

Breakthrough Generation Initiative

FINAL EVALUATION: INITIAL FINDINGS



Setting the Stage for the Evaluation

Tostan's **Community Empowerment Program (CEP)** is an evidence-based model and curriculum for “community empowering education.” Program participants live in resource-constrained communities, typically have little or no formal schooling, and time and again report life-changing breakthroughs as a result of undergoing the three-year program. These breakthroughs affect individuals and entire communities, collectively. Over the years, the CEP has produced widespread and dramatic results, garnering global recognition and accolades, while steadily expanding in reach.

Refined over three decades, today's powerful CEP was co-created in partnership with thousands of communities and visionaries. The reality-grounded process was driven by trial and error, application and testing of social science theory, and ongoing monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (MERL). The data and analysis have produced validating and illuminating data and analysis, including published research findings. Much of it has been conducted with outside experts, organizations, and academic institutions.

From October 2017 to September 2020 the **Breakthrough Generation (BG) Initiative** implemented the CEP simultaneously, across countries, setting the stage for a new standard of systematic data collection, while also offering learning opportunities about scaling the CEP. The BG was implemented in 148 villages across four West African countries: 30 in Gambia, 40 in Guinea, 38 in Guinea-Bissau, and 40 in Mali. The goal was to enable positive social change and end harmful traditional practices at the grassroots level among rural resource-poor populations with little or no formal schooling.

This unprecedented monitoring and evaluation effort builds on Tostan's recent *Generational Change in Three Years initiative*, which generated indicators on governance, education, health, the environment, and economic empowerment, as well as social norms relating to harmful practices, including female genital cutting (FGC) and child marriage. While the BG objectives are considered separately in this analysis, within Tostan's program and theory of change they are inextricably interlinked and mutually reinforcing.



The BG Evaluation: Initial Findings

The first round of BG analysis found that the **Breakthrough Generation objectives were reached**. Communities identified aspirations, based on shared values and a collective vision for the future; then, these aspirations were realized over the course of three years of project implementation.

- Participants effectively **reviewed and ended certain of their social practices, and modified roles and relationships** to improve the well-being of their communities.
- **New knowledge and attitudes spread** from classrooms to communities to interconnected communities. This contributed to establishing **new social norms** more conducive to individual and community well-being.
- Community members implemented **numerous activities** to improve governance, education, health, the environment, and economic conditions.

1. Social norms that limit well-being were improved.

Communities established new social norms that affect FGC, child marriage, corporal punishment, open defecation.

Key Finding: At the end of the program new social norms were in place in all four countries, representing a major change from the start of the program when the practices of FGC, child marriage, and corporal punishment to discipline children were widely accepted and, in the case of FGC and corporal punishment – expected.

After three years, the situation is almost fully reversed. New social norms in place mean these practices are now unacceptable; it is expected that if tried, others will intervene to prevent or stop it. Also a social norm of not defecating in the open has been established or strengthened in all countries. For all four practices, new social norms support sustainable elimination of the harmful practices.



EVOLUTION OF THE COMMUNITIES' PERCEPTIONS & SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS



Tostan's CEP theory of change portrays a virtuous and self-reinforcing process that enables communities to improve community well-being across the board. It begins with co-creation of a common vision of well-being, generating dialogue around human rights and responsibilities, and gaining and applying new skills and knowledge to address problems of everyday life. Tostan's non-judgmental, participatory methods generate deep trust within the classes, creating a space that makes new discussions possible, about practices such as FGC, child marriage, and corporal punishment to discipline children—all widespread in the BG partner communities.

The chart above shows the major changes in normative expectations, namely the respondent's expectation of the reaction of others regarding a practice. There is an almost complete reversal of the normative expectations governing FGC, child marriage, and corporal punishment of children in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Mali and a major, albeit less dramatic change in The Gambia. Data on empirical expectations, reflecting the respondents' beliefs regarding the presence of the practice in their community, corroborate the findings from the normative expectations. Together, they provide very strong evidence that **a change in social norms has taken place and that the harmful practices have been or are being abandoned.**

Open defecation is somewhat different than the previous three practices. While data collected at the outset of the BG suggests this practice was not upheld by a social norm, the data at endline show a substantial increase in disapproval and especially in the willingness to intervene. The latter indicates that **a social norm of not defecating in open spaces had been established or strengthened** during the three years of the program in three of the four countries, with some progress in the Gambia as well.

2. Gender norms improved significantly, including the role, voice, and influence of women.

Key Finding: The role, voice, and influence of women in household and community matters significantly increased in the communities of all four countries. This suggests that during the three years of the program, changes in adverse gender norms took place, going well beyond the abandonment of harmful practices that particularly affect girls and women.

CHANGES IN ADVERSE GENDER NORMS

LEGEND Percentage of respondents 0%  100%	Baseline				Endline							
	Community Members				Participants				Adopted Learners			
	Gambia	Guinea	Guinea-Bissau	Mali	Gambia	Guinea	Guinea-Bissau	Mali	Gambia	Guinea	Guinea-Bissau	Mali
Women express their ideas at community meetings	43%	39%	34%	55%	91%	91%	93%	88%	81%	82%	90%	84%
Joint decision making on birth spacing (by husband and wife)	11%	27%	13%	21%	67%	100%	90%	68%	61%	97%	91%	69%
Joint decision making on sending children to school (by husband and wife)	19%	25%	6%	2%	78%	100%	91%	53%	67%	98%	88%	44%

When Tostan first entered the BG partner communities, it found men almost always took decisions at the household and community level with little or no influence of women. Tostan observed women were often not even invited to attend initial meetings or they sat in the back, hesitant to express their opinions. They were extremely timid and lacked confidence and practice in volunteering their ideas in public. The chart above indicates dramatic change, including a major increase in the percentage of women who reported that they participated and expressed their ideas in public meetings. This indicates that, thanks to the program, they gained knowledge, competency and self-efficacy.

Responses at the endline show husbands and wives made critical decisions at the household level jointly much more than at the baseline. This is illustrated in the chart by the data on the degree of joint decision-making related to birth spacing and sending children to school data. The increase in joint decision-making is especially dramatic in Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, but also large in both Gambia and Mali. Even where at baseline joint decision-making was practically absent—as in Mali for the decision of sending children to school—at the end of the program marked change is indicated.

3. The “organized diffusion” strategy effectively spread ideas and knowledge beyond participants.

Key Finding: The CEP strategy of “organized diffusion” is effective in spreading new perspectives and knowledge beyond the class. The finding is supported directly by data showing that changes in knowledge among adopted learners are at levels very similar to those among class participants. It is also supported by results relating to the abandonment of harmful practices upheld by social norms that could not have been possible without the spread of new perspectives and knowledge beyond the class.

For the CEP, “organized diffusion” of knowledge and perspectives is essential for scaling well-being within communities and to additional communities. CEP participants adopt at least one other learner in their community and share their classroom experiences. Social mobilization activities and outreach to other communities is critical.

The data relating to harmful practices summarized above provide clear evidence that diffusion happened. When a practice is upheld by a social norm, changing it requires that a large enough group collectively acknowledge the old practice is not consistent with their well-being and thus no longer attribute social value to continuing the practice. Tostan learned this lesson first-hand in 1998 and, informed by community leaders as well as academic partners, subsequently adopted the strategy of “organized diffusion” and over the years refined its application.

Organized diffusion was seen in Guinea and in Mali after the completion of the data collection of the final evaluation when partner communities held high-profile, well-attended public declarations of abandonment of FGC and child marriage, engaging 248 additional communities in Mali and 180 in Guinea.

As shown in the chart below, the evaluation also found major increases in knowledge by adopted learners on topics relating to health and health-related practices conducive to well-being covered by the CEP. Knowledge levels were only marginally lower than among class participants.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE "ORGANIZED DIFFUSION" STRATEGY

LEGEND Percentage of respondents 0% 100%	Baseline				Endline							
	Community Members				Participants				Adopted Learners			
	Gambia	Guinea	Guinea-Bissau	Mali	Gambia	Guinea	Guinea-Bissau	Mali	Gambia	Guinea	Guinea-Bissau	Mali
Respondents who cited at least 2 ways of germ transmission	15%	7%	39%	19%	88%	97%	97%	80%	68%	84%	90%	63%
Respondents who cited at least two advantages of exclusive breastfeeding	19%	43%	45%	28%	92%	97%	95%	83%	48%	94%	84%	68%
Respondents who cited at least two negative consequences of child marriage	24%	7%	31%	19%	92%	97%	90%	84%	69%	90%	80%	65%
Respondents who cited at least two negative consequences of corporal punishment for children	6%	3%	24%	6%	66%	95%	81%	64%	31%	88%	72%	39%
Respondents who cited at least two risks associated with close pregnancies	12%	26%	23%	23%	80%	97%	85%	79%	39%	87%	70%	66%
Respondents who could identify at least two key moments for hand-washing	40%	26%	29%	53%	90%	96%	87%	65%	62%	88%	80%	49%
Respondents who would advise the use of ORS to treat a child's diarrhea	33%	59%	13%	25%	94%	95%	83%	84%	71%	96%	68%	65%

4. Community capacities to design and take actions increased, and they put them to use.

Key Finding: Communities developed and used the capacity to organize and undertake activities collectively to improve community well-being. The findings further indicate that Community Management Committees (CMCs), established at the outset of the CEP and trained by Tostan, played an important leadership role.

As part of the BG, each of the 148 partner communities established their CMCs and these elected members attended trainings on: 1) roles and responsibilities, 2) social mobilization, 3) child protection, and 4) income generating activities. The CMCs developed and regularly updated action plans and used them to guide collective actions. By the end of the program, all CMCs had obtained legal status as charitable organizations, enhancing their capacity to work with development partners.

The following activities reported during the last quarter of the Initiative illustrate the extent and thematic breadth of the activities undertaken by communities to improve well-being.

Country/ #CMCs	Governance	Education	Health	Environment	Economic Empowerment
The Gambia/ 30	45 births registered	37 children enrolled in primary school 35 community meetings	12 toilets constructed	93 cleaning activities	
Guinea/ 40	3,109 births registered		1,112 outfitted latrines	1,624 days of cleaning public place	6,745 families used improved stoves 529 repaired table-benches
Guinea-Bissau/ 40		118 education promotional activities 81 meetings with teachers and school directors	130 COVID-19 prevention activities	260 environmental activities monthly village cleaning activity in each of the 40 villages	
Mali/ 40	522 children registered with the Civil Registry		10,281 children vaccinated 812 antenatal consultations 386 post-natal consultations	189 village clean up activities	

CONCLUSION

The initial findings of the Breakthrough Generation final evaluation—and their alignment with previous CEP evaluations and other research—provide additional **evidence of the validity of the Tostan model in promoting community well-being and of the program’s theory of change.**

Relational change is an emergent theme. Characterized by greater respect and dignity for all, it appears to generate greater peace and harmony within households and communities. Recent research with communities years after the CEP completion suggests this kind of change is most cherished by communities. Relational changes may be intertwined with improvements in gender equity, and may be at the heart of many other improvements in community well-being.

Tostan’s continued analysis of the BG data will further explore relational changes that took place during the three years, as well as a host of other aspects of the data. A final version of the evaluation will be available by the close of 2021.

JUNE 2021

