

THE GRANDMOTHER PROJECT

Bulletin

No. 9
November 2011

Increased communication between generations enables communities to take action to better educate & protect girls

The Girls' Holistic Development (GHD) project in Velingara, Senegal, aimed to promote positive cultural traditions (e.g. story telling) and discourage harmful practices (early marriage, teenage pregnancy, female genital mutilation/FGM). It also aimed to strengthen communication between generations and between sexes. Various project activities aimed to encourage respect and communication within peer groups of women, men, adolescents, children, elders and teachers, between peer groups and between communities. Intergenerational (IG) community forums were a key activity in the strategy to catalyze community dialogue on issues related to education and protection of girls & boys.

The GHD methodology was developed by Grandmother Project (GMP) and implemented by World Vision from 2008-2011. In June 2011, a study was conducted to assess changes in IG communication and social cohesion in GHD project communities. 300 community members, young and old, were interviewed. Study results are presented here.

Increased intergenerational (IG) communication

When the project started, families were very concerned about the breakdown in communication between children, parents and grandparents. After three years IG communication has greatly improved. Now there is more mutual respect between generations, they spend more time together and there is more discussion and learning between them.

Communication has brought us together. That is why young people are closer to us now, they respect us and know now that what we say is important for their lives.

Gana, grandmother, Mountoumba

100% of adolescent girls interviewed said that now there is more communication between them and GMs.

GMs have taught us the behavior we should adopt with boys so that we don't get pregnant which can shame our families and ruin our chances for the future.

Fatimata, jeune fille, Dialakegne

Increased teaching of local cultural values

At the outset, families were very worried about children's loss of cultural identity. After three years, all communities report that children are more interested in their cultural heritage and adults are more involved in transmitting it.

The project helped us to realize the importance of our culture and what we can do to pass on positive traditions like story-telling, games, dances and respect for elders.

Abou Kande, Imam and Arabic Teacher

Teachers as well as families are encouraging story-telling and GMs are proud that they have played a key role in re-



Photo: A place for IG communication, the banta, in Mountoumba village

"Now when there is a problem to discuss in the village we beat on the drum and everyone comes, men and women, elder men and GMs, adolescents and also children. Before it was only the elder men who discussed and who decided. Now each voice is listened to."

Village Headman Medina Samba Diallo

viving it in all communities.

Now my GM tells us stories in the evenings when it doesn't rain. Before we didn't realize the importance of GMs. Their stories teach us lessons for life.

Deinabou, adolescent girl, 15 years old

Increased communication -> decreased early marriage

GHD activities have contributed to increased solidarity and understanding within families and communities. Now men, women, young and old talk more openly about problems, like teen pregnancy and marriage of young girls.

Before the project, fathers decided when and whom their daughters would marry. No discussion was allowed. Now if the GM doesn't agree on the marriage we listen to her point of view. We also consider the girl's opinion. Otherwise, it would be forcing her. Now all decisions are based on discussion.

Diao, grand-pere

Social cohesion leads to collective action

Increased respect, trust communication and understanding between family & community members has increased social cohesion. Now communities are more able to work together to take collective action: to preserve and promote positive cultural values and traditions with young people; and to discourage practices that are harmful for GHD.

Actions to discourage harmful practices: Communities have taken actions themselves to discourage FGM, to decrease teen pregnancies and to discourage early marriage of girls. They have also mobilized to promote positive cultural traditions and values among the younger generations. Without open communication within and between community groups these changes would not have been possible.

Lesson learned: The study clearly shows that the GMP strategy used in the GHD project contributed to increasing communication and social cohesion between generations and genders and, in turn, this increased the capacity of communities to address issues affecting the education, protection and development of girls and boys. The lesson is that programs should work to increase respect, understanding and cohesion **between** community members to enable them to work together to deal with issues related to children and to all aspects of community development.

Author: Anneke Newman, University of Sussex researcher

⇒ The Girls' Holistic Development Project was funded by World Vision and also by USAID.
⇒ For more information contact info@grandmotherproject.org, judiaubel@fastwebnet.it or visit our website: www.grandmotherproject.org