

**Report n°12**  
**Summary of the full report**

# **Changes in gender relations and in the status of women**

Kandia and Nemataba communes, Dep. of Velingara, Kolda Region, Senegal

QUALITATIVE STUDY  
CONDUCTED IN THE AREA WHERE THE  
GIRLS' HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM  
HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED

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## Executive Summary

In international development programs in all fields, increasing attention is being given to gender roles and relationships in order to promote equitable participation in and benefits from such programs. In many contexts, existing roles, influence, access to resources and involvement in decision-making in families and communities are not equitable and women are at a disadvantage. For this reason, a priority aim of many development programs is to promote more equitable roles and relationships between men and women of all ages.

The objectives of the Girls' Holistic Development (GHD) Program, implemented in southern Senegal by the NGO Grandmother Project – Change through Culture in close collaboration with the District Education Office, are to increase girls' success at school and to reduce the incidence of child marriage, teenage pregnancy and female genital mutilation. To achieve these objectives, the GHD program: promotes positive cultural roles and values while discouraging harmful ones; involves three generations of community members (adolescents, adults and elders) of both sexes; promotes intergenerational dialogue; strengthens the traditional role of senior women, or grandmothers, as confidants and advisors of young girls; and uses dialogical communication methods to catalyze reflection in communities for consensus-building on all aspects of GHD.

In 2018, a study was commissioned by the Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) at Georgetown University on intergenerational relationships in the rural communities where the GHD program had been carried out (Lulli, 2018). And in 2018-2019 an extensive evaluation of the GHD program was conducted by IRH (IRH 2019) in collaboration with the Universite Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar. Both of these earlier studies revealed that the GHD program has contributed to improving the status of females of all ages as well as relations between the sexes in both family and community contexts. However, neither of those earlier research projects investigated changes in gender relations in an in-depth way. In order to better understand the changes observed in gender relations in the GHD's zone of operation, GMP commissioned a study in September 2019 which was carried out by anthropologist, Dr. Francesca Lulli. The document presented here is the summary of Lulli's 2019 research, for which there is also a full report. This is a translation from the original report in French.

The methodology used in this study was based on the conceptual framework of the *Social Institutions and Gender Index* (SIGI) produced by the OECD (2014). This study investigated three of the four priority SIGI parameters, namely:

- Discrimination against women and their decision-making power within the family and under-valuing their capabilities and their rights;
- Violence against women and control over their bodies;
- Women's access to public spaces to allow them to be involved in political and social spheres.

The objectives of this study were to:

- Determine if there has been any change in the attitudes of men towards women who openly express their opinions and in women's confidence to speak up in family and community contexts.

- Identify changes in intergenerational relations (between elders, adults and adolescents) and between men and women.

This study was based on a series of interviews with homogenous groups of grandmothers, mothers of adolescents, adolescent girls, adolescent boys, local officials and men in 13 communities in Kandia and Nemataba communes. Interviews were conducted in the local language, Pular, and notes were taken in French. A total of 253 people were interviewed. Analysis and triangulation of the qualitative interview data from the several categories of interviewees supports the conclusion that in all communities in which the GHD program was implemented there have been positive changes in gender relations and in the status of women of all 3 generations.

The text below, as well as the table following it, present key conclusions of the study:

#### **WOMEN'S INCREASED CONFIDENCE IN SPEAKING**

According to those interviewed, prior to the introduction of the GHD program, women did not speak publicly and did not speak very much in family settings when in the presence of men and elders. Now, according to all interviewees, women of all generations have gained confidence and express their opinions in family settings and in public in front of men and elders.

*"Before, women did not dare to speak in public. There weren't any women who could speak publicly but now that is no longer the case. You see women who speak publicly, give their opinions, say whatever they think. "*

***Young boy from Diamweli***

**Grandmothers:** Before the GHD program came about, grandmothers used to be marginalized at all levels, now they have the confidence to speak up publicly during community meetings and to advise all generations of family members.

*"We didn't have that confidence before. Now we are speaking in public. If a man speaks at a community meeting, the second person to speak is a grandmother. "*

***Grandmother from Saré Niari***

**Mothers of adolescents:** Before the project, they did not dare express their ideas in a family setting and husbands considered their speaking to be disrespectful towards them and towards the elders. These women are now comfortable when they speak in family and community settings. Men and elders accept and appreciate their contributions.

*"Before, in most households, the man thought it was disrespectful if the woman spoke to him. Now, the practice of a woman talking to her husband is culturally accepted. "*

***Adolescent girl from Koumera***

*"Previously, even if you saw something wrong you couldn't speak up because the grandmothers or the old men were there and, if they didn't speak about it themselves, you couldn't find the courage to talk about it. But now we can express our ideas, we can say publicly what's in our head. "*

***Woman of childbearing age from Nemataba***

**Girls:** According to all the interviewees, previously adolescent girls did not feel confident expressing their ideas and their needs, neither in a family setting nor during community meetings, and they did not communicate on an equal footing with boys. Girls now know how to share their needs and communicate their opinions openly, in family and community settings and with boys.

*"We have observed that girls have a lot more self-confidence. There are many situations where girls now share their opinions. "*

***Grandmother from Koumera***

*"Now, we dare to tell the boys our opinion, and we know how to disagree, because we now have complete self-confidence whereas, previously, we didn't dare. Before, we were afraid to speak in public. "*

***Girl from Koumera***

#### **IMPROVEMENTS IN MEN'S LISTENING TO AND APPRECIATING WOMEN'S OPINIONS**

**Grandmothers:** According to all testimonies, prior to the project, grandmothers were not heeded or consulted by men. Now, young men, adults and public figures have much more consideration for grandmothers. They listen to the grandmothers on family and community matters and follow their advice. The grandmothers know how to communicate.

*"Previously, men never involved us in discussion and said nothing to us at all. Now we are respected, listened to and they follow our advice. If there is a problem, the first thing men now think about is getting the grandmothers to come and fix it. "*

***Grandmother from Nemataba***

*"Previously, the young boys were suspicious of us. They said we were witches. But now we can easily mobilize others. Having a meeting together is a big change. "*

***Grandmother from Diamweli***

**Mothers:** They all state that, before GHD, they didn't talk much with their husbands. The men thought that they themselves were the only ones entitled to speak and be respected in the family and they did not seek out women's opinions and there were often conflicts. Now, according to all interviewees, relationships have changed: husbands and wives communicate and listen more to each other. Now, women of childbearing age are also listened to in community meetings.

*"Now there is a big change. Husbands and wives are discussing everything. At night, when they are together, the husband asks her: "What should we do tomorrow in chAllah? Shall we do this?" And women also contribute their ideas: "Yes, that is good, that is such and such, that is not so good. "*

***Woman of childbearing age from Saré Sankoulé***

**Girls:** According to all interviewees, men (young and adult) have changed their attitudes when they listen to girls. Previously, girls could not give their opinions and were not listened to in family setting. Their fathers now listen to them, considering their needs and opinions. Boys also listen more and have more respect for girls' opinions.

*"In relation to marriage, but also in relation to the subject under discussion, we now allow girls to express themselves, to say what is in their heads, to share their opinions. Before, it was not like that. "*

***Local elected official from Nemataba***

*"Now we talk with the younger girls, we tell them that they should feel confident to look boys in the eye and be upfront with them."*

***Boy from Saré Sankoulé***

#### **THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN FAMILIES HAS BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY**

Before, it was only the head of the family who made the big family decisions, and he did so on his own. Now, men consult and collaborate much more with women and grandmothers on all family matters. The consultation process regarding the marriage of girls has also changed: beforehand, the father decided on his own, now he involves the other members of the family, especially the grandmothers and mothers, and listens to the young girl's opinion.

#### **Grandmothers:**

*"Previously, we were not involved at all, because people did whatever they wanted and only called us to tell us the outcome. But now we, the grandmothers, involve local officials in important family discussions! "*

***Grandmother from Sare Yira***

#### **Mothers:**

*"Before, the men decided on their own; they did whatever they wanted, then they came to tell you: "I did this, I did that". But now it's not like that anymore. We are involved in a dialogue on family matters regarding the smooth running of the family, for food and other thing. Our husbands involve us so that they can hear what we have to say. Now, husbands ask you: "I want to do such and such: that's my idea. What do you think?" You say what you think about that. Then you look for the right solution together. "*

***Woman of childbearing age from Saré Yira***

#### **Girls:**

*"It is now culturally acceptable for girls to express themselves. Previously, people did not understand, and children never attended family meetings. Children were chased away every time. People were not aware that it is good for children to participate too! They will one day be adults too and it is good to prepare them to become intelligent and gain experience. "*

***Local official from Sare Samba Nety***

*"Previously, the father could decide on his own to give his daughter in marriage to the man he wanted without involving the mother and without asking the girl's opinion. But now, the father does not dare to give his daughter in marriage without asking what she thinks..."*

***Woman of childbearing age from Saré Samba Nety***

## **THE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PROCESS HAS BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE**

Previously, only the men consulted one other to make decisions on matters of community interest. Now both sexes and three generations are involved in the community consultation process. Grandmothers often have a significant role in conflict resolution.

*"Things have changed. Before, only men made decisions. Now, if there is community discussion men no longer look at whether someone is a child, or a little girl or even a woman of childbearing age. They all meet so that everyone can give their opinion. "*

***Woman of childbearing age from Saré Sankoulé***

*"We grandmothers created a conflict resolution committee. We are the ones who resolve major conflicts. I am the Chairwoman. If I hear about a conflict, or if someone comes to tell me there is a conflict, I call a meeting with the other grandmothers to discuss with them through consensus. Then we go together to see the person who has the problem to resolve it as a group."*

***Grandmother from Saré Faramba***

## Gender relations between men and women before and after the implementation of the Girls' Holistic Development Program (GHD)

	Before the implementation of the GHD	After the Implementation of GHD
Women's confidence and willingness to speak up	Women of every generation didn't dare express their ideas and opinions in front of men.	Women of every generation have more confidence to express their ideas and their opinions in front of men.
WRAs (women of reproductive age)	WRAs did not express their opinions amongst their family, neither in front of their husbands nor their elders.	WRAs are more able to express their own opinions amongst their family in front of their husbands and elders.
	WRAs, did not express their opinions during community meetings. They did not participate in village political forums.	WRAs express their opinions during community meetings and actively participate in village political forums.
Grandmothers	Grandmothers were marginalized in their families in a way that often spurred conflict.	Grandmothers have the confidence to express their opinions more openly within the family and with other generations.
	Grandmothers did not speak in public at all. They did not participate in village political forums.	Grandmothers speak openly in public. They participate in village political forums.
Girls	Girls did not dare express their needs and ideas in family and especially not in front of their fathers.	Girls have confidence to express their ideas and needs to everyone in their family, including their fathers.
	Girls used to be reluctant to speak honestly with boys and to oppose them if they disagreed.	Girls have confidence to express their opinions to boys directly, to defend their own ideas and to resist the boys' advances.
	Girls never spoke during community meetings.	The majority of girls have confidence to speak their mind during community meetings.
Men's attitude towards women speaking up	Men of all ages did not value the opinions of women. It was not culturally acceptable for a woman to express a different opinion in front of a man or an elder.	Men of all ages listen more to the opinions of women and take them into consideration to a greater extent. It is now culturally acceptable for a women to express her ideas in public.
Men and grandmothers	Adult men and public figures were not interested in grandmothers' opinions and ideas.	Adult men and public figures listen more to grandmothers a lot more and appreciate their ideas.
Husbands and wives	Husbands did not listen to their wives' (WRAs) opinions and weren't interested in their ideas.	Husbands listen more to the opinions of their wives (WRAs) and appreciate their ideas.
	When disagreements broke out, husbands refused to engage in dialogue with their wives. Conflict was frequent between spouses and it was often violent.	When disagreements break out, husbands accept the idea of listening to their wives and know how to engage in dialogue with them. Disputes between spouses have decreased. (This has been confirmed by the mayor of Nemataba)
Fathers and Girls	Fathers did not ask their adolescent daughters for their opinions.	Fathers ask their adolescent daughters for their opinions and do listen to them.
Boys and Girls	Young boys did not seek out the opinions of girls. They accepted their shyness and subordination.	Young boys listen more to girls and have more respect for their opinions.
Young boys and grandmothers	Young boys were afraid of grandmothers and didn't listen to them.	Young boys listen to grandmothers and ask for their advice.