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**THE RESULTS OF THE COMPONENT OF THE
HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF GIRLS PROJECT
"UNDER THE TREE - PARTICIPATORY EDUCATION FOR GRANDMOTHER
LEADERS"**

***STRENGTHEN AND WIDEN THE ROLE OF GRANDMOTHERS FOR THE WELL-BEING OF
YOUNG GIRLS AND FOR COMMUNITY ACTION.***

GRANDMOTHER PROJECT - VELINGARA, SENEGAL.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In southern Senegal, several problems put young girls at risk and limit their development, particularly their poor education, early marriages and pregnancies, and excisions. "Grandmother Project - *Change through Culture*" is an American and Senegalese NGO working in the department of Vélingara, in southern Senegal. Its aim is to promote the well-being of girls and protect them from the problems to which they are exposed.

Since 2016, the training of grandmother leaders has been an integral and innovative part of the "Holistic Development of Girls" (DHF) program of the Grandmother Project (GMP). This non-formal participatory education training for adults provides for four sessions, each lasting 2 days, which, for the aim of this case study, took place between October 2016 and March 2017 in 9 villages in the commune of Nemataba.

The four non-formal education sessions and their training program developed for illiterate persons included 62 grandmothers (5 or 6 per village), who participated in regular monthly meetings, led and facilitated by local community activists from GMP.

This training, which aims to strengthen the role of grandmothers in promoting the holistic development of girls, had the following objectives: increase the knowledge of grandmothers about adolescence and the psychological and physical changes of young girls; increase the confidence of grandmother leaders in their role in the family and in the community; increase solidarity and collaboration between grandmother leaders and with other grandmothers; increase the collaboration of grandmother leaders with other community actors in actions to promote the well-being of young girls; strengthen communication between the grandmothers and the young girls.

To assess the results of the training of grandmother leaders, individual interviews were conducted in July 2017 (almost 10 months after the start of the training and four months after its completion) with 51 of the 62 grandmothers trained in the 9 villages¹.

This non-formal education, which took place over several months, enabled the grandmothers to already put into practice the new skills after the first session. However, we wanted to gather other opinions on the changes of the grandmothers.

32 young girls and 29 notables, from the same area were therefore also interviewed in the same period to find out their perceptions of the changes in the behavior and attitudes of grandmothers after the training of the grandmother leaders.

The interviews were analyzed with a content analysis approach. Based on the themes from the data analysis, some key parameters were also quantified.

The evaluation noted positive changes in the set of objectives targeted by the training.

- The training was highly appreciated by the grandmothers who "**have acquired new information** on the psychological and physical changes of teenage girls". They recognize that with this knowledge, they better understand the challenges faced by teenage girls and that they

¹ A "Basic study of knowledge, attitudes and practices related to the education of children and the holistic development of girls", (Fatma Teddy Balde, GMP, March 2017), concerned 7 of the 9 villages where the grandmothers came from whose interviews were used for the current study.

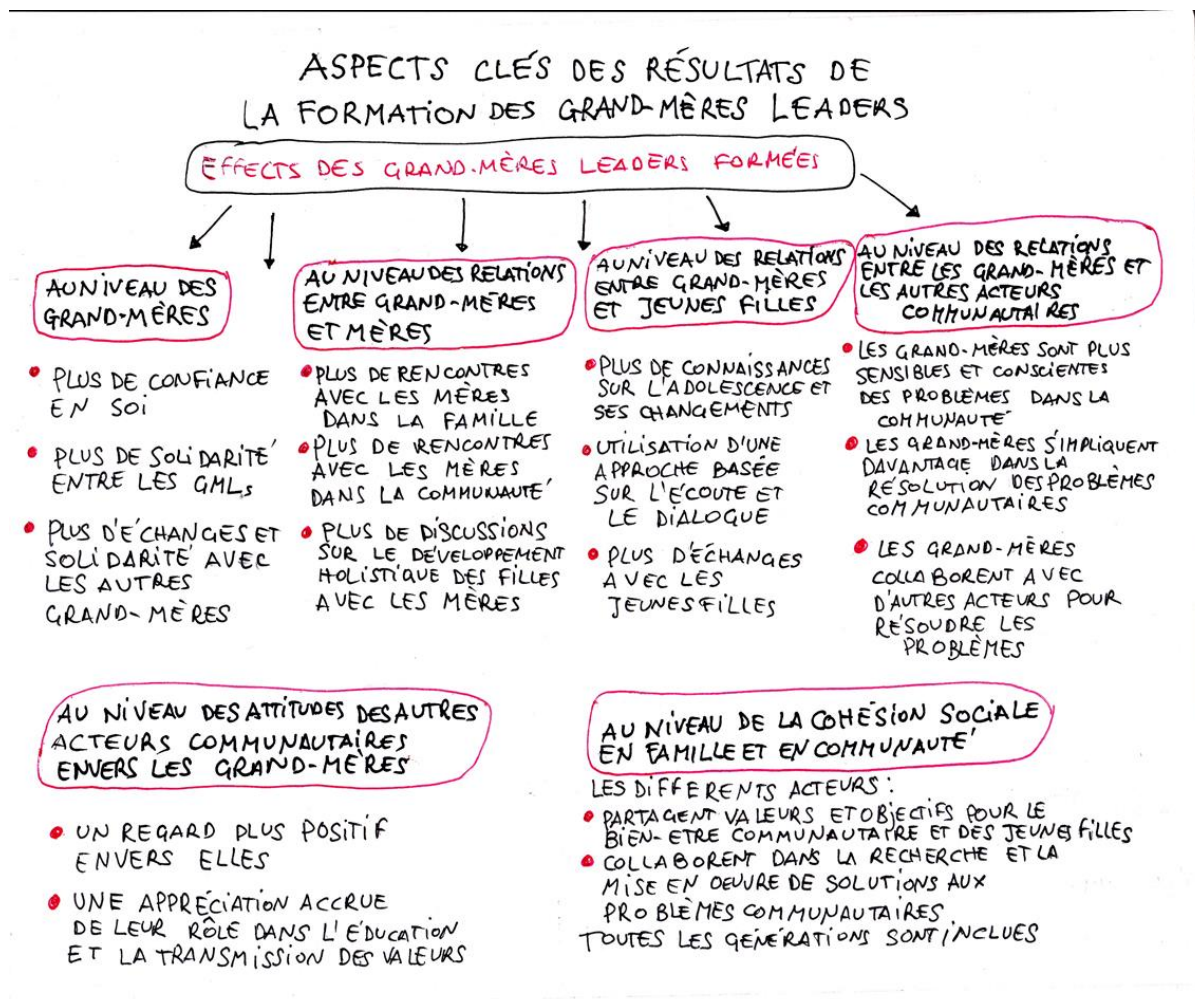
have more information to share to help them protect themselves. This new knowledge makes it easier for them to talk with the young girls.

- ➔ All the grandmothers say that through the training **their role in the community and their self-confidence have been strengthened**. To explain this change, they affirm that now: they are taking more initiatives for the benefit of family and community cohesion; they perceive an improvement in their relationships, especially with the girls' mothers and with the teenage girls; they are more respected and appreciated by other community actors.
- ➔ All the grandmothers say that **solidarity** between them has increased. They now socialize and discuss together community issues much more frequently to find solutions. Their relationships have also been strengthened with the other grandmothers, who are now more involved in their activities of supervising young girls and in the community.
- ➔ Most of the grandmother leaders say that **their collaboration with other community leaders has increased**. In most cases, before the training, grandmothers were not used to discussing problems and collaborating with other community leaders in the search for solutions. Now they share the contents of the training with them and act together for the good of the community and the young girls in particular.
- ➔ All the grandmothers and young girls notice that **communication between them has greatly evolved**. All of the grandmother leaders said that now they talk more often and more openly with the girls about adolescent life and reproductive health. Before the training, almost all of the grandmothers used an educational approach based on fear and orders, while now all say they have adopted listening and dialogue.
- ➔ The grandmothers participate in solving problems in their village. They are particularly active in mediation, conflict resolution and the promotion of collective development and sanitation activities in their places of residence.
- ➔ We see through the strengthening of the grandmothers an improvement in **social cohesion**² which translates into
 - Better agreement and sharing, at the family and community level, of values and objectives useful for the well-being of the young girls and the community.
 - Better participation of family and community actors in solving village problems and educating young girls.
 - The inclusion of all generations and all genders in these processes.

The results of the study clearly show that the grandmother leaders were receptive and ready to change their attitudes and behaviors within the family, in the community and towards young girls. Today, an important change has been noted in their commitment and their involvement in favor of the well-being of the communities in general, and especially of young girls. We have observed that enhancing their

² Knowing that the term "social cohesion" is broad and concerns a plurality of dimensions. Cf. among others P. Foglizzo, "Coessione Sociale", *Aggiornamenti Sociali*, 2012; AM, Chiesi, "Social Cohesion and related Concepts" in N. Genov (ed.), *Advanced in Sociological Knowledge over half a Century*, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden, 2004.

experience and knowledge by training them as grandmother leaders, has maximized their potential, which is a real resource for their communities in the promotion and protection of young girls. The results of this training suggest that grandmothers are a positive resource for any program that aims to promote the well-being and reproductive health of teenage girls.



I. BACKGROUND

In the department of Vélingara in southern Senegal, the economic and educational framework is more difficult than in other regions of the country. Young girls, in particular, encounter many difficulties in their development and in the enforcement of their rights.

The tradition of marrying them between 13 and 15 years old is still widespread and almost 40% of young girls are married before age 18³. In addition, in this department the rate of teenage pregnancies (9%) is one of the highest in Senegal⁴.

³ Moreover, according to the UNICEF Report *State of the World's Children 2016*, 32% of young girls are married before the age of 18 and 9% are married before the age of 15 in Senegal.

⁴ UNFPA - GEEP, *Senegal: Study on teenage pregnancies in schools*, Report, June 2015.

The prevalence of excision is 28% in Senegal. Certain ethnic groups, which are the majority in the region, (especially the Pulaar, the Mandingo and the Soninke) practice excision more than other groups in the country. This explains why in the department of Vélingara the rate of excision is estimated at 85% and has not decreased by much in recent years⁵. The schooling of young girls and the pursuit of their studies is difficult: the attendance rate decreases drastically in between primary and secondary school. In the region, families are hierarchically organized into age and gender groups, relationships between generations are conflictual and young girls find it difficult to express their needs.

In this context, the NGO Grandmother Project - Change through *Culture*, since 2008 has used the DHF program which promotes the education of girls and protects them against pregnancy, early marriage and excision. The DHF program pursues its objectives on the one hand through the promotion of positive cultural practices and values and on the other hand, through the strengthening of culturally defined values and roles, such as that of the grandmothers. GMP has discovered that grandmothers are a community resource that is particularly useful in mentoring and educating young girls and in efforts to change socio-cultural norms and practices that affect their well-being.

II. THE COMPONENT “UNDER THE TREE - PARTICIPATORY EDUCATION FOR GRANDMOTHER LEADERS” TO STRENGTHEN AND WIDEN THE ROLE OF GRANDMOTHERS FOR THE WELL-BEING OF YOUNG GIRLS AND FOR COMMUNITY ACTION⁶.

In the DHF program, since 2015, the non-formal participatory training component "Under the tree for grandmother leaders" has strengthened their role in promoting the holistic development of girls. In particular, this training aims to improve the leadership of grandmothers in communities to prevent excision, early marriages and pregnancies and to help educate girls about their well-being.

The 5 objectives of the training are to:

- Improve the grandmothers' knowledge and understanding of the physical and psychological changes in teenage girls and their needs in order to offer them better support.
- Improve the self-confidence of family and community grandmothers so that they act for the well-being of the community and of young girls.
- Foster solidarity between grandmother leaders and between grandmother leaders and other grandmothers in the community so that they collectively promote the holistic development of girls.
- Strengthen collaboration between leading grandmothers and other community actors, to promote the holistic development of girls and collectively solve community problems.

⁵ UNICEF, *Statistics; Info by Country: Senegal*, UNICEF 2013; UNFPA-UNICEF *Joint assessment. Joint UNFPA-UNICEF program on female genital mutilation/excision: accelerating change (2008-2012)*, 2013.

⁶ In the study, the component “Under the tree - Participatory education for Grandmother Leaders” for brevity is called: Training.

- Improve communication between grandmothers and young girls to support them during adolescence. The training encourages grandmothers to use an approach based on dialogue and listening rather than through fear and threats.

The *grandmother leaders* from each of the participating villages took part in the training. To identify them, before the start of the training, meetings were organized by GMP community activists in each village with all the grandmothers. During these meetings, the grandmothers themselves chose the most committed (leaders) and therefore the best able to participate in the training to share, in a second step, the contents with others. In the work of GMP and in this study, these older women are called "natural grandmother leaders".

The training was organized in 4 sessions, or training modules, each lasting two days, making 8 days of training in total. The training sessions lasted 6 months. 62 grandmothers, from 9 villages in the commune of Nemataba⁷. - Nemataba, Badiara, Bakayoko, Koulandiala, Koumera, Saré Yira, Nassoroulaye, Hafia, Saré Sankoulé - participated in the training under the tree.

The training sessions are organized in a series of participatory learning activities to stimulate critical thinking and dialogue among the participants. These activities include role play, case study discussions on typical problems and situations, discussions based on drawings, photos and testimonies of grandmothers from other communities, etc. All of the activities enabled the participants to reflect on both "traditional" and "modern" attitudes and practices.

The sessions were facilitated by community development activists from GMP.

Almost all the grandmothers who participated in the training are illiterate, so it was necessary to develop an adapted training program.

III. TRAINING EVALUATION

A. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation sought to measure the changes observed in the grandmothers following the training:

To assess the results of the training, 51 grandmothers were interviewed individually through semi-structured interviews. Interviews in small groups (between 3 and 6 people) with 32 young girls and 29 notables from the same villages as the grandmothers were also planned.

The grandmothers were interviewed to understand, from their perceptions and experiences, the effects that the five training objectives had on their role and in their attitudes and behaviors.

⁷ There was a previous edition of this training (2016) in which 230 grandmothers from 43 village communities in the commune of Kandia were trained.

The young girls were interviewed to understand the changes in their relationships with the grandmothers and in the communicative approach, to find out their opinion on the activities of the grandmothers in promoting well-being and sexual health.

Notables were interviewed to understand if they were measuring changes in the role and involvement of grandmothers at the community level and for the well-being of young girls.

Interviews were conducted in the *Pulaar* language and the operators took notes in French⁸.

The data was treated with an analysis approach by content and by themes and sub-themes emerged from this process. The answers were classified by themes, those of the young girls or notables were triangulated with those of the grandmothers. Based on the themes from the data analysis, some key parameters were also quantified.

B. The results of the training evaluation

This report describes the results of the analysis of the information gathered through the individual interviews. In the following pages, these results are classified into 7 according to the 5 training objectives defined from the start⁹.

- 1) Grandmothers' knowledge of physical and psychological changes during adolescence;
- 2) Ability and confidence of grandmother leaders to play their role in the family and community;
- 3) Solidarity between the grandmother leaders and between them and the other grandmothers;
- 4) Communication and collaboration between grandmother leaders and the other community actors
- 5) Commitment of the grandmother leaders to discuss with teenage girls matters important to their well-being;
- 6) Communicative approach used by grandmothers with young girls;
- 7) Involvement of grandmother leaders in problem solving and/or in the development of their village.

IV. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

⁸ The interviews were gathered by members of the GMP team, by the monitoring and evaluation officer and by a teacher, resource persons.

⁹ When gathering the interviews, the operators asked the questions in the order proposed in the guide in the annex. In the structure of the study, we preferred to follow a sequence more in line with the theory of social change.

Appreciation of the training from the grandmothers: new knowledge and improved social relationships

Before tackling the role changes experienced by the grandmother leaders, we asked them about the usefulness of the training, to find out their overall opinion¹⁰.

All the grandmothers found the training useful and all had new knowledge. Three-quarters of them highlighted the acquisition of social skills useful for maintaining solidarity in families and in the village. Almost everyone in this group learned to approach others, in the family and in the community, through dialogue and listening¹¹.

Following the training, more than half of them appreciate the improvement in social relationships (their appeasement, increased frequency of meetings and collaboration¹²) with other family and community actors¹³.

“The training has helped a lot in improving relationships between community members. There is more cohesion between us. We meet every Saturday to discuss about community development”. GML from Saré Sankoulé.

A large majority of them cited the acquisition of skills useful for understanding and educating children and young girls.

"This training is very useful for me because it allowed me to get to know children better, especially young girls, and to know how to educate them", GML from Hafía.

1. Grandmothers' knowledge of physical and psychological changes during adolescence

According to the results of the interviews, the training allowed grandmothers to learn new concepts on the development of young girls and puberty during adolescence¹⁴.

Among this new knowledge, the three most cited macro-themes by the grandmothers are:

- "A girl can get pregnant before starting her menstruation":

"I learned that a girl can get pregnant before getting her period and I didn't know that before. It is only through the training that I found out and since then I have been repeating it to the

¹⁰ Question no. 1.1 "You have invested a lot of time and energy to participate in the training sessions. Was it useful for you to have participated in these sessions?" Grandmothers Guide, Annex.

¹¹ For details related to participatory methodologies used by GMP, see the publication of GMP: AS Musoko, C. Scoppa, E. Mamnoncourt, *Community dialogue and culture: supporting young girls for a better future*, GMP, 2011.

¹² In the French notes of the interviews, these concepts, sometimes among others, are often accompanied by the term "social cohesion".

¹³ On the causes of the usefulness of the training, some grandmothers gave more than one answer.

¹⁴ Question 3. "Did you learn anything about the adolescence period that you did not know before?" Grandmothers Guide, Annex.

To better understand the changes, some questions were often asked (on specific topics) to compare the situation "before" and "after" the training.

young girls, especially to the youngest because it is important that they know so that they don't become victims", GML from Badiara.

- "Adolescents are subject to psychological/emotional changes;

" Before I did not know what caused the behavioral changes in adolescents, I only saw them. But since I found out what is behind all of this, I have changed my attitude towards them, in addition, I talk to parents in the neighborhood so that they too can change. " GML from Nassouroulaye

- "Young people are subject to hormonal changes":

"Yes, I learned some interesting things, for example I did not know that there is a liquid which causes changes in teenage girls and that some of their behaviors were natural at the time of adolescence. So knowing about the physical and psychological changes allowed us to better understand the girls and to be able to better communicate with them during adolescence." GML from Bakayoko

Usefulness appreciated by grandmothers with new knowledge of changes in adolescence

According to the interviews, all the grandmothers recognized the usefulness of the new knowledge¹⁵. Two-thirds of the grandmothers believe that: **more knowledge equals more protection for the young girls**. According to them, sharing this new information with young girls gives them better advice and better protects them from teenage pregnancies.

"This information and knowledge are very useful for us because it allows us to strengthen our exchange with our granddaughters and to be very explicit with them. Also, it allows us to start discussing with the girls as soon as possible before the first menstrual period even arrives because they are at great risk not knowing that they can become pregnant before they get their period," GML from Koulandiala.

More than half of the grandmothers find that: **more knowledge leads to better dialogue and better management of teenage girls**

Understanding the difficulties linked to the psychic and hormonal changes in young girls allows grandmothers to interact with them without conflict, to better understand and dialogue with them.

"I learned about the changes happening to girls. These changes have helped us get to know the girls better. We will now help them to manage these difficult moments that every girl goes through. Also, we are sure today that the girls are not completely responsible for the behaviors they develop. We talk about it with them," GML from Kouméra.

¹⁵ Question 3.1 "Was it helpful for you to know about these changes? " Grandmothers Guide, Annex.

2. The confidence of grandmother leaders (GMLs): playing a role in the family and community

Analysis results show that grandmothers have noticed changes in the role they play in their family and the community¹⁶. As shown by the following quote, grandmothers no longer hesitate to get involved, share their point of view and take initiatives.

“There has been changes because now, I take the initiative regularly. I used to be a bit shy and had a very wait-and-see attitude, which is no longer the case now. Following these training sessions, I do not hesitate and I am not embarrassed to share my point of view at every opportunity, and state my position on each issue within my family and the community. What I appreciate the most about all of this, is feeling listened to and respected by people. I now understand that I can play a very important role in the development of my village mostly by helping to improve relationships. ,” said a GML from Bakayoko

More involvement for the community's well-being

Almost every grandmother is noticing changes as a result of their personal involvement in contributing to the community's well-being.

“Before, when there was a problem in the village, nobody did anything because we feared that someone would tell us it was none of our business. Now, whenever there is a problem, the GMLs and I are always there to try to find solutions,” said a GML from Badiara.

Half of grandmothers explain this involvement in the community by emphasizing their own and new commitment to solving problems and conflicts in their family and community.

A third of them said that they cooperate to strengthen solidarity and understanding in families and communities.

More consideration from others

To explain this change in their role, often grandmothers say that they feel more respected and considered by others. They say they are consulted by others when there is a problem to solve; they are summoned to community meetings and listened to with attention and respect by their peers and young people.

“We are highly respected by the whole community. We have helped solve many problems. Instead of going to the police, people come to us when they have problems and we try to find solutions,” said a GML from Némataba.

“I have now gained more respect towards my fellow grandmothers and other members of the community. I have more confidence in myself and in my ability to be useful. I constantly talk to my peers and other stakeholders about primary education, and also the training we have received with women and others.” said a GML from Saré Yira.

¹⁶ Question 1.2 "Has the way you see yourself and your role/status in the community changed in any way since the GML training? ," Grandmothers' Guide, Appendix.

Improved relationships with young women and teenage girls

Almost half of grandmothers say that improving their relationships with young women and teenage girls¹⁷ pushed them to change their role.

Good relationships between grandmothers, young women, and teenage girls, as well as the respect that they are beginning to receive from others, allow them to confidently fight to protect women. This is an indicator of change that favor the holistic development of women¹⁸.

“My status has changed a lot. I am more valued by my peers and also by my grandchildren, who used to treat me like I was less than nothing - someone who talks too much, and is even a witch. I am now more confident in myself, my knowledge, and the role that I must play from now on. Since the training course, I have not stopped scheduling stroytelling, advice sessions or whatever it may be for young girls ” said Mariama Kindy Sow, GML from Nemataba.

Confidence has been explicitly cited in almost a quarter of the responses which is a result of increased engagement in family and community well-being, more consideration from others and the improvement of relationships.

The leaders and girls' opinion on changing the role of grandmothers¹⁹

According to results, every leader thinks that the role of grandmothers in the family and community has changed²⁰. For everyone, grandmothers are "now" much more involved at a community level and work towards unity.

More than half of leaders consider that grandmothers now know how to identify and resolve problems and conflicts within the community. Half of them believe that grandmothers are involved in the education and supervision of young girls, and slightly less than half, think that they are committed to strengthen solidarity.

"In the past, grandmother leaders were indifferent. It is only recently that they began to take an interest in community life and community problems. Grandmothers brought all the generations together and especially spoke of the need for unity between the village's different generations. Grandmothers no longer accept conflict in the village," said the Group of Elders of Badiara.

For their part, almost all of the young girls appreciate the changes grandmothers have imposed, especially regarding the quality of communication with them.

¹⁷ As we will see later, a large majority of grandmothers participate in school activities.

¹⁸ The revival of good relationships with adolescent girls is an interesting fact, also in relation to the data of the base-line study concerning the town of Nemataba, preceding the end of the training. This study underlined that to the majority of the interviewees, the young girls did not listen to and did not respect the grandmothers. (GMP 2017)

¹⁹ The sub paragraphs whose titles mention young girls and/or stakeholders are present only in the chapters concerning subjects for which their opinion has been sought.

²⁰ Question 1.3, "What role do GMs play in your community?" (before, after the training)," Notable's Guide, Appendix.

“GMs have changed, they speak to us nicely, and they listen to us as well. They have a lot of fun with us, while before they insulted and scolded us all the time,” said young girls from Koulandiala.

The change in grandmother's role and their new confidence is therefore felt by the girls and is also visible from the outside, as shown by the testimonies from leaders and young girls.

3. Solidarity among grandmother leaders and other grandmothers

It is evident that since the training course, there is more solidarity among the grandmother leaders and other grandmothers in the village.

Solidarity among grandmother leaders

All of the grandmother leaders say that their relationships have changed, that they socialize more, trust each other more, and talk more.²¹

This closeness between them is new: a third of them explicitly admitted that before training, they did not socialize regularly and only saw each other during ceremonies.

“Yes, there have been changes in our relationships. Trust and constant dialogue exist among us today, whereas this was not the case in the recent past. Whenever I have ideas on things to do, I tell the other GMLs about them. The training has strengthened communication and the relationships between us GMLs,” said a GML from Koulandiala.

Almost all of the grandmothers say they meet to talk and find solutions to community problems such as primary education.

A third of them add that they meet to act collectively for the quality of education and supervision of young girls.

“Before, GMs minded their own business. We saw each other very rarely. After the training, we understood that we must join forces to have better results in the education of girls and children and in solving village problems,” said a GML from Némataba.

Better relationships between grandmother leaders also lead to better collaboration with other leaders. They often talk to each other first and then to others to solve problems:

“GMLs get along better. When there is a problem, we meet to discuss it and then tell other members of the community. We share our problems together,” said a GML from Bakayoko.

Solidarity between grandmother leaders and other grandmothers²²

All of the leading grandmothers notice better relationships with other grandmothers. Three quarters of them share the contents of the training with the other grandmothers and involve them in the activities from it.

21 Question : " 2.1 Has the training resulted in any changes in the relationships between the grandmother leaders? If yes, what are the changes? ," Grandmothers' Guide, Appendix.

22 Question n. 2.2 "Has the training resulted in any changes in the relationships between the grandmother leaders and the other grandmothers?" If yes, what are the changes? ," Grandmothers' Guide, Appendix.

Almost half said that they had closer relationships with the other grandmothers, that they visited each other, and that they discussed children, village, and school-related problems. The closer ties between grandmother leaders and the other grandmothers are seen as a benefit by many grandmothers.

“The training has strengthened our relationships. We meet very often to discuss issues and we also visit each other often. The other grandmothers are as involved as we are because we know that everyone must participate so that we can do things that make us move forward,” said a GML from Némataba.

Together, grandmothers can come out of their marginalization and be stronger and, as peers, collaborate to solve the needs of the community with others as well. Solidarity between grandmothers and leading grandmothers in the community is fundamental to nurturing the holistic development of girls.

4. Communication and collaboration between leading grandmothers and other community stakeholders

Data analysis shows that after training, collaboration between grandmothers and other community stakeholders increased. Now, almost every leading grandmother meet with other community leaders and talk about issues that are of interest to the community, such as the education and protection of young girls²³.

On the contrary, according to the interviews, before the training, the grandmother leaders generally "never" had meetings with other leaders. A small group had meetings with other leaders only "rarely"²⁴. In general, before the training, testimonies point out that there were not many community meetings. If there were any, the grandmothers were not summoned and/or did not have the courage to participate or organize them independently.

“Before the training, we had never met the village chief and the stakeholders, the women of reproductive age (WRAs), the young people. We did not have confidence and lacked the ability to take these initiatives,” said a GM from Bakayoko.

Now, after training, two-thirds of grandmothers say they meet with women of reproductive age (WRA) to share the training and discuss community issues; half of them confront the chiefs and the leaders, a third has met members of all categories, and a quarter of them says they have met young boys and fathers²⁵ to discuss.

Question asked: 5.2 “Following the training, did you have meetings with the other chief and notable leaders, WRAs, young boys, or fathers to discuss problems/needs in the community never; rarely; several times?”

23 " Grandmothers' Guide, Appendix”.

We could not answer the questions on the temporality of the meetings: "rarely" and "several times" in relation to the different community members because, in these cases, only some grandmother used these temporal references.

²⁴ Question 5.1: " Before the training did you have meetings with the chiefs and notables to discuss the problems/needs in the community: never; rarely; several times? ," Grandmothers' Guide, Appendix.

²⁵ We did not want to represent the girls in this list because the meeting the grandmothers have with them are spoken of in all the interviews and because they are often the subject of the meetings. However, in this question (no.5.2, see note 27) the grandmothers cited the young girls among the members met after the training in one third of the cases.

Meetings and collaboration with women of reproductive age (WRA) for girls' education

The vast majority of meetings were with women of reproductive age (WRA), the mothers of the adolescents. Grandmothers see them as essential allies for the education and supervision of young girls. Grandmothers share the new educational approach with them through listening and dialogue and inform them of all the content learned during the training.

Sharing this information with the WRAs means multiplying the effect, if the latter (which are often deemed to be harsh in their approach with girls) are able to implement them. WRA meetings also improved relationships with grandmothers²⁶. In addition, starting a dialogue with the WRAs helps grandmothers to get closer to the young girls, since adolescent girls are influenced by their mothers.

“We organized meetings with the WRAs to discuss their daughters' education. The objective of our meetings with WRAs was to see how we can help girls protect themselves from the risks associated with pregnancy. It was at the end of our meetings with the WRAs that more trust was established between us, and since then, they have understood that our objective is to help them in the supervision of their daughters. Now the WRAs encourage girls to approach us,” said a GML from Hafia.

“We (the other GMs and I) met the WRAs and discussed the physical and psychological changes in young girls and boys. We also talked to them about the importance of listening to children and respecting their opinions. Besides, it was the WRAs who made it easier for us to have contact with the girls,” said a GML from Nassouroulaye.

The new collaboration between grandmothers and mothers appears to be an important element of change in the family and community strategy that is part of the holistic adolescent development program.

Meetings and collaboration with stakeholders and other members

Data analyzed from interviews with grandmothers show that more than half of them have met the village chief and the stakeholders. During these meetings, grandmothers shared the contents of the training, with the aim of preliminarily sharing the information for potential collaborations. During these meetings, grandmothers talked about the complexity and importance in educating young girls and the importance of community cohesion.

A third of grandmothers said they had met groups (of all ages and sexes) to share the content of the training, and to deal with community problems: "we met all the groups."

During these meetings the subjects covered were schooling, education and the protection of young girls, the importance of values, and the problems of the village (water, sanitation etc.)

“After the training, we met all the groups: the Notables, the WRAs, fathers, and young boys. We shared with them what we learned during the training,” said a GML from Koulandiala

“After the training, we increased the content. And nowadays, all the groups come together sometimes to talk about school or the cleanliness of the village,” said a GML from Némataba.

²⁶ It should not be forgotten that, in the region, the difficulties linked to intergenerational conflicts, whose appeasement is an objective of GMPs, also concerned the relationships between grandmothers and young adult women (often their daughters-in-law).

A quarter of grandmothers met with boys, mainly to talk about the importance of protecting girls from early pregnancies.

A small minority met the fathers individually to discuss the importance of educating girls and protecting them from early marriages.

"I briefly talked with some fathers, but also with boys about the importance of working together to help girls protect themselves well, as we learnt during our training," said a GML from Nassouroulaye.

Collaboration with teachers at school

The results of the study show that three quarters of the grandmothers interviewed collaborated with teachers in schools. In class, they gave lessons and a small minority met with teachers at school to plan activities²⁷.

"I went to school to talk about the problems that early marriage and early pregnancy can cause. We organized storytelling sessions and guessing games at school with the other grandmothers in collaboration with students and teachers," said a GML from Némataba.

This collaboration has sometimes been slowed down due to problems inherent in schools, such as in Koulandiala or Sare Yira where the presence of teachers is not regular, for several reasons such as strikes.

The integration of grandmothers into school is an important activity which requires the involvement of grandmothers but also of teachers. The analysis of this data shows the degree of involvement of grandmothers but also their level of collaboration with teachers and the state of schools.

The stakeholders' opinion on the collaboration of grandmothers with them and other community leaders

Half of them explained that grandmothers made them aware of the contents of the training²⁸. According to two thirds of them, grandmothers shared problems linked to the education of young girls; half have heard about the importance of collaboration and solidarity in solving community problems, while a quarter of them heard about children's education.

A good half said that they had also been contacted by the grandmothers at other times, to share and seek solutions for community problems and issues related to the education of children and adolescents.²⁹

For almost all the stakeholders, this is a new behavior insofar as before the training, the grandmothers were disinterested in community life and did not get involved in problem solving.

"Nowadays, we see grandmothers who are involved in the village. In the recent past, it was unimaginable for them to do so, so we assume it's a result of the training they have received," said stakeholders from Saré Sankoulé.

²⁷ Question 7.1 "Since the training, have you been to school to conduct activities with the teachers? If so, what did you do with them?" Grandmothers' Guide, Appendix.

²⁸ Question 1.1a. "If yes, did they have to share the contents of their training with you?" Notable's Guide, Appendix.

²⁹ Question 2.1 "Have the GMs ever approached you to discuss community issues? Children's issues? Young girls' issues?" Notable's Guide, Appendix.

All stakeholders said that when speaking of the collaboration of grandmothers with other community members,³⁰ that now they meet with other community leaders to talk about early marriage and the education of young girls, to promote reconciliation and to share problems at a community level. Grandmothers mostly collaborate with WRAs (according to half of the notables) and teachers (half of the opinions).

5. The commitment of Grandmother Leaders strengthens adolescent girls through discussions on subjects important to their well-being.

Strengthening the role of grandmothers for the protection of young girls and the prevention of marriages and early pregnancies is a central objective of the training, as well as of the DHF project. Meetings with young girls to talk about issues related to sexuality or other issues important to their well-being become unavoidable.

The results of the analysis of interviews with grandmothers show that all of them support adolescent girls by talking about issues related to their life and their reproductive health, and almost all do so on a regular basis and not occasionally³¹.

“I talk a lot with young girls. I gather them very often for storytelling sessions, to discuss changes in young people at the age of puberty, problems of early marriage and pregnancy,” GML from Bakayoko.

Grandmothers deal with many issues with young girls, such as the importance of studies, the negative effects of nights out, values and stories, or themes related to sexuality.

“With my granddaughters, as we live together, I chat with often, and with the other grandmothers sometimes too. These discussions are to prepare them for life, to be independent and to enjoy going to school to become someone. We often discuss the role of the grandmother, early pregnancies, rules and also certain values such as respect for the elderly, modesty, and the importance of educating girls”, GML from Némataba.

Discussions on topics related to sexuality

According to the analysis of the data almost all the grandmothers (94%) discuss topics related to sexuality with the young girls³². The topics discussed are³³ : *how to avoid early pregnancies*, named by more than three quarters of cases; *the period*, named by almost half of the grandmothers; *values*, named by a third, and *psycho-physical changes in adolescence*, named by a quarter of grandmothers.

“I talk a lot with the young girls. I bring them together very often to discuss changes in young people at the age of puberty, the problems of marriage and pregnancy,” GML from Bakayoko.

³⁰ Question 2.3 "Have the GMs carried out activities with other community leaders?" , " Notable's Guide, Appendix.

³¹ Questions: 7.2 "Do you often talk to the girls (frequency of discussions)?" Grandmothers' Guide, Annex.

³² Questions 7.2a "Do you talk with the girl about topics related to sexuality?" »Grandmothers' Guide, Annex.

³³ Often grandmothers gave more than one answer.

“Each week we talk with the girls. We are talking about the hygiene of menstruation, problems of early pregnancy and good education”, GML from Koumera.

Some grandmothers stress the importance of talking clearly with young girls about issues related to their sex education so that girls can understand and therefore be better protected.

“I chat very frequently with the girls. They like to listen to us, they are comfortable. We talked a lot about questions of sexuality, which allowed us to do it without embarrassment. There are no questions or points among us that are taboo. We explain the affairs of women in detail so that they understand. In the past, we did not use clear words because we were too modest, which is not the case anymore”, GML from Hafia.

Individual and group discussions

To the question asked: "Have you discussed sexuality with single young girls or with other grandmothers?"³⁴. More than half of the grandmothers replied that they spoke to the girls individually and half responded that they did so alone or in collaboration with others. The grandmothers who approach these discussions individually speak mainly to young girls from their own family but also to young girls in the neighborhood.

“I chat with the girls in my family especially when they are at the age of puberty. I talk to them about the importance of being careful about boys, because any sexual intercourse after having had their period can lead to an unwanted pregnancy which can be dangerous”, GML from Koulandiala.

These data tell us that grandmothers are recovering communication with young girls and their role as educators, a role that begins in the family and continues in the community.

“It was only with the young girls in my area that I conducted my activities, sometimes at my house or in another house. I do stories with them, songs, traditional dances and even what we learned from the training: advice to grow without too much risk; we prepare them to take charge when they see their period for the first time without panicking”, GML from Nemataba.

Young girls' opinions on meetings with grandmothers and discussions on sexuality

To the question if the grandmothers organize meetings with them to discuss³⁵, almost all young girls responded positively³⁶. According to the young girls, the grandmothers talked to them about several questions³⁷. Apart from the themes linked to sexuality, according to a very large majority they spoke of the values of tradition (respect and modesty), read stories and taught songs and dances; for more than a third of young girls' grandmothers spoke of the importance of education.

"We discuss respect for parents and the elderly, consideration of tradition and early pregnancies", Young girls from Koulandiala.

³⁴ Question 7.2b, Grandmothers' Guide, Annex.

³⁵ Question 2.1 "Do grandmothers organize group meetings with the girls?" » Young Girls' Guide, Annex.

³⁶ The 16% who say they did not meet the grandmothers to discuss all belong to the village of Saré Sankoulé.

³⁷ Question 2.1a "What are you discussing with the grandmothers?" ", Young Girls' Guide, Annex.

All of the young girls who talked to the grandmothers (almost the entirety of them) confirmed that they talked about sexuality³⁸.

During these meetings, the grandmothers approached topics such as: how to avoid early pregnancies (according to all the girls); menstruation (according to three-quarters of girls); the changes that occur in adolescence (according to half).

Young girls reported (almost all) being comfortable talking about sexuality with grandmothers and finding these discussions interesting³⁹.

“These meetings are very interesting. Grandmothers teach us a lot and with the sessions we did during the Forum at school, they greatly strengthened our knowledge of puberty and menstruation”, Young girls from Nemataba.

“ We are comfortable with them. They are our grandmothers and we are used to teasing them, so this becomes a lot easier”, Young girls from Koumera⁴⁰.

Discussing sexuality with the girls is a new activity

Reading the data points out to us that this ability for dialogue with the girls, dialogue on subjects related to sexuality, is a novelty. Before the training, the grandmothers did not talk to young girls about sexual matters, but they almost always had good communication with the girls.

“I chat with the girls before they have their period. Before, I didn't talk about it. Now I know that it is very important to anticipate what will happen tomorrow in their lives. If the girls are not prepared, there can be disastrous consequences forever for them”, GML from Nassouroulaye.

“I talk a lot with the young girls. Today, we have understood that girls must have a lot of information about their period but also about the way they behave”, GML from Nassouroulaye.

6. The communication approach used by grandmothers with the young girls

According to the interviews, all the actors say that the quality of communication between grandmothers and young girls has changed.

All the grandmothers interviewed affirm that their way of communicating with young girls has evolved to favor listening and dialogue⁴¹.

³⁸ Question 2.1b, "Do GMs talk to you about issues related to sexuality?" What do they tell you? »Grandmothers' Guide, Annex.

³⁹ According to the traditional custom of these regions, between alternate generations, and therefore between grandmothers and young girls, there is a relationship named for a joke called "cousinhood". In this relationship it is possible to speak without embarrassment about subjects not talked about among girls and parents, among which are subjects related to sexuality. However, this relationship was weakened by the interruption of dialogue among the generations, the strengthening of which is one of the objectives of the GMP.

⁴⁰ Here the young girls refer to a traditional custom for which between grandparents and nephews there are joking relationships which allow the people involved to communicate freely and quietly about several subjects.

⁴¹ Questions 4. "Has your way of communicating with young girls changed in any way since the training? »

4a "How has it changed?" »

4b "What are you doing today that you were not doing before? »Grandmothers' Guide, Annex.

In the notes from the interviews analyzed, the three questions are summarized in a single answer.

Changes in the educational approach

Almost all grandmothers say that they had difficult relationships with the young girls before training. A quarter of them even said that they had had a “no” approach with the young girls, based on lack of relationships and on distance. Many more than half of the grandmothers admit that before the training they were very authoritarian with the young girls, they imposed their orders through cries, conflict, and punishment.

"Before, we didn't talk with the girls, we gave them orders... ", GML from Nassouroulaye; "Before, I was only screaming, scolding and threatening". GML from Koulandiala; "In the past, I reacted negatively when a child behaved badly, that is to say that I did not hesitate to hit", GML from Bakayoko.

The grandmothers who had based their approach with adolescents on fear now say that they use dialogue and listening. They say they have replaced fear and lack of communication with calmness, listening and dialogue. Communication by listening now is steady.

"My communication with young girls has changed a lot. Before, I even avoided talking to them because, more often than not, they are not respectful. I understood with the training that it was not the right attitude to adopt towards them and that we must approach them and try to educate and help them. More and more, I call them and chat with them", GML from Badiara.

It is interesting to note that a small minority of grandmothers say that they had privileged dialogue with the young girls even before the training. However, these relationships have improved because now they are more available to listen to the girls.

In this small group many say: “Before I gave advice but now, I listen to the young girls and ask their opinion; I communicate more”.

The importance of communication through listening

Attention and the importance of listening to the reasons and needs of adolescent girls is often cited as one of the changes in communication. Almost all the grandmothers say that they now use the approach of dialogue through listening: "I am more attentive to the girls, I take the time to speak with them, to listen to their point of view".

The grandmothers now listen to the girls, ask their opinion, take their views into consideration and, armed with this information, seek to give good advice.

"Our way of communicating with young girls has changed a lot. Now we are more attentive to their concerns, we listen to them and we ask for their views on the different themes that we develop with them. Now we shout less, swear less and less but look for dialogue. We have understood the importance of listening, unlike before when there wasn't even any contact between them and us. Today is different", GML from Koulandiala.

"We did not know that it was important to listen to the girls, who we did not think could not teach us anything. Now we listen to them because we know they know things we do not know. Also, if we do not listen to them, we will not be able to know what they want and thus, we will not be able to help them", GM from Nassouroulaye.

The approach of listening and dialogue is adopted by grandmothers in the event of conflict as well. Some of them point out that they now have "the trust to talk and discuss even when there is a problem".

The opinion of young girls in relation to the communicative approach of grandmothers towards them

The young girls were interviewed on the changes in the communicative approach of the grandmothers⁴².

Almost all notice very positive changes in the approach of the grandmothers which is now oriented towards dialogue.

Among the testimonies of the young girls in relation to these changes we find: “The grandmothers have become closer and more attentive; they protect us and communicate better; they are softer, they use listening. They are having a lot of fun with us, in the past they scolded us. They are less aggressive. They do not insult us anymore, do not yell at us anymore, and have become nice and give us advice”.

“The grandmothers communicate a lot with us now. They have become closer to us and more attentive to our activities. They look after us much more than before. Before, they did not have this kind of attention and did not communicate enough with us. Now they do not shout anymore, and they are gentle with us. We think that this way is more interesting for us because it allows us to better understand and manage our lives”, Young girls from Badiara.

The change in the way grandmothers communicate with girls is an important factor in the theory of change in relation to the holistic development of girls.

7. The involvement of the Grandmother Leaders in solving problems and / or in the development of their village

Analysis of the data shows that beyond the discussions, since the training, the majority of the grandmothers have taken initiatives and have acted to solve community problems and/or for the development of their locality.

Almost all grandmothers⁴³ said they wanted to get involved in solving community problems.

Grandmothers' initiatives

Grandmothers talk about several initiatives during interviews: conflict resolution (cited by more than half); the regular organization of village sanitation days (cited by half); the opening of solidarity funds for various reasons (cited by more than a third), like a fund for the needs of poor children at school; a village solidarity fund for the sick; a savings tontine.

The grandmothers also took care, on an ad hoc basis, of actions such as: organizing and participating in the construction of a bridge between two villages; finding a solution for closing a well; the

⁴² Question 1.3 "For some time, have you seen any changes in the way grandmothers communicate with you / young girls in the village? ", Young Girls' Guide, Annex.

⁴³ Questions asked “Since the training, have you taken any action in the community to solve a problem or taken initiatives for the development of your locality? ", Grandmothers Guide, Annex.

6a "Have you solved / initiated it alone or with the other GMs?" ».

6b "Which problem / initiative?" ", Grandmothers Guide, Annex.

organization and participation in the re-establishment of a road blocked by a stream; actions to stop the wandering of animals; the institution of a reforestation day at school.

"Since the training, we have often met to resolve conflicts in the neighborhood and the grandmothers are the initiators of this action", GML from Hafía

"After the training, we got together to find a solution to the road blocked by a stream. The entire population mobilized to refill the ravine with stones. By now the road has become passable. We have also sanitized the village several times with all sections of the population. All these actions are initiated by the grandmothers", GML from Saré Sankoulé.

Those who got involved in these initiatives generally worked with other grandmothers, only the 12% acted individually, but communication with others remains important in those cases as well.

"Some actions we carry out in synergy and others individually, but we communicate with each other about everything that happens", GML from Koulandiala.

The opinion of the notables and the young girls on the involvement of the grandmothers in solving community problems⁴⁴

All the notables affirmed⁴⁵ that the grandmothers have been able to act in the community or at school to solve problems that worry them.

More than two thirds of the notables say that grandmothers are engaged in schools; two-thirds of them believe they supervise the young girls; half say they tackle problems related to unsanitary conditions; for a third of the notables they settle conflicts in family and community.

"The grandmothers are no longer indifferent. They are in the observations and in the implication of everyone. They shared their willingness to work with all the leaders on solving problems of unhealthiness, the girls' marriages, and the girls' education", The notables from Bakayoko.

All of the young girls say that the grandmothers are involved in solving community problems. All the girls said ⁴⁶ that the grandmothers are committed to solving situations or problems in the community or at school concerning girls or boys.

For two thirds of the young girls, the grandmothers sought to resolve conflicts; for slightly less than half they collaborate in the educational pursuits of children, in school-community mediation and in storytelling at school; for a small minority, the grandmothers are active in the assessment and resolution of sanitary conditions.

The grandmothers' commitment to solving community problems is also evidenced by the observations of all the notables and all the young girls.

⁴⁴ Notables and young girls were questioned on this subject.

⁴⁵ Question 3.1 "Have GMs once taken action in the community or at school to solve the problems that concern you?" , Notables' Guide, Annex.

⁴⁶ Question 2.4 "Were there any situations / problems in the community or at school concerning the girls or boys that the GMs helped to solve?" Explain", Young Girls' Guide, Annex.

Evaluating the participation of grandmothers in solving village problems through the analysis of concrete actions helps to understand the changes that have occurred. The involvement in community actions shows us that the self-confidence of the grandmothers has increased, as have solidarity and practical collaboration with other community actors.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation showed that all the grandmothers genuinely appreciated the training, which enabled them to play their role in the family and in the community with more confidence and reassurance. They have better social relationships and they have acquired new competences.

Almost all of the young girls have much appreciated the changes in the quality of communication with their grandmothers; they more easily talk to them about various themes, including those related to reproductive health.

All the notables note and appreciate the fact that the grandmothers are now sensitive to community problems and seek solutions; that they are committed to collaborating in schools and especially to becoming involved in the mentoring of the young girls.

The evaluation shows that for all of the training objectives, the changes reached by the grandmothers are positive.

- ➔ All of the grandmother leaders say they have acquired new knowledge about the hormonal and psychological changes in adolescent girls. With these new pieces of information, they are better able to understand the girls and can interact with them more easily. They have more arguments to protect them. Better understanding psychological changes facilitates dialogue and allows improved supervision of adolescent girls.
- ➔ The role of the grandmothers in the family and in the community has changed: the majority is taking initiative for the well-being of young girls and for family and community cohesion with more confidence. Almost all grandmothers now have better relationships with young women and adolescent girls and are more respected by other community actors. All the notables notice a change in the role of the grandmothers in the community.
- ➔ All the grandmother leaders affirm that solidarity between them has increased. Now they discuss the problems of the community and seek solutions to the problems of the girls and their villages. The relationships between the grandmothers are stronger, they collectively engage in activities related to the supervision of young girls and the well-being of the community.
- ➔ The majority of grandmothers now collaborate with other community leaders and share with them the content of the training to involve them in solving community problems for the well-being of the community. Before the training, grandmothers generally did not collaborate with other community leaders. The majority of them have started collaborating with teachers in schools. The majority of grandmothers are now working with the mothers of the young girls to improve the education and supervision of adolescent girls.

- ➔ All the grandmothers say that they have improved communication with the young girls and that they have abandoned the approach based on orders and fear in favor of listening and dialogue. Now they listen a lot more to the girls, ask their opinion, and take their ideas into consideration to give them good advice.
All the grandmother leaders say that they now speak frequently with the young adolescents to support them. All of the grandmothers discuss several issues affecting their lives and almost all of them discuss issues related to reproductive health. All the young girls appreciate these discussions and say that they talk a lot about different subjects with the grandmothers.
- ➔ Almost all of the grandmother leaders are active, individually or collectively, in mediation, conflict resolution and the promotion of community planning and sanitation activities. All notables and all young girls note and appreciate the commitment of the grandmothers to promote well-being of the community and of young girls.

Observations

The study shows that the grandmothers were very receptive to the training, which enabled them to optimize their leadership qualities.

During all stages of the training of grandmother leaders we have been able to understand that in the communities there are “natural” grandmother leaders who are ready to open up to new knowledge and to commit themselves to the well-being of their communities and young girls⁴⁷ as soon as they feel valued.

Before the training, if these natural grandmother leaders exercised their role, they did not have enough self-confidence and were neither recognized nor encouraged by their communities.

The training valued grandmothers and gave them new competences which allowed them to rediscover their role as leaders that had remained hidden before.

The training helped improve communication and relationships between grandmothers and mothers, which enabled them to better supervise the young girls. By sharing the acquired knowledge with the mothers, the grandmothers saw their exchanges with the young girls evolve positively.

In the region where the training took place, as elsewhere in Africa, in the past it was the oldest women who were responsible for the supervision and transmission of knowledge to adolescent girls. The grandmothers, thanks to the new materials and the acquired social skills, felt important and knew how to enhance their role which was a real resource for the whole community and for the well-being of the young girls in particular.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

⁴⁷ A previous study had shown the existence of natural leaders among grandmothers in communities in the department of Vélingara: *Investigation of the leadership of grandmothers in the villages involved in the Holistic Development of Girls program in the Department of Vélingara*, The Grand Mother Project, 2012.

- ➔ The study shows that restoring the role of grandmother leaders has led to an improvement in family and community cohesion. This leads to better cooperation and the sharing of values and objectives for promoting the well-being of the entire society and in particular of young girls by better participation and collaboration in solving community problems and by including all family and community actors in this process.
Highlighting and strengthening the role of GMLs can be essential for projects aimed at social cohesion.
- ➔ The study has shown that natural grandmother leaders exist and that a strategy which recognizes their role and increases their knowledge and confidence allows them to become more involved for the benefit of the community and of adolescent girls. Strategies that seek to enhance the role of grandmothers by enhancing their qualities as community leaders may be useful in many other parts of Africa.
- ➔ During this course, which seeks the implication and the valorization of the grandmothers, it is important to focus on the quality of relationships between grandmothers and mothers, to enable them to develop a joint family and community strategy to promote the holistic development of young girls.
- ➔ Programs that focus on the holistic development of girls should cultivate the resource that exists in all communities, that is, grandmother leaders, by developing strategies that deepen their knowledge and restore their natural authority given their role in the socialization of young girls.

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