

Summary of the external evaluation

of Tostan's Community Empowerment Program
In 100 Communities in Senegal

« When she leads,
everyone succeeds »

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A new independent evaluation of an enhanced version of Tostan's Community Empowerment Program (CEP) by Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development reveals the CEP's powerful impact on women, girls, and their communities and we're thrilled to share their findings.

For this project, Tostan's gender and peace and security post-program modules were added to its standard CEP. (Herein, we refer to the CEP and these additions as the enhanced CEP.) The implementation also included new strategies for strengthening community ties to local governing bodies. [\[For a description of the CEP, please see here\]](#)

From April 2019 to December 2023, Tostan offered its enhanced Community Empowerment Program in 100 communities across four regions in Senegal – Kolda, Kédougou, Sédhiou, and Tambacounda. The project funded a summative evaluation, conducted by an external contractor in consultation with Tostan and the project's coordinators.

The evaluation notes the challenging context of implementing a gender equity program in these regions. They are among the most underserved in Senegal, with over half the population living in poverty; they also have high rates of harmful traditional practices and a history of a male dominance in the communities' religious, social and political life.



Methodology

The evaluation used a mixed-methods, participatory approach, guided by principles of neutrality, inclusivity, and gender sensitivity. Among other objectives, the evaluation sought to assess the enhanced CEP's effectiveness and efficiency, the relevance of its results, and the factors favoring or hindering the sustainability of gender equity and the abandonment of harmful practices.

Data was collected through surveys of 413 individuals (73% women, 40% youth), focus groups with 251 participants and key informant interviews with 15 representatives from health, education, and civil society. Evaluators sought perspectives from a broad range of stakeholders—including elected officials, public service providers, and members of neighboring communities indirectly affected by the project—in addition to direct participants. This multi-stakeholder approach enhanced the trustworthiness and depth of the study's findings.

The evaluation also used triangulation to validate results, comparing inputs from documentary review, surveys, interviews, and direct observation. A strong gender lens was applied at all stages to ensure the analysis captured inclusion, equity, and shifts in power dynamics, especially for women and vulnerable groups.

Key Findings

The evaluation found that Tostan implemented the enhanced CEP with exceptional effectiveness, meeting and in several areas, exceeding its stated goals. It recommended scaling the program into other areas within similar cultural, demographic, and geographical contexts. These findings are aligned with and thus reinforce those of previous evaluations conducted by Tostan and other external evaluators. Key findings included:

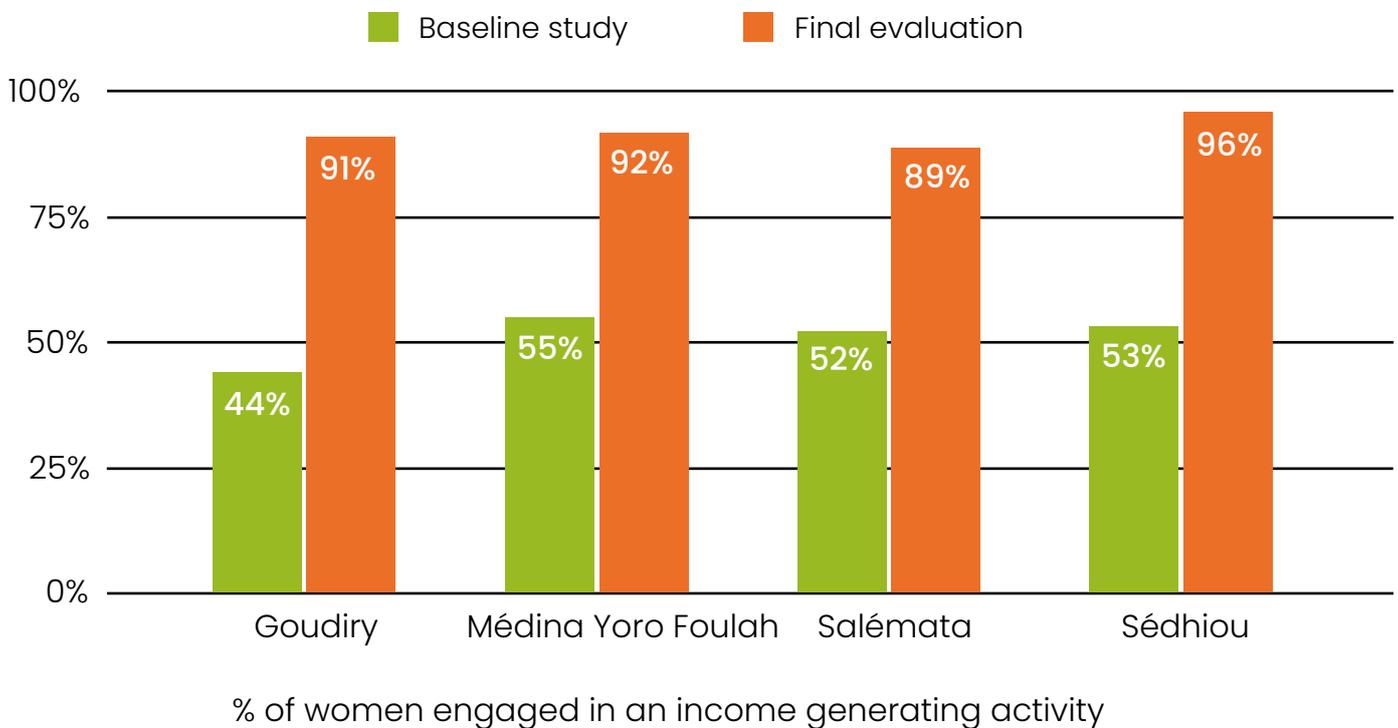
- 🌱 **Increased Knowledge of Human Rights:** Over 87% of women and girls could cite at least two human rights by project end (compared to less than 10% at baseline). There were also dramatic gains in awareness of the harms of FGM/C, child marriage, and Gender Based Violence (GBV).
- 🌱 **Behavioral Change and Shift in Harmful Social Norms:** Communities showed increased disapproval of GBV and harmful practices. More decisions about birth spacing and children's enrollment in school were made jointly by spouses.
- 🌱 **Conflict Mediation and Peacebuilding:** 182 Peace & Security Commissions were established. Women now regularly mediate local disputes and participate in community peace processes—roles previously unavailable to them.

- ✔ **Conflict Mediation and Peacebuilding:** 182 Peace & Security Commissions were established. Women now regularly mediate local disputes and participate in community peace processes—roles previously unavailable to them.
- ✔ **Economic Empowerment:** Women gained access to credit and managed income-generating activities through a small Development Support Fund provided by Tostan. Many reported increased financial gain, economic independence, and increased family and community influence.
- ✔ **Sustainability and Ownership:** By the end of the program, community ownership was strong. Many facilitators continued working voluntarily after the project's end, and CMCs were legally registered and active.

Examples of findings:

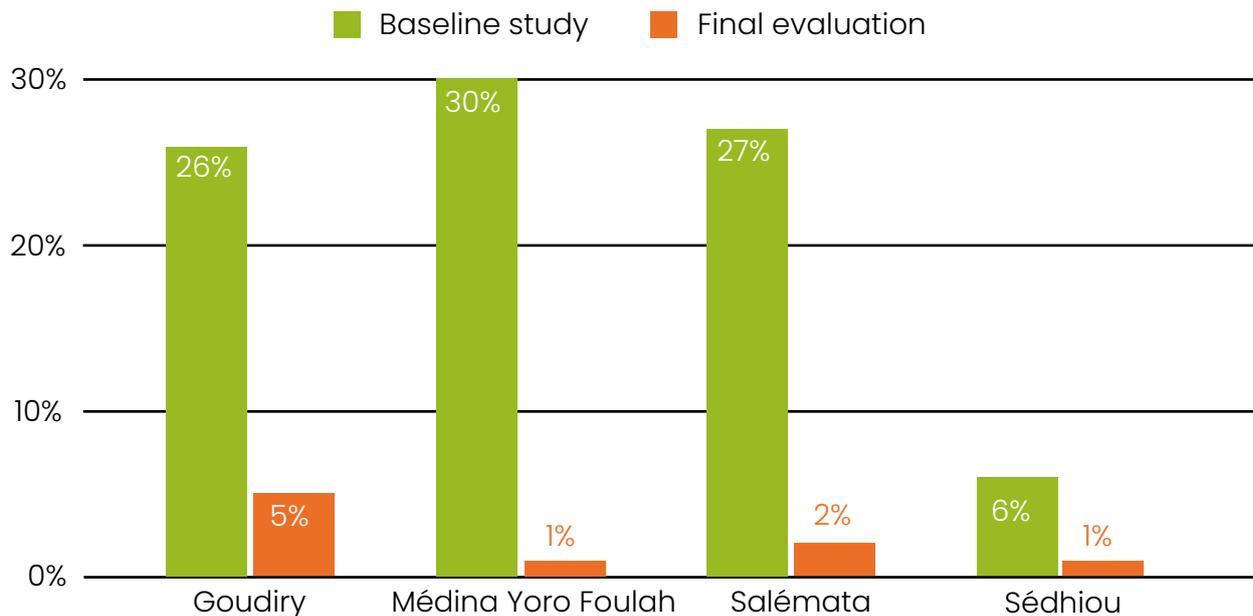
The number of women with income generating projects increased significantly, with the Goudiry region being most impressive—from 44% to 91%.

Women's engagement in income generating activities



The decline in cases of physical violence between spouses is especially remarkable, with Medina Yoro Foulah decreasing to only 1% of respondents reporting cases of violence from 30%.

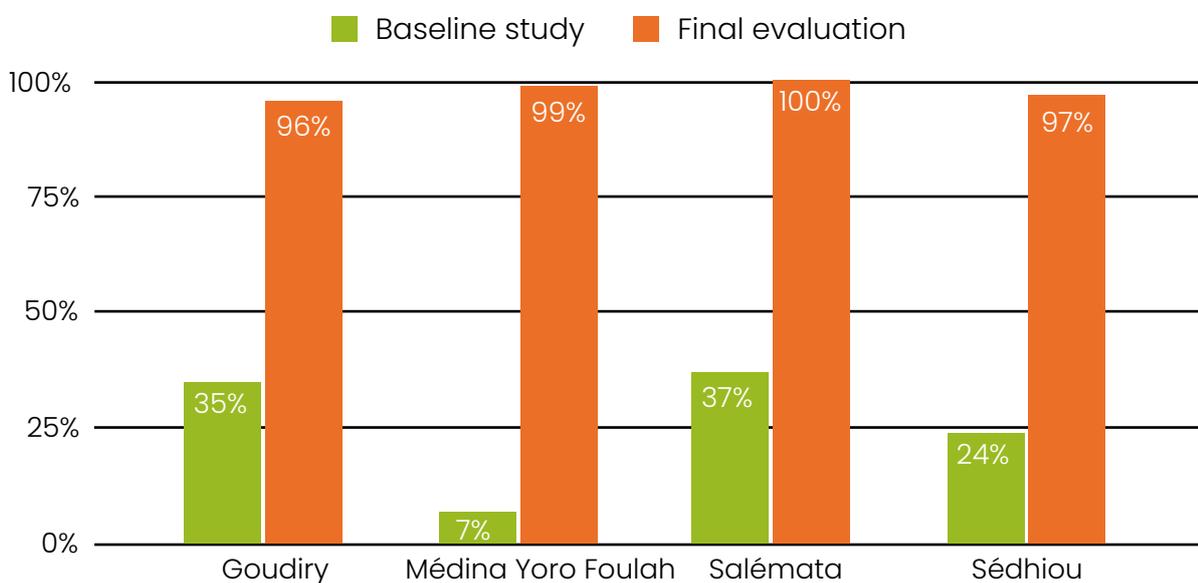
Frequency of domestic violence



% of respondents reporting cases of physical violence between spouses in the last 12 months

Knowledge of the harmful consequences of FGM/C dramatically increased, with the Salemata region showing 100% of participants' ability to articulate the dangers—up from 37%. Previous evidence has shown that behavior change generally hinges on deliberation that includes accurate information about a given practice. The findings strongly suggest that the enhanced CEP influenced community norms in a way that promotes abandonment of FGC.

Knowledge of the harmful consequences of FGM/C



% of respondents able to articulate the harmful consequences of FGC

Conclusions of the External Evaluation

- ✔ The enhanced CEP significantly improved the well-being, status, and leadership of women and girls in rural Senegal.
 - ✔ Tostan's holistic, participatory model—especially with the added gender and peace components—proved effective in promoting human rights, gender equity, and peaceful conflict resolution
 - ✔ Community structures like CMCs and Peace Commissions facilitated sustainable local governance and development.
- The integration of legal awareness, inclusive dialogue, and economic support produced lasting behavior change and community transformation.

For Tostan and its long-time supporters, the significance of these findings lies in their demonstration that a community-led, holistic approach can drive meaningful and lasting change in gender equality, human rights, and local governance.

By empowering women and girls and strengthening community structures, the enhanced CEP not only improved individual well-being but also fostered collective resilience and social cohesion. The results suggest that an education program in national languages that integrates culturally appropriate and accurate information, human rights awareness, dialogic practices, and economic support is a powerful formula for transforming norms and behaviors—particularly in rural settings where traditional practices often persist. These findings provide strong evidence that sustainable development and peacebuilding efforts are most effective when they are locally driven, gender-inclusive, and grounded in human rights education.





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