



## Gambia: Analysis of CMC Focus Groups

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### BACKGROUND

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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,<sup>1</sup> 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)<sup>2</sup>. 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.<sup>3</sup> The reports also confirm the findings of surveys that collected quantitative data in these same communities at the end of the CEP.<sup>4</sup>

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;

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> Country reports are available upon request.

<sup>4</sup> 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

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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 Gambia, CMC focus groups were held in three communities; in two of those communities, class participant focus groups were conducted; in one community, a nonparticipant focus group was conducted. One focus group was held in an adopted community. In one community, the CMC was not asked the question about changes in their adopted community.

Tostan partners with resource-poor communities. The descriptions in Gambia'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).

According to the transcriptionist, the majority of speakers in all groups were women. There were only three males in the CMCs, and they spoke very little in the meetings.

The transcriptions indicate the turns taken by speaker number: In all CMC focus groups, all but 2 members participated.

We anonymized the data for this report.

## A SENSITIZING CONCEPT: SOCIAL NORM THEORY

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Data from the baseline study undertaken by Tostan prior to implementing the CEP in Gambia 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](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 accurate<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this report, by the term *accurate* we mean information in line with what is taught in Tostan's classes.

visioning exercises, then information about democracy and human rights and responsibilities, which are 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.

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**

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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 the strengthening of 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 fell prey to scams; 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*<sup>6</sup> or awareness raising.

The following quotations exemplify how change happened and align with Tostan’s Theory of Change: [After the quotation, G=Gambia; community management committee or participant, community] [Bolded words indicate how change occurred or the holistic understanding of new practices in the community.]

[Now] we have **unity** in our village. Whenever there is a meeting, **we call each other and decide what to do**, and we did not know [how to do] that before. **Tostan’s intervention has enhanced our family ties and our friendships and neighborliness.** This has increased our understanding, and **this year we do communal farming. We have money and we use the proceeds to buy cement to plaster our [health] clinic.** (G, CMC, Fa)

Before, even physical fights between a man and his wife used to happen when there [was] misunderstanding. [Even though] people would gather and have a dialogue with them, the man would not agree and would say, “She is my wife; I will beat her.” But since we started learning in Tostan sessions, [when now we] hear that someone is quarrelling with his wife, **we go and intervene and the husband will understand and stop the fight.** So I will say Tostan came to **empower we the married women** because [the teachings] prevent us from all the violence against women. (G, participant, Se)

We have changes in our village, because before men called women in a meeting but women sat at the back and would not talk. Whatever men discussed, women agreed. But we learned in Tostan that **both women and men have the right to speak in a meeting.** I learned that knowledge in Tostan. Today if men call a meeting, if they talk, **we also talk.** We had a meeting and when I talked, men said, “On the whole women also have good things to say in a meeting. Yesterday we belittled your words, but **your contributions are very important.** Men and women should all contribute during a meeting. (G, participant, F)

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<sup>6</sup> *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.

There is a lot that **I understand now**, because a lot of people, if you tell them to participate in a Tostan class, they will tell [you that they will go] if you have something ... if you give [them] something or credit [them]. I tell them Tostan doesn't come for that, **Tostan has come for the entire community**. If you go, we will go. If you don't go, we will go. (G, Class Participant, Sa)

If we [CMC members] come from the Center [the Tostan class], we chat with [community members]; if we meet with them at the water well, we tell them we are Tostan participants. We tell them that health is not just about '**I went** to the health center;' '**I have** medicine and **I am healthy**.' Health is about [being in a] good neighborhood. If you are healthy but your neighbor is not healthy or you are not cooperating with your neighbor, that alone is a disease. **Health is not about "I am not healthy"; it is about good living and good neighborhoods. ... No matter how healthy you are, if you are not cooperating with your neighbor, your health will be lacking.** (G, CMC, Sa)

For us, **the government employees, even the teachers are involved in our activities, and doctors, councilors, the imams and the village chief are all involved**. No one will be lazy. Some people will be in the same compound without talking to each other, even the compound head will never know about it. **We will therefore inform the village chief about the situation and go together with the village chief**. The compound head [in this case] said he was not aware of what was going on in his compound, and we will tell him, that is what was happening. If we can't settle it, **we will now involve the village Imam** to solve the problem. (G, CMC, Se)

Before somebody might come from nowhere and tell us he is a government employee who wants to help us with a project, but we need to contribute; and when we contribute, he carries all the money, and we would never see the person again. And some among us before would also tell us to contribute and put the money in the bank, but we will not know anything about the money. Now where we are, **if you ask anyone among us how much we contributed and how much we have in the bank, the person can tell you straight away**. For us the change we have [made] from [participating in] Tostan cannot be over-emphasized because now no one will come to our village and start writing and ... without us knowing what they are writing or **signing a document without knowing for what purpose**. (G, CMC, Se)

First of all, in the area of **FGC, before, we used to cut our girls, but now we have abandoned the practice**. Even if we hear someone with the intention to cut her daughter, **we will intervene** to stop it by sensitizing them that the practice is harmful to the health of their daughter, and they will stop it. (G,CMC, Se)

The **consequences of child marriage are difficulties in giving birth**. That problem does not only affect the girl alone, but even you the mother. But that [practice] has



been reduced since we are now **aware of the consequences**. Before, our awareness did not reach at this level that when a girl is less than 18 years to 19 up to 20 years, she must not get married. ... But since we are aware, **our village chief himself does not allow child marriage to happen in this community now**. If they announce a marriage of a girl, **the village chief will demand the birth certificate of the girl; if she is less than 18 years, he will not accept girl marriage to be right**. (G, CMC, Sa)

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: CMCs participants stated that their communities were less violent and more peaceful with CMC/class members actively intervening in conflicts.**

Many focus group participants mentioned that, before the Tostan program, the relationships in their communities were frayed and sometimes violent.

All CMCs pointed to new “unity,” “neighborliness,” and “cohesion” and a significant reduction in violence. The descriptions of past violence were detailed, specific (e.g., “loud shouting in the morning between couples”; “quarreling between children; “a woman crying in a compound because she is being beaten”; “child beating”). In most focus groups at least one participant mentioned that violence was “the absence of dialogue,” a direct learning from the class, one that they shared when they intervened in violent exchanges. All CMCs enlisted the support of their village chiefs and imams in promoting nonviolence.

One woman discussed her own past violence and how her participation in Tostan classes led her to change her behavior:

The Tostan program helped me a lot because my husband and I would quarrel and fight every day, or sometimes if I was angry, I would beat my children. People would tell me to stop but I would not listen to them. But since I participated in Tostan, I don’t quarrel or fight with my husband. My children are going to school. (G, participant, Sa)

The more peaceful relations and social cohesion created conditions necessary for the dialogue and deliberations necessary to share information and consider changes in behavior and gave confidence to CMCs and to the communities that they could create new practices around shared values.

**Theme 2: CMC participants actively engaged with their fellow citizens in their communities and, to some extent, their adopted neighboring communities, as**

**facilitators of positive change for improved well-being. They described their approaches as inclusive and respectful.**

[Because a focus group was held in only one adopted community, data is limited although in the CMCs focus groups they report on what they observed in their adopted community.]

The CMCs in Gambia were very involved with their own 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, hygiene (especially promotion of hand washing with soap), birth registration, support of children in school, support of women's prenatal visits, going to health clinics when sick, and establishing and using the community bank. For example, one community was building a health center; one met with a nurse to coordinate activities; two communities discussed buying uniforms for children whose parents couldn't afford them. One community took multiple actions with local government officials to get a school built in their community as the school for their children was full and distant.

An analysis of the participant and non-participant focus groups showed that these activities did take place and were highly valued. The one adopted community focus group could specify similar changes in their community given the outreach activities of the community which held the Tostan classes.

**Theme 3: CMC participants demonstrated their ability to take new actions based on accurate knowledge about health and hygiene and noted it frequently as a hallmark of their learning.**

All focus groups mentioned village cleaning as an important activity that allowed them to learn to collaborate in efforts to increase well-being in the communities. The cleaning extended to the household, for example, to using and buying soap, to washing hands before eating. In one case, it extended to the mosque and the school. CMCs taught their adopted communities about cleaning.

Participant and nonparticipant focus groups all mentioned health and hygiene, especially their sanitation activities, as one of the valued outcomes of the Tostan program.

**Theme 4: Women now have a voice in the family, community meetings, and awareness raising activities.**

All the CMCs said that "Tostan has educated us [so that we understand] that men and women both have a right to express their views in a meeting." (G, CMC, Sa) Many said that they didn't know women had the right to speak before the Tostan classes started. Now, "women can express their views and make a declaration." (Gu, CMC, Fa) A

nonparticipant not only said that women now talk but also that they “can have important ideas that men don’t have.”(G, participant, Fa).

Interestingly, the CMC discusses and then its members go out to the people; they sit at the bantaba at night and call everyone [to come] and discuss .... we all become one voice. The women all participated in this work; we mobilized it.” (Gu, CMC, Fa)

**Theme 5: CMCs and participants declared that their communities had abandoned FGC, violence against children, and child marriage. Many said that they would try to intervene to try and prevent these activities from happening.**

The following quotation is typical:

What we like the most is the abandonment of FGC in this village. ... Since Tostan came; we [will] fight child marriage until we have abandoned that. (G, Sa, CMC)

Here is the typical way class participants and CMCs intervened to stop harmful practices:

When Tostan came and we participated in the class, we [came to] understand that child marriage and FGC are harmful practices, and when we have information that these practices are about to happen, we go sensitize them, and they will agree with us. We, however, see some resistances ... among people, but that is very limited because the village chief supports us in all our activities; he became a strong pillar for us. (G, Se, CMC)

Please note that FGC can be carried without being detected by the CMCs so interventions can be more difficult than, for example, announcements of child marriage or public displays of violence against women and children.

**Theme 6: CMCs and participants discussed their abandonment of child marriage in detail—which stood out, making it a separate theme. Participants and the adopted community provided accurate reasoning for this decision both in terms of harms done in the past, knowledge of health effects, and the human right to choose one’s spouse.**

CMCs and class participants gave accurate reasons for abandoning child marriage. Most discussed in detail the health effects, namely difficulties during childbirth because girls are physically underdeveloped and the loss to the community of the girl’s potential when she is taken out of school.

Impressive, however, is the accurate information and reasoning carried over from the class and CMC to the adopted community in response to a case in which the father wants to marry his 14 year old daughter. For example:

I think it is a bad suggestion [to marry a 14 year old girl] ... [the father] should not remove [his] daughter from school for marriage because if she is allowed to

complete her schooling she may be able to help him. Secondly, she is young ... and should therefore be allowed until at the age of 18 and above, when she will reach the age of marriage. (Ga, Sab, non-participant)

The advice I will give is for [the father] to leave [his daughter] to continue her schooling. After completing her schooling, she can benefit herself and her family too. She can be a professional. We know all these good things through Tostan participants, who come to our community for sensitization. (Ga, Sab, nonparticipant)

Child marriage is visible to the community from the announcement through the ceremony, so it is easier, perhaps, to identify practitioners and attempt to intervene.

Note that the benefits of leaving a girl in school are not just to the girl but to her family and community.

A new dimension emerged in accounts of Tostan participants and CMCs--Gambians in Europe requesting child brides.

There were so many difficulties associated with child marriage before, because those in Europe have big names and people believe that they have money. If someone in Europe wants to marry your daughter and your daughter says, 'No, I am learning,' the mother will respond by telling her, 'You are going to marry him; the man is in Europe and is very rich.' If the girl refuses, the mother will insist, 'You are going to marry him,' when she may be underage at 15 years old or 13 years. If she gets pregnant, she will be doing her domestic work and she cannot leave those duties and relax, and she will be carrying the pregnancy and doing her domestic work. During labor she may lose her life and that may be due to the influence of money which leads to those difficulties. (G, CMC, Se)

Note that the speaker characterizes this as an added "difficulty."

**Theme 7: 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.**

**Theme 8: 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.**

All CMCs talked about getting support from their imam, village chief and, in one community, their Village Development Committee (a group established by an act of Parliament to serve as an entry point for all local development). The following account is typical:

Our ward councilor is aware of whatever we want to do in our village, and our national assembly member is also aware ... of what we want to do. (G, CMC, F).

When we have an activity, like cleaning, if we inform the village chief; he can also inform the district chief. If it is about education, we inform the teacher who will also inform the education authorities. (G, CMC, Sa)

This same CMC wrote a letter to an official. They worked with teachers to improve the schools. Another CMC coordinated with a nurse.

Two participants claimed that the communities were more religious as a result of Tostan's program:

For me, even our religion was not very respected by people because when it was time for prayers, it was the small kids who would run to perform ablution to pray, but I think every good thing started with the religion and that Tostan promoted the [human] right to religion should be respected. Now in this village both men and women, old and young, when it is time for prayers, in any place, whether you are in the bush or at home, you will find water and perform ablution and pray.

**Theme 9: 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. Typical is a statement such as this:

Because we do regular awareness raising and dialogue about the consequences of the practices, people now agree with us. (G, CMC, Sa)

All CMCs reported that they had the support of local officials and religious leaders. The following statement was typical:

The strategy we take is to call each other to the village meeting place, and we discuss and understand each other about what should make us abandon a harmful practice. We build an understanding among each other that if a child is less than 18 years, she should not get married. We all agreed that that practice is not good. Both the village chief and the imam all supported and empowered

us—these practices are not good and we have now abandoned them. (G, CMC, Sa)

All CMCs reported meeting with and dialoguing with community members who were unsure about changing practices.

#### Limitations

Gambia's qualitative data was lacking, compared to the other countries. Two focus group transcripts from participants and three from CMCs contained similar content. Without local leader interviews and with only two non-participant focus groups, the team did not have enough information to cross-check the descriptions from the CMCs.

#### **Insights from the Interviews/Focus Groups for Understanding Quantitative Data**

Descriptions of the lack of cooperation, the frequency of violence and the poor hygiene practices before Tostan arrived stood out in the interviews and focus groups. Creating new, more cooperative relationships might have taken considerable time and effort. Confidence in one's support group is needed to take on more ingrained social norms.

Although the quantitative results from Gambia are robust across all dimensions in terms of making positive changes across the indicators on the survey, they are not as robust as other countries in some cases. For example, 39% of those surveyed said that they would intervene to stop FGC (up from 5%). This is a major change but lower than in the other three countries where the change is dramatic. The apparently higher rates of violence and conflict in Gambia may have delayed the progress on ending harmful practices. It may have taken longer for CMCs and participants to cooperate, build trust and unify, so as to create the conditions conducive to dialogue, deliberation and collective commitment. The attitudes shifted significantly (from 51% approval/indifference to FGC to 13%), but, in this case, non-approval did not go as far as bringing about the new behavior of intervening to stop it from happening, at least not yet. In the context of the CMC focus groups, those participating in them stated that FGC has stopped in their communities.