

THE GRANDMOTHER

PROJECT

The Grandmother Project is a 501c3 organization

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Dialogue Across Generations: Discussing Female Genital Mutilation

The Grandmother Project (GMP) promotes the use of intergenerational dialogue to assist communities in defining their own solutions to critical issues. The first step in GMP's approach is a participatory community listening study and the second is dialogue across generations.

In collaboration with World Vision, GMP used this approach to explore the complex and sensitive issue of female genital mutilation (FGM). In Senegal, as in many other African countries, FGM of young girls is a prevalent practice. In the Velingara district about 90% of girls and women are cut. In most countries, strategies to address FGM have not viewed senior women as critical actors for catalyzing discussion and promoting change.

The community study showed that FGM is intimately related to cultural values regarding girls' development. The weakening of family moral and cultural values appears to contribute to the importance placed on FGM. Those responsible for organizing the cutting are senior women.

In community forum-dialogue workshops, discussion focused on both positive cultural practices that are being lost, and on harmful traditions that are being perpetuated, including FGM. Following inputs from religious leaders and health workers, participants reached consensus that there is a need for continued dialogue with all segments of society if FGM is to be addressed. Activities recommended by community participants to curb the practice of FGM included: group education of girls using alternative rites of passage excluding FGM and strengthening story telling.

Next Steps.....

- Based on the success of this approach, World Vision with support from GMP, is initiating a follow up project based on the recommendations formulated by the communities.



"We never practiced cutting maliciously but rather to educate the girls, to develop in them a sense of solidarity, to prepare them to become women. Now we understand that as grandmothers we have a responsibility for this. We must organize ourselves to make a plea to our sisters and our peers to put an end to this practice."

There was agreement that grandmothers must be key actors in any effort to bring about sustained change.

FGM may not be abandoned overnight, but engaging grandmothers, the guardians of tradition, in encouraging people to rethink this deeply rooted practice is a critical first step. In Velingara, grandmothers were viewed as a resource. In past FGM programs they have usually been viewed as an obstacle and therefore not actively involved.

For all GMP projects, the starting point is dialogue among community members. GMP promotes the use of participatory communication and learning approaches to increase the capacity and confidence of community leaders and groups, including grandmothers, to promote community action in identifying and solving problems.

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