

### **Schools that respond to community priorities increase enrolment and the quality of education**

In the Velingara area of southern Senegal, several factors limit children's success at school. Primary school enrolment and attendance are among the lowest in the country. Girls' enrolment in particular is constrained by high rates of teen pregnancy and early/forced marriage. Many communities see schooling as culturally irrelevant and a threat to values they cherish. Relations between teachers and communities are often poor. Many young people no longer respect elders and communication between generations has broken down. Youth no longer learn essential cultural values, which for girls includes how to protect themselves from pre-marital pregnancies.

To address these issues, in 2011 *Grandmother Project (GMP)* launched the *Culture, Education and Development* programme in 32 villages/communities in the Velingara area. The program has 3 objectives:

- 1) to increase family and community involvement in children's upbringing, education and schooling
- 2) to reinforce communication and collaboration between communities and schools
- 3) to integrate positive cultural values and knowledge into school programs

Various school and community activities are organized:

**1) Community level:** Intergenerational Fora to increase communication and solidarity between age groups and between the sexes; Days in Praise of Grandmothers to acknowledge their role as transmitters of cultural knowledge and advisors to both children and adults.

**2) School-community activities:** workshops with teachers and grandmothers to discuss their complementary roles in children's upbringing and education, particularly regarding girls' wellbeing; cultural activities organized by teachers and communities (for example, story-telling nights); and involvement of elders, especially grandmothers, in schools to teach traditional values and practices (through story-telling, proverbs, etc.).

**3) Classroom learning:** publication of 5 booklets on: the role of grandmothers; cultural values; traditional proverbs; story tales; and African children's responsibilities and rights); creation of an interactive game "Who Are We?" to increase children's knowledge of cultural values; and the use of customary teaching methods including proverbs, tales, songs, and dances.

In early 2015, an external review of the *Culture, Education and Development* programme was conducted and



*"The Cultural, Education and Development strategy addresses key Ministry of Education priorities. It contributes to strengthening school-community relationships and it promotes children's holistic development."*

**Kabiné Diané, District Education Officer**

the following positive results were observed:

**1) School-community relations:** relationships between teachers and communities have greatly improved ; parents perceive formal schooling to be more relevant since cultural knowledge and values are taught; community members are involved in school management and in delivering lessons; parents are more supportive of children's schooling.

**2) School programs:** new pedagogical tools have improved teaching quality; school enrolment and attendance have greatly increased, including among girls; pupils' interest in learning is greater; students' oral expression, reading and writing have improved.

**3) Intergenerational communication:** communication and solidarity have increased between age groups; youth now respect the advisory role of elders and approach them to learn; grandmothers communicate more with girls to help them avoid teen pregnancy, and such pregnancies have almost disappeared; early/forced marriage has greatly decreased; and corporal punishment has been replaced with dialogue.

In the National Conference on Education in Aug. 2014 (*les Assises Nationales de l'Education*), organised by the Ministry of Education, a priority topic discussed was the *loss of positive cultural values* among young people. The conference proceedings state: "We aim to produce Senegalese citizens who are well trained but especially who are well-mannered (*bien éduqué*).” The review of the *Culture, Education and Development* program concluded that it is contributing to accomplishing both of these objectives of the Ministry of Education.