

The Community Empowerment Program

Tostan

Dignity for All



The Community Empowerment Program (CEP) is a three-year nonformal education and community-led development program. The CEP is currently offered in 22 languages in six African countries: Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, and The Gambia.

CEP participants represent the community at large, including women and men, girls and boys, elders and youth, and various ethnic groups and social strata. Most have never been to formal school, or dropped out at an early age.

There are three key components of the Community Empowerment Program:

1. Community Classes: Building a foundation of knowledge

When Tostan is invited into a village, two classes are set up: one for adults and the other for adolescents. Community members select 25 to 30 participants for each class. Implementing the program for both adults and adolescents in the same community improves inter-generational dialogue and ensures that youth have the skills needed to participate in and sustain community development. The classes typically meet three times a week for two to three hours each time.

Classes are taught by a Tostan facilitator, who lives with the community and is often from a nearby village. Facilitators are the backbone of the Tostan program. Over 80 percent are

women, and many are themselves graduates of the program. The model requires that each participating village provide housing, food, and basic support for the facilitator, who establishes a long-term presence and becomes part of the fabric of daily life.

There are two phases to the community classes. The Kobi ("to prepare the field for planting") focuses on social empowerment. The Aawde phase ("to plant the seed") is concerned with literacy and economic empowerment.

2. Community Management Committees: Creating democratic management skills

Tostan trains local Community Management Committees (CMCs) to apply the knowledge and skills from community class sessions and to build capacity for community-led development. CMCs are comprised of 17 democratically-selected members of whom at least nine are women. Some of their activities include encouraging residents to register to vote, organizing village clean-ups, and working with local health officials on vaccination campaigns.

Tostan also facilitates collaboration between CMCs and other NGOs or local governments with the aim of procuring funding or technical support for community projects. CMCs that have proven successful in planning, implementing, and evaluating community projects are equipped with small community development grants to support micro-enterprises and community-managed social enterprises such as mills and communal gardens, or fund community projects, such as constructing schools or latrines. In addition to their work during the course of the CEP, CMCs continue to operate after the CEP ends. They are essential for sustaining program outcomes.

3. Organized Diffusion: Accelerating social transformation

Tostan implements a strategy to foster the spread of knowledge and information beyond the classroom and accelerate large-scale positive social change. This strategy, called organized diffusion, encourages participants to use their existing social networks as organic channels to spread and reinforce learning and social transformation within and between communities.

Tostan's Community Empowerment Program

Module	Content	Impact
Kobi A Mandinka word meaning 'to prepare the field for planting'	Discussions on the fundamentals of democracy, human rights, and problem-solving as well as hygiene and health. Specifically, understanding positive and harmful practices to maintain best health.	Participants empowered with knowledge of their human rights and responsibilities. Community dialogue on these rights can lead to the collective decision to abandon harmful traditional practices, such as FGC and child/forced marriage.
Aawde A Fulani word meaning 'to plant the seed'	Literacy and numeracy learning. Training on project management and income-generating activities.	People empowered to lead and manage their own development and access to economic opportunity.

Program participants commit to adopting at least one other learner, but they often teach several neighbors and relatives in their community and in surrounding villages. Participating communities also adopt other villages to share knowledge and skills and to plan awareness-raising campaigns. In inter-village meetings, participants discuss controversial issues with hundreds of men, women, and adolescents, including religious and traditional leaders.

To accelerate movements for positive change, Tostan concentrates its program in interconnected networks of villages that share similar customs and engage in regular dialogue. Tostan strategically selects seven to ten communities that are interconnected through family ties, use of the same well or market, or shared affiliation with a particular religious leader in the area. Ideas percolate throughout these villages, and then to more distant communities, even to diaspora

members. Local radio programs, broadcast in national languages, accelerate the spread of information from village to village.

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