

# The Community Empowerment Program (CEP) 2019 - 2022:

## Key findings

October 2023

**Tostan**  
Dignity for All



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IGA: Income-generating activities  
BGI: Breakthrough Generation Initiative  
CEP: Community Empowerment Program  
CMC: Community Management Committees  
MC: Municipal Council  
CFM: Child-Friendly Territorial Collectivity  
BS: Baseline Study  
FG: Focus Group  
SDCE: Strengthening Democracy and Civic Engagement  
FE: Final Evaluation  
MTE: Mid-term evaluation  
DSF: Development Support Fund  
SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals  
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization  
PRC: President of the Rural Council  
SEP: Strategic Engagement Plan  
WSL: Short for '*When she leads, everyone succeeds*'.  
REC : Rencontres d'Entente Communautaire  
ORS: Oral Rehydration Solution

*This document has been produced as part of the learning journey exercise*

*for the Strategic Period 2016- 2022.*

## Summary

With the end of Tostan's Strategic Engagement Plan (SEP) 2016-2022 and the transition to the new SEP 2023-2030, Tostan has embarked on a review exercise to take stock of the changes to which the organization has contributed, especially in relation to communities that benefited from the Community Empowerment Program (CEP) during the period 2016-2022. This learning exercise drew on the CEP evaluations carried out during the period, and these results were assessed in light of the key lessons from the *Breakthrough Generation Initiative* (BGI) project evaluation.

The BGI final evaluation report is, to date, the most comprehensive document documenting Tostan's performance in building the capacity of communities to bring about systemic and sustainable change and improve their individual and collective well-being. The BGI final evaluation report - implemented in 150 communities spread across The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Mali between 2017 and 2020 - found that the CEP enabled these communities to achieve significant results in relation to: (i) social cohesion and capacity for collective action, (ii) women's capacity for expression and increased influence, (iii) community performance in achieving well-being, particularly in GESEE sectors, and (iv) changes in social norms relating to harmful practices. The BGI evaluation report also enabled Tostan to understand the common 'path' taken by communities to achieve the changes recorded.

In light of these lessons from BGI, evaluations of CEPs implemented between 2019 and 2022 have been reviewed to see if their results confirm the lessons from BGI. These are the final evaluations of the 'When she leads, everyone succeeds' project (Senegal, April 2019 - November 2022) and the Fouta 20 Centers project (Senegal, October 2019 - September 2022), and the mid-term evaluations of the CEPs/Scale of Gambia (October 2020 - August 2023) and Guinea-Bissau (August 2020 - July 2023). This report provides an update on this perspective.

This report is structured around three main points: (i) a reminder of BGI's key results and the lessons learned; (ii) a description the CEPs implemented between 2016 and 2022 and their key results; and (iii) discussion of the innovations for strengthening democracy and citizen participation and the role of men in the program.

The report shows that the CEP programming implemented between 2019 and 2022 has produced results that are aligned with those achieved by the BGI project. These outcomes include reduced violence and strengthened social cohesion, collective action catalyzed by the CMCs, strengthened capacity for women's expression and influence, communities performing well in achieving their well-being across the five GESEE sectors, and changes in social norms in favor of abandoning harmful practices. Through their perceptions of the changes and the process of achieving them, it was possible to understand and articulate a 'common path' that the partner communities followed in achieving their performance.

The review of CEP evaluations implemented between 2019 and 2022 has enabled us to retain, as key lessons, the interest shown by Community Management Committees (CMCs) and local authorities (CTs) in the 'SDCE' module (Strengthening Democracy and Citizen Engagement) and the relevance of Community Encounters (CEs) as a strategy for encouraging greater participation by men and boys in Tostan classes.

Overall, the learning exercise has helped Tostan identify lessons to be shared internally and taken forward in the new strategic cycle.

## Background and introduction

As part of the capitalization of activities implemented in line with its 2016-2022 Strategic Commitment Plan, Tostan has committed to carrying out a review of the results and lessons learned from the Community Empowerment Programs (CEPs) implemented during this period in the various countries of intervention. This review began with the *Breakthrough Generation Initiative* project, which was implemented in four West African countries (*Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Mali*) between 2017 and 2020. It was enriched by the results of the mid-term evaluation of the CEP/Scaling in The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, and the final evaluation of the CEP '20 Communities in the Fouta' and the 'When she leads, everyone succeeds' (WSL) project in Senegal. These four studies were carried out after the final evaluation of the *Breakthrough Generation Initiative* project, and formed the basis of the learning presented below.

Following a summary of the major results and lessons learned from the *Breakthrough Generation Initiative* project, this document will deal with the following two sections:

- The similarities between the results of the CEPs implemented between 2019 and 2022 and those of the Breakthrough Generation Initiative (BGI) project; and
- The new initiatives explored as part of the CEPs implemented between 2019 and 2022 and the results and lessons that can be considered through this learning exercise.

## The *Breakthrough Generation Initiative*: results and lessons learned

The *Breakthrough Generation Initiative* project was implemented in 150 communities spread across The Gambia (30), Guinea (40), Guinea-Bissau (40) and Mali (40) over the 2017-2020 period. This project was an opportunity for Tostan to continue its work supporting African communities on the path to achieving their vision of community well-being. The monitoring and evaluation system developed as part of this project has undergone significant improvements, enabling us to carry out a more accurate and robust final evaluation of the project, in terms of methodological approach.

There are many lessons to be learned from this project. But there are four main ones:

1. The CEP has strengthened social cohesion within the communities of the four countries;
2. There has been a notable improvement, in all countries, in women's expression, influence, action and leadership in both the domestic and community spheres;
3. Partner communities have undertaken significant activities in other areas of well-being (governance, education, health, economy and environment); and
4. The practices of female circumcision, child marriage and corporal punishment to discipline children and resolve marital or community conflicts have decreased considerably in all the communities involved in this project.

Boosted by the CEP, communities have made major progress in key dimensions and aspects of well-being they value (inclusive governance, education, health, promotion of a healthy environment and economic strengthening). The results observed at the community level went far beyond class participants and adopted learners. Overall, improvements were significant in all 4 countries. However, for a given indicator, the level of improvement recorded may differ from one country to another. BGI's final evaluation report, which provides more detailed information on the project's results, can be accessed via this [link](#).

## CEPs 2019 and 2022: results confirm those of previous CEPs.

- Approach and methodology

Following the *Breakthrough Generation Initiative*, and with a view to bringing the positive results of the CEP to scale, the community development model has been implemented in other countries and contexts. It is these programs that have served as sources of inspiration and learning for this exercise.

Among the sources of learning about the 2019-2022 CEPs, we considered two major projects in Senegal, which were the subject of a final evaluation. These evaluations used a mixed approach combining a quantitative and a qualitative component. These were: (i) the '*When She Leads Everyone Succeeds - WSL*' project (April 2019-November 2022) launched in 100 communities spread across the departments of Goudiry, Médina Yoro Foulah, Salémata and Sédhiou; and (ii) the '*The CEP in 20 communautés du Fouta*' project (October 2019-September 2022).

We also used results from CEPs implemented in The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. The Gambia implemented CEP/Scaling in 60 communities between October 2020 and August 2023. Similarly, in Guinea-Bissau the CEP was implemented in 120 communities between August 2020 and July 2023. For these two projects, which have just come to an end at the time of this learning exercise, we have relied upon their mid-term evaluation reports, carried out in 2022. These mid-term evaluations did not include a qualitative research component, so only quantitative results were available.

These CEPs have generally had the same focus as those implemented as part of *BGI*, with the WSL project exploring the issue of the low participation of men and boys in Tostan classes. We have also included in this review the experimentation of the '*Strengthening Democracy and Citizen Engagement*' module in 85 communities in the Médina Yoro Fouta department in Senegal, since 2019 Follow-up mission reports from this experiment - which is still ongoing - are sources of organizational learning that cannot be ignored in capitalizing on Tostan's programs in the 2019-2022 period.

Data from the 2019-2022 CEPs show that significant changes are taking place at the level of the intervention communities. In particular, we note that there are four areas in which the performances achieved by the programs implemented confirm those already recorded with *BGI*. These areas are: (1) reduced violence and enhanced social cohesion; (2) enhanced expression and influence of women; (3) community performance in promoting their well-being through the GESEE sectors<sup>1</sup>, and (4) the CEP and its influence on social norms relating to harmful practices.

- Less violence and greater social cohesion

The results of the *Breakthrough Generation Initiative* study show that the CEP has promoted greater social cohesion in the intervention communities in all four countries. This change is illustrated in particular by community members reporting: (i) reduced violence and conflict resolution at community level (associated with increased dialogue and more collective decision-

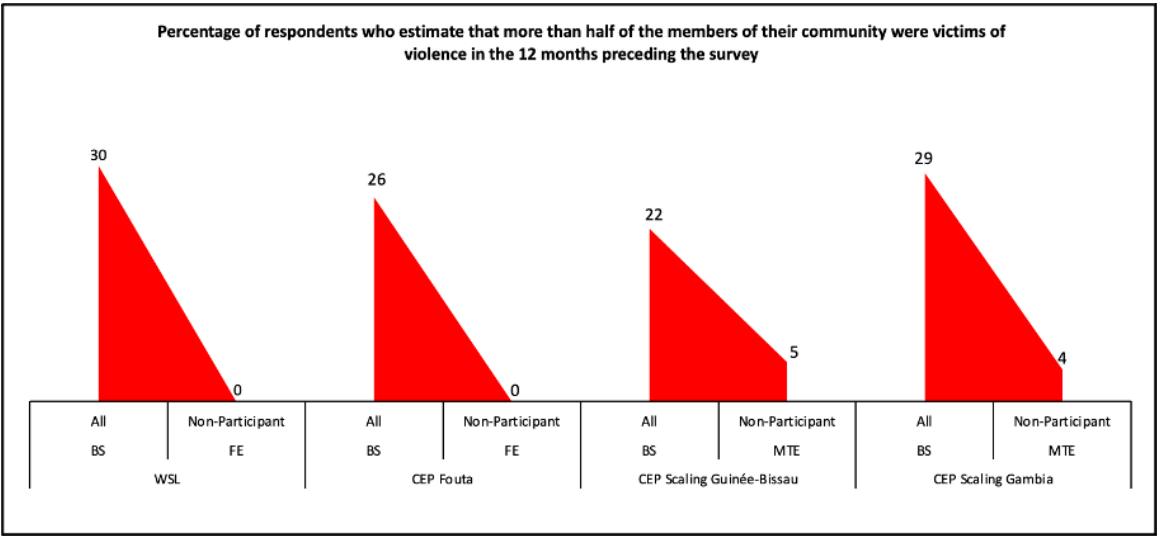
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<sup>1</sup> GESEE is an acronym for five sectors in which the effects of the CEP are generally perceived: Governance (G), Education (E), Health (S), Environment (E) and Economy (E).

making); and (ii) increased mutual respect between community members and improved interpersonal relations between men, women, youth and adults, catalyzed by discussion of values, human rights and associated responsibilities.

This reduction in violence in CEP beneficiary communities is confirmed by the results of the CEPs covering the period 2019-22, considered in this learning exercise. Indeed, for each of these projects, the perception of non-participating community members regarding the prevalence of violence in their community was documented. The table below shows that, whatever the CEP considered, respondents clearly perceived a drop in violence between the two studies considered: baseline study (BS) and final evaluation (FE) or baseline study (BS) and mid-term evaluation (MTE).

Table 1: Respondents' perception of the incidence of violence in their community



This reduction in violence, perceived by large sections of the intervention communities, is recorded in a context that promotes dialogue/discussion and more collective decision-making when it comes to dealing with conflict. In view of the emphasis placed by the various projects on encouraging the promotion of peace, solidarity and social cohesion, it is pleasing to note that families generally proceeded through dialogue or discussion. This was the case for 95% of respondents to the final evaluation of the Fouta CEP, 80% of respondents to the mid-term evaluation of the Guinea-Bissau CEP and 80% of respondents to the mid-term evaluation of the Gambia CEP. Furthermore, the request for advice from community elders (56%, 67% and 27% respectively) underlines the desire to find more peaceful solutions and reduce the risk of conflict within communities. Similarly, the practice of "*shouting at each other*" in the event of conflict within the family was very little reported by respondents, at 1%, 12% and 3% respectively. This underlines a desire to strengthen dialogue and increase cohesion within the communities involved in this program.

This growing social cohesion in CEP beneficiary communities is underpinned by an internal dynamic that has emerged over the course of project implementation, and which has had a positive impact on interpersonal relations between different sections of the community (men, women, youth and adults).

*I'm very pleased with the changes that have taken place, because parents now hesitate to beat their wives or children. Before, a wife would be beaten by her husband without anyone saying a word. Or the man would punish his child without anyone intervening. With*

*the introduction of Tostan, all these practices have disappeared from our customs, and that's progress to be applauded (KOLDA VILLAGE #2, non-participant 3, focus group of young boys and men aged 15 to 24).*

*What I've noticed is that we've been in tune with each other ever since the classes began disseminating its teachings. We refuse to indulge in pointless arguments with members of our household as soon as we think back to the teachings of the Tostan classes. As a result, calm is restored to the home as soon as the recommendations are reviewed;*

*The installation of the classes has had many positive impacts. New habits have been created through the exchange of ideas within the couple to reach a concerted decision. In short, a new momentum of trust has been established between the partners in the household. And these are the attitudes we learned through the Tostan classes. Because we had no culture of these good practices. (Fouta, FG Male participants Korobel, village 1).*

It should also be noted that a Community Management Committee has been set up in each of the intervention communities. The principle of constituting CMCs that include at least 50% women reflects a desire to promote women's leadership, to provide a model for future generations and to nurture a pool of new women leaders who can or will be able to run for elective positions, whether at decentralized or central level. And, across all of the CEPs implemented between 2019 and 2022, the role of Community Management Committees (CMCs) in promoting cordial relations, strengthening bonds of friendship and good neighborliness, and better consideration of relationships between young people and adults is magnified by members of the intervention communities. The results of the qualitative research indicate that the CMCs actively engaged with their communities as agents and facilitators of positive change to improve well-being. The following table, which summarizes achievements over the course of 2022, illustrates the collective actions catalyzed by the CMCs.

*Table 2: Collective actions catalyzed by CMCs in 2022*

		WSL	CEP Fouta	CEP Scaling Guinee-Bissau	CEP Scaling Gambia
GOVERNANCE	# meetings with representatives of the Associations	463	41	815	418
	# awareness activities for local authorities	1071	132	1622	356
	# villages sensitized	575	163	2186	221
	# campaigns to register children in the Civil Registry	747	131	1492	415
	# children registered in the Civil Registry	2090	326	2603	2717
EDUCATION	# advocacy activities with local authorities	605	10	1606	352
	# CMC participation in School Management Committee's meetings	644	45	1420	408
	# parent awareness actions	827	94	1720	402
	# children enrolled in school thanks to the efforts of CMC	2148	0	13511	251
HEALTH	# malaria awareness activities	1189	153	1999	467
	# women who did their ante-natal care visit thanks to the efforts of CMCs	4405	269	6586	1219
	# women who did their post-natal care visit thanks to the efforts of CMCs	2999	579	6360	765
	# children immunized thanks to the efforts of CMCs	16317	1310	25475	4749
	# campaigns against FGC	591	89	688	338
	# girls who have escaped FGC thanks to the efforts of CMCs	14	0	28	41
	# campaigns against child marriage	611	100	1007	339
	# girls who have escaped child marriage thanks to the efforts of CMCs	7	3	259	29
ENVIRONMENT	# public places cleaning days organized	3023	381	3967	1096
	# latrines constructed	352	15	2170	1056
	# improved stoves built	1151	235	323	1018
ECONOMY	# individual loans for women	4596	469	3331	3058
	# individual loans for girls	828	186	1401	364
	# individual loans for men	1463	326	1112	237
	# individual loans for boys	242	119	493	36

The villages sensitized have also undergone changes.

*As a result of the awareness-raising activities carried out by Tostan classes in areas not benefiting from the program, neighboring populations have come to embrace Tostan's ideals. As a result, the Tostan classes have inspired behavioral changes in the community. (KOLDA Village #1, non-participant 4, discussion group for girls and young women aged 15 to 24).*



- Greater expression and influence for women

Post-BGI CEP evaluations show that implementation of Tostan's community development model in the 2019-22 period is leading to changes in roles within the household and the community. In particular, the role of women is changing. Women are playing a greater part in the decision-making process, both in the domestic sphere and in the community. This dynamic, which seems rather mild at the time of the mid-term evaluations, becomes quite evident at the time of the final evaluations of the CEPs. The following table gives an overview of the evolution of women's level of expression and influence in matters concerning family and community well-being.

Table 3: Expression and influence of women

	QED				PRCC Fouta				PRCC Echelle Guinée Bissau				PRCC Echelle Gambie			
	BS	FE			BS	FE			BS	MTE			BS	MTE		
	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants
% women who expressed their ideas in a community meeting	11	34	47	74	5	93	93	95	40	51	63	74	38	41	56	84
% married women who reported that the decision to practice birth spacing was made jointly	25	92	91	94	11	31	37	50	19	13	10	16	20	28	36	55
% married women who reported that the decision to send children to school was made jointly	23	92	92	93	8	69	79	90	43	52	49	63	19	53	56	62

It's worth noting that the Facilitators - who run the Tostan classes - are trained to encourage women to express their opinions and make informed decisions during class sessions. Tostan's practice includes asking women to form small groups to discuss issues raised in class. This helps women gain the confidence to share and defend their ideas. In addition, raising awareness of human rights for all, and sensitizing men and religious leaders to a respectful, non-judgmental approach, means that men are becoming more open to listening to and learning from their wives. Rather than seeing this evolution as a threat to their authority, men and other traditional leaders generally support these changes, which are developing with their support.

In the four departments where the WSL project has been implemented, the women emphasized how they had boosted their self-confidence and their ability to act. They all attributed these changes to the presence of Tostan. Learning to write their name and use the telephone, as well as learning about health, project management and other wellness topics, increased their self-confidence and earned them the respect of men. The importance of consent and allowing girls to decide who they marry has been described as a result of the CEP in some communities. Furthermore, in some communities, the WSL project has led to a better balance in the workloads of girls and women, as well as men and boys, improving their quality of life. In particular, boys and men are helping to carry out domestic tasks (or agricultural work) that were previously reserved for girls and women.

*I've seen that the men help their wives with domestic activities; they fetch water, they look for dead wood for cooking. This was unimaginable before, a man carrying out cooking activities. (KÉDOUGOU VILLAGE #1, participant 6, focus group with CMC members)*

In the Fouta region, women's capacity-building was appreciated far beyond the results measured. Indeed, this dynamic has also been felt in their new writing and reading skills, as well

as in their new abilities to look after their children's health and hygiene, to keep the domestic sphere clean, and in their ability to express themselves in public and make themselves heard.

Ultimately, women's increased confidence, capabilities and contribution to well-being contributed to men's support for new, more equitable gender roles, making social change sustainable. The positive results recorded in terms of women's expression and influence in decision-making appear to be generated by the first year's CEP content on democracy, human rights and responsibilities, collective problem-solving and health, and by Tostan's use of participatory methods

- Communities that perform well in promoting their well-being

#### More inclusive community governance and greater respect for children's rights

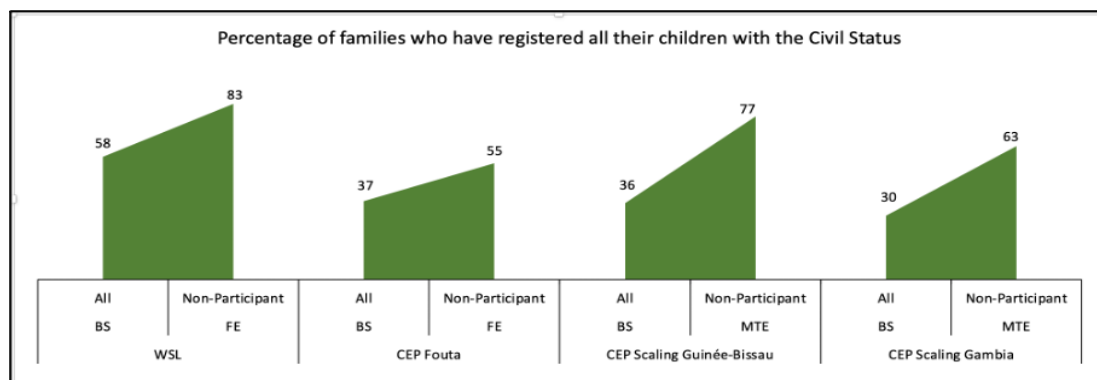
The results achieved by the CEPs in terms of social cohesion and women's participation in decision-making bodies point to a significant improvement in community governance systems. Improved collaboration with local authorities is frequently mentioned by CMC members. Improved participation by women in community decision-making bodies in particular is one of the most magnified results in relation to the issue of governance. The CMCs and the Tostan classes thus open up an important path towards a new acceptance of female leadership at community level.

*In the 35 years I've lived in this village, a woman has never led an organization. Only men were brought forward. But since Tostan has been here, we've set up our 17-member CMC, whose president is a woman, treasurer is a woman, education officer is a man and young education officer is a woman (TAMBACOUNDA VILLAGE #2, participant 1, CMC member focus group).*

*"It was thanks to attending the Tostan classes that I became a consultant. Had it not been for learning under the aegis of the program to understand things and their content, I could never have become one. I've wandered all over the place, but to tell the truth, it was learning in the Tostan modules that forged my knowledge and earned me the status of town councilor today." (Individual interview, local councilor).*

Other examples of strengthened governance involve improving the registration of children with the Civil Registry. At the start of the CEP, the intervention communities were far from systematic in registering their children with the civil registry. As part of the program's implementation, communities are widely sensitized to children's rights, including the right to be registered with the civil registry. As Table 4 shows, the percentage of families who have registered all their children with the civil registry between the baseline study and the final evaluation, or between the baseline study and the mid-term evaluation, has increased significantly. It has more than doubled in Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, and has risen sharply in Senegal. These developments illustrate the growing respect for this right, recognized as a fundamental right of every child and linked to future access to education and other social services, as well as to the vote.

*Table 4: Systematic civil registration of children*

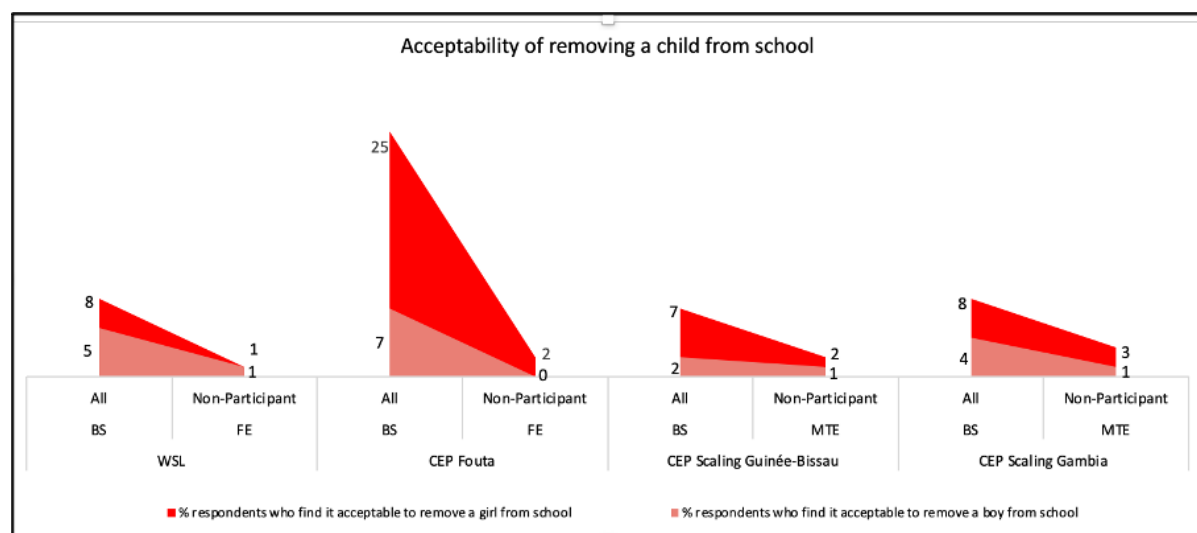


### A stronger commitment to education for women and girls

By enabling them to learn the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, Tostan's courses have provided educational opportunities that were not available to adult women, particularly those who were not fortunate enough to have access to school. These courses have proved very popular with the communities. Regardless of the intervention community considered, significant improvements were recorded in the ability of participants in Tostan classes to write simple words in the local language. This new ability to read and write words in the local language is appreciated by both men and women. For women, these new skills boost their self-esteem and that of men.

Furthermore, the importance of educating girls and women has become a key point of discussion at community level: members of the intervention communities in particular emphasize the positive effects of educating girls and women, not only for the household but also for the community, as shown in table 5 below.

Table 5: Acceptability of removing a girl or boy from school



As reported in the BGI project, the results recorded in the table above attest to a strengthened commitment to education for all children - especially girls - at the community level in post-BGI CEPs. This commitment is leading to a reduction in the gender disparity that existed in these communities at the start of the programs.

*"It seems that in the past, girls were withdrawn one by one from school until a small number were enrolled. Today, with the changes in mentality, we no longer see girls being withdrawn from school for any pretext whatsoever. Because when they're called*

*upon to do household chores, they always retort that they don't have the time, and that they're going to school to learn. And they are very preoccupied indeed, and absorbed in their studies every day of the week" (Goudiry, village #2, participant 7, focus group with girls and young women aged 15 and 24).*

*"In the past, girls didn't learn much at school, but nowadays they're enthusiastic about their studies" (Goudiry, village #2, participant 1, focus group with girls and young women aged 15 and 24).*

Teachers in the intervention communities appreciate the impact of the CEP as a promoter of respect for children's right to education. Indeed, teachers interviewed as part of the final evaluation of the WSL project confirmed their involvement in CMC activities. In particular, they cited a series of benefits they had observed in their schools: increased school attendance (especially among girls), stronger involvement of parents and communities in their children's education, and greater student commitment to their studies.

*"Yes, I had worked with Tostan for several years... One year we worked together in the classroom, raising girls' awareness of early marriage and pregnancy in [name of village]. As far as the pupils are concerned, the drop-out rate has gone down a lot. I'm happy with Tostan's work... as far as early marriage is concerned, there's definitely been a change. Before, we used to give girls 14 years of age; but now, I have pupils who are in class" (Goudiry, village #5, teacher).*

## Improved knowledge and changes in healthcare practices

In many communities, the health of the population, particularly that of girls and women, is threatened by a lack of knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and harmful traditional practices that negatively affect the health of girls and women. As part of the CEP, participants study aspects of hygiene and health, first examining and discussing their human right to a clean environment, health and freedom from violence, as well as the responsibilities associated with these rights. They then learn about good hygiene practices and how diseases are contracted and spread. With the organized dissemination strategy, this new knowledge spreads from the Tostan class to the whole community.

With the *BGI* project, the results of the final evaluation had shown that beneficiary communities improved their knowledge and health-promoting behaviors, including increased use of health services and increased use of healthy behaviors such as the use of Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) in case of diarrhea. Similar results are generally generated by the post-BGI CEPs considered in the table below.

*Table 6: Health knowledge and practices*

	WSL				CEP Fouta				CEP Scaling Guinée Bissau				CEP Scaling Gambia			
	BS	FE			BS	FE			BS	MTE			BS	MTE		
	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants
% respondents who cited at least 2 harmful consequences of FGC	11	95	92	97	11	60	78	82	25	51	66	82	8	61	63	86
% respondents who cited at least 2 harmful consequences of child marriage	33	88	91	97	28	72	83	87	35	56	71	84	31	59	69	91
% respondents who cited at least 2 risks associated with close pregnancies	24	78	78	91	32	55	74	77	29	59	58	66	20	32	33	50
% respondents who cited at least 2 advantages of Exclusive Breastfeeding	24	72	78	93	20	68	75	81	39	60	75	88	25	42	62	82
% respondents who would use ORS to treat a child's diarrhea	11	47	53	86	27	60	70	88	8	23	42	76	46	53	71	90
% respondents who practice birth spacing	29	44	42	67	26	75	87	93	57	72	69	86	28	63	61	71

Reading the performance of non-participants in the final or mid-term evaluation of the CEPs, in the light of their performance in the baseline study, shows a good level of retention and application of the project's lessons. Knowledge of the harmful consequences of female circumcision and child marriage, as well as of the risks associated with closely spaced pregnancies and the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, is more widely shared among the population. The practice of birth spacing and the propensity to use Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) to treat childhood diarrhea are much more marked with the implementation of CEPs.

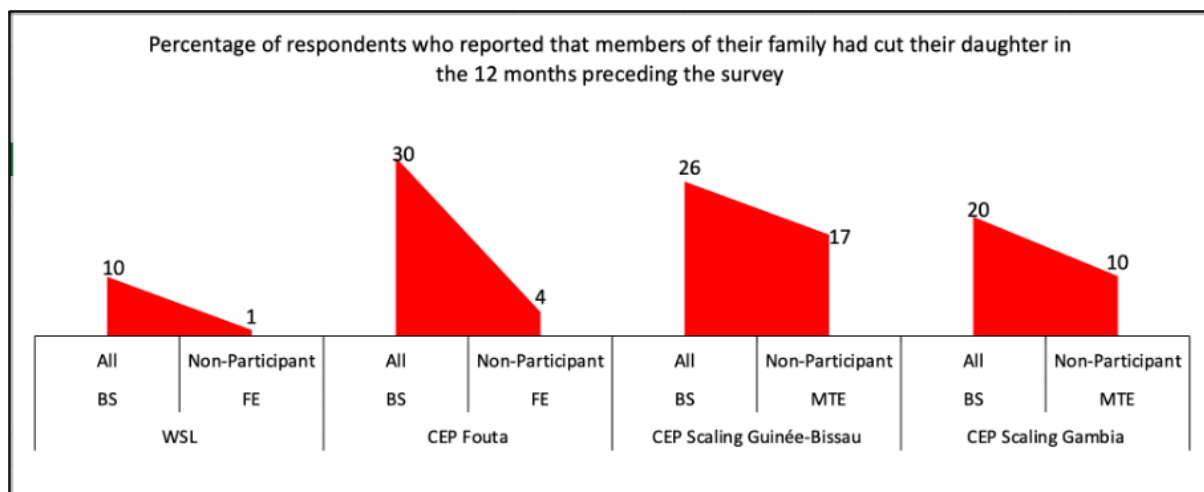
In addition, behavioral changes related to personal hygiene and the use of healthcare services were reported as important and valued outcomes by community members.

*Social changes are taking place all over the village... We are now accustomed to washing our hands with soap after using the toilet, but also before handling or eating food... One of the changes in mentality is that today, when a child is ill, he or she is immediately taken to hospital for treatment. (KOLDA VILLAGE #2, non-participant 3, focus group with girls and young women aged 15 to 24)*

*In fact, we've been working on a number of issues other than that of pregnant women, who were previously reluctant to attend their natal visits. Today, the members of the CMC have given us a great deal of support in urging pregnant women to comply with this request. What's more, women have abandoned home births thanks to the CMC's consistent support. Its members also contributed to the success of the child vaccination awareness campaign. (TAMBACOUNDA VILLAGE #4, health staff [woman]).*

In terms of practices harmful to girls' health in particular, the CEPs implemented have had a definite influence on the decline in the practice of FGC, which has already been documented on numerous occasions. Between the baseline studies and the final project evaluations, a significant drop has been recorded in the intervention communities. This decline is already beginning to show up in the mid-term evaluations, as highlighted in table 7.

Table 7: Practice of Female Genital Cutting

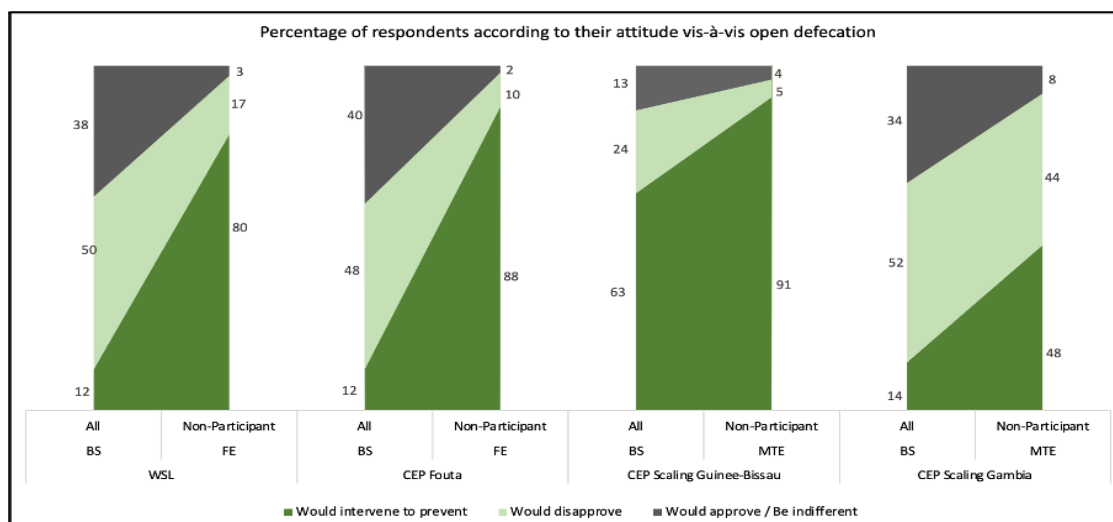


*Tostan has made great changes since he arrived. As far as the abandonment of FGC is concerned, we're very happy. We used to have our daughters cut because such-and-such a person had his daughter cut... The girl hemorrhages, she cries and we say it's this or that fetish that hasn't been respected, whereas the girl wasn't old enough and something in her body has been amputated. As for the boy, today we take him to the dispensary and look after him until he's completely cured. This is a good thing. Before, the boy would be circumcised in the bush. He was in a lot of pain, and every day we had to bandage him up and make him cry... Tostan asks that these boys be circumcised in health posts by qualified nurses. (Kedougou, Village #1, participant 4, focus group with CMC members).*

### A stronger commitment to a clean and healthy environment

Mid-term CEP evaluation data indicate that the CEP has enabled communities to achieve a significant change in social expectations regarding open defecation. This trend is confirmed and accentuated in the final CEP evaluations. The change in attitude towards open defecation, between the baseline study and the final project evaluation, can be well appreciated through the percentage of respondents who would now intervene to prevent the practice. In Fouta, these interventions increased more than 6-fold, and by almost 4-fold in Gambia.

Table 8: Personal attitudes to the practice of open defecation



It's important to note that this change in attitudes towards open defecation took place at the same time as efforts to build latrines on concessions that didn't have them. At the same time,

community clean-up days were organized. Indeed, the level of involvement of members of the intervention communities in village sanitation activities has been greater than at the start of the projects. This change undoubtedly contributes to the establishment or reinforcement of a social norm relating to the use of toilets or latrines.

*The changes are innumerable and remarkable: in the past, adults and children would go to the back of the village to relieve themselves. However, Tostan's influence was decisive in abandoning such behavior. You know that microbes live in dirt, garbage and detritus of all kinds. And they transmit disease. That's what I learnt from them in the classes (TAMBACOUNDA VILLAGE #2, non-participant 3, focus group with women aged 25 and over).*

*Our village used to be overrun with garbage, but nowadays, this disgusting scenery has been cleared away. And it's thanks to the assimilation of these lessons that a civic-minded mentality has emerged and translated into cleanliness actions. And the garbage has been moved far away from the village, making way for a healthy and welcoming living environment (KOLDA, discussion group of boys and young men aged 15 to 24).*

*In the past, households were used to relieving themselves in the open air behind the village. This is no longer the case, since latrines have been built in the houses to put an end to insalubrity and uncleanness' (FOUTA, FG Women participants).*

### Increased promotion of women's economic power through IGAs<sup>2</sup>

The results of BGI's final evaluation showed that women in CEP beneficiary communities had outperformed men in terms of engagement in an income-generating activity (IGA). However, it also showed that improvements in this area were less remarkable than those recorded in the other areas of influence of the CEP.

These two results can also be seen in the results of the final or midterm evaluations of the CEPs considered in our learning exercise.

Table 9: Practice of an income-generating activity (IGA)

	WSL				CEP Fouta				CEP Scaling Guinée-Bissau				CEP Scaling Gambia			
	BS	FE			BS	FE			BS	MTE			BS	MTE		
	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants	ALL	Non-Participants	Adopted Learners	Participants
% Women engaged in IGA	50	54	54	82	31	44	56	62	53	52	53	59	37	38	51	61
% Men engaged in IGA	55	48	53	64	51	59	72	66	51	56	60	56	43	26	21	35

Tostan provided a small grant to each community, and community members made monthly contributions. CMCs and community members noted that the funds were used to provide people in the community, particularly women, with a loan for new income-generating activities. These loans were cited as a success in contributing to local economic development and, in some cases, promoting gender equality.

The new sources of income for girls and women have had a positive impact on their lives and those of their households. In addition, some men and women reported that their relationships had improved, as women were no longer dependent on men to cover health expenses or their

<sup>2</sup> IGA: Income-Generating Activity.



children's school fees. For example, some men referred to reduced household expenses, while some women said they felt relieved not to have to ask for funds to meet their own or their children's needs.

*One fine day, they call you up and give you a large sum of 500,000 francs and say "take this money, it belongs to you, you can make loans". That's unheard of here. Now we have money. People borrow and pay back. When I have money problems, I go to X and they lend me money. That's important. It's a good thing (KÉDOUGOU VILLAGE #1, participant 4, focus group with CMC members).*

It should be noted, however, that delays in making community Development Support Funds (DSFs) available can have a negative impact on the level of involvement of community members in IGAs. This is particularly the case for the Guinea-Bissau CEP/Scaling: ADFs were not yet available at community level at the time of the mid-term evaluation whose results are considered here. At that time, it was impossible for the CMCs to encourage women's involvement in IGAs. With the revision of the CEP procedures manual, ADFs are now scheduled to be made available at the start of Kobi 2.

CEPs will also perform better in this sector if the opportunities offered by ADF can benefit more non-participating women for a more inclusive dynamic.

- **Changes in social norms relating to harmful practices**

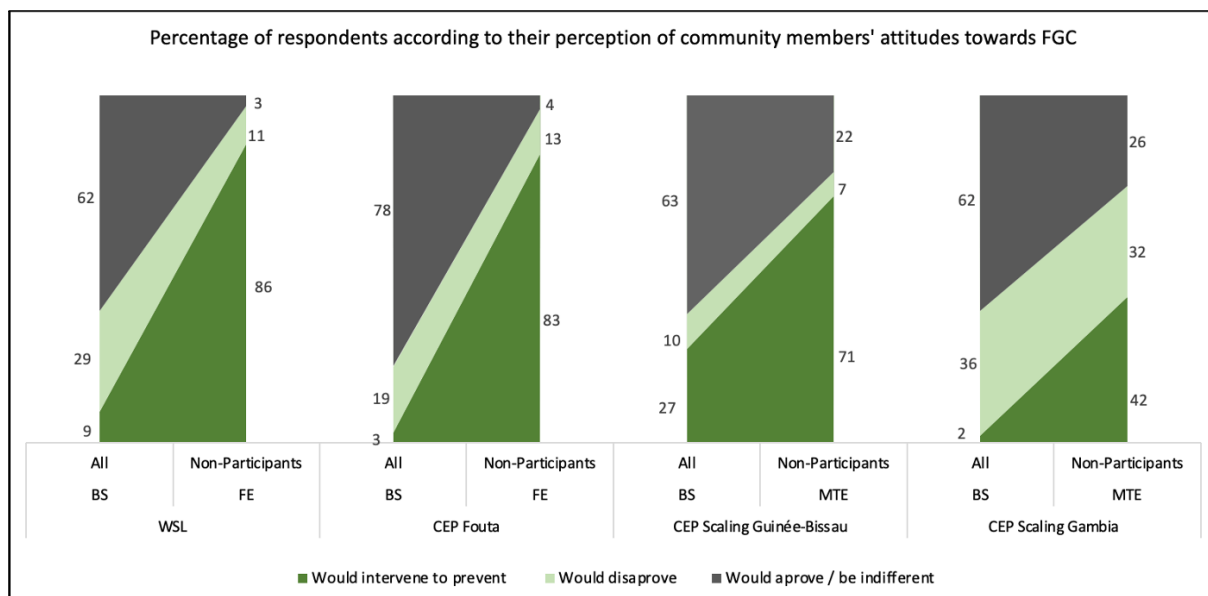
#### **Wider disapproval of the practice of FGC**

The final evaluation of the BGI project showed that beneficiary communities in the four intervention countries had almost completely reversed their beliefs and perspectives regarding harmful practices such as female circumcision and child marriage, indicating that they had created or reinforced positive social norms governing the elimination of these practices. The results of the mid-term and final evaluations of the CEPs that were implemented between 2019 and 2022 are in line with the same trend.

The following table gives an overview of the evolution of normative expectations regarding female circumcision in communities that have benefited from the WSL project, the Fouta CEP, the Guinea-Bissau CEP/Scale or the Gambia CEP/Scale. A comparison of the two studies considered for each project shows that social expectations have evolved, or are evolving, towards broader and greater disapproval of the practice.

*Table 10: Expected reaction of other community members to FGC (normative expectations)*





For most non-participants, the reasoning is often linked to the harmful consequences of FGC that were taught in Tostan classes and shared by the participants. Thus, access to new information on the practice of FGC was a determining factor. Moreover, in Senegal, as in the other two countries, it is conceivable that the enforcement and threat of enforcement of the law against FGC facilitated the change in social norms. Indeed, the assertion that the practices were contrary to the law is recurrent among both men and women.

*Our position is to abandon the practice [FGC] completely, because banning it contributes to well-being. Since most cut girls face problems during childbirth, others suffer from illnesses resulting from the operation. In this respect, we have taken the firm decision to abolish this practice from our customs. And we certify that these are actions worthy of esteem.* (KOLDA VILLAGE #2, participant 5, focus group with CMC members)

Certain interpretations of Islam (also promoted in the Tostan program) have also facilitated a change in attitude towards the practice of FGC.

*Some of our beliefs were based on female circumcision. But with Tostan, people realized that the risks involved in this practice were not worth it, and that this principle was therefore in line with Islam.* (TAMBACOUNDA VILLAGE #3, non-participant 4, focus group with men aged 25 and over)

Other factors that have contributed to the shift in social expectations towards a broader disapproval of FGC are the fact that FGC is no longer perceived by most community members as a necessary measure to qualify girls for marriage; and the collaboration between the GCCs and local authorities, health professionals and teachers. This collaboration has been an important reinforcement strategy in facilitating change in social norms.

However, there are still men who are in favor of maintaining the practice of FGC in their village. The reasons given are the reduction of women's sexual desire, respect for tradition, and their belief that FGC is required or authorized by their religion.

*For us, they have to be cut. If a woman isn't cut, she's thinking about men. If she is, she fears men. So they must be cut.* (non-participant 2)

*For the Muslim religion, girls and boys must be circumcised* (non-participant 7).

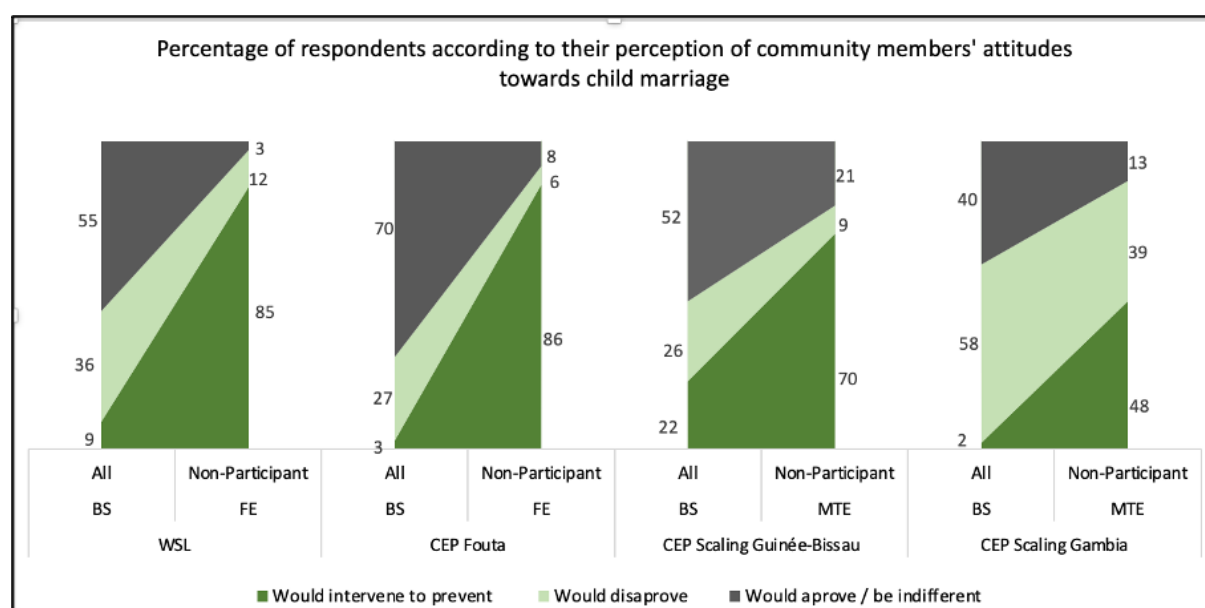
*According to our parents and also our custom and religion, it's allowed to do it. (non-participant 4), (SÉDHIOU, focus group with men aged 25 and over)*

The fact that some grandmothers are still in favor of the practice of FGC also constitutes an obstacle to abandonment in some communities, which must be taken into account in CEP strategies.

### Wider disapproval of the practice of child marriage

As with FGC, normative expectations regarding child marriage, measured at the level of non-participants, show that the CEPs implemented are also leading the communities studied to take action against child marriage. This dynamic is confirmed by the figures below, which testify to a major change within the communities.

Table 11: Expected reaction of other community members to child marriage (normative expectations)



The central argument for ending child marriage cited by non-participants and CMC members alike, is to enable girls to complete their education. Indeed, the importance of having educated girls and women in the communities was emphasized in the focus groups. In addition, non-participants often described the risks associated with early pregnancy, assuming that pregnancy immediately follows marriage. In Senegal, the enforcement and threat of enforcement of the law against child marriage and FGC also facilitated the change in social norms.

*It has to be said that the feeling of discrimination has been drastically reduced. As for forced marriage, it has been completely forgotten. Whether a little girl is subjected to FGC on the pretext that if she is, she won't be able to practice her religion, these beliefs are now a thing of the past. It's a thing of the past. As for early marriage, we categorically reject it. When we know about it, we make the parent aware of it. And if he persists, we find a way to force him. These customs have now been banished from our locality (Fouta, FG Women participants).*

However, certain pockets of resistance to change do exist and are linked to certain rationales. Marrying a girl under 16 may be a strategy to avoid pregnancy out of wedlock, a source of shame for the whole family.

*Here, it's the adults who break the children's momentum. They are the ones who force children to marry and join the marital home. However, if a girl who's studying keeps quiet and strictly attends to her studies, that's fine. But if the father sees that she's not doing well, then he's obliged to give her away in marriage. The problem is mostly with the girls, because the father doesn't want his daughter to indulge in debauchery (KOLDA, focus group with women aged 25 and over).*

- The 'path of change' experienced by communities

Using qualitative data from the WSL and Fouta 20 centers projects, the learning exercise focused on partner community members' perceptions of the process by which the changes observed at the end of the projects took place. The different phases identified after data analysis are not as clear-cut at the level of each community, nor are they always explicitly expressed by partner community members. However, for all the communities studied, the different phases seem to crystallize a process through which these communities went to achieve the changes recorded at the end of the CEPs.

Thanks to the assimilation of lessons learned in Tostan's classes and a new capacity for action, participants identify harmful social practices and find their own solutions to change them. This dynamic, generated from within, is supported by the communities themselves. Members of these communities, particularly the CMCs, take advantage of their newly acquired capacities thanks to Tostan's presence, and organize activities that improve community well-being in a variety of areas. These activities, organized in the open with positive results for the communities (e.g. village clean-up days), stimulate the involvement of increasingly large sections of the project's beneficiary populations ('As soon as an activity involving the community is announced, everyone mobilizes').

Community involvement in these collective actions is also seen by the communities as an important way of promoting cordial relations, strengthening bonds of friendship and good neighborliness, and improving the relationship between young people and adults. Men, women, boys and girls take part in community meetings and are consulted in decision-making. With this new deal in the governance of community affairs, the peaceful co-existence of different strata of the population is promoted, and social cohesion is strengthened. By adopting an inclusive, participatory approach that respects human rights and the responsibilities associated with them, CMCs share action plans and mobilize their communities.

The dynamic set in motion by the CMCs is, in fact, a great opportunity for women - who make up the largest fringe of CMC members - to put into practice the new communication skills and abilities they have acquired through the project; skills and abilities that give them new self-confidence, earning them the respect of men. With their newfound ability to express themselves in public and make themselves heard, the women are able to play an active role in decision-making processes in the domestic and community spheres. They share and defend their ideas and, as a result, influence change and transform their lives. And it's fortunate that men have taken a positive view of this process, and feel that women's contributions are having a positive effect on the community.

The multiplicity of strategies implemented by CMCs to engage men is salutary. Instead of seeing this evolution of women as a threat to their authority, it is important that men and other traditional

chiefs support the changes that are developing with their support. The involvement of CMCs with local authorities and decentralized services (health, education, registry office) also contributes to better use of these services for the well-being of the community.

Shared information on the obstacles to well-being for all components of the community, the establishment of new social expectations, the increased expression and influence of women in decision-making bodies, the adoption of a participatory, inclusive and respectful approach by CMCs to engage community members, and collaboration between CMCs, local authorities and decentralized services constitute a 'path' taken by intervention communities to achieve the desired changes, a strategy to facilitate the change in social norms.

## CEPs implemented between 2019 and 2022: new challenges to strengthen democracy, citizen participation and the role of men

In evaluating the CEPs implemented between 2019 and 2022, Tostan focused on themes such as the promotion of civic engagement to strengthen democracy and the participation of boys and men in Tostan classes. The aim was, on the one hand, to promote community development in a dynamic of inclusive partnership with local ecosystem players; and on the other, to promote greater participation by men and boys in Tostan classes.

### Promoting civic engagement to strengthen democracy: goals and performance

Since 2019, Tostan has piloted a system change model that should give communities the tools and knowledge to promote their own human rights-based development agenda with government, NGO partners and private sector actors. Strengthening Democracy and Citizen Engagement (SDCE) aims to improve communities' ability to advocate and collaborate with local government in pursuit of a collective vision of well-being. At the same time, it strengthens the ability of elected representatives in decentralized government structures to manage resources and carry out their community development mandates. In so doing, it seeks to create institutional change that is aligned with and connected to community-led social change, thereby contributing to positive systemic and sustainable change.

This approach builds on the new responsibilities transferred to local players through Act III of Decentralization in Senegal, which aimed to harmonize decentralization and local governance efforts, and provides an opportunity to strengthen collaboration between the community, the Local District Council and the Departmental Council.

The training modules engage communities through their Community Management Committees (CMCs), as well as elected officials at district level by providing training at all levels, leading to better collaboration, synergy and consideration of needs, particularly those of women. Tostan's program was to build on the results of the CEP and ultimately lead to increased civic participation and promotion of human rights on the part of rural communities. Community members were to become human rights promoters and role models, aware that they have the right to become more involved at district level, and that they have responsibilities as community representatives to promote and protect community needs and priorities.

Today, the results of this experiment in capacity-building for CMCs and local authorities have yet to be measured in terms of their impact on community well-being. But the capacity building sessions held for members of CMCs, local authorities and administrative authorities at decentralized level have taught us a great deal about the value of Tostan's SCDE module.

In Senegal, the training of the 5 local authorities of Médina Yoro Foulah on the first SDCE module revealed that most councilors were unaware of their roles and responsibilities prior to this training. It also revealed that Act 3 of Decentralization was not well understood by most of them; that the participatory budget was unfamiliar to some; and that many of them had no knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This certainly explains the interest shown by participants in the '*Understanding Decentralization*' session. The '*Municipality*' and '*Child-Friendly Municipality (CFM)*' sessions were also a great success with participants, and led to commitments to become a CFM. The session on '*Roles and responsibilities of the Municipal Council and local elected representatives*' enabled local elected representatives to assess themselves and the effectiveness of their municipality. This was followed by a firm promise to change their mentality and behavior in order to meet community expectations and, above all, realize the vision of their municipality. Finally, training participants recommended that Tostan extend the module to cover land management, natural resources and the environment. The following testimonials illustrate the interest that the SDCE module aroused among training participants.

*As a municipal councilor, before this training, I had no idea about Act 3 of decentralization. Now, with these five days of training initiated by the NGO Tostan, I have a better understanding of decentralization as well as Act 3 and its importance. From now on, I'll be doing my job as a local elected official as I should, because I now know my role and my responsibilities. With the new knowledge we have gained about children's rights, we have understood the importance of involving children in all development processes in general, and in the elaboration of a participatory budget that is sensitive to children and women in particular. We take this opportunity to renew our commitment to remain CFM with even greater determination, while respecting children's rights. We thank Tostan for initiating this training, which will contribute greatly to the smooth running of our local authority, which has become a child-friendly local authority. (Pata town councilor)*

*I would like to remind you that I was the PRC of Dinguiraye for a long time and that I am now a municipal councilor, but I confess that I have never attended such a capacity-building seminar for local councilors. My fellow councilors also gave the same testimonies as I did. This just goes to show that all seminar participants are satisfied with the content and approach of the training. We now have a clear understanding of our roles and responsibilities towards those who elected us, as well as our rights and those of others, and the responsibilities that flow from them. Every councilor now knows what's expected of them, and what's expected of the mayor too. With this newly acquired knowledge, we've become very confident in our ability to defend ourselves in dealings with the administrative authorities, as long as we know what our prerogatives are. The control of legality exercised by the administrative authority, which was not well perceived by some councilors, is now well understood; it's no longer a problem for us now; its importance is very well perceived by all. (Town councilor, Dinguiraye)*

Similar lessons generally emerged from other training courses when it came to strengthening participants' knowledge and skills (WSL project TCs, Fandène and Chérif Lô town councils, and Saam Ndiaye town council).

In 2022, Tostan expressed the need to gain a better understanding of the catalysts and obstacles to achieving the expected results of the project to promote citizen engagement and strengthen democracy Strengthening Democracy and Citizen Engagement (SDCE). The consulting firm Idinsight was recruited to carry out a Process Evaluation of the project piloted in Médina Yoro Foulah. The lessons learned from this Process Evaluation are important for the

development of the SDCE component of Tostan's community development model. They include: (i) the need to standardize the training curriculum for all MCs and for all CMCs; (ii) the absence of aspects relating to intercommunality (promotion of inter-community and inter-communal dialogue) and advocacy in the training curriculum ; (iii) the interest in working with all the players in the ecosystem (reinforcing the inclusive dynamic of all the players in the local development system); (iv) the need to do something specific for decentralized service providers or to involve them more closely in any local development perspective; and (v) the need to develop training materials in local languages.

Recommendations have been made by the authors of the *Process Evaluation* to Tostan, focusing on the need to refine the theory of change, using the results of this study to identify areas where further activities may be required to maximize the potential impact of the innovation and further anchor it to community needs.

In Guinea-Bissau, Tostan's national coordination has organized training for supervisors on Decentralization (from September 29 to October 7, 2020) and training for Sector Coordinators, regional authorities and partner NGOs on Decentralization (from September 28 to October 11, 2021). From the first training session, it was decided that the pedagogical content of the Decentralization module, adapted to the Bissau Guinean context, should not undergo major revisions, given that decentralization is not yet effective in this country. The second training session confirmed that Guinea Bissau is lagging far behind other countries in the sub-region, such as Mali, Guinea, Mauritania, Senegal, etc. .... Apart from Bissau, the capital, which is an autonomous sector and has a mayor, the rest of the country has no mayor, as local authorities do not yet exist. This five-day training workshop on decentralization was an opportunity for regional authorities, local government representatives and development partners to work together to revise their regional development plans, drawing on the knowledge received in general and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) session in particular. It was also an opportunity for them to stay together for days to talk about their collaboration and, above all, how they work together. The sessions on human rights, the roles and responsibilities of elected representatives, the qualities an elected representative should have, partnership mechanisms, the difference between decentralization and deconcentration, and participatory budgeting were of great interest to them.

In the Gambia, Tostan's national coordination organized a training session for Breakthrough Generation (BG) project supervisors on Decentralization (from November 17 to December 2, 2020). Decentralization is not yet effective in Gambia, but the process is underway. The adapted module does not differ greatly from the one in Senegal, and most of the sessions, such as 'Child Friendly Municipalities (CFM)', 'How to become a CFM' etc., remain unchanged. The team responsible for adapting the module, made up of experts in decentralization, praised the effort made by Tostan to design the module, which they found very rich. Adapted to the laws in force in the country, the team felt that the module should be popularized not only throughout the Upper River Region (URR), but also in all the other regions of the Gambia. Together with these experts and all the supervisors who took part in the training, the Basse Municipal Council expressed its total satisfaction at being the first local authority in the country to have the chance to see its 30 communities benefit from this training on decentralization.

### Low participation of boys and men in Tostan classes: reasons and programmatic perspectives

From experience, Tostan knows that the level of participation of boys and men in Tostan classes is always below that of women. As part of the final evaluation of the WSL project, particular attention was paid to the need to understand this situation.

The main reason seems to be a communication problem. When we asked boys and men why they didn't take part in Tostan's classes, most of them replied that they felt it wasn't feasible given their workload, while stressing the importance of men's role in providing for their families. Some men insisted that they were interested, but had been told that the courses were for girls and women.

*It's not that they don't want to go to school, it's that work keeps many men out of the classroom. Spouses can't both leave work behind to feed the household and go to school. And without someone going to work to support the household. For the most part, it's the man who finds and brings home the food for the family. The two of them can't keep up with learning without having to feed each other (KOLDA VILLAGE #2, non-participant 1, focus group with men aged 25 and over).*

*I used to be a politician, but we were told that a woman had to teach the class. As far as we're concerned, it's women who should be in the classroom (non-participant 5).*

*There was an awareness meeting for the class, but it was the women who were enrolled. (non-participant 5)  
(SÉDHIOU VILLAGE #2, focus group with men aged 25 and over)*

Community Agreement Meetings (CARs) are initiated in some communities to encourage boys' and men's interest in Tostan program activities. At the time of this learning exercise on CEP experiences, the data collected on RECs, the additional program component aimed at improving the engagement of boys and men, proved limited. However, the information gathered proved useful and suggested that the initiative should be repeated in future CEPs. Indeed, most of the boys and men who took part in the RECs commented positively on the meetings. Several men cited examples of successful collaboration within the framework of CMC activities. A few also reported that the meetings had had an impact on their personal lives, improving their relationships with their wives.

*Yes, indeed, useful aspects have been achieved through these meetings, and we hope that they can prosper through the positive impacts they generate. Because, if these meetings didn't exist, I doubt that this meeting could take place. Since I was ignorant in the past, today I am informed, and tomorrow I will be even more informed. (TAMBACOUNDA VILLAGE #2, non-participant 4, discussion group for men aged 25 and over).*



## Conclusion and outlook

The results of the CEPs implemented between 2019 and 2022 confirm those recorded in previous evaluations, notably that of the *Breakthrough Generation Initiative* project, in several areas. In this sense, they reinforce our conviction that the results we observe are recurrent and those we can expect during the implementation of Tostan's CEP. Indeed, it can be deduced from the various CEP evaluations considered in this learning exercise that many results are systematic and do not depend on the context or period of CEP implementation.

These systematic results include: greater social cohesion and commitment to collective action, greater expression and influence of women in the decision-making process, significant promotion of actions for well-being across the various GESEE sectors, and greater disapproval of harmful practices such as female circumcision and child marriage, underpinned by a significant change in social norms relating to these practices.

In addition, this evaluation of the CEPs implemented between 2019 and 2022 explored specific themes relating to the participation of boys and men in Tostan classes, on the one hand, and the promotion of Strengthening Democracy and Citizen Engagement (SDCE) as a catalyst for community development, on the other.

The low participation of boys and men in Tostan classes is a fact generally observed in the projects implemented. CDRs appear to be a way of changing this situation. Tostan will benefit from systematizing them as part of the implementation of future CEPs. This should enable men and boys to better understand the CEP approach and the role they can play in it, and consequently lead to greater participation on their part in Tostan classes.

The results and lessons learned from this learning exercise are of paramount importance for the impact evaluation of the Tostan CEP community development model. They will also undoubtedly contribute to the operationalization of Tostan's Strategic Commitment Plan (SCP) for 2030. Indeed, this strategy is being developed to continue working with communities to achieve the recurring results already documented in this assessment and contribute to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

But this strategy also aims to strengthen the capacity of communities to respond to the multiple opportunities and challenges they face, in partnership with the players in their ecosystem. The SDCE component takes on even greater importance in this perspective of achieving the well-being of community networks, particularly in a context of decentralization. This PES 2023-2030 will also gain from considering federating structures and other network structures.

These structures can enable communities to join forces, attract resources, collaborate more effectively with ecosystem players and become more resilient. As a result, they are better equipped to respond to the intersecting challenges of climate change, insecurity and economic shocks, aspects to which future CEPs will surely have to pay greater attention.