

### Responsibilities and Rights of African Children

Grandmother Project - Change through Culture (GMP) is proud to announce the launch of the fifth in our series of booklets for schools, *Responsibilities and Rights of African Children*. In the booklet preface, Mr. Diane, former Director of the Velingara District Education Office wrote, "This book gives teachers a framework for helping children learn their rights and their responsibilities as part of their moral and civic education." Developed by GMP with staff of Velingara School District and based on discussions with community members, production of the booklet was funded by World Vision.

Development of culturally-grounded teaching materials for schools is part of GMP's *Culture, Education and Development* program implemented since 2008 in Velingara Dept. in southern Senegal. This program with schools and communities has two main aims: 1) to integrate positive cultural values into schools in order to make school programs more culturally relevant to local communities; and 2) to strengthen community-school relationships. All 5 booklets contribute to both of these objectives. When communities see that schools are teaching values that are important to them, they are more likely to be supportive of those schools.



*The Animist, the Muslim and the Christian are all friends.*

One of the responsibilities of children presented in the booklet is "to respect the religion and ethnicity of others". The text reads: "Children should respect and love their classmates who speak a different language or who have a different religion. The elders teach us that it is important to respect and be tolerant of others regardless of their ethnicity or religion."

In contrast to the CRC, the **African Charter on Child Rights and Responsibilities** defends child rights but at the same time promotes children's responsibilities to their family, community and country. The charter states that children have a responsibility to respect their parents, and specifically their elders, and to assist them when they need their help.

Development programs are more successful when they take into account the roles and values that communities cherish. GMP believes that children's rights and responsibilities go hand-in-hand and that in light of African cultural values, children should be taught their responsibilities along with their rights. Sadly, if communities feel that their culture is being attacked, they are likely to reject the whole notion of child rights.

The 30-page booklet *Children's Rights and Responsibilities* includes the rights enshrined in the CRC, related to: health; play; protection; education; learning ones cultural values, etc. And it includes discussion of children's responsibilities related to: respecting others, specifically elders; contributing to community and family well-being; studying at school; and to demonstrate attitudes of generosity, hospitality and honesty.

Families, communities and governments must do all they can to promote and protect the rights of children. It is equally important that children understand and accept their responsibilities to their friends, family, community and country. We hope that this booklet will help children to understand their rights and also their responsibilities to others around them as they grow up and become respected members of their families and societies.

The fifth booklet in the series is on *African Children's Responsibilities and Rights*. The earlier booklets are: *The Role of Grandmothers in African Society*; *African Values for Today's Children*; *African Stories for Today's Children*; and *African Proverbs for Today's Children*.

#### Why children's rights and responsibilities?

Around the world, most children do not participate in decisions affecting their lives, and thus their human rights are often denied. To address this issue, the United Nations adopted the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (CRC) in 1989 and many development organizations, governments and schools have actively promoted **child rights**. This important initiative has contributed to improving the lives of children around the globe. However, in many cases child rights have been presented with no mention of their responsibilities to their families and communities.

Throughout non-western cultures children are expected to assume responsibilities in their families and communities. Focusing on child rights while ignoring their responsibilities imposes an alien, Western set of values on communities. For this reason, in many cases the child rights platform has generated resistance from communities. Many communities have criticized the approach for teaching young people to contest rather than respect their elders and thereby weakening communication between generations.

- ⇒ Since 2011 the *Culture, Education and Development* program has received support from the Rockdale Foundation, World Vision Senegal, the British, Dutch and Canadian Embassies in Senegal, Dining For Women, the Nando Perretti Foundation and the Gianturco Family Foundation.
- ⇒ For more information contact [info@grandmotherproject.org](mailto:info@grandmotherproject.org) or visit the website: [www.grandmotherproject.org](http://www.grandmotherproject.org)