

Summary of Study Report n°12

**The impact of the
Grandmother Project -
Change through Culture
Girls' Holistic Development Program**

*Changes in gender relations and improvement of the status
of women (Velingara dep., Kolda Region, Senegal)*

Study coordinated by: Francesca Lulli, anthropologist
Interviews conducted by Mariama Kande and Francesca Lulli

January 2020
Velingara, Sénégal

International development programs are and becoming increasingly interested in changing the relations between men and women. These changes are essential for reducing discrimination towards women and to allow for their empowerment.

The Holistic Development for Girls program, carried out by the NGO Grandmother Project – Change through culture promised to help keep girls in school and reduce the incidence of child marriage, teenage pregnancy and female genital mutilation. It set out to achieve this through improving dialogue between generations and involving grandmothers as strategic partners for the purposes of dealing with matters concerning girls. A previous study commissioned by the Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) from Georgetown University in 2018 (Lulli 2018) and an important research project carried out by the IRH (IRH 2019) suggested that the GHD program had improved the status of females of all ages as well as relations between genders in the contexts of both family and community. However, these prior research projects did not sufficiently analyze changes in gender relations.

In order to better understand the changes that arose in relations between genders in the GHD's zone of operation, GMP commissioned a study in September 2019, which was carried out the anthropologist Dr. Francesca Lulli. The document presented here is the summary for that research, for which there also exists a complete report.

The methodology used in this study takes inspiration from the conceptual framework of the SIG (Social Institutions and Gender Index) produced by the OECD (2014) and was developed following 3 of SIG's priority parameters, namely:

- Discrimination against women and their decision-making powers within the family and the under-estimation of their capabilities and their rights;
- Violence against women and control over their bodies;
- Women's access to public spaces so that they can enter into political and social spheres.

The objective of this study was to:

- Determine if there has been any change in the attitudes of men towards women who speak their mind and any changes in the confidence that women have in speaking up in family and community contexts.
- Identify changes in intergenerational relations (between elders, adults and adolescents) and between men and women.

This study is based on interviews of homogenous groups of grandmothers, mothers of adolescents, adolescents, public figures, men and adolescents across 13 villages in the communes of Kandia and Nemataba. In total, 253 people were interviewed. The processing of the data collected from several categories of persons supports the conclusion that in all of the communities in which the GHD program was introduced, significant changes came about in gender relations and the status of women from all 3 generations.

The text below, as well as the table following it, present us with the 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 much in a family setting 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, they 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 the family.

"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 the husbands considered their speaking as 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. "

Girls 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, they previously 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. "

Grandmothers 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. "

Girls 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 mobilize together; having a meeting together is a big change. "

Grandmothers from Diamweli

Mothers: they all state that, before the project, 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 fights. Now, according to all interviewees, relationships have changed: husbands and wives communicate and listen 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?" Women also contribute 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 be listened to in a family setting. Their fathers now listen to them, considering their needs and opinions. Boys also listen to and respect the opinions of girls.

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

Public figure from Nemataba

"Now we talk to girls, we tell them that it's good to 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 with women, women of childbearing age and grandmothers on all family matters. The consultation process for 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 the public figures in 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 all dialogue on family matters regarding the smooth running of the family, for food and other things; 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 thrown out 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. ”

Public figure 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 dialogue, 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 have 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 used to express their opinions amongst their family, neither in front of their husbands nor their elders.	WRAs are more easily able to express their own opinions amongst their family in front of their husbands and elders.
	WRAs, did not used to 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 openly within the family and with every generation.
	Grandmothers did not used to speak in public at all. They did not participate in the political forums of the village.	Grandmothers speak openly in public. They participate in village political forums.
Girls	Girls did not used to dare to express their needs and ideas in family and especially not in front of their fathers.	Girls have the 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 the confidence to express their opinions to boys directly, to defend their own ideas and to resist the boys' advances.
	Girls never spoke during community sessions.	The vast majority of Girls have the confidence to speak their mind during community meetings.
Men's attitude towards women speaking up	Men of all ages did not used to 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 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 to grandmothers a lot more and appreciate their ideas.
Husband and wife	Husbands did not used to listen to their wives' (WRAs) opinions and weren't interested in listening to them.	Husbands listen to the opinions of their wives (WRAs) and appreciate their ideas.
	When disagreements broke out, husbands refused to engage in dialogue with their wives. Fighting was frequent between spouses and 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)
Father and Girls	Fathers did not used to ask their adolescent daughters for their opinions.	Fathers ask their adolescent daughters for their opinions and do listen to them.
Boys and Girl	Young boys did not seek out the opinions of girls. They were used to their shyness and subordination.	Young boys listen to girls and respect the positions that they take with 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.