

INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION: THE FOUNDATION FOR CHANGE IN COMMUNITY NORMS AND PRACTICES

*A study of the impact of Intergenerational Forums on the communication
between generations and sexes in Nemataba and Kandia villages*



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Comments community participants in the intergenerational forums

“These intergenerational forums are very important because they restore the dialogue between the elderly and the young. In recent years, the elderly didn’t listen to the views of young people, and young people underestimated the elderly. Thanks to these forums, young people have today changed their attitudes towards the elderly and the elderly have changed their way of interacting with young people. We are now noticing mutual respect between young people and the elderly. These forums have strengthened communication between grandmothers, young girls and women as well as between grandmothers and young boys and also between young boys and older men”

Grandmother from Koumera

“There is a strong partnership between grandmothers and young girls, they are now communicating very well, and they are telling stories to the young girls. Young girls are also revealing their problems to grandmothers.”

Imam Abu Kande from Kael Besel

“The forums have enabled women to have more confidence in themselves. They previously wouldn’t express themselves in front of men. Only men had a say during community meetings. But now, men know that they have good ideas, just like women”.

Grandmother from Montoumba

“The forums have made it possible to give women a rightful place, because we now know that they too have good ideas. The entire community is aware of the need to involve them in decision-making”.

Young dad from Montoumba

“Discussions through the IGF have enabled us to reconsider our behaviour with girls. Today, we try to protect girls rather than harm them. We are aware of the risks that there are involving pregnancies”.

Young boy from Koumera

“We will now talk with young boys. We are more confident and are able to express and defend ourselves when dealing with young boys. Young boys have also curbed their excessive needs because this is what was causing problems”.

Young girl from Sare Samba Netty

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the department of Velingara, in southern Senegal, girls face several challenges that are constraints to their physical, psychological and intellectual development and the exercise of their rights. Certain sociocultural norms and practices, such as low education levels, early marriage, early pregnancy, female genital mutilation and the existence of a directed communication style of adults towards children do not help their development and fulfillment.

In this area, the well-being of young girls is subsequently limited by the lack of communication (or even conflictiveness) between generations and between men and women.

Grandmother Project - *Change Through Culture* (GMP) is an American and Senegalese NGO working in this department to promote Girls' Holistic Development (GHD) and provide solutions to all the problems mentioned above and to which girls are confronted.

For GMP the lever which the change of practices and social norms in communities rests on is the collective consensus, the result of open communication between generations and genders. GMP implements communication activities and tools to improve consensus among community actors to change attitudes and existing norms. Several community activities are implemented, but the Intergenerational Forum (FIG) is a flagship activity in the GHD programme. The forums reinforce dialogue and critical reflection on the issues and possible actions to be taken to resolve them.

To know the opinions of the communities on the FIG and their effects on relations and on communication; group interviews were conducted in 12 villages, including 6 in the Nemataba commune and 6 in the Kandia commune. A total of 220 people participated, including 60 grandmothers; 42 women of childbearing age (FAP); 38 girls; 26 grandfathers/prominent citizens, 24 young fathers, 18 young boys, 6 Imams and 6 village chiefs.

The answers of the interviewees were classified through the analysis of the content.

The study reveals positive changes at several levels, on aspects related to communication, relationships and collaboration between generations and between the sexes.

However, it must be emphasized that the changes observed are not due exclusively to the Forums, but that they are the result of all the activities organized by GMP with the community actors.

THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY:

➤ ***FIG strengthened relations between generations***

All interviewees appreciate the intergenerational approach and claim that the Forums have made positive changes in the relationships between the different generations. In many villages, relationships between seniors and youth were previously conflictual and "*now they have calmed down*". Elders and youths have come together and between them dialogue and mutual respect prevails.

➤ ***FIG strengthened communication between women and men***

All actors appreciate meeting at the FIGs between men and women and in all the villages we recognise that the following forums, relations between men and women have been strengthened, communication is better and domestic conflicts have diminished. Today, women are more involved in family decision-making processes.

➤ ***GMP's inclusive approach is highly valued by communities***

All the interviewees positively judge the forums which involve all generations, men and women, and value all ideas. The majority of interviewees pointed out that GMP's approach is unique and that other organisations focus only on certain segments of the population and ignore others.

According to them, the participation of all the community actors favours the sharing of knowledge and the collective search for solutions to the problems.

➤ ***FIG has improved women's confidence when speaking in public***

All women say that through the forums they have more confidence in themselves and they express themselves more easily in public and with their family. Men are now realising the relevance of their women. Women participate more easily in family and community decision-making processes.

➤ ***FIG has boosted girls' confidence when it comes to young boys***

Young girls express themselves with greater confidence than in the past, which has improved their relationship with young boys. The girls say that they can now refuse the advances of the boys, which allows for mutual respect. However, this change is also due to other GMP activities, such as Women's Forums.

➤ ***FIG strengthened community consultation process***

According to the testimonies, in all the villages, school-community relations have evolved positively. Almost everywhere now, teachers and communities collaborate, respect each other and organise activities together at school and in the community.

➤ ***FIG has increased community engagement in children's education***

According to the testimonies, everywhere communication between schools and communities has been strengthened, to discuss the needs and well-being of children, which translates into an increased commitment of communities in the education of children and in a better way of schooling girls.

➤ ***FIGs have helped to promote culture in communities***

According to the testimonies gathered in all the sites of the study, the forums contributed to valorise the existing culture, by encouraging the engagement of the parents and the grandparents in the transmission of positive cultural values to the children.

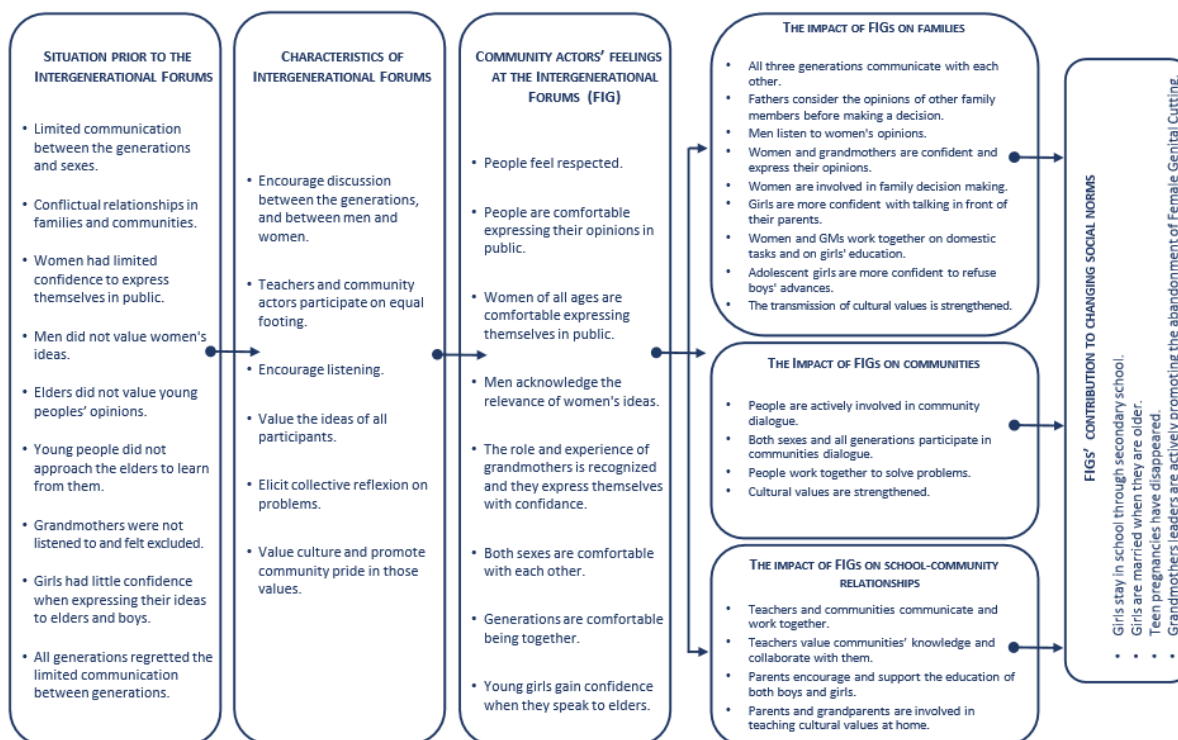
➤ **FIG have promoted Girls' Holistic Development (GHD).**

According to the interviewees, the strengthening of dialogue and the improvement of relations between the generations and between the sexes has improved the schooling rate for girls, increased the age of marriage and the decrease in early pregnancies.

Diagram : **Intergenerational Forums: Their Impact on Communities** summarises the results of the interviews.

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- INTERGENERATIONAL FORUMS: THEIR IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES -



A comment on the study:

Any programme that aims to change social norms in communities should adopt a *systemic approach* which includes all community actors. After improving communication between the generations and the sexes, the application of a dialogic approach will allow reflection within and between pairs of groups to arrive at a collective consensus on the need to change existing attitudes and practices. In the future, the Intergenerational Forums will be a useful way to work on the mutual trust and the quality of the communication of members of a community around priority and urgent themes.

I. THE CONTEXT

In Africa, particularly in Senegal, young girls face many constraints that limit their physical, psychological and intellectual development. Certain sociocultural norms and practices such as girls' lack of schooling, early marriage and pregnancy, and female circumcision hinder their development, enjoyment of their rights and reduce their chances of accessing formal education.

Since 2010, the NGO *Grandmother Project - Change Through Culture (GMP)*, works in the department of Velingara, in southern Senegal, with its *Girls' Holistic Development of Girls*, which addresses issues related to girls' schooling, early marriage, early pregnancy and female circumcision. This area, before the Forums, was marked by several factors that limited the well-being of girls, such as poor communication between generations and between the sexes or the conflictual relationships of families and communities. Women spoke little in public and in front of men who did not value their opinions. Elders did not like the ideas of youths and drifted away from them because of a very direct style of communication. Young girls did not dare speak freely in front of their parents or with young boys.

Previous studies show the negative impact of this lack of communication in the life of communities and the difficulty that arises in the consensual adoption of new practices favourable to the well-being of young girls.

It is in this context that *GMP-Change through Culture* wants to change the norms and practices that hinder the development of young girls and that is tied into African societies, adults and elders especially. Promoting such changes requires the involvement of all segments of the population. It is essential to work on mutual trust to agree on the change of certain practices in the communities. That's why GMP prepares activities to strengthen relationships among community members and enable dialogue and critical reflection on issues related to the well-being of girls, children and the community at large.

The Intergenerational Forum (FIG) is one of the main activities of GMP in the GHD programme in Velingara. Here, methods of adult education, participatory communication and critical reflection are developed to foster dialogue and awareness around changing norms and practices in the community.

II. INTERGENERATIONAL FORUMS

The Intergenerational Forum uses a method developed by GMP to facilitate community dialogue, bringing together all members of the community around the following objectives:

- Collective reflection on themes related to the education and well-being of children, especially young girls;
- Dialogue and mutual respect among elders, adults, youth, men and women and between teachers and communities;
- Discussion within communities around previously taboo topics related to Girls' Holistic Development (GHD);
- Valuing the role and influence of grandmothers within communities to promote GHD;

- Self-confidence of grandmothers to play their role as educators and advisors in the family and in the community;
- Agreement and solidarity initiative in communities, for the well-being of children and communities.

During the Forums, through an educational approach to adult education and with the help of an experienced facilitator, participants are invited to reflect on their own experiences and new insights that GMP shares with them.

It is not a question of "convincing" or "persuading" but rather of bringing the participants to a thorough reflection; for them to analyze their own attitudes, and find alternatives for deciding what to do.

Discussions take place, either in peer groups (same age or same sex) or all together where all the sexes and age groups are gathered. The forum is an opportunity to guide dialogue, exchanges and mutual listening and especially to encourage participants to continue the discussion outside the forums in the community.

The organization of FIG

The Forums last two days, bring together the representatives of two villages and take place twice a year. Each meeting has the participation of about 40 community members and teachers. The following social categories are represented: grandmothers, grandfathers, men and women, adolescent girls and boys, health workers and teachers. In addition, the Forums welcome Imams, local musicians and sages, as well as the team of facilitators of the project. Several facilitation techniques are used: group work, plenary discussions, sketches, endless stories. These techniques are based on tools such as the problem tree, images and instruction sheets for reflection... Finally, the discussions and activities are punctuated by moments of relaxation, songs and dances.

The organization of the Forums requires the commitment of the facilitators of the project. To prepare a forum, the facilitators make sure to visit the communities to inform them and facilitate the process of community consultation and choose the leaders of the different generations who will participate in the Forums to share their impressions in the community. Their role will be to support community reflection during the Forums and, later, during the community meetings, which they will also follow the discussions and activities programmed by the communities themselves. Facilitators, meanwhile, ensure the smooth running of forums. They lead all the activities and facilitate the active participation of all the community actors, to encourage mutual listening, to value the opinions which emerge and reflection on the possible changes by following a consensus process.

III. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

III.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This small study sought the views of communities on the intergenerational forums (FIG) and their effects on the quality of communication between generations and between the sexes.

The following themes were therefore identified for discussion during the interviews:

- The appreciation of the intergenerational approach on the part of the communities;
- The changes observed in relationships and communication between generations;
- Changes observed in relationships and communication between the sexes;
- The changes observed in the quality of the community consultation to solve the problems of the communities;
- Changes observed in school-community relationships;
- The changes observed on the appreciation of culture

III.2 THE SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

Group interviews were conducted in 12 villages, including 6 in commune of Nemataba: Nemataba, Bagayoko, Sare Yira, Badiara, Koumera and Saré Sankoulé and 6 in commune of Kandia: Kael Bessel, Kerewane, Montoumba, Sare Koly Tening, Sare Niari, Sare Samba Nety. A total of 220 people participated in the interviews, including 139 villages in Nemataba and 81 villages in Kandia. These included 60 grandmothers, 42 women of childbearing age (FAP), 38 girls, 26 grandfathers/dignitaries, 24 young fathers, 18 young boys, 6 imams and 6 village chiefs.

In the 12 selected villages, group interviews were conducted with the help of a guide. A variable number of interviewees participated as appropriate, but the principle was to ensure the representation of both sexes and all generations who participated in the Forums. For each theme, at least two representatives of different generations and both sexes were interviewed. Those present at the group interviews express themselves on the different themes in turn, and sometimes a participant examines a theme. During the interviews, questions and answers were publicly expressed and shared as a group. This approach allows us to say that the responses generally reflect shared community visions.

The interviews were conducted in *pulaar* and notes taken in French. The data was analyzed using the *content analysis* approach. Some themes were defined from the beginning while other themes and sub-themes were delineated during the data analysis process.

IV. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

We present here the results of the interviews carried out in the villages of the communes of Nemataba and Kandia. GMP's activities were conducted in Nemataba commune from the end of 2016. In Kandia commune, GMP implemented the Girls' Holistic Development programme, including forums, between 2008 and 2015, but some communities were not able to participate from the beginning.

It is important to note that in both areas the data analysis shows very similar behaviours and trends on the issues. This finding suggests that the forums have had a lasting impact.

The data shows that the Forums are valued by communities and the intergenerational approach seems to have had positive effects. The answers obtained highlight the following changes: better intergenerational relations, more frequent dialogue; better communication between men and women. Community consultation for solving common problems and decision-making now actively involve all generations, regardless of gender. Collaboration between school and community is strengthened; the culture is enhanced.

IV.1 STRENGTHENING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS

In all the villages, the interviewees say they appreciate the fact of being between generations in FIG. They unanimously affirm that the FIGs have had a positive impact on intercommunity relations by bringing together generations and strengthening their relations through communication, exchanges and mutual listening.

According to the interviewees, there have been important changes in the relationships between young people and elderly. Indeed, thanks to the forums, everyone seems to appreciate the improvement of the quality of the communication.

"In the recent past, there was no respect or consideration between young people and elders. But today, thanks to the dialogue initiated by GMP, the elders are getting closer and closer to the youths and they have become very open to older people, which has created trust and strong cooperation between them".

Woman of childbearing age from Koumera

"These FIGs are very important because they restore dialogue between elders and young people. In the recent past, elders did not listen to the opinions of young people and they underestimated them. Thanks to the FIGs, young people today have changed their attitudes towards elders and they have changed their way of working with young people. Now, we see mutual respect between young people and elders. The FIGs have strengthened the dialogue between grandmothers, girls and women, but also between grandmothers and boys and between young men and older men".

Grandmother from Koumera.

Testimonies show that thanks to the forums, intergenerational relations have gained respect and quality of dialogue. In this sense, the communication gap that existed between young people and elders must be noted. Today, communities unanimously recognize that generations have reconciled.

In all villages, moreover, relations between women of different generations (grandmothers, women of childbearing age and girls) have changed positively; now a great deal of trust has been built between women-of-childbearing-age (FAP) and grandmothers. They collaborate on many issues related to the domestic organization, protection and education of children. If before, the grandmothers were marginalized, today, thanks to the forums, they are consulted on all that relates to the functioning of the family and to the community life.

" With the forums we learned to consult each other. We interact with FAP on different issues; for example, how to organize the home, how to take care of children, how to act during pregnancy. What should we eat, what should we not eat? That was not done before. Before, FAP did not interest us, neither did we. Now we are asked to solve marital problems. Before, we did not have the right to speak but now we are valued. Today, all issues are discussed before a decision is made ".

Grandmother from Bagayoko

As for relations between grandmothers and girls, all the interviewees note their closeness and an improvement in the quality of communication between them.

"There is a change in our relationship with our grandmothers. Before, we preferred to go to parties or watch television instead of staying with them. But today we spend time with them to listen to their stories".

Young girl from Kael Bessel

"There is a strong collaboration between grandmothers and girls, now they communicate very well, they tell stories to young girls. The girls also talk about their problems to the grandmothers".

Imam Abu Kande, commune of Kandia

Young girls are now more interested in the knowledge of grandmothers and they are more committed to participating in their education by transmitting positive cultural values. It is in this sense that this young girl expresses herself:

"Now, I know more about my culture and think about things I did not think about. I also became closer to my grandmother. I listen to her now more than before. Stories and tradition did not interest me. But now I have a lot of interest in my culture".

Young girl from Sare Yira

Improved relationships between grandmothers and girls also enable them to be better protected in relation to reproductive health, as shown by this girl's testimony:

"Relationships with our grandmothers are good, because if we have problems or issues related to sexuality, we can talk to them about it. Now we feel comfortable with them".

Young girl from Kael Bessel

Thus, thanks to the forums, clear development is noted in intergenerational relationships, communication is reestablished, as well as the transmission of values.

IV.2 STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

The community actors interviewed all very much consider the fact of finding themselves among men and women in the intergenerational forums. The results show that the positive effects of the involvement of both sexes are manifold.

IV.2.1 STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

The interviewees unanimously state that the forums, a meeting place, have improved communication and exchange between men and women in the family as well as in the

community. Before, there was no dialogue and conflicts were recurrent; only men made family decisions. But today, thanks to the forums, trust has been restored and the two sexes have come closer together and communicate on all issues. The following remarks illustrate this change:

"Men and women did not talk enough in families. It was a problem that kept them apart and encouraged misunderstandings, conflicts and quarrels in families. Forums have come to heal this evil".

Young boy from Sare Yira

"Thanks to the activities and especially the discussions during the FIG, men and women now communicate frequently. There is almost no conflict between spouses because they favor dialogue. Women pay more attention to men and men listen more to women. People have realized that only through dialogue can all problems and conflicts be solved".

Grandmother from Koumera

"Now there is a strong collaborative relationship between husband and wife. Before there was no discussion between a woman and her husband. But since the project started to develop in these areas, men are talking with their wives and vice versa. If they have problems, they talk with their husband. Before, such a thing did not exist".

Woman of childbearing age (FAP) from Montoumba

These testimonies show that the strengthening of communication between men and women can be attributed to intergenerational forums that have helped to alleviate sometimes tense relations between spouses.

IV.2.2 REASSESSMENT OF WOMEN'S STATUS: INCREASED CONFIDENCE TO SPEAK IN PUBLIC AND TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING

In all villages, it was pointed out that the Forums have taught women to share their opinions more confidently in public and in the presence of men. These meetings made it possible for men to realize that women have good ideas, useful in developing development strategies for the village. This is what this grandmother supports:

"The forums have allowed women to have more confidence in themselves. Before, they did not dare to speak in front of men. During the community meetings, only men were given the floor. But now, men know the women have good ideas".

Grandmother from Montoumba

The forums have fostered a collective awareness of the importance of women and the need to include women in the decision-making process on family or community issues. In some villages, we now see the strong involvement of women (grandmothers, mothers, young girls) in decisions concerning the marriage of young girls. This is what this grandfather explains:

"Before, the father decided to marry off his daughter without the consent of her mother. But today, if a young boy wants to marry a girl, it is the father himself who tells his young daughter to talk to her mother and to get her opinion. So, this shows that women are now involved in decision making. In this respect, there is a big change".

Grandfather in Sare Niari

These remarks show that there has been a big change in the functioning and family organization. Meetings and dialogue regulate relations between the sexes. The opinion of the woman is now taken into account in all family discussions.

At the community level, the importance of women's opinions are also recognised by everyone. This young father's remarks illustrate this:

"The forums have given women a good position, because now we know that the woman has good ideas too. The whole community is aware of the need to involve them in decision-making. For this reason, the parity rule is now applied when the Village Problem Solving Committee is established. Before, we did not do all that; if we do it now, it's thanks to the forums".

Young father from Montoumba

After analysis, it appears that the relations between the sexes have changed a lot. The woman, who before was relegated to the background, now participates in community life. The FIGs have actually enabled women to know their value, which has made them more confident and less vulnerable.

IV. 2.3 IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GIRLS AND BOYS AND INCREASED GIRLS' CONFIDENCE

In all villages, the majority of interviewees say that there have been positive changes in the relationships between girls and boys. Thanks to the forums, young people communicate. Their relationships are now based on mutual respect and consideration.

Young girls express themselves more confidently and, through discussions, young boys understood their responsibilities to girls. The following speeches illustrate this:

"The FIG discussions allowed us to review our behavior with girls. Today, we seek more to protect girls than to hurt them. We are aware of the risks around pregnancies. That's why now we can be with girls without thinking about hurting them. In my opinion, this is because people are talking about it a lot now".

Young boy from Koumera

"Now, we dare to chat with the boys. We are more confident and we are able to express ourselves and defend ourselves against young boys. Young boys too have reduced their excessive needs because that is what caused the problems".

Young Girl from Sare Samba Nety

Young girls today no longer hesitate to speak with young boys and they do not limit themselves to refuse the advances of boys but oppose them with a reasoned-out argument.

"There is a change because before early pregnancies were common. But now it is no longer the case, because the girls are very well prepared, they are confident and are better able to express themselves. They can interact with young boys without stress, without being frustrated".

Grandmother from Montoumba

These speeches show positive changes in the relationships between girls and boys: through communication, they respect each other and can adopt new, positive mutual attitudes.

"Now, we confer with the girls. Before, there were no discussions between girls and boys to make decisions about the smooth running of the village. But today, we often talk about changing behaviour and how to move our village forward".

Young boy from Bagayoko

All of this shows that participation in the Forums helped the girls to express themselves with confidence, which facilitated the establishment of relationships based on mutual respect with boys. It should be noted, however, that they gained this confidence not only through their participation in the FIGs but rather through all the activities that the FIGs carried out, such as the *sessions under the tree* during which almost all the girls in the villages meet.

IV.3 STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RELATIONS: CONSULTATION AND COLLECTIVE RESOLUTION OF PROBLEMS

Analysis of the data shows that the positive impact of the FIGs is not limited to strengthening relations between generations and between the two sexes. Relationships between community members today are very fluid, based primarily on trust, dialogue and collaboration:

The following remarks say it well:

"FIGs are very useful because they strengthen collaboration between people. These are meetings that build trust and dialogue among community members".

Grandmother from Badiara

"The forums have brought about a great change at the community level, because now communities can see their problems, come together to look for solutions to implement".

Grandmother from Saré Koli Tening

"Through the FIG, we have been able to resolve several misunderstandings that existed between elders, youths, women, in short the village. Trust did not exist between us, people did not meet each other too much and did not attend meetings but, thanks to the FIG, today we have a united and supportive village to take care of our own problems".

Young boy from Badiara

The interviewees also unanimously affirm that all matters of common interest are now the subject of community consultation. All categories participate in community meetings and decision-making processes. Both sexes and all generations are now involved in community consultation processes.

"Thank goodness, the way you make decisions has really changed as a result of the FIGs. Now, we involve all generations, women, young people, whereas in the past, it was the fathers of families who discussed and decided and then reported to other members of the family. We understand that does not get things done in a village and that everyone needs to be involved".

Imam from Koumera

"The FIGs have shown the importance of taking into account the views of all generations in decision-making in the community. Now everyone is invited around the palaver tree so that

everyone can give their opinion. Before, only elders spoke during meetings. Today the opinions of all generations and sexes are taken into account".

Young boy from Koumera

From now on, all community players feel involved in the problems of the village and are active in finding solutions, actions to take and people to involve.

"Now we have decided to discuss all the issues that concern our community. Whenever we see the need to seek each other out, we will do it to consult each other and decide on actions to be taken".

Grandfather from Badiara

Now village members are willing to participate in community meetings. Testimonies gathered illustrate this new collective commitment:

"Now problem solving is of interest to everyone in the village. Before, nobody was interested. There was a great indifference".

Grandmother from Sare Yira

"Before we could meet, discuss, exchange to make decisions but, in the end, we did not implement them. But now, during the meetings, we first try to diagnose the problems and then find solutions together to implement them. Once the decision is made no one dares move back. For example, everyone is involved in weeding to avoid bushfires".

Grandfather from Sare Niari

This shows that the FIGs made it possible to appreciate the value of all opinions in research and in the application of the best solutions and that there is now greater community mobilization and a real commitment to finding solutions to the problems that arise.

IV.4 STRENGTHENING RELATIONS AND IMPROVING COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

According to respondents, the forums had a positive impact on relations and collaboration between teachers and communities.

IV.4.1 STRENGTHENING RELATIONS BETWEEN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

All respondents unanimously agree that following the forums, relations between school and community are better. According to the survey results, communities and teachers did not know how to communicate before the forums.

"Beforehand, teachers kept themselves to themselves. They did not visit the village. They had no relationship with us, parents of students. But now it's different. Teachers come to the village and socialize with us and we too go to them."

Montoumba's grandmother

This demonstrates that there used to be little exchange between the school and the community. Children's education was exclusively the responsibility of teachers.

"Before now there was no communication between the school and the community. For us, children's education was exclusively in the hands of teachers. The forums made us realize

that the school belongs to the community and that we need to take charge of its problems. That is why, since the forums began, teachers and communities socialize more. Teachers are involved in everything that takes place in the community.”

Grandmother from Saré Sankoulé

The forums allowed these two parties to communicate, socialize and collaborate. Communities have become aware of their role in children`s education. Teachers, for their part, acknowledge community participation and collaboration in the children`s education and give due importance to community cultural knowledge.

IV.4.2 COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATING CHILDREN AND YOUNG GIRLS

All respondents pointed out that there is better collaboration and involvement of community members in educating children.

“Now there is strong collaboration between school and the community. Teachers do nothing without the community, which also involves them in all its activities. Teachers are invited to give their opinions in meetings related to girls` holistic development. These meetings take place both in the village and at school.”

Mother of Kael Bessel

The school has become closer to the community and many activities are organized in partnership. The forums helped to involve communities in the education of children.

“Inter-generational forums are a time for brainstorming on how to help children have quality education and improve themselves with the involvement of all. We discuss each other`s responsibilities regarding child development and this has helped encourage parents to focus more on their children`s education.”

Young father of Badiara

Parents and elders are now more concerned about the education and well-being of children and are showing renewed interest in the education of young girls.

“Children`s education is experiencing a change. At first, we weren`t interested in children`s education but the discussions at the forums have made us more interested in the education of children, including girls. Honestly, only young boys used to attend school and we did not even take an interest. Today, parents follow up on both girls` and boys` studies.”

Young father of Montoumba

Regarding elderly people, respondents in all villages stated that there is effective collaboration between grandmothers and teachers. They are invited to school to impart knowledge and cultural values to children.

“We grandmothers go to school to help teachers teach values. Teachers also join us in all activities we carry out and also attend the meetings we organize.”

Grandmother Sare Yira

Involving parents and grandmothers in the education of children and providing more support to girls has enabled children to be more motivated in their studies.

“Beforehand, girls didn’t go to school. But now they are more regular because parents are interested in their studies. More attention is being paid to girls’ education and the advice of grandmothers is being heeded. Previously, girls were mainly interested in clothes, make-up, etc., however now they have changed their behavior.”

Nemataba Village Chief

“Young girls are now aware of the importance of education. Even when asked to marry someone who is rich, the girl quickly says, ‘No. My studies are my priority’.”

Mother of Kael Bessel

From these comments, it is clear that girls have become aware of the importance of education and are more motivated. They are more committed because parents and elders are more involved in their education. Marriage is no longer a top priority for them.

IV. 5 POSITIVE CHANGES IN CULTURAL APPRECIATION

According to data collected, cultural appreciation has increased in all villages among both elderly and young people. Meeting other generations at the FIG and discussing cultural values has contributed to promoting the latter, especially among young people.

“I think it was very useful to discuss the importance of our culture. We now have a different attitude. We have more respect for our culture. I think that talking about culture brought about these changes.”

Young boy from Sare Yira

Promoting culture has encouraged the involvement of parents and grandparents in passing on cultural values within the family. At present, it is mainly grandmothers who are very active in telling tales and teaching traditional dances and songs to children.

“Parents and grandparents now take the time to pass on certain values to children. This is because their cultural appreciation has increased. We grandmothers are very proud to play our part. Also, we were empowered, which is very important. That is why we are helping parents to educate their children.”

Badiara’s grandmother

“The forum has strongly promoted culture, especially among children as many children were not familiar with tales and riddles. We started telling tales to children. This helped to promote our culture.”

Kerewane’s grandmother

These comments show that there is higher regard for cultural values among all generations and especially among young people.

IV.6 ASSESSING THE CULTURE-BASED APPROACH TO CHANGE

All those who were interviewed rate GMP's approach positively compared to that of other NGOs operating in the area. According to respondents, one important characteristic of GMP is that it involves all generations in its initiatives and activities, empowering the elderly and people from all social strata.

"With GMP, everyone has their part to play in the action to be implemented. No one is excluded and all groups are valued."

Koumera's grandmother

"GMP brings all generations together while others organize meetings with some groups and leave out others, which does not promote group cohesion. This way of doing things rather results in imbalance because some are more informed than others."

Young boy from Koumera

"In the GMP approach, elderly persons occupy an important place, which is not the case with activities organized by other organizations. With the GMP, grandmothers are involved in activities and are valued by all members of the community. This is very important for the younger generations."

Local personality from Saré Sankoulé

These comments show that communities prefer the inclusive approach used by GMP to that of other organizations which deal only with certain segments of the population. According to respondents, the inclusive approach, which brings together all categories of community stakeholders around the objectives of the GHD, better responds to cultural values that promote dialogue and collective decision-making. The second aspect of the GMP approach which respondents appreciate is the fact that "nothing is set in stone." All issues are discussed at the community level and solutions result from agreements (or consensus) reached. Such an approach has not only strengthened community ties but has, above all, strengthened the commitment to make collective decisions for the good of the community.

IV. 7 SOME COMMENTS ON INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND THE GHD

This study helps us understand that intergenerational communication is at the root of strengthening social cohesion and that it is necessary for the community to take collective action to promote the GHD and change social norms.

During the Forums, inclusive and intergenerational dialogue has promoted the role of elders, especially grandmothers. This has brought consensus on the role they play in the education, supervision and protection of girls. The intergenerational dialogue has enabled all family and community actors to encourage grandmothers to become involved in changing standards related to excision, child marriage, early pregnancy and girls' schooling. Today, thanks to this recognition during the FIG, in front of all the members of the community, the grandmothers and the women became essential resources for the GHD in their communities of origin.

The analysis of the data collected reveals that there is a consensus among the community actors and that the FIGs have joined their goals for the GHD by helping to significantly change the

attitudes and practices of the community. We note, however, that other GMP activities have also contributed to these changes.

In almost all the villages, the interviewees testified that the forums contributed to the decrease or even the disappearance of early pregnancies and excisions today, as well as to the rise in the age of marriage.

"The forums have contributed to the reduction of FGM; we no longer see this practice. There has also been a reduction in school-age pregnancies, which was very common before. It no longer exists. Also, in relation to early marriages, both women and men have realized that the girl must be of a certain age to marry.

Grandma of Kael Bessel

Now parents support girls in their studies instead of marrying off them early. In families communication has improved, young girls say their opinions to their parents and are listened to. The decision-making power of the head of the family on marriage plans for the girls is almost everywhere diluted within a process of family consultation where the mothers and the grandmothers play an important role and where the young girls express their point of view. Now young girls express their opinions with confidence and can refuse the advances of boys.

Grandmothers engagement in the education of girls, helps them to combat early pregnancies, it promotes their schooling and increases the age of marriage, as shown by a 2018 GMP study in the same area¹. This commitment also seems to protect them from FGM, as another GMP study of this practice in the same villages shows.² According to this study all the grandmothers involved in the project were committed to reducing FGM in the first place through the encouragement of other community actors.

V. CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of the responses of the 220 community actors interviewed in 12 villages of the communes of Némataba and Kandia, the research team proposes the following conclusions:

- The intergenerational forums (FIG) are appreciated by all generations of the community. Senior citizens, adults and teens all say that these meetings have strengthened intergenerational and gender communication. All share the view that the FIGs helped to reduce the gaps between the different layers of the population by restoring communication.
- The forums, where everyone is invited to share ideas and respect the opinions of others, have taught girls and women to express themselves with greater confidence within their

¹ GMP *The results of the Program Girls' Holistic Development "Under-the-tree Training of Grandmother Leaders - To strengthen and amplify their role for the well-being of girls and for community action - (Némataba, Vélingara, Senegal), GMP, 2018.*

² GMP *The central role of grandmothers in the abandonment process of FGM in the communities involved in the Grandmother Project's Girls Holistic Development Program - Change Through Culture, 2018.*

families and in public spaces. The attitudes of men have changed and today they respect the opinions of girls and women more.

- FIGs have contributed immensely to strengthening social cohesion within communities, which has allowed for collective action to solve community problems.
- The change of social norms requires a broad consensus around the need to change certain traditions rooted in society. GMP's inclusive, intergenerational and conversational approach enables dialogue between different segments of the population and stimulates collective reflection on important themes such as girls' schooling, early marriage, early pregnancy and FGM. Thanks to the involvement of all the community actors, the FIGs are a privileged place for the search for consensus around the possible change of social norms.
- The structure and dynamics of the FIGs, involving representatives of the three generations and both sexes, served as a model for communities that began inclusive community consultations (i.e. with men and women, the young and the old) to address a whole community problem. This significant result could help communities in improving dialogue in the future.
- Before, some teachers felt superior to members of the community, who in turn did not dare approach teachers to discuss school issues. During forums, teachers need to listen to community members: this helps to create more equal relationships between these two groups and enables collaboration between teachers and community actors.
- The study reveals that FIGs have contributed to changing social norms regarding female circumcision, girls' schooling and early marriage. They have also contributed to the reduction of early pregnancies through improved communication between girls, grandmothers and mothers. All these changes are not solely due to FIGs. The forums have however, triggered a process of strengthening communication between community actors, for the benefit of other community and school activities that also contributed to change.
- Inclusive and intergenerational communication is a necessary factor in order to strengthen social cohesion, which is essential so that the community can take collective action to promote the GHD and to change social norms. At the Forums, inclusive and intergenerational dialogue has promoted the role of seniors, especially grandmothers, by allowing them to wholeheartedly play a role in the education, supervision and protection of young girls. This valorization by the community has motivated the grandmothers who have themselves invested in the change of standards related to FGM, child marriage, early pregnancy and schooling of girls. Grandmothers and women have become fundamental and active resources to support the GHD in their home communities.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE.

- In order to reach a community consensus around the need to change social attitudes and norms, open communication between generations is necessary, based on mutual trust and respect for each other's opinions, regardless of sex or age.

- Development initiatives need to put in place a strategy to strengthen intergenerational and gender dialogue, and to maximize collaboration and community engagement.
- The involvement of all categories of community actors in community consultation processes promotes changes in attitudes and social structures such as the decision-making power of men and seniors;
- Forum methodology is very useful for strengthening links between school and communities
- The reference to culture, its development and its consideration in activities allows communities to orient their reflections and to adopt new practices without breaking the social fabric;
- Intergenerational dialogue values grandmothers, reinforcing their central role in the protection and education of children, especially girls.
- It is essential to invite the leaders who participated in the forums, to continue the discussion in their villages and to implement the actions proposed during the activities.