changing his/her beliefs. The GMP approach first acknowledges the role of grandmothers, then encourages them to share their experiences and beliefs, engages them in dialogue and reflection on their own alternative values and ideas and lastly, encourages them to consider alternative ideas.

Reference: C. Rogers, *A Way of Being*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1980.

“This project has helped communities to revive cultural traditions and values that they had begun to lose. The integration of these values in schools will ensure that the younger generations are well-rooted in their culture while at the same time they can be open to foreign ideas and values.”

Malang Sagna, Director of Kael Besel School, IDEN

2. Community activities in the GHD project

The community activities carried out in the GHD project consisted of approximately 15 types of “gatherings” involving community dialogue, some initiated by the project and others by communities themselves. Most of the activities took place with members of one community, but some brought together representatives from several villages.

All activities were grounded in the belief of Malian philosopher, Amadou Hampathé Bâ that every society should aim to preserve beneficial traditions while abandoning practices that no longer benefit its members.

2.1 Activities initiated by the project team

► Intergenerational forums

At the outset of the GHD project in 2008, in discussions in all 20 communities, there was widespread agreement that intergenerational communication was limited between elders grandmothers and grandfathers, parents and children, but also between mothers-in-law/grandmothers and daughters-in-law. At the outset all age groups cited the



Sitting in a circle promotes dialogue



Grandmothers gain confidence to express themselves through discussion with other grandmothers

lack of communication as a problem, but there was no forum in which the problem could be discussed. Men had little regard for women’s opinions, and some topics, such as FGM and teen pregnancy, were rarely discussed since they were considered taboo.

When the project started there were many meetings and discussions with communities in the project area. Once the “community self-selection” process was completed, there was a first series of dialogue-forums, or intergenerational forums, which launched the community dialogue process.

Objectives of the intergenerational forums:

- Encourage reflection on issues related to the development, education and well-being of children in general, and specifically of girls;
- Promote mutual respect between elders, adults and adolescent men and women;
- Help communities to break the silence and discuss taboo issues related to GHD;
- Acknowledge grandmothers’ role as culturally-designated teachers and advisors and their influence in families and communities;
- Increase grandmothers’ self-confidence to fully assume their role as teachers and advisors in the family and community; and
- Strengthen understanding between villages.

The intergenerational forums can be viewed as the central and most critical activity in the project. It is through the forums that communities are fully introduced to project principles. Consequently, two types of actions are initiated:

1. the process of strengthening communication between the genders and generations on the one hand, and between community members and education and health workers on the other hand;and
2. the process of cultural revival.

In the GHD project the forums take place twice yearly in each area with approximately 26 partici-



Discussion among young men and teachers



Discussion between men and women, young and old

pants per forum. They bring together representatives from two neighboring villages and from the following categories of community actors: grandmothers, grandfathers, men, women, health workers and teachers, as well as the team of project facilitators. In addition, forum participants often include Imams, local musicians and indigenous wise men.

During the forums, particular attention is paid to acknowledging grandmothers and encouraging their participation. In the past, they were rarely involved in community meetings organized by development programs and for this reason at the outset they were rather shy. When encouraged to contribute to the discussions and when their inputs are acknowledged, they gain the confidence to express themselves in the group setting and to participate more actively.

The forums allow for phased introduction of dialogue between categories of persons who are not accustomed to having serious and in-depth discussions with each other on complex and sensitive issues. For each of the topics in the forums, the first step involves peer-group discussions on the issue. Groups are organized by age and gender, for example, a group of grandmothers and another of young men. At the conclusion of the small group discussion, the discussion is opened up to a plenary session involving all categories of participants. Hence, there is a complementarity and synergy between the two levels of discussion. Everyone actively participates in the small-group discussions while not everyone takes the floor in the large group to share his/her opinion or their own reflections. With this system, the conclusion is that everyone feels comfortable to speak at one point or another while no one is forced to do so at any time.

“The intergenerational forum taught me a lot. It reminded me of the past and it gave me ideas on what I can do to improve the well-being of children. Since the forums, I feel more open, and I communicate more with other people. The forums helped me to think about how I can enhance my role in the community. Before I was on the periphery. Now I want to do more to build relationships with others.”

Awa Baldé, grandmother leader, president of the Community Monitoring Committee in Saré Demba Mari

► Participatory education/communication sessions with grandmothers and women

During the forums, women and grandmother leaders participate as representatives of their villages. Subsequently, back in their communities, participatory education/communication sessions are organized with groups of women and grandmothers to encourage continued discussion of the issues addressed in the forums.

Objectives of the education/communication sessions with women and GMs:

- Acknowledge the role and contribution of grandmothers and women to children’s education and upbringing and increase their self-esteem;
- Strengthen relationships between grandmothers and women within the same village; and
- Encourage critical reflection on issues dealing with both positive and negative cultural practices affecting the well-being of girls, particularly early and forced marriage, FGM, teenage pregnancy and corporal punishment.

“What I like about these stories is that each person can share their own opinion, and nobody is forcing you to give this or that response.”

Youssef Sané, community leader, Inter-village Coordination Committee



Young mothers listen to a story on the importance of communication between mothers and their daughters

Topics Addressed in the Stories-Without-an-Ending

- > Early marriage
- > Communication between mothers and young girls
- > Excision
- > Schooling for girls
- > Teenage pregnancy
- > Influence of television on children's upbringing
- > Disappearance of storytelling
- > Parents' abdication of responsibility in children's up-bringing
- > Corporal punishment
- > Preparing young girls for menstruation

In accordance with Senegalese cultural norms, women of different ages are not comfortable participating in the same group. In particular, young women may feel embarrassed speaking openly in front of their mothers-in-law. For these reasons, the communication/education sessions are organized with separate groups of younger women and of grandmothers.

Participatory education/communication sessions were organized with both age groups, twice a month in each village. The peer groups usually gather together under a tree, and several elders attend each session. They open the sessions, encourage participants, listen to debates and give their opinions on the discussion topic at the end. Participation of the elders increases the importance of the sessions. The elders later share the content of the discussions with their peers and with other male leaders in the village.

In the GHD project a series of 10 **stories-without-an-ending**⁴ were developed on a range of themes related to girls' development for use during these sessions. Project staff present the stories to the groups and elicit discussion using a series of open-ended questions. At the end, the participants are encouraged to continue discussion of the story in their families and social networks. They are encouraged to come to a consensus on how to deal with the issue addressed.

► **Workshops with primary-school teachers**

Primary and secondary school curricula in Senegal include very little on traditional values and cultural realities. For several years, the Ministry of National Education has encouraged teachers to integrate experiences and information drawn from local contexts to create more "community-responsive schools" where cultural issues are incorporated into the school program. However,

Stories-Without-an-Ending

The *story-without-an-ending* is a pedagogical tool for stimulating dialogue and critical thinking on a particular issue or problem in the community. In each story there are two characters that have two different ways of seeing the same issue. One of the characters has a more "traditional" point of view on the issue, while the second character has more "modern" ideas. In each story the two characters disagree right up to the end, i.e. there is no ending to the story. This difference of opinion between the two characters serves as a catalyst for discussion. Each story is accompanied by a series of open-ended questions, based on Kolb's four-step experiential learning cycle. A facilitator presents the story and then uses the set of questions to spark and guide discussion of the different points of view to encourage participants to reach their own conclusions. In each of the GHD stories, one of the characters is a grandmother, reflecting the leadership role played by senior women in real life. In all stories grandmothers are depicted as competent and respected women.

"Souadou's Excision" Summary of a Story-without-an-ending

In a farming village, Néné Diallo, a grandmother, lives with her son, her daughter-in-law, Assiatou, and her grandchildren. Her youngest grandchild, little Souadou, is three months old. One day Néné announces to Assiatou that: "The day has come for us to have Souadou cut. As you know, in our tradition it is essential in order to become a respectable woman."

Assiatou reacts strongly and says: "It's true that I underwent this ordeal, but times have changed. We now know that there are many harmful effects from excision and that Islam does not require it." Néné presents a series of arguments on the importance of excision for a girl and says: "How can you oppose this ancient tradition that was passed onto us by our ancestors? This is a necessity for becoming a woman, a pure woman." The two continue the conversation, but they don't agree. At the end of the story, Assiatou says: "God willing, Souadou will live a long life, and I know that she will be a respected and holy woman even without undergoing excision." Néné concludes: "Today you have truly disappointed me, Assiatou. Know that my little Souadou will not be the laughing stock of the Diallo family."

The discussion between the characters has finished, but the story has not ended.

before the GHD project, teachers had few ideas on how to put this policy into practice. The Velingara District Education Office has shown strong support for the project and attests to the fact that its approach helps teachers to integrate local values and traditions into classroom activities, fully complying with government policy.

Objectives of teacher workshops:

- Encourage reflection on the role played by elders, and grandmothers in particular, in children's upbringing;
- Encourage reflection on the role of "local knowledge" in children's upbringing; and
- Strengthen mutual respect and communication between teachers and community members.

One of the priority issues addressed in the teacher workshops is the role of grandmothers in children's upbringing and the possibility of inviting them into the classroom to share their knowledge. Following a group discussion on this issue, Bouraima Baldè, a teacher at the primary school in Kéréwane, noted: "I have just realized through this discussion that, in fact, grandmothers play the same roles as teachers, although their involvement goes even further than ours. They are involved in all aspects of children's development. I wonder why they were never invited into the classroom before". The workshops include discussion on how to integrate cultural values into the school program. One of the teachers, Moussa Touré, pointed out the urgent need to teach cultural values to students: "Today children do not know their culture, and the school doesn't teach it to them. They need to know their community's cultural and moral values. During this workshop, we have seen that we must do everything possible to close this gap through our teaching".

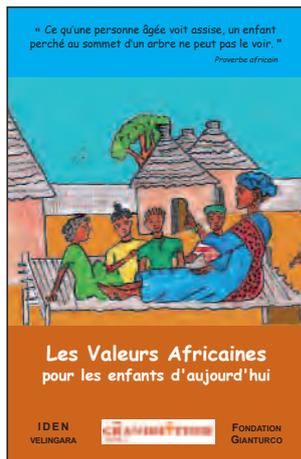


The GHD project is at the heart of Ministry of Education priorities. Firstly, we want schools to take into account the range of factors related to girls' development. I think that this project is ahead of programs elsewhere in Senegal because it boosts the overall development of girls, including helping to protect them from teenage pregnancy and early marriage. Secondly, this project strengthens ties between school and community, another policy priority. We have asked all teachers to be fully involved in the project activities.

Kabiné Diane,
Deputy Departmental Education Inspector, Velingara

▶ Participatory learning activities in primary schools

Teachers admit that before the GHD project they rarely discussed positive cultural values contributing to children's education because they lacked the materials to do so. The GHD project developed a series of tools to facilitate this task: first a booklet on "The Role of Grandmothers in African Societies"; a second booklet on 12 key values that are important for children to learn; a game, "Who Are We?" and a collection of songs in praise of grandmothers.



Objectives of activities in primary schools:

- Involve teachers in promoting local culture in schools;
- Increase the use of teaching materials on positive cultural knowledge and values in classrooms; and
- Encourage reflection among children on their heritage and cultural values.

The booklets were developed in Velingara by GMP and WV. Copies of the booklets were distributed to all schools in the project area. Their purpose is to help children reflect on the role of elders, and specifically of grandmothers, in children's upbringing and in family activities in general. Teachers throughout the district expressed their enthusiasm regarding the booklets and have used them extensively in classroom sessions on traditional roles and values.

"I think that if children hear teachers talk about the importance of elders in our society, this can help bring children and elders closer together. In the past, we never invited grandparents into the classroom. This booklet helped us see how we could do that."

Mariama Sabaly, teacher in Bonconto

The project team provided support to teachers during school visits, for example, to teach children the songs in praise of grandmothers that were used in other project activities.

► Grandmother collaboration in classroom activities

Previously, most grandmothers kept their distance from schools because they believed they would not be respected or welcomed there. In reality, in most communities there was no communication at all between grandmothers and teachers. Through GHD project activities, mutually respectful relationships developed. Teachers began to invite grandmothers into the classroom to share their experience and knowledge with students and teachers.

"Who Are We?" - A Board Game

Development of the game was coordinated by Karla Sarr, a graduate student at the Centre for International Education at the University of Massachusetts. Its objective is to get children to reflect on traditional cultural values and their relevance in their lives today. It is played in small groups to encourage dialogue among children. Parts of the game deal with proverbs that address values rooted in the culture. Teams of students are asked to discuss and draw conclusions on the relevance of the values expressed in today's world. Teachers are very enthusiastic about the game, and they have said that it has not only helped increase students' appreciation of cultural values but has also strengthened their ability to work as a team.



The game encourages dialogue between students about their cultural identity

Objectives of grandmother collaboration in classroom activities:

- Enrich educational programs in primary schools through involvement of grandmothers and their sharing of experiences and knowledge;
- Increase children's respect for elders; and
- Increase grandmothers' confidence in themselves and in to their role in children's education.

In keeping with the GHD project goal to strengthen intergenerational communication, the project team and district education staff strongly encouraged the involvement of grandmothers in classrooms. National education policies encourage schools to use community resource persons, such as grandmothers and grandfathers, so that they can share their knowledge with children.

"I think that it's important to teach children about their culture. As their grandmothers, we often take them to school. Now we are working in close collaboration with the teachers to share our knowledge of our culture with all children. We are organizing ourselves in order to support the teachers in all villages."

Siranding Sabaly, grandmother leader

"In the GMP approach, involving grandmothers in activities for children, families and communities is innovative and I think that it is very beneficial. Grandmothers were once little girls, then adolescents, young women, wives and mothers. They have learned many things through the different stages in their lives and they have much to share. Involving grandmothers in schools also helps to strengthen intergenerational communication. They encourage girls to share their problems with them, to ask their advice and to learn from them."

Malang Sagna, School Director and Zonal Supervisor, Kandia



Grandmother Fatoumata tells a traditional story to students

► Local Monitoring Committees established in each village

In each village a Local Monitoring Committee was set up with the support of project staff to monitor and coordinate activities related to girls' education and development. Committee members include grandmothers, grandfathers, teachers, mothers and young people. The committees provide an oppor-

tunity for village representatives to discuss and decide on what activities to implement to promote girls' and boys' well-being. Since their membership includes both younger and older community members, they also serve to reinforce intergenerational communication and collaboration. It is noteworthy that grandmothers were chosen to be committee presidents in 13 of the 20 villages.

Objectives of the Local Monitoring Committees:

- Reflect on how to promote positive values and traditions at school and in the community;
- Reflect on how to discourage harmful values and traditions in the community; and
- Strengthen collaboration between teachers and other community members.



Awa Baldé, grandmother leader and President of the Local Monitoring Committee in Sare Kouna

“For a long time, it was as if grandmothers were locked up in a room. The project came and opened the door. Now everyone appreciates our role and our experience, and grandmothers actively participate in community activities.”

Awa Baldé, grandmother leader, Saré Kouna

The project team organized orientation and training workshops for the Local Monitoring Committees (LMCs). During these sessions the committee members were involved in defining their own duties and functions through a participatory process. One of the motivating factors for these committees is the fact that, during each forum, they share the activities they have carried out over the previous six months. All committees carry out activities to promote GHD in their communities, however, the content and frequency of the activities varies from one community to another. Strengthening LMCs so that they become increasingly efficient in terms of planning and management skills is a long-term process.

► Workshops for community health workers, grandmothers, leaders and Local Monitoring Committee members

Several workshops involving these various community members were another activity to promote community dialogue on GHD, topics, namely teenage pregnancy, early marriage and FGM. They gave grandmothers an opportunity to understand the perspective of health workers on these issues and to acquire “modern” knowledge. In turn, health workers built closer relationships with grandmothers based on the role they play in families.

Objectives of workshops with health workers:

- Encourage reflection on priority issues related to young girls' development, particularly excision and teenage pregnancy; and
- Strengthen understanding and collaboration between community health workers, (traditional birth attendants, trained midwives) and grandmothers, who are family advisors on health issues.

These workshops bring together the officially recognized health workers and the *family health advisors*, i.e. grandmothers. They were held once during the project's second year in each of the three project sub-areas. These gatherings were not frequent; however, they provided an opportunity for community members who do not often meet to exchange ideas and information on GHD.

► Inter-village Coordination Committee

The project team facilitated the establishment of a committee made up of representatives from all villages involved in the project. The Inter-village Coordination Committee is composed of eight members who represent the following categories of community members: men, women, elders, young people, community leaders, religious leaders and teachers.

Objectives of the Inter-village Coordination Committee:

- Identify activities to be carried out in all communities to promote girls' and boys' well-being; and
- Inform local officials of the committee's mission and solicit their support for proposed activities.

The Inter-village Collaboration Committee was set up toward the end of the project's second year. A participatory process was used to design the committee's operational framework during a series of meetings facilitated by the project team. The committee members are motivated to carry out collective activities in the area.

► In praise of grandmothers: inter-village gatherings

While grandmothers have always played a central role in family and community life, their contribution was very rarely publically recognized. Throughout the project activities, explicit efforts were made to acknowledge and to encourage grandmothers so that other community members, and the grandmothers themselves, would increase their appreciation for the important contribution that grandmothers make every day to family and community well-being.

“We all know what a grandmother represents in our society. A very significant aspect of the approach is the recognition and veneration of grandmothers. In my opinion that is the key element that explains the success of the GHD project.”

Siradio Diao, teacher and cultural advisor



These gatherings strengthen ties between grandmothers of different ethnic groups and from different communities

After 18 months of activities in individual villages, the team decided to organize grandmother appreciation days, bringing together grandmothers from several villages to let them share with their peers and local officials their activities related to promoting the well-being of girls and boys in their respective communities. In each project area “In praise of grandmothers” days were organized.

Objectives of “In praise of grandmothers” inter-village gatherings:

- Publicly acknowledge the role of grandmothers;
- Strengthen ties of friendship and solidarity between grandmothers from different villages;
- Encourage dialogue and the exchange of ideas between grandmothers from different ethnic groups;
- Enable grandmothers in the host village to share with their visitors the traditions they have taught to young girls (traditional stories, dances and riddles); and

- Strengthen grandmothers’ commitment to promote positive changes for the well-being of girls.

During the grandmother appreciation days, community leaders from the host village, the school director, the Inter-village Coordination Committee president, local cultural actors and other guests expressed their appreciation for the role of grandmothers. The grandmothers, in turn, attested to their greater involvement in family and community life since the arrival of the GHD project which has acknowledged and encouraged them. Young girls presented dances, songs and traditional stories learned from the grandmothers. At several times during the ceremony songs were sung in praise of GMs. All participants, including the grandmothers, the local visiting dignitaries, the young girls, the teachers and other visitors expressed strong sentiments of joy and satisfaction with the renewed involvement of GMs in family and community life.

“We are very happy and proud today. Before, people did not get along with each other in the village. The grandmothers have done a lot to restore understanding between adults, between young people and adults, and especially between young girls, mothers and grandmothers. Grandmothers are making a big commitment to restoring our culture and to passing it on to children and young people. We are very happy today that our efforts are recognized and this encourages us to continue and to strengthen our investment in the well-being of children and of the community-at-large.”

Tacko Baldé, wife of village headman, Saré Faremba

“This day is important because we are here to pay tribute to grandmothers who are advisors to both couples and children. They were almost dead in the villages, but now they have been revived. Ever since grandmothers have resumed their role in the upbringing of young girls, teenage pregnancy has significantly decreased.”

Mamadou, elder, Saré Faremba



Gathering in praise of grandmothers in Kael Bessel



Young girls present a traditional dance during one of the days "In Praise of Grandmothers"



Grandmothers show off their traditional coiffures

► Workshops with village headmen, religious leaders (Imams) and teachers of religion and Arabic

Village headmen and Imams are accustomed to meeting in the communities. The Islamic and Arabic teachers teach religion in the schools, but they do not often have the opportunity to discuss with the village headmen or the village Imams. All of these individuals have a common interest in transmitting cultural and religious values to young people, yet they never meet as a group to discuss these issues. The workshops organized with these groups in the project's third year dealt with girls' holistic development and FGM in particular, given the widespread belief at the outset in all the communities that Islam recommends this practice.

Objectives of the workshops with village headmen, religious leaders (Imams) and teachers of religion and Arabic:

- Encourage discussion about children's education and upbringing among the "guardians of cultural and religious values";
- Encourage reflection on the role of parents today in young people's education and upbringing; and
- Encourage discussion about excision, early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

All three categories of participants greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet together and share their points of view on the issue of GHD, a common concern to all of them.

"We consider that this project is our project. I think that it's a very good idea to bring together village headmen and Imams to discuss issues related to the family and community because no decision can be made without them."

Saydou Mballo, village headman, Saré Demba Mari

"This is the only time that I have seen a project that deals with children's education by involving elders. In effect, the elders are the only ones who can give children a good education because they know our traditional values. If children spend more time with religious leaders, everything can change for the better in our communities."

Mouhamadou Seck, Islamic and Arabic teacher in Saré Demba Mari

These workshops were beneficial to the project team as well, because through the discussion they were able to perceive the viewpoints of traditional and religious leaders concerning FGM and to identify those still in favor of the practice.

Even if their numbers are small, it is important to identify them and to develop an individualized strategy that fosters in-depth discussion with them, with the help of appropriate community resource persons.

2.2 Activities initiated by communities and encouraged by the project

The project team initiated the 10 activities described above, all elements of the overall strategy to promote community dialogue on GHD. The overall goal was to catalyze dialogue, reflection and action to promote GHD through these activities, and then to encourage continued discussion of these ideas and actions in the community. At the outset it was unclear whether and what actions the community might take.

The four activities presented below are the results of this process, in which communities took on their own initiatives to organize gatherings in which dialogue, sharing and learning took place. The four activities bring together community members from various gender and age categories.

► Gatherings of adolescent girls organized by grandmothers to teach traditional stories, songs and dances and to provide advice

Traditionally, in African societies, there were strong relationships between grandmothers and their granddaughters. Over time, however, these relationships weakened because girls' respect for elders diminished as did their interest in cultural traditions and values. As for grandmothers, they adopted the attitude that their experience and knowledge was no longer relevant to the needs of young girls in the "modern world".

Following their participation in the intergenerational forums and other gatherings, in the context of the GHD project, the grandmothers decided on their own that they would try to revitalize traditional education of girls. They did so by organizing regular sessions with adolescent girls in the community, often in the afternoons when schools were closed under the shade of a large tree. During the year, when there was not too much work in the fields, these meetings were organized once or twice weekly.

Objectives of traditional education of girls:

- Strengthen communication between adolescent girls and grandmothers;
- Help grandmothers to understand the everyday problems that girls face in life in order to provide them with counsel and support; and
- Strengthen adolescent girls' cultural identity.

With varying frequency, but in all communities, grandmothers organized adolescent girls into small or large groups. During the group sessions, the grandmothers use traditional cultural resources, specifically stories, riddles and songs with dance to transmit values and culturally accepted behaviors to young girls. An unexpected result of the grandmothers' initiative has been the very enthusiastic response and participation of girls in these activities.

“Now girls are with their grandmothers all the time to listen to traditional stories, to discuss with them and to listen to their advice. They are now true accomplices. Before, the girls made fun of their grandmothers. They laughed at them. They hid whenever their grandmothers called them. Now they are anxious to spend time with the grandmothers.”

Mother from Saré Boule

“Before, grandmothers told us nothing about pregnancy. Now, they tell us all about the risks of pregnancy for young girls.”

Diénabou Baldé, adolescent girl from Saré Faramba

“We had stopped advising the adolescent girls because we thought that in this age of democracy, we should let them do whatever they want. Through various discussions in project activities, we realized that our advice is still useful for girls, and now we spend a lot of time with them and we listen to them a lot to understand their problems and we give them good advice.”

Eggé, grandmother leader, Saré Faramba

“Now after dinner, we prefer staying with the grandmothers to learn traditional stories (tindi) and riddles (talli). We have realized that it's more useful for us to stay with them than to go to nighttime dances with boys. We're trying to convince all of the other girls to do the same.”

Meta Baldé, adolescent girl

The girls' incredible receptiveness to the grandmother-initiated activities motivated the grandmothers to continue. Encouragement from other community members, parents, grandfathers and village officials also contributed to bolstering grandmothers' commitment to continue their involvement in these activities.



Young girls present traditional dances during a forum with coaching from grandmothers

► Evening story-telling sessions with children and young people

According to the communities involved in the GHD project, before the project began children spent little time with parents and grandparents, and most of their time was spent at school, watching television or with their friends. The family tradition of nighttime storytelling was disappearing, as were traditional songs and dances. On their own initiative, grandmothers decided to revive the cultural tradition of nighttime sessions with young children to

pass on to them old story tales, riddles and songs. The grandmother-led sessions are now frequently organized in the family compound and typically include the neighbors' children as well.

Objectives of nighttime story-telling:

- Strengthen relationships and communication between small children and grandmothers; and
- Increase grandmothers' involvement in transmitting local knowledge to the younger generations.

In all communities, people claim that grandmothers, and to a lesser extent mothers, are now much more involved in traditional story-telling with young children since the project made efforts to promote positive cultural traditions. According to adults and children alike, the stories are very popular with children. Grandmothers draw great satisfaction from knowing that children now want to spend more time with them and that they are more interested than before in the knowledge that they can pass on to them. This has encouraged grandmothers to continue this activity.

“I want to talk about the importance of these traditional storytelling sessions. Children don't go out at night if there is story-telling. The stories teach. With grandmothers, children aren't afraid to go to sleep. This activity also strengthens relationships between grandmothers and children.”

A grandfather, **Kael Bessel**

“Our perception of grandmothers has changed considerably. Before, we thought they were there just to eat, sleep and scold. Ever since our teacher showed us the booklet, “The Role of Grandmothers in African Societies”, I spend my evenings with my grandmother talking to her and listening to her stories and accounts about what happened in our village before I was born. I didn't know about any of those things before.”

Woudé, 12-year-old schoolgirl

► Community cultural and religious events: storytelling nights, cultural days and *dairas*

One of the decisions made by community members during the intergenerational forums was to undertake activities to perpetuate the transmission of cultural values and traditions to the younger generation. Hence, from time to time, some communities organize cultural days, traditional dance and storytelling nights and *dairas*, discussions about religion. The whole village - men and women, young and old - is invited to participate in these three activities.

Objective of storytelling nights, cultural days and *dairas*:

- Strengthen the community's cultural and religious identity;
- Enable young people to discover their cultural roots; and
- Acknowledge the knowledge of the elders.

“Grandmothers' traditional stories are very useful because they teach you how to think and be careful and protect yourself by making good choices.”

Fatou Ba, adolescent girl

Traditional storytelling evenings and cultural days are both events that are organized from time-to-time in each community. The planning and mobilization of human and material resources is entirely the responsibility of community members. When these activities take place, teachers usually participate as well. The project team encourages and supports these initiatives by providing advice to communities, who then decide whether or how to carry them out. Team members participate when communities implement these activities in order to acknowledge their efforts and encourage them to continue.



Re-enactment of a traditional marriage ceremony during a cultural day

The Importance of Story-telling in Children's Upbringing

I can assure you that the cultural and moral condition of children has deteriorated because story-telling has been abandoned in virtually all families. The most effective tool that elders have for teaching children is story-telling. Traditional stories transmit our true values. Stories teach children the behaviors that the society expects of them, what is right and what is wrong. For an African child to be well-mannered he/she must know our traditional stories.

Moussa Mballo, sage, Velingara

Objectives of the *dairas*:

- Increase young people's interest in the teachings of Islam; and
- Impart and discuss religious/cultural values related to community concerns, such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy and children's education.

Outside of the rainy season, when people are too busy due to intensive agricultural work, *dairas* are organized quite often. Imam Abou Kande is encouraging other villages to organize these gatherings. During the forums, communities discussed the role of religious leaders in promoting children's upbringing, especially girls. After the forums many Imams decided to initiate discussions with men at the mosques after the Friday afternoon prayer, where they are accustomed to sitting together and exchanging ideas about religion and community events. Imam Abou Kande took the initiative in two communities to organize *dairas* to increase knowledge about religious values among young people. He says that his participation in the forums influenced his decision to launch this activity, as the discussions during the forums frequently addressed young people's misunderstandings about traditional values. He subsequently decided to bring community members together regularly - women and men, young and old - to share religious teachings with them about children's upbringing and family well-being.



Creation of the "*daira*"

At the outset the impetus for creating the *daira* was to help the grandmothers better understand the precepts of Islam. The idea of organizing the *daira* came into my head when one of the grandmothers died. She was the only woman in the community who knew how to perform the ritual bathing of the dead. None of the other grandmothers knew how to do it. When another grandmother died, they had to send for a grandmother from a neighboring village to come to wash the corpse. When this happened the grandmothers realized that the problem was that they hadn't studied their religion sufficiently. They approached me and asked me to teach them more about Islam. At first they met in small numbers to listen and to learn. Over time, the other community members joined the movement and now everyone participates, especially young people. It is interesting that the young girls are the most dynamic and numerous participants. Normally, the *dairas* take place every Saturday and Thursday afternoon and evening.

Abou Kande, Imam from Kael Besel, religion and Arabic teacher

*"We are all Muslims, but there are many things about Islam that we don't know about. The *daira* allows us to deepen our understanding of our religion. A wonderful thing is that all ages participate in the *daira*. It's fantastic."*

Village headman, Saré Faramba

► Traditional games played by men, grandfathers, boys and adolescents

In the GHD project's efforts to promote positive cultural traditions, communities themselves have rediscovered traditional games, such as "worri" and "choki". Traditional games give adult men, boys and young men an opportunity to spend time together and to communicate. Through traditional games, young boys and men rediscover resources from their cultural heritage which can strengthen their cultural identity and allow them to face the challenges of today's world with greater confidence.

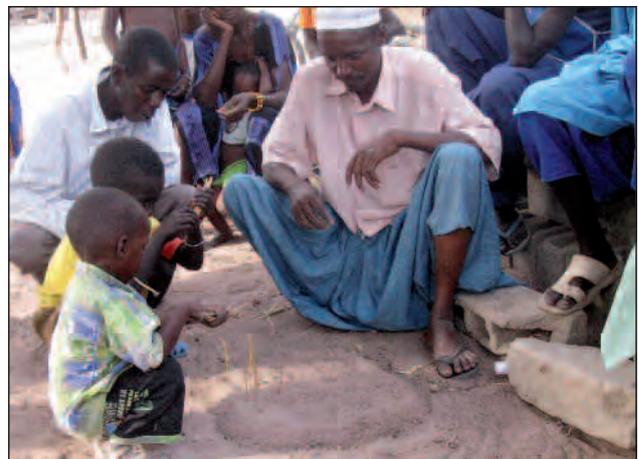
Objectives of teaching traditional games to children:

- Bring men and youth closer together;
- Strengthen the transmission of traditional values to children;
- Stimulate intellectual development of youths.

In one of the forums there was a discussion about traditional learning methods, including games. For that occasion the project commissioned the production of wooden "worri" games for all of the schools, as a means of acknowledging the value of traditional games and encouraging parents and elders to spend more time imparting this cultural knowledge to children and adolescents.

"Traditional games are very interesting. You can learn from these traditions. If you play the games, you won't get bored or speak badly about others."

Oumar Diallo, a young boy



"Choki", a traditional game that builds intergenerational relationships and stimulates young minds

V. Results of the Girls' Holistic Development Project

In the Girls' Holistic Development (GHD) action-research project, ongoing documentation and analysis of the activities were a major component of the continuous learning process. Throughout the entire project implementation period, at different points in time and using various tools, information was collected on community feedback on the activities being carried out.

The data collection activities include:

- Process documentation throughout the entire project: notes reporting on all discussions during the various gatherings organized by the project;
- A qualitative study with adolescents to understand their perceptions of "traditional" and "modern" influences on their identity and attitudes (2009);¹
- A mid-term review (2009);²
- A qualitative study to assess changes in community attitudes regarding early marriage and teen pregnancy (2010);³

- A rapid assessment by a Kenyan anthropologist for World Vision's East Africa office (2009);⁴
- A report on lessons learned between September 2008 and March 2010;⁵ and the
- Final project evaluation (June 2011).⁶

The information collected through these various activities provided data on expected results and also on various unexpected results.

The diagram below presents two levels of project results:

1. Strengthened social cohesion
2. Changes in social norms and practices related to girls' development

RESULTS OF THE COMMUNITY DIALOGUE STRATEGY IN THE GIRLS' HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

PROJECT STRATEGY	RESULTS	
	STRENGTHENED SOCIAL COHESION	CHANGES IN SOCIAL NORMS AND PRACTICES RELATED TO GIRLS' HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT
Catalyze community dialogue through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion of all community members - Respect and tolerance - Critical reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural values are more respected and understood by both young people and adults - Respect for elders, specifically for grandmothers, has increased - Grandmothers' self-confidence has increased - All community members' experiences and viewpoints are valued - Communication and understanding between various groups and generations are strengthened - More open and respectful communication is adopted in families and communities - Communication and collaboration between communities and schools are strengthened - Communities have greater confidence in their own capacity to act to improve the well-being of children, families and communities 	<p>Practices that harm girls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FGM is decreasing - The age at marriage for girls is rising - Teenage pregnancy is decreasing - Attitudes toward corporal punishment are beginning to change <p>Positive practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integration of cultural values in schools - Greater parent involvement in children's education and up-bringing - Greater involvement of grandmothers in children's/girls' education - Communities initiate activities to transmit cultural values and traditions

“The first thing the project did was to strengthen the solidarity, the relationships between neighbors in the same village and between different communities. Now, everyone feels closer to his neighbor. Second, before the project started we were almost at the point of thinking that our culture has no place in this modern world. But we realized that what we must do is to reinvigorate our culture and ensure that our children know and understand it. I also realize now that we must do everything possible to preserve the positive things and to abandon the bad things in our culture, such as excision.”

Koukané Diawo, representative of the village headman of Mountoumba

1. Strengthening social cohesion

All of the evaluation and documentation information collected suggests that the strategy adopted by the GHD project has contributed to strengthening social cohesion and that this greater sense of cohesion has given the community a strong foundation on which to take action to promote girls' development. This experience has made it clear that social cohesion is a prerequisite for any community that aims to undertake activities to improve the living conditions of children and families.

As listed in the table on the previous page, the project contributed to:

- A renewed a sense of cultural identity among both youth and adults;
- Increased respect for elders, and specifically for grandmothers;
- Increased self-confidence of grandmothers;
- Increased respect for the experiences and viewpoints of all community members;
- Greater communication and understanding within peer groups and between generations;
- Promotion of a more open and respectful mode of communication in families and within the community;
- Strengthened communication and collaboration between communities and schools; and
- Strengthened confidence on the part of communities in their own capacity to improve the well-being of children, families and communities as a whole.

1.1 Cultural identity is renewed among the youth and adults

The qualitative study conducted at the start of the project revealed a serious concern on the part of communities for the loss of cultural identity, which was especially marked among young people. A related and widespread concern of communities was the breakdown in the transmission of cultural val-

ues and traditions to younger generations. After nearly three years (32 months) of GHD project implementation, there is increased interest in and promotion of cultural values, roles and traditions in communities in the project area.

“Thanks to the project, we have seen great improvements in our village. Before, we were worried about what would happen to our children. We asked ourselves: ‘What will their future be if they don’t know about our culture? They will be like trees without leaves.’ Now many people are reclaiming our culture. Now young people are beginning to understand the importance of our traditional values.”

Village headman of Saré Faremba

Among young people and adults alike, there appears to be considerable change in attitudes toward cultural values and practices and also greater interest in the acceptance of the traditions of other ethnic groups in the area. Parents are more convinced than before of the importance of imparting their cultural values and practices to young people (through traditional stories, songs, games, clothing and festive costumes). Children and adolescents are far more interested in and more knowledgeable about their cultural traditions than they were in the past. For example, now girls who go to school are proud to present the traditional stories and songs that they learned from grandmothers that they barely knew before the project started.

“Grandmothers are bringing back our cultural values. Since the project started, we’ve seen a change in children’s behavior. Now, children greet adults when they pass by and they bring water to drink to visitors. Yes, grandmothers have taught us many things that they hadn’t taught us before.”

Kadidiatou Baldé, 16-year-old girl

“The project enabled us to re-establish a connection with our traditional values, which is of great importance to us young people. It’s as if we were in front of a hut full of knowledge that we weren’t making use of. Now, we know that we must go up to that hut and open the door. Now, I am actively trying to convince other young people about the importance of our culture and traditions.”

Aliou Sabaly, jeune, Sari Demba Mari

1.2 Respect for elders, and specifically for grandmothers, has increased

In all African countries, younger generations’ respect for elders is a fundamental value. During the project’s preliminary phase, a crucial problem identified by communities was young people’s lack of respect for elders. Furthermore, young people themselves recognized this problem.



Greeting visitors: Reviving the culture

In all communities there has been a significant and positive change in terms of respect shown to elders. In keeping with cultural values, today elders, and specifically grandmothers, are more revered in families and communities than before by children, adolescents and adults alike. These changes are reported in all communities that participated in the project.

“Before, we thought that the elders’ knowledge was of no use to us, and that’s why we spent every evening with friends our own age. Recognizing and involving grandmothers in this project has been very beneficial to us. Now we are beginning to understand how important the grandmothers are.”

Ablaye Mballo, adolescent boy

“Usually, many children fled when they saw a grandmother because they believed she was a witch. Even if a grandmother had a tree full of mangos, the kids were afraid to pick them. Now children spend all of their time with grandmothers.”

Mballo, adolescent boy

“Prior to the GHD project, as grandmothers, we felt as if we were lost in the middle of the forest. But this project brought us together and brought us back home. Now we are very happy because before we felt uncomfortable with people who had been to school, but today we are able to participate in community discussions like everyone else. Young people thought that we weren’t important any more because we didn’t go to school. Today they recognize that we do have knowledge and that this knowledge is useful. Before, we were not invited to community meetings, but now we are and we participate actively.”

Hadja, a grandmother leader, Kandia

1.3 Grandmothers and other elders have greater confidence in their own experience and role

Prior to the GHD project, elders, in general, and grandmothers in particular, felt marginalized. They felt frustrated that young people neither sought nor appreciated their knowledge. In addition, the feeling of exclusion by grandmothers, was accentuated by the fact that most development programs do not acknowledge their role and expertise and do not involve them in community activities. The grandmothers even questioned whether their experience related to the education and upbringing of children is still relevant today.

“In the past, I spent most of my time at home helping my family. But I always felt angry in my heart because I wanted to help others, but I didn’t have the confidence to do so. The project has acknowledged the role of grandmothers, and now I feel much more confident and energized. Now I delegate my household chores to other younger women in the family so that I can spend all my time moving around the village checking on the well-being of women and children and seeing where I need to give advice or correct what is being done. Before I felt like I was in the dark; now, I feel that I’m out in the light.”

Awa Baldé, grandmother leader, Local Monitoring Committee President, Saré Kouna

A positive consequence of the change in attitude toward elders among children, adolescents and adults is the increase in self-confidence among seniors in the community. Now, grandmothers and grandfathers feel that their role and experience are widely acknowledged. Many of them have stated that now they have a strong sense of recognition in the community and that this makes them more determined than ever to impart their knowledge to and be more involved in raising the younger generations.

“Before, we didn’t really give much advice to young girls because we thought that in these modern times, they should be free to do whatever they want and that our advice was outdated. Through the discussions in the project activities, we came to understand that our experience is relevant, and that we shouldn’t remain silent and just wait for the girls to come home pregnant. We have resumed our traditional role as special advisors to girls, and now we discuss everything with them.”

Diabou Diamanka, grandmother leader, Saré Faremba

1.4 All community members' experiences and viewpoints are respected

One of the underlying principles in the project's activities based on community dialogue is the importance of listening to and respecting all individuals' points of view. Testimonies from community members suggest that many have embraced this concept and that, compared to before, people now listen to and respect each other more, especially between genders and generations. Women, young people and especially grandmothers say that now others pay much more attention to their ideas and that their opinions receive greater consideration in discussions in both family and community settings. This consequence of the GMP approach has helped strengthen ties between community members and, in turn, has strengthened social cohesion.

“It is the way that the project meetings were conducted that enabled me to see how it is possible to discuss an issue with people who have different ideas without getting upset. Also, through these activities I now understand the importance of involving all groups in society: grandmothers, grandfathers, young men and women.”

Mamadou, Imam, Madina Samba Diallo

“In my family, I used to make decisions on my own, and then I informed the others of what I had decided. Now, I bring the whole family together, including the young people, and listen to everyone's opinion before making a decision.”

Bantanto Molo Baldé, village elder, Bantanto

1.5 Communication and understanding between various groups and generations are strengthened

In the preliminary phase of the project, all communities expressed profound concern about the breakdown in communication between the generations. After less than three years of project implementation, all communities report positive changes in communication between the generations and also between different age and gender groups. According to community members, communication has improved within peer groups of grandmothers, grandfathers, women, men and adolescent girls, and there is now a stronger sense of solidarity and mutual support between communities.

“Today there is greater understanding between people within the community. Before, if your neighbor's cow caused damage in your field, you went straight to the police. Now if such a problem arises people sit down together, share their viewpoints on the situation and work together to find a mutually acceptable solution.”

Mamadou Mballo, grandfather, Saré Faremba

In all communities, communication also seems to have improved between different groups: grandmothers and granddaughters, grandfathers and adolescent boys, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, mothers and daughters, grandmothers and adolescent girls and teachers and grandmothers. In addition, an unexpected result noted by community actors is greater understanding between villages involved in the project.

“Now, better understanding and better relationships exist between those living in Mountoumba village and those from the Dialékégn village.”

Faly, Imam, Mountoumba

Adults as well as young people share the opinion that intergenerational communication has become easier. Currently, the youth are more interested in learning about their traditions, and they have greater respect for adults. Since elders now feel that they enjoy greater respect from young people, they are more inclined to share what they know with children and they are more involved in children's upbringing and in passing their knowledge onto the younger generations.

“Previously, elders didn't want us young people to sit with them under the 'palaver tree.' But ever since the intergenerational forums started, elders have been more open to us; now they encourage us to sit with them under the tree so they can share their knowledge and so that we can discuss together.”

Alassane Sabaly, adolescent boy

“Since the project started, there is much more communication between the different segments of the community. During the intergenerational forums, elders, young people, grandmothers and women discuss in small groups and also in plenary sessions. And afterwards, these discussions continue in the villages and they enable us to understand each other better and to solve many problems.”

Thierno Moussa, President of the Inter-village Coordination Committee, Kael Besel

“Before the GHD project, people were not united; each person was in his/her own corner, often criticizing others. This project has helped bring people together and strengthen communication between everyone. Now, a synergy exists between people because relationships have been strengthened among the young people, among the elders, between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law, between children and their parents and grandparents, between men and women and between the generations. This project is helping communities to solve many of their problems because now there is more communication and trust between people.”

Amy Sarr, development worker, World Vision

Grandmothers have re-established their role as teachers in the family. It is curious that nowadays many young girls in the project communities say that they prefer to spend their time with the grandmothers, chatting and learning from them, rather than participating in “modern” entertainment, such as dances or watching films on television.

The new alliance between young girls and grandmothers allows girls to address sensitive issues with their grandmother “advisors” such as those related to sexuality. According to community members and teachers, increased communication between young girls and grandmothers has helped better prepare young girls to avoid the advances of boys and men and thereby avoid teenage pregnancy.

“Since there are no taboos between grandmothers and young girls, they can easily discuss issues related to sexuality. The project’s impact is very clear in this respect - it has strengthened the ties between grandmothers and granddaughters.”

Cherif Baldé, teacher, Dialékegny

1.6 A more open and respectful mode of communication is adopted in families and communities

The GHD project did not explicitly set out to strengthen communication within families and communities. An unexpected and positive result of the intergenerational and grandmother-inclusive strategies reported in many communities is that today families and communities have changed how they communicate with each other adopting more open and respectful attitudes.

In families, it is reported that young people respect and listen to adults, parents and grandparents more than in the past. Parents are also beginning to rethink the widespread practice of using a “heavy-hand” to discipline children and are increasingly convinced of the relevance of dialogue with children to solve problems. Mothers and grandmothers report that they have changed the way they talk to children and, specifically, to young girls, adopting a less harsh and vindictive tone of voice and attitude toward them.

“Usually, grandmothers scolded young girls all the time, and girls were afraid of them. Through the project activities, grandmothers realized that wasn’t the best way to communicate with young girls. Now, we talk to them softly, and the girls listen much more to our advice on sexuality, etc.”

Maimouna, grandmother leader, Saré Faremba

1.7 Communication and collaboration between communities and schools are strengthened

In the past, in communities in the Velingara area, as elsewhere in Senegal, there was often a gap between teachers and communities, and communities were often disturbed by the fact that cultural values were not integrated into the school program.

The project aimed to strengthen relationships between schools and communities. There is ample evidence that there have been positive changes in the relationships between teachers and communities.

On the one hand, teachers now demonstrate greater respect for, and interest in, community elders’ knowledge; they are in closer contact with community members; and they have recognized that children’s education should include not only lessons taught at school but also teaching by parents on cultural values, traditions, the history of the family, the community, etc.

On the other hand, positive changes are observed in parents’ and elders’ attitudes toward schools. Families have been reassured by the fact that teachers are beginning to integrate cultural values into the classroom; they now have more contact with and greater trust in teachers; and they feel honored by the fact that teachers have invited grandmothers and grandfathers into the classroom to help “teach” the students by sharing their knowledge and experience.

“In times past, it was as if the school was competing with the community, and the community viewed teachers as outsiders. We have been encouraged to integrate elements of local culture into the school program, and now the teachers, and the school, are better accepted by the community.”

Oumar Baldé, teacher



Close relationships between grandmothers and teachers

The information from the various sources of data listed in the beginning of this chapter clearly shows that, in all of the communities that participated in the GHD project, school-community relationships are stronger today than they were when the project started. Both teachers and community members agree that the relationship has been strengthened and that this has benefited both parties as well as children.

It seems that increased recognition of community members' knowledge and experience by teachers has contributed to increased respect on the part of children toward parents and grandparents. An unexpected consequence is that parents are now more comfortable sending their girls to school. With increased confidence in teachers, many community members feel less hesitant about sending their young daughters to school as they perceive that the risk of intimate relations between girls and boys or between teachers and young girls has decreased.



Grandmothers and teachers in partnership

“The project approach and activities with grandmothers have contributed a lot to keeping children in school, especially girls. Very recently, several grandmothers helped us to get seven students who had abandoned school a year ago re-enrolled. We are very pleased with the role played by grandmothers and we are convinced of their positive impact on children’s education and especially on girls’ upbringing. One of the girls who returned to school at the grandmother’s insistence, Mariana Diao, is now in sixth grade in Velingara. As teachers, we are very proud of Mariana’s success and it’s thanks to the grandmothers that she is continuing her studies.”

**Pape Aly Sane, Primary School Director,
Medina Samba Diallo**

1.8 Community has greater confidence in its own capacity to act to improve the well-being of children, families and communities

At the start of the project, when parents and elders listed their concerns related to children’s education and development, many expressed a feeling of hopelessness when faced with problems such as the “lack of communication” between the generations and “teenage pregnancy.” At the outset, with tears in his eyes, one father said: “We just don’t know how to communicate with our children. Sometimes you even ask yourself if you did the right thing by bringing them into this world.” When project activities started there was a widespread sense of hopelessness regarding what could be done to ensure a positive future for children.

Through the process of community dialogue with various community groups and at various points in time, in both project-initiated and community-initiated activities, community members were involved first, in analyzing the cause of such problems and second, in discussing possible solutions. The many positive changes observed in communities over the course of three years, involving closer relationships between people seem to have all contributed to strengthening communication and understanding between community members. In addition, communities have gradually come to a consensus regarding the need to take collective action to ensure the well-being of girls in particular, and of children, in general. The inclusive and participatory discussions initiated during project-initiated activities appear to have helped communities increase their confidence in their own ability to act both individually and collectively to improve family and community environments in which children are growing up.

All 20 communities involved in the project have initiated activities on their own, both to promote greater appreciation of positive cultural values, especially amongst children, and to discourage harmful practices. The impetus for the organization of these activities involving dialogue with various community groups seems to stem from the ongoing discussion and reflection, especially between elders and adults, on issues related both to cultural renewal and to the abandonment of harmful traditional practices.

The following testimony by Awa Baldé, a grandmother leader in Saré Adja, illustrates how a process of community-driven dialogue can lead to a consensus on the need for community-wide action, in this case, to abandon a practice ingrained in the community but which is no longer beneficial.

“After the forums, we spoke with our village headman and we organized at least five meetings with other grandmothers, community leaders and some of the younger women. We discussed what the midwife, Binta, told us about the problems associated with excision, and also what the Imam, Ustaz, explained to us about the fact that Islam does not require this cultural practice. During the fifth meeting, we decided together that we must give up this tradition. Since then, everyone has respected the group decision.”

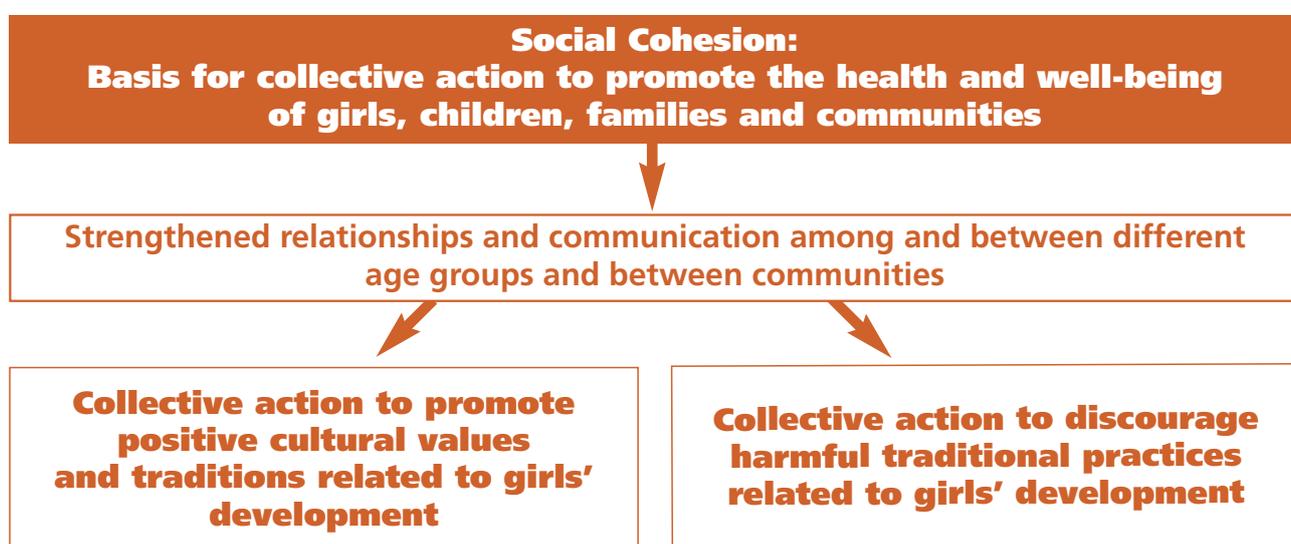
Awa Baldé, grandmother, Local Monitoring Committee President, Saré Kouna

“In this project, everyone has a chance to express his ideas and to feel as if the project belongs to him. This project is based on our own ideas, and that’s why we insist on saying that it’s “our project”.”

Abdoulaye Mballo, youth leader



Grandmothers proudly discuss their own role in society through discussion of the GMP booklet



1.9 Social cohesion supports collective action to promote the development of girls, children, families and communities

The diagram above presents one of the most important conclusions of the GHD project. The final project evaluation, as well as all earlier analyses, supports the conclusion that the critical factor that contributed to sustained community action to promote positive cultural values and traditions, on the one hand, and to discourage traditional practices that are harmful to girls’ development, on the other hand, was the strengthening of social cohesion in communities. The project’s goal was to strengthen the capacity of communities specifically to promote GHD relative to key problems faced by girls. Project results related to those specific GHD issues are very positive. In addition, it appears that increased social cohesion within project communities should enable them to collectively address other issues and problems related to community

life in the future. The spirit of social cohesion that exists today in virtually all communities is reflected in the words of a village headman. In 2008, when the project was launched, the village headman of Saré Boula was skeptical about the project. He said: “In reality, these development workers want to meet with us just to talk to us about excision. That really doesn’t interest us”. His attitude changed considerably. Three years later, he expressed his satisfaction with the project’s results: “I am very happy about this project that has strengthened the social cohesion in our area. When the project arrived we were no longer talking to our neighbors in Saré Demba Mari. Today, project activities have brought us much closer together. Now we are able to discuss all sorts of issues and in a peaceful way”.

A concrete example of the renewed spirit of social cohesion that now exists between communities and between the generations is a collective activity to “Repair the road to Kandia” that was carried out just before the rains started in June 2011.

2. Changes in norms and practices related to girls' well-being

The primary objective of the GHD project was to promote changes in community norms and practices related to early marriage, teenage pregnancy, FGM and corporal punishment. The secondary objective was to increase knowledge and the use of positive cultural values and prac-

tices that contribute to the well-being of girls in family, community and school contexts. The table on page 44 summarizes the changes in community norms and practices that have been documented through both quantitative and qualitative data collection.

The quantitative results presented below are primarily from the baseline survey (Sept. 2008) and the final survey (June 2011), both conducted by external evaluators.

Community action to repair the impassable road: The Fruit of Social Cohesion



For several years, along the main unpaved road running through the Kandia area and connecting 74 villages, there was one place where there were several deep holes in the road, and during the rainy season it was virtually impossible to get from one side to the other. A young community leader, Alpha, said: "The problem with the road existed for years but people never got together to figure out how to solve it. Everyone thought that it was the responsibility of the local government, which never did anything to address the problem".

The president of the Inter-village Collaboration Committee, Thierno Moussa, explains that "during the intergenerational forums there was a lot of discussion on the importance of solidarity within and between communities. And in one of the sessions

there was a group exercise that involved using the six key "steps in the problem-solving process" to address a real community problem. Learning about those steps gave us an idea. Before the rains started in 2011 the committee members met with village headmen from many villages to discuss what could be done if people from different villages joined forces".

According to Youssef Sané, the villagers decided that they should no longer wait for the government to repair the road. He says "Through the GHD project we realized the importance of working together to solve community problems. And when we learned about the steps in problem solving we realized that we could follow those steps to find a solution ourselves to the impassable road".

In the past, there was concern that different generations of men were often reluctant to work together. But this time, the inter-village committee was determined and they mobilized numerous men, from the oldest to the youngest, from all 20 villages involved in the GHD project, and even some from out-lying villages. They worked together for several days, some bringing gravel, others rocks and others their physical strength. The job was done just as the rains started. The committee realized that the job they did was not perfect because they didn't have enough technical advice on how to deal with the vast quantity of water that inundates that area when it rains. But they are proud of what they were able to do working together and they concluded that next year, before the rainy season, they will seek advice from an expert on road maintenance so that they can find a long term solution to the problem. While recognizing the limitations in the work done, the committee coordinator, Thierno Moussa, is very pleased with what they did do: "This activity is proof of the solidarity that exists today and that didn't exist at all before the GHD project".

Awa Mballo, a grandmother member of the committee participated in the planning meetings and encouraged the men, younger and older. When the work on the road was finished, she said: "This is the first time that many communities have worked together to solve a common problem. It's thanks to the social cohesion that now exists between communities and their commitment to working together that made it possible. It's the first time we have seen this type of solidarity between people but I am sure it will not be the last".

2.1 Reduction in practices that are harmful to young girls

The available data support the conclusion that there have been positive changes in teenage pregnancy, early marriage, FGM and, to a lesser extent, corporal punishment.

► Increased age of marriage for girls

“Since the project's been here, early marriages have decreased a lot in our community. Now, families prefer to discuss, to communicate with their daughters. They no longer rigidly insist on their position.”

Molo Baldé, village elder, Bantanto

Both the quantitative and qualitative data collected support the conclusion that nowadays families prefer to marry their daughters when they are older, as compared to three years ago.

Ideal age of marriage for girls (years)		
	<i>Baseline Survey 2008</i>	<i>Endline Survey September 2010</i>
Mothers	15.6	17.3
Grandmothers	15.6	17.3

Qualitative documentation collected during the project shows that the rise in the age of marriage of girls is directly linked to the decrease in the risk of pregnancy among schoolgirls. When the risk of girls becoming pregnant is reduced, families are more comfortable letting them continue studying beyond puberty. At the same time, families are in less of a hurry to marry them off if they feel that they are not at risk at school. The rise in the age proposed for the marriage of young girls appears to be associated with several aspects of the GHD methodology:

- Increased acknowledgment of grandmothers' role by other family members;
- Strengthened communication between grandmothers and young girls;
- Greater contact between grandmothers and teachers; and
- Grandmothers' increased understanding of the importance of girls' education.

► **Decrease in teenage pregnancies**

All of the communities involved in the GHD project state that the number of schoolgirl pregnancies fell sharply during the course of the three-year project. In the 2011 end line survey, nearly all mothers (95%) and all grandmothers (100%) stated that there has been a decrease in pregnancies among girls attending school. In a survey of teachers in the project area conducted at the end with 2010, all (100%) stated that pregnancies among female students decreased between 2008 and 2010, though it is very difficult to get precise quantitative data to support these assertions. In the end-line survey, interviewees expressed their opinions on "the risk of girls becoming pregnant at school." Nearly all interviewees, mothers (95%) and grandmothers (100%), said that the risk had decreased. These attitudes support the conclusion that families may be more comfortable now letting their daughters continue their education after puberty.

Percentage of GHD project participants who think that the risk of girls getting pregnant in school has decreased

<i>Endline Survey - September 2010</i>	
Mothers	95%
Grandmothers	100%
<i>Endline Survey - September 2010</i>	
Teachers	100%

These results are very significant given the fact that teenage pregnancy rates in Velingara are among the highest in the country. Particularly towards the end of the project's third year, numerous testimonials from grandmothers, grandfathers and young men and women confirmed this trend.

Factors that seem to have contributed the most to the significant decrease in teenage pregnancy are:

- Increased involvement of mothers and grandmothers, in particular, in advising and encouraging young girls;
- Increased confidence on the part of grandmothers in their role as teachers of young girls;
- Strengthened communication between grandmothers and granddaughters and greater respect for grandmothers' advice on the part of young girls
- increased trust and collaboration between grandmothers and teachers;
- Increased respect among young girls for their parents and grandparents; and
- A greater sense of responsibility among boys to protect girls.

The project team did not directly address issues of sexuality, including teenage pregnancy, with young girls. Rather, mothers and especially grandmothers took on that role in line with socio-cultural tradition.

► **Attitudes in favor of abandoning female genital mutilation**

Triangulation of quantitative and extensive qualitative data supports the conclusion that there has been significant change in community attitudes regarding FGM. In the 20 villages involved in the project, the vast majority of men and women report that they decided to abandon the practice after the project started.¹

Increased understanding of the risks of FGM

The final survey results show a very positive change in the perception of the risks associated with excision. In the baseline survey, only about half of mothers (53%) and 41% of grandmothers said that FGM is more of risk than a benefit. In contrast, in the final survey almost all mothers (92%) and grandmothers (95%) stated that the risks of FGM are greater than the benefits.

The risks of FGM are greater than the benefits

	<i>Baseline Survey 2008</i>	<i>Endline Survey September 2010</i>
Mothers	53%	92%
Grandmothers	41%	95%

Changes in the perception of Islam's position on excision

In the qualitative study conducted at the start of

the project, interviewees stated that the main factor that motivated them to continue to cut girls is the belief that Islam recommends the practice. This belief, in fact, is not the case.

In the baseline survey, three-quarters of the mothers (75%) and grandmothers (76%) thought that in order to be a good Muslim, a woman must be cut. This position was defended only by a few mothers (7%) and grandmothers (5%) in the final survey.

	A woman must be excised to be a good Muslim	
	<i>Baseline Survey 2008</i>	<i>Endline Survey September 2010</i>
Mothers	75%	7%
Grandmothers	76%	5%

Having a daughter who is not cut is becoming more acceptable

In the baseline survey nearly half of the mothers (45%) and grandmothers (47%) said that they would be ashamed to have a daughter or a granddaughter who is not cut. In the final survey, only a small percentage of mothers and grandmothers (3%) said that would have this feeling, signaling a very significant change.

	Ashamed of having a daughter who is not cut	
	<i>Baseline Survey 2008</i>	<i>Final Survey 2010</i>
Mothers	45%	3%
Grandmothers	47%	3%

FGM is no longer perceived as a cultural obligation

Initially, the vast majority of mothers (88%) and grandmothers (86%) stated that FGM is a cultural obligation. In the final survey, only 9% of mothers and 5% of grandmothers stated that FGM is a cultural obligation; a very significant change in attitude.

	FGM is a cultural obligation	
	<i>Baseline Survey 2008</i>	<i>Final Survey 2010</i>
Mothers	88%	9%
Grandmothers	86%	5%

Triangulation of results from the final survey and extensive qualitative interviewing and documentation collected during the entire three year project implementation period supports the conclusion that in all 20 project villages, attitudes toward excision have changed significantly, and that all communities have either abandoned the practice or they are in the process of doing so. The triangulation of information collected at various points in time and using various data collection methods increases the reliability of these conclusions.

The factors that seem to have contributed the most to the changes in attitude toward FGM are the following components of the GHD methodology:

- Ongoing community dialogue between different age and gender groups aimed at reaching consensus on how to address this issue;
- The fact that the strategy focuses more on encouraging positive aspects of the culture than it does on discouraging harmful ones (in line with the principle of unconditional positive regard);
- The active involvement of social networks made up of all grandmothers and grandmother leaders in the community catalyzed a collective process that resulted in changes in grandmothers' attitudes and subsequently contributed to changing community norms related to this practice (this conclusion is consistent with recent research findings by Shell-Duncan in the Gambia);
- Respect shown at all times to grandmothers, the guardians of tradition;
- The approach used in which information on FGM was shared but in which there were no messages or recommendations that it be abandoned; and
- The fact that the cutters were neither identified nor stigmatized.

“Our ancestors taught us that girls should be cut so that they will be more faithful to their husbands, but we no longer believe that. We now know that nowhere in Islam is FGM recommended. There are at least 30 little girls in the community who were born in the last two years who have not been cut.”

Dinde, an elderly grandmother, Saré Faremba

“After the law against FGM was passed, we were summoned to various meetings where we were told that our village headman could be imprisoned if we continued FGM. At that time, we weren't fully convinced, but many of us stopped out of fear. With the GHD project, we started to understand the risks of FGM for both girls and women. Now, we also know that our religion doesn't require it. Today, we have stopped because in our hearts and minds, we know how harmful it is.”

Awa Baldé, grandmother leader, Saré Kouna

“We know now that women who are not cut are not at any risk, that they can be happy and fulfill their religious obligations and have children. Through the project activities we have learned that during pregnancy, women who are cut can experience all sorts of complications, which can even end in the worst-case scenario. We are committed to continuing the positive practices for the development and well-being of girls and we are going to abandon those that are negative.”

Faly, Imam, Mountoumba

► **Decrease in corporal punishment**

A widespread practice in the project area, as elsewhere in Senegal, is the use of the paddle to discipline children.

The project fostered discussion on corporal punishment, although less emphasis was placed on this issue in comparison to the other GHD topics.

The qualitative information collected during the project suggests there was some change in attitude and decrease in the use of the stick to punish children. However, it appears that this practice persists and it should be the focus of future community activities.

2.2 Increased promotion of positive values and traditions that are beneficial to girls' development

Quantitative, as well as qualitative, information shows that there are very positive changes in terms of efforts increasingly being made in families, schools and communities to strengthen the transmission of positive cultural values and traditions to children.

► **Integration of cultural values in school programs**

In keeping with the Ministry of Education's priorities, the project aimed to promote the integration of cultural values in schools. The qualitative information collected from adults, children and teachers show, that there have been significant changes in teachers' attitudes toward the relevance of promoting cultural values in the classroom. Teaching materials and activities proposed by the project, which encourage children to reflect on cultural values, are being used in all schools. These include: a booklet on the role of grandmothers, a game called "Who Are We?", songs in praise of grandmothers, traditional stories and informal teaching by grandmothers. All these activities continue to be promoted by the district education office which bodes well for their continued use in schools.

“We invite elders in the community to come into the classroom to share their knowledge which I believe is essential for children's development. I invite grandmothers into my class to share their immense wealth of knowledge. In my opinion, schools must play a role in restoring African values.”

**Ephren Diatta, Primary School Director,
Saré Demba Mary**

Towards the end of the project a second booklet for the primary school was developed, entitled "African Values for Today's Children".

“We are touched by the recognition shown to the grandmothers by including their ideas in this booklet. This booklet proves that no one will ever again ques-

tion the importance of grandmothers. We will do every thing possible to support the teachers to convey the content of this booklet to children.”

Kankouyel, grandmother from Kael Besel

“We are happy that this booklet will be used in our schools. We will be able to learn about our values and traditions. I think that the elders will be happy to come to the school to help the teachers so that we can really understand these values.”

Abdoullaye Baldé, adolescent boy, Darou

► **Greater investment in children's education and upbringing on the part of parents and grandparents**

Qualitative documentation collected throughout the project shows a significant change in parents' attitudes toward their role in children's education and upbringing. At the beginning of the project, the attitude of most parents was that schools have the sole responsibility for educating children. Three years later their attitudes have changed considerably and they have realized the need for greater involvement on their part to ensure a synergy between their own efforts and those of teachers.

This change in attitude on the part of parents and grandparents appears to be linked primarily to:

- Establishment of ongoing dialogue between teachers and community members;
- Greater acknowledgment on the part of both families and teachers of the importance of communicating local knowledge and traditions to children; and
- Increased understanding among parents about the complementary roles of teachers and themselves in children's education and up-bringing.

► **Increased involvement of grandmothers in children's, and specifically girls', education**

Before the project began, families and communities tended to marginalize grandmothers and underestimate their importance in children's education and upbringing. Data collected from all categories of community members (adults, adolescents and children) show that grandmothers are now much more involved in the education of children, in general, and of girls, in particular, within family, community and school settings.

In the baseline and endline surveys, one of the indicators used to assess the level of grandmothers' participation in children's education is their involvement in story-telling. In the baseline survey only 28% of mothers and 20% of grandmothers said that "many grandmothers tell traditional stories" in the village. In comparison, in the endline survey nearly three times as many mothers (73%) and grandmothers (72%) gave this response.

The factors that seem to have contributed the most to this very positive change are:

- Greater respect on the part of children and adolescents for grandmothers;
- Greater recognition of grandmothers' role and experience on the part of parents, grandfathers and teachers; and
- Increased confidence among grandmothers regarding the importance of their own knowledge and role in the family, especially with children.

Specifically as regards young girls, grandmothers' increased involvement in advising and supervising them is reported by all family members and is particularly appreciated by the young girls themselves. According to the girls, they now spend much more time with their grandmothers and they are receiving more advice and support from them, which is helping them to avoid getting pregnant and allowing them to continue their schooling.

“Now, grandmothers invite us all the time to come and sit with them and talk. In the past, there was considerable distrust between us and we were distant. But now there's a mutual feeling of trust. I could say that now, the grandmothers are very enthusiastic about teaching us everything they know.”

Binta, a 12-year-old girl

“Grandmothers have a very important position in our society, particularly in the lives of children and young girls. But unfortunately in the past, development programs completely forgot the grandmothers. They didn't participate in community activities, and they didn't have the right to speak. In fact, they are probably the best entry point for addressing various issues and problems in the family and community. Today, they are self-confident, and they're involved everywhere in the community. They are an invaluable resource for development programs.”

Amy Sarr Cissé,
community development worker, World Vision

“There are very visible changes brought about by the GHD project. Nowadays you always see grandmothers and young girls together, chatting. Now the girls stay home at night rather than running off to dancing parties in other villages. Girls are no longer married at a very young age as they were in the past. And nowadays no father can just wake up one day and give his daughter away in marriage without asking her opinion. Now, if a girl doesn't agree to the proposed suitor, her father will not continue negotiations. It wasn't like that before.”

Mamadou Sabaly, Imam

► **Community-initiated activities to pass on culture**

In the preliminary phase of the project, one of the major concerns expressed by communities was the loss of cultural values and traditions. One of the project objectives was to encourage communities to take initiatives to promote the transmission of cultural values to younger generations.

An important outcome of the project is the significant number of activities now being undertaken by community members themselves to pass positive cultural values onto young people. All communities involved in the project have undertaken some initiatives, without any impetus from the project team, to promote cultural values with children and adolescents.

This includes the following activities, listed in approximate order of frequency: traditional storytelling sessions with children organized by grandmothers, traditional education sessions with groups of girls organized by grandmothers, community cultural days, the construction of bantas (a traditional meeting place for discussions between older and younger males), traditional community-wide storytelling nights, sessions with boys to play traditional games, daïras (religious meetings and discussion), and discussion of GHD issues among men at the mosques after Friday prayer.

These various activities, involving different age and gender groups, have enabled all segments of society to share and/or learn more about their own cultural values. Factors that seem to explain the active mobilization of communities to carry out these activities to promote local cultural values and traditions are:

- Renewal of cultural identity on the part of youth and adults;
- Consensus between community members on the need to take action to halt the loss of cultural values; and
- Commitment on the part of numerous community groups to promote positive traditional values.

“We haven't had these kinds of cultural events in the village for the past 30 years. The last time I witnessed this type of cultural event was many, many years ago when my father was the village headman. Nowadays, people are interested in money, television, music and football. And all the young people have left. Through this project, it's our humanity, our very existence that is returning. Now, those of us who have been around for many years know that they know something.”

The Djarga, Village chief of Saré Mari Demba

VI. Lessons learned from the Girls' Holistic Development Project

The lessons drawn from the GHD project, presented below, come from a variety of sources, notably feedback from community members, teachers and education sector officials, health workers, World Vision field staff and managers, local government officials in the project implementation area, routinely collected documentation, periodic surveys and two evaluations.

1. Lessons learned: the GHD methodology

► Respecting cultural values and traditions to increase community involvement and commitment

A determining factor that contributed to sustained community involvement in project activities is that the entire strategy is based on respect for local cultural and religious roles, values and practices. Acknowledging and respecting communities' cultural identity in a development program makes them feel more confident and subsequently more open to change. Development programs should not only aim to introduce change into communities but should simultaneously and explicitly acknowledge and reinforce existing positive cultural roles, values, etc.



The facilitator presents the problem tree dealing with the lack of intergenerational communication. Forum participants have identified the roots of this problem (written on the ovals)

► Inclusion of elders to create synergistic action with youth

In all African societies, elders play a central role. Often development programs primarily target the younger portion of the population assuming that they will be more receptive to proposed changes than older members of the society. However, from the community's perspective, active inclusion of elders in programs can be viewed as a gauge of the project's merits. In the GHD project, young people applauded the fact that elders were actively involved, as this created a synergy between the wisdom of elders and the physical strength of young people.

► Involving grandmothers: A cultural resource to promote lasting change in socio-cultural norms

For issues specifically linked to the well-being of children, young girls and women, it is older, experienced women — or “grandmothers” — who have primary responsibility for advising and supervising them. In families, young girls do not make autonomous decisions concerning major life events, such as excision, schooling and marriage.

Generally, family decisions about these critical events are collectively made and in this process grandmothers have great influence because of their age and status. Community interventions should be built on existing social roles and hierarchy rather than on foreign models of social organization. The GHD project demonstrates that when grandmothers' role is recognized and their knowledge is enhanced, they can change their attitudes toward harmful practices, which can in turn lead to changes in community norms.

► A holistic approach to improve young girls' development and well-being

Families are concerned about girls' overall development, including physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural, spiritual and behavioral aspects. Often, programs deal only with one aspect of their development, and focus, for example, on discouraging early marriage or excision. The GHD experience suggests that communities are more receptive to an approach that deals with girls' development in a holistic fashion.

▶ **Intergenerational communication strengthens social cohesion and collective action for social change**

At the outset, communities in the project area were deeply concerned about the communication breakdown between the generations. All communities state that the project has significantly contributed to strengthening mutual respect, dialogue and understanding between generations. Increased communication between the generations not only can contribute to building consensus around specific community issues, but it also contributes to increasing social cohesion and collective capacity to deal with future problems.

▶ **Community dialogue between the various age and gender groups to build consensus for change**

The communication strategy in the GHD project catalyzes dialogue within and between different age and gender groups. Changing community norms related to early marriage and other issues that have an impact on girls' development requires a consensus between the different segments of society. Often, communication strategies in development programs target one or more groups in the community without explicitly strengthening communication and understanding between them. In order to promote lasting changes, programs should opt for communication strategies that catalyze discussion between the various segments of society so that they reach consensus on which attitudes and actions to promote.

▶ **Emphasis on positive values and roles to promote change: Unconditional positive regard**

Most community programs aim to convince communities either to adopt new practices or to abandon existing ones. It is not easy for communities to feel comfortable about always being asked to change this or that with the arrival of one project after another. One of the project's core principles is that of *unconditional positive regard*.¹ This concept implies that greater emphasis should be placed on acknowledging and encouraging positive existing roles, values and practices rather than on promoting change. In the GHD project, this principle was applied and it seems to have led to community commitment to reconsider ancient practices such as FGM. This principle could be adopted in programs that affect deeply ingrained community norms and practices to facilitate change by communities.

▶ **Close relationships with communities to catalyze community dialogue and change through community-driven initiatives**

A prerequisite for the effectiveness of GMP's community dialogue strategy is the establishment of

close relationships between development workers and community leaders and groups. Maintaining trusting and open relationships with community leaders is a key factor in promoting ongoing community dialogue and community-driven decision-making and action. Past experiences have shown that in order to promote change, providing information on suggested practices is necessary, but not enough. Genuine interpersonal relationships with community actors are a powerful force for encouraging them to reflect on new information, re-examine their own experiences and decide for themselves what actions to take. Experience in the GHD project supports the need for development workers to maintain continuous and close relationships with community members.

▶ **A community-driven approach to promote the rights and responsibilities of children**

The GHD project objectives comply with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The Government of Senegal has made a clear commitment to promoting these rights for all children. At the community level, however, community members are often uncomfortable with programs based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that dictate how they should bring up their own children. In the GHD project, an "approach based on children's needs" was used involving a bottom-up approach in which communities themselves identify children's needs, or rights and responsibilities, in the family and community. The identified needs derive from cultural and religious values, but also other more universal values. Based on this experience it appears that in the African context communities are much more receptive to an approach in which they themselves identify children's rights but also their responsibilities.

▶ **Communication and education methods to catalyze reflection rather than to persuade communities what to do**

In the GHD project, the concept of communication used involves encouraging critical reflection on various issues concerning GHD as they relate to both, the communities' existing ideas and the new information. In the GMP approach there are no "messages" per se that tell community members, for example, that girls should not be married off at a young age. All of the communication activities and tools aim to catalyze dialogue and encourage people to formulate their **own** conclusions on what to do. According to community informants, it is this non-directive approach that motivated them to discuss issues among themselves and to decide what action to take or not to take, to discourage harmful practices and to promote positive ones in support of children's development.

► **Strengthening school-community ties requires complementary strategies with children, teachers and parents**

Creating a close relationship between the school and community is beneficial to children, parents, teachers and the school system as a whole. The closer relationships observed now between schools and communities in the project area can be attributed to the project strategies that, first, strengthened mutual respect between community actors and teachers and second, strengthened dialogue between them on a variety of topics related to children's education and upbringing. This led in turn to changes in the attitude and interaction between teachers, parents and children. This experience suggests that in order to foster understanding and close collaboration between schools and communities, complementary strategies that target all categories of adults and children are required.

2. Lessons learned: Factors that contribute to the reduction of early marriage, teenage pregnancy and female genital mutilation

The significant decrease in harmful practices (early marriage and FGM) and teenage pregnancies that have been documented after three years of project implementation appear to be related to several key facets of the GHD strategy:

- Ongoing community dialogue between generations and between different community groups that facilitated consensus-building on how to address these issues;
- Active involvement of grandmothers, based on their role and influence on sociocultural norms and practices related to the three priority GHD issues addressed in the project; and
- Adoption of an approach in which a systematic effort was made to acknowledge positive cultural roles and practices, which increased community confidence in its cultural identity and at the same time made communities more open to critiquing and reconsidering traditional practices.

► **Factors that most contributed to the rise in the age of marriage of young girls**

In addition to the three factors cited above, the significant change in attitude toward the age for marrying young girls, and regarding the importance of taking into consideration their opinion in choosing a spouse, can be primarily attributed to the following aspects of the GHD methodology:

- Increased acknowledgement of the grandmothers' role in the family by all family members;
- Strengthened communication between grandmothers and young girls;

- Closer contact between grandmothers and teachers; and
- Increased commitment on the part of grandmothers to promoting schooling for girls.

This experience suggests that grandmothers can be an invaluable resource in combatting early and forced marriage, given their status and influence in the family.

► **Factors that most contributed to the decrease in teenage pregnancy**

The significant drop in teenage pregnancy among school girls seems to be primarily associated with:

- Increased involvement of family members in girls' education and upbringing, particularly by mothers and grandmothers;
- Grandmothers' increased confidence in their role as advisors to young girls;
- Development of close relationships and strengthened communication between grandmothers and young girls;
- Increased respect on the part of young girls toward parents and grandparents; and
- Increased sense of responsibility on the part of adolescent boys concerning the well-being and protection of girls.

The GHD project team was not directly involved in discussing issues of sexuality, including teenage pregnancy, with young girls. The grandmothers and mothers took the responsibility for counseling girls through existing communication channels and methods. For programs dealing with issues of pregnancy and early marriage, this experience also suggests that it is important to promote mutual respect and communication between girls, their grandmothers and mothers, and between grandmothers and teachers.

► **Factors that most contributed to changes in attitude toward FGM**

In addition to the three factors cited above, the significant changes in attitude toward FGM appear to be primarily attributed to the following aspects of the GHD methodology:

- Activities with informal social networks of grandmothers and particularly grandmother leaders catalyzed a collective process of change in grandmothers' attitudes and subsequently contributed to change in community norms related to FGM;
- Respect was consistently shown toward grandmothers' role and experience;
- Information on FGM was shared with community members at various points in time, without the use of directive messages calling for it to be abandoned; and
- Cutters were never identified nor stigmatized, at any time during the project.

► **Difficulties in discouraging the use of corporal punishment as an educational method**

In the project area, the use of the “stick” as a tool in educating children is a widespread tradition. As a secondary objective, the project fostered reflection on this disciplinary practice, however, there has been only a limited decrease in corporal punishment during the course of the project. Communities express frustration both due to the law that forbids it and to the policy promoting “the rights of the child” as defined by the CRC. Families perceive this situation as leaving them without any means of disciplining their children. Future programs should facilitate in-depth discussion with communities on alternative ways of punishing children without hitting them.

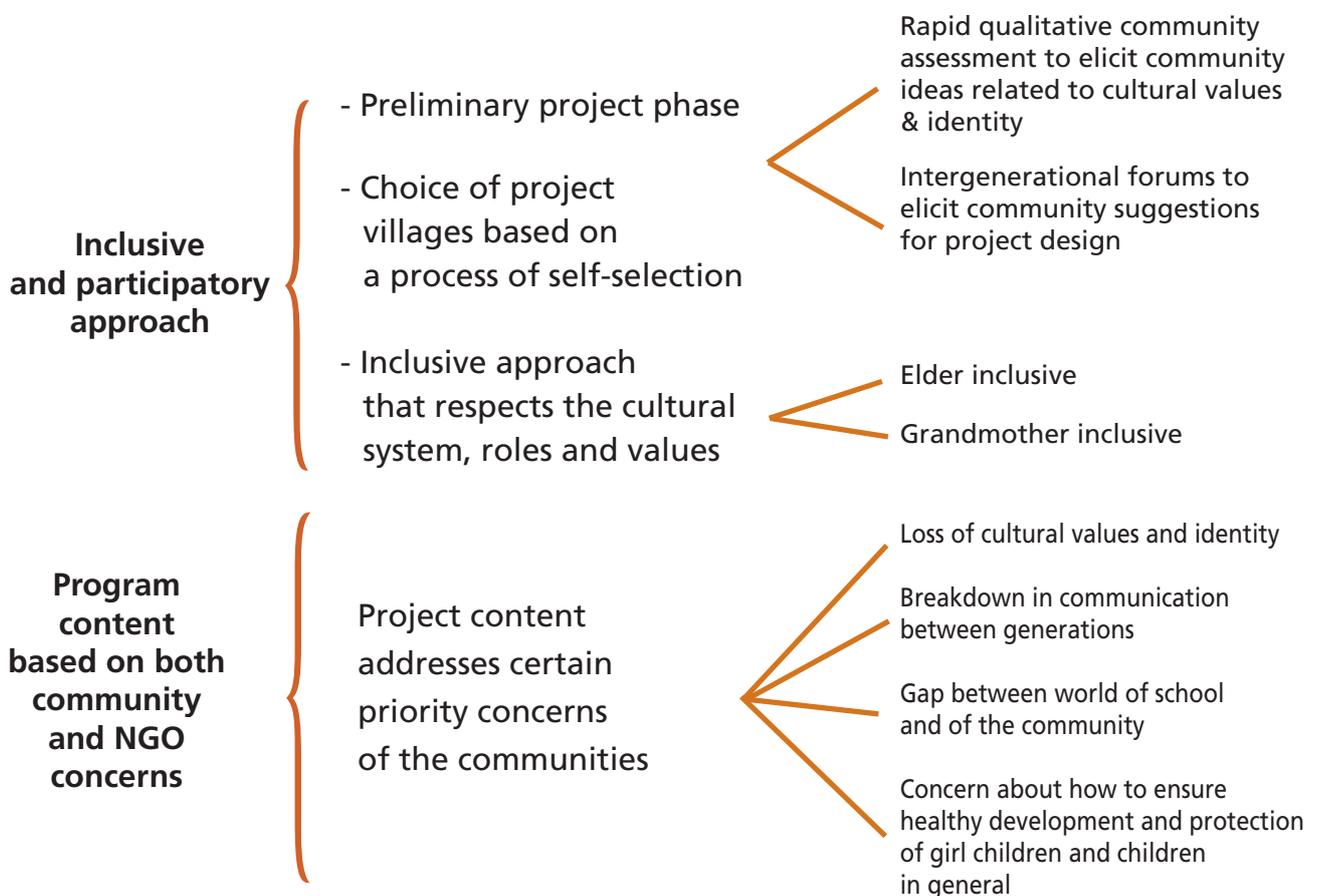
► **Strong sense of project ownership on the part of communities**

Both community members and external observers have noted a very strong sense of project ownership

among communities involved in the GHD program. Various facets of the project methodology seem to explain this strong sense of ownership, notably:

- The preliminary phase enabling program planners to understand community perspectives and take them into consideration when designing the project;
- A self-selection process allowing villages to decide themselves whether or not to participate in the project;
- Respect for existing social organization and cultural values in all project activities;
- Active inclusion of elders in general and grandmothers in particular;
- Addressing several serious community concerns, namely loss of cultural values and the breakdown in communication between the generations; and
- The non-directive approach that does not tell communities what to do but rather catalyzes dialogue and encourages them to arrive at their own decisions regarding which traditions to preserve and which to abandon.

Factors that Contribute to the Strong Sense of Community Ownership and Involvement in the GHD Project



3. Lessons learned: Resources required

▶ Financial and human resources required to build communities' social infrastructure and sustained change

In community programs that focus on building the capacity of community leaders and groups to analyze situations, make decisions and take action on their own to promote change in social norms and practices, the resources required are primarily human resources and methodological tools for catalyzing and reinforcing these processes. In financial terms the cost of such interventions, that build the social infrastructure, is less than programs that invest heavily in physical infrastructure, materials and stipends to government staff to involve them in community activities. The total GHD project costs were US\$ 400,000 for three years. One quarter of these funds covered technical support provided by The Grandmother Project to develop the intervention methodology, support implementation of all community activities, including on-going training for the project team, and document all community activities. The main portion of the budget was for salaries, logistics, production of methodological tools and organization of community workshops and meetings.

▶ Skilled and committed human resources

The success of any development program depends to a great extent on the human resources involved. Implementation of this kind of capacity building community program requires a sufficient number of human resources with skills in facilitation, community development, and adult education plus in depth knowledge of the cultural context. It requires good quality human resources, who not only have technical skills but also the necessary personal characteristics, such as a positive attitudes toward communities, excellent skills in non-directive communication, empathy for others, tolerance and patience. Knowing and respecting the local culture and developing close relationships with community members are also essential competences. In order to implement programs based on dialogue rather than message dissemination, human resources must have strong skills in group facilitation based on adult participatory education. Developing the facilitation skills of those who interface directly with community actors should be an on-going activity throughout project implementation.

▶ Methodological approaches that build on indigenous communication and learning models

For all community activities, it is important to use methods and tools that are based on traditional models of cultural expression and also to draw on the expertise of community actors who have in-

depth knowledge of cultural values and traditions. The GHD project used various tools that were based on local culture: stories-without-an-ending, skits, a booklet on the role of grandmothers, traditional stories, proverbs and songs of praise of grandmothers.

▶ Project duration required for community-driven change

Many programs have a short time frame, one or two years, yet they anticipate significant changes in community practices. In order to produce the planned results within a short time frame, external pressure is often applied on communities to convince them to change traditions that they value. If, however, programs aim to make communities the protagonists in promoting changes in social norms and practices that are deeply engrained in tradition, this cannot happen quickly. For community-driven change to come about it appears that a three to four year intervention period is more realistic so that community actors have time to reconsider their attitudes toward existing norms and practices and to decide collectively whether certain practices should be maintained or abandoned.

▶ Adaptation of community strategies during implementation

The GHD project, implemented from 2008 – 2011, was an action research project. A critical aspect of the project that contributed to its success was the on-going process learning approach in which identification of strengths and weaknesses in the program, generated lessons that led to adjustments in the strategies used throughout the project implementation period. In all programs there should be some flexibility in the planned activities in order to be able to respond to community feedback, changing needs, unanticipated outcomes and opportunities that arise.



VII. Conclusions

Communities in Senegal, government officials and development organizations all have a concern for the well-being of young girls, who will become the women, mothers, and citizens of tomorrow. The preliminary phase of the GHD project shed light on several serious problems facing communities in the Velingara area of Senegal such as the loss of cultural values, breakdown in communication between generations and widespread teenage pregnancy. Promoting children's well-being has been the key focus for World Vision's work in the past eleven years in that area of the country. The organization has a particular interest in promoting the well-being of girls and in identifying culturally appropriate ways to address the issues of early marriage, teen pregnancy, FGM and corporal punishment, which all have a direct impact on girls.

“In African societies we all know what a grandmother represents. In my opinion the success of the GHD approach resides in the fact that grandmothers are revered. I participated actively in the GHD project and when I reflect on it, it makes me think about what the Nigerian author, Tchinoua Achebe, said in his novel about “the world that is falling apart”. The only difference between the world that Achebe talks about and the world here in Velingara is that just at the time when community values were starting to fragment the project arrived to put together all of those who have a role in safeguarding those values.”

Siradio Diao, secondary school teacher, Velingara

After three years of project implementation, information collected in several surveys and in the final evaluation reveal significant positive results. First, there have been positive changes in the norms and practices that influence the well-being of girls. Second, social cohesion within families and communities-at-large has been strengthened. For example, extensive qualitative documentation collected over the course of project implementation shows a very positive change regarding what is considered the ideal age of marriage, a practice that is ingrained in tradition in this part of Senegal. Another significant result of the project is that communities believe that girls' risk of teenage pregnancy greatly decreased in the three previous years.

Other changes in family and community attitudes and practices that have a positive impact on the upbringing and well-being of girls are:

- Integration of cultural values into schools;
- Greater investment by parents and grandparents in their children's education;
- Greater involvement of grandmothers in the education of children, in general, and girls, in particular; and
- Organization of activities by communities themselves to pass on cultural values to younger generations.

It has also been documented that a range of intermediate results at the community level have contributed to the positive changes in social norms and attitudes discussed above. The cumulative effect of these results is that of greater social cohesion observed in both families and communities. The factors that appear to have contributed most to this positive change are:

- Increased importance given to cultural identity on the part of both young people and adults;
- Greater respect for elders, and specifically grandmothers among family and community members;
- Greater self-confidence on the part of grandmothers;
- Positive acknowledgment of each community member's point of view;
- Strengthened intergenerational communication and understanding;
- Adoption of a mode of communication in families and communities that is more open and respectful than in the past;
- Strengthened communication and collaboration between communities and schools; and
- Greater confidence on the part of communities in their own capacity to promote the well-being of children, families and the communities at large.

The increased feeling of social cohesion among community members appears to have been both the foundation and the impetus for communities

to take collective action to promote the well-being of girls and boys. It is the solidarity and common commitment to improving GHD that enabled communities in the project area to take action to discourage certain harmful practices while at the same time actively promoting positive cultural values and traditions that they tended to ignore in the past.

“In the approach used in the GHD project no orders were given and nothing was imposed on communities. The very strong motivation on the part of communities to participate stemmed from the approach used which involved eliciting dialogue and reflection amongst community members. The positive changes in attitudes and practices, which are shared by all the members of the community, are the fruits of this process in which communities themselves decided what to keep and what to change.”

Malang Sagna,
Director of Kael Besel School, IDEN

The success of community programs has been attributed to the interaction between three categories of factors related to the:¹

1. Intervention methodology;
2. Community development workers or change agents; and
3. Community characteristics.

► **Key characteristics of the intervention methodology in the Girls’ Holistic Development (GHD) project:**

- The intervention strategy was designed following a preliminary consultation process with communities.
- The choice of communities who participated in the project was based on a self-selection process in which they decided themselves whether or not to participate;
- In all activities, cultural values and roles were consistently validated.
- Elders were explicitly involved and the approach fostered respect for their age and experience.
- In the program preferential status was accorded to grandmothers, consistent with their authoritative position in society.
- The communication model adopted in the project was based on dialogue and critical reflection rather than on a message-driven approach in which communities are instructed what to do.
- Activities encouraged communication between gender and age groups.
- All activities were conducted in the local language.

- At no time did community members receive remuneration for their participation in activities organized by the project.

Characteristics of the community development workers or change agents

- Their role was to “facilitate dialogue and reflection” between different segments of society, rather than to “persuade” them to adopt a pre-established objective or practice.
- There was an ongoing process to strengthen the capacities of field staff to facilitate and encourage community confidence and capacity-building.
- All field staff speak and write the local language.
- They lived in communities in the project area.
- They maintained frequent contact with each community.
- They developed close relationships with grandmother leaders and other influential and respected people in communities.
- They have respectful attitudes toward community ideas, values and traditions.
- They respected the communities’ “pace.”

► **Key characteristics of communities**

- The elders – grandfathers and grandmothers – were very involved, ready to share their knowledge and to re-examine their own experience and attitudes in light of new information.
- Grandmothers in particular were an invaluable resource because of their knowledge, experience and availability.
- Leaders from all segments of society – men, women, young and old – were all willing to contribute to efforts to improve community well-being.
- Most teachers were open to building stronger relationships with the community and were actively engaged in the project activities in schools and in the community.
- There was a gradual increase in social cohesion between the different segments of the community across villages.

An overarching lesson drawn from this experience is that the key elements of the approach, namely community dialogue catalyzed by project activities and the anchoring of each strategy in cultural roles, values and practices of local communities - are believed to be both applicable and relevant in other contexts and to address other community development issues.

Another major lesson that emerges from this experience is that social cohesion within communities is a prerequisite for sustained community action to achieve lasting change. In this vein, the GHD project experience demonstrates that trust and com-

munication between family members—between men and women and between different age groups—are necessary for any development programs to be successful in promoting sustained changes in social norms and practices. By definition, social norms are collective, meaning that they are shared by community members. Therefore, to ensure that changes in social norms are sustainable, it is essential that the process for change involve all segments of society affected by those social norms.

In the GHD project, in which the goal was to improve the well-being of young girls, several categories of persons who directly influence the definition and communication of social norms related to girls' development and well-being were involved in discussions on both existing norms and possible alternatives. These priority groups were senior women, or grandmothers, traditional community leaders, religious leaders and men. The process of community dialogue was initiated with the leaders of these key groups who, in turn, encouraged discussion within their respective peer groups. Later, the dialogue was expanded to include discussion both between these groups, and with other groups, such as younger women, in a gradual consensus-building process within the community.

Most programs that aim to promote the well-being of adolescent girls involve only them as actors and often as the only target group. The GHD project opted for a systems approach in which not only young girls, but all categories of adults in the family and community who have a decisive influence on them were involved. Another unique feature of the GHD approach is that the advice provided to

girls regarding early and forced marriage, teenage pregnancy and FGM did not come directly from project staff but rather from the family and community actors who are culturally designated to play an advisory role with them, namely grandmothers and also mothers.

The approach adopted by GMP – based on dialogue and consensus-building between community actors on changing social norms—allows communities to develop and adopt a vision for girls' development that responds to the needs and desires of young girls. Girls want to finish school before marrying and they want adults to listen to their views on when and who to marry. Moreover, they also hope to grow up with a strong understanding of their history and cultural identity.

The approach used in this project seems to offer a response to criticisms often made against development cooperation programs due to their tendency to impose "foreign" or "Western" values, practices and lifestyles without taking into account the cultural context and communities' priorities. Experimenting with this approach in other development domains could confirm its validity beyond the domains targeted in the GHD project.

“We cannot hope to have sustainable development if the approaches we use are based on foreign models. The relevance of this project is irrefutable as it has encouraged communities in the area to become more united and committed to promoting their own community-driven (endogenous) development.”
Malang Sagna, Director of Kael Besel School, IDEN



Community dialogue to promote change for GHD.

Summary

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2. See: <http://www.grandmotherproject.org>
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5. Freire, Paulo, *L'éducation : Pratique de liberté*, Édition du Cerf, Collection Terres de Feu, 1975
6. The development of the "stories-without-an-ending" has been inspired by Paulo Freire's work on the *problem exposures codes*, from the *experimental learning* model of Kolb, and by the Brookfield's (1991) use of the *critical incidents*, with the aim of stimulating collective thinking and solution of problems. The choice of presenting always feminine characters under a positive angle is based on an important concept of feminist pedagogy (Belenky and others, *ibidem*).

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In the GHD project, the role of grandmothers in the upbringing and protection of children, and particularly of girls, is being restored in communities. Thanks to this project, the concept of "community-responsive schools" is being put into practice for the benefit of all.

Sagane Thiaw
Program Manager, Velingara
World Vision Senegal

In the GHD project, for three years we tried to change community attitudes by acknowledging what is positive in communities. Our major discovery was that grandmothers are levers for change in society. When we have confidence in them and when we acknowledge their importance, we can achieve extraordinary results that are likely to be sustained.

Boubacar Fofana
Girls' Holistic Development Project Coordinator
World Vision

The GHD project has helped restore local cultural values that are often ignored in other approaches and programs. And it is the recognition of communities' cultural assets that has given them the confidence to reexamine their attitudes and practices related to certain issues that can hinder the development, education and protection of girls and boys.

Falilou Cissé
Community Development Advisor
The Grandmother Project

In my opinion, there is no doubt that the importance given to culture in this project has contributed to creating a sense of social equilibrium based on respect, acknowledgement of tradition and openness to other cultures. This approach has contributed to decreasing conflict and to creating a culture of peace and understanding, all hallmarks of sustainable development.

Mamadou Coulibaly
Teacher and Program Officer
The Grandmother Project



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Girls and Grandmothers Hand-in-Hand Dialogue between generations for community change

The document describes the Girls' Holistic Development Project, implemented in southern Senegal by World Vision with technical support from the Grandmother Project (2008-2012). It presents the results of an innovative approach that emphasized the active involvement of an under-utilized resource in development programs, namely grandmothers, to strengthen social cohesion and promote change by working through the local culture. Many of the lessons learned from this experience are relevant to other organizations' programs that aim to improve the lives of children, especially girls, women, families and communities.



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"A young plant always grows better under the shade of a big tree."
"Leggel, si faalaama mawnude, ko e lekki uworo." Halpulaar proverb

The Grandmother Project (GMP) is an American and Senegalese non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the health and well-being of women and children in developing countries.

Grandmother Project was founded on three principles:

- Active involvement of grandmothers in particular, and elders in general, in programs aimed at promoting the well-being of children, women and families;
- Strengthening communication between generations; and
- Use of communication and education methods that catalyze community dialogue for collective action to improve their own lives.

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