

Tostan
Dignity for All

**Breakthrough
Generation Initiative**

FINAL REPORT



SEPTEMBER 2021

Dear Partners,

It is with both excitement and pride that I deliver this report on Tostan's Breakthrough Generation Initiative. With your generous support, Tostan launched this ambitious multi-country initiative in 2017 knowing it would be a vital piece of our scaling strategy and also provide important proofs about our approach. Almost five years later, we are seeing the impact of this work and understanding the complexity of change that takes place because of Tostan's empowering education model.

As you read over the report, I hope you can visualize the many ways our work together is transforming communities. From the women who step into their power and add their voice and ideas to the conversation about their communities, to the men who open up to dialogue and change, and who are open to new problem-solving approaches, and to the youth—the Breakthrough Generation—who see possibilities that didn't exist before. Our community partners are using the information and resources Tostan provides to not only define their own vision of well-being but to actively pursue it and engage others along the way.

We will continue to use the learnings from this powerful initiative to inform our ongoing work in the region and beyond. Thank you again for investing in this vital work. Together we are truly creating an inspiring Breakthrough Generation for the future of West Africa.

With gratitude,



Elena Bonometti
CEO



PROJECT SUMMARY

Following the successful “Generational Change in Three Years (GC3Y) project,”¹ Tostan launched the Breakthrough Generation (BG) Initiative in October 2017 with the objective of scaling its Community Empowerment Program (CEP) to inspire sustainable, community-led change for well-being in The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Mali. The Initiative was designed to foster positive social change and end harmful traditional practices at the grassroots level among rural resource-poor populations who had little or no formal schooling.

This Initiative benefited from a collaborative funding model, where several donors contributed funding for a three-year period (from October 2017 until December 2020). Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the short-term suspension of CEP classes, the 150 targeted communities finalized all planned activities thanks to a no-cost extension (until June 2021) provided by Norad and the Orchid Project. Now with the Initiative complete, Tostan has witnessed a large-scale increase in both individual and community promotion and respect for human rights, particularly as related to women and girls, as well as in the ability to accomplish goals for collective well-being. These outcomes are described in the sections below.



■ The Gambia	30
■ Guinea	40
■ Guinea-Bissau	40
■ Mali	40
Total	150

¹ The GC3Y was a campaign implemented by Tostan from 2013 to 2016 in 150 communities in Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, and Mauritania

ELEMENTS OF THE INITIATIVE

1. Community Empowerment Program (CEP)

When the Breakthrough Generation started in October 2017, Tostan aimed to continue inspiring large-scale movements for dignity for all by partnering with 150 communities in The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, and Mali on implementing the CEP. For the sake of clarity, it is important to note that in Guinea-Bissau there are two villages in which two communities, differentiated by language or by their social ties, lived alongside each other. In these two villages, Tostan operated separate class centers (one with classes in Pulaar and one in Mandinka) but only one Community Management Committee (CMC) was created in each village. Therefore, the BG Initiative encompasses 40 communities in Guinea-Bissau, but only 38 villages. Globally, we refer to 150 communities and 148 CMCs for the entire Initiative.

Although Mauritania was part of the GC3Y, Tostan made the difficult strategic decision early on not to move forward with BG in this country due to challenging operating circumstances for non-governmental organizations. Due to setbacks caused by the COVID19 pandemic, the project came to a close in June 2021, instead of December 2020 as originally planned. The 150 partner communities demonstrated impressive progress toward defining and pursuing their visions for community well-being.

When the CEP classes finished in December 2020, Tostan recorded 12,344 community members, of which 9,772 (79%) were women and girls, as participants in Tostan's CEP in four languages (Malinke, Mandingue, Pulaar, and Bamanankan).

Country	Communities	Women	Men	Girls	Boys	Total	% Women and Girls
Guinea Bissau	40	1,406	316	1,202	276	3,200	81
The Gambia	30	1111	154	1,016	338	2,619	81
Guinea	40	2,081	651	193	55	2,980	76
Mali	40	1,318	406	1,445	376	3,545	78
Total	150	5,916	1,527	3,856	1,045	12,344	79

2. Organized Diffusion

From the beginning of the CEP classes, discussions centered around important issues regarding human rights and led to collective action for community development and well-being in the 150 partner communities and their extended social networks. The shared vision for well-being is also defined at the beginning of the program and each community establishes a Community Management Committees (CMCs) to ensure this vision is carried out. CMCs also work with Social Mobilization Agents to manage social mobilization activities, which include traditional and religious leaders. Key messages and best practices learned in CEP modules are shared through inter-community meetings and radio broadcasts throughout the entire program period. This multi-layered strategy ensures the total number of beneficiaries is much greater than the number of participants directly enrolled in class.

In this context, and to initiate and foster a community dialogue around human rights issues and harmful practices (such as FGC and child marriage), at the beginning of the CEP every participant commits to share their new knowledge with at least one other community member. By June 2021, class participants had adopted 10,772 community members to share CEP information (The Gambia = 1,384; Guinea = 3,987; Guinea-Bissau = 2,434; and Mali = 2,967).

By December 2017, 148 CMCs were established in our partner communities. Of the 2,516 CMC members, more than 70% were women.

Country	CMCs	Women	Girls	Men	Boys	Total	% Women
Guinea Bissau	38	342	113	123	68	646	70
The Gambia	30	353	40	81	36	510	77
Guinea	40	388	27	242	23	680	61
Mali	40	352	168	104	56	680	76
Total	148	1,435	348	550	183	2,516	71

Most CMC members have participated in Tostan classes, and throughout the CEP they also received five special trainings on: 1) their roles and responsibilities; 2) social mobilization; 3) managing micro-credit and Income Generating Activities (IGAs); 4) child protection; and 5) decentralization. Once the group completed the training on micro-credit and IGAs and their development plan was approved by a Tostan supervisor, they received an amount equivalent to \$800 USD in 2018 and early 2019.

CMCs play a central role in the organized diffusion process as they actively raise awareness within their villages and across neighboring communities on issues covered and/or raised during the CEP including those related to Tostan's key indicators on governance, education, health, the environment, and economic empowerment.

Throughout the Initiative, 48 inter-community meetings were organized (respecting COVID-19 prevention measures where necessary). These included inter-village meetings (IVMs), which gathered representatives of partner and non-partner communities within the same zone, and inter-zonal meetings that brought CMCs and participants together from different zones to share their experiences. Local, political, religious, and traditional authorities, as well as journalists, joined the meetings. The dialogue and exchanges during the inter-community meetings were vital to reaching a critical mass of people who supported changing harmful social norms such as FGC and child marriage. Leaders saw the impact of their decisions, which in turn, encouraged them to support other leaders, resulting in a network for change.

Additionally, Tostan Gambia organized two inter-country exchanges. The first took place in late 2019, bringing 15 CMC members and several Municipal Counselors to Medina Yoro Foula (Kolda, Senegal) where they shared resources and knowledge with their Senegalese counterparts. The second took place in January 2021, and brought together Gambian local authorities, (elected Ward Councilors, Area Council Staff) administrative authorities, and Tostan National Coordination staff, as well as community representatives from The Gambia and Senegal (Medina Yoro Foula Department). During this gathering, a partnership was formalized between the Honorable Chairman of Basse Area Council and the Honorable Mayor of Medina Yoro Fula in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), a draft of which was developed during the last visit of URR partners at the end of 2019.

Tostan's program also uses radio broadcasts to disseminate key information and opinions across programming areas, and to engage communities not directly touched by other forms of social mobilization in the movement for positive social change. During the Initiative, a total of **1,456 radio shows** hosted by Tostan staff, Social Mobilization Agents, CMC members, and class participants were broadcast across all implementation areas.

The format of these broadcasts allowed listeners to call in to ask questions or share their experiences, expanding community dialogue. Topics covered included a range of human rights-related issues relevant to community well-being, including FGC and child marriage, vaccinations, nutrition, breastfeeding, treating diarrhea and dehydration, malaria, the dangers of artificial depigmentation, and smoking. Basic information on coronavirus transmission and prevention was also provided, as well as community-government collaboration during the pandemic, religious texts that reinforce public health measures, and education in the time of COVID-19. The main intended audience of these broadcasts are the rural communities where illiteracy, their remote location, and a lack of electricity limit people's access to other forms of media like newspapers, television, or the internet.



Participants watering their new vegetable garden with support from FAO and Regional Agriculture Directorate in Samba Kunda, Basse (The Gambia)



Radio broadcasts in Fasso Dabola cover topics like equal rights before the law and due process (Guinea)

3. Public Declarations

The new knowledge acquired by participants in CEP classes and through organized diffusion by Social Mobilization Agent and CMCs contributed to raising awareness in both partner and adopted communities on the negative consequences of FGC and child marriage. As a result of this new information and open conversations held through the program, communities began to question these practices, to understand they are not compatible with their human rights-based vision of community well-being, and eventually agree and commit to abandon these practices.

Public Declarations led by Tostan's partner communities are a turning point of the CEP program; a defining moment when networks of interconnected communities decide to change certain practices related to social norms in their communities, especially those that are harmful to the health and well-being of women and girls. Decisions to declare their commitment to abandon these harmful practices is entirely up to communities themselves.

In **The Gambia**, a total of 57 communities (30 Breakthrough Generation partner communities and 27 adopted communities) led a Public Declaration, announcing their collective decision to abandon FGC and child marriage in their communities. Held on December 29-30, 2020, in the Sutukoba community in Wuli East district, the declaration included 626 participants, of which 444 were women.

Due to government restrictions and to ensure COVID-safe environments, Public Declarations in **Mali** were divided into three ceremonies, two of which took place in December 2020 and the final in February 2021. Representatives from 248 communities in Koulikoro, Banamba, Diola, et Baraouli attended the ceremonies, representing various sectors including administrative authorities, mayors, village chiefs, religious leaders, youth, and women. Among the highlights of the various ceremonies were speeches, skits on FGC and child marriage, and readings of the declaration texts in French and Bamanankan.





In **Guinea**, the Public Declaration took place in Kouroufindéng (Dabola) on December 22, 2020, with 180 villages (40 partner communities and 140 adopted communities) participating. The ceremony opened with a soccer match between two women’s teams from Kouroufindéng (Dabola) which was part of the effort to raise awareness about the abandonment of FGC and child marriage. A press conference following the match gave journalists the opportunity to interview participants from the CEP classes, Social Mobilization Agent (SMA), CMCs and religious leaders. The text of the Public Declaration was read in Maninka by a schoolgirl named Aminata Kake.

In **Guinea-Bissau**, due to restrictions of large gatherings, Tostan organized three Public Declarations. The continuous engagement between the CMCs, their communities, and the neighboring communities resulted in a consensus among the community members about the importance of organizing and participating in these events. Between June 23-30, up to 920 invited people from 105 communities of Farim, Ganadu, and Sonaco participated in the three Public Declarations. One of the inspiring testimonies came from Fenda Djauara (Coordinator of CMC of Amedalai, a past partner community and a solar panel engineer) who stated:

“ I know you are excited about your declaration and you deserve it. I know it is a difficult task to teach and transform a community of hundreds and today you have changed the lives of thousands. I encourage you to prepare for the next phase because for these last three years to be worth it, you must sustain these results and create new results. You will have new challenges, new opportunities, and new solutions. You will see the last three years were just the beginning. ”

KEY FINDINGS

From October 2017 to June 2021 the Breakthrough Generation (BG) Initiative implemented the CEP simultaneously, across four countries, setting the stage for a new standard of systematic data collection, while also offering learning opportunities about scaling the CEP. This unprecedented monitoring and evaluation effort builds on Tostan's recent Generational Change in Three Years project, which generated indicators on governance, education, health, the environment, and economic empowerment, as well as social norms relating to harmful practices, including 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 first round of BG analysis found that the Initiative's 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. Four key findings from the initial analysis are elaborated here.

1. Social norms that limit well-being were improved. Communities established new social norms around FGC, child marriage, corporal punishment, and open defecation.

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. With new social norms in place, these practices are now unacceptable. And, if one tries to carry out one of these practices, there is an expectation that 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 mean harmful practices will be eliminated for good.

*“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.”*

(CEP Participant, The Gambia)



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

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

When Tostan first began working with BG communities, men almost always made decisions at the household and community level with little or no input from women. Tostan observed women were often not even invited to attend initial meetings or they sat in the back, hesitant to express their opinions.

Data collected at the end of the Initiative show husbands and wives made critical decisions at the household level jointly much more than at the baseline. The increase in joint decision-making is especially dramatic in Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, but also significant in both The Gambia and Mali.

“ 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. ”

(CEP Participant, The Gambia)





3. Organized diffusion effectively spreads ideas and knowledge beyond class participants.

When a practice is upheld by a social norm, changing it requires a critical mass of people to collectively acknowledge the old practice is not consistent with their well-being and thus no longer attribute social value to continuing the practice.

Though the strategy of organized diffusion has been part of the CEP for decades, the results of the Breakthrough Generation Initiative clearly demonstrate its efficacy in spreading knowledge beyond the class for the first time. 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 abandoning harmful practices upheld by social norms which was possible because the new knowledge and perspectives were shared and discussed beyond the class.

The data relating to harmful practices from the final evaluation provide clear evidence that diffusion happened. 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 abandoning FGC and child marriage.

“ Sharing knowledge with others is a blessing, when you know, you also educate the next person. It’s an important component of Tostan’s work that we’ll remember. Human rights, management, business feasibility, and development grants that Tostan gives to our community have lots of positive impact economically on women. ”

(Mukeh Damba, CMC Coordinator, The Gambia)

4. Communities learned to plan and take actions together for well-being.

Communities developed and organized and collective activities 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 partner communities established their CMC and the elected members developed and regularly updated action plans to guide their collective activities. By the end of the Initiative, all CMCs were registered as charitable organizations, enhancing their capacity to work with development partners.

*“ [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.** ”*

(CMC Member, Guinea)

Overall, the initial findings of the Breakthrough Generation final evaluation—and their alignment with previous CEP evaluations and other research—further reinforce the validity of the Tostan model in promoting community well-being and the program’s theory of change. Relational change is an emergent theme that is characterized by greater respect and dignity for all. This type of change appears to generate greater peace and harmony within households and communities. Recent research with communities who completed the CEP years ago 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 advances in community well-being.



CHALLENGES

With an Initiative this large in scope, various challenges arise that offer learning opportunities and further insights into the program decision and realities in the field. During the BG Initiative, challenges emerged related to political instability, logistics and operations, and unexpected circumstances. These challenges are further described in this section.



1. COVID-19 Pandemic

Perhaps the biggest challenge to implementation throughout the Breakthrough Generation Initiative was the COVID-19 pandemic. CEP classes were suspended from the onset of the crisis to its first peak in the fall of 2020. Once the situation stabilized in West Africa and Tostan had put in place a contingency plan for its staff and partner communities, CEP classes resumed in all 150 communities. Thanks to the flexibility of its partners, Tostan could finalize all planned project activities, particularly reviewing CEP sessions and various social mobilization activities.

More importantly, the pandemic actually demonstrated the significance of Tostan’s model and approach, especially as it relates to individual and communal health. Before a contingency plan was in place, current and former partner communities across all implementing countries established new social norms to prevent the spread of the virus. Families made their own masks, villages set up public hand washing stations, and neighbors changed the way they greeted each other and socialized. Social mobilization teams and CMCs took the initiative to share information about the virus and its prevention with neighboring communities.

2. Community Participation

It is not uncommon to have challenges associated with selecting partner communities. When considering whether to enter a community Tostan uses a standard set of practices and systems to identify and monitor potential internal and external risk. These practices include research, internal analysis, and interviews with stakeholders at all levels on potential risk areas to understand the various risks and to determine whether the community is an appropriate fit for the CEP program.

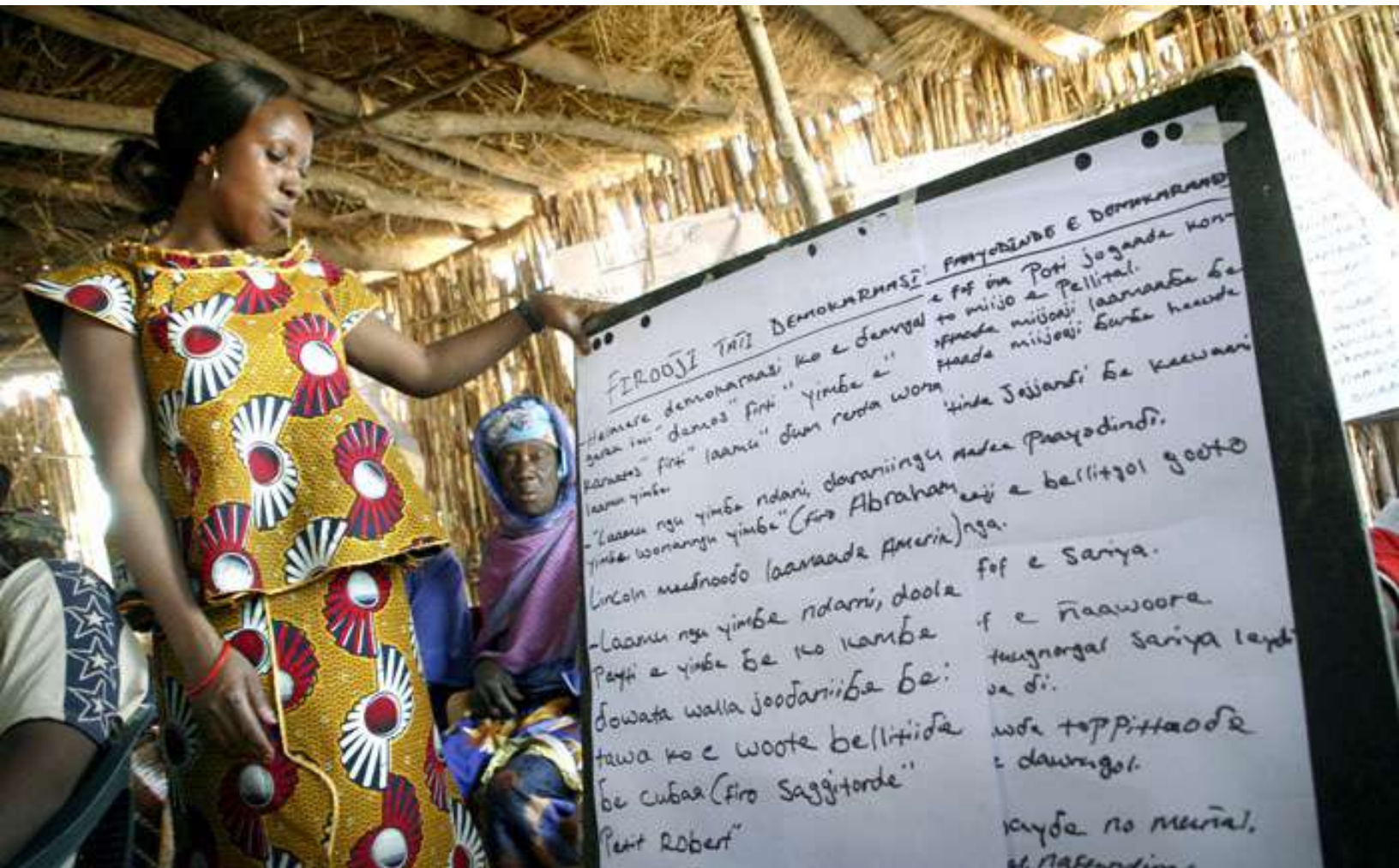
Unfortunately, early in the life of the Initiative, Tostan was forced to interrupt the CEP in two cases: the community of Paunca, located in the Gabu Region (Guinea Bissau), and the community of Komba located in the Koulikoro Department (Mali). In both cases, the decision was due to influential persons from the communities who were opposed to Tostan’s program. Despite the efforts of Tostan’s team to engage in constructive discussions with these individuals and their broader communities, it was not possible to create the conditions needed to effectively implement the CEP. As these events took place early in the CEP, both Paunca and Komba centers were replaced by creating new centers in the communities of Canmane and Mhantampa (Guinea Bissau) and in the partner community of Tougouny (Mali).

3. Political Instability

Furthermore, in 2019 political instability at the country level in Guinea, Guinea Bissau, and Mali created logistical challenges and in some cases delays in the classes. In Guinea Bissau, a protracted political crisis caused the postponement of a special training for CMCs on decentralization. Despite the two “coup d’etats” perpetrated by the Mailan armed forces in August 2020 and again in May 2021, Tostan Mali continued activities without further obstacles.

4. Logistics and Operational Limitations

As often happens in the remote places where Tostan works, there were some technical challenges that slowed, though did not impede, the implementation of Breakthrough Generation. For example, supervisors who are responsible for monitoring several communities in remote areas, had issues with motorcycles that are several years old, often experiencing breakdowns on the way to villages which required spending time and resources on repairs. Using electronic devices to monitor the initiative is also challenging in places where electricity is inconsistent. Both of these challenges have been taken into account by Tostan, with the logistics and MERL teams working to identify solutions. Tostan field and monitoring and evaluation staff have also noted that CMC members seem to have gaps in the knowledge acquired from their trainings, as they often struggle to accurately track and report their activities. Tostan’s Programs Department has taken this observation into account and will adjust the content of the trainings for future iterations of the CEP.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Results of the Breakthrough Generation Initiative are key to Tostan's learning agenda. They will inform an internal review of the CEP Facilitators' manuals, a comprehensive review of our theory of change, Tostan's results framework, and eventually an impact evaluation for the CEP.

The results will also contribute to two important process evaluations scheduled to begin in 2021. The first is for a new activity involving unconditional cash grants to women in communities that have already benefited from the CEP. This activity was developed as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic to assist the most vulnerable in these communities. As the first activity of its kind implemented by Tostan, this process evaluation is significant as it will inform further improvements to the CEP in the area of women's economic empowerment.

The second is a process evaluation of the Strengthening Democracy and Citizen Engagement (SDCE) innovation of the CEP, that entails training of elected officials at the level of the district to prepare them to better perform their mandate vis-à-vis communities while also informing communities of the roles of their elected officials, and fostering collaboration toward community well-being.



OUR PARTNERS

We are grateful to the following partners who provided support for the Breakthrough Generation Initiative. Their generosity ensured Tostan could expand the Community Empowerment Program to communities who were poised to pursue their vision of community well-being.

Institutional Partners

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