



Guinea: Analysis of CMC Focus Groups

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BACKGROUND

Tostan's 2016-2022 Strategic Engagement Plan (SEP) sets out a clear vision to bring human rights-based education and community-based approaches to new levels of depth, quality and scale for positive social change and increased well-being among rural resource-poor populations in West Africa. The Breakthrough Generation (BG) Initiative was a central part of this effort. Through the BG, Tostan implemented its flagship Community Empowerment Program (CEP) in 148 villages in four West African countries: 30 in Gambia, 40 in Guinea, 38 in Guinea-Bissau, and 40 in Mali from October 2017 to September 2020.

Tostan undertook the evaluation of the BG using mixed methods. It sampled 20% of the villages in each country and undertook baseline and endline studies using standardized questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. The quantitative data informed a set of indicators on governance, education, health, the environment, and economic empowerment, with specific attention to changes in social norms relating to harmful practices, including female genital cutting (FGC) and child marriage. Analysis to date of the quantitative data examined the results especially among class participants and among adopted learners with whom class participants share their classroom experiences as part of the CEP strategy of “organized diffusion”.

The analysis of qualitative data was critical for triangulating and interpreting the quantitative data. It was also essential for gaining additional understanding into how the well-being results were reached by the communities as a result of the program. Importantly, it also provides more systematic evidence than was previously available indicating that the communities of all four program countries follow the same pathway to reach the results of improved well-being. This is of critical importance for sharing the model with other organizations and development actors interested in adopting essential

elements of the Tostan model to strengthen their capacity to promote community well-being.

A team of external experts, working in collaboration with Tostan's Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Research staff,¹ analyzed the qualitative data (110 focus group and/or interview transcripts). A primary objective of the analysis was to assess the effectiveness of the Community Management Committees (CMCs)². These are elected and trained bodies of 17 representatives from the communities, of which at least nine are women, that are established at the onset of the Tostan Program. The CMCs consult regularly with participants in the Tostan classes and frequently, some members overlap. Given Tostan's community-led approach and its participatory methodology, the CMC is a lynchpin for leading, nurturing and supporting the activities and changes that the class members set in motion during their participation in the class. It is also the structure that is left in place when the program ends. It ensures the continuation and sustainability of well-being initiatives undertaken or planned.

The analysis provided evidence well beyond the role and effectiveness of the CMCs. In exploring the validity of the claims CMC members made regarding the well-being results they helped to generate, major evidence emerged regarding the perceptions and opinions of community members as well as leaders and officials regarding what well-being results were reached and – importantly – regarding the ways in which they were reached.

The team prepared a separate report for each of the four countries. Each country report details the themes that emerged from CMC and Tostan class participant descriptions of their activities during the three-year implementation of the CEP and from individuals not directly involved with the classes or the CMC, including local leaders, public officials and service providers.³ The reports also confirm the findings of surveys that collected quantitative data in these same communities at the end of the CEP.⁴

At the onset of the Tostan program, the community elects a Community Management Committee (CMC), a group of 17 people, including at least 9 women. This committee, which Tostan trains:

- communicates with the Tostan class and various groups and leaders within the community and its neighboring communities;
- coordinates class activities with local and regional officials as well as various organizational leaders who support community activities;
- works with class members as they identify their vision for the future;

¹ Diane Gillespie, PhD, Tostan volunteer, assisted by Kyla Korvne and Tilly Ruback conducted the analysis, and they co-authored the country reports. Disclosure: Diane Gillespie is a sibling of Molly Melching, Creative Director, Tostan; she received no monetary compensation for this project.

² A description of Community Management Committees can be found in each of the reports and at Tostan.org.

³ Country reports are available upon request.

⁴ The summary results can be found here <https://tostan.org/resources/evaluations-research/>

- helps build on community strengths and finds solutions to problems identified by the class;
- establishes fora for community activities meant to spread the class experience to the rest of the community;
- organizes activities aimed at improving well-being, such as village cleaning; and
- helps resolve conflicts or situations that are at odds with decisions reached, including those relating to ending violence and harmful practices.

Given Tostan's community-led approach and participatory methodology, the CMC is a lynchpin for leading, nurturing and supporting the changes that communities set in motion. It is also the structure that is left in place when the program ends and that is responsible for supporting the continuation and sustainability of the initiatives undertaken. During the program, when possible, they reach out to neighboring communities to share what they are learning. [These communities are called "adopted communities".]

Tostan's Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) staff administered surveys and conducted focus groups/individual interviews in a representative sample of communities at the end of the Community Empowerment Program.

The purpose of the qualitative component of the evaluation with members of the CMCs was to:

- provide a space and opportunity for the CMC members to reflect on their Tostan education and make meaning of their experiences;
- check the descriptions of CMC members by analyzing the descriptions of those working with the CMC (class participants and community leaders/officials) and those affected indirectly by CMC activities (nonparticipants in class or adopted learners);
- elicit descriptive data about their experiences so that Tostan can learn about program effectiveness;
- provide an explanatory context for the quantitative data that was being collected at the same time;
- and increase staff capacity in conducting qualitative inquiry.

METHOD

MERL used a structured interview protocol for the CMC focus groups. Interviewers were Tostan supervisors who spoke the same language as interviewees, but were not from or working in the communities being interviewed. Interviewers asked the CMC groups:

- what their favorite activity was;
- how they engaged people in their activities;

- how they engaged local authorities in their activities;
- what had surprised them in the encounters with people inside/outside their communities;
- whether they had faced resistance and what strategies they had used to manage it;
- what changes in their own communities they found most important;
- and what changes they found most important in their adopted communities.

For the interviews with community leaders, those leaders were asked about changes that they witnessed in their communities and about their own participation in CMC activities. For the focus groups conducted separately with men and women, members were asked about Tostan and their understanding of Tostan's work and/or about their participation in any CMC activities. They were also presented three scenarios on corporal punishment, child marriage, and Female Genital Cutting (FGC). Each scenario concerned someone in the community considering whether to carry out the practice: a mother hitting a child to discipline the child for disrespecting her grandmother, a father considering marrying his 14 year old daughter and a mother considering cutting her daughter. In each scenario, members are asked what they think, what members of their community would think and what they would do, if anything.

Interviewers were instructed to encourage participants to expand answers for details and rationale related to new beliefs and/or practices and to encourage all members to participate. At no time did any interviewers contradict or intervene when participants spoke.

In Guinea, CMC focus groups were held in eight communities. In addition, 16 focus groups were held with nonparticipants, eight with men and eight with women, and 16 interviews were conducted with community leaders. This provided a rich data set both for understanding the work of the CMCs and for cross-checking their claims about their work in their community.

Tostan partners with resource-poor communities. The descriptions in Guinea's transcriptions indicate that such conditions existed in the communities (e.g., poor roads, inaccessible and ineffective health centers and public schools, unhealthy environmental conditions).

We anonymized the data for this report.

A SENSITIZING CONCEPT: SOCIAL NORM THEORY

Data from the baseline study undertaken by Tostan prior to implementing the CEP in Guinea indicated the presence of harmful practices. Given its history with working in communities since 1991, its current Theory of Change and research on the program,

Tostan recognizes that corporal punishment of children and female genital cutting (FGC) can be practices governed by social norms-- with corresponding collective beliefs about what community members expect of each other. (See: https://www.tostan.org/wp-content/uploads/Cislaghi2019_Article_ChangingSocialNormsTheImportant-1.pdf) Under certain conditions, the practice of child marriage can also be so upheld. Social norms theory helps to guide Tostan's work in the field even as what happens in the field informs the application of the theory. Researchers crafted an interview questionnaire with social norms theory in mind; specifically, Tostan asked CMC members about their experiences with efforts to raise awareness with community members beyond the class on the harmful consequences of child marriage, FGC, and physical punishment of children.

Social norms frequently operate invisibly. They are implicit rules of behavior based on beliefs held by most members in a community. If they are to change, they need to be made visible to the community at large and evaluated in a neutral way through provision of accurate⁵ information and a space for values deliberation—both of which Tostan provides and integrates into its educational curriculum and pedagogy. As the class deliberates and decides to change past practices, the CMC, having benefited from training from Tostan, sets up activities that help to inform the community at large and their neighboring or closely connected communities in a process called organized diffusion. CMC members share new information and any new actions that participants in the Tostan program decide (on their own) to undertake to align their new understandings about health and wellbeing with their existing practices.

At all stages, those participating in the organized diffusion activities must be able to reach decisions autonomously as they are presented with factual information about physical punishment, child marriage and FGC and given time to discuss that information with their classmates and people in their communities. In addition, they hear the stories that emerge, often for the first time, from within the community of harms caused by past practices. What was invisible becomes more visible during discussions, both in classes and in community meetings held by the CMC. What also becomes visible is that a portion of the community is committed to ending the harmful practices. For participants to take actions to end harmful practices, a significant portion of a community and of its intra-marrying communities must decide to abandon these practices; otherwise individuals who stop the practice will be perceived by others to be, for example, “bad” or “incompetent” parents and in some cases, will be attacked and/or scorned by their communities. Because social norms are embedded in everyday/ordinary experience, people need time to consider new information. Tostan's educational program begins with visioning exercises, then information about democracy and human rights and responsibilities, which is discussed in-depth in classes three times a week over a five-month period. Given a commitment to a democratic process, coercing people to change is not an option for the CMCs.

⁵ In this report by the term *accurate* we mean in line with the information taught in the Tostan classes.

Tostan believes that enhanced relational capabilities, acquired during the CEP, provide the basis for the process of respectful discussion and increasing coalescence of a group committed to abandoning harmful practices. Specifically, collaborative endeavors, respectful engagement with others, neighborliness, mutual understanding, and sharing of information in a non-judgmental fashion are critical for undertaking the collective action that increases community well-being. Without such social cohesion, sustainable social change is not possible.

The improved relationships are characterized by a new-found respect. Respect for traditional authority of men and older community members remains and is not usurped, while respect extends to women and youth in unprecedented ways. Women and youth participate in mixed gender community meetings for the first time. They take on new roles in the community and on the CMC and participate in and influence decisions. Violence, especially against women and children, decreases.

The CMC's role becomes key for the abandonment of harmful practices and the promotion of well-being if communities are to create sustainable change over time. The program lasts for 30 months, after which the CMC must take the lead in continuing to promote social change. Tostan's questions were designed to evaluate the effectiveness of CMCs given social norms theory, which is also embedded in Tostan's Theory of Change.

EVIDENCE OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TOSTAN'S THEORY OF CHANGE IN FOCUS GROUP DESCRIPTIONS

Although the interviews did not ask focus group participants to articulate a view of how community change takes place, many did. The fact that participants spontaneously articulated their understanding of how change occurred, in alignment with Tostan's Theory of Change, provides a certain kind of evidence for the effectiveness of their CMC education/training. For example, several participants said that their community had ended public defecation. Linking that change to better health, which several participants did, would be a learning outcome, but linking it to strengthening the community and its well-being and development indicates that they understand themselves as engaged in a longer-term process of change.

Neighborliness was not common before Tostan; community members lacked the ability to assess offers from outsiders and lost their money; FGC and child marriage were common practices; physical violence was part of everyday life. Reasons given for establishing new practices are accurate and a reasoning process is linked to the emergence of new practices. Many participants said, "We (I) understand now." The CMC's role is to engage both class and community members who are not in the class in further deliberations and to provide opportunities for communities to imagine and practice actions that will better align new understandings, say about health, with their behaviors. As noted above, given

their shared commitment to democratic values, resistance cannot be met through coercive means; rather it must be met with further dialogue. Several stated directly that they approached resistance through patience, communication and information sharing in a process they call *sensitization*⁶ or awareness raising.

The quotations below show if and how change happened: [Gu=Guinea; CMC=community management committee; MFG=male focus group; FFG=female focus group; I=interview with community leader, first letters of the community] [Bolded words indicate how change occurred or the holistic understanding of new practices in the community.]

Before, there was **no understanding between the Peuhl and the Malinke**, but thanks to the **reciprocal visits between us**, today there is **no more mistrust** between us. Today **we all share our happiness and misfortunes**. (Gu, CMC, Sa)

Two years ago, in this community no one was interested in his neighbor, but thanks to Tostan's program, **solidarity is strengthened among the population**. (Gu, CMC, Ma)

We decided to **set up a collective fonio field and to buy groundnuts by consensus** with everyone, which fostered **a climate of understanding and love among us**. (Gu, CMC, Ko)

[We know that **women are freer today**] because our husbands **no longer hit us in our families, thanks to the adoption activities that we carry out with our husbands on human rights, on [how to engage in] good citizen behavior, and through the sensitization activities carried out in the village that have allowed them to change their behavior and attitudes towards us**. Today, if there is a problem, **we sit down together to make a decision**. (Gu, CMC, Fa)

No one hits his wife or children because people have understood the consequences thanks to Tostan. We have **understood that the abandonment of these behaviors contributes to the establishment of love in the homes**. (Gu, CMC, Sa)

Women are participating in community meetings now. Really today, this surprised me and it is thanks to Tostan. **Women freely choose their candidate during the legislative and presidential elections without constraint**. Moreover, today, **some women are in the office of the rural commune as councilors thanks to their leadership**. I did not know that, one day, **we women would sit down in a place with men to discuss village issues**. ... **Women are involved in community**

⁶ *Sensitization* is the term used by translators from national languages into French and then into English. Difficult to translate into English, it is a term that describes the approach that class participants and CMC members take to inform others about what they have learned in their classes. It means reaching out to people, providing information respectfully, sharing personal experiences, and explaining why their own behavior has changed. It does not include coercion or forcefulness.

decision making. As proof, we participate today in this meeting with men. (Gu, CMC, Wa)

The sanitation of the village and the construction of latrines for all families contributed to the improvement of the health of the population. The abandonment of open defecation has reduced contamination. (Gu, CMC, Ba)

The activities carried out by the CGC that I liked [involved] **the mobilization of the population to participate in the vaccination campaigns for pregnant women and children.** Otherwise, when the agents were supposed to come and do the vaccination, **some women made their children flee to the bush to avoid participating in the campaign. They said that if the children were vaccinated, this could cause illness to the children. But now, this behavior has changed dramatically in the community. This has helped to improve health.** (Gu, CMC, Ba)

I liked **the knowledge of the consequences of child marriage and excision. Sincerely, we understand today the negative impacts of these practices on the health of the girls but also on the economy of the family.**” Gu, CMC, Wa

The training we received allowed us to solve any problem. Then we carried out [awareness raising] activities and took measures to ensure that anyone who practiced FGC in public or in secret would be sentenced to two years in prison and fined 2,000,000 fg if they were suspected. One day, I got into a vehicle and in the same vehicle, there was a cutter.. So, as far as I was concerned, she was going to perform the excision in the village. **I approached her and asked her if she was still doing it. I told her that she should do the right thing, otherwise it is strictly forbidden because if someone is caught doing it, the person will be sentenced to two years in prison plus a fine of 2,000,000 fg.** The next participant said, **‘It is the sensitization activities and educational talks that have allowed people to give it up.’** (Gu, CMC, Dar)

The following are themes that emerged from our analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts. Themes are common ideas or topics that become evident during close reading of the texts. We begin each thematic section with a brief description of the claims made by the CMCs and then provide evidence from individual interviews with leaders/officials and nonparticipant focus group members about the trustworthiness of the claims.

Theme 1: Community Engagement

CMC participants actively engaged with their communities and their adopted neighboring communities, as agents and facilitators of positive change for improved well-being. They described their approaches as inclusive and respectful.

The CMCs in Guinea were involved with their communities and described how they engaged the community themselves and how they deployed village leaders and local authorities to reach out to those not participating in the Tostan classes. New activities included: community cleaning, improved hygiene, birth registration, support of children in school, support of women's prenatal visits, going to health clinics when sick, using latrines, and establishing and using the community bank, noting the transparency around its operations.

The following quotations illustrate some of many activities that the CMCs and the classes carried out in its own community:

We have built improved stoves, abandoned open defecation and built latrines in all homes. (Gu, CMC, Sa)

Then, it should be noted that the women of this village suffered a lot because of the lack of a milling machine. The money from our community fund--everyone gave 1000 fg per week and Tostan provided an amount of 6 400 000 fg. One day we decided to make a rice field in order to buy the machine. So after the sale [of rice from that field], the interest we had [from our community bank] plus our contribution is what allowed us to buy the machine. Today our women no longer leave here to go and pound rice in [a neighboring community. (Gu, CMC, Da)

CMCs reported supportive relationships between them and their adopted community. For example, a CMC member said,

During our visits, we also make them understand that we must all join hands because we are all Guineans and what belongs to us all is Guinea. Currently, if there is a social problem like death here, the neighboring villages come to assist us and vice versa. Before, there was no such thing between us. (Gu, CMC, San)

We hold an internal meeting and then we inform the village authorities that we want to do an awareness activity on the importance of a healthy environment and on certain human rights ... on such and such a day so they authorize us. At that point we spread the information throughout the whole village. **N°11:** After we meet among ourselves, we go door to door to inform the population of the meeting at the market at such and such a time. This is how we involve people in the activities. (Gu, CMC, Sa)

[Note: In collecting data from the participating communities only, it is difficult to ascertain the effects of these efforts in the adopted communities.]

The non-participant focus groups and the interviews with community leaders confirmed the scope and effectiveness of their activities. Further, all participants linked the activities with strengthened community solidarity.

This is the first time that I have seen people joining hands to make a collective field [for a garden], thanks to Tostan. Social cohesion is strengthened within the village. The sanitation of public places (mosque, health post, school, well, market) is done regularly. Everyone now participates in social affairs in the village. (Gu, WFG, Sa)

Theme 2: Newfound and Strengthened Community Solidarity

CMC members stated that their communities were more cohesive and much less violent. Generally, CMC members commented that peace and understanding has been brought to their village.

A CMC member said,

Before, we didn't get along here, sometimes there were even insults between us. Some people used to disrespect the village authorities. But thanks to Tostan, this bad behavior no longer exists in the village. Now, there is understanding and cohesion among us today. (Gu, Da)

Several focus group participants confirmed the CMC members' description. They mentioned that, before the Tostan program, the relationships in their communities were frayed. All CMCs pointed to new "unity," "love," and "cohesion" and a significant reduction in violence. The men's and women's focus groups and the leader interviews all attest to repaired and improved relationships created by class members and the CMCs.

Although the women talked more of improved relationships in the focus groups, men also recognized the reduction in conflict, especially between spouses. For example, one man said,

There is no more conflict between spouses. The men do not get jealous of their participating wives, asking, 'Where were you?' Before when the woman left the home without the consent of her husband, upon her return one expected a fight. (Gu, MFG, Du)

Another man said, "Thanks to Tostan's program, we have understood today that dialogue is better than conflict. That is why today there is a significant reduction of conflicts in our families. (Gu, MFG, Da)

A male leader said in his interview,

The proof of this [reduction in conflict] is that among [my three wives], one is a participant of the class, but everything she learns in the class, she multiplies it for us at home. This has allowed us to adopt good behavior in the home between couples. So it is thanks to her and Tostan that we have reached this level today in

my family. My wife has become my main advisor on my conduct between her two co-wives but also towards the citizens of the village. (Gu, manager, Wa)

In an interview, a health worker confirmed this:

The first change is the strengthening of the social fabric among the women of the village. Before, there was a total disagreement between the women of the village. But thanks to Tostan, today all the women of the village are united. For example, in the village, there were co-wives who did not even speak to each other, but thanks to the sensitization activities carried out by the participants, today these women speak to each other and collaborate well. These sensitization activities have allowed these women to become morally aware of their situation. Today, these co-wives eat from the same bowl and sleep in the same bed. (Gu, individual interview, Sa)

In their focus groups, women discussed improved spousal relationships: “[Tostan] training contributed to the establishment of peace of heart and mutual understanding in the homes” (Gu, Bam, WGF).

Both nonparticipating men and women in their focus groups and leaders in their interviews mentioned that the community was more cohesive. For instance, a woman in the focus group said, “Social cohesion among women is strengthened and these women show solidarity.” (Gu, WFG, Bam) An Imam said, “Our wish is that the CMC will be sustainable because we see that there is understanding, development and solidarity among them, which makes us very happy in the village” (Gu, Far, I).

A village leader made the direct connection to development:

Solidarity is reinforced in the village, I swear. Thanks to Tostan, we have understood that we are responsible for our own development because if we sit down and say that we are going to wait for outside support, we will never experience the development boom (Gu, manager, Wat).

A school official said,

Community members used to be very brutal in solving problems. Nowadays, if there is a problem in the village, the community seeks to understand the cause of the problem, to mediate to solve the problem. (Gu, Koum)

Even an Imam who was in no way involved in the classes, the CMC or any of the activities stated: “One of the changes we have seen here is the abandonment of conflict in the village and in the home.” (Gu, Imam, Man)

The activities, then, lessened violence and produced solidarity in their own communities. Women especially participated in ways that increased their visibility and agency.

Theme 3: Women's Empowerment -- Increased Voice and Agency

After Tostan's program, women have a voice not just in the family but also in more public venues, such as community meetings, and they conduct awareness raising activities, working visibly as leaders to advance well-being in the community.

Before, the women of this village did not dare to speak in public, but thanks to Tostan, whatever the audience, we can participate at the same time and express our opinions without fear. (Gu, CMC, Fel)

We women are very happy today that we have freedom of expression in our meetings with men. Before, this was not done because it was only the men who held meetings among themselves and no woman was allowed to attend but thanks to Tostan, all that has changed today. Before when women should participate in the meeting, they would sit far away from the men, but today, we even sit together to dialogue and express our ideas about the village issues. (Gu, CMC, Wat)

Further, they have used that voice in voting for their preferred candidate and in running for, being selected/elected to, and then speaking in their roles as public officers:

Women are participating in community meetings now—really, today, and this surprised me. Women freely choose their candidate during the legislative and presidential elections without constraint. Moreover, today, some women are in the office of the rural commune as councilors thanks to their leadership. (Gu, CMC, Wat).

Women's empowerment is evidenced both in the interviews with leaders and in the focus groups with those who did not directly participate in the program. Take, for example, what this man said in his focus group:

Today, thanks to Tostan, the women's capacities are strengthened in terms of management. These women now know how to take care of themselves and their children. They have understood the importance of associative life in development. Peace is strengthened in the families and in the homes. Also, they are able to use cell phones. Before, we didn't even know the name of the cell phone in the local language. (Gu, MFG, Fel)

In an individual interview, an Imam said,

Women have confidence in themselves; they are at ease when they express themselves in front of the public; they even dominate the men in debates, thanks to Tostan. (Gu, Fara)

Theme 4: Significantly Improved Health and Hygiene

CMC participants demonstrated their ability to take new actions based on accurate knowledge about health and hygiene.

All focus groups mentioned village cleaning as an important activity, and both male and female focus groups and interviews with community leaders affirmed that the health effects were visible and valued. They mentioned the benefits of new stoves, latrines, abandonment of public defecation, prenatal visits and vaccinations, among others.

Take, for example, the following woman who was educated by the awareness raising activities of the class/CMC:

I saw the [Tostan class] participants doing sanitation in the village. I recognize that when we respect the rules of hygiene, we can prevent many diseases (Gu, WFG, Fa)

Most powerful, perhaps, is the example given in an interview by a health worker of the impact of the program:

When we want to do the vaccination campaign against polio, with the head of the health post [CPN], for example, we inform the members of the CMC to pass the information in the village so that the population participates in vaccination campaigns. Before Tostan, we had a serious problem mobilizing the population. Wherever we go for the vaccination campaign, if it is a community that is a beneficiary of the Tostan program, if it is informed, it mobilizes without constraint. Before, as far as CPN is concerned, no matter how much awareness was raised among women in their family to participate in the vaccinations, they were not even interested in it. But since the start of the Tostan program in these communities; ... I thank Tostan today [because] the program has helped change the behavior and attitudes of the population. (Gu, leader interview, Da)

Theme 5: Abandonment or Decreased FGC, Child Marriage and Corporal Punishment

CMCs and participants declared that their communities had abandoned FGC, corporal punishment, and child marriage. All communities said that they had been practicing FGC, child marriage, and corporal punishment before Tostan. Many said that now they would try to intervene to try and prevent these activities from happening.

Female Genital Cutting

All CMCs recognized, as a major accomplishment, the intent to abandon FGC completely, although support for the practice exists among a small minority. In the nonparticipant focus groups, members are given a scenario in which a mother wants to cut her

daughter. Only two male participants from one focus group said that the mother should cut her daughter:

No. 6: I think this decision is right. Since she excised the first girl, she is right to excise the second one too. N°1: We will tell Penda that her decision is good but we must see the age of the girl if she is not too small otherwise it could cause problems in the long run because the child cannot protect herself. The best thing to do is to leave the girl until she is conscious and then Penda can cut her without any problem because at this age she can protect herself in the absence of her mother. (Gu, MFG, Sa)

From another focus group, a man suggested that some were still practicing and or confused about the role of religion.

I am against excision but maybe the religious rules recommend it. Honestly, if we know the consequences of this practice in the name of God, we must all mobilize to stop it. In any case, as far as I know, excision is not good. There are people who are against it and others who don't want to give up. Sometimes, if you don't get your message across well, you will be considered a racist or miscreant [e.g., an unbeliever]. (Gu, MFG, Fello)

Except for the above descriptions, members of both focus groups and leaders/officials were clear about why they would not advise the mother to cut her daughter. For example, here is an exchange about the case:

The law still prohibits excision because [given the age of the girl] it can lead to the death of either the girl or her baby. N°4: If you have seen that today excision has been abandoned, it's because its consequences are numerous. In the past, women who suffered a lot during childbirth, we were told that they had been excised, so today the whole village is aware of the consequences and we have abandoned it. (Gu, Bam, MFG)

A school principal stated, "The CMC [provided] sensitization activities on child marriage, on excision, which are currently abandoned in the village." (Gu, individual interview, Wat)

Most said that they would try to intervene through awareness raising or sanctions if they learned someone was going to cut their daughter. For example, "Community members will intervene to tell Penda not to cut her daughter because the consequences are enormous. If she had known before, she would not even have cut her first daughter." (Gu, WFG, Fa) As in the quotation indented above, several mentioned the law as a deterrent.

Child Marriage

Likewise, the CMCs all claimed child marriage was abandoned, and nonparticipants and interviewees acknowledged that it was now abandoned. In the scenario in which a father wants to marry his 13-year old daughter [to a suitor], many members of the

nonparticipants' focus groups said that he should not marry her, both for her educational attainment and for her health. Women's nonparticipant focus groups tended to mention the medical complications that could arise from child marriage, as well as the educational benefits of remaining in school, while men tended to emphasize only the educational benefits of keeping girls in school. But a few men noted health effects:

Removing a child from school is a violation of her right to education....one of the consequences if a girl marries early, she gets pregnant, she doesn't have enough strength to support the pregnancy. There is certain work that she will not be able to do because of her age. (Gu, MFG, Ba)

Many talked about the advantages education would bring to the girl, her family, the community, and the country:

When a child is studying, she should be given the chance to finish her studies. At the end of her studies, she will be able to have a good job which will improve the living conditions of her parents and her husband's family. (Gu, WFG, Fa)

Some talked about taking action against the father. A nonparticipant in the women's focus group said, "If, after all the advice given to the father, if he still does not manage to obey, we will bring a complaint against him before the authorities." (Gu, San, WFG)

Of note, several men gave conditional approval of delaying marriage if she wants to study. These men said, "But if the girl doesn't want to study then instead of staying in school, it is better to give her in marriage so that she doesn't live a life of vices, which will tarnish the family's image." (Gu, San, MFG)

Corporal Punishment

All CMCs acknowledged that corporal punishment had decreased, or had been abandoned. The focus group leader presents a case where a mother is hitting her child because she disrespected her friend. The nonparticipants' focus groups generally confirmed that punishing the child should be handled through dialogue rather than through hitting. The following illustrates what most said in focus groups and interviews:

If you hit the child, she will either be hurt or traumatized. I prefer that you call her over and give her good advice on what is good and what is not good. (GU, MFG, Ba)

If Penda hits her daughter in an exaggerated manner, community members will intervene by telling Penda that she should not hit her daughter in this way, otherwise this action may have consequences for the child. They may also tell Penda that in some cases it is better to counsel the child than to hit her. Then they will give advice to the girl. (Gu, WFG, Ba)

Several people did say that the mother was right to hit her daughter. But in every focus group where someone said hitting was appropriate, another member expressed a dissenting view: For example, in the same group in which the mother was praised for hitting, someone said, “People will say that educating the child is better than hitting him. Sometimes the physical punishment leads to the child's trauma, fear, injury, followed by economic consequences.” (Gu, San, MFG) Here is another example of an exchange between N3, N4, and N6:

N°4: In my opinion, Penda [the mother] is right to hit Fatou [her daughter]; otherwise if she doesn't hit her, one day Fatou will disrespect her own mother the same. N°6: It is necessary to show to the child that what she did is not good so it is necessary to hit her not to repeat this behavior another day. N°3: If it were me, instead of hitting the child, I would call Fatou over to give her useful advice. N°6: As we have said, it is not good to hit a child. Penda should tell Fatou if she repeats the behavior again, then she will sanction her. (Gu, WFG, Bam)

Theme 6: Accurate Reasoning for Abandonment of FGC, Child Marriage and Corporal Punishment

All focus participants gave accurate and relevant reasons for abandoning FGC, child marriage, and violence against children. We found no misinformation about these practices in the transcripts, except for one man who suggested that FGC might be a religious obligation.

The following nonparticipant male accurately describes the physical and emotional dangers of FGC, especially when practiced with child marriage; he also explains how his community would approach a woman contemplating cutting her daughter. Note his ability to articulate the dangers as someone who was sensitized by the class and/or the CMC.

We will tell a mother contemplating cutting her daughter that excision can lead to many consequences, such as illness in the long run. For example, if the girl goes to the bathroom, she may feel pain; she may even say that her parents made her suffer. Now if we give this girl in marriage, then at this moment these [effects of cutting] can appear little by little. So we will make her aware of the consequences by giving her examples of such cases that we have experienced. If she is convinced, she will no longer have her daughter cut. If you come with force to talk to her then it will be a failure. But if you explain the harms and benefits of not cutting, she will understand the advice given.” (Gu, FL, MFG)

Theme 7: Partnerships with Local Leaders and Public Officials

All CMCs reported informing and/or working closely with and consulting local leaders, from those within the community (e.g., imams and village chiefs) to those outside the community (e.g., health workers, school teachers, and local government authorities).

They gave numerous examples of their partnerships. They described establishing communication networks that spread outward from their community to other communities and upward to people in local and national government. Most of it was mouth-to-mouth, some by phone.

The CMCs described a network of connections--starting with their own collaborations and agreements and then reaching out to village leaders, to the entire community, to local health and education officials and, in several cases, to government officials. For example:

Before, we did not get the birth certificate of the children. But when Tostan arrived in our community, we understood the importance of this document. So today, as soon as there is a birth, the person in charge of the civil status sub-committee in collaboration with the community liaison officer or the community agent sets out to accelerate the process. (Gu, CMC, Fa)

The day that Tostan was to send the **6,400,000** fg [for the community bank], we went to inform all the authorities on site, the religious leaders and the commissioner came with the general of the rural commune of Dialakoro to participate in this event. (Gu, CMC, FL)

The non-participant focus groups and the interviews with leaders all confirmed this flow of communication.

A school principal discussed his work with the CMC:

Yes, I work with the CMC. I am happy with this question because the parents support me well in the mobilization of the children towards the school and as soon as I notice cases of absence of certain pupils, I just alert the office of the CMC especially the person in charge of education, who immediately makes him/herself available to solve this problem. (Gu, Wat)

A community health agent discussed what he observed:

Thanks to the participation of the parents in the vaccination campaigns, I cannot say that polio is totally eradicated in the village but the curve has dropped considerably. Following the sensitizations, we have noticed that mosquito nets have been installed in all the homes. The patients regularly use the products against malaria.

Theme 8: Resistance Strategies: Dialogue and Nonjudgmental Information Sharing

All CMCs reported some resistance at the beginning of the program and said they try to use dialogue to persuade and convince (but not coerce) community members who

resist. The CMCs report that the resistance was overcome by awareness raising with those who wanted to continue harmful practices. For example:

When we received the training from Tostan on human rights, we held a meeting among the members of the CMC and identified all the people who violate these rights. We brainstormed ideas on how to approach these types of people. Then we formed delegations that went to the homes of these different people to exchange with them in order to find a consensus. Today, thanks to the different sensitizations, these practices are no longer popular in our village. (Gu, CMC, Wa)

All CMCs reported that they had the support of local officials and religious leaders.

Strengths and Limitations of the Qualitative Project

The strength of Guinea's qualitative data is that it is rich with stories and examples from CMCs, community members who did not directly participate in the program, and local leaders who also were not direct recipients of the classes. Especially important for determining the presence and visibility of the new practices brought by the program are the examples given by the school principals, Imams, and health workers--more children in school, cleaner houses, vaccinated children, to give but a few examples. Also impressive is the articulateness of the nonparticipating community members about the dangers of harmful practices that they are abandoning in their communities and the assertiveness of their claims that these practices are being or have been abandoned. Their accuracy and confidence mean that the sensitizations or awareness raising activities of the class and CMCs have been effective. Interviews with local leaders confirmed most of the CMC's claims. Leaders provided many examples of collaborations that advanced the well-being of the communities.

A limitation of the qualitative project is the absence of data about the claims that the CMC focus groups made about their adopted communities. Cross-checking their claims was not really possible.

Insights from the Interviews/Focus Groups for Understanding Quantitative Data

Of the four countries, Guinea had the smallest percentage of women in their CMCs and the highest approval ratings by survey respondents--at baseline--on familial approval of FGC, child marriage and corporal punishment. Yet, they had the most robust changes on measures of familial attitudes: at baseline, survey respondents said 94% of their family would approve of cutting their daughter and by the endline only 3% said so. The same holds true of family approval of child marriage (from 88% approval to 3%) and corporal punishment (from 92% approval to 6%).

The claims made by the CMCs that opened this report turned out to be corroborated by the other participants in this qualitative project. The quantitative data showed that Guinea also had robust changes on two dimensions of women's

empowerment--expressing themselves freely and making joint decisions with husbands on birth spacing and enrollment of children in school. On the latter two dimensions 100% of responses said that women were making joint decisions with their husbands (up from 25% and 27%). The quality of women's participation in the CMC focus groups alone--semi-public settings with men present--indicate their capabilities to engage knowledgeably and assertively on behalf of the issues that they care about.

From the qualitative data, one can see that the CMCs were especially effective in partnering, not only with members of their communities, but also with local officials who were very supportive of the changes that the CMCs were making. The descriptions provided by the men in the focus groups proved them to be supportive and knowledgeable, especially remarkable since they are speaking in a semi-public setting in front of other men.

The impressive number of activities reported by the CMCs--indeed the most of all the countries--correlates with the statements by those who worked directly with them to improve well-being across the key areas of governance, health and hygiene, education, economic empowerment and environment.