

# THE GRANDMOTHER PROJECT

## Bulletin

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### Intergenerational Communication and Grandmother Inclusion to Decrease FGM

Grandmother Project (GMP) is working with World Vision in Senegal to implement a "Girls' Holistic Development" (GHD) project that aims to promote girls' well-being and decrease female genital mutilation (FGM). Before designing the project, discussions with community members led to several conclusions: 1) communities are very concerned about loss of cultural values and traditions; 2) there is a serious breakdown in communication between older and younger family members; 3) grandmothers (GM) play a key role in all aspects of girls' development including FGM. A key assumption at the outset was that changing this deep-seated cultural practice would require the involvement of and ongoing dialogue between young and old, male and female, community members.

GMP proposed an innovative strategy to promote abandonment of FGM with two objectives: 1) to strengthen positive cultural values and traditions related to GHD; 2) to discourage harmful cultural practices related to GHD including FGM, early marriage and other types of violence against girls. Most FGM programs do not actively involve grandmothers, aim to convince people to change and deal only with FGM. The GHD project is based on alternative concepts: inclusion of grandmothers as key promoters of change for GHD; strengthening intergenerational (IG) communication and learning; participatory communication to catalyze dialogue for community decision-making about FGM and GHD.

The key project strategy involves building close relationships with community leaders and groups in order to encourage dialogue and community decision-making on FGM and GHD. In IG forums held twice a year, IG dialogue is promoted on both positive and harmful cultural traditions related to GHD so that communities decide themselves how to best promote girls' development. Non-formal education sessions are held with GMs and women of reproductive age to promote discussion of cultural values and traditions related to FGM and other issues concerning girls' development. Activities with primary schools promote appreciation of cultural knowledge and traditions, strengthen IG communication and learning and develop partnerships between GMs and schools.

After fifteen months of implementation, a mid-term review revealed the following very encouraging initial results related to the two project objectives:

- ◆ Increased communication and learning between youth and elders
- ◆ Increased communication and understanding between

⇒ The Girls' Holistic Development Project is funded by World Vision/Canada, GMP and USAID.  
⇒ For more information on GHD project contact: [info@grandmotherproject.org](mailto:info@grandmotherproject.org), Judi at [judiaubel@fastwebnet.it](mailto:judiaubel@fastwebnet.it) or Susie at: [s.carrington@tin.it](mailto:s.carrington@tin.it). For information on GMP our website is: [www.grandmotherproject.org](http://www.grandmotherproject.org)

*Hawa Balde, Grandmother Leader:*

*"For a long time it was as though the GMs were closed up in a room and the door was shut and we felt alone. When the project came the door opened. Now our role and experience are valued by everyone and GMs are actively involved in all community activities."*



*"In the IG forums we discuss many topics related to girls' education and development. We must encourage beneficial traditions like story telling and reconsider harmful ones like FGM."*

- ◆ community groups and between different communities.
- ◆ Increased community efforts to promote positive cultural values and traditions (e.g. story-telling, songs, games).
- ◆ Greater recognition of GMs' critical role in transmitting cultural values and traditions to young people
- ◆ Increased integration of local cultural knowledge and values in schools
- ◆ Positive changes in community attitudes toward FGM and other harmful practices with girls (early marriage, teenage pregnancy, corporal punishment).

A village Imam talked about the IG approach: "Most programs only work with young people. What is fantastic here is that all groups, young and old, men and women, are involved. It is essential that experienced elders be involved in development projects like this that concern community well-being."

The project encourages communities to decide themselves what to do to promote GHD. A village headman stated, "The project has not imposed anything on us, as other projects have tried to do. They only asked us to discuss different aspects of GHD. We discussed at length and made two collective decisions, first, to stop practicing FGM and second, to restore GMs' role teaching children moral, cultural and social values."

These are only preliminary GHD project results but they are very encouraging. Two key factors appear to have significantly contributed to these results: 1) project strategies improve IG communication and learning; and 2) GMs are involved and empowered as key partners in promoting GHD, including FGM abandonment.