

THE GRANDMOTHER PROJECT

Bulletin

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Early marriage and teenage pregnancy have decreased thanks to the joint efforts of teachers and grandmothers

Between 2008 and 2011, the Girls' Holistic Development (GHD) Project was implemented by World Vision (WV) in the Velingara area of southern Senegal with technical support from Grandmother Project (GMP). To ensure optimal development of young girls, the project's goals were: 1) to strengthen positive cultural values and practices; and 2) to promote adoption of positive community attitudes and social norms regarding female genital mutilation (FGM), early marriage and corporal punishment; and 3) to reduce teen pregnancies.

An innovative approach was used, developed by GMP, involving dialogue between generations in community and school-based activities and the active participation of elders, and especially grandmothers.

In late 2010, GMP conducted a community survey in the GHD project area to assess changes in attitudes regarding the age of marriage for girls and trends in teenage pregnancies. Results of the survey showed positive changes related to both of these issues. In total, 451 people were interviewed, including 63 elders, 83 grandmothers, 94 mothers, 104 adolescent girls, 84 adolescent boys, 21 teachers and 2 midwives. Interview results, as well as extensive notes taken during intergenerational forums and other project activities were analyzed. The findings are presented in a report: "Teachers and Grandmothers Join Hands to Reduce Early Marriage and Teen Pregnancy."

Key survey results are:

- ◆ **There is a direct relationship between early marriage and teenage pregnancy:** Many families believe it is important to marry their daughters at an early age "to avoid the risk of pregnancy before marriage."
- ◆ **Decreased teen pregnancies contributed to a rise in the age of marriage for young girls:** In late 2008, the average age recommended by communities for girls to marry was 15.6 years. In late 2010, the average age was 17.5 years, a significant increase.
- ◆ **Strengthened relationships and communication between girls and grandmothers have contributed to the reduction in teen pregnancies:** In all 20 communities involved in the GHD project (with the exception of two that had never experienced out-of-wedlock marriages), interviewees stated that teen pregnancies have decreased since the project started in 2008. All groups interviewed said that the factor that contributed most to the reduction in adolescent pregnancies was greater communication between grandmothers and adolescent girls and also between girls and their mothers.

- ◆ **Increased involvement of parents in children's upbringing:** All categories of adult interviewees said that the GHD project helped them realize the need for parents and grandparents to be more involved in the upbringing and supervision



Girls learn traditions from grandmothers

of their children, boys and girls alike. In the past, many thought that schools had sole responsibility for educating children.

- ◆ **More teaching of cultural values and strengthened intergenerational relationships provide a solid foundation for girl's growth and development:** Increased interaction between generations has strengthened the transfer of traditional values and knowledge. Grandmothers have rediscovered their role as educators, children are being taught more about their cultural traditions and they now have more respect for elders.

- ◆ **Cooperation between teachers and grandmothers has helped to protect adolescent girls from early marriage and pregnancy:** One of the goals of the project was to strengthen communication between schools and communities. The information collected clearly demonstrates that today, in all communities where the GHD project was implemented, there are stronger relationships between teachers and communities, and above all, between teachers and grandmothers. These changes are beneficial to girls in particular and to children in general.

Conclusions from the Girls' Holistic Development project: The results of the community assessment clearly showed that grandmothers' role and influence within the family and the community, as well as within schools, represents an extraordinary resource for combating teenage pregnancy and early marriage. It seems that grandmothers in communities and teachers in schools are the two sets of actors who are most committed to ensuring girls' success in school. Results of the GHD project show that, in future, efforts to prevent early marriage and teen pregnancy, these two groups constitute an abundant and critical resource that should be utilized by district education offices, World Vision and other NGOs involved in promoting the well-being of girls and of children in general.

